

5 WAYS TO FINALLY GET UNITY AROUND TIME AND PRIORITIES

<https://fiercemarriage.com/5-ways-to-finally-get-unity-around-time-and-priorities>

[00:00:00]

Selena: All right. So we've been going through a series of what we've learned in the past 20-plus years of our marriage. We've covered various topics such as communication, conflict, just talked about sex and intimacy. You should go check that one out. I know you will.

And today we're going to talk about priorities. Setting priorities.

Ryan: Prioritize.

Selena: Then the week after this we're gonna be talking about finances because we feel like these are the five kind of pillars that marriage is kind of crumble underneath or are built onto in terms of foundation. What?

Ryan: Crumbling underneath the pillar.

Selena: Sorry, crumbling on.

Ryan: What kind of building is this? [both laughs] Anyway, they're important. So we'll see you on the other side.

[00:00:48] <music>

Selena: All right, Ryan's gonna run the episode. I'm done. [Ryan laughs]

Ryan: We've reached the portion of our podcast where Selena starts to fall asleep.

Selena: Well, it's your voice. It's just so relaxing. Just love it.

Ryan: I'm glad that I could bore you to sleep.

Selena: Not that. I didn't say what I didn't say in the words, my husband. I said what I said, not anything else.

Ryan: Communication. That's three episodes ago. Go check that out. All right. If you don't know who we are, first, I'm Ryan. This is my lovely wife, Selena. We're the Fredericks of the Fierce Marriage Podcast. Thank you for joining us.

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that tight-knit, elite community, go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. You too can be one of the elite.

Selena: Moving on. Our episodes are getting too long. People are not going to listen if we keep chatting.

Ryan: Yeah. That's okay. At least we're not-

Selena: [laughing] Ah, that's okay.

Ryan: Only the good ones stick around.

Selena: Only the good ones stick around.

Ryan: Anyway.

Selena: Thank you for your support. It really does keep us alive on the months... these months of our lives. Sorry. [laughs]

Ryan: We've reached the portion of our podcast. This is an inside joke.

Selena: Check it out.

Ryan: All right. Okay. So what's the governing principle? With each one of these, we've had a governing principle that is the kind of... it's the font, as I've said, from which the rest of the lessons have flowed. Flowed? Do you not like the font?

Selena: The font?

Ryan: The fountain.

Selena: It makes a lot of sense. It's just it's funny.

Ryan: Well, you're funny.

Selena: What's the governing principle, Ryan, for setting priorities?

Ryan: As Christians, we prioritize what God prioritizes. Meaning, we don't just pluck our priorities out of thin air.

Selena: Okay. But what about my interests? What about the things that give me joy and feed my desires?

- Ryan:** I'm just going to repeat the principle. We prioritize what God prioritizes.
- Selena:** I know.
- Ryan:** I know.
- Selena:** I'm being facetious because that's where the problems come in.
- Ryan:** Right. And so we don't pluck them out of thin air. We don't just arbitrarily decide. We don't even strategically decide outside of the filter and the lens of we prioritize what God prioritizes. In other words, we call important what He calls important and we order our lives according to His created order. That's the governing principle. And if you don't start there, none of these other things will make sense.
- If your governing principle is my priorities are ordered in order to make me happy, or my priorities are ordered in order to make us as much money as possible, or our priorities are to have our lives revolve around our kids, or revolve around our hobbies, or revolve around work, or revolve around anything else, none of this is going to make sense.
- Selena:** Right. Which you really kind of have to go through it with a fine toothcomb, because a lot of these things are good. A lot of them take up a lot of our time. So how do they not become a priority or how do we fight to keep them in the spot that they're supposed to be in, in terms of our heart, our affections, our time and energy, all of that?
- Ryan:** Yeah. So we're distilling down 21 years of learning and having to figure this stuff out. And man-
- Selena:** Life gets complex. And the more kids you have... I mean, I was stressing about this earlier this week. I was like, do we do the ballet class or do we not? Do we sign up for this thing or do we not? It felt like there were 5,000 decisions that we had to kind of make. And I was trying to let a one big decision govern, but it felt like even that big decision you're trying to take into consideration, you know, the interests and abilities of your children, the skills, but also prioritizing family time and the home. So anyways.
- Ryan:** Here's why we're talking about it. We keep saying it's important. Here's why it's important. It fuels everything else, yes. But just boots on the ground, talking to marriages, the biggest thing that marriages struggle with is communication. The second biggest thing that marriages struggle with is not sex-

