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The Humble Parent

Guest:	Todd Friel
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Bob: It's possible that one reason teenagers are turning away from their Christian faith is because their moms and dads continue to try to control them even when they become young adults. Todd Friel says he's had to recognize his own tendency to do that and back off a little bit.

Todd: I need to start letting my kids make some of their own decisions—and this will sound pretty radical—but even make some mistakes along the way because if I try to protect them and put the bumper rails on everything, when it's their turn to give it a go, they are going to make a big hash of it. I'd rather be there to help them clean up the mess than just never let them even potentially make a bad decision.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. One of the ways we help our children begin to exercise their own faith is by letting them make some of their own decisions—even wrong decisions. We'll talk more about that with our guest today, Todd Friel.

Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We have been establishing the fact, this week, that moms and dads need to make sure our sons and daughters understand that we are sinners just like they are. I think one of the challenges moms and dads experience when they think about that is—"I'm going to lose my ability to be the authority in my child's life if my child knows that I'm a mess just like he is."

Dennis: Being authentic never hurts your authority with your child's life. In fact, if anything, your stock goes up because I think children today are spotting phonies; and if you are acting like you're perfect—and they already know you aren't—that's not going to do you any good.

We have a parent here who has already claimed on *FamilyLife Today* that he is perfect. Todd Friel joins us on *FamilyLife Today*.

Welcome back, Todd.

Todd: Yes.

Dennis: Perfection and how I achieved it. You know Todd is a radio host, TV host, of programs called Wretched TV, Wretched Radio, and is a father of three, the husband of Susan for, now—well, all the way back to 1990. So, I'm going to ask you one of my favorite questions: "What's the most courageous thing you've ever done in all your life?"

Todd: Apologized to my wife and children.

Bob: Wait, he didn't even pause.

Todd: No, no, no.

Bob: You didn't pause with that.

Dennis: No, he—I'm not going to accept that as the answer because you just generalized a bunch of stuff. I was asking—

Todd: What? Do you want my particular sins that I had to confess?

Dennis: Just listen, Todd.

Todd: This has become *that* kind of a show.

Dennis: Courage—yes, it has—courage is doing your duty in the face of fear.

Todd: Right.

Dennis: What one act of courage comes to mind? I'm not talking about a generalization because I get that. Continuing to apologize to your wife, ask her forgiveness that faces down fear and demands courage.

Bob: Was there a big apology moment that comes to mind?

Todd: No, not one—about ten million. That's—the reason that's hard for me—it's a pride issue. That's all.

I think that most family explosions come from that issue—pride. We love ourselves. I'll be the first to admit: "I love me *some* me. I love me a lot. I like me more than anybody else. And if you do not behave the way I need you, at least in my mind, to behave"—James 4 has the most profound question: "Why are there quarrels among you?—don't tell me the Bible isn't relevant—"Is it not because you need something"—or so you think you do—"your desires are thwarted? So you murder."

Now, we can murder in a lot of different ways. In fact, let's—you can do a little introspection, guys. There are four ways that I think you can—murder your spouse in

response to his or her sin. Now, we'll just use ladies for the moment. Let's just say your wife legitimately sinned against you. This isn't a preference issue, like how to fold the laundry or how to stack the dishes. She sinned. She said the thing that you know—she just put it in and twisted it.

Now, we tend to respond in one of four ways. See if you find yourself in one of these four ways.

Number one, they hit a serve at you; you return it twice as hard. Number two way is you don't respond; but you file it away because you know it will just be a matter of time—it might be years—but it will be a matter of time when you can take that out of your rolodex, slap it down, and "AHA" them.

Bob: It's a trump card that you hide away—

Todd: That's one of the ways to do it.

Bob: —for the moment that you can play it.

Todd: Exactly. Third way, you abandon ship. You just leave. You go to the garage. You go to the basement. You go shopping. You play a round of golf. You immerse yourself in work. You just skedaddle.

Bob: This is what ESPN is for.

Todd: That—I think we just discovered which camp you fall into. [Laughter]

I happen to be in the fourth camp. It's the big chill—the silent treatment. Now, my friend Rick Thomas pointed this out, profoundly. Silence—it accomplishes the same thing murder does. Murder gets you off the planet. Silencing you says, "I don't want you on the planet. I'm not going to engage with you." Now, that's the way that we can respond—sin for sin.

