

FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

References to conferences, resources, or other special promotions may be obsolete.

Dating With Purpose

Guest: Marshall Segal
From the series: Not Yet Married (Day 1 of 3)
Air date: April 15, 2019

Bob: If you come into a dating relationship with a past—a past that you’ve never shared with your current boyfriend or girlfriend—and that relationship starts heading toward marriage, do you tell them about your past? How much do you tell?

Here’s how Marshall Segal answers that question:

Marshall: I think the gospel frees us. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The gospel frees us to be honest about our failures, our weaknesses, and our flaws. If we’re not willing to be that with someone that we’re dating, that’s probably not going to change just because you make promises at the altar. Nothing is more important in marriage, apart from Christ, than trust and honesty in those things. So I think it’s really helpful, and it’s a way of cultivating in dating the kind of honesty, transparency, and trust that marriage runs on.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to talk about the challenges facing people who are not yet married today. That’s the title of a book by Marshall Segal, who joins us. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

So do you have a lot of not-yet marrieds at Kensington Church?

Dave: We have a lot of them!

Bob: Do you?

Dave: I think we hear it quite often. Like, you know, one of the things Ann and I do regularly is a marriage series.

Bob: Yes.

Dave: And the singles will say, “Hey!” You know, “What about us?” So you hear that. Although we think, “Hey! This is *for you!*”

Bob: Exactly.

Dave: But they don't see it that way.

Ann: I think, often, the singles in our church can feel forgotten.

Dave: Yes.

Ann: And not addressed.

Bob: When you planted the church 30 years ago, I'm guessing that the singles were younger singles, and that they're older singles today. Would that be right?

Ann: Yes, I think we have an array of all different ages: 20s to 60s.

Dave: You know, I'm laughing because I think we're so old, we don't remember! [Laughter] But, yes, when we started, we had 43 people. So that means there was somebody who was single.

Bob: Yes.

Dave: Because you've got an odd number. Of course, that counted dogs, cats, trees, bushes, everything, you know? [Laughter]

Bob: Okay.

Dave: But yes, it's an eclectic group still today, but they're a dominant force. That's why I'm excited to talk about this.

Ann: An important force!

Bob: They are an important force, and we've got Marshall Segal here to talk about it today. Marshall, welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

Marshall: Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Bob: Marshall lives in Minnesota with his wife and—how many kids?

Marshall: Just one; a two-and-a-half year-old.

Bob: So what's the problem? Just one? What's going on?

Marshall: No! We're praying for more.

Bob: Okay, alright.

Marshall is a writer and Managing Editor at DesiringGod.org, which many of us appreciate and have benefitted from. We are so grateful for the huge archive of books, and sermons, and articles, and videos. I love the “Ask Pastor John” videos you guys make available, so thanks for all you do.

Marshall: Well, thank you! Praise God. It’s great to get to hear what God’s doing through the resources. We’re thankful.

Bob: Marshall has written a book called *Not Yet Married: The Pursuit of Joy in Singleness and Dating*. As we heard, you’re married; so, did this come out of years of singleness for you?

Marshall: Yes, absolutely. I say in the introduction that it’s strange that the book came out after I was married. Some people questioned, “*Not Yet Married*, but”

Dave: Yes.

Bob: You are!

Ann: You are!

Marshall: “. . . you already are!” It did. It came from, really, a decade of reflection, starting right as I was graduating from college, and all the way up until getting married, and then after. I finished writing the book after I got married, so I was just reflecting on what I thought God was doing over those years—back into the teen years, high school, college, after college; and what He was teaching me.

So, as I started to write those lessons out, the process was long. It was five years, probably, in the making. So the book did come out after I was married, but I’m really grateful, actually, because I think it put some closure on that season for me, in a way that I could look back and feel like I could put the book forward in a way that feels like I could close that chapter and try to explain what God had done.

Bob: Let me ask you about that season. As you look back on the start of high school to, “I do”. . .

