



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Becoming the Couple You Long to Be – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Rhonda Stoppe

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello, everyone. I'm James Dobson. 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.

**Roger Marsh:** Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. I'm so excited for you to hear today's broadcast. We're concluding our two-part conversation featuring Dr. Tim Clinton and author Rhonda Stoppe on the subject of Rhonda's new book called *The Marriage Mentor: Becoming the Couple You Long to Be*. Now there's so much wisdom in Rhonda's book. In today's show, I hope you'll listen closely for the next half hour or so and that God will speak to your heart.

Rhonda Stoppe is a speaker, and author of six books, and a passionate lover of Jesus and Scripture. She speaks at women's events, pastors' wives conferences, MOPS and homeschool conventions, and more. Rhonda ministers alongside her husband, Steve, who pastors First Baptist Church of Patterson, California. They live out their own real-life romance, writing books and speaking at their No Regrets Marriage Conferences, but their favorite ministry is their family. Rhonda and Steve have four grown children. Are you ready for this? 13 grandchildren. Let's go now to the conclusion of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with author Rhonda Stoppe, the No Regrets woman.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Rhonda, welcome back. Hey, Rhonda. We were talking yesterday about relationships and the significance of marriage mentors in our lives. 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 love you, and Rhonda, nothing more painful, disappointing, discouraging, depressing than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you.

You're not sure they love you, or maybe they don't love you. In the midst of it, the cry of the soul is, "All I've ever wanted is for someone to love me." You open up this book, the Marriage Mentor, with a story, and I want you to share it. It's about Vi and her husband, Curt.

**Rhonda Stoppe:** I love this story. I have a heart for pastors' wives. Steve and I minister to ministry marriages. You'd be surprised, maybe you wouldn't, how many ministry marriages are struggling.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I know.

Rhonda Stoppe: They don't have anywhere to go to talk to anyone about it. They feel like if they reveal that they're having struggles, that it's going to affect how their church thinks about them. So oftentimes, Steve and I are that anonymous couple that comes alongside of them. We have an 80-acre ranch in the middle of nowhere in California. We have a little cottage there that we let them come stay a week with us and really just unpack some things that they're struggling with. There is a ministers' wives retreat that I attend every year since I became a senior pastor's wife 21 years ago. There was this precious woman named Vi. She was older, much older than me, short, so full of life, and energy, and laughter, just the funnest person. I was like, "I want to be a pastor's wife like Vi."

We became fast friends, and we've been friends over 21 years now. One year, her husband, Curt, came down with cancer. She missed that women's retreat that year. We all prayed for Vi and for Curt. Vi said that on the last day of Curt's life, she was sitting next to him. He was on the couch. He looked at her, and he said, "Vi, am I dying?" Vi said, "Yes, Curt, you're dying." Then Vi mustered up her happiest, most joyful spirit, and she said, "But Curt, you're going to see Jesus today. What's the first thing you're going to tell Jesus when you see Him today?" Vi said Curt closed his eyes, and then he got a smile on his face. He opened his eyes. He looked at her, and he said, "Vi, I'm going to thank him for giving me you." I cannot tell that story without crying.

That is what we want our husbands to say. At the end of their life, we want them to say, "The greatest gift God gave me was this helper, this woman, this lover, this friend." Honestly, when I tell that story when I'm speaking at a women's event, tears fall because we all knew the wife we meant to be, the wife we were so sure we were going to be, and we all know the wife that we are. I always express to them, "Are you the wife you meant to be? If you're not, let's change that." Our husbands are going to be on their deathbed, and they're going to say, "Peace out, girlfriend. I'll see you on the other side. We're not married in heaven. Jesus said so," but we long for it. We do want our spouse to love us like that. We want our husband to love us like that, but there's some work involved in being that type of a spouse.

It's coming alongside of them. It's laughing with them. It's praying for them, enjoying them. It's liking them, covering with love. We're not looking for, "Oh, well you didn't measure up to my expectation again, and let me tell you what you did or didn't do." For me, the girlfriends that I have, the friends I hang out with are the ones that if I forgot their birthday, they don't hold it against me. They filter my conversation through what they know of my heart.

