BURN THE SHIPS! WHY NOT HAVING A PLAN B IS A NECESSITY IN MARRIAGE

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Selena: Staying committed to our marriage does not have to be a white-knuckling experience.

Ryan: Amen.

Selena: God has called us to live in covenant with one another. And we don't have to sit in this idea that "maybe we should have a backup plan. Maybe, you know, if it doesn't work... I feel like we're just having too many fights. I don't know that we're in love anymore." That's not the way that we're called to live in this covenant of marriage. So we're here to say it's time to burn the backup plan, burn the ships, as you'll say, as we'll say. And we will talk about what that means on the other side.

[00:00:31] <music>

- **Ryan:** Burn the boats as they say.
- Selena: Burn the boats. [chuckles]
- **Ryan:** Burn them down, all the way down to the depths of the sea so that you have no backup plan, *[laughs]* you have no, no-
- Selena: Which can be a scary thing I think for some people. Because depending on where you're at in your marriage, you might be thinking, "Maybe it's time to throw in the towel. And I'm watching this podcast or I'm listening this podcast, I'm watching this video because I'm kind of at the end of myself. I don't know what else to do. How do we move forward in such a hard time in our marriage?" And we're saying the first thing that you need to do is burn the ships, is burn that backup plan.
- **Ryan:** This is what gets me about this topic is that there's no couple stands at the altar on their wedding day and says, "I do unless..." No one says that.

Selena: I do until...

Ryan: I do unless. No one says that. And no one would even overtly admit that even years into their marriage. At least very few people would. But we live like it.

And here's the thing, we're talking to Christian couples. So here we are, we say we submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture. We're going to let it tell us how to live our lives. It's radically countercultural, but that's what a faithful Christian does, ideally. And no Christian thinks consciously in their minds that at any point they could back out of their marriage if they decide to.

But subconsciously I think a lot of Christian couples kind of live with that in the back of their mind. That "it's not really working, so maybe there's a way out. Maybe there's another path."

And by God's grace, my dad, one of the things that he just pounded into my head as a young man was marriage is until death, until death do you part. So when we got married at 20 and 21 years old. I knew like this is it. I'm going to die in this relationship. *[both laughs]* That's what I thought to myself.

- Selena: He's so loving and so life-filled.
- **Ryan:** You know what? I think it was a grace of God that I didn't have kind of cognitive ability to understand what 60 plus years of marriage would look like if God allows us to live to 80+. I didn't understand. But you know, standing here we're almost 20 years into it now and I'm thinking, I couldn't imagine having a marriage that had any backup plan where I could just say, "You know what, this is actually a little tougher. I'm going to get back on that ship, and I'm going to go back out to sea. I'm going to find another-
- **Selena:** Find another maiden. [both laughs]
- **Ryan:** Find another seafaring maiden.

Selena: Not possible.

- **Ryan:** You're the only seafaring maiden for me.
- Selena: I think one of the big points you want to just start with today is that God is faithful to sustain you in your relationship. Wherever you are, whatever you're facing-
- Ryan: Amen.
- Selena: ...He is faithful. He's given us His Word as a guide, as instruction, as authority. And this marriage covenant that He has allowed us to engage in with each other is a way for us to experience freedom, and to let go of the backup plans because the backup plans are not His ideal plans. And we see that in the Bible.

We are going to continue going through this conversation after we talk about a few things.

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And by the way, I want to make sure that we introduce ourselves. I'm Ryan and this is—

Selena: Selena. [both laughs] We should put a little name things above us just in case. Or like the arrow pointing at us.

Ryan: Yeah, the whole time. That won't be obnoxious at all.

- Selena: It won't be obnoxious at all.
- **Ryan:** Where do we go in today? No backup plan.
- Selena: There's no backup plan. So I think we have tendencies and moments in our marriage [00:05:00] where this idea of having a backup plan sounds a little more appealing than not. That would be kind of big life transitions. Even the first couple years of marriage, that's a huge transition for people. Having children, changing of jobs, and moving to a new location. We've seen a lot of people relocate as of late. And that can take its toll on a marriage relationship, especially if you're moving into a new community where you may not know people.
- **Ryan:** So you're seen those are moments when it's most-

Selena: Tempting.

