Spiritually Mismatched

Guest: Kent Hughes

From the series: When the One You Love Doesn't Believe
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Bob: If you're a Christian, and you're married to someone who is not a Christian, Pastor Kent Hughes wants to remind you of a very important point. This is something you can't fix.

Kent: Unbelieving spouses, theologically, are dead. They are non-seekers; they have need of a righteousness outside of themselves; they have need of a gift of faith to receive it; and they have need of regeneration.

So the question is – in the light of this, what are they to do?

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, March 26th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. If you're married to an unbeliever there are some things you can do and probably ought to do. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Monday edition. We're going to be spending time this week looking at a common situation; something that is very difficult for couples who find themselves in this situation and that is when a husband and wife are one in every dimension of their marriage relationship except for the spiritual dimension.

Dennis: And at that point, Bob, you know, it's a little bit like oil and water. You've got two people who may be desiring – well, at least one of them desiring to mix and be one in all ways, and yet if they don't share that common faith in Jesus Christ and aren't sharing in the things of the soul, then the oil and water separate and, increasingly, we get letters from listeners who are in these situations where it may be a man who is married to a woman who is not a believer, or a woman who is married to a husband who is not a believer. But they need help, they need coaching, and we're going to give that over the next few days.
Bob: I look around a church, and I see husbands who are there alone, or wives who are there alone, reflecting that one of them has a spiritual passion, and the other one doesn't. And I know that pastors are hit with this issue routinely – a wife or a husband who shows up and says, "What do I do?"

And, in fact, that's one of the reasons that we hosted a conference for pastors and for lay people designed to help them deal with the family issues they face in their churches.

Dennis: Yeah, we pulled all the stops out, and we invited John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Elisabeth Elliott, Stu Weber, Paige and Dorothy Patterson, along with 30 more speakers to come together at the "Building Strong Families in Your Church" conference. Our desire, Bob, was to create a conference, kind of a watering hole, where pastors and church leaders could come and get equipped to handle some of these thorny issues.

You know, it was just last Sunday I ran into a woman who has been going to our church without her husband for 20 years – the very thing you're talking about. And you know she's sad that she doesn't share her spiritual experience with her husband, but she continues to faithfully be there and also attempt to raise her children.

And that's a difficult balance because when you're married to someone who is not marching to a spiritual drumbeat, at points they may become jealous of Jesus Christ in your life and may feel like they're competing with Him.

Bob: A number of the pastors who attended the event had an opportunity to hear Kent Hughes speak on this subject of how to minister to a believing spouse who is married to an unbeliever.

Dennis: Yeah, and, you know, we chose someone who has had more than 35 years of ministry experience – Kent Hughes is the pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. Some of you are familiar with Wheaton College. I'm sure he has a ton of Wheaton students who go to his church there.

He is the author of 25 books. He and his wife, Barbara, have four children and 14 – count 'em – 14 grandchildren. But you get the sense, and you're going to hear Kent speak about this today and tomorrow – you get the sense that he's been in some deep waters not only in his public ministry but also privately as he's ministered to those within his own family, Bob.
Bob: Right, and if you find yourself in this same situation – married to someone who doesn't share your spiritual passion or if you know someone in that situation, invite them to join you and listen in as we hear from Kent Hughes.

Kent: [From audiotape.] I have a wonderful story, it's about our neighbors, Jamie and Debbie. James and Debbie that live directly across the street, and the story, as they tell it, is about how 20 years ago they moved in across the street, they knew that they were coming to a town that had a lot of churches, and they hoped to be as far away from that as possible, but this Victorian dream house that they wanted was where they bought it.

And they began to work on the house, and five months later, the new pastor of College Church moved in across the street, and they went, "Oh, no."

Well, we began a friendship with them – lovely couple. He had taken over the family business, and the business was prospering and, in fact, it prospered in such a way that that business itself is 100 times bigger than it was when he took it over today. So you're talking about it's all over the world.