- Selena:** It's not finances.
- Ryan:** It's not money. It's not even conflict. And not priorities writ large, but rather, chores.
- Selena:** Right. Division of labor in the home.
- Ryan:** Division of labor in the home. I'm telling you, that's the thing that causes the most arguments, the most division. And what that does is it creates a crack and that crack widens because usually communication is bad or selfishness abounds.
- Selena:** It just augments any other little crack in the foundation.
- Ryan:** And it comes from not understanding it... You have too much to manage and you're not managing it well. What is that a function of? It's a function of your priorities are not set or they're misunderstood or they're not articulated or they're wrong.
- Selena:** Do we rightly understand a) what a priority is and b), how does God prioritize this? What are His distinctives for a priority? What does he value? And how can we value the things and people and relationships that He values based on His word that He's given us?
- Ryan:** So if you want to go on a journey, if you will, into exploring how to establish godly priorities in your marriage, actually go to fiercemarriage.com, and then there's a search bar, search for "First Things". That's the name of the series. We did a series I think of five episodes, including a Q&A about two years ago. But that's not this episode. This episode is just distilling the big kind of lessons we've learned. Okay?
- All right. The first big lesson that we've learned is this. Begin with the end in mind. So what does that mean? You're living your lives, you're building out a life together, you are going about work. Maybe you have kids. Maybe you own a house or you're dealing with that. At some point, it might occur to you that you should probably have some sort of plan for your life. Right?
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** You want to save. You want to get ready for retirement, old age, whatever. Or you're just trying to create a legacy of wealth for your kids, and so you want to, okay, so we need to put money. At some point, you realize you need a plan.
- Selena:** Right. You should realize, I think.

Ryan: You should. And if you don't, this is your wake-up call. You need a plan. So the question is this, we begin with the end in mind, we're asking this question is what kind of person, what kind of couple, what kind of family, what kind of individuals, marriage, name, whatever the blank, what kind of that thing do you want to be? That's the end in mind. And then go back up to the governing principle: we prioritize what God prioritizes. So we want to be people who value clear, ready obedience to God, faithfulness to God. Then that trickles down into all the other areas of your lives in terms of your priorities.

If you reject that first principle, that governing principle, and you say, well, I actually don't care about what God thinks, I want to be the kind of person who has three, you know, sports cars, does this, you know-

Selena: You're probably not listening to this podcast. But what I think you're saying-

Ryan: But you can functionally reject it without overtly rejecting it.

Selena: Yeah. I think there's a lot of Christians out there that just want to be a good Christian, but they want to have their cake and eat it too. Right? So what are those priorities? What are the things... are you living a life that is you-centered or is it God-centered? And what is the differentiating or the differentiator between the two? And so how do we know what God prioritizes? Well, how do we know God? We know God through His word. Are you in His word daily? Do you know Him? Start there. Basic. Read your Bible every day. No exception. Like I'm trying to be legalistic or anything like that.

Ryan: You're not saying that saves you, but you're saying that that's.. I guess that's part and parcel with the Christian life.

Selena: But I want to know my savior. I want to know God. And this is the way he told me that I can know Him. So why wouldn't I want to do that? Right?

Ryan: So begin with the end in mind. What should that end be is the question we're asking. Well, the end is informed by our governing principle, which is it should be honoring and obedient to Christ, to God. So that's the big lesson that we've learned is don't just go about with even the next two to three years in mind. Those are good goals, but those should be subservient to the greater end, which is frankly, it's into glory and eternity.

Selena: Right. And I think that's beautifully put because I think as a Christian, you need to differentiate yourself by saying that my priority is what God prioritizes and that's eternity. It's not that He ignores the here and now, but we are made in his image. We're here and now, but we are going to be there and then. We

have to battle this... I don't know if it's an invoice or whatever, or just a human, humanism at its best, but wanting to just do what we feel. Like we want to prioritize what we feel. Well, we want to make money. So we're going to go somewhere, we're going to work, we're going to do all these things.