- **Ryan:** Most tempting. Okay, there it is. Most tempting to hop on that hip and try to go back. And what we're saying is like, in our minds we have to just completely torch the thing. Completely just, again, demolish the backup plans. That's what we're talking about today.
- Selena: Yes. So how do we begin kind of talking about this? Because, I mean, that would be very hurtful of me to be like, "Well, you know, I've been thinking about this." It's like, "Why have you been thinking about it? How long have you been thinking about this? What?" That'd be very hurtful and taking-
- Ryan: "I've been thinking that this might not work out."
- Selena: Yeah, that would take you off guard quite a bit. And so-
- **Ryan:** I think couples that fall into that they never really grasped the full weight, the weightiness of marriage as God designed it. Okay. A lot of couples will get into marriage and they'll think, "Well, we've been dating, okay, we dated for three years, we dated for... whatever the timeframe is, and now it's just the next step."

And unfortunately, nowadays many couples will cohabitate long before they'll get married.

- Selena: Even Christian couples.
- **Ryan:** Which you're not doing yourself a favor if you cohabitate. The research is out. If you want a relationship that lasts, you will not live together until after you're married. Okay, that's research. It's secular research, Christian research, everybody says it. So that's a different conversation.

But most average couples will then move in with one another and they'll say, "Well, I guess this is a thing so let's just get married." Because that's what they do in the movies. That's my parents did. That's what-

Selena: We do.

Ryan: ...couples do. And that's not how the Bible prescribes us to get married. Marriage is covenantal.

And so a lot of even Christians, again, don't really grasp the depth of what a covenant is, a covenant relationship that God has chosen to relate to us as people. That in itself, utter miracle. That the God of the universe has said, "Okay, I am going to make myself known to you."

There's general revelation, special revelation in Scripture. General revelation is we see God's kind of fingerprints on everything. We look at how the universe is designed, we look at how physics work, we look at how human development works from the embryo on outward. We look at all these things that just kind of show us, wow, there's a designer here. But we don't know who He is until we have this special revelation of who He is. And that is what we get in Scripture. That's what we get through the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's what we get through the Prophets. In the Old Testament, that's how God revealed Himself was through the prophets.

And so God has chosen to reveal Himself. He has chosen to relate to us. And the method by which He has chosen to relate to human beings is covenant. It is the mechanism that He's chosen to relate to us.

And so it's no coincidence that God now said, "Now, you relate to one another, not in every human relationship, but in your marriage, human relationship, you are to relate to one another, like I am chosing in a similar way, like I have chosen to relate to you. And that's through the mechanism of covenant."

And covenant is so profound. And covenant, when we understand it is, I think, the only way that we can really come to truly, by the grace of God, burn these ships in our hearts and say, "I am utterly covenantally committed to you regardless of-

- Selena: Covenantal is very eternal in perspective whereas contractual is very day-today can be... is on the chopping block all the time. Whereas covenant is... there's more breadth, there's more depth, there's more purpose in that.
- **Ryan:** I love that you said that it's eternal in perspective. I want to be clear here. Covenantal marriage doesn't last eternally.
- Selena: Right.
- **Ryan:** But it's eternal in perspective in that we see this as something that has eternal-
- Selena: Implications.
- **Ryan:** Internal implications, yes. And so it's not just about my here and now happiness. It's about my glorifying God into eternity.
- Selena: And diving into Scripture, we were looking at Mark 10 for this, talking about... Well, Jesus was being confronted by the Pharisees about divorce. That's a whole nother episode of conversation. But for the purpose of this conversation today, they were asking like, "Moses permitted a man to write

his wife's certificate of divorce and send her away. But Jesus told them—this is Mark 10:5—Moses wrote this commandment for you because of your hardness of heart. However from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female for this reason: a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh, and they will no longer [00:10:00] be two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let man not separate."

Ryan: So when a husband and wife or I guess a bride and a groom stand before God and witnesses... this has taken on a modern expression. I doubt they had the types of weddings that we have nowadays back in these biblical times. The point is, is there is something happening that supernatural when that husband and wife or that bride and groom look at each other and say, "I am covenantally abinding myself to you before God, before our parents, before our friends. I'm making this covenantal commitment." There's something that happens that is supernatural.

