Bob: The decisions we make today in our marriage, and in our family, ought to be made in light of the fact that one day we’ll stand before Jesus and account for those decisions. Here’s Gary Thomas.

Gary: On that day, when I’m facing Jesus, He won’t ask me: “Gary, did Lisa know your love language and use it? Did she know, as a man, you need respect and respect you? Did she know your needs and seek to meet them?” Instead, on that day, which will stamp my eternity, Jesus will say: “Gary, did you know, as a woman, she needed to be adored and cherished? Did you adore and cherish her? Did you know her needs and seek to bless her according to those needs?” Jesus will say, “Gary, did you know My daughter’s love language and meet it?”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, April 8th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. What does it look like to live in a marriage and family with eternity in view? We’ll explore that today with Gary Thomas. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I have to tell you—I was looking at one of the themes that is addressed in Gary Thomas’ book, A Lifelong Love—and Gary’s back with us again on FamilyLife Today. Gary, welcome back.

Gary: It’s so good to be here.

Bob: And the theme, Dennis, is the theme of husbands and wives being on mission together. In fact, Gary quotes a guest we had on FamilyLife Today, more than two decades ago—Kevin Miller—you remember?

Dennis: Right.

Bob: —wrote a book called More Than You and Me about husbands and wives being on mission together. I came across that section and I thought, “Dennis is going to be all over this”—[Laughter]—I just knew you would be pounding the table on this.

Dennis: Yes. For some of our listeners, who don’t know Gary Thomas—he is a prolific writer, preacher from Second Baptist church. He and his wife Lisa live in Houston,
Texas, where Second Baptist is located. You talk about, in your book, *A Lifelong Love*, about a magnificent obsession. I have to tell you—when I read that in your book, I went, “That’s a great way to put it!” Every couple *needs* a magnificent obsession. You do use the illustration of Kevin Miller and his wife—and how they wandered about for a while but how they have finely found that.

**Gary:** They just experienced what most couples would experience after the infatuation begins to die down. All of a sudden, they’re like: “Is this all it is? I mean, it’s become routine.” In his case, he took over a youth group that had a number of, let’s just say, unruly kids, at best, and—[Laughter]

**Dennis:** I was one of them, by the way!

**Bob:** Could have been! [Laughter]

**Gary:** The thing that astonished them is they found it began to pull their marriage together. Suddenly, they were *forced* to pray as they’d never prayed before. They felt like they were in over their heads. They were in a place where they *knew* they couldn’t just do this on their own. There were something about being together now—facing this together / working together—they started to have more conversations because they had something to have conversations about.

They had a purpose bigger than themselves that drew them together. The irony is that giving themselves to a ministry renewed their marriage and gave them sort of a second wind to appreciate each other, to enjoy each other, and feel closer together. I quote them in my book, where Kevin’s wife, Karen, says this: “We hunger for this today”—speaking of joint mission—“cooperating together, meshing, working like a mountain climbing team ascending the peak of our dream, and then holding each other at the end of the day.”

God has planted this hunger deep within every married couple. It’s more than a hunger for companionship. It’s more than a hunger to create new life. It’s a third hunger—a hunger to do something significant together. According to God’s Word, we were joined to make a difference—we were married for a mission.

**Dennis:** Yes. Ephesians 2:10 is what I like to preach and share with folks when I come to this subject right here—we were created by God: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works...” You have been designed by God for good works—which it says: “He has prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.” This is a transcendent mission / a transcendent work that each of you have, as individuals, but also, because you’re husband and wife and you are joined together, you have a mission, as a couple. The question is: “What is it?”

**Gary:** What that Ephesians passage tells us is, Dennis—that if you have a couple that are having date nights, having regular times of intimacy, enjoying themselves, creating
good meals, but they’re not waking up, saying, “What good works can we do?” there’re not doing what God created them to do. We were created, in Christ Jesus, to do good works. A couple that is living for themselves is not doing what God created them to do.

**Bob:** My wife and I—I think, if we were to look back on the first two-and-a-half, maybe three decades of our marriage together, and I was to say, “What was our common mission that we had, as a couple?” We were involved in a discipleship ministry with five individuals that we were discipling on a daily basis; okay? Those five have now grown and are out of our house. Four of the five are married to spouses. Honestly, our common mission, for years, was the discipleship of those kids. Don’t you think that’s the center of most couples’ marriages, and is that a sufficient mission for a husband and wife?

**Gary:** I think it’s an essential mission—let me begin with that. One of the best gifts any married person can give to the church, and to God’s kingdom, are men and women raised in the faith—raised in a stable home that honors God—that grows up with the sense of mission. It’s really one of the best things that we can do.

