Bob: When Jody Zappia learned that her husband Ron had been unfaithful, she agreed to go to pastoral counseling/marriage counseling. What she didn’t expect was that, in the marriage counseling, she’d have to examine her own heart and her own life.

Jody: The truth of the matter is—I knew that I had sin in my life. You know, I had done some things in college that I was pretty sure was not good. We were sitting there—I just didn’t think I was going to be talking about it that day, but he was not going to let up on me. I thank God for that; because if he hadn’t been so persistent, one person would have walked out of there saved, and I’d have been in bad shape. I’d have got what I went there for, maybe; but I wouldn’t have experienced the grace of God.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, April 23rd. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. Ron and Jody Zappia’s time with a pastor/marriage counselor was the beginning of the resurrection of their marriage. We’ll hear more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re hearing a powerful story this week from a couple who—I chuckle—they’ve written a book called The Marriage Knot—and that’s k-n-o-t—because I was thinking a little: “The Marriage—Not”—[Laughter]—because that was almost the case.

Dave: Good clarification.

Ann: They were kind of tied in a knot.

Jody: That’s how it started.

Ron: That’s exactly how it started.

Bob: The couple, who are joining us—Ron and Jody Zappia. Guys, welcome back to FamilyLife Today. These are friends of yours [Dave and Ann]; you’ve done ministry together. Ron and Jody give leadership to a church in the western suburbs of Chicago—Highpoint Church. You’ve been there for almost two decades; is that right?

Ron: Yes; totally.
Bob: Parents of three daughters.

As we’ve already heard this week, you guys met each other in junior high—dated off and on throughout high school and college—got married—corporate fast-tracking for both of you—living apart for part of the first six months of your marriage. And all of that came to a head when, Jody, you walked in one night to surprise your husband and you got the surprise—and found that he was with another woman. That led to the crisis point that brought you guys to going, “Okay; what do we do?”

I was thinking, as I heard you tell your story this week—thinking about the couples we see, all the time, at our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways—most of those couples are in a good spot in their marriage; but we’ve got couples, every weekend, who are joining us, whose marriages have been rocked by the kinds of things that rocked your marriage.

And I’m just mentioning that here, because of the Dave and Ann Wilson special that our team put together in honor of you guys being the new hosts for FamilyLife Today. This week, if our listeners are interested in attending any of the 16 remaining Weekend to Remember marriage getaways that we’ve got between now and the end of June, they can save 40 percent off the regular registration fee as long as they contact us this week and let us know that they’d like the Dave and Ann Wilson special. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and find out more about the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. Your marriage does not have to be in crisis to attend. In fact, as I said, most marriages aren’t; but it’s a great getaway. Every couple needs a refresher like this for their marriage.

Ron, when your marriage hit the wall, you were shattered. And Jody, you were the planner, who said, “Well, I’m giving myself a two-week deadline to decide whether I divorce him or not.” You put that in your Franklin Planner and, then, got counsel from a stranger, who said you should go to this marriage workshop at a local church. That’s where you ended up—this was two nights after the affair?

Jody: —and days; yes.

Bob: You are in a marriage workshop at a local church. You hadn’t been to church, together, ever; right?

Jody: No.

Bob: Ron, you said you’re hearing things you had never heard about being a husband before; and God was at work on both of you.

Ron: Yes; it really was. I mean, for us, obviously, it was devastation. I was making choices/living a lifestyle and doing some things I wish I wouldn’t have, but we were—
you know, I was broken. I think about what Jody could have done that night and I—this is the kind of stuff people could respond in a lot of very, very different ways.

Fortunately, we went to this marriage workshop. Jody had wanted to talk with a pastor/meet with a pastor, because we weren’t getting our questions answered—one specific question, you know: “Can I get a divorce?” We wound up getting a counseling meeting with this pastor.

It was a very interesting meeting—now, being in ministry. I mean, we grew up with a non-church background. I was in the business world; there was no path way to ministry. We were looking at each other. We went to this counseling meeting; and the pastor said to us—he said, “Well, I’ve got about 45 minutes to meet with you.”

**Dave:** —“to fix your marriage.” [Laughter]

**Ron:** I thought that’s a good technique. [Laughter]

**Ann:** Jody, did you think, “Well, okay; this 45 minutes—I will know whether I should stay or not”?

**Jody:** Absolutely; I thought I was going to get a checkmark.

**Ann:** Okay.

**Ron:** Well, and he said—and this was the pivotal point—he just said, “You know, we can talk about how messed up your marriage is and all of that, or we can talk about the grace and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ.” I needed forgiveness.

