

INFERTILITY, BLENDED FAMILIES, EARLY MARRIAGE MISTAKES – LIVE Q&A WITH JOHN & BEKAH LOVELL

<https://fiercemarriage.com/infertility-blended-families-early-marriage-mistakes-live-qa-with-john-bekah-lovell>

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Ryan: Hey guys, Ryan here. What you're about to see is a monumentous event. At least it was for us. What it is is it's Q&A, live quote-unquote podcast recording from our first-ever Fierce Families conference. And in it, it's us and our good friends, John and Bekah Lovell being asked questions that were gathered from the audience by our MC, who happened to be our pastor, Pastor Rich Hamlin.

In it, in this Q&A, we have a lot of fun, but we also cover topics like struggling with infertility or what to do if you are in a blended household, or as parents, what do you do if you came to Christ after your kids were teenagers, and now you're having to figure out how to lead them in the things of God? So we answer these questions and a bunch more, and we pray that it blesses you.

One thing to keep in mind is that the theme for this year's conference was Faithful, Fruitful, and Fierce. You'll see that come up throughout the Q&A. So just keep that in mind. Again, this is from our Fierce Families Conference.

If you wanna find information about maybe attending the next Fierce Families Conference, or even bringing Fierce Families Conference to your area, just go to this website, fiercefamilies.com. You can find information there. You can pre-register to be on that early access list when new events are planned and scheduled. So, like I said, we had a lot of fun recording this. We pray that it blesses you, and so we'll see you on the other side.

Rich: How would you apply the fruitful piece of being faithful, fruitful, and fierce to married couples dealing with unwanted infertility? They wanna have a family, they wanna do this, but right now, God in His providence has said no. Speak to them.

Ryan: You're all looking to me. [laughs] I came up with the banner so I got an answer for it. I okay. So yeah, that's really hard. There's no getting around how frustrating and dire that can seem. We've walked alongside some friends and through infertility. It's hard. So I don't wanna minimize that by any means.

And as I think mentioned yesterday, the fruitfulness that we see in the garden extends beyond just the multiplication part. And I think that's key for the

couple who's going through this to understand that babies are a blessing. Well, and that's partly why they're a blessing, right? Because God in, His sovereignty, gives children, well in His sovereignty, sometimes He doesn't.

But babies aren't the only blessing that families beget. We receive, but we also beget blessings. And I think that's part of what I wanted to get across yesterday is that the fruitfulness extends into the very act of being human itself. And what being human means, as we saw in the garden, was to cultivate, to work, to be on mission.

So my encouragement for that couple is there's fruitfulness anywhere you go if you're living a faithful life unto Christ. So just press into that, press into prayer. Look into scripture, respond obediently, and be faithful, and faithful and just trust that the fruitfulness, whatever God would ask of you will be born according to His plan. If you guys have anything to add to that.

John: I'm thinking of a gal right now, a dear friend of ours. She's in her 50s. She never had any kids of her own, but she has become a massive influence in the lives of all kinds of... you're thinking of the same?

Bekah: Mm-hmm.

John: Same, yeah. So has been this great light in the lives of dear nieces and nephews, friends, and kids from church. So I think there's enough brokenness and lack of solid role models that your legacy doesn't necessarily have to be written on the lives of merely biological kids, but seeing a gap in there. She didn't have any biological kids. She has adopted the entire community's kids, and they love her, and they know her. And I don't think we'll ever really know the impact of what she's had in their lives. She is fruitful beyond measure. We'll see in the kingdom of God who is affected more, but she has adopted and raised up all these different kids, and doing a great thing. They just weren't hers biologically. Incredible.

Ryan: Well, you said that today when you were talking about the indestructible family. We're brothers. I said that to you this morning over the breakfast table.

John: I said it first in my head.

Ryan: But some brothers are runtier than others. There's a runt of the litter in this family.

Bekah: Oh my gosh.

Rich: We're gonna move on.

John: Oh, it's a short joke. [all laughs] It hurts my heart.

Ryan: It's okay.

Bekah: Oh, one more thing. I just wanna add in that there is oftentimes a real need for special needs adoption maybe if you open your vision to different callings. And then, like you mentioned, the large sibling groups. So sometimes if you look at these agencies like Lifeline, Christian Adoption based out of Birmingham, sometimes there's 5, 6, 7 kids that they don't wanna split up and they need someone to take them. And there's not a ton of people willing to do that. And maybe you're called to do something like that, that you have the capacity for it.