I love the way Elton Trueblood talked about this when he said we live our life in chapters. You have the chapter of your life as a single person, the chapter of being a young married, the chapter of raising kids, the chapter of your empty nest years, and the chapter of your retirement years and beyond. You don’t look at your life according to one chapter—your life is this one long story.

So, I do think that’s a significant mission; but I would say this Bob—it still needs to be a view of mission, as you raise your kids. We’re not raising our kids just to be happy, just to be successful, just to look good at the end-of-the-year Christmas letter. We’re raising them with that sense of mission. We’re raising them to believe in good works, which is why I don’t think it’s sufficient, in its own, in this sense. If they don’t see us doing good works, when will they learn that God created me to do good works? How do we teach Ephesians 2 if we’re not living it out in front of them?

**Bob:** Well, the reality of it is that the discipleship ministry does come with something of an expiration date or, at least, a period where it wanes at the end of life. If you haven’t been doing anything else, other than discipling your kids, when that hits—a lot of husbands and wives look at each other and say: “Who are you?” and “Do we have any purpose together anymore?”

**Gary:** I cry just about every time one of my kids goes back to the airport. A few days ago, after vacation, I dropped my oldest daughter off. I thought leaving was a onetime thing—you cry when your kid goes away to college or you cry at the wedding. The reality is—because of the life that God has given to Lisa and me—in many ways, life is easier because He’s given us so much more to focus on and so much more to do. I’m just so grateful for the purpose we have that fills that hole of our kids leaving the home. There might be some couples that have been caught by surprise. They became empty
nesters and: “Is this really all there is? I mean, is there really nothing more?” That’s when you can double down.

What I mention in A Lifelong Love is the story of William Tyndale, who was burned for—and this will shock people—by the church for translating the Bible. At the time, that was considered a treasonous offence. His life mission was this—he boldly told the clergymen, “If God spare my life, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scripture than you do.” God used Tyndale to launch, ultimately, you could argue, what became the Reformation—and what we take for granted today—that there’s a Bible in just about every Christian home and in many non-Christian homes.

It’s a helpful exercise—it’d be a great date-night exercise, for couples listening, to just get away at a restaurant and say: “How would we finish this sentence? If God spares our life…what will be different about the world?” Maybe it’ll have to do with coaching athletics. Maybe it will be the testimony we have about building a business together—who we hire and how / what we do with the profits. Maybe it’ll be about education, or the arts, or working with the local church. “What do you think God is uniquely called you together to do, and gifted you to do, so that the world will be a different place because you lived?” Ultimately—here’s the irony—that will give you the happiest life.

**Dennis:** You’re really talking about passion—what fuels our imagination? What gets us out of bed in the morning? I think, for a lot of couples, what you’re asking them to do, right now—I think it’s a hard question because they haven’t pulled back and evaluated—over their period of being married together, whether that be a few years or many years: “What have we found ourselves pounding the table about, as a couple? What have we found ourselves going, ‘Somebody has got to do something!’?”

It doesn’t mean you’ve got to address all of the burning fires in the culture. It just means you have to find one. Find your fire that you’re supposed to put out and extinguish, or something you’re supposed to build, or do, or create; and then go do it together. Any other advice you’d have for a couple that’s starting down this journey, trying to determine, “What is our mission together, as a couple?”

**Gary:** I’ve seen that work in a lot of different ways. Sometimes, I see people working, side by side. A couple we knew—one was a coach at a high school athletic team and his wife was sort of his right-hand person. They did it together. She wasn’t officially a coach but, in all practicality, she was—and they had this together. I’ve seen some—where the woman took the lead—a writer and speaker, where her husband was the support / he took care of the business end. He made everything work so that she could go and do the ministry she did. I’ve seen that reversed, where the husband did it.

I think God is very creative in calling couples together. The important thing is to support each other / to encourage each other. I couldn’t agree with you more, Dennis—it’s about the passion that God has given you. It’s about the passion that you feel like you can
have together—fulfilling that. What keeps you up, at night, thinking: “What can we do tomorrow to make it happen? We need a reason to wake up.”

**Dennis:** I don’t want all the listeners, who are listening to us right now, to jump on this; but I am looking for about a million. I am looking for about a million who raise their hand and say: “You know what? I agree with you.” Here’s what it is—marriage and family are under attack today as never before in our nation, at any point in our country’s history. It’s under attack.

We can easily say: “Oh that’s FamilyLife’s problem,” “Oh that’s another organizations problem,” “Oh, that’s another group’s responsibility.” Instead, I think the solution to the problem is for many hands, all across the nation—just like Nehemiah called the people to rebuild the broken wall. That’s what the family is—it’s a broken wall that’s down right now. It needs to be rebuilt because, like a wall, a family protects a nation from the outside invasions that can come at it. So, what I’m looking for is about a million people, who’ll say: “You know what? I’d like to start an *Art of Marriage* small group Bible study in our home,” “….in our church,” “….at our place of work for our employees,”—maybe—“….for some of the parents of the kids your kids go to school with.”