By God's grace, like we wanted those things in an earlier period of our lives, and by God's grace, He didn't allow those things to take a hold of our hearts. He still helps us battle some of those desires. But they are not as strong, I think, as they were.

Ryan: Well, some of the lessons will bear themselves out how we've learned those, but yeah.

Selena: So when we say, you know, look at the person that you want to be through the lens of being a Christian, of God, not just what are my desires, what do I like? What do I want, who do I want to be, like those are-

Ryan: And your relationship with God is will go into eternity. And so, yeah, we're keeping that end in mind as well as the ends in terms of the key milestones in life.

Selena: I want to be clear that, you know, people aren't just hearing, you know, do what you want and prioritize what you want and what you feel and what you desire. And it's like, no, what does God prioritize? How does He prioritize? And what does He say is worth, you know... what is beautiful, lovely, pure? All those things.

Ryan: By way of example, okay, we've decided the priorities in our life, in addition to the big things of God is we want to prioritize hospitality. So we put money aside that will allow us to be hospitable on a whim so that we're not hesitating to invite people over or to splurge on the meal that's feeding, you know, 25 people. That's a priority because we feel like that's a call that we have as Christians, not just to people we know, but even to people we don't know as well. That's an example.

Let's keep going down the list. So that was number one. Number two is make big decisions once. What do we mean by that? Again, we're talking about priorities. Here's the clearest example of this: church attendance. Christians, we value what God values. The church is the bride of Christ. I've heard it said that the church is actually the expression of God's love for His own Son. It's the bride that He's given to His son. It's an overflow of His love.

We can't call ourselves Christians and also neglect Christ's bride. If you are neglecting Christ's bride as Christians, you probably have reasons that are

swirling around in your head. You don't have a good church in your area. You tried it once and got burned. Whatever the reasons are, welcome to the club. Been there, done that many times.

Selena: Who hasn't? I mean, really, who hasn't?

Ryan: Right. And so-

Selena: The mark of a Christian is being able to reconcile and find a church that is faithfully serving the Lord, whether you like their coffee or not. It's not about those things. It's about a pastor faithfully teaching through the word, living a life that reflects that. And it's about working through the dysfunction or the frustrations you might have with people in that church. I mean, we're just like the world if we can't. I mean, right?

Ryan: Mm-hmm.

Selena: The mark of a Christian is forgiveness and repentance. Maybe you don't go back to being besties, but there should be some decorum. You should be able to have some hard conversations with Christians and continue to attend the church and continue to work through some of those things.

Ryan: I mean, unless the church is teaching heresy or they're not teaching through the word, things like that. But here's the big point is that you make that decision once. Meaning that, what is the decision? We belong to the body of Christ. What does that look like? We attend a local church and we are involved in a local church. So we're not making the decision every Sunday morning, should we go to church?

Selena: Right. That's been made.

Ryan: It's already been made. We go. And by far, the exception is we don't. And it's because we're out of town or someone's sick, you name it. The legitimate reasons come up. But the decision is always, by default, yes. So take that same principle. We make the decisions once, the big ones once, and put that throughout the other aspects of your marriage. What are big decisions?

We don't let fights go on without being resolved. Big decision. Made that once. We don't do hobbies to the detriment of our family or we don't overspend.

Selena: We don't use sex as a bargaining tool.

Ryan: Right. That's a big decision. I'm wondering if that's a priority decision or if that's just-

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: We prioritize dinners at home. That is the ideal. And that's the aspiration every day. Whatever the priority decision is, you make it once because you know it's right. And then you just do the right thing over and over and over again without having to revisit the decision. All right. So that's number two. What's number three?

Selena: Seek unity in priorities. So that's, I think, where I was talking about when we first opened the episode is the problems come when we start making hobbies our priorities and we haven't talked to one another about it and we're not in agreement that this is a priority.

I think early on in our marriage... I mean, we were pretty unified on what was a priority and what wasn't. But I don't know that they were necessarily right because we were devoting so much time to them, I think, for some of the wrong reasons. I'm thinking church involvement and owning horses and-

Ryan: Well, good things have a way of kind of taking over more and more real estate in your heart and in your mind and in your life and in your time and with your money.