**Jody:** That was a really interesting meeting for me; because again, I did—I really thought the spotlight was going to be on *Ron*. He was going to be convicted: “Guilty,” and I was going to walk out of there with my okay or whatever.

**Ann:** —your checkmark.

**Jody:** Yes; so he mentioned something like the mess you’re in, or God’s plan, or something. I guess I looked at it as: “There’s probably not much redeeming we can get out of the mess we’re in, so it sounds like this other thing—maybe, this would be more helpful.”

**Ron:** He started explaining the gospel to us.

**Jody:** He zeroed in on our sin; so we did end up talking about the mess we were in, because what I remember out of it is like—again, I thought the whole spotlight was going to be on *me*. Because Ron broke pretty
easily—like he knew what he did was wrong. He was what our friend/pastor, who has said now—is he witnessed Ron’s repentance, right then and there—

**Bob:** Wow.

**Ann:** —because Ron was saying/recognizing that he didn’t like the person he had become. He also recognized that he had sinned, not only against me but against God—which again, that’s the Holy Spirit; because that just wasn’t even in our vocabulary, but that happened there.

**Ron:** But you’ve got to understand something—I didn’t realize that I had sinned against God; I never even made that connection—I didn’t really know; I didn’t really care; I never thought about God. I never really understood. I was in a place, where I had nowhere to turn; so when he gave me a pathway of forgiveness, I mean, I took it.

**Dave:** You grabbed that.

**Ron:** —the lifeline. I didn’t want to be the person I had become. I had hurt the most important person in my life.

**Ann:** And so Jody, for you, it was easy to see Ron’s apparent sin. Could you see your own sin?

**Jody:** Well, the truth of the matter is I knew that I had sin in my life. You know, I had done some things in college that I was pretty sure was not good. We were sitting there—I just didn’t think I was going to be talking about it that day, and I didn’t really want to talk about it that day—but he was not going to let up on me. I thank God for that; because if he hadn’t been so persistent, one person would have walked out of there saved and I’d have been in bad shape. I’d have got what I went there for, maybe; but I wouldn’t have experienced the grace of God.

**Bob:** Did he just keep coming at you until you broke?

**Jody:** Yes; he just was—I had to confess some very specific sin. I remember getting angry with him. He specifically asked me about: “So did you and Ron—did you have premarital sex?” I remember thinking, “Who is he to ask me that question right now?”—you know, like I was not—

**Ann:** “What does that have to do with anything? This is Ron’s problem.”

**Jody:** Exactly; and I was mad. I didn’t want to deal with that today. “Well, yes; but…” I remember I was so justified, because he was the only person and I married him. I was justified in that; because I had all these little things I was building my life on, trying to be a nice person. It was just becoming very apparent that I was just as sinful as Ron, and I didn’t plan on dealing with it that day; but—
Ron: Well, he said, specifically, though, hon—he said, specifically—

Jody: He said, “Oh, then, you said it was okay to have sex outside of marriage.”

Ron: And when he said that—

Jody: —I was mad.

Ron: I mean, this girl was ready to attack this guy. [Laughter] So you invited—

Bob: Wow.

Ron: When he said—I’ll never forget that.

Jody: I said: “I did not. I would never say that.” Then, he said “Well, you know, actions speak louder than words.” I remember being mad; and yet, at the same time, like [groan] you know—like he was right/like he got me. So basically, it became apparent that I needed forgiveness just as much as Ron did.

Ann: Did you guys surrender that day?—your lives to Christ?

Jody: We did.

Ron: Yes; we both did.

Dave: Wait; what did that look like?—was it a prayer?

Ron: Yes; it was a prayer. We didn’t understand. I mean, honestly, he said a prayer. It’s a version of the sinner’s prayer.

Jody: He said, “Would you like to get forgiveness from that sin?” and we’re like, “Yes!”

Ron: Yes; God was breaking us down—He had to break me down. I knew the reason we were in this counseling meeting was because of me—because of my sin, because of my fault, because of what I had done. I was ready. I would have done anything to get rid of that guilt.

He led us in a prayer. I remember the time; I remember where I was standing. I remember walking out of that counseling office—it was fall; it was dark—not knowing, “What’s next?”

