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A Shared Vision

Guests: Joel and Nina Schmidgall
From the series: Praying Circles Around Your Marriage (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: Are you and your spouse on the same page when it comes to your marriage relationship / your family? Are you both pulling in the same direction? Joel Schmidgall says that's important for every couple.

Joel: Any time—two—as the Scripture says, two are becoming one, something has to die, and I think there is something in my individual vision that has to die when I come together as one with this woman. So, first, I need to let go of those previous things. Then, second, to find a vision together—we do go through this process from values to vision to purpose. So, values: What's important to you? Vision: a shared way of seeing; purpose: a shared way of doing.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll talk today with Joel and Nina Schmidgall about how praying together as a couple can help us get on the same page and be in alignment with God's purposes for our marriage. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I'm just curious about both of you. Is one of you more prone to move to prayer quickly than the other?

Dave: Oh, yes. [Laughter] Oh, yes.

Bob: You didn't miss a beat on that one.

Dave: No. My wife is a prayer warrior.

Bob: Really?

Dave: It's actually awesome.

Ann: It's because I'm needy.

Bob: I think a lot of people will default toward action—

Dave: Yes.

Bob: —right?—in the middle of whatever you need. So, you strap it on, you go, and you act. Then, when that's not working, then you pray.

Ann: I've had enough bad action. I am—because I am a doer—

Bob: Yes.

Ann: —I'm like—"Let's get this done." I think I've done that so much in my flesh, and it hasn't turned out well—that I've learned the habit of going to God first.

Dave: I mean, honestly, she has brought—really in the last five years / seven years—a whole new prayer energy to our marriage.

Bob: Really?

Dave: It's really been beautiful. Sort of when we were sitting down to write the book and that kind of thing, she sort of said, "We need to be praying together every single day." I'm like—"No; we don't; you know? We do a little bit here and there." It was like—"No; let's be intentional about this." It changed our marriage, and I'm not saying our marriage went from a five to a ten. I'm just saying, "Our perspective on ourselves changed everything."

Ann: I think it's gotten better because I would get resentful that Dave wouldn't lead. So, then I'd have this attitude like—"Well, I thought you were the spiritual leader." I thought, "You're not going to do it. I'm not going to do it." So, then I'd lay there stewing at night, bitter, and resentful. I felt like God said, "If I put it on your heart and I'm prompting you by the Holy Spirit, why don't you just initiate." So, then I started to do that without that resentment like—"Oh, yes; God put it on my heart. I'm going to do it."

Dave: I will add this. I don't want to take too much time, but a life-changing moment, 11 P.M. / 11:30 at night, Sunday night preached all morning, four or five services, exhausted—we're going to sleep, and she says, as I'm closing my eyes—

Ann: This wasn't good.

Dave: It changed my life—eventually—not in the moment. But she said, "Boy, I wish the guy who stood on our stage and led our church and prayed with passion was the same guy that I was married to—something like that.

Joel: Wow.

Dave: At first, I was like—"Wait; did she just rip me?" So, I turn. I'm like—"What are saying?" She was saying, "I watched you this morning. You're full of passion. You are praying with fervor. See, I rarely see in my home." I got mad.

Joel: Wow.

Dave: The next day, I went into my little prayer closet—not literally a closet—just my office. I said, "God, were You speaking?" He goes—"Yes." I would say the people of our church would say, "Dave Wilson is a man of prayer." My wife would say, "Dave Wilson is not a man of prayer." I would say to every guy listening right now—"That was a moment I said, 'You know what? She's right. I need to change, and I can change. I am going to change. I am going to lead her." Again, I'm not the greatest at this; but it was like—"This is a decision I need to make."

How hard is it to bring prayer into your marriage? It can be done. Let's do it. Let's start right now.

Bob: Explain to our listeners why we are talking about this subject today.

Dave: We are talking about this because we are sitting here with a book in our hands called *Praying Circles around Your Marriage* with Joel and Nina Schmidgall. This is a great book about prayer and your marriage. So, they're the experts. I'm just a rookie at this thing; but we are going to talk about what that looks like.

Bob: Joel and Nina are both on staff at National Community Church in Washington, D.C., where Mark Batterson is the pastor. He wrote a book called *The Circle Maker* years ago. You've taken that idea and said, "Let's apply this to marriage relationships." Before you applied it to other marriage relationships, you had to figure out how you were going to apply it to your marriage relationship; right? Has this been foundational to your relationship since you were dating?