Selena: Absolutely. Absolutely. They have your affections. You start finding your affirmation and your identity in them. And it's such a slippery slope, which is why I think having agreement on those things is so important. Because if we're not in agreement, that's going to really shake how I feel and how I experience this priority or hobby.

Ryan: And how do you get unity around it? Well, you have to look back to the very beginning. We need to value and filter everything through what God values. And if you have something that is taking up your time and your energy in your headspace and your affections, what are some of these things? You said hobbies. Even some friendships, right?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Some friendships could be needing boundaries because they're becoming toxic and needy or they're just unhealthy from some other reason, or they're just taking it more time than they should. Things like leisure and entertainment. Are we becoming belly gods in that we are always beholden to our appetites and our distractions and those things are running our lives.

Work. Work is good, but work can become bad pretty quickly. I tend toward workaholism for sure, because I always have something burning and always some other thing to do.

Selena: There's just a line between... I mean, everything is at home, right? Like you call everything work, but-

Ryan: Yeah. And so all of these things can suck up all the time, energy, space, and affection in your life. And so you have to go back and look at, okay, what is our governing principle? What is our end game? I don't want to raise children who have an absentee father who is there by lip service only. I want to be someone who's there in presence, heart, mind, and body that I can have energy for them, or I can have headspace for them. And so we have to say no to some things and say yes to some others.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: That'll be number five. One, two, three, four. So number four. I'm jumping down. Big thing we've learned about priorities. Every yes is a no to something else, and every no is a yes to something else. So you can say no to good things because you're saying yes to a better thing.

Selena: And I think it's important to know, K-N-O-W, know your family's capacity, know the space and time that you need to either rest, to reflect, and then be able to go again. Because I've noticed in our family, when we have too many things two to three days in a row, it really burns us out. We become relationally grumpy with one another. There's harder battles to fight. And I'm not saying you're just going to achieve this perfect schedule every week. But knowing when the crunch times are coming and knowing maybe how to soften some blows and also how to just encourage your family saying, Hey, this is a season, but it shouldn't always be a season, right? It shouldn't always be pedal to the metal, getting all the things done.

Ryan: Yeah. This comes... excuse me. This comes with knowing your limits as well. You mentioned that like with young kids, with whatever.

Selena: And being okay and content and joyful in that, because I remember having younger, younger kids and feeling very left out or like I was missing stuff. And now I'm so grateful to have one more young kid that I feel like I can opt-out if they're sick because it's kind of sometimes a blessing to just be home and, you know, reading the Bible and listening to church at home when you know the kid's just not doing well. So just find the joy and blessing in each season.

- Ryan:** Half the battle too is having the security and clarity of mind to say no to a good thing and still not let that eat you up.
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** Because you can say no to a good thing, but then feel guilty because a little voice in your head is saying, "Oh, that's a good thing," or "you let that person down" or whatever.
- Selena:** Or even a well-meaning friend can say that too. But you really have to be anchored in it.
- Ryan:** If you're anchored in, okay, I'm doing this in the name of faithfulness to the Lord, because I have this end game in mind-
- Selena:** And we're in unity on this. So when I start feeling some of those doubts or you do, I can say, "Hey, remember this was the decision we made. This is why we made it." And I can remind you, encourage you, we can be built up together in it and we can move on from that.
- Ryan:** Amen. Final one. Establish standard operating procedures for divisions of labor. That's a really fun thing to say. That phrase.
- Selena:** That's really fun to say.
- Ryan:** SOPs for divisions of labor. In other words, you're taking some of the guesswork out of the day-to-day grind. I mean, you're creating a baseline saying, okay... we had an issue in our marriage a number of years back where you were in charge of paying bills. Remember that?
- Selena:** Yeah. For the first few years of our marriage. Did not go well.
- Ryan:** It didn't go well. It wasn't playing to your strengths. You had other stuff going on. Balancing a checkbook used to be a thing. We don't do it anymore because... I don't know.
- Selena:** Everything's online.
- Ryan:** I haven't written a personal check in years. But I just said, "Hey, you know what? I'm going to do that." Because I think what was happening is we were going over budget and we were bouncing checks. Like stuff was happening. And I've friends who have done this recently as well. I said, "You know, I'm just going to take all of that and I'm going to do it. Relax. You don't worry about that." And then, here's what you can worry about or whatever. And you've got

your own stuff that you're doing for the household. I'm not going to worry about that. We're going to divide this and this is our standard procedure. Man, how that takes guesswork out.