Now, all four of those are ways of really murdering with our heart; but more theologically, our spouse has sinned against us. What are we doing? Theologically, we are punishing our spouse for his or her sins. Question: "Who was punished for your spouse's sins?" Jesus. So, when I punish my spouse for her sin, I'm basically telling God, "I know you bruised your only Son, but that's not enough for me. I need a pound of flesh." I confuse the Gospel.

So, we need to make sure that we are theologians in our marriage that we don't sin against sin and that we don't confuse the Gospel. Instead, we remember that we are the chief sinner in the house. My wife has never done anything to me that I have not done to God a million times worse and over. Therefore, I have no need to retaliate. I've been

forgiven much. I can forgive much. It is that humbling message that then allows you to say, “I’m sor—I’m sorr—I’m sorry I was Fonzie.”

You know we stuttered so hard because it’s a pride issue. That’s why it takes courage.

Bob: So, that’s a great answer. Now, what the most courageous—

Todd: I thought I got out of this.

Bob: No. The question is still on the table. What’s a time when you can say—

Todd: I’ll just tell you one recently. My daughter lovingly, respectfully sent me a text—okay, it wasn’t face-to-face—she sent me a text. She said, “Dad, I’d like to talk to you as a Christian sister.”

Bob: Oh!

Todd: All right? She wasn’t being a petulant daughter. She was—it was genuine.

I work with a pretty young crew and specifically a fellow named Adrian who you, maybe, see on the TV on occasion. She said, “Dad, there are times that you talk to us in ways that you would never talk to Adrian”—who is just about their age.

I had to stop and really analyze that and ask the question: “Do I talk to my daughters in a tone that I would never talk to a coworker?” I had to admit she is right, but wait—it went even deeper. I started to think back—if I’m not recognizing that today when I can just say to my 23 year old daughter, “You’re going to drive carefully; right?” You know just—I would never say that to you, Bob, or Dennis—“Hey, you’re going to drive safely; right?” Is it possible that I’ve talked to my daughters like that my whole life? I had to admit: “I think I have.”

I had to say to my daughter, “Honey”—and I did say it face-to-face—“you’re right. Not only am I sorry for the way I talk to you now, but anytime that I’ve talked to you that way in my whole life.” That is profoundly difficult for me because of this pride monster that lives inside of me.

Dennis: And what you just demonstrated there is what I think a lot of parents need to just take to heart and never lose the ability to apologize to their kids and to listen carefully to what their kids are saying to them because I think all of us have got our Achilles. We’ve got our weaknesses where we don’t realize how we’re coming across with our children or with our spouse. So, listen carefully when, not just when they write a text and say, “I’m coming to you as a Christian sister,”—

Todd: Right.

Dennis: —"but I'm coming to you wanting an audience and needing you to be teachable / needing you"—

Todd: How about this—when they don't do it well? Do you have the proverbial ability—

Dennis: Oh, yes.

Todd: —to receive criticism—

Dennis: Sure.

Todd: —delivered harshly or severely or offensively and still go—"Is there any truth in that?" Oh, is that hard!

Bob: Okay; hang on.

Have you guys not read Ephesians 6:1 that says—

Todd: Exactly.

Bob: —"Children, obey your parents"—

Todd: The first we have them memorize.

Bob: —"in the Lord;" right? I mean isn't there something—all we've been talking about this week is Mom and Dad need to be humble and need to be Gospel; and you need to be going to your kids and repent.

Dennis: Repenters.

Bob: Where is the part, Todd, where we tell our kids, "Look, I'm Dad. You're Kid. I say what goes. You obey." [Paper rustling] You have it there.

Todd: Know what I've got right here?

Bob: What do you have?

Todd: Well, three verses later, there's an admonition to Mom and Dad. We don't memorize that one, ourselves—two commandments that are given to parents.

Now, you guys are in the parenting business / in the marriage and family business. I can only find two direct commandments to parents throughout the Bible. One of them is Deuteronomy 6. It's also in Colossians, but we see it in Ephesians, Chapter 6: "Train up your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord"—one commandment. Here, now, is

the second commandment. This is God's other commandment for the monstrous task of parenting.

Here it is: "Don't make your kids nuts." That's it—"Don't make your kids angry."

