

ARE OPPOSITE-SEX FRIENDSHIPS APPROPRIATE?

<https://fiercemarriage.com/are-opposite-sex-friendships-appropriate>

[00:00:00]

Ryan: Greetings, Fierce listeners. Ryan here. Hear that? That's nothing. Selena is not with me today. I'm really sorry to say that. This is something I've not ever really done. It's an intro by myself. The reason for this kind of unique situation is that if you listened to last week's update episode, we kind of talked about how our family has been going through a lot. I won't get into the details, but we could just appreciate your prayers. We've got a lot of health stuff going on, we've got a lot of challenging stuff in terms of what we're working on around Fierce Marriage and our new initiative called Gospel-Centered Marriage. Again, listen to that last episode if you want more details.

This week, we are going to be sharing content that we recorded over two years ago that I still think is very relevant today. And the reason I think it's relevant is because we continue getting questions from earnest husbands and wives wondering, is it appropriate, is it good, is it healthy to have friendships with those of the opposite sex? Now, this is a nuanced topic. It's both obvious but we also need to treat it with wisdom because there are good aspects to having friends of the opposite sex, there are also some things to be kind of cognizant of in ways that it can evolve into something that's unwise or unhealthy. So in this episode, which like I said, we recorded it two years ago, I still think the treatment of it stands up, stands the test of time. So we hope it helps you, we hope you're encouraged by it, we hope you learn something and more than anything, we hope it points you to Jesus. So with that said, enjoy the episode.

Ryan: Big question here. Is it okay to have a relationship with somebody of the opposite sex besides your spouse?

Selena: You mean friendship relationship? *[both chuckles]* Just making sure. Just making sure.

Ryan: Should I redo that?

Selena: No. That's funny. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: Is it okay to have friends of the opposite sex while you're married? That's a good question.

Ryan: It's a good question. It's really tempting to fall on either side of this right and say, "Oh, absolutely. It's all whatever. It's platonic. It's fun. It's okay."

Selena: "My husband's okay with it."

Ryan: Yes. Or on the opposite side, which is like avoid them like the plague.

Selena: Right. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: And I think there's something to be had, something to be said in the middle of all that. And that's what we're talking about here.

[00:02:26] <Intro>

Selena: Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up, and refuses to give in.

Ryan: Here we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

Selena: Sex—

Ryan: Communication—

Selena: Finances—

Ryan: Priorities—

Selena: Purpose—

Ryan: And everything in between.

Selena: Laugh, ponder, and join in our gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

[00:02:57] <Podcast begins>

Selena: I'm kind of excited to talk about this one. You know, it's a really controversial topic. And I think just kind of sharing from our hearts and some biblical understanding that we've gained through it, how can we really have wisdom to know and enjoy the blessing of friendship in a way that honors both our marriage, you and I, and our brothers and sisters in Christ while ultimately bringing glory to God? Right?

Ryan: That's good.

Selena: So we are going to be diving into that. We're going to do our heart check. And we may get to a question...I don't know. We're kind of running low on time here. I think we should start off with... Oh, the couple's challenge is going to be a good one, too. There's some tough questions in that. I'm not excited, but I'm...they are tougher questions than normal. But before we get started, Ryan, why don't you...?

Ryan: I feel very titillated right now by the way.

Selena: Why?

Ryan: Because you have a really good intro. I'm saying that's a good thing.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: What's going to happen? What are they going to talk about that?

Selena: I'm glad. Do you want to do the housekeeping?

Ryan: I don't like being titilly.

Selena: Being titilly.

Ryan: That's Office quote. Anyway. Okay. First off, housekeeping. Thank you for listeners who have rated and reviewed this podcast. It means a ton. We say it every time because (a) it's always really encouraging, (b) we want to keep a healthy rhythm of asking you to do this because it gives you a way to help others and to participate. So go to iTunes, do a rating and a review. The rating takes about two seconds. Just click the star thing. Review takes a little bit more. Whatever you feel allowed to do, we'd be honored and blessed by that.

Nextly, if you want to support this podcast, you can do so on patreon.com/fiercemarriage. That is basically our way of connecting directly with you, our listeners, the ones who are benefactors of this content. It helps us to keep it ad-free. It helps us to eventually get transcriptions done of these things and to bring in interviewees in a way that is going to be good quality and not just "Hey, here I'm calling from my shoe phone and it sounds like I'm in the cave at the same time [00:05:00] and be cutting in and out.

Selena: Awesome.

Ryan: So we want to do it in a quality way. Lastly, if you have any questions as we're going through this or any questions in marriage in general, or even just the

gospel and how it lays a foundation for marriage and for life, we're happy to review those and answer those if we can. Go to fiercemarriage.com/podcast, or you can call in and you can text or leave a voicemail at this number: 971-333-1120.

Selena: Whooh! So good. So fast.

Ryan: There we go.

Selena: All right.

Ryan: Heart check.

Selena: Heart check. I think you should start because I feel like you've been in some books lately.

