



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding True Love in a Grace-Based Marriage – Part 2

Guest(s): Brad and Marilyn Rhoads

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- Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, hello everyone and welcome into Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host of the program here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm honored to serve alongside Dr. Dobson as resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDFI. We're so glad you've joined us today. A welcome to day two of our conversation around the Grace Marriage. Our special guest today, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads, they head an organization called Grace Marriage and they're the authors of the new book, *The Grace Marriage: How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship*. We're going to be taking a deeper dive today on what it really means to embrace the heart of Christ. Brad, Marilyn, welcome back.
- Brad Rhoads: Thank you so much.
- Marilyn Rhoads: Thank you for having us today.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: I want to go back and just kind of highlight, recap a little bit about our subject yesterday. We were talking about performance-based marriages and grace-based marriages. And in our conversation we began to just touch a little bit on this idea of mindset, that this is something that has to get wired deep down inside of you. Brad, can you start us out? Just tell us a little bit about the difference between performance-based and grace-based marriages and then what it means to let this mind, if you will, be in you.
- Brad Rhoads: Yeah, the grace-based marriage, it's like I'm going to offer kindness, service, gifts and love to my wife as a free gift of grace. Why? Because I've been given a free gift of grace and I've been called to love my spouse as I've been loved. So it's just offering yourself as a free gift of grace. That's the grace piece. And then the mindset piece is marriage is a big deal. Husband, wife, Christ, the church and we are going to have a good marriage. We're not going to let the world squeeze it out. We're going to spend time together each week. We're going to talk every day. We're not going to let the whirlwind of life squeeze us into a functional

coexistent relationship, but we are going to work together stiff arm the world and we are going to live out marriage differently.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yesterday too, Marilyn, we talked about that moment where you had a conversation with Brad. It was the, "Let's talk" and talked about how you had many of those moments. But God had done something in your heart, Marilyn, and it was real, it was genuine. You realized that Brad was not going to meet the deepest longings of your soul. Only one could do that, and that was Christ. And that was a shift for you. Talk to us again about that shift and again what that means because some may be confused that your quote, "just giving up or surrendering all your right even if you've been violated or hurt and more" yeah, what is it and what it's not.

Marilyn Rhoads: Okay. Well, what it's not is grace is not allowing abuse or ongoing infidelity. Those are really important issues to seek help, to seek safety. It's okay to have desires and for me to communicate with Brad, I would love these things to be happening, but I'm just not going to condition the love that I give to him on those things. So it wasn't that I quit sharing with him desires of my heart, what I hope the Lord could do in and through our marriage, but it was just going to the Lord and shifting the focus off what he was and what he wasn't onto what the Lord was calling me to be. So grace does not mean you don't communicate if there are ongoing patterns or things that are going on in your life that need to be addressed.

Like Brad is saying, it's a mind shift. Shouting those verses in my head at times, "Okay, well I was a sinner. Christ died for me. And Brad's struggling right now and he's not performing, if we want to use that word, how I wish he were performing is maybe a parent or a husband, but I'm going to love him because it's a rescue mentality because life throws a lot of hard things at us. And trials hit, tragedy hit. And then also as Brad said, the world squeezes out our marriages. Because we think our marriages should be easy, we let everything else become a priority over our marriages and intentionality is so important to having a good marriage. So it's setting aside time to pursue Brad, to spend time with Brad, to go on dates. That intentionality piece is what is a beautiful picture.

I mean, our marriages are called to be a picture of the gospel, and the gospel's beautiful. Our marriages are so much bigger than just Brad and I having a good marriage. We want the world to look at our marriage and see what God designed and he said it was good and it's beautiful and we want people to be drawn to Christ the way we love each other.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, I love that because when Christ captures a heart, and we've all seen it, we've seen it in people around us where you've seen the love of God just move and a life transformed, they begin to radiate. Their faces shine, if you will, with the glory of Christ. That's what we're talking about here. We're not talking about being a doormat. I'm not talking about laying down, let somebody run all over me. What we're talking about is I'm choosing something here that I want to bring to our relationship that I think will do a shift. Brad, everybody knows that

there are topics in marriage that are hot buttons, communication. I'm thinking about sex. I'm thinking about money and more. Talk to us a little bit about.... And you guys write about this in the book. You take these subjects dead on, and a masterful job with it. How does grace begin to impact those issues in our lives?

Brad Rhoads: It's atmospheric, I mean, because for Marilyn it just wasn't this atmosphere of just pressure and frustration. No longer did I always feel like I was a disappointment to Marilyn. No longer did Marilyn feel like she was just always an afterthought to me. So it completely changed the atmosphere of our home, which makes everything easier. And people say, "Well, grace sounds hard." And I'm like, "With all due respect, what you're doing looks harder." I feel unconditional favor, unconditional acceptance from Marilyn and it just really opens the door for us to work on every single issue because no longer is everything just this big point of contention.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm just thinking, Marilyn, about Brad when I was reading some of how you described him and Brad was being honest in the book about himself, how he was living. There was a tenderness, a shift that happened in him that there's something that got ahold of his heart that he began to see you and respond to you radically different.