Rich: And the God who is writing every story, and for that couple, God is certainly aware and He's doing His most beautiful work, sometimes it doesn't match up with our timing and things that we want certainly.

There was a lot of comments about homeschooling, and there was a great question about "we're interested, but we really don't know where to start". What's some real practical advice to a couple who wants to homeschool but really doesn't know what they need to, to do first and second and third?

Bekah: I think the first step is always find a group. So search Facebook. Ask your friends. Ask through church. Ask through any organization, sports teams, ask who is the local homeschool group? And start there. And then plug in with families that you start to see you admire their kids, you see their outcomes, the kind of family that they've got, and plug yourself in with them. And then the two big things I always say is just read aloud and play outside, and you'll figure it out as you go. [laughs] Yeah.

Selena: Yeah. I would echo that. You know, if they're young kids just read and play and just be with them. You're way more capable than you think. You love your kids the most. You're the most invested in your children. You're very, very capable. So starting with finding your people, right? Start with your church. Start with a group. There's always more seasoned homeschool mothers that are in those groups that love to pour out their knowledge, love to pour out their experiences. So clearly you're not alone.

I love what you said yesterday. Just when you're homeschooling doesn't mean you do school at home. Like you don't have to do the eight hours. It's less classroom management, right? It's more just discipling hearts and teaching them. So you find a rhythm that works for you. You find people that are like-

minded that you can pray together, you can ask questions. There are so many resources out there. But yeah.

Ryan: I've never met a homeschool family that just felt awesome at the outset, right? They always feel like, "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm in over my head. I'm drinking from a fire hose." So for every passionate family that's passionate about homeschooling, they started like a deer in the headlights. So, you know, you can do way more than you realize. And I think the first thing is just community and just trust the process.

Rich: Years ago it used to be, what curriculum do I use? Now we're at a place where there's so much curriculum. So I think it's just asking questions, right? It's finding out what people are using and working and so forth.

Someone says, "I came to faith later in life. My kids aren't little teenagers now. I'm trying to figure this out. How do I be a godly parent when I'm just learning the godly faith and now I'm a different person and I'm parenting these people in my house? How do I do that?"

Ryan: Rich, you got anything? [all laughs]

Rich: I would love to comment-

Ryan: Please.

Rich: ...and then we can see if there's some more pinball off of this.

Bekah: My oldest is 11. So I don't know. Why don't we bat this one over to you?

Rich: Well, we've talked about the role of repentance yesterday and today. It's always about repentance, and it's communicate. It's being real. "Dad, I just came to saving faith and my world is changing here, and I'm trying to figure it out how I am supposed to interact with you now, my son and my daughter and your mom. I'm gonna make some mistakes but I have something now that's the most important thing. And I'm going to try and figure out this new way of how I'm to raise you. Let's keep talking about this. In fact, we're gonna pray about this."

I mean, I think it's relationship, it's communication, it's vulnerability, it's confessing the many mistakes that will be made. It's confessing "I believe I failed you. I needed to be talking about this when you were 2, not 15." And there's beauty in vulnerability, right?

Ryan: Amen.

John: That is better than what I was going to say. [all laughs] But I think whatever I was gonna say was gonna be better than what Ryan was gonna say. [all laughs] So I feel like I was bookend in there. So you won on that one.

Ryan: If you gotta say it, is it true? I mean-

John: Huh?

Ryan: If you gotta say it, is it true?

John: Yes. [all laughs]

Rich: Kind of a similar question. Divorce is real, family's split up, damage is done, regret, there's hurt, there's all kinds of second-guessing. Kids are living here now, kids are living in the other home. One parent saying, "I'm trying to follow Jesus. My ex has no interest in that. My kids are picking up on stuff, and now I'm trying to deal with it when they come back home to me. How do I navigate that?"

Ryan: Yeah, I can speak to that. So again, the three words that keep coming up is this the faithful, fruitful, and fierce. So, Ray, who spoke to the men yesterday, thank you, Ray, him and I have been mulling this idea over the idea of faithfulness is our responsibility, fruitfulness is God's.

So for that spouse who is struggling to see the fruit, well, in no way does that affect the faithfulness, the call to be faithful. So that husband or that wife, they need to press into what it means to be a faithful Christian, a faithful husband, or a faithful father, or a faithful wife, and a faithful mother, whatever that role is. They're in charge of faithfulness. That's your call. The fruitfulness is God's domain, right? What did Apollo and Apollos, right? I planted Apollos water, but God brought the growth. Well, why would we expect that anywhere else, you know?