Ryan: So, if you're wondering what a heart check is...

Selena: Oh, that's a good thing.

Ryan: ...it's three questions. What book is in your hand? What voices in your ear? And what is stirring in your heart? What is God doing in your heart? By the way, these are good questions to ask each other. You have like a car drive...Is that a thing? A car drive? A long drive?

Selena: Driving the car.

Ryan: Car trip? I don't know.

Selena: If you have time in the car together. *[both chuckles]* It's a good question that...

Ryan: ...because we can articulate things.

Selena: These are some good questions to ask and engage in. So what book is in your hand, Ryan?

Ryan: I'm reading a book by John Stott and it's called "Basic Christianity." And the reason I'm reading it is because I've become a fan of John Stott. He's just a really solid thinker, great theology, all that kind of stuff, as far as I know. But I'm a fan of books that kind of summarize the core tenants and the core differentiation points of the Christian faith for somebody who may not be in it. Right? So by reading these books, it helps me understand maybe a perspective that I'm not in tune with, seeing how I've been following Jesus for

a number of years now. So I'm reading that and it's been great. It's just good reminders. There's some really good quotes in there and nuggets and things.

What voices in your ear? I'm stoked to say this. The Knowing Faith podcast is back for Season 2. That's the one with Jen Wilkin. She's the star. I'm not kidding. There's two other guys on there, Kyle Worley and J...What's this? Oh, man, I'm sorry, if you're listening to this. And it really smart Jay something. Oh, my goodness. I feel bad. So that's been great. But we've actually been I've been listening to them talk about like, why do we read books like 1 and 2 Samuel, and how do we get past all the grittiness of it? You know, there's lots of adultery, there's lots of blood, there's lots of names and timelines, and it just feels like you sometimes get dropped into the story and you don't know what's going on. They talk about how to view that and why biblical literacy in that part of Scripture, the historical parts of Scripture are very important to having a very biblically literate life.

Selena: What's the name of it again?

Ryan: Knowing Faith.

Selena: Knowing Faith. I was like, "Knowing God." Okay.

Ryan: It's a Knowing Faith podcast.

Selena: Awesome.

Ryan: They talk about these types of more complex issues.

Selena: Awesome.

Ryan: What's stirring in your heart? Gosh, it's hard to articulate this.

Selena: What not straining in your heart? That's the question.

Ryan: Right? Am I right? What's stirring in my heart? Honestly, I just want to be faithful communicator. *[laughs]*

Selena: Done.

Ryan: I want to be faithful communicator.

Selena: Done.

Ryan: I want to be a faithful communicator of the gospel. And that a lot of times means the message, but also the means and the methods, right?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: So finding a way to get this type of content to (a) say it in a way that's faithful to Scripture, and to write things that are faithful to Scripture, but also to kind of master the means and methods for getting that from point A to point B. We clearly do a lot of our stuff on the internet, but also we want to equip the local church. So there's quite a bit of stuff happening there. That's just been stirring in my heart for some time. And finally, I think it's coming to a boil in a good way. Yeah.

Selena: That's awesome. The book in my hand. My friend Katie has been talking me about this book for the last like two years and then she finally gave it to me because I didn't order. I ordered so many books and I forget. I'm sorry. She's just my faithful friend. She got me the book "Triggers" by Amber Lia, I think, and Wendy Speake.

Ryan: It's a picture of a woman screaming.

Selena: Yeah. It says, "Exchanging parents angry at reactions for gentle biblical responses." I feel like I have angry reactions towards my little one sometimes and it's not...

Ryan: Nooo. Never!

Selena: It's not ideal. I don't like where it comes from and I don't...I'm only on day three or something like that and it's just been very eye-opening and very liberating to me in the Gospel, and how God responds to us and how He interacts with us when we are facing challenges and how we are trained and walk out in the Gospel. I don't know, it's different. It's challenging me in some ways, but it's also affirming me in some ways, and it's also bringing clarity. [00:10:00] I still am just so unsure about some things. How do you let your kids know that you're angry? Not necessarily by yelling, right, but maybe a stern voice? Or is it a sharp light correction? Is that okay? What does that look like? So I'm constantly exploring these as our girls grow up.

Ryan: It's good.

Selena: And I'm really grateful that God gave us no memory of like three and below sometimes. Because it's, you know, kids just...I love my kids. I love them a lot. They take a lot of energy. And that's just parenting, you know. So I just want to do it well. I really want to do it well. Well in God's perspective.

Ryan: I think our tendency too is just to kind of do whatever the default is. Right?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: And try to be patient and try to speak kindly, but you don't think about...

Selena: And I do it with a little listen.

Ryan: Right. If you don't think about...

Selena: How far much is that my fault? You know.

Ryan: If you don't think about how to actually respond when anger is warranted...Because I mean, anger is...There's a righteous anger.

Selena: Right. God gets angry with... Right. But then how do we deal with that? How do we respond out of that?