Jody: I remember asking the question—like, “Hey, what about the marriage?”—because we had got off on this tangent. [Laughter] I remember, you know, I had to figure out, “Is he supposed to be moving out?”—you know, real practical things.
Bob: Hurt, and betrayal, and trust—I mean, that’s all still there.

Ann: Right.

Jody: Right.

Bob: Even though you both just surrendered to Christ, you still have a lot of shrapnel.

Ann: Yes and “Now, what?”

Jody: We did.

Ron: And so she was: “I’ve been through this before. This is an act. What’s he doing?”—like she didn’t believe it. And so she was fortunate enough to let me come along. It was like, “Okay; I’ll let you prove it out, and you’re going to drop out of this thing.” I didn’t drop out, because it was real. It was the first time in my life that I was learning things that could help me. I walked out of that meeting—I can’t speak for Jody—but I’m telling you—man, like the weight was gone; I could feel it.

I hear—and maybe there is someone listening today, where you’re trapped. You can’t stop that behavior. You have the guilt/the shame. I walked out of there with the freedom and the forgiveness that changed the trajectory of my life. You know, we have one of those lightning-rod-moment stories, where I was struck; God healed. I didn’t know what was going to happen. We didn’t know what the marriage was going—even if it was going to survive. But I was walking out there, with a new lease on life. I was walking out there, with a second chance that I desperately wanted and needed.

Jody: —unrelated to the marriage, really; because, at that point—

Ron: Yes; it wasn’t about the marriage.

Bob: Well, you had given the marriage two weeks—

Jody: Yes.

Bob: —and you’d make a decision, in two weeks, about what you were going to do.

Jody: Yes.

Bob: So we get to the two-week deadline—

Ron: We become Christians. [Laughter]

Bob: —you become Christians in the process.
So when you’re there, with that Thursday in your planner, are you thinking, “Well, I guess divorce isn’t an option anymore,”—is that what you’re thinking?

**Jody:** Not necessarily; however, I will say—like the decision about him moving out—the pastor asked a couple of key questions: “Was he—had the affair ended?—done?” Ron said: “Yes,” and “Definitively.” Then he said, “Okay; well then, it would probably be best if you guys stayed together; because you’ve just experienced this new thing/this new relationship that’s starting with God.” I just trusted him, and we didn’t get separated. It was a good thing; because, you know, there’s fruit of repentance and—

**Bob:** —and you started to see some of that.

**Jody:** Yes; and if we hadn’t been together, I think I still would of have been a little leery that, “Oh, well, sure; he’s on his best behavior.”

**Ann:** What kind of things did you see?

**Ron:** Good question.

**Jody:** I did see a couple of changes. I mean, it was like something as silly as the Tupperware® falling out of the top shelf on top of him when he grabbed one thing. In the past, that would have been a huge—“Jody…—you know, it would have been a major—

**Bob:** —some words that should not be said on the radio?

**Jody:** Yes; exactly.

**Ann:** —and “…your fault.”

**Jody:** Yes; my fault and it would have been a big—you know, even like, I think, alcohol too. He was, right away, there was—not that he—

**Ron:** And that was a contributor to the breakdown.

**Jody:** Yes; it contributed, and it was social—we were just social drinkers.

**Ann:** So you were done—like, “I’m not going to drink anymore.”

**Jody:** Yes; he recognized—so I saw some things like that—that no one told him to do either.

**Bob:** You recognized that inhibitions get tampered with when you have a couple of drinks.

**Ron:** Yes.
Jody: Yes; with a member of the opposite sex; yes.

Bob: Your guard goes down.

Ron: Yes; we would say there has to be some fruit if you’re in that situation. Certainly, we wouldn’t tell somebody to stay in a damaging and difficult situation when there’s no change/when that’s not happening. But I think, you know, I was making decisions that were such to where Jody could see some things changing and that was really pivotal.

What the pastor did—one of the things we learned is—we talk about the marriage triangle. It’s so simple—but imagine a triangle in your mind, right now, with God at the top. You’re on the left corner and your spouse is on the right corner. And he just said this—he didn’t tell us about the marriage and whether it was going to work—he just said, “As you move up, one side of the triangle, and the other person moves upside the other triangle—like right now, at the bottom, you guys are both really far apart. Do you see that? Do you see that?”—he’s circling it; then, he’s drawing it up there.

Jody: Our assignment was: “Work on this relationship with God. So as you work on your relationship with God; he works on his,”—we get closer.

