



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Marriage Game Plan

**Guest(s):** George and Tondra Gregory

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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, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and I'm Roger Marsh, sitting in the co-host chair today, and today we're going to have a conversation about marriage. Marriage, the sacred gift that God has created and given to mankind since the beginning of time. We go back to Genesis chapter 2 verse 24. "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh." And then again, 1 Corinthians 13, which is a very popular verse, especially this time of year. It's often quoted at weddings. "Love is patient. Love is kind. it does not envy, it does not boast, it isn't proud. It does not dishonor others, it's not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Now, if that sounds like your marriage, then you don't have to pay attention for the next half hour, but for the rest of us, we've got a great conversation lined up for you with George and Tondra Gregory. For more than 25 years, the Gregorys have coached thousands of couples worldwide in marriage and relationships and since 2017, they have also served as the official chaplains of the Los Angeles Chargers in the NFL. And what's important about that is something we'll get into with regard to what happens to professional athletes after they retire and what happens with their marriages as well. Now, the Gregorys have written a brand-new book. It's just now out, it's called *The Marriage Game Plan, Developing a Winning Strategy for Marital Success*, and that'll be the basis for our conversation for today and today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. George and Tondra Gregory, welcome to the broadcast, Dr. and Mrs. Dobson extend their warmest greetings and we're grateful to have you on the program with us today.

George Gregory: Thank you.

Tondra Gregory: Well, thank you so much.

George Gregory: Thank you for having us. We're excited to be here.

Roger Marsh: Well, we are excited too. I mean, your background George with your degree from Duke Divinity School and Tondra, with your advanced education and counseling, you've been working together for nearly three decades to help couples really thrive. What are you hearing? I mean, what's the consensus from the couples that you're talking to? Are marriages kind of on the brink? Are they just holding on? Or are you really running into some couples who are saying, "Hey, we're thriving here. We're thrilled with what God's doing."

George Gregory: Yeah, I think it's a mix. I think it's probably kind of like the divorce rate, 50-50 in some respects, right? There's so many couples who are doing happy and they're thriving, but the more we get in with couples and sit on our couch or we're doing Zoom calls with them, we know that there's a significant amount that are dealing with problems from a lack of communication, a lack of intimacy, maybe it's finances, or we like to boil it down to a lack of a game plan that they're running the same plays and on the same team and really understanding what a win is for their particular marriage.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting to use the sports analogy. I know we've had Jim and Jill Kelly on the program before and they do the same thing in terms of the couples that they work with because of the number of people who can say, I can relate to the game, but we don't think about what goes on behind it. Well, obviously the Chargers don't just take the field and call out numbers and snap the ball and throw it all over the field. They have a game plan for both the offense and defense. Tondra, talk about why this is so important for, especially for wives to say, "Boy, it's nice to know that my husband and I are on the same page here. We're working off the same playbook, if you will."

Tondra Gregory: Yes, it's so important because the goal of marriage is oneness, right? So if, how do you take two God-designed, uniquely significant individuals on purpose, God designed us different, right? So how do you take those two different people and now say, now we have to be one, right? And so I feel like that is a huge challenge for couples is to figure out how do we fit together and operate as that well-oiled machine, right?

George Gregory: Yeah, we like to call that being on the same team, right? And understanding that you're on the same team is when you get into those, we don't call them fights, Roger. We call them intense fellowships. Is that when you get into moments of intense fellowship and you feel like opponents or enemies, you need to realize, yeah, we're on the same team. So we have to honor each other with our language. We have to honor each other with our tone as much as we can, right? And the rest, we just have to ask the Holy Spirit, help Lord help, right?

Roger Marsh: Well, that intense fellowship, I love that because I realize that there are a lot of couples who kinda come to the realization that you're either fighting for something or you're fighting with someone, and it sounds like what you guys are talking about is the former, right? If you've got a game plan, a playbook, you're on the same team. Now you're not fighting with each other, but you're actually

saying, “Okay, there's a problem here and we are working toward that solution.” What does it take in terms of communication to get to that point?

