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Resurrecting a Marriage

Guest: Marvin and Linda Rooks
From the series: Fighting For Marriage While Separated (Day 3 of 3)
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Bob: When Marv and Linda Rooks separated, it was Marv who moved out, he's the one who packed up and moved away. Linda felt like he was responsible for their separation. But that all changed one evening.

Linda: In the middle night, I woke up and it was like all of a sudden God put in front of me this picture of Linda that was not a really great person, after all. You know, I mean, she had these ugly attitudes, she was self-righteous, she was feeling sorry for herself. All of a sudden, I saw myself in a way I did not like, and I thought, "This is not all his fault."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine.

We'll hear today how God took a couple that had been separated for three years and began to work to bring them back together as husband and wife. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

It's interesting to me that as we're talking this week about couples who are separated in marriage, they are either emotionally separated, living under the same house; or they're actually physically separated and thinking about divorce as their option, it's interesting that we would think, "This is a crisis that needs to be dealt with quickly. This is an emergency. You jump right in." Yet, what we're hearing this week is that maybe a part of the strategy needs to be to just give things a little bit of time and just leave some space in here for God to be at work.

Even as I'm saying that, I almost am like, "That feels wrong, to—"

Ann: Yes! I am so impatient, and I think in our culture we want quick fixes.

Dave: We want Amazon marriages. We want it delivered to our front door tomorrow.
[Laughter]

Ann: The next day. Yes.

Dave: By a drone, right?

Ann: So to hear years feels like forever. It feels like that feels so wrong.

Bob: Well, and we've also known couples in separations that it just never goes anywhere and ultimately the divorce happens, so it's not like leaving time is the silver bullet, the magic bullet that's going to solve all your problems. But as we've already said this week, if you try to quickly reconcile and just go back to old patterns and old habits, you'll find yourself in the same situation you were in before.

We have friends joining us this week, Marv and Linda Rooks. Marv, Linda, welcome back to *FamilyLife Today*.

Linda: Thank you.

Marv: Glad to be here.

Bob: This is your story that we're talking about this week, and since it was your story, two decades ago, you have gone on now to talk to couples who are in the same situation you were in. You've talked with hundreds of couples over the years, led a class at your church, Marriage 911, to help couples who are in emergency situations know the kind of path they ought to be one.

I was interested—your separation occurred at the beginning of the empty nest years for you. It happened kind of impulsively on an Easter Sunday, when Marv, you just said, "I'm out of here," and went and checked into a condo and said, "I'm not going back and I like my freedom and I'm not sure where this is going, but I'm just going to live like this for awhile." You got a little panicky in that moment, Linda.

You said that there came a point where a counselor persuaded the two of you to get back together. You moved back in. Did things seem normal to the two of your for those two months you were back together?

Linda: No, they seemed very much the same as they had been before. I mean, I was walking on eggshells because I didn't want to lose it—

Ann: You didn't want him to leave again. And he did.

Linda: Yes.

Bob: Were you coming home every night thinking, "I really don't want to be here"?

Marv: One of the worst fears that I had—and I tell people in our Marriage 911 group—the last thing we want to do is to make you spend the rest of your life with a person just because you think that this is the right thing to do or what God wants you to do.

Bob: Right.

Marv: We want you to spend the time with a person because you love them and God has joined you together.

Bob: Yes. This is not, “Go gut it out and be miserable because that’s the right thing to do.”

Marv: Yes. Now, I’m not saying I was miserable, but I didn’t see any real change. It wasn’t until some things happened later that laid the foundation for us to have these 20 years we have now.

Bob: When you checked out the second time, was there a trigger event that caused that to happen, or were you just seeing, “He’s no different. In fact, maybe he’s living a different life—I’m not sure I want this man around my house.”

Linda: I think I started realizing at that point that, you know, I didn’t like some of the things he was involved and some of the lifestyle that he had. I felt like, you know, if we were going to have a marriage, that kind of needed to end. So we had a discussion one afternoon, and I said, “I really feel like you need to choose either that lifestyle or choose our marriage with me.”

Bob: And you said, “Okay, I’m out.”

Marv: Yes.