Selena: It's very liberating for both of us, I think.

Ryan: There's man work around the house and there's a woman work around the house. I mean, the men and women, we have different types of work. Like it is by far the rule that I do anything heavy, obviously garbage, taking the garbage out. You can do it, but that's a man job.

Selena: It is. And when he forgets, he's like, "I'm sorry. That was a man's job."

Ryan: I'm so sorry, I owe you flowers because I have an early morning meeting and I forgot to take it out and I'm running late.

Selena: Yes. It makes me feel good. I'm like, yes, it is. But also I can do this. I'm capable for the good of our family.

Ryan: And it's not because... And it's just like if-

Selena: But I look to you for that.

Ryan: ...all of the laundry's dirty, I can also run a load of laundry. It's not emasculating to me. It's not that hard. We can do it. But just the standard is that we have a division of labor that we understand.

Selena: We mentioned this in the I think the sex and intimacy episode, that this is one of the major things, or maybe it was this episode that really can eat away at the foundation of a marriage is who does what around the house. Because we all come in with these expectations from our family of origin, or our own past experiences, you know, expecting you, my husband, to do the things and to do them a certain way, because that's what I grew up with. That's what I know. Why are you doing it this way? Are you doing this? Why aren't you doing this? Right? There's all these connotation and conversation that goes around it. So-

Ryan: If you don't talk through it, it leaves room to grow bitter, to grow frustrated. And instead establish those standards. Establish how your household will run, who is doing what, and when. And then if you deviate from it, just talk about it. Just talk about it. It takes all the guesswork out of it.

Selena: Agreed.

Ryan: And the priorities go from there. So these are - what? Five things we've learned in 21-plus years in the area of priorities. We hope that it's been helpful to you and your marriage. Take one thing, talk to your spouse tonight about it, and see what they say.

As we always do, we want to end these episodes with a reminder of the gospel. If you don't know who Jesus is, or you've never heard the gospel, it's basically this. Jesus is a Son of God. He died for sinners to save sinners. He didn't stay dead. He went into the grave, He came out victorious over death, and now He's offering eternal life to anyone who will repent and believe in Him. What a wonderful gift! A free offering of the grace, unmerited grace of God, the favor of God, that being justified before Him, that we might be adopted into His family and called co-heirs with Christ. And it costs you nothing. That's the gospel.

So if you don't know who Jesus is, if you're not in Christ and you're not called a co-heir with Christ, we want that of you. We want that of you. We want to call you brother or sister. And so we recommend you do this. Find a friend, talk to them about Jesus, ask them to read the Bible with you. Find a church that preaches out of the Bible that hopefully will be welcoming to you and loving to you. Engage in that church. If you don't have either of those two things, go to this website. It's thenewsisgood.com.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your word. Thank you that you've given us wisdom around our priorities, that we don't have to flail and try to find meaning on our own. We can look to you for meaning and from that get our purpose and from that get our priorities and in many ways, get our marching orders from you. And how we might live this life, not just out of cold obedience, but really knowing that you are a loving father who's given us direction that we might flourish, that we might enjoy life all the more, that we might have abundant life in you, Jesus.

I pray you give us wisdom and discernment around this area in our marriage. I pray for the couples as well, listening, watching this, that they would have wisdom and discernment. In Jesus' name, we ask these things. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Amen. Okay. Well, thank you for joining us for this episode. If you want to join the Fierce Fellowship, go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. As I said, it's the elite partners, the fellows. We'd love to have you in there. It's one of the main ways God has seen fit to provide for this ministry. So thank you if that's you. With that said, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you, Lord willing, in about seven days. So until next time —

Selena: Stay fierce.

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- **Recommended resource**
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