Bob: Scott Kedersha is a pastor who has done a lot of pre-marital preparation. He's had a lot of conversations with a lot of couples thinking about getting married. He says he sees all kinds of different couples headed toward the altar.

Scott: I used the traffic light analogy a lot—that:

“Green light” couples we celebrate—we’re excited for them to move forward.

“Red light”—they’re the ones everyone knows it’s not the right thing: “Hit the eject button; get out!”

Then the “yellow light”—“Proceed with caution. Here’s some things you really need to think through and figure out before you say, ‘I do.’”

If people blow through the yellow and red, we remind them: “Hey, we love you; we care for you. We want the best for you. We’re warning you: ‘This is where things may be headed.’”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, July 15th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. What can we do—as individuals or in our churches—to help couples, who are planning to wed, to be as ready as they can possibly be to tie that knot? We'll talk to Scott Kedersha about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. If there are 52 Sundays a year, how many of those 52 Sundays, at the church where you pastor, are you talking something about marriage?

Dave: Fifty-two, Bob. That’s all we do. [Laughter] No; I’m kidding/I’m kidding. I would say, though, the people in our church would say: “Almost every message Dave Wilson gives—

Bob: —“has some marriage content”?
Dave: I just talked to myself in the third person. That’s pretty—that’s pretty embarrassing to do that. [Laughter]

Ann: Wait; you do that all the time at home! [Laughter]

Dave: Whatever. I never do that; don’t let anybody think I do that. [Laughter]

Somehow, it does feel like—whatever the topic is that day/whatever passage I’m teaching out of the Word of God—there’s going to be an application to relationships and marriage. It’s a passion of ours, so it’s going to come out, I bet you. 50 out of 52 Sundays.

Ann: I was going to say that, because this is a passion for Dave, that he usually will share an illustration or something in as a tie-in to marriage. I don’t know if it’s that often, but it is—yes; it probably is.

Dave: I will add this—I know, sitting in those seats, people are longing to have great relationships, whether it’s even marriage or not. Anytime you can show them that God is concerned and has wisdom from the Word of God that can help them, they’re going to lean forward; so why not?

Bob: The number one place where our sanctification gets tested is in our marriage relationship. If the rubber is meeting the road regularly/our profession of faith is being tested regularly. It’s more likely it’s being tested at home than in the workplace, or in the neighborhood, or at the school.

This is why the genuineness of our faith is proved in our marriage relationship. I was thinking about how passionate you guys are about marriage. I know your church is—it is central to what you are doing. If you’re thinking about top ten churches in America, where marriage is central, Watermark Church in Dallas would be in that list; wouldn’t it?

Dave: Number one in my mind.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: It’s really by reputation. I’ve never been there; I want to go there—I’m throwing that out right now.

Ann: We are even sending people there, because they have such a great reputation of building healthy marriages.

Bob: And it’s not necessarily because Todd Wagner, who’s the senior pastor, is talking about marriage regularly—he may be illustrating, regularly, like you guys are. They have built a ministry/a marriage ministry at Watermark that churches, all across America, are
saying, “Help us know how we can do this in our community.” I mention all of this because Scott Kedersha is joining us today. Scott, welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Scott: Thank you. So good to be here with you.

Bob: This is the field you’re laboring in. What’s your role at Watermark?

Scott: I serve as the Director of Marriage Ministry. I get to spend a lot of time with pre-married and newly-married couples.

Bob: You’ve been a part of this ride for the last—you’ve been there 17 years?

Scott: Seventeen years at this church and, then, thirteen years on staff.

Bob: You’ve written a book called Ready or Knot? for pre-marrieds—K-N-O-T—Ready or Knot?

Dave: I get it; I get it.

Bob: We’re going to talk about that.

If you were to look at what it is that is happening at Watermark and why you think it’s caught on, what would you say?

Scott: Without question, it’s a movement of God. He gets the credit; He’s the One who built everything we’re doing. We found that this is such a felt need for people. We can say, “Hey, we want to teach a series on a book of the Bible,”—people are not going to be interested, if it’s a non-believer/someone with a nominal faith.

But if you say: “Hey, we’ve got a great class,” or “…a ministry for you to start your marriage right,” or “…begin your marriage before you say, ‘I do,’” or “If you’re in crisis,” people are going to come. It is a felt need, and they’re hurting. We’ve capitalized on that for years—creating opportunities for folks before they say, “I do,”/for folks who are in crisis. Instead of paying a ton of money to go to a counselor, we say, “Why don’t you come and be a part of the church, where the church is supposed to help couples prepare and start their marriages right?”

