



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Finding True Love in a Grace-Based Marriage – Part 1

Guest(s): Brad and Marilyn Rhoads

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

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.

Now, if you're married, you probably have said something like this to your spouse on your wedding day. "I, Tim, take thee, Julie, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish 'til death us do part." And those are some beautiful, important, meaningful words. And many of us at the beginning of our marriage may not fully realize the gravity of what it takes to live out those words day in and day out. It's sometimes though, can feel like a lot to handle. Well today and tomorrow we have a special guest here in studio, two experts on what to do and perhaps more importantly, what not to do to succeed in a loving, safe and supporting thriving marriage relationship. They're husband and wife co-authors of *The Grace Based Marriage*, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads. Brad, Marilyn, what a delight to have you. Welcome to Family Talk. Dr. Dobson and his wife Shirley, they send their regards.

Brad Rhoads: Thank you so much and we're so grateful for Dr. Dobson and the impact you've had on us and the impact he's had on so many.

Marilyn Rhoads: Oh, Thank you for having us today.

Dr. Tim Clinton: By the way, I made my way through the pages of this new book, *The Grace Marriage*, which I think is excellent. Matter of fact, I thought to myself, I'm going to hand this book to my daughter Megan and her husband Ben, and to my son Zach and his wife Evelyn, because there's some truth in this book that's just special. But I want to learn a little bit more about the two of you. Why don't we just start with how long have you guys been married and tell us a little bit about those children you have.

Marilyn Rhoads: We've been married 27 years. We have five children and another one that we claim as one of ours. So 24 down to 12. So we've got one married and two in college, two in high school, one in middle school. So it's busy. It's a gift.

Brad Rhoads: It's one chaotic blast, we have daily. It's, I love what God's given us.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So in other words, you've got enough water under the bridge as they say to maybe offer up a little bit of words of wisdom for everyone on how to make love and marriage work. We all know this, that it's tough. If you look at the statistics around marriage, it's pretty sobering. I know there's a lot of debate, some suggest maybe 50%, others in the 30% bracket. Whatever it is, we know this, that there's a lot of pain associated with trying to keep your hands clasped. I think of Ecclesiastes, 9:9 says, "live joyfully with the one you love all the days of your life." But that's a tough assignment when it seems like everything works against love and marriage. The backdrop as I began to work through *The Grace Marriage* book was about you guys being honest in your own journey. And Brad, I guess I'll start with you. Take us back. Tell us a little bit about where you guys met and how it started out and then maybe how the storm started coming.

Brad Rhoads: Well, I was an attorney at a big firm in Nashville and I was doing witness interviews in a little town called Waco, Tennessee, which most of you don't know even exist. And I'd locked my keys in my car. I was multitasking, which is a whole reason that happened. So I come rolling in the office at 10:00 PM because I was so late coming back and as I was walking down the hall, I glanced in and I saw Marilyn. I mean, she just looked gorgeous. And I know she hates when I publicly compliment her, so sorry, babe. But I looked in, so it's like I almost just couldn't help but just walked in, just started talking to her. Her sister was a paralegal at the firm we were working in. So I talked to her for about 45 minutes and when I walked out, her sister said, "I've been working here three years and he's not talked to me five minutes." So that's how we met.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I wonder, Marilyn, was it that kind of same experience for you when you saw Brad or you were thinking, who is this guy or?

Marilyn Rhoads: It was the same experience. We really enjoyed talking to each other and from our first date to our engagement was just three and a half months and four months later we were married. So it was a whirlwind. I wouldn't recommend it, I don't think, super short getting to know someone leaves you a lot to learn when you walk down that wedding aisle. But it was a whirlwind, that's for sure.

Brad Rhoads: Tim, she says it was the same, but when I called her, she didn't even remember who I was in...

Marilyn Rhoads: That's a longer story.