So kind of a very wealthy, 30-something couple with very few needs – at least they looked that way to us. And my wife began a friendship with her, and there had been some exchange with her, and she got her to come to woman's Bible study, and she found a group of women that she'd never experienced before. She began to come.

Campus Crusade had organized an outreach, a country club luncheon with a professional golfer, and James and Debbie got roped into going to that, and James didn't like what he heard, and so he checked the box, "Don't call me." He said, "I distrusted the born-again types." And, besides, I had been chairman of the board of elders at my church, so wasn't I religious enough?

Well, what happened is that Debbie, that night, said, "God, I want to know You," and she said that she prayed. She said, "I'm going to go out in my yard the next day and when I go outside, I want you to have Barbara come outside so we can talk about my soul."

And she walked outside, and my wife walked outside and led her to Christ. Our neighbors across the street – what a beautiful thing.
Well, James said, as this happened, he said, "I was trying to be understanding and patient, but I often found myself resentful and angry. I felt lonely in my own house. If God is good, how could He be at the center of a heretofore successful marriage? I had my own views about God based on I know not what. I figured I had a reasonable shot at heaven because I was a pretty good person. God graded on a curve, no doubt, hopefully, a generous one."

"Debbie" – this is his newly regenerated wife – "refuted my arguments based on Scripture. She spoke of salvation through faith in God's grace. Well, maybe there was some good in all of this," I thought, James speaking. "Difficult as it might be for me, for all that I had resented about our new lifestyle, Debbie had changed positively in many ways.

For openers, she was at peace with our relationship. I was the one in emotional distress. She definitely was stronger, a more independent person, but she was less argumentative and more forgiving. Irony of ironies, she was somehow more romantic through this period of marital tension."

Well, this went on for about a year, and I started a study with him, and he was marvelously born again and came to Christ. And I tell you because there's many things – and I'll say some things about Debbie a little later, but she modeled a lot of what needs to happen in Scripture for a husband in order to come to Christ, and they are a marvelous Christian couple today. He is on my board of elders of my church today, a very good friend, and if I'm every a little down about the Gospel, all I've got to do is pick up my head and look out the window across the street at their house, because there's a miracle across the street – living across the street from me.

Now, this whole matter of what to do, I think, first of all, is a theological issue. So I'm going to move from theology to then some very specific advice. And the first thing is that unbelievers are dead. You know the classic text on that begins in Ephesians, the second chapter, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins wherein you used to walk according to a course of this world, the prince and the power, the heir of the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience," and goes on to describe that before it comes to a great statement of grace later in that chapter – really did.

The second thing is, is that unbelievers are depraved. Now, depraved doesn't mean that you are as bad as you can possibly get, and that's oftentimes how the word is used in our language
today, so we talk about a depraved something, where somebody has done some terrible act. But the theological doctrine of depravity doesn't mean that. What it means is that every part of your personality is tainted by sin so that you are utterly depraved.

In other words, there's no part of your life that isn't tainted by sin. It's like if you took a drop of blue dye and put it in a gallon of water, it would affect all of the water, and so sin affects every part of our life. And the other thing that was alluded to, a third thing, is that unbelievers are not only dead, they're not only depraved, they are non-seekers.

Now, you may imagine otherwise – for instance, one of the spouses here may have some things that you would say that they are seekers, but Romans 3:11 says "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."

Now, I will grant, if a person is being pulled by Christ by the Holy Spirit that they will begin to seek, and that's something that only the Lord knows, but they don't naturally seek God. So that unregenerate spouses of Christians are dead, and they're depraved, and they are non-seekers, and that is a condition of every non-believing spouse.

That doesn't leave things hopeless, by any means, because it wasn't hopeless in James and Debbie's relationship. And because of this, that means they have huge needs, and the first need is of a righteousness. Now, you know that in the Book of Romans, you have the grand statement of righteousness in Romans, the first chapter, that's Romans 1:16-17, where Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for as the power of God into salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also the Greek, for in the Gospel a righteousness from God has been revealed from faith to faith as it is written the just shall live by faith."