> We talk about the consummation of marriage. There's a sexual consummation of marriage that happens on a wedding night, ideally. But there's also a binding and a blending of souls in a really deep way that is... many, many theologians would say that you can't undo it. It's permanent. Even if you get divorced that that blending has not been undone. And that's where some of the damage comes from. There is a conversation, of course, but yeah.

- Selena: And this idea, so, you know, going back to not burning the ships, understanding that God brought you together, right? And not that there's this soulmate or one person for, you know, "Oh, I hope I married my soulmate." That is a myth. That's untrue.
- **Ryan:** Oh, that's a good video idea.
- Selena: Yeah, we'll do that.
- **Ryan:** The myth of the soulmate.
- Selena: The myth of the soulmate. We had talked about that. The main idea that we want to engage in here is that God did bring you together and you are engaging. He's allowing you to engage in this covenant. And there's a bigger purpose for your marriage than just your happiness. Again, there's this idea of holiness. There's this idea of sanctification. But God has brought you to be together. And why? Why, why, why? To experience His love through another human being.
- Ryan: Amen. Can you imagine... You said that-

- **Selena:** Hopefully that doesn't sound weird. Does that sound weird? [chuckles] It might sound a little weird.
- Ryan: No, I think we see-
- Selena: Because you know me the most, we know each other the most and the best, and we have that direct line to each other's hearts. And so being able to love in a deep and true and transparent way can only happen with you. And God-
- **Ryan:** It can only happen in a special way that's only experienced between husband and wife. Now, we do have friendships that you experience kind of shadows of God's character through how they love you how they care for you. And that's the beautiful thing, bless the body of Christ, the people of God being loving the way God has shown us in especially Paul's epistles.

Well, you said something that was very, I think, telling to me. You said our marriage essentially it's not just about our happiness. Many have written on that topic. Gary Thomas being part of the main author who's contributed that idea to the marriage space. But can you imagine if our marriage was just for your happiness? [Selena chuckles]

- **Selena:** We'd be done a long time ago.
- **Ryan:** I know we say that but... We had a fight this morning. Let's just be honest.
- Selena: Never. [Ryan laughs]
- **Ryan:** We had a fight this morning and last night. And it was just like we weren't really feeling it. We're both pretty unhappy with each other at that time. And if I looked at my wife and said in that moment, "Oh, this is-
- **Selena:** Strike five. [*Ryan laughs*] We're done. This is just too much.
- Ryan: Well, in 18 years, I mean, five strikes isn't too bad. Let's be honest.
- Selena: Strike 20 million.
- **Ryan:** But it would be so hopeless. That's my point.

Selena: Right.

- **Ryan:** Because you look at this person, you say, "Oh..." You'd have times when you're like, "Oh, you complete me." Like Jerry Maguire. "You complete me. You are my soulmate-
- **Selena:** "We could be outside of Christ." There's the truth, people.
- **Ryan:** We had those moments, though, where we think, "Oh, man, everything is great in our marriage." And then there's moments of despair. And those moments of like, just kind of pragmatic, "I can see where this is going. This is as good as it gets. If this is all there is to it, kind of-
- Selena: If those are questions that you're asking, though, I gotta say, You got to flip the script on yourself because God has created marriage. And we are here to say that He has created so much purpose.
- Ryan: That's the whole point we're trying to get to is that it is Christ's context that makes marriage so wonderful and so beautiful and so livable. Without it, I'm hopeless. Without Him, I can say, "Wow, not only am I experiencing a very tangible version of Christ's love through my wife but I also know that I can do this unto His glory." And that wells up within me a deeper desire to love you.
- Selena: Again, when we are understanding the first thing that God brought you together, God brought us together, there's eternal purpose in just that, it's easier to light that match and burn those ships, I think when we understand the greater purpose and the creator who's behind our relationship and the purpose in it.

Also, we mentioned talking about how we love each other. We just did a video that you probably saw about [00:15:00] what is love, right? How do we define love, especially within a marriage covenant and the biblical perspective? And we talk a lot about how to not love selfishly. I don't even know if you can love selfishly. If we've defined love a certain way, can you actually love selfishly? No. That is just being purely selfish.