Brad Rhoads: And she thought I was just some sales guy that she had met at some conference hitting on her. So that's a little more backdrop.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's interesting how we work to win each other's hearts and that upfront part can be very dynamic, fun, engaging. But what started happening, I guess, between the two of you that took you on this journey where you found yourself, and I remember reading in the book, Brad, that moment when Marilyn said, "Let's talk", and this has a special twist to it.

Brad Rhoads: Yeah, I mean, we didn't have our first fight until our wedding reception. And you're laughing. That's totally true. It's, we didn't even make it out of the church, so it was... But the conversation you're speaking of Tim, she just said, "Can we talk?" And I remember what she said. She said, "Brad, I want to tell you something. I don't need you." And when she said that, it really scared me, like, where's this conversation going? And then she followed up even more surprised and said, "And I want to ask for your forgiveness", which she'd been upset at me for a better part of a year. So I'm like, this is kind of odd, and asking for you what only God can give. And she goes, "Look, I'll be your wife, but I'm off your rollercoaster. Christ is sufficient for me." She said, "My beauty, my security, my everything comes for Jesus and He is enough. My joy's not going to be hitched to how much attention you give me."

Marilyn Rhoads: Yeah, well, I said, let's talk a lot in that first year. And Brad and I both were just coming at marriage out of the gate from very selfish perspectives. And I think that's where we got tripped up so fast is God designed marriage where it's you're laying down your life for another, not just expecting and demanding what you want. And that's really what we both were doing. And I had just bought into the lives of the world that he was going to complete me, that he was going to be my Prince Charming. We were going to live happily ever after. You don't, when you think about it logically, of course he's not a perfect person, but you kind of expect your spouse to be this ideal that's unattainable, that only Christ is. There's only one perfect, and that's where our hope is. So we were on this huge rollercoaster.

I was crying probably twice a week and ultimately felt like, is this it? Is this what marriage is? Is this going to be my life? And the Lord really broke my heart to, I'm your hope, not Brad. And I just went to him and I did, I said, "I'm sorry, I don't need you to have joy." I had gone from a pretty stable, I'm a pretty even-keeled person to crying all the time. And so I just said, "Will you forgive me? I've put you in the place of God and I'm going to love you the way He's calling me to love you", because I was doing it wrong, Brad was doing it wrong, but the Lord really started with me in my heart.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Marilyn, somewhere in that piece of your life, God was doing something. A lot of people are probably turning up the radio right now to listen because maybe they're in that cold place, that crying place where they feel very disconnected, not attached, alone, almost like a prison sentence. And Brad, I appreciated what you wrote about where you were. You had a little experience too where some people said, Hey, we're going to take you, I think it was your uncle and someone else, but they said, "We're going to take you to a little event here and see if we can speak something into your life because we can tell something's happening,

that you got a disconnect." Maybe there's a little focus on self too much and your career or whatever.

But in that piece, you guys, and I think that's where a lot of people get lost, they don't feel like people understand what they're experiencing or what they're going through. And so when they try to believe that God's there for them, Marilyn, it's hard. It's hard to think, hey maybe God will step in the middle of this because I've been crying out, I've been praying, I've been asking Him to do something and learning that He's enough is a tough place to go to, isn't it?

Marilyn Rhoads: It is. It is. But then it's freeing when you do because it allowed me to turn Brad over to the Lord. I was in graduate school at the time and thought, if I don't tell him, he won't know. We're going to get into these patterns. And I was telling him everything. I was crying out. I was doing everything in my power to try and get him to be what I thought I needed him to be. And then when I turned him over to the Lord, it really made room for the Holy Spirit to work on his heart. But there are people who do cry out and they're praying and the Lord hasn't moved. And that's such a hard place to be. And we talk to couples all the time, but when you do move to that place of okay, Christ is where my hope is, He's the greatest lover of my soul. Then it does allow you to just by the grace of the Holy Spirit, love whoever you've committed to love 'til death to you part, even if they're not being what you feel you need them to be.