So we get frustrated, because we don't want the hardwood to grow, we're expecting bamboo to shoot out of the ground when really God's wanting to build hardwood, maybe. And that takes time. It takes roots. It takes weathering. So the call to that person would just be, continue being faithful. Don't let the response you're observing determine your response to God.

Selena: Well, and I can speak to that. I was that kid. My mom's, she's right over there. She's here. She was the faithful one. She was the faithful one who brought us to church consistently, made sure we were in a Christian school, worked hard to put God where a father couldn't be, or to make sure we were just

consistently hearing the things we needed to hear. So when we were faced with things that we didn't agree with, didn't believe, had questions about, you know, I could always go ask her or I knew there was someone at church that I could talk to. God's family is big and ready and open and willing.

So I think that, again, like you said, just that faithfulness there. You know, she didn't know the fruitfulness that she would see. She just knew that she needed to be faithful in getting her kids to church and getting them into the family of God. So here we are. I mean, God is good. [laughs]

Rich: Amen. We've been talking about family worship here, and pastor Dimitri nailed it. Bro, nailed it. But this is a new concept, maybe for some. Just give us a couple of real practical how-to steps. What does family worship look like? And maybe you can address it with younger kids, with elementary kids, and then maybe older kids. Maybe touch on all three real quick.

Ryan: Yeah. I'd love to share our vision for family worship and you guys share yours because... So the way we characterize it, and it's the simplest way I can just formulate it is just these three things: read, sing, pray. Whatever those in include for your age and stage that your kids are at. So, open the Bible, sing some stuff together, some God-glorifying. We sang Jesus loves me. Well, that comes directly from our breakfast table with our baby, who is nine months old now. So we read, we sing, we pray. In terms of what you do, that is up to you, right? You can pray.

Also we layer in things like catechesis You made fun of Greek speaking. I didn't appreciate that because we're teaching our kids. [all laughs] Actually, they know-

John: I think it's awesome. I think it's awesome.

Ryan: I was considering-

John: Unofficially I think it's awesome. They know that song that we sang today in the Hebrew alphabet. That sounds really pretentious to say that, doesn't it? [all laughs]

Selena: It's because you're in seminary.

Ryan: It's because I'm in Hebrew class right now, and I need it for me. But the point is, is the baseline is pretty low. And people get overwhelmed by, oh, I don't have the qualifications to teach. No, yes you do. You have all you need for life. Open God's word, read it to your kids, ask them questions, sing a song you know. Terribly.

John: We still do it. [all laughs].

Ryan: We still do it. And then pray. There's so, so much simplicity there. And then just grow into that. You don't have to have it dialed the first time you do it. And I wanna say this, then I'd love to hear your thoughts. A lot of men that come to me, they say, I'm not qualified to do it. Or my wife... I haven't built that rapport with my family. And the response is just, well, you, so what? Go do it. Do the thing. And if to the wives who would undercut their husbands who give it a shot, I would say just let him grow into it without cutting off the knees. Give him a chance to mature.

Selena: Mary mentioned yesterday in our Q&A over there, sometimes it is helpful to let husbands fail. Like they need to grow in that and we need to be gracious in that. And we need to be... again, it's the faithfulness, right? It's not just nailing it, getting it every time. Yeah, we got this family worship, kids are amazingly obedient in those moments. But allowing the failure to happen, allowing God to use it to grow you, to grow your children. There's no perfection here.

Literally, he brings out the ukulele and we sing and it's awesome and chaotic and good. But we read the Bible, we ask questions, we pray together. And it takes all of maybe 15 minutes on a short day. And sometimes the prayers go long and then they wander off with our 3-year-old. So, gotta reign it in.

Ryan: Yeah. How about you guys?

John: Read, sing, pray inside the home. Fantastic. I think also, because I think you nailed that very well, I'm like, we're very similar in our home. I like the idea of, well, that extends outside of the home as well of like, we're driving and let's blast out some music and let's get real loud praising some Jesus. We have some deep tracks. You remember Carmen at The Old Sun? Yeah? Anybody know those? Of like Sundays on the way? And I'm like, we will rock out. And it's just fun worship.

