

ARE YOU IN A TRULY CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

<https://fiercemarriage.com/are-you-in-a-truly-christian-marriage>

[00:00:00]

Selena: Ryan, what is a gospel-centered marriage? What is that? We talk about it all the time. We're doing a course on it. What in the world is this gospel-centered marriage?

Ryan: This is how Selena starts the episodes when we've just been arguing.

Selena: Let's get the ball rolling. I didn't say anything.

Ryan: Just roll it. Just roll it. Anyway, a gospel-centered marriage is a marriage that is centered on the gospel. There you go. Happy?

Selena: Done.

Ryan: Anyway, hey, you're the Fierce Marriage Podcast. You get the real deal. All right, we don't do the show here. We just show up. That's what happens. No, seriously, gospel-centeredness is of vital importance. However, it can be misunderstood. We did this episode how long ago? It was probably like two years ago.

I was kind of digging through the archives, we were preparing for our Gospel-Centered Marriage cohort, which launched a couple of weeks ago and it occurred to me that, you know what, we should probably revisit that for our dear listeners. So, friends, you're listening to the Fierce Marriage Podcast. We're going to do just that on the other side.

[00:01:07] <music>

Ryan: Selena, why are you the way you are? You guys you don't realize how malfeasant my wife is. Can you tell? Can you tell?

Selena: I don't even have to say anything. He's already just like... this is his way of crumbling.

Ryan: It is not. Anyway. Okay, gospel-centered marriage. We're going to talk about that this week.

Selena: Who are you?

Ryan: If you don't know who we are... this is what I'm talking about. If you don't know who we are, my name is Ryan. This is my lovely wife Selena, salty and sweet. Oh, what a treat.

Selena: What in the world is this? Just thump, thump over here. Clearly, our marriage is not centered on the gospel at this moment. Do you need to go repent? Do you need to go repent?

Ryan: Beauty of it is I can just edit all this out.

Selena: It's more editing for you. Do you want me to make your job worse? Longer?

Ryan: One big swath. So yeah, we're the Fierce Marriage people. We do the Fierce Marriage Podcast. We also have the Fierce Parenting Podcast, which gets a little less of the time these days.

Selena: It's been like a few months.

Ryan: We'll get something out. I promise.

Selena: I have an interview waiting. I have an interview waiting.

Ryan: It's waiting in the wings. Ruth Cho Simons. It'll be great. Anyway. So welcome to the Fierce Marriage Podcast. Just like our marriage vows, for better or worse. Anyway, if you want to partner with us, we would be honored. You know, these days when Santa just phones it in.

Selena: I wrote these things. Actually, I think you wrote this one.

Ryan: That's right. FierceMarriage.com/partner.

Selena: Thank you very much. Okay.

Ryan: So what exactly is a gospel-centered marriage? If you're listening to this, I will say this is the most important aspect of a marriage. If you're not married yet, and you come and talk to us, or you go talk to your pastor, I would hope that this is the one thing they zero in on.

Because if you don't have this at the center of your marriage, the gospel, the reality of Jesus Christ having lived, died, been resurrected, ascended into heaven, and the reality of that event, if that's not at the center of your marriage, it needs to be. Problem is, a lot of Christian couples would say it is. Right? They would say, we're Christians. Yeah, of course, I have a gospel-

centered marriage. And in reality, I'm not putting words in their mouth at this point, they're thinking, whatever that means.

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: Whatever gospel-centered means. And then you have on the other side of gospel-centeredness kind of a caricature of what it is. This is a fairly new phenomenon. And I see it crop up in some circles. So I feel it needs to be addressed here. I did address this in our cohort. If you've listened to that, I'm going to say it again. There is a stream of Christianity that is so centered on the gospel that they don't get... how do I say this? That they think anything other than that indicative statement that Christ died for your sins and you were saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone, that anything other than that takes away from that somehow.

Selena: Is it like you're missing the trees in the forest? Or are you missing the forest through the trees kind of thing?

Ryan: Well, so if you talk to a husband, and I'm encouraging him and I say, hey man, you should really pray with your wife, or you should really lead better, or you should really go get a better job. And if that guy was so inclined, he could say, well, you're just adding... you're binding my conscience. You're heaping onto me something extra to the gospel. Or like, don't try, just believe. And I'm here to say, yes, when it comes to our salvation. But our salvation has entailings. It has entailments that flow out of it.

Selena: Saved into.