That's what our spouse wants from us. "Know me. Know my heart. Know that I'm tired. Know that I am out there slaying giants for you in the workplace, keeping my eyes only for you." He walks in the door, and immediately we're saying, "You forgot to take the trash out, and the neighbors are thinking we're such pigs because we haven't mowed the lawn."

We're not celebrating who they are. We're listing what they're not and punching them in the gut. I want my husband on his deathbed to say, "I want to thank God for giving me you." It has to start somewhere, so let begin with you.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Rhonda, I want to offer a guilt-free drop today to our listeners too because many listening are in maybe some empty, loveless relationships, and they want that. They're struggling. Should I turn this up, or should I turn it off? We want you to turn this up because there's some things to share here that I think would really mean something to your heart.

Rhonda, that guilt-free drop is this. A lot of marriages are in trouble. Behind closed doors in the quiet corners of a lot of hearts, there's sorrow. There's emptiness. There are tears. Let me say this. Anything that smacks with the righteous or beauty of God, like your marriage, I believe all hell will be against it.

I don't know your thought, Rhonda, but I really believe this is a war zone. This isn't a battlefield. This is a war zone out there right now. We've got to do something radical to help save relationships. We need that now more than ever. Not yesterday, this is right now.

I agree with you. We talked a little bit yesterday about our kids growing up and whether or not they want a marriage like Mom and, or Dad. It's like, God help us. Rhonda, we talked some yesterday, disappointments, other things. Let's come back to, what are some of the war-zone challenges that are going on that you think this is a... Hear me. You got to get this stuff right. You got to see this because this is killing us.

Rhonda Stoppe:

It is killing us, and it's killing the church. The pretense behind closed doors, and the judgmental attitudes, and all of those things that we know are in our marriage... We really want to change them.

I remember one couple, and I think I tell their story in *The Marriage Mentor*. They had come in, and they were saying how hard their marriage is. They both worked full times. The kids come home, and they're latchkey for a while till Mom or Dad gets home from work. One's not making dinner because they're tired, and the other one's mad because they come home to a messy house. Everybody's just working themselves to the bone. I said, "Can I just throw out there that maybe you need to change your lifestyle? Maybe you need to get rid of some things." They wanted the stuff. They wanted the nice house. "I've worked hard. I deserve all of this stuff."

I remember saying, "If you don't and you lose this marriage, you're both going to end up living in an apartment. Your kids will have less supervision than ever because you'll both be working full-time. Most moms that are single moms are struggling financially. Dad's going to marry a 20-year-old, and his house is going to be the fun place to hang out. You are not going to be better off if you guys separate. God doesn't want that for you. Satan is lying to you. We wrestle not

against flesh and blood, but against principalities of darkness. He's wanting to lie to you to tell you, you'd be happier with someone else or single." What do we do? We press in to find mentors. We say, "This is what is destroying my marriage. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to let go of what good comforts or things I think I deserve." There are difficult seasons in marriage. They come, and they go.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They do.

Rhonda Stoppe: As we cry through those, as we work through those, as we allow God to work in our own hearts and to basically take away everything that we think brings us glory, to live for His glory, then He begins to knit our marriages together.

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you have somebody to share this with, someone that you are going to accept influence from... You got to find that person, by the way. You need that person. There's something that begins to take place in your heart. You don't feel like you're so alone anymore. Somebody's walked these dirt roads, if you will, ahead of you.

"Mom, Dad, I didn't know you guys went through hard times. I didn't know you almost left each other. How'd you get that done? What do you believe now really matters? What are the priorities that we need to be thinking about as a couple? How do we resolve conflict?" Rhonda, you share a lot of these insights inside this book, *The Marriage Mentor*, but can you give us one or two nuggets that just say, "Hey, listen. If you're in a spin and you're not able to talk well to each other... " Take us down that road, would you?