Bob: You have talked, Marv, about having drifted in your relationship. You weren’t accountable to your friends, you weren’t going to church anymore, you’re not reading your Bible.

Marv: Right.

Bob: I mean, spiritual stuff was completely off the table, and this new of doing life, of going out drinking and partying and living life differently than you’d lived it before was kind of appealing to you at the time.

Marv: It was. It was more appealing than going back to the marriage that we had.

Bob: Linda, when you sat with him and said, “You have to choose our marriage or this lifestyle,” and he said, “Okay, it’s the lifestyle,” was that like getting kicked in the gut a second time?

Linda: Yes. Yes, it was, and I remember watching him drive out the driveway and go off, and I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't believe that he had really chosen that. It was really heart-wrenching; it truly was.

Ann: In this time, you had been praying that Marv would be reconnected with Jesus, so when he left that second time, even spiritually, did you feel like, "God, what are You doing? What's taking so long?"

Linda: Well, at that point I probably had not been praying that much about him changing or whatever. I was kind of looking at it more like, "You know, I've lived a good life. Why is this happening? I don't deserve this."

Bob: So this was the beginning of a spiritual journey that God had you on to bring you to a place where you understood Him differently than you had before.

Linda: This was really probably more the beginning. I remember going to this pastor at our church and telling him what had happened, and he said, "Linda, when a marriage comes apart like that and somebody leaves, it's usually not that they want to divorce the person in the marriage, they want to divorce the form of the marriage."

He didn't explain what he meant, but it just intrigued me. I thought, "What does he mean by changing the form of the marriage?"

So I started reading every book I could, every Christian book, listening to all the Christian leaders on the radio, and that's when I started really digging into the Lord and really wanting to know what God had for me.

Bob: What were the awakening moments for you? Where did you start to go, "Oh, that's different than I've thought about this before"? Do you remember?

Linda: Well, there was one thing that really did hit me, and it was talking about the difference of men and women and how they respond to different things. It was talking about the emotional needs of a man versus the emotional needs of a woman, and when I read what the emotional needs of a man were, it was so different than what I thought. Emotional need of a man is acceptance, trust, admiration, encouragement, those kinds of things; and I was just being very thoughtful and kind and loving like what a woman wants, you know.

So when I realized that, I thought, "I have not been doing any of these things. This is not what I've been doing at all." So I realized that I needed to make some changes in the way that I spoke to him. So I started, when we would have a conversation, I would say something very positive...

Bob: Were you seeing a difference, Marv?

Marv: Yes. Yes, very slowly. It wasn't like, "Oh, she did this." She just started to create this environment that was safe for me. I could tell the truth and we would discuss it rather than go off the deep end. That was huge for me.

Linda: I want to go back to one thing that I think is important, too. Another friend, when we were out together one day—again, I was talking about everything that was happening. She said to me, "Linda, put him on the back burner and focus on God and what He wants to show you." That was really an important moment, too. You asked me about important moments. I started really spending more time in the Word and everything, at that point. That was the point I started doing that.

There was another very pivotal moment, and it was when I had been talking to his mother—he had a really sweet mother, and we had a great relationship—and I'd been talking to her one night, and she was very encouraging. I went home, and somehow I was thinking about our conversation, and I was thinking, "She was supportive of me, but there was something in her eyes that was saying, 'Don't you have a part in this, too?'"

In the middle of the night I woke up, and it was like this blaring picture of myself that I didn't like. It was like all of a sudden God put in front of me this picture of Linda that was not a really great person, after all. I mean, she had these ugly attitudes, she was self-righteous, she was feeling sorry for herself; things like that. There were a lot of negative attitudes. All of a sudden I saw myself in a way I did not like, and I thought, "This is not all his fault. I have a lot of fault in this, too."

It just absolutely floored me, because I had been going along thinking I was the good person—this was a year after we separated. So that night I even wrote him a letter, not that I was intending to send it to him, but I just wrote a letter. I did end up sending it to him, I believe, but I realized that, "No, we're both fallen creatures and I'm as much at fault as you are because of my attitudes and things like that."

So that was a really eye-opening time for me.