Ryan: The Bible doesn't say, never get angry. The Bible says, "Do not sin."

Selena: "In anger do not sin."

Ryan: So that's good to be asking those questions.

Selena: And she just really highlights and bring verses to light. Like, be patient, be slow to speak, quick to hear. All of those. Putting that in the context of parenting has really helped because I've heard those verses for many, many years. And putting them into my parenting brain side, I'm like, "Oh, these are new." Anyway, it's not necessarily the case. So that's the book that's in my hand among many.

The voice that's in my ear. We met...well, you know him. Dr. Josh Straub and Christi. We didn't meet Christy. She wasn't there at this. We went to the Marriage Collective a little while ago, is kind of a meeting of marriage ministers. They do a podcast and they live in Colorado, right?

Ryan: Yeah. No, no, they live in Nashville.

Selena: I can't keep up straight. Anyways, they are an awesome couple with kids. Just kind of the next generation. They are like six, seven, eight, and older.

Ryan: No, their children are exactly a year ahead of ours.

Selena: Oh, never mind. Okay.

Ryan: So not too much older. But he's a legit doctor.

Selena: He is a legit doctor and he's super kind and smart and...

Ryan: Articulate.

Selena: Very articulate. I wish his wife was there. I hope that someday we get to meet them.

Ryan: You mean articulously good looking?

Selena: ...meet her.

Ryan: He's one of these handsome guys that I'm like, "You can't be handsome and smart." *[both laughs]* I'm kidding. He's a good friend.

[crosstalk]

Selena: Yes. So they have a podcast called...

Ryan: Oh, you're going to look it up now.

Selena: I know.

Ryan: You're so unprepared.

Selena: I know. I had a...

Ryan: This is not the bush leagues. All right?

Selena: Tell me his...

Ryan: This is the major leagues. *[laughing]* No, it's not the major leagues. That's cool. I try to buy time for you and you're still searching.

Selena: I know. In This Together.

Ryan: Okay. *[laughs]*

Selena: It's a podcast. He talks about just family and parenting and everything he presented to at that conference that we were at. And it was so good. So I just want to put that out there as a resource to you as well.

- Ryan:** For parenting. They also have to 226parenting.com, which is like online community.
- Selena:** Yeah. He's all about just healthy families for God and healthy marriage for God. I mean, just good stuff.
- Ryan:** Funny story is I actually met Josh in Nashville. I was there for the Q conference with Nations, which is a board that I sit on. It's an incredible nonprofit. We just had our board retreat this weekend. It was phenomenal. Nationsmedia.org. Check it out. They have amazing stuff happening there. So I'm there with them for Q, I get a call from John McGee. John McGee happened to be there too. John McGee is a marriage champion, a marriage pro retreat, a pastor in Dallas...
- Selena:** He's a hero.
- Ryan:** He said, "Hey, we got all these awesome married people here, come have lunch with us." I said, "Well, okay, I'm here with this group." I didn't leave with the one who brought me. *[both laughs]* I went and hung out with them. That resulted in a tour of LifeWay, which is a publisher, and they do Christian retail. Not so much in the northwest, but they do it a lot in the south everywhere else. And then also Josh shows up and I go, "Hey, you're Josh Straub." And he goes, "I am. Who the heck are you?" *[both laughs]* And the reason I knew him is because we have a web development company on the side... I'm sorry, it's a lot...
- Selena:** And it's my heart check.
- Ryan:** Our web company built their...
- Selena:** Just spit it up. I'm giving you the finger here. The ring round finger, not the middle finger. *[Ryan laughs]* The wrap it up finger.
- Ryan:** No, ladies and gentlemen, it was middle finger. *[both laughs]*
- Selena:** It was not. *[both laughs]* It's always this close.
- Ryan:** Anyway, we built this website for 226 Parent Team. He was like, "You did that? No way." It was this big crazy moment and I realized just how small [00:15:00] the world is. Incredible guy. I got to talk with him more.