So how are we loving one another in a selfless way and not seeking our own benefit? Because when we're seeking our own desires, I want to save the ship. I don't want to light the match and burn that backup plan. But when I'm seeking to love you selflessly, to love you patiently, to not count all the wrongs against you—1 Corinthians 13 lists out the products of love, I guess, or the way of love—the match is lit so much faster, right, to the ship. Does that make sense?

Ryan: Yeah. And do check out that episode if you haven't yet because we get into that a little bit in more depth. But you're absolutely right. Because when we

look at love the way God looks at love, we can't help but take our eyes off ourselves.

And when we take our eyes off ourselves, we have two places to go when it comes to relationships. We can look at God, we can look at Him as our perfect example of love and our perfect experience of love. And then I can now look to my wife or your spouse and say, "I'm not just thinking of myself what can I get from this. But now how can I love you because I have experienced and seen the love of God in Christ?"

And so yeah, it does like that match because I can now take my eyes off myself. And it completely disarms that desire to run away because now I'm just completely utterly focused on you. Which, I mean, if you want to get to the root of it, there it is.

- **Selena:** There it is. So far we've covered a little bit about how to preserve those ships and those backup plans-
- **Ryan:** Not in those terms.
- Selena: Not in those terms.
- **Ryan:** But that's when we try to-
- Selena: When we don't take our marriage covenant seriously, we see it more contractually, like, "Well, he did this so I got permission to do this. I'm out." Or to love selfishly, which again, I don't know how you can love selfishly if you've defined love as a selfless act.

And then how do we begin to fight the urge to keep our ships, right? So we've talked about, like I said, preserving the ships. But then there's always these moments that hit us that we want to keep them, we want to keep them. How do we continually fight against those? What are some ways that we can say, "I'm not going to entertain this thought. I'm not."

And what are the ships that were we're kind of falling back on? What would you identify those ships to be? I mean, things like addictions I think can be like this... not backup plan, but it's a place we might go instead of going to our spouse or instead of going to God.

Ryan: We talk about escapism.

Selena: Escapism, yeah.

Ryan: We actually have an online marriage course. So we talked about it in there, this kind of escapism cycle and how it almost always inevitably spins out of control until the only real way to get out of the cycle is to either look to Christ or to get divorced. I mean, I'm saying it very brashly, but I think that's what you're talking about escapism.

So how do we keep from being tempted to not burn our ships, is what you're saying. Praying. So what does prayer do? It completely orients our hearts on the supremacy and the goodness in the glory of God.

- Selena: If we're praying correctly, right? Because I think there's some wrong prayers out there.
- **Ryan:** I mean, we pray and so that's a posture of prayer. But then the specific prayers that we could take would be for God to work, a, in our marriage. "If there's something that I'm blind to, Lord, help open my eyes. Soften my heart. Open my ears. Make me aware of ways that I am sinning being selfish or just being blind to how I can love my spouse better." So praying for your marriage, praying for yourself, and praying for your spouse.

Selena has had many moments in our marriage where I, you know, like lots of guys, you can kind of shut down and your heart starts to harden. Right? You start to get these kind of encrusted layers of rock on the male heart. And Selena is at her wit's end trying to get through to my heart. And her only recourse is to pray, is to ask the God of creation to work to touch, to penetrate my heart. And you know what? He does.

- Selena: I can't chip away at it. You'll just get mad at the chipper.
- **Ryan:** Yeah. I mean, that's unfortunately a lot of nagging wives. That's what they're relegated to because they don't have a recourse for husbands hard heart
- **Selena:** Prayer goes to the core, gets to the inside.
- **Ryan:** God will work supernaturally. A lot can be said by the husband who is humbled before God and praying. So like if you want to start cracking the hard shell around your heart, the first thing you do is pray. [00:20:00] It's like, "God help my heart heart." I mean, that's the essence of repentance. I turn from that unbelief because I know that you're worthy of my belief, you're worthy of my submission. So prayer—praying about your marriage, about yourself, your own heart, praying about your spouse. What else?
- **Selena:** Kindness. I think that goes overlooked. We talk about friendship a lot in marriage. And I think a byproduct of friendship is kindness to one another,

gentle assurance through your words. I know that speaks volumes to me. Being thoughtful or unintentional in ways that you know your spouse will feel loved.

