“My Job Is to Make You Happy”

Bob: If we’re honest, when most of us got married, we were thinking, “What’s in this for me?” Hopefully, we reach a point, where we think, “I ought to be serving my spouse”; but when we get to that point, there’s still a ways for us to go.

This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, June 20th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. If seeking to please my spouse in marriage is not the ultimate endgame; what is? We’ll talk about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. So, here’s what we’re hoping is going to happen as you listen today. We’re hoping that a lot of our listeners, who are thinking, “I’m where we’re supposed to be in marriage,” are going to go, “Oh, there’s more than where we are.”

This is tied to my own journey/my own story of our marriage; but I came to a—kind of wake-up moment, where I said, “Oh, I thought this is what marriage is supposed to be all about; and there is something more to that.” I’m kind of teasing, where we are headed. I don’t want to give away the punchline—

Ann: Right.

Bob: —here; right?

Dave: Yes; yes.

Bob: But we were just talking about this. I think a lot of people/a lot of Christians would say, “The place you’re supposed to get to in marriage—that’s the important place to get to—is where you look at your spouse as more important than you.” That’s a good place to get to; right?

Ann: But it’s not enough, and that’s why I think people are going to be so intrigued by your message. I don’t think some people have even heard this part of it.

Bob: Yes.
**Dave:** I know I had *never* heard it, even going into marriage. I thought the *goal* was to become selfless and put Ann first.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dave:** I got there. I did that Day One; didn’t I, honey?

**Ann:** Uh—

**Dave:** —not quite?! You didn’t even answer; I guess I didn’t. [Laughter]

**Ann:** Yes; yes is the right answer—[Laughter]—you did.

**Dave:** It took decades.

Here’s the insight you’re about to hear. There is a *whole* other level. Well, you call it a phase—

**Bob:** Right.

**Dave:** —but it’s like going to take you to a place that will sustain your marriage for *life*.

**Bob:** Exactly; this is from a message that I was able to give on the *Love Like You Mean It®* marriage cruise, back in February, this year. We’re going to hear Part Two of the message.

I just need to mention, here, the 2020 cruise that the Wilsons are going to be on, along with Dennis and Barbara Rainey; and with Dr. Gary Chapman; and with Charlie and Kirstie Dates—

**Dave:** Quit doing that, because you’re going to say it is sold out. [Laughter]

**Ann:** And you’re coming—you and Mary Ann are coming.

**Bob:** We’ll be on the cruise, as well. It’s not sold out yet; but it looks like, by the end of this month, it will be sold out. We’re letting *FamilyLife Today* listeners know: “If you’d like to join us in 2020 for the 10th Anniversary cruise, you need to get in touch with us this week for a couple of reasons. *FamilyLife Today* listeners—there’s a special offer available to you guys. You can save $300 per couple off the regular cost of the stateroom if you register this week; and there are some additional perks that our team is throwing in, as well. You want to makes sure your stateroom is reserved before they are all gone.”

Go to our website—if you have any questions/want to find out more about the cruise—go to FamilyLifeToday.com. There is a link there that will tell you all about what’s
happening in 2020. If you’re ready to register, or if you have any questions that you need answered, call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY”; but again, don’t delay. Let us hear from you, and we hope to see you on board the 2020 Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise.

All right; we’re going to hear Part Two of the message that I shared on the cruise. I’ve already talked, in this message, about Phase One of our marriage, where I was pretty much focused on: “How do I benefit from this relationship?”

Dave: —making Bob happy.

Bob: “Am I happy?”—right. Phase Two is where I had the wake-up call: “It’s not supposed to be about me. I’m supposed to die to self and serve Mary Ann.” That’s where we will pick things up here.

[Recorded Message]

Bob: This is how I lived for a long time in our marriage. I thought my job: “Die to self and make sure Mary Ann is happy. If she’s happy, then God must be pleased with me; because He wants me to make her happy.”

Here is what I realized about Phase Two in our marriage. I realized that I was making the mistake of thinking that love is the same thing as making happy—that if I’m making my wife happy, I’m loving her. That’s not always the case; right? If I’m making sure you’re happy all the time, I may not be loving you anymore than if you make sure your kids are happy all the time—you may not be loving them when you are doing that. Now, I’m not trying to say that I parent Mary Ann; but it works both ways—when both of us are thinking, “I want to make you happy,” “No; I want to make you happy,” that’s different than thinking, “I want to love you well.”