Joel: Since we were dating? We've got to go back a little bit for that one. I grew up in a foundation of prayer, and my parents really modeled prayer for me. So, a pivot moment growing up for me was when I was back in Chicago and we had these storm windows—I think you guys probably have them in your homes. We don't in D.C.—but so, at night time, I could sneak out the basement storm window and sneak back in. So, it was like 3:30 A.M., and I'm sneaking back in. I hear my dad praying in the other room. He would get up every day at 3:30 A.M.—

Bob: Wow.

Joel: —pray for an hour, read the paper, go to the office, pray for another hour at the church. So, he was a man of prayer. So, I hear him calling out my name to the Almighty.

Nina: Yes.

Joel: Here I am sneaking back in the house, and it was one of those moments where it's not just that prayer is something that he talks to us about; but he lives it, and he acted on it. So, I always grew up knowing that prayer changes, and it changed me. My

life was changed. So, I think we did. We always had an element of that being a foundation for us early on; but we did over time grow in what that looks like in both our lives.

Nina: Joel's dad passed when he was in Bible school. So, by the time we met one another, I never got to meet his dad; but very clearly, you realized that there really is this legacy of prayer. The impression I always got was that people really coveted the intimacy he had with the Lord. It wasn't just about petitioning the Lord for things. It was about a very trusted relationship there.

I am actually not from a family of faith. I met the Lord in youth ministry when I was invited by a friend. So, my journey really was always very much my own. You know I share in the book about a lot of insecurities that I felt probably even about marriage; and in the writing of the book, I knew in my spirit that I had dreamt of a healthy and whole marriage really before I even understood what that was from a very young age.

So, I went back to my journals just out of curiosity: "Would I ever find anything in there?" I found a little book that I had written. It was a class project, I think, in the third grade. In there, it had a list called, "Someday": "Someday, I will go to Japan." "Someday, I will do this." "Someday, I will be married, and a happy marriage—it will be." So, I mean I just had tears reading these words of an eight-year-old kid who didn't even know who Jesus was; and that He really is the hero and the model even what a marriage relationship is about.

We dated for quite a long time because we had to reconcile those two backgrounds. I had faith for a long time at that point already; but to have to navigate the insecurities on what is a healthy marriage founded and what does that, you know, look like. My prayer relationship with the Lord has always been pretty strong; but as we've started to step into marriage, all of those insecurities about—did I even know what a healthy marriage was? Could I even have it?

Anytime we had a conflict or anytime he expressed, maybe, doubt during our relationship—all of those insecurities would flare again. Even now when we will step into conflict, some of those feelings of "I don't know what I'm doing," "I haven't had this modelled for me," "I am set up to probably fail here," really developed a desire or a need to just beg the Lord for His leading / beg the Lord for Him to show me and lead me the way / beg the Lord for it to be out of His leading, not of my own and to not, maybe, kind of repeat patterns or history.

A lot of people ask us about the writing process—I don't know what your experience was—but we'll say, "Oh, a book on marriage—what was that like?!" I say to spend a year / spend an amount of time reflecting on what makes our marriage work / reflecting on what are the times that we stumbled and what did we learn through those things / reflecting on what do we believe God intends for marriage and to try to put words to that

was, I think, a very beautiful process; and I think we are still experiencing the fruit of that now.

Ann: There aren't very many marriage books that talk about the Toyota way.

Nina: Yes. You know we talked earlier about the role of prayer in marriage, and one of things we say is that prayer is the best evaluator. It is through prayer that we understand our own brokenness that we are bringing to a situation. It is prayer that God can reveal to us fresh understanding.

So, we were speaking in, actually, Bowling Green, Ohio, at a marriage conference there and shared about the Toyota way. Toyota—you know a lot of their success is dependent upon this principle which is about incremental changes over time. Individuals new to the automotive floor are encouraged—there is a circle that they have to stand inside, and their first task is just to take a look around.

Our prayer or hope is that this book becomes a tool for continual improvement and that couples would start by just getting inside. Of course, by circle, we mean—that's metaphorical; but maybe, it does help if you pick a rug in your home, and you take a look around.

The circles that we have in the book are areas we thought, either, in our own marriage or with couples that we counsel or work alongside—that these are seven circles that if couples would invite that evaluated look—that if you would lean in intentionally in these seven areas that there really would be an improvement or that the Lord would begin to reveal to you.