George Gregory: Yeah, well you gotta...most of the time we look at each other and we understand that as couples, that sometimes couples aren't necessarily communicating about the same thing. They might be arguing or having intense fellowship, but we like to say pull it back a little bit and define what the problem really is, right? And after you define what the problem is and you both are aware that we're talking about the same thing, look for ways in which both you contributed to the problem and ways that the problem can be solved. Again, we're talking about a team aspect, not just it's one person's problem, or it's one person's issue. It's this marriage and if one fails, we both fail. But if one wins, we both win. And that is what we want marriages to win at all cost.

Roger Marsh: One of the quotes you have in your book *The Marriage Game Plan* is “Having a winning marriage mindset takes grit, resiliency, and a willingness to grow, learn, and adjust.” Tondra, out of all of those characteristics, which one has been your experience that couples have the most struggle with, the most intense fellowship with, if you will?

Tondra Gregory: I would say the growth part, 'cause a lot of people feel like, you know, and I'm guilty of this. When George and I first got married, I told him, I said, "Don't try to change me. You knew how I was when you married me, right?" So, you know, so a lot of people have that same mindset is, "No, this is just me, you have to accept me as I am" and growth is the opposite of that. A growth is “No, I'm open to change. I'm open to being influenced by the way God made you and vice versa.” Right? And I do think that resistance to want to change, or to grow, it causes a block. We're trying to make our spouse do things and receive love and all those things the way we do, but we have to understand that God wants to make us more in His image and that this spouse that you have is supposed to fill some gaps to make you more well-rounded and more in the image of God. So that means change is a part of marriage. There was this saying that when I was growing up, that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. And that is not true, you can. God created our brains with neuroplasticity. And that neuroplasticity, it allows us to learn new things and to change break habits, learn new habits and grow. We got married at 23. I'm not the same woman I was at 23 that I am at an undisclosed age right now.

Rober Marsh: We'll talk about George's age all day long. But, Tondra, that's off the table, right, George?

George Gregory: Well, if I tell you how old I am, she's a little older than I am.

Roger Marsh: Oh, and you see, my mom and dad have the same problem. They're nine days apart, and so we always celebrate my dad's birthday, and then say, “Oh yeah, and mom also, that same age.” But we don't talk about it that way, and they're 92, it's worked great for them. George, let's talk about something that I mentioned at the outset with your degree in divinity and your pastoral work and

then Tondra, taking more of the counseling side of it, talk about some of the bigger challenges that you're seeing couples face. I know that there sometimes are some spiritual issues, one's growing a little bit more in their faith or maybe a couple would come to you for counseling and one of them just got saved and the other one isn't and they're saying, "Who is this person?" Talk about the importance of the spiritual, but also what Tondra's bringing here too. I mean, obviously she's a Christian, but a lot of couples see it as an either or, it sounds like you're talking about it's a both and situation.

George Gregory: Yeah, it definitely is a both and, right? There's grit, there's talent, meaning on the football field. And the same way I marriage, you gotta have grit and determination that we can make it through anything, right? But let's face it, there's some spiritual forces in our world that we know we wrestled with. That's why Paul says that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and wickedness in high places." And so I think that a lot of times that couples, when they don't understand the God component that they think that they can do everything according to what they know how to do or what they can't do, then they dismiss as it's over. However, when we welcome to Holy Spirit in our life, what we're saying is we need You because we can't, right? So I'll tell you a story about one of our football players. He asked me to marry him and we did. And a few weeks later, I said, how's marriage? And he says, "Well, it's kind of the same thing. We were already living together and we had kids." And he says, "I just did it because she wanted a ceremony." And I said, no, no, no, no, no. I said, "You missed the whole point of the ceremony. At the ceremony is where you invite God. and just as a football player, when you're on that field and you need a second wind, you're tired and that second wind comes, you need help with that. And he says, right. I said, "The Holy Spirit is our second wind. When we can't do things in marriage, we just say, 'Holy Spirit, help me out, help me to talk right, help me to do right, help me to be an example of what you want us to be and reflect who you are to us.'"

Roger Marsh: You know, it's interesting you mentioned that aspect of aspect of the professional sports part of your ministry. Since 2017, you and Tondra have been the chaplains for the Los Angeles Chargers. And I have to admit, I've met many men who have been chaplains for professional sports teams before. I don't know that I've heard of a married couple that are chaplains. Well, Tondra, let's get your perspective first. How did this all come about? Was this something George really wanted to do and you said, fine, I guess I'll do it. Or is this some part of your ministry that you've been really feeling God calling you to?

