Bob: The church is made up of sinful people—all of us in need of the grace of God. Dr. Tony Evans says that is as it ought to be.

Tony: That’s what the church is for—we’re hospitals—sick people are welcome—you know: “We’re here to heal you. We’re here to help. We’re here to correct / we’re here to guide. But don’t ask us to tell God He’s wrong. ‘Let God be true and every man a liar.’” See, what people don’t understand is—unless you call sin what God calls sin, even God can’t help you.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, July 7th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll spend time today with Dr. Tony Evans, talking about how the church can be the church in our culture today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I’ve heard you—for years—quote a sociologist from Harvard who, back in the 1940s or 1950s, looked at the things that cause a civilization to crumble / to decay. You look at his conclusions, from the 1940s and 1950s—and you lay them against our culture today—and you do wonder, “Will America, 50 years from today, still exist as a powerful civilization in our world?”

Dennis: Yes. The author’s name was Dr. Carle Zimmerman. He wrote a book called Family and Civilization. He traced all the great civilizations in history and tracked what happened to the families as that civilization crumbled and fell apart. He described three phases. Clearly, we’re in the third phase as America—as an empire—I think is seeing the erosion of some its most fundamental elements. Our faith is at the core of all of that.

We have not merely a pastor joining us, but a fellow graduate of The Dallas Theological Seminary.

Bob: The—The Dallas—

Dennis: Well, that’s a little pun for my friends at—

Bob: —at Ohio State?

Dennis: No, no! The Southern Baptist Seminary!
Bob: Oh, got you! [Laughter]

Dennis: Dr. Tony Evans joins us again. Tony, welcome back.

Tony: I’m glad to be with you, always.

Dennis: Tony’s a pastor—has been for more than four decades at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas/Fort Worth. He has his own radio program called The Alternative that is heard in more than a thousand communities across the country and 130 countries around the world. He’s written a book called America: Turning a Nation to God.

Tony, you begin the book by talking about a woman by the name of Flory Evans. I don’t know that I’d ever heard the story. Share that with our listeners.

Tony: Well, Flo—as she was known, as a 14-year-old young lady, at the turn of the century / the 1900s, around 1904/1905—who stood up in a church gathering and who proclaimed her faith very loudly. For some reason, it ignited a fire in that church, which was picked up by a pastor, who then led what became known as the Welsh Revival—where over 100,000 people came to faith in Christ, starting with that young lady’s public declaration of her faith in Jesus Christ.

I open that up to say that what that young lady did that started that revival is what we need to do today because only a revival, where God enters into this fray, can have circumstances in this nation turn around. We only have two options: the return of Jesus Christ, which solves it for us, as believers; or an invasion by Jesus Christ that so ignites His people that it changes the trajectory of the nation.

Bob: Do you think we’ve seen a revival in our lifetime? Do you think what happened in the late ’60s and the early ’70s with the Jesus Movement—was that a revival in our nation?

Tony: No. It wasn’t a revival because you had pockets; but in terms of a national revival, no. We’ve not seen that in a lifetime—I don’t think we’ve seen it in the twentieth century, and now we’re in the twenty-first century—not like that.

Bob: Do you think we can?

Tony: Oh, absolutely because the whole point of a revival is to re-engage God into the life of His people, and then from His people into the life of the culture. What people do not understand—spiritually and theologically, which I try to point out in the book—is that we are now experiencing the passive wrath of God. Second Chronicles, Chapter 15, verses 3-6, says, “In those days there was no true God, no teaching priests, so there was no law.” It says, “Citizen rose up against citizen, city rose up against city, and
nation rose up against nation,”—and then it closes with this phrase—“for God troubled them with every kind of distress.”

Now, if God is your problem, only God is your solution. If God is your problem, it doesn’t matter whom you elect. Politics can’t solve this if God is your problem. God is our problem—and because God has been offended because we put Him on the loop / we sprinkle a little Jesus on it to make it sound good—but decision-making excludes Him. We are now undergoing the passive—fire and brimstone’s not coming down—that’s the active wrath of God. It’s where God removes Himself and lets you have the consequences of your choices to leave Him out—that’s what we’re experiencing.