Joel: One of the highest divorce rates with empty-nesters. The kids leave, and then you face up to all the challenges and issues that you have. So, what you realize is there was no evaluated experience along the way. There was no touch point. So, that's another element of praying into your marriage. It's touch points that you have to make sure you're going in the right direction and listening to one another and growing together. So, that's kind of the concept.

Dave: So, there is no big circle in the middle of your home that you stand in? No.

Nina: No.

Dave: But you do evaluate, and you take it to the Lord—

Nina: Yes.

Dave: —which is what we're talking about. I think so many couples—I know we've done this—we talk, talk, talk rarely pray, pray, pray about the things we're talking about. So, this is a whole other dynamic to encourage couples to say, "Let's talk. We need to talk;

but what about praying about this and listening as well." So, let's talk about the first one—the vision circle. Getting a vision for your marriage / a purpose / a mission. What does that look like?

Joel: Yes; well, vision—you know—the idea of playing offense in your marriage is vision. I think most of us get to marriage, and we feel like—"Okay; I made it to the finish line"—instead of the starting line. So, we think we've done all the hard work, and we just let things happen. We have love, and that will take over; but there is a chemistry of love.

Science shows us that in the first 18-months / 24-months of a relationship that you the adrenaline is pumping, and all these chemicals are—three different chemicals are working together to create this element of love within you. So, within that first 18 to 24 months, everything is just kind of taking up in a tidal wave; but then, after that, your brain shifts. It kind of readjusts into a more settled state, and that's when a lot of breakups happen. That's when a lot of—

Ann: We would call that the reality phase. [Laughter]

Joel: Yes; yes. That's the truth. So, at that point you realize, "Okay; what's driving us forward." So, we talk about the idea of vision being the driver. So, when you take the word division, it literally—you know it's the prefix di- and the word vision. Di- meaning two. So, you have two visions. Then it's division that leads us apart. So, we ask that the Lord might give us / might grant us a vision together. So, we talk a little bit about that process. What does that look like? How do you find a vision in your marriage?

We go into Mark, Chapter 8, and we talk about that; but we go from value to vision to purpose.

Nina: Well, that's a lot of—that's just sharing kind of our own story of coming into an understanding of God's purpose to use us together. Probably a lot of the burden of this vision circle is from some of the work we do—especially with couples in D.C.

I would say what many marriages are facing is, as people are coming into marriage with two unique callings—particularly as women are having their passion in certain areas or feeling drawn in the Lord. We see many young couples that we work with will step into marriage with two callings / two visions and feel very inspired by that from one another. Then over time, maybe, feel that that can start to pull them apart.

Ann: Well, they could have two different visions—right?—

Nina: Yes.

Ann: —that they are going two different ways.

Nina: Two different directions. What happens—and actually this is part of our story, and Joel shared before about just a season that was very difficult for us. I came to D.C. to work for the United States Congress. I had a career, kind of, doing that. As the church grew and as our family began to grow, I eventually had to make a decision and stepped away from that.

Not too long ago—a number of years ago—as our kids were getting a little bit older and had started school, and I started to wrestle with, probably, some feelings of resentment / some feelings of "Did give too much up" / "Did I put too much down". The most peaceful moments I've, of course, feel the greatest peace about nothing that I would sacrifice for our children or for our marriage or for our ministry with the Lord not honor; but in the hard moments is: "Did I give up too much of myself, and am I using my giftings to the full?"

I'll be honest, actually, those things don't ever fully go away. We have to rehave those conversations again and again; but in honest conversations—that we would have about those, and I think honesty really was important in those for me to be able to share those things with him in a way. But we began in that prayer season to ask the Lord for a shared vision / to ask Him for joint purposes together, and He has been so faithful in that.

So, I think our hope in this is that couples would deal honestly with some of those feelings and begin to ask the Lord would He reveal to them a joint vision. That does require a laying down. It's not that there isn't—that there is no sacrifice involved in any of that.

Dave: Talk about this. How do you hear that? You know, if I am a person at, maybe, I pray and I have my list; but I don't often listen, and I am asking God for a shared vision; you know? I'm thinking that a listener is like—"I don't know if I've ever heard. How would I know?" When I look at your book, you are very clear that you've felt like God gave you a vision for your marriage which is service, adventure, generosity, courage, and honor. Which is awesome; right? To give more than you receive, how did you hear that?

Joel: It wasn't a euphoric moment.

Nina: Yes. [Laughter]

Dave: No voice?