Tondra Gregory: Yes, well, we definitely feel God calling us to minister to couples and marriages. And so that's something we've always done together. And so with coming to the NFL and working with professional athlete football teams, we do do couples studies as well with the teams. And then, of course, breaking off into, George works with the men and the husbands and I work with the wives. And so it kind of just organically happened. So George does the chapel services the night before the game. He does a coaches Bible study, a players Bible study. So I work

with the women and I work with coaches' wives. I do a Bible study for them and a Bible study for the player's wives and girlfriends.

George Gregory: Roger, we always say, I always tell people that I allow Tondra to go anywhere in the Chargers facility she wants to except for the locker room. She can't go into that locker room for fear she might leave me.

Tondra Gregory: That's so funny. He's crazy.

George Gregory: No, but we do, Roger, we do it together as a team. And, you know, when we were first brought here, we got here because we were Coach Anthony Linz... that was two head coaches ago, we was his pastor in New York City. We were moving out of New York and he was coming out here and it just lined up that this was the perfect match for us to do it together. And there's a lot of teams that have a husband-and-wife component, but we like to say, and not bragging, but man, we do bring a lot of education. We bring a lot of experience being married 30 years. And the practicality is that our schedules are available for these players and our wives throughout the season really just gives us the ability to be excellent marriage coaches in the NFL and to other professional athletes in other leagues.

Roger Marsh: And what a golden opportunity for you is as you write about in your book, *The Marriage Game Plan*, the fact that the divorce rate among professional athletes is so high, especially when they leave, 'cause I would imagine it's such a surreal experience and what's the average life expectancy for an NFL career? A couple of years, maybe. I mean, not everybody's Tom Brady. A lot of people never make training camp and that's the way it goes for them. But when you're used to a certain way of living, it's really surreal. And then all of a sudden you have real life facing you and you run into players like the one you just described who was saying, yeah, we did this because, well, I wanted her to have a ceremony and you're like, no, no, you missed the point. You're probably rescuing a lot of marriages from that 70 % statistic with the work that you're doing now, but then the follow-up that it kind of gives them moving forward. Tondra, I would imagine for a wife, especially, that's a huge benefit.

Tondra Gregory: Oh, absolutely. It's a huge benefit in the NFL, like football is king, right? That's the main primary thing that has to trump a lot of things. And that's just how it's set up. And that's what husbands and wives, um, they agree that this is what we're doing together, right? You do need to have that agreement to do something like this together to say we make football a priority in our marriage.

George Gregory: Pro players are just like anybody else. They just problems are just magnified and we can all see when they mess up, right? But we like to teach proactivity, Roger. And there's something about an athlete that if athlete isn't proactive, if he's not working out, if he doesn't have the good nutrition, if he's not sleeping well, then it's going to be a bad game. And so we teach the same thing as the coaches do. Hey, let's be proactive instead of reactive. And if you don't want to become that 70% divorce rate statistic, then it's best that we sort of get you into practice and

reps right now to look at your marriage. Don't wait until your career is over to deal with your marital issues, but deal with them now through counseling or a coach or even through a book like *The Marriage Game Plan*. What we realize is that people, in a lot of ways, they won't help, but sometimes they don't know how to ask help, but when you've got coaches like us that make ourselves available, the help is right there, and that's what we believe.

Roger Marsh: George and Tondra Gregory are our guests today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We're talking about their new book, *The Marriage Game Plan*, which is just now out, *Developing a Winning Strategy for Marital Success*, and we have a link at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). You mentioned the inevitable conflicts in marriage, and you call them intense fellowship, which I think it's great. I realized though that there are a lot of couples who are, you know, it's just, it's hard work, hard work, hard work, hard work. And so the tension can either build up or it'll just spill over. There is something that happens in the sports world, you write about this in your book called Victory Monday. And the way that you parallel this, you know, with what happens for athletes and why it's significant for them. And when it comes to developing marital success, you've got to parallel. Kind of walk us through that if you would.