And I think even giving in those moments of feeling like you want to give up, that's the most important time and the prime time to be giving of that kindness because you don't want to. And it goes against everything you're feeling. And they probably don't deserve it. However, what other model do we have but Christ who completely gave for us in moments that He... I don't know. He probably had feelings of not wanting to go to a cross I imagine for people that were going to continually sin and ask for repentance and grace. But He did.

And we only have Him as our model. So I just encourage you in those moments where you don't want to be kind, you don't want to say that nice word, you don't want to be understanding, empathetic, or loving to do it.

- Ryan: It's so hard when you don't want to. It's so hard-
- **Selena:** If life was everything that we wanted. *[laughs]*
- **Ryan:** ...when in your guts you feel like you're justified in your coldness. That's when we need the Lord to work. So prayer, kindness, and then fighting for purity.
- **Selena:** I think addictions and impurity, sexual immorality, it all creates this ocean for the ship to want to sail out onto, right? [*Ryan chuckles*] If that can be so.
- **Ryan:** I like to think of the ocean as indifferent. [Selena chuckles]
- Selena: Okay. He likes the ocean.
- **Ryan:** Oceans are wonderful.
- Selena: He likes the ocean. I'm sorry. It creates a space for the ship to exist. How about that?
- **Ryan:** It's the dock.
- Selena: It's the dock. No one likes to docks.
- **Ryan:** You said sexual immorality. What does that include? Well, your thought life, your actions. If pornography is a consistent part of your life, you are sexually immoral. Hear me. Okay? If pornography is a consistent part of your life, you are a sexually immoral person.

Now, there's grace for you. And there's grace and there's freedom to be found in Christ. But I think we've watered down that message for too long. Like, "Oh, it's a struggle." You guys. I've been a part of dozens of men's groups, accountability groups, all those sorts of things. And it's always dealt with but in a very watered-down, non-confrontational, non-specific, non-vulnerable way.

- Selena: The truth is the truth. [chuckles]
- **Ryan:** When you ask me, "Hey, how you doing with your with your struggles, brother?" I'm going to say, "Oh, it's hard, you know, I slipped up and fell once last week." "Okay, well pray for you." That's watering it down. What that man needs to hear, with grace, with love, with lots of compassion, is "You have sinned grievously against the God of the universe. You have sinned grievously against your wife. You need to repent, brother because you are a sexually immoral person."

Like if we start reading the scriptures and seeing ourselves in there, then what does that do? That does one or two things. It crushes us or it turns us to Christ. If we try to live under that weight by ourselves, we will be crushed. But if we see the weight for what it is... And that's the thing. We trick ourselves into thinking that it's not actually weighty. But we see it for what it is. We say, "Oh, that is heavy. And my condemnation is secure without help. It's secure."

Selena: "Jesus, I need you."

- **Ryan:** "Jesus, please, help me." Now, if you are in Christ, you're positionally righteous. You are saved. But that sin is still festering and need to be routed out. And our affections for Christ will make sin repulsive to us if we see sin for what it is. I just want to spend a few moments on that. We'll probably talk about that again.
- Selena: And I think that's key. I just want to add this final piece to the fighting for purity. We've talked about praying, we've talked about kindness and friendship, fighting for purity, all of these things that will help us burn the ship have a backup plan. But I think the biggest one that might go along with worship is just being in God's word consistently and in bulk. *[laughs]* Reading not just a passage, like I mean not two verses. Reading chapters of the Bible every day.

Ryan: Soaking in it.

Selena: Soaking in it. Reading it over. Getting on a reading plan. It's life-changing. And it's not about legalism or anything else but about knowing God and being able to allow his Holy Spirit... [00:25:00] The Bible is alive. It is His Word. Hebrews talks about the power of the word.

How can we begin to even try to burn a ship if we don't, a, know it exists, b, know that it's bad that it exists, and see that we actually have a way out? We have to actually see that there is a way out before we can begin to light that match.

And the word provides us, again, not with just this legalistic rules to follow. These are the commands and words and promises of God and the good news of the gospel laid out word for word.

