



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Becoming the Couple You Long to Be – Part 1

Guest(s): Rhonda Stoppe

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well, hello there and thanks for listening to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And before we get started today, I'd like to remind you that Family Talk and all of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is a completely listener supported ministry. If you've been blessed by Family Talk, won't you consider making a tax deductible donation in support of our ministry so that we can continue to encourage and equip families all over the nation? For more information on how you can give, visit our website at drjamesdobson.org or call us at (877) 732-6825.

Now I'm so glad you've joined us today because our guest is the one and only No Regrets Woman, Rhonda Stoppe. Rhonda has joined us before to discuss moms raising sons to be men and today, she's here to talk about her latest book called, *The Marriage Mentor: Becoming the Couple You Long to Be*. Hosting today's interview is our own Dr. Tim Clinton. Dr. Clinton is the co-host of Family Talk. He's also the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and the author of over 30 books. We're so blessed to have him here on the team at the JDFI. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton to introduce our guest, Rhonda Stoppe, here on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I'm thrilled to welcome back to Family Talk, Rhonda Stoppe. She's the founder of No Regrets Woman, a ministry dedicated to helping women live life with no regrets in a way that I honors God and is designed for them. Rhonda ministers alongside of her husband, Steve, who pastors First Baptist Church in Patterson, California. They have four grown children, 13 grandchildren. Rhonda I'm jealous. We have one, but hey, welcome back to Family Talk.

Rhonda Stoppe: Thanks. It's so great to be back with Family Talk. I so appreciate Dr. Dobson. When I first met him when I came into studio, when I was there before, I literally walked in his office and I said, "I got to give you a great big hug. I feel like I'm meeting an uncle who's taught me so much about marriage and family." And he jumped up and gave me the biggest hug and I just appreciate him so much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley and the team out here, they love and respect you guys. Again, it's a delight to have you. Rhonda, let's start this way. You guys are serving out there on the front lines in California during the pandemic. You also have just given a ministry to helping marriages, especially those who are in difficult, deep waters. Tell us what you're seeing out on the front lines.

Rhonda Stoppe: Yeah, so much. Steve and I, before Steve will marry a couple, we do six weeks of premarital counseling. And honestly, that's the beginning of a no regrets marriage. If couples take the time and spend the time with a good biblical counselor that helps them talk about their family of origin, talk about what your idea of normal is and your idea of normal is and what speaks love to you and what speaks love to you. We have seen great success in our small church and Patterson, California in our marriages of those that have come together under that type of training before they even get married. But we see so many couples that didn't have that or after. When you're counseling before marriage, they're like, "Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh." And after they're married, they're like, "Tell me that part again."

Dr. Tim Clinton: My son, Zach, just got married and Rhonda, we put he and his new bride Evelyn through premarital counseling. Because I stand with you. The research is strong on how important it is to journey. Those days come when it's like, uh-oh we're here. We've got a little work to do. Rhonda, Ecclesiastes 9:9 says this, "Live joyfully with the one you love all the days of your life." Kind of all the days of your life because that's your calling or your blessing in life but that's a pretty tough assignment when it seems like everything seems to work against our love or our affection in marriage.

Through the years, Julie and I, when we got married, we didn't go through premarital counseling and we had a tough go up front. As a matter of fact, there was a time when I was sitting alone in an apartment, she was gone, Rhonda, and I'm thinking, what am I going to do? As we come back to relationships, with what we've learned now and the insights and the wisdom from couples like you all, I think there's a lot of hope and there's a lot of strength, a lot of gifts we can give to couples. I want to talk up front about your ministry on marriage mentoring and why it's so significant. Your new book, *The Marriage Mentor: Becoming the Couple You Long to Be*, tell us about the ministry piece that you and Steve are doing and what you're finding.

Rhonda Stoppe: The ministry we are doing is getting into the lives of people that were not emotionally involved in their everyday stuff. Because sometimes the issues not really the issue, unmet and expectations they breed resentment, unforgiveness. It divides. So often marriages start unraveling and it's not a major offense. It's the chipping away. And you talked earlier about joy. Nehemiah, in Nehemiah 8:10, while he was rallying the troops, they were building a wall and they had a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. They were being onslaughts, they were being accused of things that were not true. Their integrity was being

challenged. And Nehemiah's pep talk to these people is Nehemiah 8:10, the joy of the Lord is your strength. We have fight for joy in our marriages.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We do.