Then, shortly after that—it was like two weeks after that—I went to a women's Bible study, and they were talking about Hebrews 12, about "the Lord disciplines those he loves," and I thought, "Okay, God, I get the message! You're talking to me, You're disciplining me, and You're showing me the things that I need to do that are different, and You're showing me how I need to change."

Bob: When your separation was a year, year-and-a-half old, there's been no talk of reconciliation at this point. There's also been no talk of divorce, or was there talk of, "Maybe we should just finalize this?"

Linda: Well, when he left the second time he did say, "Okay, maybe we should just get a divorce." Then for four months I thought maybe that was the case. But then our daughters was graduating from college and we both went up to see her, and the same

friend that had been our mediator before gave me some advice, and he said, “Now when you fly together, don’t talk about your issues. Just have a good time together.” So I did that, and I followed what he said.

So we went up there, and of course when our daughter graduated, after the graduation she wasn’t interested in spending time with us, she wanted to be with all of her friends that she wouldn’t be seeing. So he and I were left alone, and we went to dinner together. So at dinner I said, “Well, are you still thinking of divorce?” He said, “No, I’ve changed my mind. I don’t think so.”

At that point I thought, “Okay, things are going to start changing, things will start getting better, we’ll start seeing each other,” but we didn’t really. It was awhile before—

Ann: And you guys did start dating eventually. How did that happen?

Linda: That was when our daughter was getting married. That was about a year and a half later on. At that point I was really angry with him, and I went on a fast, because I thought, “Okay, our daughter’s getting married. I don’t want to ruin her wedding with what’s going on with us.”

I was praying, and I really felt God leading me to invite Marv to help me pick out the food for the wedding reception. So I did. We went and we went on a walk and we had a nice time, and we enjoyed each other.

After that, he started asking me to go out to a movie or to dinner or to something like that, so we started this period of time that I now call “friendship dating.” It was totally friendship; it wasn’t anything romantic or anything, we just went out and spent time together, and we got to know each other again as friends, as the new people we were becoming. We were each becoming new people.

Bob: This period happened after you had been confronted, Marv, by guys in the church who had come and said, “What is going on with you? What are you doing?” Right?

Marv: It was about the same time.

Bob: Yes.

Marv: These things seemed like little things, but when you add them together, they were huge to me.

Bob: Yes.

Marv: I remember one night I asked her out on a date, and I can’t think of the name of this movie, but it was three women whose husbands had divorced them—you’ve probably heard of it—

Ann: “First Wives—” [Laughter] Yes, I remember that!

Bob: He took her to see “First Wives”! [Laughter]

Marv: Yes, she wanted to see it. I wasn’t sure what it was at the time.

Ann: Did you know what it was about, Linda?

Linda: Not really. [Laughter]

Marv: So I sat there in agony for an hour and a half, and everything that she and I had experienced negatively I’m watching on the screen.

Bob: Yes.

Marv: So I said, “Oh, boy. I’ll tell you what; maybe I ought to just run out the exit over there and pretend—I’m going to get it when this is over.”

When it was over, she didn’t bring up one of those subjects. She just said, “That was an interesting movie,” you know, whatever. All of the defenses that I had, I just didn’t have to deal with them. You know, it wasn’t anything manipulative on her part; she just felt like—once again, I keep saying this word over and over—she created an environment of safety for me, where I could get back in and be myself and I didn’t have to come in and be some romantic person or defend myself against some situation like this.

Ann: You didn’t have to jump through all the hoops.

Marv: Exactly! It was like when we first started.

Bob: At the end of those dates, did you kiss her goodnight?

Marv: No.

Linda: No. I kind of didn’t let him at that point.

Bob: Yes?

Linda: At one point he tried and I kind of backed away, because—and that’s another part of it being safe, you know. You need to just have a safe time, because if you’re romantically working on it your heart’s going to be torn back and forth. One of the Scriptures that I love to quote is Proverbs 4:23, “Guard your heart, for the heart is the wellspring of life.”

Bob: So, how long from when you started dating before you're at the Christmas party and he does grab you and kiss you?

Linda: Yes. Yes, he took me to a firm Christmas party.

Bob: This is your law firm.

Marv: Yes.

Linda: Yes, right.

Bob: So you go to the Christmas party. How long had you been dating at this point?