I also thought that dying to self meant you should always get your way; and I should never get my way. I also thought being unselfish means, “We’ll do whatever you want.” Well, here’s the problem with that—in a very subtle way, I was saying to Mary Ann: “Look, you’re in the driver’s seat. It’s all on you. Whatever you say, I’m just here to serve.”

Now, I remember reading in Mark 11, where Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all.” I thought, “Okay; I need to be Mary Ann’s slave.” It would work like this: We would face a decision in our marriage; and I would try to think, “Okay; which choice is going to make Mary Ann happy?—because I want to do what’s going to make her happy.”
She wasn’t asking me to do this. In fact, there were times she really didn’t like that that’s how I was thinking; because no woman really wants a butler or a lapdog; right? They want somebody, who is a partner in this whole thing. She didn’t want the pressure of always thinking, “It needs to be my way.” That’s a lot of pressure for somebody; but I thought this was what being the slave of all was supposed to do.

Now, listen—again, I’m not saying, here, in Phase Two—it’s not wrong for you to defer to your spouse. It’s not wrong for you to stop and ask the question: “What would please my spouse? What would make them happy? How can I honor them? How can I be unselfish?” Those are all good, biblical questions to be asking. Phase Two is saying, “Am I making my spouse happy?”—that’s progress. The problem is when you get stuck there/when you think Phase Two is where you are supposed to land—it’s the end of the story.

There is another step you’re supposed to go to. If Phase One is: “Does this make me happy?”, Phase Two is: “Does this make you happy?”; you know what Phase Three is; right?—“Does this make God happy?”—it’s a God-centered marriage. It’s when you stop asking the question about: “What would please us?” and you start asking the question: “What would please Him?” It’s a marriage that transitions. This, by the way, is the foundational question we should be asking in a marriage.

In fact, I’m going to make a pretty bold statement here; and I think I’m on solid ground. When both of you are asking the question together/when you’re saying, “This is what we want for our marriage. We want a marriage that’s pleasing to God,”—when you make that your aim and objective and the two of you have come together to say, “This is what we want to have happen,” that’s when transformation happens in a marriage. Transformation doesn’t happen when you’re saying, “Will this please me?”
Transformation doesn’t happen when you’re saying, “How can I please you?” It only happens when the two of you, together, say, “How can we please God?”

Now, let me give you some illustrations of how this God-centered phase works differently than the self-centered or the other-centered phase of a marriage relationship. We’ll take a couple of issues—like, let’s take the issue of anger. Maybe, some of you would say, “Yes; I’ve got an anger problem”; or maybe, you’d say, “I don’t have an anger problem,” and your spouse would say, “Oh, yes; you do.” When they say that, that makes you really angry; [Laughter] and so—bingo!—yes; you’ve got…

So, if you’ve got an anger issue—and it flares up from time to time—in a Phase One phase of a relationship, you will find yourself thinking: “Well, look. It’s not my problem. If these people would just do what they are supposed to do…” / “If they would act the way they are supposed to act, I wouldn’t be getting angry. It’s not me that’s—it’s them provoking the anger. They are the problem,”—that’s Phase One.

Now, let me pause here again. There may be a kernel of truth to that. It may be that people, who are provoking you to anger, need to be coached, and taught, and disciplined
so that they turn the anger thermostat down in your life; but that whole idea of “My anger is justified,” is the wrong way to be thinking about your anger issues.

When you move to Phase Two, you think: “Okay; it’s not about me. It’s about dying to self. It’s about serving others.” In a Phase Two situation, you are saying to yourself: “My job, now, is to please my spouse. So, when I start to feel anger bubbling up in me, what I need to do is count to ten, clinch my teeth, go in the other room, breathe deeply, and just come out and say, ‘Okay; if that’s what you want’”; right? This is kind of: “Here’s how we’re supposed to manage our anger,” with this kind of behavior modification approach.