Bob: The marriages in crisis—the groups that people come to—one of the things I’ve heard—and again, I haven’t been a part of this, but we’re hearing all of this from a distance—is that people show up, and there is remarkable transparency. You’ve trained your facilitators to get up and share their mess. In the process, that invites people in the group to go, “Oh, we can be honest about our mess?”—that’s how things get worked out.
Scott: That’s exactly right. The only promise we know about in the entire Bible about marriage—it’s 1 Corinthians 7:28—that if you marry you will have trouble, [Laughter] which is not exciting for a pre-married couple; but it’s reality. When we act like we’ve got it all together—why would we ever, ever do that?—when it’s normative to have struggles and have trials.

We have this culture, where we are authentic/transparent. We know that, if we conceal our sin, we’re not going to prosper; but if we confess and forsake it, we’ll find mercy. We’ve found, from the top down, that we have to be real and honest about marriage—the good stuff and the bad stuff.

Bob: If you were leading a group, and it was your night to lead, and you’re going to get up and share your story, what’s the mess you’re going to share?

Scott: “How much time do I get? [Laughter] How many things do you want to hear?”—right? I’ll give you a couple from my life. I’ve struggled with pornography and lust. I started looking at porn, as a seven-year-old, and was full-on addicted by the time I’m ten or eleven.

Bob: Wow.

Scott: Then, the effects of that—of lust—that’s affected my life. I’ve struggled with eating my whole life and being overweight. If anyone thinks that doesn’t affect their marriage, they don’t really know what that’s like. That affects my health, my energy, the way I love my wife and my kids.

I struggle with people pleasing, so I’m going to say, “Yes,” to everything that comes my way. That affects my marriage; it affects how much time I have for my kids, for my relationship with Jesus, for friends; because I want the approval of man.

I’ve struggled with anger and getting frustrated and can lose it at times. God has done amazing work in my life there, but I can still get frustrated or angry at times.

That’s a very short list.

Dave: Man, you talk about going there!

Ann: I know.

Dave: You start right off with some big sins that most people hide. Obviously, you’re modeling what happens in the ministry at Watermark. Like Bob said, if you start out a night that way, I am now leaning in, saying, “Help me, because I’ve never said out loud what you’ve just said.” Personally, I have; but many haven’t.

You’re also going to show them what?—what’s the answer to those struggles?
Scott: It’s coming to Jesus; it’s coming to the Lord. It’s identifying with them in their pain and saying, “You’re not alone, and there’s a solution.” The common factor that we have all between us is sin, and the answer/the solution to all that sin is Jesus.

Bob: You guys have pre-marital classes if folks want to get married in your church—not even in your church—I’ve talked to people who got married in other churches but came to Watermark for their pre-marital; right?

Scott: Yes; this year we’ll have about 1,000 couples that will come through our pre-married class. Very few of those will get married in our chapel.

Bob: A thousand couples?

Ann: Wow!

Bob: You’ve said, over the last decade, it’s been like maybe 6,000?

Scott: Yes; probably six/seven thousand—somewhere in there.

Bob: Okay; so you’ve worked with these couples; and that was really the genesis behind the book, Ready or Knot? You’ve seen the things that they come in, unaware of/ill-equipped for things that—they’re about to say, “I do”; and they have no idea what they’re doing; right?

Scott: That’s right.

Bob: This book is designed to help them have the conversations; in fact, the subtitle: 12 Conversations Every Couple Needs to Have Before Marriage. All 12 of these are great conversations. Is there one of the twelve that you look at and say, “If you could only have one, have this one”?

Scott: It’s a million-dollar question. [Laughter] There’s no question what the right answer is—it’s the faith conversation. So often, this is the last thing couples will speak about. You find someone who’s cute, who’s attractive, who is fun to be with. You want to be with them; you like being with them. Somehow, you get a couple months down the road, and you never have a genuine faith conversation. This is the one that is absolutely most important, because it affects everything else—the way you view your relationship with the Lord, what salvation means, who Jesus is.