Ron: And there’s no guarantee that I would do it/she would do it; but that’s what we began to do. How silly and simple it seems—we began to develop a relationship with God that we didn’t have.

Bob: I love how Dave and Ann talk about this—and I’ve said this, over and over, to so many people, in so many places; but—

Dave: Have you Bob? That’s nice to know!

Bob: I have—yes; and I attribute you about 30 percent of the time. [Laughter]

Dave: —30 percent.

Bob: And the rest of the time, I just take the glory for myself.

Dave: I’ll take it.

Jody: “Since you’re here today…”

Bob: Yes; it’s the statement that you guys have made—which is: “If you want to get this relationship—the horizontal relationship/husband and wife relationship—you want to get that right, you’ve got to get this right,”—and now, you’re pointing upward.

Dave: Vertical
Bob: “You’ve got to get the vertical relationship right.” It’s what is the heart of *Vertical Marriage*—the book that you’ve written. And if there’s a problem in the horizontal relationship, that’s an indication there’s a problem in the *vertical* relationship. You fix the vertical relationship, the horizontal relationship can work its way out; right?

Dave: Yes; and the crazy thing is—that is what that pastor really showed you.

Ann: Yes; that’s exactly what it was.

Dave: We’ve gone through the same thing. It’s really cool to think the miracle of you guys going vertical is now God’s using that to help other couples—not just through your book—but everything you do.

I’ve got to ask this: “You know, you’re watching Ron change—did you change?—and especially, how did you get to forgiveness?”

Jody: Yes; that’s funny, because it did—it all just went, hand in hand. I started seeing him change, and I do remember *feeling* kind of like a little excitement.

Ann: Like were you hopeful but hesitant?

Jody: Yes; I would say that, because I remember my mom saying: “You can’t change a person. People don’t change, so you made your bed; you sleep in it,” or “You know, you’re not going to change him at the altar,”—or “…alter McAltar,” or something like that.

I started seeing, like: “People can change. Then, if he can change, then I can change.” So that was going on; and then, the issue of forgiveness was definitely hanging over my head. I will say that I—because I, too, when we left that meeting, had the same sense that Ron did of the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders; and, honestly, even the weight of making this decision on Thursday about a divorce. Again, like how you mentioned: “Give it time. You don’t have to make this quick decision. You don’t have to make it this week.” That was freeing to me—to not feel like I had this big huge decision to make.

Ann: —deadline.

Jody: Yes; I could just give this some time and God was going to show me now—like I now was on a path, where I was going to get answers, and that’s what started happening. And one of the big questions was—I kind of understood “I need to forgive him.” That was rooted in the fact that I had this sense that I knew, because I had been forgiven everything, I was not in a position to withhold forgiveness. I understood that, but the issue of trust was the bigger deal—like, “Well, I can forgive him; but I don’t have to stay married to him.”
Bob: Well, this is really important for a couple to hear; because there is a difference between forgiveness and trust. And forgiveness is a choice and a decision we can make. Trust is something—

Jody: Yes; yes.

Ann: —to be earned.

Bob: —that has to be overt. So here’s my formula.

Ann: Oh, good! This is good.

Bob: There’s a formula for rebuilding trust—it’s: CB over T is the formula: “Consistent behavior over time equals trust.”

Ron: That’s good.

Ann: I like that.

Bob: So if you want to rebuild trust in somebody in your life, you have to see a pattern of consistent behavior—that there is a difference—that things have changed, and that’s consistent over time. People will say to me, “Well, how much time?” I will go: “As long as it takes. How deep did the wound go? That’s how long it’s going to take.”

Somebody will go, “Like a couple of months?” Well, it might take a year; and the person, who’s been violated, can’t just refuse to grant trust. Then, they have to ask “Have I really forgiven?”; right?

Dave: Right.

Bob: Because you can say “I’ve forgiven” and still hold on to bitterness. But if you’ve let go of the bitterness, and if you’ve really forgiven, then the posture of your heart should be: “I want to be able to trust you again. I want us to get to this position. So let’s work together to make that happen.”

Ron: I learned—let’s just stop on the forgiveness thing for a moment—I learned, from forgiveness from Jody, I learned God’s forgiveness—what that was about—as she forgave. But then, I needed to affirm; because I knew I had damaged and I had broken the trust. I had to affirm her, and I had to slow down. She, emotionally—there was times, where I had to affirm my commitment to her, over and over, just like you guys are saying—I had to say it, “I’m committed to you.” I had to verbalize it, which was not easy for me; because I wasn’t a verbal person, at that point, in my life.