Here’s the problem with that approach—you take that approach to your anger issues, and one of two things is going to happen. You’re either just kind of swallowing it and stuffing it; and it goes into this little anger tank inside of you, which is a toxic waste dump for anger; and it just stores up there. One day, somebody says something, and the whole thing just explodes—it just spews out, and all the toxicity just comes out in one fell swoop.

Either that happens or you start just biting your—you grit your teeth—and you say, “Okay; I’m not going to get angry”; but here’s what happens—you start just moving toward isolation. You just start drifting apart: “Why do you want to come together with somebody when there is anger being provoked?” Maybe, you don’t erupt; but there’s not oneness happening in your marriage.

But if you’re moving into Phase Three, Phase Three asks the question: “I’m feeling angry. What would God want me to do? What would please the Lord in our relationship when I feel angry?” You come across verses like this one from Colossians 3, which says, “Now, you also must put them aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth,”—and go—“This is what God wants; God wants me to put this aside. So, how do I do that?”

Well, you read a little farther, and it says, “As you, who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” How do you get rid of the anger and the other? You have to replace it. You can’t just try to chase it out and hope it stays away. You’ve got to be developing these godly virtues in your life.

You say, “How do I develop those godly virtues?” Well, C.S. Lewis said, “The best way to develop a virtue is pretend like you already have it.” I’ve always thought, “That’s a good approach”; because let’s say you say, “I lack kindness.” “Okay; here is your assignment: Pretend like you are a kind person, and do that for a long time”; and guess what will happen? Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, as you are yielded to that and say: “This is who I want to be. Lord, help me be this kind of person,” God will grow kindness in you as you do.
You can’t just chase out the bad; you’ve got to replace it with the good. This is what the Bible calls the put-off/put-on principle, and that’s how you deal with your anger. Again, it’s you and your spouse saying: “We want our marriage to be what God wants it to be. So, dealing with anger, we’re going to come together and say, ‘What would God have us do? He would have me put these things off; He would have me put these things on. Let’s work together, as a team, to try to make these things happen.’”

Now, it’s about pleasing God, not about me or you being pleased; but guess what? You and I are both going to be pleased when we are pleasing God this way; okay? So, does that make sense?

Here’s a second illustration. One of you wants sex more often than the other; okay? In Phase One, you’re looking at it, saying, “I want more sex”; and you’re saying: “I have needs; these needs should be met. You remember, spouse, when you said, ‘To have and to hold from this day forward’—do you remember saying that? Okay; time for some having and holding”; right?—that’s what you’re thinking because “I have needs. You’re the only legitimate way for these needs to be met. So, let’s get after it. Meet my needs,”—that’s Phase One thinking.

Phase Two thinking is: “Okay; I have these needs; I’d like to have sex. She’s not interested,” or “He’s not interested,”—whatever it winds up being—“and so, I’m not going to press the issue. I’m just going to defer. I know this person is tired,” or “…distracted,”—or whatever else—“I’ll just defer, and I’ll just—I’ll sacrifice, and I’ll die to self and die to my needs.” You’re thinking, “That’s how I’m supposed to do this—grit my teeth, accept disappointment, and don’t be selfish.”

The problem with that is: “When you take the grit-your-teeth approach, either you’ll store up bitterness and resentment, or you’ll start to be susceptible to the lure/the attractiveness of other people, who are coming along, who are more open to that idea with you,”—that’s the culture we live in today.

Here’s Phase Three: “What would God want?” Well, it’s in 1 Corinthians 7: “Because of the temptation to sexual immorality each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, likewise, the wife to her husband.” That means you both should give each other sex; okay? That’s what conjugal rights mean.

“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” Now, I’ve got to tell you—that verse always kind of tripped me up; because I thought: “Okay; I’m going to apply that verse. So, I’m going to say to Mary Ann: ‘You don’t have authority over your body. I do. So, let’s go’”; right? [Laughter] She was going to say back to me: “Well, you don’t have authority over your body; I do. So, go take a cold shower”; right? [Laughter] How is that supposed to work out in real life?
Well, the way it is supposed to work out in real life is—you are thinking, “What would please God, and how can I serve my spouse?” That means there are some times when I go: “You know, she has had a hard day; and she is exhausted. I just need to back off.” There are some times when she might be thinking: “You know, it’s been a while; and I can imagine he’s frustrated. Even though I’m not feeling it, I need to be available.” That’s a part of how we deny ourselves—not just to please the other person—but because we know: “This is what God wants for our marriage.”