Marshall: Yes?

Bob: Give yourself a number grade, 1-10, on how you would say you did during your single years.

Marshall: Yes, thanks for asking. I can’t give a number from that whole range, but I can say high school would have been a 2 or 3.

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: College was 3 or 4; and then, after college, there was a really big awakening for me in my pursuit of the Lord, and discovering what it meant to enjoy Jesus and treasure Him; find Him as my greatest satisfaction; look to Him for happiness and significance and love. So, from there on out, it got a lot stronger fast, and then deepened as, eventually, I met Fay.

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: And as we walked through some of the lessons I had learned, and I got to learn a lot from her in the process, too. So I don't know how to rank that season. I look at it really fondly, getting to meet her and getting to know her.

Bob: Well, the trajectory was good, from high school all the way. You were moving in the right direction.

Marshall: It didn't get *worse*!

Bob: Yes, that's good.

Marshall: It didn't get as much better as I would have hoped.

Ann: Why were the numbers so low in high school and college?

Marshall: Yeah, I jumped into dating really early. Really, in middle school was what I would consider the first serious relationship. It was sixth grade.

Dave: Seriously?!

Marshall: Yes.

Dave: Really?

Marshall: I can look back and remember calling a girl regularly. We said we were "boyfriend and girlfriend." We never went on a date, and I'm not even sure what my parents, at the time, knew about the relationship. They knew we were friends; they probably didn't think much of it. But then, from there on out, a serious girlfriend per year—seventh grade; eighth grade; ninth grade; tenth grade. [It was] different girls each time, with varying levels of unhealth in those relationships, and immaturity.

I say in the book, I don't think people should date until they can marry, at least within a reasonable time. That's because we're just not ready in terms of life. So, falling into all kinds of traps that there are for dating: dating too early, staying in relationships too long, treating a young woman's heart cavalierly, experimenting physically, and sexual immorality. The trend through was that my heart wasn't yet anchored in Christ in a way that would allow me to selflessly love somebody else.

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: I'm ashamed of the way that I treated some young women in those years. As Faye and I have processed this (and I write about it in the book), there was a day—

We started dating May 1, 2013. We had dated for a year long-distance, so with long-distance, it takes longer to get to know each other.

Bob: Yes.

Dave: Yes. How old were you?

Marshall: So I would have been 26.

Dave: Yes.

Marshall: A year later, I had decided I needed to explain and share more of my history with her before we moved forward any more. I could tell there were things developing in the relationship, and I was having affections for her, and falling in love with her, and wanting to marry her, and wanting her to love me and marry me; but I knew that if we were going to trust each other, I needed to be really clear and honest about things in the past so that we could process that together and give her an opportunity to say, "I can't trust you in light of those things."

So on May 1st we started dating, in 2013, and May 2, 2014—so almost exactly a year later—I was visiting in California. I talk about this in the book, but I can remember. I could take you to the place on the beach where we had this conversation. It took me 30 minutes to try to get the umbrella into the sand; to try to stick it in the sand. [Laughter] I couldn't do it! I was so nervous already about the conversation.

Dave: Wow.

Marshall: And then, it was windy. So I eventually just laid it down on the ground, like a white flag of surrender. But then, I proceeded to share about, you know, the last ten years or so—ten or 15 years—and just the layers of brokenness and ways that I had sinned against her long before I even knew her. The ways that I felt intensely now, knowing her and admiring her and falling in love with her and practicing sexual purity with her—I knew that she needed to know these things.

So I shared about it, and it fell really heavily on her. I could *feel* the emotion of it. And yet, she'll describe it today if people ask her about it. She just felt a wave, unlike she'd ever felt before—a wave—of grace come over her. She was able, through tears in that moment, to extend a forgiveness that has endured to this day.