So we'll have our more sincere times, more reverential, and then we're just going to be nuts. We're gonna have fun worshipping the Lord. Also our public worship on Sunday mornings. We're here as a family and we're worshipping and arms around and hands lifted high and smiling back and forth and worshipping. That's a real big deal. I'm never gonna forget some of the sweet times we've had praying together as a family, worshipping together as a family, whether it's, you know, by a downtown lake or by river in a park or our prayer walks or before we go on a drive or something like that.

I hear Bekah upstairs all the time as part of homeschool at the beginning, she'll read them scripture, they'll sing a song. And it's good memories. But that's family worship. Oh it's not the thing you do. It's we do it as we go.

Bekah: And you asked about ages. So maybe for the younger kids, it could be just five minutes, but it's consistent, right? So they start to learn how to act and how to behave when we do these things, even if they're running off or screaming. And then as each age group progresses, maybe they've got questions. Ours are at the question age where, you know, maybe we had something planned, but they wanna take it a different way. And then we answer deep questions of, well, what does this mean? And what about that? Have you thought about that, daddy? And it's just really cool.

John: So I'd also add of like I think there's a way to include giving in your worship as well. You can do that in such a way where it's kind of like family huddle, we're doing this for them. It can be a really sweet form of worship to be generous together as a family of, like, I grew up where more money was something completely private. You know, I had no idea whether my parents were giving or not. And they were, I didn't know it. We're not doing that. Some of this stuff kids don't know about and some of the stuff the kids know. Like, no, we're giving generous and this is a gift unto the Lord that's gonna bless this person or this family, or this group. so that's a real neat thing.

Ryan: Last point I'd like to make just lower the expectation too. I mean Selena's not kidding. I mean, it's chaos. Dimitri joked like, yeah, worship is warfare because it's warfare. The kids are warring against each other and we're trying to get them to focus. Well, that's real. Like, the chaos is real. So, yeah. You said like five minutes is plenty. Lower the bar. The goal is... who said it today? You said it today. Do tiny things over a long period of time. That's the goal. Not perfection on one day, but tiny things over a long period of time. Faithfulness.

Rich: Can I just add two quick things? One thing that we did was we... if you're looking for sort of a time window or whatever, it was our oldest child, and we'd go a minute per age. So when he was three, it was roughly three minutes. When he was eight, it was roughly eight minutes. There was younger kids. But that just kind of gave us a structure.

And the second thing and maybe the best thing that our kids now out of the home, remember... they don't remember all the catechism questions. They don't remember all the prayers and stories. But the thing that we did, and I don't remember how this all began, but it was on Sunday, on the Lord's day, we would at the end of family worship, each child would come sit on my lap and dad would give them a blessing. Not a prayer, but a blessing. There's a difference. And they still remember that today. And they would scamper off

my lap, and then the next one would come on and then they would get a blessing, literally with my hand on their head. And that was really meaningful, I think, to our children.

Ryan: I'm gonna steal that.

Rich: Okay. Go ahead, Ryan. You wanna...

Rich: If you were to start over... Here we go. Vulnerability time. If you were to start over what building blocks would you put into your marriage that were not there when you began?

Bekah: Did we have any of the blocks?

John: We had no blocks.

Bekah: I don't think we had any blocks.

John: We did an early inventory and found no blocks.

Bekah: It collapsed. There were no blocks.

John: So yeah, how would you answer that right off there?

Bekah: Oh Man. First thing that comes to mind is kind of like homeschool finding a community is we needed mentors.

John: I'm sorry. Was this marriage or homeschool building blocks? This is marriage. Then we're gonna go parenting next. So we're just dealing with marriage.

Rich: Basically, we could ask this question this way. What do you wish you knew then that you now know if you were starting over?

John: Okay. All right.

Bekah: I was just thinking find a mentor.

John: Ah, yeah. Great one.

Bekah: We didn't have mentors around us that we could look at their marriage and model it. It took us a few years to find some people worth emulating. Right?

John: That's so good. I don't have a picture of what it's supposed to look like, how in the world do I know what to build? So having a picture now, we kind of

whether we're raising kids or working toward a marriage, we found folks of like, all right, these folks seem to really crush marriage. And these folks are really raising their kids well. They really have their business in an order and daily habits and disciplines. So you kind of build a bear with mentors and you figure out what works and then you emulate that. And we didn't have-

Bekah: Build a bear.

John: Build a bear mentor. I like it. If like, I don't have an apostle Paul, I'll just kinda, you know, power rangers him up.