If that's the other command, it must be something that we specialize in. So, what I did, gentleman, for this book that we're discussing today, I wrote down the ways that I can make my kids angry; and I thought this is going to take me hours because—whoa! I never do such things!

I started to write down all of the things that I do to make my children angry, and I realized I can do it in the most subtle ways.

Bob: Don't put the list away. Keep the list. Give me a couple.

Todd: Okay. Here—for instance, I try to control my children as if they are still a child.

Bob: Yes.

Todd: I remember this one. We went over to some friend's house to just hang out, and we're all meeting in the foyer of their home. There's a lot of chit chat. Well, the couple that we were with—they had some older sons and daughters, and my kids were teenagers. They said, "Hey, we've got this great big movie screen downstairs. Let's go watch a movie." And just like that—"Hey, hey, what movie are you going to watch?"

I had to determine what my kids were going to put in their eye because I didn't think they were capable of making that decision. Furthermore, I embarrassed my teenagers in front of other kids; and that's when I realized, "Uh-oh, I've got to be mindful. I need to start letting my kids make some of their own decisions"—and this will sound pretty radical—"but even make some mistakes along the way."

If I try to protect them and put the bumper rails on everything, when it's their turn to give it a go, they are going to make a big hash of it. I'd rather be there to help them clean up the mess than just never let them even potentially make a bad decision.

Bob: So, the mom or dad who is hearing you say this and going—"You're telling me I just let my 17 year old decide whatever movie they want to go watch."

Todd: No, you don't—okay, "Mom, can I go to the crack house tonight?" The answer is "No."

Bob: Okay.

Todd: But could it be—"Mom, can I go to that movie tonight?"—and you know they've got that test the next day? "If you think that is wise, honey, go ahead." Then, they go,

they don't study well, and they get a poor grade. There are natural consequences to that.

Now, I'd like to deal with that decision as opposed to the crack house decision; and let them sometimes fall on their face.

Dennis: Some of our listeners are still looking for the verse—"Don't make your kids crazy."

Todd: That's a paraphrase.

Dennis: It is. It's Ephesians, Chapter 6, verse 4, I think.

Todd: Yes, sir.

Dennis: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger."

Todd: Yes.

Bob: We've still got to get back to 6:1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord."

Todd: That's in the Lord, though. That's what you're driving at; isn't it, sir?—that we want our kids to obey the Lord. So, what does that look like? When I typically parent, my bent is to get them to obey me. Now, make no mistake about it, God is giving us the authority to tell our kids what to do; but if I'm not careful and if I become the authority in their lives—uh-oh—when the authority figure is gone, they are off to the races.

Instead, I want my children to obey me as they submit to God.

Now, the question is how do you do that; and I think the answer is—going back to our Ephesians 6:1, "…in the Lord"—back to Deuteronomy 6: "Talk about Him." We need to use the Bible as our authority.

Dennis: I'm just thinking back. How did I learn the authority of God? I think some of it was hearing His judgment of sin and my accountability to Him.

Todd: Sure.

Dennis: I mean He is in charge, and He will call into account what we've done; and there is an unhealthy fear of God, but there is also a *very* healthy fear of God that I think does turn our hearts away from evil and turns our hearts toward Him.

Todd: I agree, but I'm going to keep going with that though because I do want my kids to fear the Lord; but I don't want them to just fear the Lord. So, I would say, "Amen," to

that because very few pastors are preaching anything about the fear of the Lord, judgment, and consequences.

I do want to let my son or daughter fear the Lord, but then I also want to let them know the Good News because of Jesus you don't have to. So, then I also bring in the Gospel with it so that they love the Lord and desire to obey Him as opposed to just kind of looking out for the lightning bolts. So, I agree with you.

Bob: Todd, I want to loop all the way back to where we began the conversation—backsliding kids. It's the subtitle of your book, *Reset for Parents: How to Keep Your Kids from Backsliding*. If a parent's got a 26 year old / 32 year old—and you know what?—when they went to college they took the left turn in there, they are still off there; and Mom and Dad are thinking, "It's all over. All we can do is pray at this point and hope somebody comes and crosses their path." Is there anything we can do with adult children who have headed in the wrong direction?

Todd: Yes, that's probably one of the most heartbreaking dynamics of any family. You trained up your child; you brought them to Sunday school; and now, they're acting like that. There is embarrassment.