I would say that’s the most important marriage question you will ever answer—is: “Who is Jesus?” You’ve got to be aligned on that. If you’re not, then everything else will be—it just doesn’t fall in place. It doesn’t matter what you believe about money, and in-laws, and communication, and sexual intimacy. If you’re not aligned, spiritually, then nothing will match up. You’ve got to be aligned in your view on faith.
Bob: I have a young woman I worked with, years ago, who—she was a single parent; she’d been married and divorced. She was in her mid-thirties. I could tell she longed to be a mom again. She wanted to have another baby; but she was single, not dating anybody. She comes in; she says, “I’ve met this guy.” I said, “Tell me about him.” She was unpacking it for me. I said, “Does he go to church?” She goes, “No-o-o; he doesn’t.” I said, “Well, you can’t even—you shouldn’t even be having the conversation. You shouldn’t be dating him, because if that’s not right—that’s foundational to everything.” And she says: “You’re right. I know; I know.”

She came in one morning—I’ll never forget this—she came in and said, “Last night we were up until four in the morning, talking. He prayed to receive Christ.” I said, “That’s great!” She said, “So we can get married now; right?” [Laughter] And I was like, “Here’s my question: ’Did he pray to receive Jesus or pray to receive you?’”

Scott: Great question.

Bob: I said, “You’ll know that about six months from now.” She married him—got pregnant. The marriage was over in less than a year, and she was now a single parent with two kids. It’s because the faith question can’t simply be answered with, “Have you prayed the prayer?”—right?

Scott: Yes; it’s not just a matter of “Are you a Christian?—yes or no?” It’s: “Is Jesus just going to be your Savior, or is He going to be the Lord of your life?” Because if He’s the Lord of your life, it affects everything you do—it affects the way you spend money; it affects the way you communicate; the way you look at your job; the way you raise your kids; the way you view day-to-day jobs around the house; it affects your roles.

It’s not just checking the box. So often, Bob, I think you’re right—people check the box: “Is he” or “…she a Christian?—yes?—that means I’m free to move forward.”

Bob: If you’re working with somebody, and helping them evaluate: “Is it okay for us to move forward?” “Is this person really a believer? Do they know Jesus as Lord?”—how do you help them figure that out?

Scott: “The proof is in the pudding,”—right?—that’s what I always say. Fruit of the Spirit—is there love?—is there joy?—is there patience —is there kindness?—is there gentleness?—is there self-control? If you don’t see those things, then I’m not sure that Jesus really is the Lord of their life. I’m not going to judge their salvation, but there better be fruit.

Dave: If you don’t see those things when you’re dating, guess what?! [Laughter] We’re all laughing because we’re married, but it’s only going to get worse. They’re on their very best—you’re getting the very best. I always say: “When you date, you lie.” It’s almost like you’re pretending, but you’re going to see those later.
So many think—how do you deal with this in your pre-marital classes?—so many think—I've heard this a thousand times: "I'll change him" / "I'll change her after we're married." Do they change?

**Scott:** We say it's not just lying, but you're dating each other's PR departments. You're putting your best face on. You haven't eaten a carbohydrate in months. [Laughter] You're looking good. [Laughter] Then, when you meet his parents or her parents, then the best behavior really comes on. That's always my hesitation—if a couple starts—they meet, and they want to get married so quickly—again, you've got to give it time and see what life really looks like.

Community plays a huge role, so are there other people around them? That's always one thing I'm really focused on: "Are there other wise people around them, who are helping them become more mature in their faith?—who can vouch for what—if the guy says he's mature and solid—I want community to speak into that—to say, "Yes; he is," or "He isn't. That role of community plays a huge role in helping them prepare.

**Ann:** It's almost like a background check—

**Scott:** Yes.

**Ann:** —you know, "Is he really living out what he's talking about?"

**Scott:** Yes.

**Dave:** And to what—Bob, you were saying with that lady—he prayed the prayer—I've wanted to explain the passage, where Paul, in Corinthians, says to be "equally yoked." I think a lot of people think that means: "I'm a believer. He just became a believer." As you look at it, it's like: "No; there's a similarity in our maturity—'I'm running fast on the track; so is he.'" It isn't like: "Oh, I'm going to pick up somebody off the bench; they're on the track. I'm going to change them as they go." Talk about that.

**Scott:** That's exactly right. That yoke—so it's not just—if you're unequally yoked, you're going to be moving in different directions. Even two believers—if one is pulling harder than the other, you're not going to go in a straight line; you're going to pull off to the right or to the left—you're never going to be moving in the same direction.