Goerge Gregory: Yeah, well, there's no better thing than to hear your coach say after a win, hey, Victory Monday, right? And Victory Monday is just any day after the game. It could be Victory Friday, if it's a Thursday game or whatever. But what it does is it gives those guys the ability to start going around that locker room and they're high-fiving and they're saying, "Man, I saw you on that play." And so, you know, as couples in marriage, we can be pros at pointing out where people do wrong or where our spouse does wrong or need to improve. But Victory Mondays is not a time to do that. It's a time to high-five your players that you've played hard with and congratulate them and celebrate together. And that's what we like to do. We like to say to couples, spend some time pointing out what your spouse does right and that will probably benefit you better than always pointing out what they do wrong and celebrate, which is man, give them a kiss or a hug or take them out to eat to their favorite dinner or if you're married, man, go and like lay it on them in other places and just say, man, we're gonna celebrate because this is a big win in our life.

Roger Marsh: I know that's huge for guys to receive that from their wives. Tondra, give us the other out of the coin here because I'm sure there are a lot of guys saying, "I told you, I loved you last week. Do I have to tell you again?" you know, I mean, and I'm not making fun of us, but that's just kind of the way guys are wired. Talk about what a Victory Monday does for a wife in a situation like this.

Tondra Gregory: Absolutely. It definitely feels the love tank, right? And it's definitely a thing to feel cherished and adored and to just take those moments and pauses to prioritize your relationship. So much of, like George always says, we focus so much on the away game and we kind of really don't kind of invest in that home game, so for a woman to receive that from her husband to prioritize her, to prioritize the relationship, to acknowledge and celebrate what she's doing, it

just fills you up to be able to kind of run and have some endurance for those challenging seasons.

Roger Marsh: And guys, it sounds like, and Tondra, correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like you're saying anything is better than nothing. I mean, in terms of not that you would, you're trying to quantify these or say that this an A, B, and C, but any kind of recognition of something like that is going to speak volumes to a wife from a husband.

Tondra Gregory: Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. Because sometimes, especially working with professional athletic couples, I've worked with women in all fears where their husbands have served in all roles; doctors, lawyers. We lived in New York City, husbands that are on Wall Street, pastors. A lot of times women are feeling insignificant in supporting their husband's career or not that they don't have their own lane, but I'm just saying, just being mindful of...we talk about in the book in marriage, there's no Michael Jordan's or Scotty Pippen's in marriage, meaning Michael Jordan was the big personality and then Scotty Pippen was the support role, right? And so we just have to keep that mindset that in marriage that each person is significant. Each person's role is significant and there's like George just said a few minutes ago, like we all win. When one wins, we all win. We can never be great in our own right when we're in marriage. We're great because of the partnership that we're in.

Roger Marsh: I think that's wonderful and it's so encouraging to hear from a couple who's seen it, you know, you've been up and down, it's not like you have the perfect scenario here. Yeah, obviously you guys have worked through your times of the peaks and the valleys of marriage, but George and Tondra Gregory with this new book, *The Marriage Game Plan: Developing a Winning Strategy for Marital Success*, it's been successful for you. You've seen it work in the lives of couples and now you wanna share this with the world. When someone gets a copy of this book and the book is just now out, what is your hope? I mean, who did you write it for? Did you have a couple in mind that might be really struggling and they're just trying to pull his off the brink or maybe a couple that's doing okay, but they wanna move from survive to thrive mode. What was your hope?

Tondra Gregory: Our hope with this book is that couples will walk away with a game plan. Our book is not just a book that you read and then you're done, but we actually, couples will be working on their game plan. At the end of every chapter, there are questions and activities for the couples to work on. And what they don't realize is doing all the work and the activities and answering these questions, this book is guiding them in building their marriage game plan. And when they get to chapter 10, it's gonna be a place for them to pull everything together and have their marriage game plan developed that they can refer back to and adjust as needed as life changes, but it's something tangible that they can begin to implement for their marriage.