Dennis: Isaiah 59 talks about how “righteousness stands afar,”—at a distance—“and truth has stumbled in the street.” The picture is—truth is kind of flat-down on its face in the street. It says, as a result, instead of us conquering evil, evil is preying upon us. Describe for our listeners what you see, as a pastor, in terms of evil preying on our children / our grandchildren, and even on us in this culture. How serious a situation are we in here?

Tony: Well, let’s start with the loss of values. There was a time when the Christian worldview, even if you weren’t a Christian, dominated the environment. People wanted that worldview reflected in the character of people. But now, with secular media, now with values clarification, now with the redefinition of the family, all of that has eroded—that Judeo-Christian worldview that we were dependent upon. As our founders said, and said so accurately, this republic is dependent upon a virtuous people; and that if we are not a virtuous people, this democracy cannot stand. We have lost or are losing our virtue. So, we’re losing our country.

Dennis: There is no longer an agreed-upon moral basis—

Tony: Absolutely.

Dennis: —from which democracy can flourish.

Tony: The definition of truth is: “An absolute standard by which reality is measured.” We now live in a relativistic society, where truth is whatever I deem it to be at any given moment. So, you can have conflicting truths all over the place—so therefore, conflicting definitions / so therefore, conflicting implementations.

We are experiencing that—as a culture / in the family—even in our churches—who don’t stand / many of them who no longer stand for God’s standards. We have invited the world into the church rather than the church going into the world. Everything is going away from God, and we are imploding within.

Dennis: You’re pastor of a church of over 10,000 people in Dallas, Texas. You have to see what’s happening in the family, up close and personal. How important is it that our
country is now tampering with what God designed in the beginning? In the book of Genesis, He made it really clear: “Male and female, created He them,” and He called them to become one. He was the One who designed marriage, not man. Comment on the importance of this new redefinition of marriage.

**Tony:** This new redefinition of marriage is the nail in the coffin—because once you redefine marriage and, therefore, redefine the family and, therefore, raise a generation of children, who are now being raised to believe this is a legitimate option—then what you have done is redefined society.

What people don’t understand is that to redefine marriage other than what God created is to attack God because male and female were created in His image—not male and male / not female and female—it was male and female. So, you no longer have the full expression of God’s image. If you no longer have the full expression of God’s image, you have another god. If you have another god, then you have chaos because there’s only one true God. To attack marriage is to attack God.

**Bob:** Yes, but what about the folks who are saying: “Let the church define marriage the way the church wants to define it, and let the culture define it a different way. We can’t impose our morality on people who don’t bow to our God.”

**Tony:** Well, first of all, what they do not understand is Romans 13—and that is—even governments were instituted by God. So, the closer a government is to God, the more orderly the society will be. The further a government is from God, the more disorderly the society will become. Marriage was not just created for Christians / marriage was created for the human race.

**Dennis:** So, a society that follows God’s design, even though they may not follow Him, will benefit.

**Tony:** Absolutely. It’s like non-Christians who get married but use God’s principles in their marriage. Even though they’re not Christians, they can benefit from the principles because they’re applying them as best they can in that relationship—the same thing to a culture and to a country.

**Bob:** Given where we are today / given the movement away from a biblical understanding of marriage to this more broad, open, inclusive idea, do you really—I’m trying to imagine a time in our country, other than Prohibition, when we took a step over the line and said, “Oh, we better pull that back.” Can you imagine that we would step in, five years from now, and say: “Oh, we have it wrong—we need to go back to one man and one woman. Those of you, who are married gay couples—you’re going to have to break things up.”

**Tony:** Well, that will be very tough to do. We have to fight it now in every way we can, in love, because we still have to treat people with dignity/with respect. We still have to
have a loving spirit about us, but we don’t have to compromise the principle to do it in love. The principle is non-negotiable.