Marilyn Rhoads: Mm-hmm. It was, I remember the first time was he had gone to a promise keepers event and came home and I got up early before church to plant flowers. I was in finishing graduate school so I didn't have a lot of time and it was like 5:00 in the morning, Brad, I think. I was up planting flowers and Brad was not an early riser and he walked outside and he said, "Where do you want me to dig?" And I looked at him like he was an alien. I cannot believe he's out here wanting to help me, and it was a huge shift.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That heart is what I pray earnestly for. I hope people are sensing that that's what we're trying to communicate on the broadcast today. We're trying to bring the love of God into the midst of a pretty tough world, a really tough world that brutalizes and it comes down hard on relationships. And Brad, we tend not to move toward each other. We tend to move against each other or away from each other. You can only do that if you are "examining yourself before the Lord" and asking him, "God, what do you want to do in and through me?" What starts taking place that explain to us what you began to experience even at a whole nother level?

Brad Rhoads: It's like my sin became HD clear. It's like I was asked that scripture, "Love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave his life for her," I was given some space. "Okay, just take some time Brad and just tell me how you're laying your life down for Marilyn." Well, I wasn't. "Do you live with her in an understanding way?" I was asked, "Do you just sit and listen to her for hours and get to know her heart and ask her questions?" No. That scripture, "Don't be harsh with your wife." I was sarcastic, I was rude. And I was just convicted.

I came home and said, "Marilyn, the only thing that's going to be different is everything." I said, "I've been awful." But the cool thing about the whole deal is that Godly sorrow verse, I didn't just feel horrible about myself and like, "I'm this awful guy." I felt like, "Man, I really messed up, but I can't wait to ride this ship." I was super excited just for change. I find when couples really make space, spend time together consistently and just have some focus on grace, marriage becomes much less heart. I mean, the longer we have really dated and spent time together and communicated, it has its difficulties, but I got a lot of things in life a lot harder than being married to Marilyn.

Marilyn Rhoads: I do think outside our relationship with Christ, Brad and I going on a date once a week is the number one best thing we do for our marriage because it does just naturally get squeezed out. We can end up being two ships passing in the night. With kids activities and we're in a child-centered world and then you add technology in our phones that we can look at constantly, if we don't put them down, if we don't step away, we don't have to show up at every single event our kids are having and it's good for them to see our marriage being a priority, it brings us back together. It helps us get on the same page when we're actually saying, "Okay, our marriage is worth investment. Our marriage is worth time." And it's hard to make time. It's hard to squeeze out the world, but if you will, like Brad said, it's so encouraging and helpful and it makes you want to do this.

Our marriages are being an oasis. And if you're intentional with your marriage, it can be the sweet place when there's a really hard world that we have to deal with together.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's a journey though because if you're in a spin, you try the date night thing, you don't like going to-

Brad Rhoads: No.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ... dinner with somebody you don't like.

Marilyn Rhoads: That's right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That things aren't going well, well, you're really not going to do it. But so somewhere when this mindset shift begins to take place, you've got to step up to the plate and begin to move in directions that says, "You are a priority and we're going to figure out how to spend some joyful time together. We're not just going to go, by the way, go out and hammer stuff out over dinner. No. We want to go out and enjoy each other. God help us. We need each other. We need to laugh. We need something to happen between us that gives us strength for the journey." Am I making any sense there?

Brad Rhoads: Yeah, absolutely. It's like, well, say you're out of shape and you had an exercise for a year and you go to the gym four days in a row and you call me and complain, "It didn't work. I'm not healthy. It isn't ongoing." Same thing with

date. You're not in a great place and you go on a couple dates and, "Wow, it didn't work. We still don't like each other." But if you have consistent and like, "We are going to make our marriage a priority," and if you do that every week for a year, two year, you'll see steady improvements and you'll see steady growth. But just making that commitment, putting the stake in the ground.

Marilyn and I have dates where we argue the whole date. We have dates where we sit down and Marilyn cries the whole day so upset about one of our kids. It's not like this idealistic we just stare each other eyes and hold each other's hands and walk around like it's the end of some movie. Now, some dates are great but some aren't, but we are committed to a good marriage and we know a good marriage takes time and we give our marriage time. We went on a date last night. It was awesome.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host here. Our special guests today are Brad and Marilyn Rhoads. Amazing new book, *The Grace Marriage: How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship*. If you don't have this, by the way, if you got someone in your life who just needs something around relationships, for God to do something transformational, you need to get a copy of *The Grace Marriage* and let God begin to do some special grace work in your heart and in your lives.