Linda: It had been almost a year.

Bob: A year of going out and having fun, just enjoying one another?

Ann: Laughing.

Bob: So, tell me what happened at the Christmas party?

Linda: Well, they were doing a white elephant game. We had gotten one that was really funny, so we were laughing about it. All of a sudden, he grabbed me and kissed me, and it was like we just sank into each other's arms, and it was like, "This is what I want. This is it. We want to get back together."

Bob: He kissed you and you kissed him back.

Linda: Absolutely. [Laughter]

Marv: I need to say here that it really did just happen. Two minutes later we were not walking up the stairs. That needs to be clear.

Bob: Right. Right.

Marv: I can't remember what was going through my mind, but I said, "Okay, this is safe. As long as I don't push my decision, and I really had fun tonight, and this is an appropriate way to express it."

At that point, I had gotten back in the church. I went to two guys (and it ended up being four). One of the guys, Kip, he was very direct, and he said, "How would you like to meet once a week with me and we'll study the Scripture and get you back into where you need to be?"

So we started meeting together at his house at six a.m. on Thursday—and that eventually expanded to several more guys—and I just said, “Guys, I’m giving you permission to hold me accountable in life.”

Bob: Wow.

Marv: What I tell people in my group, and I think Linda does the same thing, is that unless you are hooked into Jesus, you don’t have much of a chance. Most men get up every morning and the first thing that they do is say hello to their favorite person in life, themselves. [Laughter] They look in the mirror.

The only way that you can get to the point of where you can love someone else more than yourself is through the power of the Holy Spirit. I had let that go.

Bob: Sounds to me like he recognized that if his relationship and his marriage and his other relationships were going to work out right, he had to vertical. I mean, I hate to throw that title in here, but—

Dave: Well, I’m glad you brought that up, Bob! I’ve never heard that before! [Laughter]

Yes, I mean, as I’m listening, you know, it’s obvious that going vertical or putting Jesus first is priority number one for you, and that is really the end of it. But another big piece, you just have to remind all of us, is the safety you created in understanding one another is huge. I mean, I’m listening to your story and I’m thinking, “Men run, when they’re affirmed, to that.” It’s a magnet. In some ways, you brought your husband back.

You know, Jesus did this, but you created a place where he wanted to run to. He was running away from that before, and I think women need to understand that. I know it goes both ways, but man, it was a magnet. You understood, you started to affirm, and you called it a safe place, but really you gave grace to let Marv be Marv, not a man without God, but a man with God, but to be who he was, and he ran back to that. That’s why you grabbed her that night. It was all that coming together. It was like, “There’s the grace of God being shown to me to accept me as who I am. She really does love me.”

Bob: I think listeners need to understand your book is not simply your story. Your book is practical information to help people who are in the midst of a separation. Guys, thank you for your transparency this week, for letting us into your story, and for how God has been using your story for two decades to help hundreds of couples understand how they can move toward oneness in their marriage again. Thanks for being here.

Linda: Thanks for having us.

Marv: Thank you very much.

Bob: You know, what Marvin and Linda have shared with us this week is really central to who we are here at FamilyLife, effectively developing godly marriages and families, and helping couples lean into the covenant when times get hard. We have the President of FamilyLife joining us, and hearing this story reminds us of why we exist, doesn't it?

David: I mean, this is one of the core reasons FamilyLife exists, absolutely, Bob. One of our core values is to help couples fight the drift toward isolation in marriage, because no couple naturally drifts toward oneness. That's something we say often at *Weekends to Remember*. We want to help couples grow toward real oneness, and really fight for it. I just love how Marvin and Linda fought for their marriage, cling to Jesus, and have a redemption story to tell.

It reminds me of something Matt Chandler once said. You don't really need to make a vow to stick with someone in the best of times; the inclination to run doesn't exist then. It's the low times that the covenant is made for.

I love seeing God at work. This is what we're about at FamilyLife: a covenant relationship growing even stronger through the valley. It's a tough valley sometimes, and a lot of marriages go through these moments, maybe not as extreme as this, but marriage can be hard, and we're about pushing people to Jesus to cling to him and grow closer in the context and the covenant.

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