Bob: And those folks, who look at this and say: “Tony, you of all people understand civil rights issues. This is a civil rights issue because it involves discrimination against gay people.”

Tony: No, it involves discrimination against sin. We are told to discriminate against sin. When you discriminate against sin, that’s righteous discrimination—all discrimination is not illegitimate.

Dennis: You speak, in your book, how this is like an alarm clock. God has an alarm clock, and it’s time to wake up.

Tony: That’s right. When my alarm clock goes off, it’s disturbing my sleep. I have two options—I can turn it off and go back to sleep, or I can pay attention to it and get up. The only reason I set it is for it to disturb my sleep. When God shakes things up—Hebrews, Chapter 12, says, when He shakes things up, it is to re-introduce His Kingdom. God is now shaking things up—He’s allowing the culture to go crazy—and it is the alarm for Christians to wake up.

Bob: And there are a lot of God’s people, who are looking at this issue and going, “Maybe the Bible—maybe we’ve just misunderstood some of these verses, and maybe they should be re-interpreted.” There does seem to be—I’m wondering if, at your church, do you have Christians coming up and, “I’m not so sure that homosexuality is wrong”?

Tony: Not if they’ve been there for a minute—[Laughter]—if they’ve been there for a minute, it has been inexplicably made clear—

Bob: It’d be time for a session with him. [Laughter]

Tony: —what God has to say. Yes, it’d be time for a session. [Laughter] We make it clear but, at the same time, we do it in love—we say: “If you struggle in this area, okay. That’s what the church is for—we’re hospitals—sick people are welcome—you know: “We’re here to heal you. We’re to help. We’re here to correct / we’re here to guide. But don’t ask us to tell God He’s wrong. ‘Let God be true and every man a liar.’” See, what people don’t understand is—unless you call sin what God calls sin, even God can’t help you.

Dennis: So—here we are, as a country. Some are calling sin what is truly sin, but a number of folks haven’t paid attention to the alarm clock. They’re still slumbering. What do they need to do; and what do those need to do, who have awakened and are really troubled? You know, I talk to a lot of people, Tony, and so do you—who are talking about: “Can you believe this?” “Can you believe that?” “What about this?” “Did you hear
this story?” At some point, we have to stop wallowing in how we are losing the battle and find a way to engage—freshly, with love, as you said / with truth, as the Bible commands us to—but be about redeeming and proclaiming the gospel of redemption to a broken nation.

Tony: Well, everybody else is coming out of the closet; so we might as well come out too. Everybody else is going public; so we must go public too. The church is not just for inside the walls. A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew unless the pastors take the lead in equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry, outside of the sanctuary, so that there is this collective public presence that speaks the truth of the Word of God in an uncompromising way.

The reason why marriage is being defined by a small group of people is because they’re unified. Their message is the same / their activism is the same, and they’re not compromising. They’re not shutting down. We are wallowing back—we do not have a collective presence, saying: “This is what God says. This is what God means. We want to love you in moving you in that direction.”

Dennis: There’s something else taking place, too, though. There are a lot of people afraid, Tony. There are a lot of people afraid to speak up because: “If I speak up, it could cost me my job.” “If I speak up, it could cost me my relationships.”

Tony: Well, that’s where a clear understanding of discipleship has to be communicated because Jesus says, “I want you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me.” Speaking up for Christ isn’t always the most pleasant place to be. Yes, there is risk. It’s called the risk of faith. So, who are you going to trust? Are you going to trust man, or are you going to trust God? If you are obeying God and you’re doing it in love; then God is responsible for the result, not you.

Bob: You gather your church together once a year for an event—you call it—it’s a solemn assembly.

Tony: It’s a solemn assembly / a sacred gathering.

Bob: Explain to folks what a solemn assembly is and how that’s different than just a Sunday night church service.