Bekah: Not the answer they were looking for. [laughs]

John: They'll never forget it though, right? It's too stupid of a word picture for you to ever forget it. So, you know what, I've used Power Rangers. I've redeemed it in the name of Jesus to make it edifying forever. Quit judging me. What's wrong with you people? [all laughs]

That was one building block is a picture of it. I think having a good theology of how actually the marriage works together. The end picture of like, okay, I'm supposed to be leader and you're supposed to submit. I'm like, Oh, leader. I'm like, but lead like Jesus having all authority in heaven and earth. So he took out his outer garment, head around his waist, got down on his knees, and washed his disciples feet. And I'm like, Ah, servant leadership. That doesn't sound as fun. [all laughs] I was picturing a different kind of like, leg-up lead. Yeah, lead. Woman, serve me as I lead. Like, no, that's not the thing.

I had a good bit of building blocks of how do you picture what a good marriage should look like? That was very hard. How am I supposed to act and how is she supposed to act? And that was extremely challenging as well. Also to be able to... here's little things of dealing with conflict sometimes. The other one is just having a bad day. And I'm like, well, I'm having a good day and I demand you have a better day. You need to repent. I'm like, Nope. Cool your jets hero. Just leave her alone, pray for her, serve her a little bit, and just... You know, sometimes you have a bum day, huh? But we want to fix them and adjust them. And it comes over to control and self-righteousness and has the feeling of being holy and it's not.

So being able to love your spouse in the way that they need love, not in the way that you demand you give it. One is self-serving while you lull yourself into thinking that you're actually being a good spouse and you're not. So I had to figure out the difference of how we're built and how we're wired and how to sweetly shift how I would naturally be predisposed to come to you and instead come to you in a way that was helpful and met you with where you

were at and what you needed. And I needed that vice versa. That took a while to figure out.

Rich: Good. Fredericks, what do you wish you knew back then that you now know that would've been nice to help get a good start?

Ryan: For me, it was... so we're 20 years married now which is better than John.

John: 20 years, guys.

Ryan: No, he's great.

John: I'm gonna cut Ryan off because Ryan was an early picture of marriage. When I met Bekah, he was 3,000 miles away. So we couldn't gaze at their example very readily. But you were mentors to us in marriage, and I think y'all have a really special marriage. Y'all have figured some stuff out and I'm so proud of you guys and your marriage. So truly you have mentored us in ways that I don't think I've ever fessed up to directly. No, I have.

Rich: You were watching Power Rangers or something. [all laughs]

Bekah: Yeah, he was busy watching. He was busy.

John: But sometimes I admired their beautiful marriage and manipulated it in like commercial breaks. [all laughs]

Ryan: I was gonna say as a young married man 20 years old up to like say 35 [laughs] communication was pretty terrible. Didn't ever really wrap my head around the fact that if you can communicate things right, if you can get communication down, it is the pipeline through which all manner of flourishing flows in marriage. Like, if you can just talk about hard things without fighting and getting after each other and taking offense that wasn't meant, and you can both do that, I'm convinced that's 90% of the marital battle.

So as a young man, I would communicate very brashly and using things like facts and logic and reason. You know, yeah just feel the way you're supposed to feel, according to this logical thing of... well, I mean, sure.

Bekah: You love that.

John: False analogy and red herring doesn't work. Gave the ground.