Rhonda Stoppe: And I know when we walk down the aisle, I remember when I was a new bride, it was 40 years ago. I had that big white hat veil thing on, maybe your wife wore one of those too. And I knew the wife I was going to be, she was awesome. Steve was my high school sweetheart. I was going to be his best friend. I was going to be his cheerleader, his confidante and I was going to enjoy him. But we both worked full-time, living in the San Francisco Bay area. Money was tight. And I remember, I literally, he was in construction. He was at home on a rainy day and I had to work at the office, came home on my lunch hour and there were peanut butter toast crumbs all over the counter and I just started weeping. And he was like, "Who is this crazy person?"

But it's the issue that wasn't the issue. What those crumbs represented to me was "You don't care what I do all day. I work hard. I come home. I clean and your crumbs tell me, 'Do in again lady.'" And then he said, "I honestly was trying to save you from washing a plate so I thought that was the best way to help you." And I realized in that moment, I come from a long line of not healthy marriages, of marriages that unraveled because of resentment and unmet expectations and I knew I needed help. We weren't the couple we longed to be. We were crazy about each other and I was having these little issues.

Steve was in youth ministry at the time and I looked around at the marriages of kids in our youth group and the ones whose marriages I wanted to emulate, I just became friends with those ladies. The reason that God calls the older women to teach the younger, I always say hashtag because old ladies know stuff. We live our mistakes and I teach more passionately from my failures than I even do for my successes. That's the basis for the mentoring, the marriage mentoring, the mommy mentoring that I do is being a Titus 2 woman. And the number one thing is teaching women to fight for joy because it is their strength.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rhonda, you don't have to go very far in the scripture to realize that life's all about relationships, get them right you're blessed, get them wrong it's going to be a journey, you're going to hurt. And I remember the first time I came across this in my mind as I was reading, there's nothing more beautiful in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you and they actually love you and nothing more painful or difficult in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you and you don't know if they love you or maybe they don't love you.

Rhonda, in your journey and you've spent a lot of hours mentoring and you tell a lot of your personal stories, which I appreciate in the book and you and Steve actually share perspectives from both her heart and his heart because we've got to have both sides at the table but just maybe upfront, what are some of the biggies? The big lies that we get caught up and you mentioned them.

Expectations, that we can bring these huge expectations to marriage and then we're crushed because it's not there. This isn't what I signed up for. But what else are some of the things that really steal our hearts, our joy?

Rhonda Stoppe:

I think men expect that their wife is going to be their best friend. And when we get busy, I had kids and my hormones were nuts. I had postpartum after my third child, we tend to not be friendly. During the thirties, they say, it's the unfriendly years. I think Dr. Eggerichs says that. The unfriendly years, we're hormonal, we're not sleeping well, we're underpaid. Every single person in the house has touched my body and my husband walks in the door and he wants to touch my body and I'm like, you don't even understand I am on sensory overload. And honestly, men are saying their wives don't want them in the marriage bed. And women don't understand that when a husband's wife pursues him in the marriage bed, it speaks to him a depth of love that we don't understand. In fact, there's a quote in *The Marriage Mentor*, where Steve says, as a biblical counselor, as a pastor, "I've learned that men whose wives pursue them sexually are deeply in love with their wives."

That doesn't mean it's just, "Hey, it's Tuesday. Let's do that thing we do." That means you send him a text in the middle of the day, "I'm thinking about you." You flirt with him like you did when you were trying to get his attention when you were dating. You reach out to him and you want romance. And women long for romance and men, they romance them right it up till they walk him down the aisle and then they like, "Hey, she's my trophy. I got that. And I'm going to do my thing." And so we have to learn what speaks romance to each other.