Verse 5 says, “Don’t deprive one another except for perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer.” This says there may be a season, where you are devoting yourselves to prayer; but it’s a season—and “Then come back together again so Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” The Bible is so practical on this.

Here is the question—with your sexual relationship—it’s not: “What do I want?” / “How do I deny myself?”—it’s the question of: “What does God want?” and “Can we, together, get on the same page for what God wants to happen in our marriage?”

Now, look—you can apply this same kind of principle to issues like finances; or in-law issues; or raising the kids; or you’ve got issues from the past that show up, and it triggers something in you. The Phase One part of you comes out and says: “Well, this is how it should be. This would please me.” Then, you go: “No; I need to die to self”; but then, you’ve got to get together and say: “We want our marriage to please God. How can we get on the same page with this?”

How do you find the answers to all of those issues? Here is the good news—God wrote a Book; okay? He gives us answers in there about what would please Him. So, if we want to know what would please God in our marriage, we’ve got to be people in the Book. We’ve got to be spending time reading God’s Word together. If you want to ask the question, “How can I please God?”, read your Bible, go to church, get godly counsel, and listen to FamilyLife Today everyday on the radio; okay? [Laughter]

Listen—I told you Mary Ann and I are coming up on 40 years of marriage—and we still drift in and out of these phases. It can happen in a given day, where at one moment, I’m in Phase One—it’s all about what I want—and I have to remind myself of what the Bible says. Another moment, I’m going, “Okay; I’m going to deny myself, even though this is what I want. I’m going to put myself...”—“No; what does God want?”

Here is the good news—after almost 40 years, we’ve learned to recognize these traps and see them for what they are. We can get to what God wants quicker than we used to, because we’ve taught ourselves to spot Phase One and Phase Two and to get to Phase Three.

Now, I want to go back and say, “Phase One is not wrong; Phase Two is not wrong—they are just not the foundation.” Once you’ve built the foundation, you can bring Phase
One and Phase Two into the equation and say: “Okay; this is what God wants. God wants us not to deprive one another in sex. Let’s talk about what would serve you and what would please me, and let’s have this conversation so that we can be together on this page.” It’s built on a foundation of “We want to serve God.” Ultimately, at the end of the day—it’s not: “What would please me?” or “What would serve you?”—it’s, ultimately, “What would please God?”

Years ago, I asked a group of pastors—I was getting ready to speak to a group of pre-marrieds—and I asked them—I said: “If you were going to speak to pre-marrieds, and you were going to give them one verse of the Bible to talk to them about marriage and you couldn’t use the go-to passages—no Ephesians 5, no 1 Peter 3, not even Genesis 2; you can’t use those; and Song of Solomon is off limits, because they are pre-married; okay?—[Laughter]—if you’re going to do that, where would you go?” I got some great answers from these pastors.

One said, “I’d go to Ephesians 4:1-3, which talks about the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of peace, and what’s needed for that to happen.” Another one said, “I’d go on down in Ephesians 4, to where it talks about: ‘Be angry; do not sin, don’t let the sun go down on your anger.’” That’s good, practical advice. Another one said, “Well, I’d go to the end of Ephesians 4, where it says, ‘Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.’” Those were all good answers.

But two of the pastors said, “Here is my verse.” When they both shared the same verse—and when they shared it with me—I went, “That’s the one; that’s the verse.” It surprised me—because I had heard this verse; in fact, I had sung this verse in a song, and I knew the verse—I just never thought of it in the context of marriage. It’s Psalm 34:3; and it says, “O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.” That’s the foundation—that’s Phase Three: “O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

What should be at the ground level of our marriage?—that desire—that our marriage would magnify and glorify Him: “I want what pleases God to be the foundation of our marriage,” and “I know I’ve got to curb the Phase One, what-pleases-me side of me, and I’ve got to be aware of the Phase Two, ‘How do I serve you even if it frustrates me?’—I don’t ignore those—but the foundation of it has got to be: ‘O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.’”