- Selena:** They were awesome. So what is God's stirring in your heart? I think, for us, after kind of all these, it feels kind of like mountaintops we've been on a little bit. I have been there in a while.
- Ryan:** I'm just picturing you give me the finger right now.
- Selena:** No, the wrap it up finger.
- Ryan:** I'm giving him the finger right now. *[laughs]* It was the wrapping up finger.
- Selena:** It was. But, I don't know, just being around all of these people in the last two weeks that are championing marriage and gospel-centered, Christ-centered marriage. There's been decades of people fighting for these kinds of things to be...for people like us to come together to connect and to continue furthering and championing together marriage in the name of Christ in the Gospel. And I've just been overwhelmed. I feel so supported. We're kind of an anomaly out here in the northwest. It's a lot more in the south and in the Bible Belt areas in the Midwest. I just feel so connected. And I was like, "These are my people." There was some such deep affinities there, and I felt very affirmed on just many levels. And it's just been really good for my heart.
- Ryan:** I'll echo that. I will say that although maybe we don't have like a Focus on the Family here, or LifeWay or a megachurch that has proponents of marriage here in the northwest. The churches thriving here. One of the things was we gave a little presentation. As sometimes we were asked to do, we talked about how do we reach the people that are listening to us and reading our stuff. It tends to be a younger demographic. And so we talked about the fact that the Northwest is what I would consider not post-church but pre-church. And that we've kind of come full circle. And now the young couples that we're talking to here in church and in this ministry that happens here, they don't know Jesus as the same guy who died on Easter and rose from the dead and was also born on Christmas. That's not the same person to them.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** Which, you know, if you're listening to this, you might be thinking, "What in the world?" No, I'm telling you biblical literacy is back at square one here. The beautiful thing of that is that the church thrives in that scenario and the gospel thrives when it's truly good news, when you can tell someone, "Hey, you're lost in sin. But guess what? Jesus. Jesus and He died for you. He loves you. He wants you to follow Him. He wants to save you. He has done it."
- Selena:** And we shared this in light of... because where other people may be struggling or other ministries are older, kind of in the south where it's kind of a bit of a

generation behind or something, they're at looking to us saying, "How are you...?"

Ryan: "What's going to happen?"

Selena: Yeah, what's going to happen? They're watching Christianity unfold again in the more...I think I want to just say rural areas of the country. I mean, it's one of the most rural areas.

Ryan: Yeah, exactly. This isn't a podcast about that. But just to let you know, Fierce Marriage community, you're a part of this movement of what God is doing in these, again, what I would consider a pre church, cultural world that we live in. So know that God is moving and know that even though it might feel like it's a losing battle at times, the Bible says that the horse is prepared for battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: And we're here preparing horses...

Selena: I like that.

Ryan: ...trusting.. Yes, you do. *[both laughs]* Trusting that the victory belongs to the Lord. It belongs to Him. He doesn't have to buy it yet. He doesn't have to go get it. It is His.

Selena: It's His.

Ryan: And we are just preparing our horses for battle and trusting Him.

Selena: I love that. That just kind of gets us into kind of a quick recap about Fierce Marriage in this podcast and what it's about. These really are candid conversations around marriage in light of the gospel, and how does it affect how we live as married people? Ryan and I are not doctors. We're not gurus. We just kind of share honestly and transparently. Yes, seminary is in our future. That would be awesome. At least for you, probably, I'd be like half a class here.

Ryan: Well, you, I think you are just as eager to do it but it's more a function of our life at the moment.

Selena: Right, we have little kids. Then just kind of a plug for...so, Fierce Marriage is here, again, to be this kind of community and conversation, but our goal is to really support and mobilize the local church. And that's where we would

encourage you this is not a place that replaces the body of Christ. It's not here to be your community necessarily that you go to for all the answers and whatnot because it's so nuanced. We don't know your situation, but you need to be with people who know you and know what's going on in your marriage and in your life. So that's why I would say [inaudible] true community, attend a church, be an active part of the body of Christ. [00:20:00] Don't look at Fierce Marriage for that.

Ryan: Yeah. We talk about transparency a lot. It's all about being known and knowing others. And the church is the only place where that truly can transform. All the transformational stories that we encounter are not like, "Oh, your website changed my life." It's not. It's like how scripture has a fleshed out in their relationship and through the relationships with other couples.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: So we want to remind you of that, that this is not that. But go deeper with others.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So, today, Selena, we are talking about: can I have a friendship, not relationship—I made that mistake once already. Can I have a friendship, a friendly relationship with someone of the opposite sex?

Selena: While being married.

Ryan: Just give me a yes or no answer.

Selena: No. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: No, please.

Selena: Don't make me commit like that. Oh, man. So we just want to set some parameters around this conversation. We're trying to focus on one area. We're not talking about like, "Is it okay for us to have...?" It's not the Billy Graham rule here that we're talking about. Billy Graham's rule is like not being alone with anyone of the opposite sex.

Ryan: Ever.

Selena: Ever. Kind of in any way. We're not saying that. We're not talking about professional like, can I go to lunch with this professional? If I'm a woman and he's a guy, can we go out to lunch? I would, on wisdom side, saying that's not

a good idea. But that's not what we're talking about today. Today, we're talking about...

Ryan: Can I add one thing?

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: You say it's not the Billy Graham rule. Look at Billy Graham.

Selena: I know. I'm not trying to demean him because he...

Ryan: No, no. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying look at his life, look at the fruit of his life, look at the fact that he never had an affair, never had anyone question him. Especially in light of today when all these like sexual misconduct, all the junk that happens on the internet and in media. Billy Graham, his reputation remains untarnished in this area. And I'm just going to say the proof is in the pudding.

Selena: Yes, sir.

Ryan: And his witness is not damaged because he went to this extreme of saying "never be alone with the opposite sex ever." He's an evangelist, travel all the time, there's all kinds of little nooks and crannies and caveats and things like that, but just wanted to put that in there.