So it's stated right at the beginning, the theme of the Book of Romans, that what you have to have is you've got to have righteousness, and that righteousness is an external righteousness, which comes from God and is a gift of faith. And so they have this massive, huge need for faith. They need righteousness, they need faith, and they need regeneration.

Of course, we read about that, and we know the story of Nicodemus who comes to Jesus, a ruler of the Jews, and he comes by night to Jesus, and he asks Jesus those questions – he leads with his chin, as you remember.
And in reply, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." In the fourth verse, Nicodemus says "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him, "Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?"

And Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit." I say all of this because theologically, unbelieving spouses, theologically, are dead, they are depraved, they are non-seekers, they have need of a righteousness outside of themselves; they have need of a gift of faith to receive it; and they have need of regeneration.

So the question is, in the light of this, what are they to do and what are the means of ministering to the unbelieving spouse? What are they to do? And the first thing is – you've got to pray.

I have a younger brother – two years younger than me. If we were standing side-by-side today, we'd look exactly alike except he's five-seven and a little broader, a little stouter than I am. But and I could not be more different. I was the study, he was the non-student; I was witnessing, he was punching people out. I mean, we could not be different. The only thing that my brother and I had in common is we love to fish, we love the outdoors, and we loved each other.

I set myself to praying for my brother as soon as I became a Christian, and I prayed for some 32 years for my brother. About a decade ago, longer than that, I suppose, I was up in Maine, and my brother was – he was managing an estate up there, a big estate. It was in the wintertime, and we had the whole place, the mansion, the whole place to ourselves – he and his wife and my wife. We were snowmobiling and having a great time.

And I'd been praying for my brother all these years and as we were out, he said to me, he said – my brother said this – "let's talk about my soul." I mean, you could have knocked me over. And so that night we went into the den in this place, you know, surrounded by trophies and game and so on, and I began to talk about it. My brother's greatest fear was that he was just too wicked to become a believer, that it couldn't work for him.

And we went through those Scriptures and, here we are, a couple of old guys in our plaid shirts, and my brother finally came to a
place where he began to weep, and we got down on our knees next to each other in that study, and he asked Christ into his life.

And when we walked out of there, my brother saw my wife, and he says, "Hi, Barbara." He said, "If I die tonight, I'm going to get there before you." This is what he said. And my brother was marvelously born again – 32 years of prayer and, I have to say, 32 years of very little encouragement.

But I prayed all those years. Now, I don't believe that prayer is where you pray and pray and pray, and finally you get a critical mass and God says "Okay." This becomes some sort of merit before God. But I do think that consistent, long prayer is a demonstration of faith in God; that He can do it.

Bob: Well, we've been listening to Part 1 of a message from Kent Hughes today on the broadcast. It's a message about what to do when your married to an unbeliever and, as he illustrated at the end, one of the things you do, Dennis, is you wear out heaven, as I've heard some people say, with your regular prayers for the salvation of your mate.

Dennis: Yeah, and as he was telling that story, I couldn't help but think of 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 7 through 9. Let me just read it here – "The end of all things is at hand therefore be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." Verse 8 – "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

You know, a person who is not a believer and Kent did a wonderful job in there of explaining the state of someone who has not been born again spiritually – their eyes are darkened, they can't see, they're blind. They are in need of us being fervent. That word "fervent in love," means stretched out as a runner stretches out to break the tape first. We are to stretch and strain in the Spirit in loving those who aren't spiritually alive.

And then, last, be hospitable. That's just being kind, making your home a warm place to be. And, Bob, I'm not suggesting easy answers for those who are married to non-Christians. I can't think of a more challenging situation than day in and day out living the Christian life and loving someone who doesn't share it with me.