A story I think of is when Steve and I were dating, it was summertime and I would be sleeping in, I was in high school. He would leave work, come drop off flowers that he picked up from the florist. And he only had time to give me the flowers and go back to work because he was on his lunch hour and I'd say, "Oh, how romantic." And after we were married and after we had a couple of kids and I was a stay at home mom, so we were on a tight budget, he brought me flowers from a florist. I was feeling frumpy. He knew it. And I said, "Oh, how expensive." And he was like, "Oh." And what I said to him in that moment was you can't romance me. You can't afford to romance me anymore, buddy. And what I should have said was, "Thank you." And later I said, "It's not that I didn't appreciate the flowers. You can get them at the grocery store and they're so much cheaper but thank you for the flowers."

We have to teach each other how to romance. The Bible calls husbands to live with their wives according to knowledge. In seasons of life, romance is different. A husband will walk in with some gerbera daisies, his wife's in the kitchen. She's cooking. She's helping these ones with their homework. Somebody's hanging on her. He sees she's in the middle of it. He doesn't want to get in her way so he's thinking, "I'm going to give her her flowers. I'm going to go watch TV while she finishes all this and then I'm going to get lucky tonight because I brought her flowers." She's thinking, "I want to wop you upside the head with those gerbera daisies."

And the reality is the way you romance your wife at that season, roll up your sleeves, do those dishes, help with the homework. And wives, we have to tell our husbands, "Hey, I want to take you to bed but I got my mama hat on my sexy mama hat is somewhere in the bedroom under the bed gathering dust bunnies. If you make all this crazy, go away, I will meet you in the bedroom and I will make it worth your while. I'll even shave my legs, it's going to be great." But then we can't micromanage it. If he gives them cereal for dinner, so what? If they go to bed without a bath, so what? You let him be your knight in shining armor. That's how he's going to romance you and you meet him in the bedroom and you enjoy him in the marriage bed because God calls us to renew our covenant through intimacy in the marriage bed.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rhonda, you're right. I think what happens is we lose sight of each other. You talked about Emerson Eggerichs' *Love and Respect* piece. I know Chapman's *Love Languages*, Gary Chapman and others. But somehow we're trying to reach toward each other but we're not linking at all. And then it's really discouraging because you feel like there's nothing I can do. I don't know what to do or where to turn. And Rhonda, those breakdowns, if we're not careful can lead from not just differences and disappointments, they can lead to real spin and chaos and conflict can really erupt between the two of us. Let's go there for a moment. Rhonda, what do you do when you have a couple who's in real trouble?

Rhonda Stoppe: If you're listening today, let it begin with you because what couples always say is, "I'll change if he'll change." "Well, I'd be happy if she would change." We try to find our worth and our value in who loves us. We ache and long to be loved in a way that's going to say, you matter, you are important. And God created us with that longing, with that ache, that desire. He created it to find our worth in who loves us but it's in who loves us in a relationship with Him. And when we find our worth in Him, Jesus said the priority of life is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and then love your neighbor as yourself. These mentors, these women that were in my life invited me to a Bible study. I'm like, "Girls, I don't need another Bible study. I just need how to be a better wife. I need to know how to be a better mom."

And what I found was the Word of God, which is quick and powerful and sharper than a sword, pierced my thoughts and intents of my own heart and they showed me my own sin. I love when the psalmist says, "Search me O God and know my heart, try me, know my anxious thoughts and see if there's any wicked way in me." Let it begin with you. Let God show you; iron sharpens iron and sparks fly but we're sharpened in the end when we live in community. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they had walked with God in the cool of the day every day and the day that they sinned they hid and God said, "Adam, where are you?" And he immediately turned on Eve and blamed her.

When my intimacy with my Father is not right, when I'm not my worth in the perspective of His adoration for me, then my relationship with my spouse, I won't love my spouse selflessly. I will love my spouse for what I need from them, for what I can get from them. I hate to spiritualize it because I feel like

people are like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I just want to be a better wife. I just want my husband to be better." But the reality is it starts with us. And I know marriages that have been turned around when one decides not I'm going to pull up myself by the bootstraps and love my spouse better, I'm going to love God better. I'm going to surround myself with mentors who are in love with Jesus. I'm going to daily wash my mind with the water of the word. I'm going to regularly look at my own sin and not measure it against the sin of my spouse. And I'm going to beg God to love my spouse through me.