Rhonda Stoppe: I think it's obviously getting help from the outside. I'd like to just talk for a second about the spouse who knows their spouse is never going to get help because that's common. Their spouse is never going to say, "Yes, I'll go talk to somebody, or I'll go listen." I have watched women who were in difficult, painful relationships, I'm not talking about abusive, decide they were going to get help, talk to godly counselors. They were going to choose to forgive and let God love their spouse through them. They're happy. Their children have watched them live in a difficult marriage, one that didn't have good communication, but one where the one who decided to walk with the Lord stopped arguing. It says, "As much as it depends on you, dwell at peace with all men."

If you're having a prayer life that is powerful, oftentimes the wife can say something, shut your mouth, and go ask the holy Spirit to do the work in the spouse, and you'd be surprised what the work will be done. Their children are watching. I have watched children in those marriages grow up pursuing Christ, choosing spouses who loved the Lord, and having amazing marriages because of the example they saw in a home that wasn't a perfect marriage, but it was one that the spouse who walked with the Lord reflected his love.

What do you do when you're spinning and you're out of control? It's really being a peacemaker, not a peacekeeper, just holding your tongue. I'm not a fighter. I'm a middle child. I would plug my ears when my siblings went at it. Just make me invisible, and it's going to be okay. When people argue and they disagree, there's either flight or fight. Some press in, and it's like, "Come on. Let's talk, and let's get this out."

If they grew up where that's how their parents fought, that's how their siblings fought, that's how they just said whatever was on their mind to get it out there. They say harsh words to win the argument. Then they walk away, and they're okay because they've said what they needed to say, and you just better deal with it. Someone like me, if someone talks to me like that, I'm thinking you must hate me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes, you shut down.

Rhonda Stoppe: Yes, that you had been thinking those thoughts in your mind, and finally got so angry that you would explode on me, and say those things. How long have you hated me? Because I would never, ever do that unless I absolutely had had enough, and someone had just pushed my buttons until I had finally blown up. That's happened to me a couple times in my lifetime, and I'm not proud of it.

What do you do? You have to evaluate, what kind of a person are you? What kind of person is your spouse? If your husband is not a fighter and you try to say, "Hey, you need to listen to me, and this is something you're not doing. You need to measure up. I want you to change, and this is why. I'm not happy, and this is why." You're following him all around the house, and he's going to the garage, and trying to turn on the TV, and look at the remote. He's trying to pull back. Maybe he needs time to process, but we have to speak in a way that they can even hear it because otherwise, they just shut it down.

Saying something to them that you respect about them, "I know you work hard. I know you're really tired at the end of the day. I am too, but I know that there's got to be some way that we can figure out how to share this burden with each other." Then if they don't listen, don't chase them around.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Psalm 1:27, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Rhonda, we know how important it is to be anchored. A lot of the discussion people don't understand when they begin to talk about faith and marriage is we often look to our spouse and believe they're going to make us happy, that they're going to meet the deepest longings of our heart.

Then when they disappoint or when they hurt, it's devastating. We're lost, wondering what that's all about. As we fight the clock here a little bit, Rhonda, I want you to take us there and talk to us about who Christ is to you and how that helped you on your journey.

Rhonda Stoppe: We start believing the lie, "I married the wrong person. I'd be happier with someone else." Steve says in *The Marriage Mentor*, "The grass isn't greener on the other side. The grass is greener where you water it." In my own life, I would have ruined my marriage. My husband's a great guy. My husband would do anything in the world for me and I would have sucked the life out of him trying to get my own sense of worth from him, my sense of satisfaction, my happiness.