Brad Rhoads: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Brad, I want to go to you for a second. When your wife's not happy, when she is crying a lot, and you can tell that this isn't maybe the way you thought it would be either. You're an attorney, you work, you get a lot of affirmation, say from what you do, you can stay busy. There's a tendency not to want to come home or maybe to disengage even a little bit more, pull back. It's like if I don't know what to do, I know as a man, if I don't know what to do, I'm going to do something else. I don't know. What was happening inside your heart?

Brad Rhoads: Yeah, I was a little bit confused. I'm like, why is she freaking out about everything? Everything's fine. I mean, I didn't get it. I really didn't. I wasn't nearly as miserable as she was. And I was like, "Marilyn, everybody else likes me fine." I said, "My staff likes me. I won the volunteer of the year award." I mean, it's like, babe, get on the bus. But yeah, I really was. But I heard a businessman once say, if the person that knows you the best likes you the least, buddy, you got a problem. So for me, I really didn't get it. God hadn't opened my eyes up to my selfishness, my sin, my drivenness. I mean, it's like I didn't see anything. And when she would cry, I would just say, "Oh my God. Well, what did I do now?" And I remember telling her specifically, "Why are you crying? I did not do anything." And God showed me later. That was the whole point. You did not do anything.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That let's talk meeting. Let's go back to it, Marilyn. And when I saw that, I just circled it and I thought, well, I'll tell you what, a lot of people are there but her

let's talk, Brad, was all about her going in a direction that God was taking her in. The old Gary Thomas book, *Sacred Marriage*, is marriage about making you happy or holy?

Marilyn Rhoads: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And seeing some of those strands here come together.

Marilyn Rhoads: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Is that what was happening inside your heart?

Marilyn Rhoads: That's absolutely what was happening. We had not read that book yet. That is a book that was later gifted to us and was such, I loved it. It's probably my favorite book of any that I've read on that shift of, okay, it's more about me being holy even than happy. It's just an incredible shift when you get there and that it's the perfect, even says in the book analogy of, it's like a workout facility. It's a gym to practice servanthood. And that's a mind shift that's counter-cultural. It's not what the world teaches us. But when you look at Scripture, and that's what Brad and I in the *Grace Marriage*, when you get God's design for marriage, it's beautiful. When you understand how to put your marriage under grace, it's transforming.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Some listening, Marilyn, may think, "Ugh, that sounds awful." In other words, I'm going to tolerate and I have to put up with or what have you, the way he's living as selfishness, the way he's treating me or what have you. But that's not really what's going on here, is it?

Marilyn Rhoads: No, it's not. And it's God's kindness that leads to repentance. And the way Brad and I were working in our first year is we were responding back and forth in kind. If he was nice to me, I would be nice to him. But if he hurt my feelings then I would withdraw and distance myself, I would cry. I would point out the things that hurt my feelings. And not that you don't do that in a grace-based marriage, but the perspective of, okay, my spouse is struggling, and rather than take offense to their struggle, whether it's they're hurting because of life circumstances or work or whatever that is, instead I'm going to look at them and I'm going to move towards them in love. And when you do that, it doesn't give them a license to be a jerk. In fact, it's convicting. I know when Brad does that with me, I'm so convicted so quickly.

There are times he's walked in the house and we have five kids and I've had it up to my eyeballs with kids, and I snap at him or I snap at one of the kids. And rather than him pointing it out and saying, "Hey, you need to calm down." And my response then would want to be, "You have no idea what I've been through today." But when he walks in and he sees I'm struggling, and he takes that kid that's driving me crazy and goes for a walk around the block, I mean, that leaves me to deal with myself. And then I'm quickly convicted and go to that child and

say I'm sorry. And if I got frustrated with Brad when he walked in the door, I'm so much quicker to see my sin than if he responds in kind.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow. Brad, so you come home. She said, let's talk. I want to ask your forgiveness. And you're already like, what's happening? And now you're looking at this woman in the eyes and it's somebody you love and you're seeing something happen. There's transformation taking place. What are you thinking?