Ann: Ron, was there a point that you had to forgive yourself?
**Ron:** You know, I mean, I think I was so broken and shattered that I think the Lord’s forgiveness really helped me understand that. I think, for me, I would just say it like this: “I was caught in a situation to where I was so broken that, when I sensed the healing from God that I do have a fresh start; I can change; my life can be different. You know, one of things—I believed it too—I believe that people couldn’t change.

Some of our listeners, right now, you think people can’t change. I believed it when I was in college, and the reason I thought that was because I couldn’t change. I mean, Thursday night, the school I went to—and I was an athlete—and you know, Friday morning—get up and you’ve got the hangover. We’d look at each other—I’d say to my roommate: “Man, I’ve got to stop doing this. I’ve got to stop doing this.” You can’t stop doing this. That’s one of the things for me that God rooted some things out. I could be different. The new you was there and I believe that was a result of God’s forgiveness. I saw myself as a different person in a different light.

**Dave:** And I would add this—and I know you guys agree with this—it’s like, “Can people change?”—yes and no. We can change in our own strength a little bit—and maybe for a little while—but permanent, life changing/life-altering legacy transforming change—you guys found it. It’s in Jesus. It’s in a power, supernaturally, that we don’t have; and so your story is a picture of that.

So I would say to anybody listening, right now: “If you don’t know Jesus, this is the day to bow your head and say: ‘God, I’ve been trying to change. I want to change. I want long-term change. I can’t change my spouse, but I can change me. No; actually, I can’t; God, you can. I surrender.’” When they go vertical/when they do what you did, God changes people, inside out, through the Holy Spirit resurrection supernatural power of God. It, literally, has consequences that will change your legacy forever.

**Bob:** Oh, yes.

We’ve got the President of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, who has been joining us here today. David, you love hearing about—

**David:** I mean, what a great story; right? This is amazing. I love changed-life stories. Every changed-life story, and how God enters in to someone’s story, is different and not exactly the same; but there’s also usually some commonalities. One, in particular, is that God must bring us to the end of ourselves. We must get to the point, where we’re like Ron, and he knew he couldn’t change on his own; or we’re like Jody, and she became convinced of her need.

But there’s another consistent commonality. That’s when someone points the way/when someone’s a guide, pointing you to Jesus and to the hope that can be found in Him. They aren’t the ones with the power to forgive or to bring change; but they still play a
vital role in God’s work as they point those, who are at the end of themselves, to where they can find hope and find Jesus.

**Bob:** I’m thinking about Phillip and Nathaniel and how one said “Here, come and see.” He was described as one beggar showing another where to find bread. That’s just a great picture for us.

**David:** Absolutely; and we all get to participate in it. If we are a follower of Jesus, He invites us into the joy of filling the role of being an ambassador of His, from time to time. As you’re in relationships with people around you—on your street, in your work, in the schools that your kids go to—listen and look for those, who are in need and are searching for faith, and are coming to the end of themselves. Often, that is God’s invitation for you to point the way to the One who can forgive and bring new life.

**Bob:** I remember somebody saying: “It’s as simple as this—if you see somebody, who’s hurting, just ask them, ‘Would it be okay if I prayed for you?’ And just see how they respond to that. You’ll be amazed. Almost nobody will say, ‘No; I’d prefer you didn’t pray for me.’”

**David:** Yes, just moving toward them and entering into their journey.

**Bob:** Good word. Thank you, David.

I hope our listeners will get copies of the book that Ron and Jody have written called *The Marriage Knot: 7 Choices that Keep Couples Together*. We’ve got the book in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can order it from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com.

And I hope a lot of our listeners will take advantage of what we’ve come to call the Dave and Ann Wilson special around here this week. You can sign up for one of our remaining *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaways. We’ve got 16 more of these events happening this spring. If you sign up this week, you can save 40 percent off the regular registration fee. We’re doing this to welcome Dave and Ann, here, as the new hosts on *FamilyLife Today* and to encourage you to spend a weekend together, as a couple, and get away and build into your marriage relationship.

Find out more about the getaway and how to save 40 percent. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website: FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800:“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to hear about the process of rebuilding trust after there’s been betrayal in a marriage relationship. Ron and Jody Zappia will be back with us again. I hope you can be back as well.
I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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