- **Ryan:** Amen. Another I think really tangible, tactical, practical thing you can do as a couple is remove things out of your vocabulary. I'm amazed at how harshly couples can speak to one another. The words the husband can use against his wife. A daughter of the king, his bride, not the king's bride, but your bride, husband, a daughter of the king to call her some of the things I've heard husbands call their wives.
- Selena: I think there's name-calling and threats. They probably fall under two categories.
- **Ryan:** Okay. Yeah, threats. Threats of, "Well, I'm going to leave," or "I'm just going to get a divorce. I'm going to file those papers." Whatever the threat is that's kind of the broken record in your marriage, you have to consciously pluck those things out in the name of preservation, in the name of saying these things are not on the table for us. You know what is on the table for us? Reconciliation. You know what is on the table for us? Working through this together.

If you can agree to that... It takes two. Both of you can look at one another and say, We are never going to use the word "divorce." I'm never going to speak as if this is an optional thing that we're in. I think that's a huge first step if you can just get on the same page there.

And then consciously remove them from your language, especially when you want really badly to begin using that language again because you're angry or hurt or whatever. And obviously, ideally you're not sinning against one another. Like don't sin against one another too, is a huge thing too. Just love one another well. And with all this kind of as the backdrop, man, you're going to have a marriage and a life that is flourishing together.

Selena: Yeah. So we're going to leave you with these two questions for a couples conversation challenge. First of all, where do you feel like you want to jump ship? I think maybe you guys can think about those separately and then come together and talk about them. You might be surprised, you probably won't be surprised, at the points of which you feel like you want to jump ship and what that looks like. Maybe it's just disconnecting, maybe it's just giving each other cold shoulder. But where do you feel like you want to jump ship and how has that looked for you in the past?

And the second question, how can you both help each other burn each other's ships I guess specifically. So if I know where you're tempted, where you're feeling the pinch, where you just want to kind of give up and shut down, then we can talk about that and then I can begin to recognize that and maybe by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit help you and encourage you in that.

- Ryan: I'm going to add this little language to this. You said: where do we want to burn the ships? Look at that. Another way to identify that if you're saying, "Well, I don't really know," think of a time when you felt hopeless in your marriage. Husband, if you feel like the affections that you get from your wife are disingenuous or the times of intimacy are few and far between and you feel hopeless, and that you think "I could find what I need somewhere else," that's a temptation to get on the ship and-
- Selena: Sail away.
- **Ryan:** Sail away. Or wife... you mentioned that if you feel like you're disconnected for a prolonged period of time, your husband feels like he's more married to his job than he is to you, that's a space of hopelessness. I think that would be an area where you're tempted to get on the boat and sail out to sea.
- **Selena:** Somewhere else, yeah.
- **Ryan:** And then I love what you followed up with. Talk about that. Well, why do you feel hopeless in this area? Okay, how can I help you? I'm sorry for what I did.
- Selena: That's good to own that part of-
- **Ryan:** Own what you can. Don't pass the buck. Own what you can and do so before a gracious God in a covenantal marriage. And wow, I can imagine how your marriage will flourish as a result.
- Selena: You want to pray us out?

Ryan:	Yeah. Lord, I pray for these couples watching, listening, hearing these words. I pray that you would bring them to life in their hearts. I pray for whatever we said that it would resonate with your truth, Lord, and not our own but with your truth.
	Lord, I pray that these couples be filled with a desire to love one another the way they're loved in you. And as a result, they would burn these ships so that their covenant can thrive as it was designed as a lifelong union between husband and wife. Lord, we love you so much. In Jesus' name, amen.
Selena:	Amen.
Ryan:	All right, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Show [00:30:00] is in the can is [both laughs] Shoot.
Selena:	You can't change the words after five years. But here we go. It's on to new-
Ryan:	New horizons.
Selena:	New horizons.
Ryan:	We burned this ship. We're on videos. So this episode of Fierce Marriage thing is—
Selena:	In the can.
Ryan:	See you again in about seven days. Until then—
Selena:	Stay fierce.
[00:30:21]	<music></music>

Ryan & Selena Frederick

PODCAST NOTES

- [00:09:21]
 - Scripture references:
 - Mark 10:5

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