Brad Rhoads: I wasn't the deepest guy in the world, so probably not as much as I should have been thinking. I wasn't trying to control her, but no longer did my mood control Marilyn. All of a sudden she became steady. Before she was up and down and all over the place, crying, upset, happy, all over the place. She was just totally hitched to me. And when she separated her joy from me and put it a hundred percent in the Lord Jesus Christ, everything stabilized in our marriage. I mean, I was still in the marriage, Tim, so we still didn't have a great marriage, but our marriage stabilized because Marilyn was just consistently abiding and resting in Christ and trusting in Christ and was no longer on this rollercoaster ride of frustration with me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's where I think grace began to do something special in your life. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton. Our special guests today are Brad and Marilyn Rhoads. They're the authors of a new book, *The Grace Marriage: How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship*. They head an organization called Grace Marriage. They do a lot of speaking and traveling and God's using them to really speak life and hope into marriages that are struggling. Coming back, you guys, the heart of the book is built really around performance-based relationships and grace-based relationships. And you've got to understand what's happening here. And I see it in marriages all the time. Marilyn, take us to the idea of performance-based relationships and how it takes us down a road to disaster.

Marilyn Rhoads: It does. It's just we're in a society that's workspace. So we naturally take it into marriage and into this relationship. But another thing that trips us up is I think we think marriage should be easy. If that's the case and someone underperforms, you're going to get extra frustrated over that because this should be the easy piece in life. Well, that's a lie. That's not true. Marriage is work. It's a beautiful institution God created, but it is work. So if you take that performance-based mentality, plus it should be easy, you're really going to be disappointed. And that's where we were.

So performance-based is okay, we got married that first year, and I had these expectations and ideas of what our marriage was going to look like. I thought we were going to have breakfast every morning, and Brad gets up two minutes before he has to walk out the door and is like a hurricane, getting ready fast and doesn't say a word. And there he goes. And then I get frustrated. So what do I do in response to that is I distance myself. I don't spend time with him. So it's just responding in kind. So that's a performance-based marriage, but a grace-based marriage is okay, he's in a hurry. I'm going to throw him a cup of coffee

out the door and just show him love rather than taking offense to what's occurring. Would you add anything to that, Brad?

Brad Rhoads: Performance-based is basically, my love for you is going to go up and down based on how I perceive you're treating me. It's not like I'm going to give my love as a free gift of grace, but it's like, my love's going to be doled out and kept back depending on what I feel I'm getting. It's a conditional love. It really puts the marriage on a rollercoaster. So the marriage is totally hitched to how well each spouse is doing on a day-to-day basis. It's very inconsistent. It's up and down. It's unstable, and it oftentimes falls apart.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, I was thinking about when you were talking, Brad, often it takes five to 20 positives to counteract a negative. And so people often talk about love tanks and that we're trying to "pour into each other's love tank." But if all you're doing is trying to measure all this and you can't figure out how to bring some grace into this relationship, you're going to be exhausted. And so I wanted to ask you, because people are probably in their own minds saying, well, wait a second. Is it wrong to have expectations? I mean, is it wrong to say, "Brad, pick up your clothes, make the bed, do something around the house?" How do you guys handle that for a moment? Really, I want to set us up to talk about grace. What grace really is and why it is at the heart of what God's doing in and through your ministry.

Brad Rhoads: It's not wrong to communicate desires, but what the problem is when you give and withhold love based on whether it's met or not. Does Marilyn ever ask me to make the bed? Yes. Would I ever make it if I wasn't married? No. So we communicate, but Marilyn doesn't give and withhold love based on whether I'm consistent or not in it. So our marriage is stable because Marilyn loves me just as a free gift of grace, because that's how Christ loved her. She doesn't love me, "oh, if you make the bed, it's going to go well. And if you don't, it's not. If you're what I want you to be, I'll be a good wife. And if you're not what I want you to be, I won't." So grace isn't a behavior manipulative model. It's a beautiful just putting the gospel on display, while we're yet sinners, Christ died for us. While Brad's yet a sinner, Marilyn dies for Brad, and Brad dies for Marilyn. That's putting the gospel on display.