Tony: A solemn assembly is a sacred gathering. It’s usually combined fasting and prayer, where you give up a craving of the physical in order to gain a deeper presence of the spiritual. We invite our whole congregation, over that week, to give up something that matters to them for something spiritually that they need to matter to them.

I preach a sermon on Sunday morning to prepare them for it. On Sunday night, we tell them to get alone with God; and you spend that alone time. On Monday night, it’s all the men of the church / on Tuesday night, it’s all the women of the church. On Wednesday
night, it’s the whole church. On Thursday night, we say: “Get with your nuclear family. Talk about the year and where we want to go, as a family. Pray for your family to be in one accord, as you enter this year.” On Friday night, you get with other families or other singles to break the fast, so to speak. They have breakfast together at midnight—that kind of thing. That launches our year every year.

Dennis: And what is the impact of that on a congregation?

Tony: The impact is (1) unity—all in one accord—prioritizing the spiritual over the physical and expecting the supernatural. We’ve had many supernatural testimonies, where God has broken through in deep needs in people’s lives because of solemn assembly. In the Bible / throughout the Bible, whenever there was a deep crisis, there was a sacred gathering.

Dennis: And I would think there’d be some housecleaning occurring—

Tony: That’s right—a lot of housecleaning.

Dennis: —in some marriages and families, where some folks were coming clean and stuff.

Tony: That’s right. They’re cleaning up some stuff so that they can move forward and get out of the mud, and muck, and mire and begin to live life as God intended it.

Dennis: So, the church gets unified—it gets, spiritually, cleaned-up or in the process of coming clean. Where do we go next?

Tony: We go next by now beginning to live out the principles of the Kingdom of God. We call it the “Kingdom Agenda”—the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life through these four covenants—the individual, the family, the church, and then the community:

What we do is—we teach our people: “Individually, you are to become a disciple—Jesus Christ rules your life. He’s not just a visitor—He has full custody.”

Secondly: “In your family—okay, family devotions, using the table as a time of child training, and not just eating, but using the table as a time of blessing your children and encouraging them/correcting them.

Then the church: “Engaging in the church / using your gifts to minister to the church and through the church.”
Then: “Having a presence in your community.” Our one church has adopted 55 public schools, where we have mentoring, tutoring, and
family support services going on. Everybody in our community knows our church for good because we’re trying to bless the community through our presence.

When you get enough churches to do that—there are three churches to every public school in America—you get every public school adopted by a solid church that does that, you’ve reached every community in America. You haven’t created anything new because every community already has churches, schools, and families. These are the kind of initiatives that we’re trying to take across the country.

**Dennis:** And what you’re doing is—you’re providing a different look / a different face to Christianity and people of faith than how a lot of folks can characterize us.

**Tony:** Right because a lot of them are only responding to hammers on the pulpit and mean spirits in the pew, rather than clear teaching from the pulpit and love emanating from the pew.

**Dennis:** I think another area that is a great opportunity for the church—that only the church can address—and pardon me for getting on a little soapbox here—but I think it’d be a great one to kind of hitchhike off what you’re talking about—is the foster care system. We have over 400,000 kids in the foster care system. A lot of them have no place to go. The foster care system doesn’t know how to address it. When the church steps in, they can provide the one thing the government can’t—a family to care for these kids.

**Tony:** Absolutely—a simple solution. We have close to 400,000 churches in America. All you have to do—if you can unify—is get every church to commit to get one of these kids adopted. You just shut down that system.

**Dennis:** And that can happen.

**Tony:** That can happen—but you have to have a *unified church*. We are good at being *divided*. We’ve become pros at it—illegitimately divided. We ought to divide over some things; but when you’re illegitimately divided, Satan has a hold; and therefore, the culture can go its own way.

**Bob:** Speak to that idea of what’s legitimate and what’s illegitimate because there are some folks, who would look around and say, “We ought to be partners with these folks down the street,” and other folks would say, “No, not them!”