But you decide: “You know what? You guys have created a tool that makes it very easy. I don’t have to go to seminary / I don’t have to go away and get trained.” This is a plug-and-play small group study. If you can lead a conversation, you can lead a small group through the *Art of Marriage*. Or maybe it’s the *Art of Marriage Connect*—a small group Bible study that many have started after they’ve been through the *Art of Marriage*. Maybe you’re familiar with it around the title *Homebuilders*. We’ve had over three million people go through the *Homebuilders* Bible study since 1986. We’ve redesigned it and shortened it for this generation of folks. There are eight different books that all talk about various needs—communication, responsibilities of a husband/a wife, building your mate’s self esteem—different topics that you can grab hold of.

The issue is: “What’s your passion? What are you going to do, as a couple?” If marriage and family are yours, you know what we’d like to do? We’d like to empower *you* to make a difference where you live. This is not about us doing it—it’s a matter of us helping *you* be effective in doing it.

**Gary:** I’m a huge fan of the *Art of Marriage* series. Here’s the thing—I believe biblical counseling is so important; but many times the best defense is a good offense.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Gary:** I believe there are a lot of couples out there—the best thing they can do for a listless struggling marriage is to go on the offense—sponsor—like you said, it’s laid out. You don’t need to feel intimidated—it’s right there. You lead a discussion, you plug it in, you turn it on, and you have the coffee ready to go. That will actually do more, I believe,
to restore, not only the marriages of people who you are trying to reach, but the people who are sponsoring it—doing something together/praying for the people.

I don’t know why it works but, when you join around a mission—it’s what happens. It happened to me, in high school, in cross country teams—those guys—even though I haven’t talked to some in a couple of decades—when you face that contest together—it happens when men go to battle together. There’s something about joining around a purpose greater than yourself that creates a sense of loyalty and intimacy that nothing else can really match. That’s what this mission can do.

**Bob:** Those couples that don’t have what you’re talking about—that don’t have a common mission—they’ll get to a point in life, where they’re just kind of looking at each other and going: “Why are you here? Why am I here?” and the life goes out of their marriage; doesn’t it?

**Gary:** It does. Sometimes, I read obituaries. I don’t want to sound judgmental—but one of the saddest ones was just an obituary of a guy. It talked about how he was buried with one of his favorite clubs, and he had a 3 handicap, which he played a lot. I’ve golfed—I think everybody needs their recreation—but I just thought: “You know, if that’s the story of your life, and your handicap dies with you, what are you leaving behind? You get deleted from the computer—now the handicap no longer matters.”

That’s the thing about some marriages. You live for your happiness—okay then, fine—you die and what is left? I do believe the day’s going to come when you’re going to wake up and say, “Isn’t there really more to life than this?” I think what we’re saying is, “Yes, there is much more!”

**Bob:** If fact, you say, in the book—that if a couple will live with the perspective that there is a final day coming, that will have a dramatic impact on how they live together.

**Gary:** Second Corinthians 5:10 should drive every Christian’s life. Paul says we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Now, that word, “bad,” in the Greek probably would better be translated “worthless.” There’s a different word Paul could have used if he meant evil.

That’s the Bema Seat—that theologians would say. It’s not the judgments of Christians or non-Christians—that’s a whole different thing—that’s the finished work of Christ that takes care of that. This is the Judgment Seat of Christians. Paul says each one of us will appear where God will reward us according to what we have done with the faith. That has transformed my view of marriage.

When we go back to yesterday’s discussion about love, how relevant this is—on that day—when I’m facing Jesus, He won’t ask me: “Gary, did Lisa know your love language, and use it? Did she know, as a man, you need respect and respect you? Did
she know your needs and seek to meet them?”—that’s what I was obsessed with, as a young husband. Instead, on that day, which will stamp my eternity, Jesus will say: “Gary, did you know Lisa, My daughter’s, love language and meet it? Did you know, as a woman, she needed to be adored and cherished? Did you adore and cherish her? Did you know her needs and seek to bless her according to those needs?”

I used to think a good day was when I was noticed, and appreciated, and thanked; but that’s living for this life. If I live for the Bema Seat of Christ, a good day’s when I can notice, when I can appreciate, when I can serve. It begins with marriage but it goes out into communities.