Selena: Okay. I agree. In this specific conversation, we're talking about is it okay for like...I'll just put into context. Is it okay, Ryan, for you to have a friendship with a girl outside of our marriage? For us personally, no. *[laughs]* It's an awkward thing to think about. It's an awkward thing to entertain.

Ryan: Before this I was like, "Hey." Because we have our good friends, Jake and Jess. I was like, would you ever just go out to coffee with Jake and just be like, "Hey, catch me up on your life buddy." And you cringe. You are like, "That'd be so awkward," because this is not the type of friendship we have.

Selena: It's not just the culture in our marriage. It's not what we stand for. It's not what we value. We're going to get into some questions and challenges I think as to why this is not the best. Being one on one with someone of the opposite sex doesn't necessarily foster good friendship, especially in the church. Right?

Ryan: And I think that's probably the big idea we want to get across here is that the questions is always, hey, can we be one on one? Or should we be one on one? And you're here saying, that's not the best way to build the relationship? So the question should be, how can I have a deep brotherhood or sisterhood

friendship with someone of the opposite sex? How can I have the most healthy friendship? And you're saying that it's not one on one.

Selena: The one on one is not...Right. I'm saying that for Ryan and I personally, some of the deepest friendships that we've experienced with the opposite sex has been through our marriage and couple to couple. It's not been me with some other guy or you with some other girl. The deepest and most real, most fulfilling relationships have been couple to couple. I think, again, Jake and Jess are a great example because they're kind of our small group leaders, and he's been a pastor and he's very pastoral and very theologically sound, and all of that. He passes all the tests.

But whenever he's ever said anything to our group, like to me specifically, or we've encouraged each other or something just brother to sister in Christ, it holds more weight for me that you're there hearing that too because I want you to affirm or say no, he was off, not hitting [inaudible 00:24:32]. But just encouraging me and saying what he sees or what he said about you like this is true. It's very affirming to have you a part of that. I don't want to hear it by myself. I want you to be there. That's just kind of my own...

Ryan: And it doesn't feel off as a husband at all to have a good friend speak truth and encouragement. It would feel off if I found out that you guys were out having...[00:25:00] I'm not talking about specific people. But if you're having lunch with another guy and you're like, "Oh, he was so encouraging to me." And I'm like, "Wait, what? Who? You had lunch with somebody and...?"

Selena: Red flags for sure.

Ryan: Yeah. Like, why is he taking you out to lunch? You know what I mean?

Selena: Right.

Ryan: I think, and I want to look in the big point, is that if we really want to have a healthy, gospel-centered friendship with the opposite sex, there are ways to get that. Again, we're saying it's not through the alone thing.

Selena: The one on one, yeah.

Ryan: It's like someone who says, "Hey, what's the fastest way for me to get from Seattle to New York?" And you're saying, "Well, it's a plane?" And they're saying, "Well, no, I want to drive this car. I want to get there." So we're saying that if you really want that end game, you want the healthy relationship, you want to get there fastest, then you have to fly.

Selena: This is the way. Right. Right.

Ryan: Don't say you're going to drive this car because you just want to drive the car, right?

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So the motivation is what we're getting at.

Selena: Right. And there's a lot of conversations I feel like that are emerging as of recent about being able to have friends of the opposite sex. I read a review on the Gospel Coalition by Winfree Brisley. And the book that she was reviewing was by Aimee Byrd, "Why Can't We Be Friends?: Avoidance Is Not Purity". There's things that she agrees with Aimee on and then there's some things that she thinks Aimee takes a little bit too far. I haven't read the book. I'm not endorsing it. There's a couple of parts that I really agree with. And I just wanted to share one because I feel like, again, as Christians, we tend to fall on either, you know, if Ryan goes out with another girl, like she's just a temptress. So we just avoid them completely. We're unkind, we're cold. And then the other one is how can we be brothers and sisters in Christ and be kind and loving?

Ryan: Speaking to the men, you can be a loving brother to your sisters in Christ by even protecting them in some ways. I know one example you have is like the alley example. Chivalry is not dead, right?

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So I can open the door for a female friend when we're all together and it's not like I'm trying to become indecent. I'm just respecting you and displaying that respect in a way that's tangible and endearing and relationship building in the proper context.

Selena: She says, and I feel like this just encapsulates this conversation pretty well, she says, "Are we opposed to friendship?" This is Amy who's writing? She says, "Are we opposed to friendship? No, we're opposed to sin. And we are for holiness..." Which the other the reviewer Brisley she agrees. And Brisley says, "Where Christians have communicated by their behavior that members of the other sex aren't valuable, we ought to repent and consider how we can treat others kindly. Where we have been the objects of overzealous attempts to avoid sin, we ought to extend forgiveness and love, and where men have abused power and victimized women, let's hold them accountable and strive to create environments that protect and defend women."

I feel like this really speaks to all the different areas that we're talking about in terms of how we can, again, have this friendship with someone of the opposite sex biblically. When you're married for us, that really is couple with couple.