Brad, Marilyn, you guys, God's called you to marriage ministry. He's got you in a special place. I want you to talk a little bit about what's happening through Grace Marriage.

Brad Rhoads:

Well, I'll kind of give you the brief journey there from civil litigation attorney to the natural transition into full-time marriage ministry. So Marilyn's got her background in counseling, got her master's in social work. Somebody asked us to do their premarital counseling, it went well. And then we asked them why and they said, "Well, we want what you have in marriage because we really do enjoy marriage." And over time I'll spare the details in interest time, but I was ordained lay pastor in marriage at our church. When I was ordained lay pastor in marriage, I noticed we did premarital counseling and crisis counseling. I mean, the only thing we were missing in our marriage ministry was the marriage itself. And then when I looked at churches all around us, that was normative. And the church is important. And if marriage isn't a big deal in the church, it won't be a big deal in the home.

Then I saw a study that Community of Barna did that I think 72% of churches have no marriage ministry, 80% of churches spend not \$1 on marriage. And then we wonder why marriage declines and the church is silent? So our vision is that every church would have an ongoing and effective marriage ministry to help couples do well and grows. They don't just drift into crisis. The first contact a pastor typically has with a marriage when they call and say it's fallen apart and we realize this reactive approach must be replaced with a proactive approach. What we've done is developed an ongoing marriage ministry platform for

churches and made it so churches can easily and quickly implement an effective strategy for marriage in their church. So the big vision, it's going to be standard operating procedure in the church to take care of marriage. It is starting and we're just praying that God continues to expedite it. So if your church doesn't have a marriage ministry, gracemarriage.com, please call us. Every church needs one.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Marilyn, just your take as a counselor, someone who understands and probably spends a little time face to face and certainly over the phone just trying to encourage hearts, what's inside of you? What burden has God put in your heart?

Marilyn Rhoads: I'd say a burden for both Brad and I is we long to see marriages come alive. And we've worked with couples and they say, "I shifted out of performance into grace, everything changed." And so it's our prayer that people who love Christ, that their marriage would come alive, that they would be transformed and that others would be drawn to this beautiful institution because it really is a beautiful institution God created. The world has sabotaged it and makes it look like it's a life sentence of something dull and boring and miserable, but it's beautiful when it's done right. And our prayers that just couples could see and experience that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You talk a little bit about curriculum, Brad, that you guys want to put together materials that help people, for example, work through sex and marriage, how to work through money and marriage, how to work through communication and marriage. I go back to sex. I was looking at the chapter that you guys did. You were saying it should deepen your relationship. It really is reflective and emotional connection with your spouse. It should be about mutual selflessness, bonding. You guys talked about some of the science around the oxytocin and dopamine being released and more, how it's protective and delightful. I love that because when it's anchored in what you've been sharing with us for the last two days, grace, it's a game changer. It takes away all that performance insanity that destroys us. Talk about what you see or what you envision in terms of being able to get that kind of a message into the lives of couples, especially young couples.

Brad Rhoads: Well, it's basically a vision be completely changed the paradigm in how marriage is done. Right now, it just settles into this functional coexisting relationship, but we want people to pursue a grace-based marriage. We want people to spend time together and do marriage differently. If we keep doing marriage like we've done marriage, it will keep declining. We have to completely change the way marriage is done. So when you get married, you realize marriage is a big deal. We spend time on it, we focus on grace, we focus on forgiveness, and we both work together to cast a vision for beauty and we work together for it the rest of our lives and seek to grow every single year. So right now people really aren't taught how to do it well and when they get married, they don't know how to do it well and then they're surprised when it falls flat on its face. But if done differently, that can totally change.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You both, I think, are pretty big fans on premarital counseling as well as marriage mentoring. Having another couple come alongside of you to strengthen your love together. Marilyn, talk a little bit about that and why you've learned to put a premium on both premarital counseling and marriage mentoring.

Marilyn Rhoads: Brad was invited, his uncle and aunt saw that we were struggling. You could look from the outside and see, and so he invited Brad. And then we had another couple that we went to church with that just reached out to us and started meeting with us. And they were the ones that told us, "You need to make your marriage a priority, start dating on a weekly basis." And those couples, the Lord used to help us understand how to be married in a way that brings God glory. And so it's huge to have people in your life that are pouring into you. And then it's also so important that we're pouring into others. Like I said earlier, our marriage is so much bigger than just Brad and I. When couples see us dating and making marriage a priority, it encourages them to do the same. So it's our desire, it's the multiplication process like scripture teaches. It's the sowing and the reaping principle and talks about mentoring in the older pouring into the younger. And it's so important so that we can spread this to other couples.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Something that's been showing up on my radar that I'm reading a little bit about is graying divorce, what we're seeing happen in that middle age America and more. And I'm also thinking about couples in crisis. I want you to speak to people who maybe are in the middle of an absolute disaster. As they listen, they've been turning it up, but their hearts sinking because they feel like there's no real life wrapped for them. They want God, they're praying for something to happen. What do you say to them, Brad, Marilyn together?