Another way of looking at this is sort of like when you do your taxes at the end of the year. As a speaker/as a writer, I get different checks from different places. I always rejoice, “Another check—good, we have bills to pay.” Then I try to be a cheerful giver but, sometimes, there’s a little bit of wincing, “I’m giving this—we could use this for that,” or whatnot. At the end of the year, it’s entirely different because I’m adding up how much I’ve earned and I’m like, “More and more taxes.” Then I add up how much I’ve given and it is like, “Okay, the tax break!” I am rejoicing over what I was frustrated with, and I’m frustrated over what I was rejoicing with.

I think the Judgment Seat of Christ will be like that. We might say: “Man! I really want to watch that game—I’m going to go paint that widow’s fence.” At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we’ll say, “I’m so glad I made that choice!” or “I really wanted to buy that new set of clubs. Instead, I helped out a single mom.” At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we’re going to say, “That was the best use of that money.” That’s reality—the Judgment Seat will happen. It is so emphatic in the Greek—each one of us must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ—so that each one—it will happen. Paul urges us: “Live for that day, not this day”; and that’s what mission is all about.

**Dennis:** There will be an appointment—there really will be—and there is a conclusion to it. I have to say two things in finishing up today. Number one: When I die, they will bury my clubs but not with me. They don’t belong in my casket because I wasn’t very good at using them when I was alive.

**Gary:** I bury my clubs in the lake.

**Bob:** Yes

**Dennis:** If they still exist by then. [Laughter]

The other observation I’d make is: There isn’t a couple, listening to us today, or a single, for that matter, who doesn’t need to lift their view of marriage out of the cultural definitions and the way the culture has dumbed this whole thing down—and how even the Christian community has contributed to this, frankly—talking about happy marriages. They need to recalibrate. They need to think about marriage as God designed it and as
you’ve exhorted us to do here—to know how to really love the other person well, to be on task, to be on mission to fulfill the assignment God’s given you.

And to do that, they need to read their Bible; but it would be good if, right next to their Bible, as they read it, they had a copy of your book, Gary.

**Bob:** At least for a week or so.

**Dennis:** Yes

**Gary:** I’m not sure they’d need it put there all the time

**Dennis:** Not there all of the time—not permanently. Well, they may—some may have come from situations, where they feel like: “You know what? I need to review this for more than a week.” You’ve done a great job on this. You’re a great friend and appreciate you coming on our broadcast. Hope you’ll come back soon and join us again.

**Gary:** Thank you so much, Dennis.

**Bob:** We do have copies of Gary’s book *A Lifelong Love* in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. We hope that our listeners will get a copy. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click in the upper left-hand corner of the screen, where it says, GO DEEPER.” That’ll take you right to the spot where you can order a copy of Gary’s book from us, online. Again, FamilyLifeToday.com—click the link in the upper left-hand corner that says, “GO DEEPER,” and order *A Lifelong Love* from Gary Thomas; or call to order: 1-800-358-6329—1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY.”

You know, throughout our conversation today Dennis, I’ve been thinking about a question that you asked me, back at the very beginning / back more than 22 years ago. We were talking about marriage and family and “How important is it?” I remember you used to like to ask people: “Does marriage and family—does it make you weep and pound the table? Is it something that you get passionate about?” I answered that question when you asked me—I said: “What’s on the heart of God is what makes me weep and pound the table. So, to the extent that marriage and family is on the heart of God, yes, it makes me weep and pound the table.”

What I didn’t realize, at the time, I don’t think, is how much marriage and family is on the heart of God—how central it is to everything that God has for us. Everybody comes into the world in the context of some kind of family structure. Family is how we relate to one another in life. If we’re going to love our neighbor, it has to start with our husband/our wife, our brothers/our sisters, our moms/our dads. That’s what *FamilyLife Today* is all about—we want to help people effectively develop godly marriages and families. We
want to see every home become a godly home. We hope that these daily programs help you get a different vision for your marriage and your family.

Of course, these programs are made possible by folks, just like you, who believe this is important, along with us. They help support this ministry by donating to help us cover the costs of producing and syndicating this daily radio program and help support the other outreaches of FamilyLife Today. We’re grateful for those of you who do partner with us.

We’d like to ask those of you, who’ve never made a donation: “Would you consider going, online, today? Go to FamilyLifeToday.com—click the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, ‘I CARE,’ and make an online donation; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and say: ‘I’m in. I want to help with a donation to support FamilyLife Today.’” Or mail a check to us in support of this ministry. Send it to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR. Our zip code is 72223. Let me just say, “Thanks,” in advance, for your donation. I want you to know that we’re grateful for your partnership with us in this ministry.

We hope you can join us back tomorrow. John Trent is going to be here. We’re going to talk about what a married couple can do to break the cycle of divorce in their extended family. What can you do to make sure your marriage goes the distance? We’ll talk more about that tomorrow. Hope you can tune in.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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