There is disappointment. There's heartache. There is concern. So, we need to once again jump back to the Word of God and ask, "How can the Bible help me with this?"

I would like to suggest to you: "Remember this. It's not your job to get your child saved." So, you may have sinned against your child in raising your child; but you didn't cause your child to not get saved. That onus is on them. So, what do you do?

For starters, instead of looking back and having perpetual regrets—and don't just try to do some sort of a mind-swipe where I just forget about it or just say, "Well, God throws my sins into the deepest part of the sea and puts up a sign that says, 'No fishing'"—which is absolutely correct—but God doesn't forget our sins. Otherwise, you'd forget half the Bible because it deals with all of our sins in the Bible.

Bob: Right.

Todd: In heaven, we wouldn't be rejoicing because Jesus saved us from our sins. So, God doesn't forget our sins, and neither should we; but we don't want to dwell on them. Instead, we want to remind ourselves, "You know what? I committed really bad sins against my children, but I've got to Savior who is greater than those sins; I've been forgiven; and I worship a great God who forgave me." That's for starters.

Secondly, I would suggest: Why don't you call up that prodigal child and do something profoundly bold—recognizing now that you have sinned against your child, that you perhaps have never said, "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" and had a sin transaction?

Think about a piece of carpet. You get new carpet installed in your home, and it's beautiful and nobody gets to walk on it with their shoes; but over time, you get a little bit lazy, and then there is a stain here. Maybe, you clean it up. Then there is a stain there. The next thing you know, years go by, and the thing is filthy. What do you need? You need a carpet cleansing. Now, if you haven't done it along the way, now, you've got yourself a big mess; and it can be cleaned.

If you will approach your child, demonstrate the Gospel as humbled you to say, "I've been thinking back on my parenting years and all of the sins I've committed against you"—not because you want to trick them or get them to become a Christian, but because—"I'm sorry I yelled at you. I didn't treat you with respect. I didn't love you. I didn't give you the time that you should have, and I'm sorry, honey. Will you please forgive me?"

You start there by showing that prodigal you're a changed person. It's going to get their attention and then continue to live that way with them, witness to them as much as you can naturally, and know that God loves to write prodigal stories; and it's not too late.

Bob: Your wife Barbara shares in *The Art of Parenting*™ video series about one of those moments that she had with your children where she gathered everyone around and said, "I need to ask you to forgive me because I sinned against you."

Dennis: It was really a pivotal moment in our family, and I'm married to a great lady that she would repent publicly in front of her kids and do it in a way that her heart was breaking as she did it.

It was not fake. It was not a show. It was genuine. She was really sorry; and basically, it came about over a period of a number of years of, ultimately, coming to grips with a weakness that she had of getting frustrated with the kids and finally had to realize that she needed to go to them and ask for their forgiveness.

This was a living devotional. I mean this is a mom who wants to do a great job with her kids and is admitting she had failed and hadn't failed just once but had failed repeatedly with her emotions. I just I hugged her afterward, and we prayed together.

And it's in those moments, I think, that truly the love of Christ dwells richly in a family in a way that can't be manufactured by a sermon, by a devotional out of a book, but just from the heart of a mom or a dad to their kids.

Todd: This is a story from Randy Alcorn. I include it in the book. Some years ago, I sat with my daughter at a wonderful father / daughter banquet at our church. Someone at the table asked my youngest daughter Angela, what I had done as dad that made the biggest impression on her. Well, that could be problematic to have your daughter answer that in public. [Laughter]

Dennis: Yes.

Todd: She said, “I remember one time when Dad was harsh with me, then, a few minutes later, he came back into my room; and he cried and asked my forgiveness.” I’ve never forgotten that.

Dennis: Yes. I think humility—true humility / admitting a failure / admitting our humanity—really can be used in a powerful way in your children’s lives.

Todd, I want to thank you for your honest, for your book, *Reset for Parents*, and for helping parents keep their kids from backsliding.

Ultimately, this is authentic Christianity; this is being authentic as a Christ-follower; it’s being real and showing your kids how you do real life in a messy way; but you don’t quit. You keep on repenting, and you keep on following Christ. Thanks for being with us.

Todd: Complete honor.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

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I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I’m Michelle Hill and I invite you to join us again for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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