Joel: There was a lot of months and years of prayer. I will say this: Before that, you have to realize what your vision is not. So, any time, when we read in the Scriptures, biblical covenant happens, something always has to die.

Nina: Yes.

Joel: Right? Literally, an animal—

Dave: Yes.

Joel: —is sacrificed and dies. So, anytime, two—as the Scripture says, two are becoming one. Something has to die. I think we would lose that. There is something in my individual vision that has to die when I come together as one with this woman. So, first, I need to let go of those previous things. Second, to find a vision together—we do go through this process of values to vision to purpose. So, values—what is important to you? Vision is a shared way of seeing. Purpose is a shared way of doing.

We won't get into all the questions; but a lot of those are just questions mining who you are / who God has made you to be / where you find joy / where you find togetherness / where you see God blessing your relationship. So, when we get on mission together and we do projects together and we started—we just talked through these things—over time, those five things came out of this process of question asking and praying. So, when we talk about values, a vision, a purpose—that whole thing is overlaid with prayer in every step of the process.

Bob: I'm so glad that you kind of put some practical handles on that. Rather than folks thinking, "Okay; I need to pray. I didn't hear anything from the Lord. I guess this doesn't work for me." But if you pull back and say, "Here is the issue. We need to have shared vision. We should have shared values in our marriage. So, Lord, what should those be? Now, you're in His Word, and you're listening as you read His Word.

Dave: Even maybe going away—you talk about getting some time.

Bob: But a thought will come to you: "Maybe, generosity should be one of those things." You just think, "Let me chew on that for a while. Let me meditate on that for a while. Let me continue to read God's Word. Pray, 'Lord, is this what You are saying to us? Would You confirm that and have it be on my spouse's heart as well?'" Just kind of slowly, methodically working through this until you get to a point where you'd say, "This keeps coming back"—

Nina: Yes.

Bob: —"in the word / in my thoughts. This is what God is laying on my heart, and it's on both of our hearts. Now, we can come together."

I think all of the sudden we've demystified what hearing from the Lord—

Nina: Yes.

Bob: —can look like in somebody's life. You go—"Okay; that's happened to me."

Dave: I always say, “God speaks to us in the P.E.W.S.” This is—this is the way my brain works. People at our church, probably, can say this.

Ann: They can.

Dave: I have said it enough times. There are other ways, but generally, it will be through people—P—a person. It could be a total stranger. It could be your spouse / could be your son or daughter. Events or circumstances line up in a certain ways; and you’re like—“Oh, I think God is doing something here.” The Word of God—

Nina: Yes.

Dave: —W—and then, S is the Spirit of God—a nudge / a thought, like Bob was just saying. I get this thought in my mind, and we just dismiss it. It’s like—“Wait. Stop and go—‘That might have been the Spirit of God.’”

Bob: Test that.

Dave: I’m going to test it.

Bob: Chew on it; right?

Ann: You’re always weighing them with one another.

Dave: There you go—the P.E.W.S.

Nina: I like that you said that there is some great handles because every time I even hear us talk through the values, vision, purpose, I’m always like—“Uhh. I don’t want to sound too prescriptive”—

Bob: Right.

Nina: —“because that might be a total different revelation process.” On the other hand, I think our desire was to at least share our process and the hopes of giving something for couples to—a starting point or something to try—but the truth is it does become kind of revealed over time in exactly the ways that you talked about. Then, you know, you probably go back to them. We could probably—during this next year, we might even spend some time just re-wrestling with that and saying, “Lord, do You have a new word for us and a time?” So, those things will continue to evolve over time.

Bob: I don’t know how many couples have ever taken the time to say, “Do we have a shared vision for our marriage?”

Ann: Right.

Bob: Just asking that question is a great starting point and then working through the chapter in the book where you give us how you'd recommend we wrestle with this.

Michelle: FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife. And our goal is to develop godly families and marriages that change the world one home at a time. One of the ways we do that is through this radio broadcast, FamilyLife Today, which is heard in 47 countries and in 4 languages. We also partner with people around the world, people who share our same desire to see strong marriages and families and these people are sharing FamilyLife resources in their countries, maybe that's yours.

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Thanks for listening. Thanks to our global broadcast producer Marques Holt, our mastering engineer Dennis Leake, our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. We hope you've enjoyed the broadcast, Bob.

Bob: Be sure to join us back tomorrow. Joel and Nina Schmidgall will be here again as we continue to talk about prayer in marriage. Hope you can tune in.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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