Ryan: And so the word for this, the theological word for this is antinomianism. The idea that the law bears no weight on my life because Christ died and erased it. Christ didn't erase the law. He fulfilled the law. But the law was always grace. It was always good. And so when God says don't murder, that's still good to not murder. When God says don't commit adultery, that's still good. And God still loves not committing adultery. God's law is there because it's this reflection of His character. It was never just letters for us to follow. It was His character for us to grow an affection story. That's why we see the Psalmist saying: oh, how beautiful is your word? How beautiful is your law, your ways, your statutes? I want them more.

And so that's what I'm pushing back against right now is the idea that the law is null and void or the law is somehow antithetical to the gospel. That's not the case.

Selena: Not the case.

Ryan: In terms of salvation, the law is powerless to save you. It's powerless to save you, but the law is still good. Christ saved unto something. He saved unto the imperatives of the gospel, which are things like love one another, you know, give of yourself to one another, forgive.

So I've hopefully cleared some of the air around what gospel-centeredness is. The reason we want to take it up again here, and I did mention it, is it's possible to be a Christian couple and to still not be gospel-centered. So it bears some teaching, it bears some clarifying and some encouragement, so that hopefully listener or viewer, as you go home or you think about this, as you go about your day, that you can think of ways that you can be more centered on the gospel. Make sense?

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: Some tangible ways too of how we can really be loving each other the way Christ... I mean, we say this all the time. Like, how can we, how can I hold a grudge against you when I've been forgiven of so much? Like, how can I not forgive you when I've been forgiven of so much? It's rooted in all of that. So you talked about it completely hinging on the resurrection of Christ. Can you expend on that?

Ryan: Yeah. So gospel centered marriage or gospel-centeredness completely hinges on the resurrection of Christ. What I mean by that is the resurrection of Christ, not His death, is the resurrection is the center of all scripture. It is the center of all Christian doctrine. The idea that Christ did what He said He was going to do, and He didn't stay in the grave, He arose from the grave, conquered death, conquered sin, and then ascended into heaven.

So if that's the gospel, that's at the very center of it, the historicity of that event is the thing that we're hinging it all on. So if you can read... so let's read from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Selena, why don't you read this for us?

Selena: "Now I would remind you, brothers, a of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Ryan: So when we have a gospel centered marriage, we are answering an unequivocal yes to the question, this question: did Jesus raise from the dead? And you see Paul is zeroing in on it. He says, this is the thing that I preached, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day. Here's the key, in accordance with the scriptures. Why in accordance with the scriptures? Because this is all that He promised he would do. This is what the prophecy, the prophecies of the Old Testament through Isaiah and Jeremiah and in the Psalms, things that were the messianic prophecies.

So what that does is it proves that Jesus isn't just a good teacher. He's not just a philosopher. He's not just somebody to be held up alongside the other great moral teachers of history. But He's in fact, the Son of God. He's in fact, God Himself. And that who He was is true, and therefore what He did is of utmost importance. So it answers a genuine yes to that question, did Jesus raise from the dead?

And so if you're a couple and you consider yourselves Christians, but it's not something that's a big centerpiece in your life, but for whatever reason, you're listening to this podcast, I just want you to ask this question of yourselves: Do I believe Jesus Christ actually raised from the dead? And if you could say yes to that, then you have to take it to the next step. Well, if that's the case, what does that mean for my life? And that's where you start to begin the gospel-centered conversation. Because if Jesus was resurrected, one, He is God. That's John 5:18. Two, so Jesus is God.

Two, scripture is true. That's John 5:39. I'm not going to quote it, but I'll just give you the references to look up. If that's true, scripture is true, then I am who the Bible says I am. What that means is I'm made in God's image. I'm complicit in sin. I'm dead in that sin. But if I place my faith in Christ, I am saved. John 5:24-25. This is also true, that I'm only saved the way Jesus says I can be saved. He says, I am the way, the truth, the life. John 5:40 is a reference for that one. Also, if Jesus was resurrected, scripture has relevance for every aspect of my life. John 5:1-17.

In other words, if I say that Jesus is who He says He was, He raised from the dead, then I'd better perk up my ears to what He said and what He taught, and what His word says. And He said His word is true. He said he is true. He gave us the map to salvation and then I need to live accordingly.

Now place Him at the center of my life, of our marriage, of our conflict, of our communication, of our intimate life, every aspect of our marriage. It's what does Jesus say? What does he think? Not how can I rationalize? How can I win? How can I get what I want?

Selena: How can I find the scripture that fits my desires in this moment to make it work for me?