**Tony:** There are fundamentals / there are non-negotiables: The authority of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ, salvation by grace through faith—they’re fundamentals. When you get to those four or five key items, and you agree on the fundamentals, that is enough to work together for the key issues that we need to face—that is, the commitment to Christ, the gospel, the family as God intended it to be, the influence of
the church through some common means for the wellbeing of the community—if you’re together on the fundamentals, that’s enough to work together.

Dennis: And what I want the listener to hear—and I want you to comment on, Tony—is that you, as a pastor, welcome laymen and women—talking about people from your congregation who step forward / who want to be deployed in this battle of love for the culture. I believe there are literally millions of believers, who listen to broadcasts like this, who pound the table about / saying, “Something must be done,” and who are ready to be deployed if they knew what battle they could best be used in going against. You’re ready for them to come forward, as a pastor.

Tony: I’m ready. Not only am I ready, you can’t join our church if you don’t agree to serve. You have to come in, agreeing to serve, or you can’t become a member. You can’t say, “Sing to me, preach to me, pray for me, counsel me, help me, marry me, bury me; but expect nothing from me,”—that’s called a leech. [Laughter] To become part of the body of the Christ is to enter into ministry.

Dennis: I agree—I really agree—you know, the real growth that occurs when you get on the battlefield / when you get in the game is a test of faith that causes your faith muscle to be flexed and to grow because it has tension against it.

Tony: The reason why a lot of our members aren’t growing is because they aren’t serving. Jesus says, “That is the greatness of My presence, is in your service,”—not just in you listening to sermons. It is incumbent. You’re doing your congregates a disservice to allow them to go, month after month / year after year, doing nothing but sitting, soaking, and souring.

Dennis: And if you go to Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, I want you to overrun Tony wanting to serve. [Laughter]

Tony: Come on—overrun me.

Dennis: Overrun him. You know, come forward and say: “Put me in the game, Coach! I’m ready to serve.” And if you go to another church, go to your pastor. Maybe pick up a copy of Tony’s book, America: Turning a Nation to God—and get one for yourself and get one for your pastor—and then start talking about: “How do we take the high ground again? How do we return the church to the place of salt and light in our country that it needs to be?” It needs the voice of reason / the voice of God today as never before.

Tony: Absolutely, and that’s what we do across the country—serve churches. If we can help you or your church to do that, we’d be glad to do it.

Bob: Well, in fact, we have a link on our website, at FamilyLifeToday.com, to The Alternative website. Folks can come to FamilyLifeToday.com—when they click in the
upper left-hand corner of the screen, they’ll see a button there for *The Alternative*. Click on that, and we’ll get you directed to Tony’s ministry.

We also have copies of Dr. Evans’ book, *America: Turning a Nation to God*. You can order the book from us, online. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com. Or you can call to order at 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—1-800—“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, I think about all that is going on in our world today. I think it is important that there are voices present in the church and in the culture saying, “This is what God says.” What we try to do every day, here on *FamilyLife Today*, is to provide practical, biblical, authentic help and hope for your marriage / for your family so that you can grow in godliness in the midst of a culture that is going in the opposite direction. That’s our mission; and we appreciate those of you who link arms with us, as partners in this ministry. Those of you who donate from, time to time / those of you who are regular contributors to this ministry, as Legacy Partners—we’re grateful for you. We just want to take a minute and say, “Thanks.”

Summertime is often a time when we don’t hear as regularly from our friends as we do in other times of the year. That’s why hearing from folks, like you, during July is particularly encouraging to us. If you would consider making a donation and help support this ministry today, we would love to hear from you. Go to: FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, “I CARE,” and you can make an online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY—make your donation over the phone—or you can mail a donation to us at *FamilyLife Today* at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR. Our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to spend time talking to a mom who faced a tough decision after her child was born. She had a career that was advancing in some significant ways—something she loved doing. Was she going to go back to work after the birth of the child, or was she going to stay home and be a mom? We’ll hear how Cindy Calwell processed that decision in her own heart and mind on tomorrow’s program. Hope you can join us for that.

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 tomorrow 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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