So, to this day, despite us having to work through some of the pain and the consequences of sin—sin *always* hurts; sin *always* has consequences! So, to this day, we're still working through some of those things, but *never* have I felt that she has withheld the forgiveness that she granted me that day. And so, when we talk about the past, I talk about it in two ways. And I think it is true to talk about it in two ways.

One—someone will ask, “If you could go back and do it again, just like you were talking about, would you do it again differently?” Absolutely!!

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: No question in my mind! If I could go back again, knowing what I know now about Christ, about the Bible, about heaven and hell, about my joy in Him, and about Faye! If I could go back now and do those years knowing, “You’re going to meet this woman. You’re going to love this woman. You’re going to spend the rest of your life with this woman.” I would do *almost everything* differently in my dating life.

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: But, if you ask Faye, “Do you wish he did it differently?” She would say, “Yes, but I wouldn’t trade any of it. I wouldn’t trade any of it.” She believes, and we believe, that we have experienced more of God on this road—the road that we’ve walked including my broken past—than we would have experienced any other way. It wasn’t a Plan B for God, as if there would have been a Plan A—a better version—where we would have experienced more of Him if I had done things differently.

So both need to be said. If you have not made the mistakes that I made in relationships, I *plead* with the Lord that you wouldn’t!

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: That He would rescue you from that; that you wouldn’t be drawn into the things that so many are drawn into in dating. But, if you have a past, don’t for one second believe Satan and think that those years were wasted.

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: That God can’t purpose those for ways to make you a better spouse; a better husband; a better wife; a better father or mother—that He can’t use that in some way, because Scripture is *filled* with testimonies of broken people who God repurposed in some significant way for His glory and for the good of others. So I just want to say, if you’re ashamed of your past, that’s okay. We should feel that. There’s a godly guilt that we feel.

Micah 7 is one of my *favorite* verses. This was, if I had to pin-point where my 1-10 turned—

Bob: Yes.

Marshall: Micah 7 says, “Rejoice not over me, oh my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I shall bear the indignation of the Lord.” That’s a terrifying verse; a terrifying phrase in there: “When I fall, I shall rise. . . I *will* bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my cause and executes judgment *for me*” (not against me).

Ann: That’s good!

Marshall: “He will bring me out into the light. I shall look upon His vindication.” That was life-changing for me, because it didn’t brush away the past. It didn’t brush away the guilt, but it created a world in which I could live with hope despite my past, and believe that God was working. He was bringing me out into the light, and He was using that in a way for my good, for Faye’s good, for our son’s good; for those that I serve in ministry and their good.

So I think it’s really important how we deal with sexual history and broken pasts in dating or in any other area of life.

Bob: It’s the beauty from ashes principle.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: And that’s what God delights in doing. I think it’s important for listeners to know, you may be looking at your past and thinking, “There’s so much I’m ashamed of! There’s so much. I’ve made such a mess of (whatever).” The truth of the gospel is, God takes whatever the mess is, and He makes something glorious out of it when we surrender to Him.

Ann: So, for parents, how do we coach our kids that are too young, and they’re not emotionally mature, and they’re not spiritually mature? You’re a young dad. What are you going to say, and how will you coach your son?

Marshall: Yes, I’m glad I don’t have to answer that question quite yet! [Laughter]

I’ve got ten or so years, I hope, to learn. I would say it’s not helpful, right out of the gate. There’s not any relationship built; no trust built. It is a subjective thing. I wouldn’t say one year or six weeks or six months, because some of the relationships just operate on very different timelines. But I would say my principle for questions like these is to lean hard on those who know you best, love you most, and are willing to tell you when you’re wrong.

And, obviously, I’m assuming that they love Christ. I would lean hard on a few people in your life who are willing to say the hard thing to you; to say, “I know I need to be honest with this person, eventually, about my past. Do you think now is a good time to be honest with them, or do you think I should wait longer?”

Dave: And what do you think the wisdom is on the “what” question? You just talked about “when,” but “what” do you share? How much? How detailed?

Marshall: Yes.

Dave: How do you answer that question?