- Ryan:** So there's truth to be had in terms of facts and those sorts of things. But as a husband, your call is not to that. Husband, your call is to so much more than that. So, just wrapping my head around the idea that communication is something I can learn, I can get good at. I'm not predisposed for life. I can actually grow and skill and I can ask my wife for feedback. Like, that was huge. I wish I'd have known that 15 years sooner. What about you?
- Selena:** I echo the mentor. I was so hungry for wives. In the church that we were in, in the season we were in, they just weren't there. There was just no depth, no theology, no looking forward to "this is what you can look forward to. These are some of the hard things you might walk through some. Here's how to handle some of those conversations. Here's how to, you know, talk to your spouse when they don't know how to talk to you." [laughs] I'm kidding. I think just again, the body of Christ is, find a good body if you don't have one and get plugged in and get connected because there's a wealth of knowledge, experience, lots of dinner tables that people will welcome you to to be able to share their wisdom and for you to be able to cry to them.
- Rich:** Good. Let's be a little bit quicker with this one because I wanna get to a couple more. But what about parenting? As you look back now you know, how old's your oldest, Fredericks?
- Selena:** Nine.
- Rich:** 9-year-old. And yours guys is 11? What do you wish you knew when your little guy was two and Della was three but you know it now?
- Ryan:** Well, to go back to family worship, frankly, that's a new thing. I feel like that when I read... Donald Whitney wrote a book called Family Worship. It revolutionized our home life. And I'm like, what are these foreign flourishing shores that I've washed upon? Where does this warm heart now that is God's word that we can more...? We didn't have any of that for the first five years of our kids' lives. So family worship, if you're just hearing about it, don't let it stop here. Find someone to help you with it. Find a book, find something, go for it. I wish I'd have known that sooner.
- Selena:** And for any new or newer moms, just finding that community, finding the people that... Kristen yesterday said it so well, that we are women of strength because of the Lord, excuse me. We can handle more than we think. So when you have those new babies, and yes, the nights can be long and all of that, but find the community that won't just, you know, say, "Oh, it's okay, here's a glass of wine," but "Oh, I've had those hard nights. Let me bring you coffee and donuts in the morning. Let me take your kids." I've had friends come over, sit and fold my laundry, and talk to me. You know, just let people in to serve and

love on you. They want to do it, and you need it. And that's good. We need to know that we have needs. So just again, a community shout-out, I think.

John: I got one. To establish earlier boundaries for where we are. So for instance, you come home and you're exhausted from a day at work, and then the kids are gonna ask you questions and you get the first few, I'm like, "Hey buddy, come on up here. Yeah, absolutely. I'm like, superhero dad." But when I'm 322 questions in, I am not super dad anymore. I'm like, "What? No, ask your mother. She just..." You know, you start getting snippy, but you're like, ah, at some point a man runs out of ability to answer any more questions.

And then there'd just be like chaos around here. Somebody's screaming and banging a pot and you're like, "I am going to fall over and die." You don't let them get to that point. The moment they're harassing or annoying or something else like that, shut that down. Like, "Hey boys, I need y'all to be quiet now. We're gonna..." I don't want this kid-centric home where they get to run the place making all manner of racket in. So I'm like, no, no, no. I want a happy home. And if this continues to go on, I'm going to passive-aggressively blow my lid and yell at my kids in about an hour from now. I'm like, no, I'm gonna cut this off.

And I notice it in my spirit, I'm like, Ah, I'm running outta patience and there're getting crazy. I'm like, Nope. Let's shut this down. Hey boys, I need you to find something constructive to do or I'm gonna give you some chores." And two minutes later, I'm like, "Boys, we're doing chores. No big deal. And this is a good opportunity to help your mother." So now we just assigned chores, cold, hard math right there. So we set discipline boundaries. And keep you from blowing up at your kids and doing stuff that you want or mistreating them kinda in those, you know, unhealthy, toxic ways.

So the kids will flourish under that discipline and putting them to task and chores. The worst thing you could do is allow these little Napoleon to commandeer your household, make it a thing of chaos and strife. So at the end of the day when they go to bed, we're so beat, exhausted, and harried. We're angry. You know, like, no, no, no. Don't let that happen.

I think we idolatry our kids so much that we don't say no early enough and often enough. And as a result, we ruin and spoil our kids. It's okay to say no. It's okay to say no early and it's okay to put them to work. Maybe some of you, moms, are really too tired because you're working too hard and your kids aren't working hard enough. Put them to work. Make it easy. Kick up your feet, rest. Let them do it. They can't figure it out. Let them keep trying to figure it out. Good problem-solving skills. "Not my problem, kid. Beat it. Go figure it

out." It doesn't sound spiritual, but it actually is. It's good. I just don't shush it up for you. Alright, next. [all laughs]

Rich: That's right. Husbands and wives have disagreements, husbands and wives can argue some, husbands and wives may even use the word "fight". When you find yourself in those situations as a Christian, what are the rules of engagement? How should one fight in a loving and honorable manner that pleases the Lord? Or is this question an oxymoron? I mean, how do we deal with disagreements, how do we deal with conflict in a manner which Jesus is sitting right there watching this whole thing, which He is, and we're gonna please Him?

Selena: I mean, we've had a few rules in our house basic of like, you know, no name calling, no cursing at one another, no threatening divorce. I heard somebody say sex is not a bargaining tool. We don't use that in conflict. The goal during conflict should not be to fight. The goal is reconciliation. So if we can fight well because the goal is reconciliation, I think that sets us up for a better fight. Because you are gonna fight. We're both sinners. We're gonna bump heads. We're not gonna communicate well. You're not gonna submit to me very well and... [all laughs] Just kidding.