Ryan: One of the alternatives to this is we can... instead of having a gospel-centered marriage that is founded on him, now the only alternative is to found it on myself.

Selena: Which we drift into naturally if we're not actively making the gospel front and center. A couple of the couples in the cohort also expressed they've been child-centered, right? They're empty nesters. They've been child-centered for so long. Now they're just kind of looking at each other like, well, what do we do now? Who are we? Where do we go from here?

And so, they are taking this course and they're going through it, thank God, to hopefully kind of either rekindle, reconnect, kind of find each other again and being centered on the gospel and all the ways that you've expressed. I mean, you can be spouse-centered, you can be kid-centered, you can be job-centered, you can be anything-centered other than the gospel.

Ryan: And all those things, yes, are going to be some version of me-centered because I'm just spouse-centered because I want to keep her happy because that's how I feel secure. Or kid-centered because I'm placing them at the center of my universe because that makes me feel better. Or, you know, job, whatever.

Selena: How does this work itself out?

Ryan: Good question.

Selena: In like, you know, how we communicate, how we are intimate, how we decide what's a priority or not, how do we deal with conflicts in terms of being gospel-centered as a couple?

Ryan: Right. Given we have two options here, we have me-centered and gospel-centered, let's just go through a few. I think there's seven of these. There's seven kind of categories of marriage or categories of life, if you will, that can take different forms depending on what's at the center.

So, identity. Identity is a big topic in our culture. Everybody's so concerned with their identity. They identify as something, they want you to identify them as that. They see them a certain way, they want you to see them that way. So, identity that is me-centered comes from within, right? I self-actualize. I have this feeling, the sensation inside of me that determines how and who I am.

My identity is in no way imposed on me. Instead, I invent it. I am self-invented. Right. It's an amalgamation of my feelings, my accomplishments, my experiences, and my beliefs. That's a me-centered identity.

Selena: Contrast, yeah.

Ryan: Whereas gospel-centered identity is almost the complete opposite. Now, it does go to the very core of us, but it is assigned from the outside in. It's not from the inside out, but it comes from the outside in. And I know that I am valuable because I have been made in the image of God. I'm created in the creator's image. That's like identity 101 from a Christian worldview.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: But then my identity now is also filled with the realities that Christ has bought on the cross for me. As somebody who's placed his faith in Him, I am saved. I am forgiven. I am called. I am loved. I'm adopted. I am sanctified. All the blessings of Christ in His salvation are now mine in my union with Him.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: So it completely changes the nature of your identity if you're gospel-centered versus being centered on yourself.

Selena: How we might see this in communication, being understood and heard is of ultimate importance. I'm all about getting empathy. If I'm me-centered in my communication, I want to be heard, I want your empathy, I want you to say all the things that I need to hear. It's all about me, right? It's the me-centeredness.

Where in contrast, the gospel-centered type of communication is... someone whose gospel-centered is listening. I'm seeking to understand what you're saying and understanding and finding unity and resolve or resolution. Those are the priorities. It's not just about winning an argument. It's not about just being heard. It's about, I'm saying these things like, let's say these things to get resolution. Let's say these things to find our unity again. Let's communicate in a way that is God-honoring, even when we're having conflict. There are boundaries of things that we say and do not say and how we say things and when we say things. Let's do it in a way that honors God and not just how we feel when we want to do it, whatever. There's some governing, once again, from the Lord.

Ryan: Yeah. I think the me-centered version of all of these is going to be utterly selfish. The purest gospel-centered version of all of these is going to be utterly

selfless. I'm going to be looking outward to what God thinks and to how I can love according to that because I'm secure because the gospel has made that true.

Me-centered view of intimacy and sex, moving on down this list. For the me-centered person in a marriage, intimacy exists to fulfill my personal needs, my desires. If at any point I'm not happy, it's because I'm not being fulfilled the way that I deserve to be. Whatever your role in that is, I'm going to show you and we're going to work that out.

Whereas the gospel-centered view of intimacy and sex is this. Intimacy is an opportunity to know and to serve and to enjoy your spouse unto the glory of God and for the good of your union. You see, intimacy is a gift from God given for a purpose. It's not just for you. It's not just physical, but it has all these different purposes that are biblical, that are ordained by God and blessed by him. It's not about me. It's all about him while also being very much about us because we're not just spiritual beings. We have these physical bodies that intimacy is very involved in. You can see how the glory of it is rolled up and given to God.