Bob: I'm going to be speaking here in a couple of weeks at one of our Weekend to Remember conferences out in the Los Angeles area, and anytime I go to speak at one of these events, I think about the
fact that there will be some couples in the ballroom who are in this very situation, where one spouse is Christian and the other spouse is not.

In fact, we've tried to design the Weekend to Remember so that it is something that non-Christians can feel comfortable being a part of and yet can clearly hear a biblical perspective on marriage and hear the Gospel in the course of the weekend.

And I know there are spouses who pray as they come to these events that this might be the weekend that God uses to do a work in a husband's heart or in a wife's heart, and we have seen God do that in some situations but, obviously, there's no way to make that happen.

I think the counsel that you've given to a spouse here is the same kind of counsel we try to put in place at the Weekend to Remember. We try to make sure that it's a setting, an environment, that is hospitable for someone who is not a Christian; that they are going to feel comfortable in that environment.

And I want to encourage our listeners, whether you are married to an unbeliever or not, if you have not been to one of these Weekend to Remember conferences and had a tune-up for your marriage relationship, or maybe it's been a while since you've been, let me encourage you to go to our website at FamilyLife.com and get more information about our spring conferences. They're going on in cities all across the country each weekend between now and into early July.

Again, if you'd like more information, you'll find it on our website at FamilyLife.com. When you get to the home page, there's a red button you see right in the middle of the home page that says "Go," and if you click that button, it will take you right to an area where you can get more information about the Weekend to Remember conference and when we're going to be in particular cities.

There is also information about resources that are available from us here at FamilyLife specifically dealing with this issue of being spiritually mismatched. We've got books that speak about that particular subject, and we've got books that encourage you, as a husband or as a wife, to be the kind of husband or wife that will be attractive to an unbelieving spouse.

Again, you'll find more information about these resources and information about how you can get a CD of Kent Hughes' message
on this subject. It's all on our website, FamilyLife.com. Click the red button that says "Go," and that will take you right to the area of the site where you can get more information about what's available or call us if you have any questions or want a recommendation. The toll-free number is 1-800-FLTODAY. That's 1-800-358-6329. 1-800-F-as-in-family, L-as-in-life, and then the word TODAY.

Let me encourage you, when you do get in touch with us, we've got a project going on this month that many of you have already responded to, and we're very encouraged by that. We want to distribute the sets Resurrection Eggs this year at Easter to people who don't know Christ.

If you're not sure what Resurrection Eggs are, this is a tool we created several years ago where in each of a dozen plastic eggs there is some symbol that represents something that happened in the last week of Christ's life on earth. It tells the Easter story.

This year we've made arrangements with our friends at Here's Life Inner City to distribute these Resurrection Eggs to families in the inner city who need to hear the Gospel. In addition, we are asking you to become a part of that distribution network and to share a set of Resurrection Eggs with someone you know – a family member, a friend, a relative, a co-worker.

So here is how all of this works together – if you can make a donation this month of any amount to the ministry of FamilyLife Today, you will make it possible for us to send a set of these Resurrection Eggs to our friends at Here's Life Inner City for distribution within the inner city and, at the same time, we'll send you a set of Resurrection Eggs so that you can pass those along to someone you know as an Easter gift, and it's a fun way for them to maybe hear the Easter story for the first time or to hear it again but begin to understand, perhaps, the spiritual significance of that story.

There is more information available about this online, but if you'd like to join with us, you can make a donation on our website, FamilyLife.com, or you can call us at 1-800-FLTODAY and make a donation. If you're donating online, when you come to the keycode box on your form, just write the word "eggs" in there so that we know that you're a part of this effort during the month of March.

And if you call 1-800-FLTODAY to make a donation just mention that you want to take part in this Resurrection Eggs initiative, and we'll make sure to get a set off to you along with our thanks for your
financial support of the ministry of FamilyLife Today and for your participation with us in this project.

Well, tomorrow we’re going to be back with Part 2 of Pastor Kent Hughes’ message on what to do if you’re married to someone who isn’t a Christian. I hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. I hope to see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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