Ryan: It's a dry sense of humor. It's a dry sense of humor.

Selena: But yeah, when we make those mistakes, what are those boundaries? What are those rules?

Ryan: I'll just add this little thing that helped us immensely is a three seconds is a difference between a reaction and a response. So just wait three seconds and respond and think about how you're gonna respond. Because so often we get caught up in the moment and it escalates and it doesn't have to. I think conflict is inevitable, but fighting is not in the marriage. You're gonna have to work through stuff, but you don't have to do it in an unhealthy way. So three-second rule helps a lot, especially if you can sense... Husbands, I'll put it on you. I would say you're at the helm of de-escalating that situation. And that means being sensitive to your wife, being sensitive to the situation.

Get on the same page. That's one of the things that we figured out. Like we want the same things. Like we really do want the same. We're not really at odds. Problem is there's some noise that's gotten mixed in with the signal here. And you're hearing noise, I'm hearing noise. We're both sending... So let's get down to the signal, which means let's stop, pause, get on the same page, and not let this thing escalate. So what do you guys think?

Bekah: How about adding one thing would be don't bring up the past, right? No records of wrongs. Like, well, you did this, and you always and you never. Try not to use those words, right? Yes. What else?

John: Some of the fights, Bekah, I've been in especially the more intense ones have usually happened because one of us or both of us were burned out. When you're burned out, you're just not yourself. You're just not yourself. And so you need to recognize the signs of burnout, because what can happen is, is you know, work or life or family stress or remodel or whatever is going on can just wear you down, and then you find the most convenient and proximally close person, and you just go to war, you know. Like, you may not have been the problem, but I'm certainly making you the problem now. So you gotta really recognize the signs of burnout and put up guardrails early.

Bekah, became good at this, especially when our kids were in their terrorists twos and threes, you know... [all laughs] Kids are a blessing from the Lord, but some of the terrible twos and threes, it's an expression for a reason. It's because kids before they really know how to communicate, they're just this mess of emotions that can be highly volatile. And you can't reason with them. Once they're four and five and six of, like, you can be on that track, but two and three, they're wrapping their heads around a lot of selfishness and a lot of explosive emotion and they have no way to communicate.

So we had some pretty strong-willed kids especially our firstborn, very strong-willed kid. And Bekah invariably would reach burnout pretty regularly in a day. I would be coming home from whatever I'm out doing, work, and she'd be like, "Hey, I'm on fumes." And I'm like, "Copy that." And I'd high-five her in the yard as I came in and she left. And I was actually good with it. I wanted to spend time with the kids. I've been gone all day and she needs to desperately get away.

Now she had to struggle with the demonic influence of, you know, well if you leave or you don't wanna be away from your kids, then you're an unfit mother. You know?

Bekah: No, this is just like going to the grocery store for an hour. Right?

John: Yeah.

Bekah: It's a good breather.

John: Right. So she just needed a little bit of a breather and then she comes back refreshed and she's good to go. So I'm writing it larger than it is, but it's just you're beat and you need a rest. Recognize that you need a rest. Know that

that's okay. And Bekah would do a great job of communicating like, "Hey, I need to get a loan for a couple hours." I'm like, "Hey, Roger that. Get outta here. I got it." You know? And vice versa of like, "I need alone time. And she's like, Okay. We're able to kind of trade-off, get our energy under us, and then we approach. But really our biggest way to keep from fighting is just to battle personal burnout. That's one of the big things.

Also, we have a failsafe. We have an emergency button, and it's orange. If either one of us says the word "orange" that means like, "Hey, I'm about to be a blinking red light, like of burnout. If anyone says orange, that means we're not gonna talk about this anymore. We promise to talk about it later, but right now I'm upset. I'm gonna say something I don't want to, orange. I need a breather. I need to pause. And then we'll come back to our disagreement or our conflict later where we're kind of peaceful and calm. But there's our emergency word, orange.

Ryan: Can I add one thing?