There's a verse in Amos—Amos 3:3. "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet?" A different translation would say: "They've got to be moving in the same direction." If they're not moving in the same direction, at the same pace, that's going to be a problem. Even though they're two believers, your life is going to be really difficult and miserable together. You're not going to change them; the Holy Spirit is the One who has to change the individual. What you see now, I would just plan: "That's probably
what you’re going to get in the future unless you see any indication that they’re willing to change, and they’re teachable, and open to the input from others.”

**Bob:** Scott, we’ve all known couples—don’t go to church; don’t have any faith background—they’ve got great marriages, so how can you say that’s so important? How is it that pagan couples can have great marriages?

**Scott:** We certainly do see some of those around us. That’s the common grace of God, I think, that would allow them to have a marriage that seems to be looking good from the outside. I firmly believe in John 15:5—that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

**Bob:** And you know that, among engaged couples—you’re talking regularly to people, where one person says, “Yes; this is important.” The other person may say it to get along, but it’s not being lived out—and yet, their [the one thinking it is important] emotions, their passions, their desires overwhelm all of that. As much as you’re in there, trying to say, “This really matters,” they go, “Yes; but….” You’re seeing those folks, a year later, in your marriage in crisis class; right?

**Scott:** We do. Those couples—what we tell them is: “Hey, I’ve got nothing to gain by you getting married or not getting married. I’m just appealing to you as someone, who cares about you/cares about marriage, and we’re warning you, ‘This is not...’”

I use the traffic light analogy a lot—that:

“Green light” couples we celebrate—we’re excited for them to move forward.

“Red light”—they’re the ones everyone knows it’s not the right thing: “Hit the eject button; get out!”

Then the “yellow light”—“Proceed with caution. Here’s some things you really need to think through and figure out before you say, ‘I do.’”

If people blow through the yellow and red, we remind them: “Hey, we love you; we care for you. We want the best for you. We’re warning you—this is where things may be headed.” We want to be honest and open as much as we can. They’ve got to, ultimately, make that decision.

If they know we care for them—if they’re struggling in a year, then they’ll come back; because they’ll remember we did care for them. Even though, maybe they took counsel different than what we told them, at least, they’ll remember, “This body of Christ cared for me and loved me.”
Ann: I’ve talked to so many parents, along the way, whose kids are in the marrying years. They are in so much distress, because their son or daughter is getting married—maybe they have faith—but their boyfriend or girlfriend does not have any faith. The parents are so worked up and so worried about this. How do you encourage or what do you say to them?

Scott: That’s a very tough place to be, as a parent, because you love your child and you want the best for them. That’s what you do—you appeal to them—say:

I want the best for you. You know I love you. Your whole life, I’ve done everything I can to care for you, and love you, and point you in the right direction.

Again, I’m going to tell you—it’s not because I don’t want the best things for you; it’s because I care. I’m going to beg you/I’m going to appeal to you to not move forward with the decision,” or “…to take the steps you need to grow in your relationship with Jesus,” or “…in your relationship, as a couple, before you say, ‘I do,’/before you move forward. And if you do move forward, we’re here; we love you. This is not a conditional relationship, but we’re warning you that you’re making a decision that’s destructive.

Bob: You said this is the foundational question that needs to be addressed first. It’s the one you address first—it’s Chapter 1 in your book. Couples might look at this and go: “It isn’t communication, or conflict resolution, or intimacy, or how we handle money, or what we think about kids? I mean, those feel like bigger/weightier issues than how we feel about Jesus.” Explain why how you feel about Jesus, and your relationship with Him, is really foundational; and all of those other things draw life from that.

Scott: The reality is that the Bible doesn’t say a ton about marriage. We’ve got Ephesians 5; we’ve got Proverbs 18:22. We’ve got a few others, here and there, that speak to marriage specifically—the whole book, The Song of Solomon—but there’s not a ton of marriage passages.

There’s a whole lot that speaks to our relationship with Jesus—a lot that tells us how to draw closer to Christ. If you’ve got that right, you’ll communicate better; you will raise kids in a more united way; and intimacy will, typically, be better for you if you’re in line with what you believe about Jesus.

Dave: One of the things I love doing, when Ann and I are invited—to not speak at a church and do a marriage retreat—although that’s wonderful; we do that probably more than anything else—but when we’re asked to come to a business/a secular business and talk about relationships. They’ll say, “By the way, you can’t really get in too much to the faith things, or the Jesus thing, or even the Bible thing.”
We go in there—and I love this because it’s a room full of people, who don’t go to church—most of them—and what do we do? We teach the Word of God—all the principles about relationships from the Word of God.