Ryan: Yes. I would 100% agree with that, of course. That's why we're doing this podcast.

Selena: And you had a verse up there that you were talking about that really just...we use it many times. Again, it kind of coincides with this whole idea of boundaries and priority.

Ryan: We did talk about boundaries a few weeks ago on this podcast. Of course, listen to that if you haven't. But this verse we talked about, specifically in that context, it applies here. It's Proverbs 25:28. "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls." So the context of that it's obviously biblical times. A city without walls was exposed and in danger constantly, always in danger of being raided, of being attacked, of being victims of theft and pillaging and all that kind of stuff.

So it would be utterly ridiculous to say, like, "Yeah, we're a strong city," but you have no walls. So we're saying the boundaries in this area...I think a boundary is misplaced if you say, "I'm a man and you are a woman, I cannot talk to you. You are the enemy." That is a misplaced boundary. But there are boundaries you put in place to inhibit sinful behavior and sinful desires that maybe you don't recognize. Maybe you're trying to get validation from the opposite sex and so when you go out to lunch, and you kind of have this weird sort of tension...

Selena: Yeah, maybe you're having a hard in your [00:30:00] own marriage and this person is an easy...

Ryan: And they're validating and they're undermining your covenant in doing that and it's leading towards sin. It may not be sin in itself, but it's leading that way, and therefore just foolishness. It's like following the adulterous. I'm not saying every woman's an adulterous, but it's akin to walking toward a cliff, and you're blind.

Selena: Honestly, our boundaries are a function of our priorities in a lot of ways. I was on a podcast, I think I mentioned on the Fierce Wives page with Spiced Wife. We were talking about boundaries. And one of the things we talked about is how sometimes it's hard to say no to things, but when you know what you're saying yes to, it can often make the no comes much more sure and more

confident and clear. And you want to say the no because you're actually saying yes to these other things.

Ryan: A good example. We have a lot of gals that work with us at Fierce Marriage and our various other, you know, where we got irons in the fire, so to speak. I'm meeting with one of the gals tomorrow. I have to be very conscious about the appearance of it, the fact that Selena is...I want to make her aware of it. So I told her, I said, "Hey, we're going to meet up in our home office. I'll leave the door open. Here's what we're talking about. Here's who she is. She's new to the team." It was all very aboveboard. Again, I'm not going to say let's go out and spend all this time together having lunch, and then we'll go meet somewhere private or whatever, simply because I just want to say yes to health in our marriage, I want to say yes to transparency because I want to say yes to Selena, because she is the one woman that I am...

It's all very easy at this stage. But the problem is, is like when if you're insecure, or you've been damaged, or you've been hurt, or whatever, then all sudden you have this opportunity, and you're getting validation. Whoo, that's slippery slope.

Selena: I think that is one of the hardest parts. And you know, even stepping into the whole social media aspect, I'm sure there's some of us that have had friends on there that leave private message and just had these conversations below board and seems harmless. But you're allowing something to take root that's probably not helping your covenant.

Ryan: And a lot of times the trapdoor starts with "Oh..." This is somebody I went to high school with or college with. "What are you up to? Oh, you have a family?" "Oh, I'm sorry you got divorced?" "I'm having a hard time too in my marriage." "What's your husband doing?" "Oh, he's doing this or that." And it's like, all of a sudden, you're on these intimate conversations.

Selena: It happens so quickly.

Ryan: "By the way, I'm only 30 miles away. Let's get coffee next week."

Selena: Scary stuff.

Ryan: It's scary but it starts like that.

Selena: It starts small for sure. Sure.

Ryan: So these boundaries of having these conversations, and Selena is going to ask some really challenging questions here in a sec, but having these boundaries,

it looks like having a conversation with your spouse that's very clear about what is healthy, what you will allow, and how you will guard yourself from it. In other words, having conversations and things like that, but also not engaging and knowing personally like I'm not going to personal message anybody online. I'm not going to send emails unless it's work-related or something.

Selena: Right. Right. So think about your marriage and your spouse. If you have friendships that were kind of in place prior to marriage, or maybe you've just kind of developed a new friendship with somebody of the opposite sex recently or something. And maybe even you guys both agree, and you're like, "That's fine. I don't care if you talk to so and so or whatever," I think, Ryan, I would both lovingly challenge you to consider a few questions in this couple's challenge. And they're tough, but we think they're necessary in order for the good and security of your covenant and for God to be glorified through marriage.

Ryan: That's very good. Think of these as diagnostic questions. To have a proper diagnosis, you need to have proper results delivered. If you try to think about it honestly by yourself, we're asking you these questions. And depending on how you answer them, may or may not diagnose an area that needs to be addressed.

Selena: And I definitely think you should discuss them with your spouse, because if there's nothing to be worried about or whatever, then that would easily be able to answer these questions. Anyways, the first question is, do you ever compare your spouse to your friend?

Ryan: Oh, snap!