We watch *Cinderella* stories, and it teaches us that it's Prince Charming's job to sweep us off our feet and make us happy and when they don't, we blame them, and we want to look for another prince. We think I married Sleepy, or Dopey, or Doc, right, or I didn't marry the prince. The reality is for myself, for my own story, for the women I've mentored, it began with me falling on my face and asking the Lord to transform my heart. Make me into the woman God wants me to be. He saved me and to good works that he ordained in advance that I should walk in them. That work begins in loving my husband.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rhonda, I've always believed, by the way, that the most important work we can do is interior work. When we know we're loved deeply by God, it is such a game changer. It frees me up because it frees you up. I don't have to draw from you what I can't get from you. That makes all the difference in the world. Hey, Rhonda, I want to go a little further. I read in the book that you have become a biker chick. I wanted you to help our audience understand what's happening in your marriage.

Rhonda Stoppe: My husband loves dirt bikes, and motorcycles, and all of those things. In fact, he shattered his hip in... I don't remember what year it was, 15 years ago. He has a metal plate. I call them buns of steel because he has a metal plate in his hip now. He always wanted to take motorcycles, street bikes. I didn't want to do it because we had kids. If we die, who's going to raise them?

So, I had a choice to make. Husbands want us to play with them. That is one of the things when we're dating that they say, "Hey, let's go miniature golfing," or "Hey, let's go hiking," or "Hey, let's go do the thing." What a lot of times happens, once we get married as wives, our life becomes all about work, and we stop playing with them.

I decided it was time to get on a back of a bike, and we have had the most amazing experiences. We've taken the motorcycle from California to Seattle on several occasions and then caught a cruise ship to Alaska. His romance was the me on the bike behind him, and my romance was the cruise to Alaska.

Even when you're doing those adventures together, things go wrong. Those things that go wrong kind of make you a team. We were coming home from our Alaskan cruise, and the bike broke down. We were on the Oregon coast. It was the summertime, and there were no hotels available. We got one last room. It was the dirtiest, most horrific hotel room I've ever been in in my entire life. We were there for two days with a bike that did not work. He was a mechanic, so he was trying to fix it.

He was like, "Let's call somebody from church. They'll bring a truck and pick us up." It was like, "No, we're going to finish this. This is our vacation. It's just the two of us. We're going to do this together." We did.

When you play together and when you exert yourselves together, or you accomplish something together, or something goes wrong and you come through it together, that's community building. That's actually something that we laugh about now and the stories that you tell your kids. If it's all just everything's in order and nothing ever unexpected happens, you kind of miss that romantic element that you could enjoy.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Rhonda, it's amazing. You look at some of the studies on what individuals do after a divorce. First thing they're doing, going to the gym, going on a diet, starting to play again. It's like, come on. Let's figure this stuff out now. Rhonda, Let's close this way, talking about some of those keys to a fulfilling... Super happy couples, what do they look like? What do they do? What do we need to do to get there?

Rhonda Stoppe: We want to be that couple. We want-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes, we do. People want emotional closeness. They want to love and be loved.

Rhonda Stoppe: They want their kids to enjoy them. We have four adult children. Our oldest son, Tony... He's a fighter pilot in the Air Force. Didn't come to our family until he was 15 years old. He has a wife and two kids. The best thing that our family enjoys is when everyone can be at the ranch for a week together with all the grandkids. 13... I have two on the way, so I'll have 15 very soon. So. I'm winning big time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

Rhonda Stoppe: They don't want to do that if Mom and Dad are walking on eggshells. You got to have an environment that is joyful, and Mom and Dad enjoying each other. Then the kids and the grandkids want to come. 10 keys to a more fulfilling marriage... I'm just going to list these off real quick from *The Marriage Mentor*.

Number one is your husband was never meant to be your happily ever after. Jesus was. We talked about that in an earlier conversation. Number two, respecting your husband will inspire him to love you more. We have to create a way that they know we think the world of them. That will actually trigger their emotions and love for their wife. Staying in love is all about your love for God. Again, we talked about that.

The Bible says, "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." Psalm 119:165, I think. When I become offended, it's because I'm offendable. As I'm washed with the water of the word, I'm less offendable. "What did you mean by that? Why'd you say that?" When I'm offended, I need

to pull back and ask the Lord, what's going on with me that I'm picking up all of these offenses?