Dr. Tim Clinton: No, I love that. I really do. And we all know that we can't earn God's love. It's grace. It's unmerited favor. When I think of our children, so often people do this to their kids. They want their kids to perform. If they don't perform, then we're not going to hang out. You're going to get stuck over in the corner somewhere. We're going to lock you up. No. You know what? Your kids need you 20 minutes a day. No matter what happens during that day. They've got to be able to look in your eyes. You've got to embrace them. You've got to hold them. And that's kind of the heart of what you're saying here, right, Brad?

Brad Rhoads: Yeah. I mean, what, what's your goal? Is your goal just personal happiness and making your life better on this earth? Or is your goal putting Jesus Christ on display and seeking to magnify Him and bring Him glory through how you live?

So it is the goal, me living out the gospel to draw people to their only hope, Jesus, or is my goal hoping another person will act in a way that somehow makes my life easier and better?

Dr. Tim Clinton: You guys write about how this grace piece is a mindset. It's something that becomes a part of what's in your heart, in your mind every day. This is being intentional. And when you're able to "lock into that", you could begin to take your marriage to places you never even thought or jumped possible. What's in your heart right now as you think of what we were just talking about? And Marilyn, what do you want to say is the great takeaway from today for couples who are out there, maybe some people who are struggling right in this very moment, and they're with you and they're praying, God, do something in my marriage.

Marilyn Rhoads: The first thing that I would say is it all flows out of your relationship with Christ because this is something that Brad and I both, we all have to be reminded of, on a daily basis because we've got this flesh, this skin on. And so going to Christ to have that mindset, it's something we have to be reminded of regularly because we still naturally just fall back into that performance-based approach to life and our marriages. So going to Christ is the only way that we're able to then freely offer that to our spouse and keep that mindset front of mind.

Brad Rhoads: Yeah, the more you realize just the extent of grace we've been given. I mean, I almost heard God say, "Brad, you're not okay, and it's okay. I just love you. You're my adopted son. Chill, rest in me. You're my guy, Brad." And I just like, wow, you're kidding me. The pressure's off. And then when I kind of realized the extent of His grace, over time, it does get easier because now when Marilyn's acting in a way that frustrates me, it used to just instantly, I could just feel it inside making me mad. Now, my initial thought is uh-oh, Marilyn's not doing well. What do I need to do to help her? So it's like I shifted from an offense mentality to a rescue mentality. At that point of offense, the more you choose to pursue and love, over time, it does get easier, not harder.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, I love that. Well, we've come to the end of our first day. Our special guests, again, have been Brad and Marilyn Rhoads. Boy, if you don't have this book, you need to get up online right now, *The Grace Marriage, How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship*. Hey, Brad, Marilyn, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, and our entire team, we are really grateful what God's doing in and through you and Grace Marriage and can't wait for tomorrow's discussion. Thank you so much for joining us.

Brad Rhoads: Thanks.

Marilyn Rhoads: Thanks for having us.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an encouraging conversation today here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to hear more about how to transform a marriage as well

as how to take a good marriage and make it amazing. You will not want to miss this great conversation. Now, for all the singles who are listening to our program today, be sure to listen and take notes. Remember that preparation is crucial for setting a proper foundation for a relationship when God finally brings the one into your life.

Do you ever think about how the future will be in the hands of our children and grandchildren? We must do what we can and stand together to protect our youth. And this includes protecting the lives of the pre-born. Too few people realize that standing on the front lines of the mission field are our local pregnancy resource centers. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute urges every church and every believer to adopt a PRC, Pregnancy Resource Center. To find a PRC in your local area, we've created a special website. Go to drjamesdobson.org/prc. That's drjamesdobson.org/prc. Submit your email and then find your local pregnancy resource center link at the top of the page to find the PRC near you. It's that easy.

I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for making us a part of your day. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Family Talk.

Announcer:

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