Marshall: Again, it’s going to be a subjective thing, but I went into the conversation with Faye saying, “I don’t want anything to come up after we’re married that would surprise her.” So I want to share enough detail that if the scrolls are unrolled before her when we’re in marriage, she would say, “Oh, you never told me about that!”

So I don’t think that means a gratuitous amount of detail. I don’t think you have to go back and explain every interaction. But frequency and kind of offense, whatever it might be. There could be a whole host of different things that might come up here in terms of brokenness and the way that could be. Obviously, about communication; it could be about physical intimacy and sexual immorality.

I think the gospel frees us. “There is therefore now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The gospel frees us to be honest about our failures, our weaknesses, and our flaws. If we’re not willing to be that with someone that we’re dating, that’s probably not going to change just because you make promises at the altar. Nothing is more important in marriage, apart from Christ, than trust and honesty in those things. So it’s a way of cultivating in dating the kind of honesty, transparency, and trust that marriage runs on.

Dave: Faye experienced this wave of grace. I love the term!

Marshall: Yes.

Dave: Did that ever like dissipate? Like, after a week or two, was it like, “Ahhh!” You know?

Marshall: I would say, there have been days in dating, and then, especially in marriage—you’re’ so much more vulnerable to each other in marriage.

Dave: Yes.

Marshall: There have been days in marriage where my past is very hard for her. She’s honest about that, and I’ve encouraged her, “Any time you feel that, I want to hear it!”

Dave: Yes.

Marshall: “It hurts me, because sin hurts. You’re not abusing me by doing that.”

Dave: Yes.

Marshall: So for me to be able to say in advance, “Thank you so much for forgiving me the way you did. It was the most tangible expression of the gospel I’ve ever experienced, that afternoon on the beach.” And she remembers that! She remembers what it feels like for the wave of grace to fall over her. This moment, instead of becoming a pulling of the thread in our marriage, and of the trust in our marriage, we’re weaving together instead. So it’s adding to the quilt that we’re making.

My other thought on that is that a lot of people say, “Don’t do things now you’ll regret in marriage.” I agree, but I just think a lot of young people—

Ann: They always hear it.

Marshall: I knew that!

Ann: Yes.

Marshall: I *said* it to people!

Dave: Yes.

Marshall: And yet I was doing it. So I think one thing is that we all, for instance, love the idea of sexual purity. The kind of people who are listening and leaning in and reading their Bibles and loving Jesus—no one is saying, “Oh, I just—sexual impurity is something. . .” You know, they’re not *drawn* to it as a concept in most of their moments. 99% of them say, “Oh, absolutely not! I want to be sexually pure. I don’t want to go there.”

Then, these moments of weakness, where you put yourself in a bad situation; you’re tired; temptation comes. Then, all of the sudden, you’ve fallen into something that, 99% of the time, you’re like, “I don’t want any part of that!”

So I want to bring that back to talking about, “Don’t do something now that you’ll regret in marriage,” which I think is a pretty vague, abstract thing for a lot of young people. Something that Faye and I practiced that was super-helpful was that we talked to each other in ways that assumed we were going to marry somebody else.

Ann: Oh! What do you mean? What did that look like?

Marshall: For instance, there would be conversations that would have, or if there was any temptation into sexual impurity or anything like that, we might talk about—she might talk about—her husband. So she’s not saying, “You’re going to be my husband.”

Ann: Yes.

Marshall: Because I think we all, as we start to date, every single relationship I was in, I said, “This is the one!”

Bob: Right.

Ann: Me, too!

Marshall: “I’m going to marry her . . . unless we break up.”

And I think if you turn it and say, “This is not my husband,” or “This is not my wife.” “My husband (or my wife) is waiting at the altar.” So, for us, that third person was a really helpful tool for us in making it more concrete that you’re going to have to tell a husband or a wife about this relationship one day. That helped us a lot. Now, we were 27, 28, 29—not a teenager—but, already, as I think about my son, that’s something I want to start practicing really early. To say [to him], “Don’t assume that this person is your husband or wife.”