George Gregory: Yeah, and Roger, I'd say, man, we messed up so royally in the beginning of our marriage with not knowing how to do it. We didn't have a game plan that...

what we realized is that because we've been married now 30 years and we think of God as a sense of human that He's using us how we started off. But we like to say that we are pictures of God's grace. If we can do it, all of your couples, Roger, they can do it. If they develop the game plan, if they're willing to practice. Pros practice every day, we need to practice every day; practice love, patience, kindness. If we do what we say we believe that God has called us to do, we should do it in the home, not just in the away game. And we know that couples can make it if they've got a plan and they've got God on their side.

Roger Marsh: Well, I love that analogy of the home game and the away game and the fact that, you know, that there is a world that you go out and do things in and you have to fight the battles that are out there. But then when you're at home, those home games, oftentimes that's where the neglect starts to creep in. And you put so much emphasis on being a good road team. You guys both know that the championship teams are the ones that win the games they're supposed to and take care of their business at home. So I just love the analogy there. The book again by George and Tondra Gregory, it's called *The Marriage Game Plan* and it's just now out and we're so happy to have this opportunity to chat with you about this brand-new book as the book is releasing. Congratulations on that. We have a link for it up at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). Take the final moments of our time together and talk to that couple that says, "Okay, I hear it. I know you guys are working through it. We are five years into the marriage and I can already start to see that we've got some issues and I'm not sure if we're gonna be able to come back from the edge."

George Gregory: Sure, well, I'll tell you, you can, you can. And what we like to say, you know, for many years, we struggled. For the first two years, I'll say, in marriage and it was through education like Dr. James Dobson, who really helped us out and who showed us that we could do it through game planning and through certain tools. And so we'd like to say to Dr. James Dobson, thank you so much for pouring into couples through your curriculums, through your books and things of that nature. And look at us now. We've taken what you've given us and we're now impacting professional athletes and couples from locker rooms to everyday living rooms. So thank you so much, Dr. Dobson.

Tondra Gregory: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, George and Tondra Gregory, thank you so much for this book. Thanks so much for your time today. God bless you as you continue to minister to athletes wherever the Lord takes you. It sounds like it's a fascinating ministry that you have, and I pray that God will continue to bless you individually and as a couple in the days to come. Thank you so much for being with us today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

George Gregory: Thank you.

Tondra Gregory: Thank you for having us.



Roger Marsh:

Well, what a great conversation on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Our guests once again have been George and Tondra Gregory. They are the authors of the brand-new book called *The Marriage Game Plan: Developing a Winning Strategy for Marital Success*. And if you missed any part of today's discussion, you can catch up by visiting [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and click on today's broadcast. That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). The book is being released tomorrow, so be sure to check it out. We've got a link for it up at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) as well. Well, today is June the 30th, and it is the final day of our June matching grant opportunity. The deadline is tonight at midnight. Some generous ministry partners have stepped forward with an incredible opportunity, but it expires in just hours. Every donation that we receive today will be doubled, but only until midnight tonight.

That means your support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will have twice the impact in strengthening families through biblical truth. A \$50 gift becomes \$100. A \$500 gift becomes \$1,000. A \$10,000 gift becomes \$20,000. Whatever amount God leads you to donate, every dollar will go twice as far, but only if you act today. You can make a secure donation online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). You can also give a gift over the phone and you call 877-732-6825.

You know, when families are grounded in biblical principles, they become beacons of hope in their communities. Your doubled gift today helps us continue introducing families to the gospel while preserving the sacred institutions of marriage and family that God has designed. And by the way, as a thank you for your gift of any amount in support of our ministry today, we'll send you a copy of Dr. Dobson's timeless book called *Your Legacy* along with the companion DVD. This powerful resource will equip you to leave a heritage of faith for your children and grandchildren. And in times like these, there's nothing more important than being intentional about their spiritual training. Now, request your copy of Dr. Dobson's book, *Your Legacy*, along with the companion DVD, when you make a donation of any amount online at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). And with the 4th of July just around the corner, it's actually coming up this Friday, now is the perfect time to rediscover the faith that shaped our nation's founding. When you visit [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org), you can sign up for our inspiring "Faith of Our Founders" email series. And when you read it, you'll learn how God's guiding hand guided our founding fathers. You'll also discover why our founders believed that only a moral people could remain free. You can sign up for the free "Faith of Our Founders" email series when you go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).

Well I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at Family Talk, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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