Selena: Yeah. I think that's a natural one that kind of happens, whether we mean to or not. Just kind of a conscious.

Ryan: On that note, I'll say as a guy, when we were first married, I had this... Actually, it was when we were dating. I had the revelation that there's always going to be other attractive women around. They look differently and all this kind of stuff and being very visual and all that. It's always going to be a struggle. So I had to make a decision. I was like, "Okay, I know I love Selena. I know that she's beautiful. I know that I value her [00:35:00] more than any other relationship. But I also recognize that there are beautiful women in the world.

Selena: Wait, what? *[chuckles]*

- Ryan:** Wait, what? "Therefore, Selena, you are my standard of beauty from here on out." And that sounds like mental jujitsu, right? It sounds like, "Oh, you just mincing words." And I'm saying, no. Honestly, there was something that happened in my mind I said, "Selena, you are the standard of beauty. Anybody who looks differently from you gets further and further away from what I think is absolute beautiful." That was very liberating thing.
- Selena:** You wrote a blog post on that. You should post that.
- Ryan:** Yeah. I think "Your Wife, Your Ultimate Standard of Beauty" it's what it's called. And the whole point of me saying that here is that comparing is so easy until you realize that your spouse is the pinnacle of what you're going for, because by virtue of being your spouse, not by any other standard, but they are yours and you are there. And so there's freedom in that. And there's freedom and articulating that and communicating that to yourself and to each other.
- Selena:** So good. So good. So that first question, do you ever compare your spouse to your friend? Second question, have you ever entertained romantic fantasies about your friend?
- Ryan:** Wow.
- Selena:** These are some deep ones. Do you have a physical or emotional attraction to your friend? I think these are just right. These questions are right on point.
- Ryan:** Can we be honest for a sec?
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** I think we've had these conversations before...
- Selena:** For sure.
- Ryan:** ...where I've said to you or you've said to me—it's been a two-way street—"I think that person's...I attracted to them."
- Selena:** Yeah. And I found that they were very nice looking.
- Ryan:** And entertained it for too long. So what happens in those instances is the Holy Spirit will convict. We talked about last week on how you kind of just know when something's off. You'll know. So after that moment passes, you get home, the dust settles, you're home with your spouse, and I just...I've said it to you, "I need to talk to you about something. This is what happened today.

I didn't act on it or anything, but I seem to let you into my world a little bit...or fully." *[Selena laughs]* And say, "I found someone so attractive and I recognize that that's wrong. I recognized that there's...I want to just reinforce the fact that I love you."

Selena: Right. I think it's bringing that thought under captivity. It's bringing it to the light. It's taking it captive and saying it's not going any further than this. No. And I know and we're going to be on the same level as this. And I know that takes a bit of emotional maturity because I don't think we could have had those conversations in our young age and early on our marriage. I think they would have looked different. I think they would have been a little more emotionally fueled. So take it slow with your spouse, and extend a lot of grace and be humble and...

Ryan: That's a really good point.

Selena: ...give space to kind of...

Ryan: Because I could have never done that if I thought you were just going to go off the handle and throw it in my face.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: If I know that you are empathetic and you are gracious toward me...

Selena: And God is good and able and faithful to bring about that maturity in us. And sometimes it takes us hard conversations more than once, unfortunately, to kind of build that just a little bit on us. Again, we haven't had those conversations. We're also 15 years married and so just...Keep having them, though. Just lean into the transparency.

The last question here, do you and your friend ever discuss personal details about your lives or complain about your relationship to each other?

Ryan: Oh, snap. We say this a lot. Your marriage needs advocates, not adversaries.

Selena: Mm hmm.

Ryan: Whether it's same sex friend or opposite sex friend, I think this goes both ways. But they need to advocate for your marriage not just for you. Now, this is where it gets really tender is if you're having this intimate exchange with somebody either via phone, text, email, online message, like whatever, Facebook message, Twitter or anything like that, Snapchat. We don't do that.

- Selena:** We don't have time for that.
- Ryan:** That's like a teenage thing I think.
- Selena:** A lot of people are on it.
- Ryan:** There are those weird dog faces back and forth to each other. *[Selena chuckles]*
- Selena:** Anyhow.
- Ryan:** If you're having hard time, and all of sudden you're in a dark room by yourself on your phone, and you're saying, "Oh, so and so, my wife has just been so difficult right now, and here's why."
- Selena:** Oh, man. Scary stuff.
- Ryan:** And then she swoops in this other woman and she's like, "Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. I wouldn't have done that. I would do like this." And then all sudden, I'm in a weak spot, so I'm like, "Oh, you would?" Oh, that's funny. That goes away. Then maybe next time, maybe a week later, a month later...
- Selena:** It's that affirmation and building that... [00:40:00]
- Ryan:** "You know what? I'm so sick of her. Let's get together. I want to just take you out for whatever."
- Selena:** And when you're building this affinity with someone else, you're dividing your marriage, essentially.
- Ryan:** Intimacy...We talked about this last week...
- Selena:** So good. Preach.
- Ryan:** We talked about intimacy last week. But in this regard, it's not just limited to sex. Intimacy is so much more. We talked about cohabitation and how you're building intimacy, even emotionally by acting like you're married when you're not. And that type of intimacy is only designed for the covenant of marriage, not just this transactional thing. Anyway, that's always going to lead to a dark place. I'm just telling you, both by you know, having seen it firsthand, but also through God's word having seen it. So these questions are meant to diagnose. Maybe if you're teetering on the precipice here, the bottom is very dark and very, very hurtful.