Dave: You know, I’ve never heard that explained that way.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: That’s good, yes.

Dave: It’s a really good way to think.

Ann: Yes, it’s really good.

Dave: I was thinking, even now, as a married man and a dad, to think the same way. I’m making decisions for my son; I’m making decisions for my grandkids. You know, not just for me. It adds gravitas to the decision. I don’t want to stand in front of my wife and kids and explain some bad decision. I want to stand before them and say, “I was thinking of you when I stayed pure; when I made this decision.”

Bob: I think it’s clear that every 11 year-old in America needs to read *Not Yet Married*.
[Laughter]

I mean, that’s who you wrote it for, right? The 11 year-old? [Laughter]

Marshall: I hope some 11 year-olds read it.

Bob: It would be good for high school kids to read this, or for college kids to read this, or for moms and dads to take a high school son or daughter through this.

Dave: Yes.

Bob: Go through it together. The first half of the book is about being “not yet married,” and the second half of the book is about when the not-yet-married meet, and you begin the journey toward possible marriage.

You know, I'm thinking back to the conversation that Marshall had with his then girlfriend—the woman who would become his wife—where he was talking about his past. That's a conversation that more and more young couples are having to have. They've got to think through how they're going to navigate that. That can be a challenge. David Robbins, who's the President of FamilyLife, is here with us.

You've talked to a lot of young couples who have had to think through, "Am I going to have this conversation? What do I say? What's the right time? And how much do I share?"

David: Yes, it was an ever-increasing conversation with 20-something couples that we were working with, but really, with this conversation today, I am listening to it and just thinking, "Oh, my word! I remember my conversation with Meg." I remember the restaurant and the table we were sitting at. As Marshall said, our relationship—enough time had been there for some significant trust to happen, and we were at a turning point, thinking about the future.

The Holy Spirit really began a season of prompting in me to "go there" with some of the mistakes in my own life. We set up the conversation. We knew we were going to talk about it. Meg jumped in. She said, "I'll go first!" So she went first, and she was there crying, in tears, over telling one boy in her lifetime that she loved him; and she kissed him a little too much.

I just thought, "I love your sincerity, but, oh, man! Here I go! It's my turn!"

Bob: You've got a 'carry on' and I've got a 'foot locker,' right?

David: Exactly!

Bob: Yes.

David: It can be fair to say, I never fell off a cliff of where I didn't want to go, ultimately, by the grace of God, but I brought a lot more, in my 'locker,' to the table. And, as I went there, and shared some of the things that really were just shame—you know, secret things that I had held on to, I encountered the grace of God through Meg that day; forgiveness in a way that I had really never experienced. I mean, I experienced 1 John 1: 7 in a real way: "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Bob: Yes.

David: The most important thing that happened that day was that it set the pattern of keeping things in the light; a pattern of trusting God and believing in running to the light as soon as possible in marriage. That is always worth it! It was set that day; the pattern was set.

Bob: Those conversations can be very hard conversations to have, but, as I've heard Dave and Ann Wilson say, there's deeper intimacy on the other side of those conversations.

David: Yes.

Bob: That's good counsel. Thank you, David.

Now tomorrow, we want to talk about those not-yet-married folks who are in a lonely season, because they would like to be in a relationship; they would like to be married, but nothing seems to be happening. How do they find joy in their not-yet-married status when that's what's going on in their lives? We'll talk to Marshall Segal about that tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

Michelle: FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife. And our goal is to develop godly families and marriages that change the world one home at a time.

We have resources that may be helpful for you at FamilyLife.com. And, you can also email us global@familylife.com with any of your questions or concerns.

Thanks for listening. Thanks to Marques Holt, Dennis Leake, Rhonda Street and our entire broadcast team. We hope you've enjoyed the broadcast and that you will be back for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you've benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](#) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com