Rich: You, sure can. This is your conference. [all laughs]

Ryan: I'll add one thing, Rich. So you mentioned burnout. For a lot of couples, the fight is the symptom of not dealing with things like coming back to it, like you said. I used to do wildland firefighting from the state of Washington, the DNR and that was awesome. I learned some things about wildfire. Well, wildfires happen for a reason, right? Either there's tinder collecting on the forest floor because the forest is unhealthy and the tinder's not been cared for, it's not been stewarded well, or the forest is dry because there's a lack of water. And then there's some sort of inciting event that will kick it off, right? Whether it's the cigarette butt or the stray campfire or the lightning strike.

Well, marital conflict is a lot like that. So we need to make sure that we are being watered by the word, we're staying in the word together, not just I have my own life and... No, we're warming ourselves and drinking from the same well together. But also that we're dealing with that tinder before it collects. Because you can control the tinder, you can't control the inciting events. Because what happens, you know, your carburetor blows out or transmission blows out on your car. Well, that's an inciting event.

Now, do you have a lot of tinder now that's built up bitterness, it's been swept under the carpet, under the rug, and it's not been dealt with? Well, of course, that lightning strike is gonna set your whole marital forest fire ablaze. But if you've been mindful, you've been diligent, you've been talking through things when the inciting events come in, you have a better chance at not letting it explode into something it shouldn't have ever been.

- John:** So good.
- Ryan:** So tend to your forest fire... or tend to your forest rather, and you won't have as many fires. So there's a book on that back there.
- John:** That's sweeping under the rug, not dealing with the conflict, guarantee bitterness will seep in between you and you'll grow further and further apart. And the longer you wait, the bigger that pile gets until it's just... how do you sweep that out the front door anymore? You know, it's easy to deal with it a little bit at a time. But if you keep putting off conflict and not dealing with it, you are doing something to your marriage that it's not going away, it's building up. And so don't let bitterness find a root with unresolved conflict.
- Rich:** I think this will be a good culminating question because it captures a lot of the things that have been spoken about. And it comes from the vantage point of a wife. I want my husband to lead. I want my husband to take the mantle here. I want him to be the spiritual leader, but doggone it, he just won't. How do I encourage this? How do I get him to do so without being a nag?
- Bekah:** I would say treat him as if he already is that amazing man and leader. Give him all the respect that he may not deserve, which is really hard. And it's really kind of that sacrificial love. But treating people like the amazing person they are before they are that person is really going to embolden them in a way that nagging and bitterness never could.
- John:** Let your husband define what the word nag is as well. What does that mean? Let him define it for you. It says typically of like even a wife that is nagging her husband, that's hand pecking. You can do it through questions or reminders over and over where you are subtly trying to... you are leading him to lead and that doesn't work. It actually steals his spirit and makes him not want to do it. So in your prompting, in your hand pecking, you're stealing the spirit outta the man, not encouraging him. And that's awful.
- Now that's not to shoulder his passivity as if it's your fault, because it's not. My passivity is my fault alone. My lack of leadership is my fault alone. It's not her fault. It's my fault. And I'm accountable for that. I'm responsible for that. And I need to cowboy up, learn to follow God, which is the same thing as learning how to lead my wife. It's the exact same thing. Follow Jesus, the strong, bold loving servant Jesus. And that will amount to... you can't possibly follow Jesus and not lead your wife. You can't do it. I think that's practical.
- However, there are some things that a wife can do to undermine and sabotage and nagging is certainly one of those. I think about. And just so that you

understand how dire this is, the strongest man in the Bible, Samson, finally gave up to Delilah because she nagged him. He was not strong enough to deal with her nagging. She conquered him.

The wisest man in the Bible, Solomon, said it'd be better to live on the corner of a roof than with a nagging wife. You know, I wonder if like maybe Samson, if he goes to heaven, I doubt it, I don't know. But he gets to heaven and he gets in front of Solomon and he's like, Hey, how do you deal with nagging? I ever figured out? I don't know. I don't know." But it's a really serious thing.

And that's lots and lots of questions where it feels like it's almost a cross-examination or prompting, prompting, prompting. Instead when he shows any leadership, praise him and leave it at that. He'll love that. A lot of us are like, I'm a golden retriever. If you pat my head and say, "Good," I'm like, "Really? Well, watch this." I'm really that shallow and superficial. I just want to be told, "Hey, good job. I like that." I'm like, "Oh, yeah, watch me serve that. I'll be that easy to influence. I thrive on encouragement, and I wilt under any nag. And that's just the way I'm built. And your husband probably is too.

Rich: The Frederick's and the Lovells, let's thank them for their interaction here.

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