Selena: In terms of priorities, a me-centered person... Sorry, let's just recap real quick. We've talked about identity, being me-centered and gospel-centered, communication, intimacy, and sex. Now we're talking about priorities and then conflict and money.

Priorities. A me-centered person is my life is oriented around what's most important to me. When that comes to hobbies, there's families that life is oriented around things other than God. Insert sports, insert whatever. There's just other things that they're oriented around. Whereas a gospel-centered marriage is going to be oriented... We're striving to orient our life around what's most important to God, whether that's a regular gathering with the saints on Sunday morning, prayer, spending time together praying, spending time together, reading scriptures, spending time together training, and teaching our children. Also, of course, yes, having fun and recreating together. Those are things that are important. It's not trying to be legalistic.

Ryan: It doesn't mean you become monks, so to speak.

Selena: No.

Ryan: It doesn't mean that you just all of a sudden have zero desires outside of going to church or reading your Bible. But all of it is founded in that seed. It says, I am not just going to work because I want the job or I want the promotion or I want the things the work gives me. I'm going to work because God has given

me this job to care for my family. Therefore, even if it's terrible in the season, or even if it's hard, or even if it's not what I want it to be, it's centered on that reality that God's given it to me. It's oriented around Him.

Selena: I'm going to be faithful and God is governing those desires and He's ordering the priorities of our lives.

Ryan: All right. So we're going to do conflict next. Me-centered conflict looks like this. You want to avoid conflict typically in order to-

Selena: By whatever means.

Ryan: By whatever means. Yeah, you can be passive-aggressive. You can just be a doormat or you can be super passive as a man. But you avoid conflict in order to keep the peace or you engage in conflict in order to prevail and win. Whereas a gospel-centered view of conflict in marriage sees conflict as necessary. It's a welcome process, which we pursue it in, caveat, healthy ways for an end, which is to be sanctified and be reconciled, to be made more holy and to be brought back together. So gospel-centered conflict, man, I can tell you that's a game changer. All right.

The final one, I'll just do it quickly, is me-centered view of money. Right? In other words, when I see money as a means by which I self-actualize, by a means I get what I want, in that instance, I am trusting my job. I'm working feverishly. I'm spending with patterns in order to maximize my status or my ease or in some other times I pursue security through my wealth. So I see it as a means by which I am fulfilling my own desires. I'm getting the wealth and security that I hope for.

Gospel-centered view of money sees money as a tool. It is a means to an end. It is not worthy of any pursuit in itself. Instead, it's a tool God gives us so that we might provide, so that we might advance the kingdom, that we might give back to those in our lives as He leads and to pursue God's purposes. So you can see the contrast between me-centered.

So, friends, we're just, lots of Christian couples will say, yes, we believe in Jesus, yes, we believe in God, we believe the Bible, but they'll functionally live with a me-centered view, if not in all of these areas, maybe just in one or two. But the point is, there's a very big difference between a Christian marriage that is me-centered and a Christian marriage that is gospel-centered.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: And so our whole mission is to help you center your marriage on the gospel. And so to that end, Selena, how do we become a gospel-centered marriage? What can we do from here?

Selena: I think we can repent if we have not been living in a gospel-centered way and ask the Lord to help you recognize areas that you've been putting yourself at the center. That's one of the first ways that I am always like, God, where are my blind spots? What am I missing here? How am I living selfishly? Repent to the Lord, repent to your spouse, and then look ahead, move forward, and find... maybe go through Gospel-Centered Marriage, the course, and find ways that you can be more centered on the gospel in terms of how can we work out our communication?

Look at the tension points in your marriage and where's that consistent tension happening and start digging there. Start going there. And line it up with scriptures. What does scripture inform us on how we're supposed to communicate to each other? What does scripture tell us about our priorities or money?

And if you don't know where to start, go ask your pastor, go find a brother or sister in the Lord to give you some guidance and some instruction on where to start. But God is faithful and good, and it is a good thing to pursue and don't get hung up in feeling lost, like pressed through in that.

Ryan: Yeah. And again, we don't have any idea where you're coming from in your faith. Start there. Repent. Say, Lord, I have not done this, help me. Now here's how He's already helped is He has given to you His word. So I highly recommend getting into God's word, open up the Bible, and read the thing.

Selena: Know it for yourself.

Ryan: You read in James where it says that, you know, you should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to anger. Well, that's very instructive for how we center our communication on the gospel. Why am I slow to become angry? Well, because I need to be quick to understand and I need to be asking questions and introspective in a healthy way, knowing that I'm not perfect and all these things. If you don't know God's word, you can't know how to do these things. So it's very practical.