Because when our husbands are loved, when our wives are loved with God's selfless love, that's what knits our hearts and marriages together. And God calls our marriages to reflect that type of love because a marriage that loves like that is what the world is longing to see. It is the number one thing that kids leave the church after growing up in a Christian home because of the hypocrisy in the marriages and it made me cry. 18 years of youth ministry, "My parents say they're Christians. They say they love Jesus. They smile at church but they get in the car and they are at each other's throats."

Dr. Tim Clinton: And they hate each.

Rhonda Stoppe: Or silent treatment. And those kids go, "I don't need your Jesus." But when they see mom and dad pursuing love in Christ with all their heart. Apologizing, repenting, when they stand against each other, because you still do, but it's holding no record of wrong. That is a light that draws our kids to Christ and the world. When we share our faith and they know the love we have for each other, it is a light that draws them like a moth to a flame.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rhonda, I have no doubt that there are people turning up the radio here for a moment and saying, "Hey listen, Rhonda, Tim, that's where I'm at. Understand this, I love my home, I love my kids I'm in a mess and we've been trying everything in the world to turn this and it's not turning for us. I'm weeping as I listen to you guys because I'm crying out to God and saying, 'God, rescue this. Help us.'" Rhonda, I think that couples can get into a place where they escalate quickly. They get these self-protective walls that go up. That emotional connection is lost. And they're just, they're digging and digging and digging. They're grinding on each other, frantic to get the other person to change. I love what you said, own your stuff.

Let me ask you this, when I'm in that place, having someone to talk to becomes really important. I'm going to come back to your mentoring piece here for a moment. We'll talk counseling too but having a trusted friend, an older couple who would just say, "Listen, we've been there." How important is that at this particular point? Because most of us were so prideful or so secretive you don't walk into the church and say, "Hey, our marriage is a disaster." Hey, people hide that.

Rhonda Stoppe: True. And it's lonely. And you think you're the only one having the struggle. And again, just going to a woman's Bible study and hearing the women that talk

honestly about their lives. That's how you find a mentor. Or you find a couple that still holds hands when they sit in church together. They laugh. I feel like laughter in a marriage is an evidence of a healthy marriage and you go to them and you say, "Hey, can we just hang out?" It doesn't have to be this formal interaction. *The Marriage Mentor*, we wrote that because most one or the other of a spouse will go to counseling but not both. We wrote it. Steve wrote to the guys, it's a little gray box in each chapter and he basically tells the guys, "Look, your wife read the chapter. Here's the Cliff Notes. Just read this. This is what your wife wants you to know." And then I got to write a little gray box to the husbands, "Guys, this is what your wife wants you to know."

And then we even made free videos on my website. You can go to my website, find the videos, as if you're sitting in our office talking to us and it can kind of open some conversations. But definitely the key for couples that make it when they're in the situation like that is they get help. Go to your pastor. It doesn't have to cost money to go to counseling. There are Godly counselors that will help you. And here's the thing, sitting in Steve's office, hearing and couples talk, you said this and you said this. You heard this but that's not what she said. And you heard this but that's not what he said. You're filtering it through a lifetime of resentment and unmet expectations. Let's help you weed through the real issue and what they were really trying to get you to hear. There is hope but definitely you have to get help from the outside when you're at that desperate stage. And if your spouse won't get help, you get help.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Rhonda, I love your honesty in the book and I love your communication style and your genuineness about wanting to see couples make it and thrive in their relationship. In the book you talk about a painful past. You talked about being abused as a little girl, how that influenced you. Sometimes we bring stuff to the marriage. We're working like crazy trying to make our marriage work but we've got this history, these childhood storms and more that we've brought with us that we've got to work through too, as a part of this journey. And we don't even see how it's impacting my relationship now.