That’s my prayer for you tonight; in fact:

Lord, I just want to pray for these couples, and just ask for all of us, that You would burn into our heart and soul the desire for our marriages to magnify, and please, and glorify You. We want, more than anything, for our marriages to be a testimony of Your grace.
Lord, we confess to You that there are times when that desire is overwhelmed by our personal interests; or there are times when we take on the approach of a martyr and say, “We’re going to defer to our spouse,” really, because we just want to keep the peace.

Lord, help us to make the foundation of our marriage Your glory and Your honor. Let us ask the question: "What would please the Lord?” and then live that out in our marriages. We ask that in Your name; Amen.

[Studio]

**Bob:** Well, we’ve been listening to Part Two of the message from the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise. Really, I’m listening to that, thinking, “All I’m saying is, ‘Go vertical!’”; right? [Laughter] That’s the whole thing I’m saying—it’s the same message—

**Dave:** That is Vertical Marriage.

**Bob:** —that’s at the heart of what you guys—

**Ann:** —of our book.

**Bob:** —have been talking about, on marriage, for years.

**Ann:** Yes; it’s a great message. I’m so glad that you delivered that, because we all need to hear it. We need to be reminded, but it’s not easy to do.

**Dave:** Not at all. It’s interesting—you’re talking about what pastors told you. You know what came to my mind?

**Bob:** No.

**Dave:** Did you tell them they couldn’t use Matthew?

**Bob:** No.

**Dave:** This is Matthew 7: “Therefore, if everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dave:** Jesus talks about the storms are coming, but that house is going to stand because it’s built on Jesus/on the Rock, which is your whole point. Then, He says, “Anyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice is a fool, who built his house on the sand. The storms are coming.” So, that would be—that’s
vertical. That’s going and saying that Phase Three is really the most important phase, where I get to the point where it’s not about me—it’s not even about my spouse—it’s about honoring Christ and making Him the foundation of our marriage.

**Bob:** You guys use the triangle imagery,—

**Dave:** Right.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Bob:** —where a husband and a wife are at the base of the triangle. The closer they get to aligning with God’s purposes, the closer they get to one another as they go up the sides of the triangle.

You think about that: “Let’s be united in the goal of pleasing *me,*”—then, we’re going to be lopsided. If we say, “Well, let’s be united in the goal of pleasing *you,*”—we’re going to lopsided. Even if we try to say, “Let’s be united in the goal of pleasing each other,”—those are good and important things—but when you can say, “Let’s be united, together, in the goal of pleasing God,” then, when one or the other of us is *not* pleased, we can come back and say, “Well, what would please God here?”

**Ann:** Right.

**Bob:** That’s how you get back in alignment in your marriage.

**Ann:** That takes away the expectations of what my spouse is *not* doing when I have been so loving, and have been so serving, and I’ve been so about him; because this isn’t about our spouse—whether your spouse goes there or not—we still can draw closer to God.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Ann:** We can still do it unto Him. That makes a big difference; because there are a lot of listeners—that their husbands will not respond or, maybe, their wife will not do anything—but we still can. That brings glory to God. It’s something that’s really important for us to engage with Him, because He *fills* us up—He gives us purpose, and He *reminds* us that He is with us and sees us.

**Bob:** Yes; I’m just thinking back to the week that we had, back in February, on the cruise and just what a spiritually-refreshing week that was for all of us. Clearly, it’s a lot of fun; it’s relaxing; but it’s also spiritually-invigorating and enriching. I hope many of our listeners can join us on the cruise this year.

I mentioned, earlier, we are about 90 percent sold out. We expect to be completely sold out by the end of this month. So, if you are interested—if you’d like to find out more/if
you think you can join us Valentine’s week, go to FamilyLifeToday.com. The information is available there. If you are ready to book your cabin, or if you have any questions, call 1-800-358-6329—that's 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” Get in touch with us quickly. There are some incentives available for FamilyLife Today listeners if you book this week. You’ll save $300 per couple off the cost of your cabin; some additional perks have been thrown into that. Find out more when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY. We hope you can join us on the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to hear a message from the cruise from Alex Kendrick, who has a brand-new movie that is coming out, here, in a couple of months called Overcomer. We'll hear more about the movie and hear a great message from Alex on tomorrow’s program. I hope you can be with us for that.

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 back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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