Another thing that God has given you is, and we say this all the time, I'll say it again, is God's given to you the church. In fact, He's given you to the church in a sense, right? That you are the church. If you're a Christian, you're the church. But that involves a body of believers. It doesn't mean out there somewhere. It means people that you actually know and who know you, who can help you

with these things. Older couples who have been through it. You can go to them and say, "Here's the thing that we're dealing with." As a husband, I'm blind. What am I missing here? What does God's word have to say about this? And if he doesn't know that guy you're talking to, then he'll probably go look it up with you and you can learn how to go find it.

So this is how we become a gospel-centered marriage. It's actually not that difficult. I'll say it's very, very simple, but it's not easy, right?

Selena: Yes. That's better. I was going to say, not that difficult as if we do not have it perfected.

Ryan: But I'm just saying it's pretty straightforward. It's just not easy.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: And it takes a whole lot of help from the Lord, from the Holy Spirit. And it's going to be the rest of your life as a married couple.

Selena: And learn to be resilient in it. Yeah.

Ryan: Certainly we're not perfect, as you saw at the outset of this episode.

Selena: Get through it.

Ryan: Gotta stick with it. I love you.

Selena: Love you too.

Ryan: This is good. Okay.

Selena: If you need Jesus in your life. Not if. You do. But we always like to end these episodes with that.

Ryan: Yes. We talk about the gospel this whole time. And the gospel is simply this. The reality, the news, the truth that Jesus Christ came, He was who He said He was. He died an unjust death, a sinner's death He did not deserve on our behalf, went into the grave, was dead, stone cold dead, rose back to life and then ministered for a few days, ascended into heaven, and basically said, repent and believe in me and you'll be saved. Like that's the gospel.

He didn't say, do all these things and you'll be saved. Follow the law perfectly, you'll be saved. Continue doing the sacrificial system in the Old Testament, you'll be saved. Be a good person, you'll be saved. No. He said, repent and

believe the gospel. Repent and believe that I am the Savior and you'll have eternal life. That's what He said.

So if you don't know that, if you don't believe that, we want you to believe that. And we want you to step down that path. We always recommend new believers or would-be believers do this. Talk to a friend who's a Christian, if you have one. If you have one, you likely know who they are. Give them a call, shoot them a text, say, can we meet for coffee? I want to talk about Jesus with you. I guarantee you, you'll make that person's day.

Number two, hopefully that person has a church they're going to, go to church with them. If you don't have a friend that you can think of or a church that you can think of, we have a website that will help you. It's thenewsisgood.com. There's a church finder there. It actually points to the Ligonier Church Finder, which is a solid organization that we trust. They'll point you to a good church in your area. Sound good?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for your gospel. Thank you that you died for us, that you arose from the grave and you've invited us into salvation by placing our faith in you. Not only that, you've given us the faith that we need. Holy Spirit, you've enlivened our hearts and turned our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. It is by your grace that we are saved through faith, and that faith itself is a gift from you. So thank you, Lord, for that. Thank you for your grace. Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for your mercy.

Lord, I pray for the couples that are striving and struggling and feeling like they're hitting their heads against the wall. Lord, I pray that you would give them breakthrough. You would give them encouragement, that they would have eyes of faith not to give up. Lord, I pray that you'd give them unity in that, that supernaturally they would both want the same thing. They would want to be reconciled unto you and reconciled unto each other. Lord, that they might not pursue the destructive path of divorce. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Amen. Amen. Thank you so much for joining us for this episode of Fierce Marriage. Again, if you want to partner with us, we would be honored by that, go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. That community is just a budding... it's a cornucopia of delights.

Selena: That word does not-

Ryan: What? Cornucopia? It's a great word. It's a great word. Anyway, thank you for listening to this episode of Fierce Marriage episode of the Fierce Marriage podcast. With that said, this episode is—

Selena: In the can.

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

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1-4
 - John 5:18
 - John 5:39
 - John 5:24-25
 - John 5:40
 - John 5:1-17
- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

FIERCE MARRIAGE RESOURCES

Main Site: <https://fiercemarriage.com/>

Shop: <https://shop.fiercemarriage.com/>

Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/fiercemarriage>

Podcast: <https://fiercemarriage.com/podcast>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/fiercemarriage>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/fiercemarriage>

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/fiercemarriage>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/fiercemarriage>

Pinterest: <https://pinterest.com/fiercemarriage>

Ask Us Anything: <https://fiercemarriage.com/ask>