Rhonda Stoppe:

And so often we'll focus on what we don't want to become. I am not going to be like my mom and I love my mom. My mom was a teenager when she had me. I was her second child. I led my mom to the Lord six months before she passed away in 2016. My mom was my friend but she was a child trying to figure out how to raise kids. And she did the best she could in her marriage. But I could either make a list of what I didn't want to be but the Bible says, "As a man thinks in his heart so is he." Even when someone's growing up and saying, "I will never be an alcoholic, like my dad, I will never trigger and be angry like my parent was or whatever." You're still thinking on it. And you still, what you're going to think on is what you're going to become.

Philippians 4, we have to think on what's good, right, honorable, praiseworthy. That's a battle in your mind. A good marriage is won and lost in your mind. But what we bring in from our childhood, one of the stories that comes to mind that I have to share is men addicted to pornography. There's a story in my book, I

think it's in my book, *Real Life Romance*, Chuck and Angie. He grew up in a Christian home. He and Angie were virgins when they got married and then she realized he didn't want her marriage bed like she had expected. And of course she stumbled on his screen of his computer and found that he was looking at pornography. He cried, he was embarrassed. He was ashamed. He was sorry. And here's what Chuck had done as a child, as a junior high boy, he looked at pornography in his bedroom as a way to quote, "keep himself pure until marriage."

Now that sounds ridiculous but in a junior high boy's mind, it kind of makes sense. "I'm not going to have sex with anybody. I'll do this instead." And he fully thought he could put it away after they got married. He didn't know what you feed your flesh, your flesh craves. As this went on, he asked Angie to be his accountability partner. That's a recipe for disaster because talk about disrespect. Are you on the computer again? Shame on you. Now she's his mom. It was a big division for them and she was becoming more and more resentful and then it hit her. And she says this, "When I realized that my resentment toward Chuck was just as sinful as his addiction to pornography, was when I was ready to repent and now I could pray powerfully for God to convict my husband and for God to send him Godly mentors who had walked the path ahead of him."

That's what we have to realize is the Bible says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one accomplishes much." How are we righteous? Number one, in having a genuine heart change life relationship with Jesus Christ, not just being a religious person, entering into a covenant with him. Do you want to know more about that? Message me on noregretswoman.com and I will share with you the gospel that has changed my life. But then when we want to walk in righteousness, it's asking the Lord, "Search me, cleanse my heart." And then we're Moses on the mountain top. Then we're interceding for our children in our marriage.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Yeah. You're not talking about tolerating anything. You're actually saying, we want to do radical work. We've got to step into this and step into it fast and now. Because if we don't, it's the old line, how's that working for you? It's not working. It not working. Hey, our topic today has been *The Marriage Mentor*. Our special guest is Rhonda Stoppe. Her husband Steve, they have a real serious ministry to couples out there wanting to see their relationships radically changed in a place where God gets all the glory and they know how to love and be loved. It's all about becoming the couple you long to be. We're going to come back tomorrow, Rhonda, and talk a lot more about, hey, the wins and the challenges and what it means to rip down those walls and get to a place you've never been before. Rhonda, such a delightful conversation today. Thank you for joining us.

Rhonda Stoppe:

Thank you.

Roger Marsh:

Proverbs 13, verse 20, "Walk with the wise and become wise for a companion of fools suffers harm." In other words, you become like those you spend in time with. If you're struggling in your marriage or even if you're not, take Rhonda Stoppe's advice and reach out to your pastor or a Godly couple whom you know. Ask them if they would be willing to spend more time with you and your spouse so that you can learn from them. It's a biblical principle to learn from those who are more mature than us in our faith. It's one way that God teaches us and helps us grow. And on the other side of that, Godly mentors are so needed in the church. Ask God if he is calling you and your spouse to become a mentor for a younger couple, it could turn out to be one of the most rewarding ministries you've ever had.

Now, Rhonda Stoppe will be with us again tomorrow here on Family Talk so make sure you're listening in for that. In the meantime, if you want to learn more about Rhonda, her books or her ministry, please visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. That's D-R jamesdobson.org/broadcast. And while you're there, be sure to spend some time browsing our website. Whether you're single, have kids in diapers or you're a grandparent, we have great resources there to encourage you. Thanks for listening today. I'm Roger Marsh and I hope you'll join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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