I will say, every 28 days, we're a little crazy, and we do get offended. I always tell wives, "Wait three days. If you still feel that strongly about that thing you have to talk about three days later, have the conversation." The next one is number four. Parenting as one brings unity into your marriage and security to your kids. Your kids will never be more secure than when they know Mom and Dad are in love with each other. Number five, the grass is not greener on the other side.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Rhonda Stoppe: Number six, the secret to keeping your husband's attention is finding your worth in Christ. Number seven, pursue your husband sexually, and it will fulfill him with a sense of wellbeing. Number eight, be a peacemaker in your marriage relationship. Number nine, the joy of the Lord is your strength. Number 10, live with a missional perspective, living in a way that knows that God has put us here. I'm an evangelist at heart. In fact, I did a devotional for Dobson's... when I was there one time for his staff. It was called "Sharing the Gospel Without Regrets." That's my passion. If we are not willing to live in a way that God can use us to hold out our faith to draw others to Christ and our marriage being that light, we're missing the purpose for which God has saved us and to what he has called us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: My wife, Julie, is having a birthday. We're doing a pretty big celebration. It's a significant birthday. I found a little picture of her, Rhonda and I sent it to her and said to her, "Man, do I love this little girl." Rhonda, as we are up in our years together, it's just like, you can't get enough of each other. You want to figure this thing out. I want to make sure we finish well. You and your husband, Steve, had a conversation with Dr. Dobson. I'd love to close today's broadcast with what took place in that time together.

Rhonda Stoppe: What an amazing man. He has a picture of Churchill on the wall outside of his office. My husband actually is related to Winston Churchill. Right away, there was a connection and they had a great conversation about that. I'm with you. I just turned 60 in May. I'm that 14-year-old girl that Steve fell in love with. I'm 80 years old now.

Dr. Dobson said to Steve, "In all of your years of ministry... " My husband's 67, almost. "In all of your years of ministry, what's the one thing burdening your heart right now in your life?" My husband teared up. My husband's a big burly guy. He teared up, and he said, "I want to finish well. I want to handle well the preaching of the Word. I want to finish well." Dr. Dobson teared up also. He reached over, and he grabbed Steve's arm. I looked over, and I saw these two men, two of my heroes and embracing each other in Dr. Dobson's office and he just said, "Me too, me too." That's our heart. Let's finish well.



I meet women all the time that are my age. They say, "I don't have anything to share as a mentor. I didn't do it well. I lost my marriage. I wasn't the wife I should have been," or a husband that says, "I wasn't the husband I should have been." Use what God has taught you and be the mentor. Get the copy of *The Marriage Mentor* and have them go through the book with you if you don't know what to talk about. Finish well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: God, we're asking that you save marriages. We're asking that you strengthen marriages, that you would pour out your spirit like we've never seen before and be glorified in and through it. Rhonda, what a delight to have you. Again, the book is *The Marriage Mentor: Becoming the Couple You Long to Be*, Steve and Rhonda Stoppe. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the team at Family Talk, Rhonda, we thank you for the amazing work you're doing. Thank you for joining us here on Family Talk.

Rhonda Stoppe: Praise the Lord. Thank you. It was wonderful.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Rhonda certainly had some encouraging as well as challenging words for married couples on today's edition of Family Talk. I hope that you were able to listen closely to the broadcast and that God used it to speak directly to you. Not only did God create the institution of marriage, He also gives us specific instructions in His word for how to do it well. Now, I'm not saying that it's easy. Neither is Rhonda Stoppe. In fact, Rhonda explicitly said today that there are going to be difficult seasons in every marriage, but one of the best ways to work on or even save your marriage is to find godly mentors who you can look up to for guidance and encouragement. You can start by getting a copy of Rhonda's new book called *The Marriage Mentor*.

Just visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast) to learn more about Rhonda Stoppe, her books, and her ministry. Again, that's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast), or give us a call at (877)732-6825. Well, that's all the time we have for today on this Friday edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, have a wonderful weekend.

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