Selena: Again, just to recap these questions real quick, these four questions. (1) Do you ever compare your spouse to your friend? (2) Have you ever entertained romantic fantasies about your friend? (3) Do you have a physical or emotional attraction to your friend? And the last one, do you and your friend ever discuss personal details about your lives or complain about your relationships to each other?

Ryan: Wow. Wow.

Selena: Again, talking in terms of boundaries, God wants these boundaries for our good and for His glory. Again, these are not to squash your personal joy having a friend outside your marriage or something like that. It's very much for your flourishing. It's for roots that can go deep so that experiences can be even greater with your spouse. What you see and what you experienced today is not the end all be all to your marriage. There's so much more to be had and can only be had when we are committed and have those boundaries.

Ryan: To summarize this, the big idea from today, just so it's crystal clear, in terms of having a friendship with the opposite sex, here's what we're trying to communicate is that yes, friendship with the opposite sex is good. And what we're saying, the best way to friendship in the most healthy way when you're married is through cultivating a friendship as couples. That's going to be the healthiest, most wise way to go about cultivating those friendships. I feel like I have a great friendship with our friend Elise and it's very healthy.

Selena: Sorry, Elise. *[laughs]*

Ryan: Sorry, Elise. That's an inside joke. And you have a great friendship with Jeff. You guys share a lot of affinity in your profession, both being photographers, or having been photographers at one point. And he helps a lot in that regard. And it's all very healthy, very joy-filled. I don't think it would be that way any other way.

Selena: Right. Absolutely.

Ryan: That's what we're trying to say. In summary, today...I mean, I already to the summary. To finish this out...there you go, *[both chuckles]* I want to talk about this. We don't sponsor this podcast, but we have these new devotionals that are coming out. We're going to start the pre-order if it hasn't started already. 40prayers.com. Just basically, you can pre-order.

If you see just an email field there...I don't know when it's going to happen. That's why I'm saying this. We're recording this in advance. *[Selena laughs]* If you see an email field there, put it in, you'll be on the preorder list. If not, then

you'll actually go to the preorder page. You can preorder those. It's a 40 day prayer journey where you're basically building your faith and contending for your spouse in prayer. These books changed us when we were writing them. We think and hope they will help you like they've helped us. Go to 40prayers.com to find out more about those.

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But really what we're going for is people that want to see our mission made louder and clearer in the world. And our mission is very simple. We want to point couples to Christ. We want to commission marriages for the gospel. You'll hear us say that a lot. But really we want to see marriages made whole but also made stronger, and also have a clear vision for how they can perpetuate the gospel through their relationship. So patreon.com/fiercemarriage. Anything helps. Starts at \$2, goes up from there. Lastly, if you have any questions, 971-333-1120. And I think that's it. [00:45:00]

Selena: You think what?

Ryan: I think this episode is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: In the can.

Selena: Oh, man. We got to try. We got to practice that one.

Ryan: This episode is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: Oh, my gosh. *[laughs]*

Selena: Third time. It's all right. It's all good.

Ryan: All right.

Selena: Thanks for listening, friends. Do you want to close out in prayer real quick?

Ryan: I would love to.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Jesus thank you for this time. Thank you for what you're doing around the world. We love to see how you are just loving couples through the local church. I love to see how your truth is bearing weight in people's lives and creating abundant life. I pray for the couple who's struggling, that you would strengthen them, give them hope. I pray that you would give them peace in their struggle. I pray for the couple whose flourishing that you would bring people into their lives that they could disciple other couples that they could help and minister to. And I pray for anybody who's wrestling with today's topic, that you would give them clarity and wisdom, and through your Holy Spirit, give them conviction and give them relationships with people who would help them navigate this topic in a way that will lead to help and lead to life. We give it all to you, Jesus. Thank you for your word. It is forever fruitful in our lives. Maybe glorify you through Jesus' name, amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: All right. Have a good week. We'll see you guys in seven days.

Together: Stay fierce.

Ryan: There we go. *[both laughs]*

[00:46:36] <outro>

Ryan: Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit FierceMarriage.com, or you can find us with our handle @Fiercemarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

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- **[00:12:57]**
 - Podcast recommended:
 - [In This Together](#)

- **[00:29:00]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Proverbs 25:28

- **[00:35:38]**
 - Blog Article recommended:
 - [Your Wife, Your Ultimate Standard of Beauty](#)

- **[00:43:41]**
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