Ann: We’re not sharing Scripture; we’re just sharing principles.

Dave: Yes; we don’t really reference where it comes. This happens every time—I remember one of the last times we did it—these couples rush up during the break. We have two sessions and, then in the evening, they want us to host the Newlywed Game at a dinner thing. It’s a great opportunity; right?

They come up, after the first one—these guys come up: “Where do you get that stuff?! That is dynamite stuff! I’ve never heard any of that stuff before!” I look at this guy and go: “I’ll tell you exactly where I got it. I got it straight from the Word of God.” They go, “The Bible?!” I go, “Yes; the Bible.” “That’s in the Bible?!”

I’ll never forget this one guy—he goes, “I’m going to start doing that!” I looked him right in the eye and I go: “Oh. I need to tell you something very important. You can’t.” “What do you mean I can’t?!” “You can’t just start living this stuff out. There’s a power you and I don’t have—that’s in faith/that’s in Christ. You’ve got to have Jesus to be able to do this.”

That’s exactly what you’re saying—that’s how important faith is: “It’s great to hear these principles. I’m going to do this,”—you find out in about six minutes, “I can’t do this!” Then, you don’t know why. There’s a resurrected Christ who can live in you to give you the power to do it—that’s the role of Jesus and faith in a marriage.

Bob: You can do it for an evening or for a weekend.

Ann: Even a week, maybe, if your spouse is nice to you. [Laughter]

Bob: You might go a month, you know, and you go, “This is awesome!”; but sustaining it over a lifetime?—that’s the issue—and that’s why this is the starting point in terms of talking to engaged couples. It’s why the book, Ready or Knot?: 12 Conversations Every Couple Needs to Have Before Marriage starts here.

Again, we’ve got copies of Scott’s book in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. If you’re working with engaged couples, if you know an engaged couple, if you are an engaged couple, these are conversations you need to be having. That’s why, this week, we are making copies of Scott’s book available to anyone who can help support the work of FamilyLife Today with a donation. The book, again, is called Ready or Knot?: 12 Conversations Every Couple Needs to Have Before Marriage. You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com.

Keep in mind, the work of FamilyLife Today—the cost of producing and syndicating this program, maintaining its website, offering new content, new podcasts/all that we’re
doing here at FamilyLife®—that’s possible because listeners, like you, have made it possible in the past. It will be possible, going forward, when you go to donate today. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to donate, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation by phone—that’s 1-800-358-6329. Ask for your copy of Scott Kedersha’s book, Ready or Knot?, when you make a donation today. Let me just say, “Thanks,” in advance, for being part of the FamilyLife Today team that makes all of what we’re doing, here, at FamilyLife possible for listeners, like you, in your community and all around the world. We’re grateful to be in partnership with you.

It’s not just engaged couples who need to be having conversations about their relationship. Married couples need to be having these kinds of conversations as well; and yet, often, after we get married, we kind of let that slide a little bit. That’s why the FamilyLife team has put together a training program/a fitness program for your relationship for this summer. It’s the “Stronger Forever Marriage Fitness Plan” that we’ve developed. We’ll give you exercises you can do—not physical exercises—relationship exercises you can do to help improve your cardio/get your heart racing a little faster or help improve your marital relational strength.

Here’s the best part of it all. If you sign up and start to participate in this plan, one couple is going to be selected from all those who sign up. One couple is going to be selected to be our guest on the 2020 Love Like You Mean It® marriage cruise, which happens in February. The cruise is almost sold out, but we held back one cabin for a FamilyLife Today listener. If you sign up and receive the “Stronger Forever” content, you’re automatically registered for the drawing that we’ll have. There’s no purchase necessary to enter. The contest began on July 1st; it ends on August 30th. The official rules can be found at FamilyLife.com/StrongerForever.

Do something really good for your marriage relationship this summer. Who knows?—you might get an all-expense paid trip on the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise in February of 2020. Again, all the information is available at FamilyLife.com/StrongerForever.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to hear how we can help prepare couples for the reality that things that seem kind of cute and attractive right now, when you’re dating, may turn annoying after you get married—the differences that can start to grate on you after you’ve said, “I do.” We’ll talk about that tomorrow. 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 next time 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.
We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com