Brad Rhoads: Well, I'll start with the graying divorce that you brought up initially. A lot of it's the fruit of a child-centered society because it's everything revolves around the kids. Kids leaves and all of a sudden we don't have much. And then within a year or two it falls apart. So I think that's contributes. But I talked to an empty nest couple recently. I said, "Man, you got a blank canvas. Man, make it beautiful." And they just really started casting vision about how we could have an amazingly beautiful empty nest. And within a week, they're already starting to get re-excited and reignited about marriage and kind of falling back in love again.

So hey, when all of a sudden you're trying to figure out a new norm or maybe you haven't invested, say, "Okay, let's start now and make this thing great and be patient." So that's the growing divorce. And as it relates to the crisis couple, Marilyn said it earlier, it's Christ, Christ in Christ. I mean, he is the only source of peace. That's where we get everything. When hope is placed in marriage, it feels really hopeless. So the only true hope is found in Jesus. Marilyn, would you add to that?

Marilyn Rhoads: Yes. And then get help. It's so important if you're in a crisis place to have other people pouring into you. When Brad and I were in a crisis place at first, I wanted to go to a couple, and Brad didn't.

Brad Rhoads: Yeah.

Marilyn Rhoads: He was like, "I don't want to talk to someone about this." But it's so important. Thankfully, there were others looking in that could see, "This couple's struggling. They need help" even though we weren't saying that. But if you are in a place that you're struggling, seek help. There's good Christian counseling out there, so don't just feel like you have to be alone in this.

Brad Rhoads: And if one spouse wants help and the other one doesn't like me, I said, Marilyn, look, I don't want to air our dirty laundry to everybody else," basically, if you're a pride man like me, lay that pride down before your marriage is gone.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I'll PS what you were saying, both of you reach out for help. Often taking a step is the gateway to a new day and hopefully a new you, new relationship. Can one person change a marriage? Yep. It takes two to get it done, but one person can take a first step and then watch what God can do in the midst of all of it. It's not easy. It's a journey. It takes us a while to get in. It's probably going to take a little while to get out. But I've learned this, you all, it's not about the darkness. It really is about the light. When you bring the light of God in the midst of a dark journey, ah, just keep bringing the light and watch God go. Brad, Marilyn, what a delightful conversation. A, as we go here, people want to learn more about you and your ministry. Where can they go?

Brad Rhoads: First place to go would be go to gracemarriage.com, that's gracemarriage.com and just reach out to us. And if your church doesn't have an ongoing marriage ministry, reach out to us and we will help and make sure they do soon.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And Marilyn, just maybe a word, a final word of hope or encouragement, especially say to that woman who's out there and she's on her knees, God's doing something in her heart and she knows it's time.

Marilyn Rhoads: I would say that as you were talking a second ago, it's the ministry of reconciliation and it's beautiful and, as we talked about, getting help if you're in a dark place. But there is also when you bring grace to marriage, we have seen marriages transform so quickly. So God often transforms a marriage beautifully. So even if you're in a place where you don't feel like this could happen, our God is a miracle worker and He is about reconciliation and beauty and rescue. And so just put your hope in Him and pray and just see what the Lord can do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know there are a lot of resources out there on love and marriage, but let me recommend today, *The Grace Marriage*, this new book, *How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship* by our special guest, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads. Brad and Marilyn, on behalf of Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley,

the entire team here, we salute you. I pray that God will continue just to raise you up, your voice, your ministry for such a time as this. Thank you both so much for joining us.

Marilyn Rhoads: Thank you.

Brad Rhoads: Thanks.

Roger Marsh: Marriage can be a beautiful blessing as long as it's filled with God's wisdom, faithfulness, and grace. When you keep God at the center of your marriage, you and your spouse are setting yourselves up for long-term success. And we have so many resources to strengthen your marriage here at the Dobson Institute. Just go to D-R, jamesdobson.org/marriage. This will take you to a special page that we have created to help you navigate life's unique marriage and relationship challenges. Watch encouraging short reels from couples just like you. You can even sign up to receive more short videos over a series of days in your inbox to help you stay right on course.

You've been listening to Brad and Marilyn Rhoads with our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk. And by the way, you can easily share or listen to either part one or part two of this two part conversation from the Family Talk JDFI app on your smartphone. You can also visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's D-R, Jamesdobson.org/familytalk. I'm Roger Marsh. And on behalf of Dr. and Mrs. Dobson, my wife Lisa, and yours truly, and all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening. Have a peaceful and blessed weekend.

Speaker 7: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.