FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Gospel-Centered Parenting

Guest:	Todd Friel
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Bob: Todd Friel says that when he was a child he prayed a prayer asking Jesus to come into his life. He said after that prayer nothing in his life really changed.

Todd: I had been a rebel from sunup till sundown, never thinking to thank Him for His good gifts, let alone for His Son. That's what was missing the first time around. The first time I thought it was cool; it was a 'get out of hell' pass. This time I've seen in the sacrifice of the Father in sending His Son and how I had not lived in response to that. He convicted me of my sin. He crushed me, so there was a guilt that led me to Him.

This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine.

So maybe *your* son or daughter prayed a prayer as a child. Did that prayer mean anything to them? Has there been a change in their life? How can you know? We're going to explore that subject today with Todd Friel. Stay with us.

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

We're going to talk about a subject—in fact I think this book we're talking about today, if the subtitle comes with a money back guarantee, I predict this is a New York Times Best Seller, don't you think?

Dennis: Let's ask him! Todd Friel joins us on the broadcast. Are you guaranteeing our kids will not backslide?

Todd: There's just a little star behind—a little caveat, a *nota bene.*

Bob: A disclaimer!

[Laughter]

Todd: You may be—

Dennis: Disclaimer…disclaimer…disclaimer!

Todd: You know, actually gentlemen, let's start right there because I am quite certain somebody has a prodigal child and they are blaming themselves for it. I think it's important to remember you can't get your child saved, you can't keep your child, you can't get him glorified, so take yourself off of the hook that God does not have you on. God saves our kids.

Our job is to be faithful parents, so if you have a wondering child, first of all, you are not responsible for their decisions. Second of all, please know that God has written about a billion prodigal stories, so don't write off your child.

Bob: That's a great word.

Dennis: Todd is the host of a daily syndicated radio program and a TV—

Todd: Which is why I just why I kind of want to jump…Oh, I'm sorry! Go ahead.

Dennis: No, that's okay!

[Bob laughing]

The TV program is called—

Todd: [Hesitates]

Dennis: Your not willing to say it, are you? You're embarrassed!

[Laughter continues]

Todd: No! I'm not embarrassed!

Bob: Straight from Romans 7.

Dennis: I just think, I just think it's—

Todd: It's from Romans 7. It's not what a cat does! It's called, *Wretched* as in, '*wretched* man that I am', also 'oh that saved a *wretch* like me'. It's called, *Wretched*.

Dennis: The name of the radio program is?

Todd: The same. We're not that varied, we're just not that clever. Same thing! *Wretched* and *Wretched*.

Dennis: *Wretched* radio and *Wretched* TV. Todd has been married to his wife, Susan since 1990. They have three children.

Let's go back to when you became a follower of Jesus Christ. How did you come to faith in Christ?

Todd: Well, after I'd studied to be a pastor I got saved. You see, they didn't ask on the resume if you were actually born again. I wasn't. I was a false convert. I studied to be a pastor but I wasn't even a believer.

Bob: So you grew up going to church.

Todd: No, sir, I did not! I started getting taken to church when in the eighth grade. I had a terrible fear of hell as a child. I know nothing about church but I was terrified of death, almost obsessively terrified about death. I used to pray obsessively to a god I did not know, Please let me live forever—not like 'die and go to heaven', because I didn't know that—I mean on earth, older than Methuselah, live forever, that's what I wanted because I was so afraid to die.

So when I went to church and I heard 'if you just believe in Jesus, you won't go to hell, you'll go to heaven' I was all in. But I didn't repent and put my trust in Jesus.

He was kind of 'Get out of hell' free card. But I never turned from my sins, put my whole-hearted trust in Him.

Bob: Right.

Todd: That came much later in life.

Bob: But you were in enough with what was going on in church that you thought, 'I wanted to be a pastor'.

Todd: Yes, but, okay, again you're going to see inside my wicked heart. It's because I wanted to be in church, but I wanted to be the guy in front.

Bob: You wanted people to look at you.

Todd: Yes! Yes!

Dennis: So did you go to seminary? Is that where you found Christ?

Todd: No…no. It wasn't until after we got married. I didn't go into the pastoral ministry which is a blessing to everybody. We've got far too many people who aren't saved that are in pastoral ministry.

Bob: Whoa!

Todd: Unfortunately. Well, I went to school with some of them I know, I would have been one of them.

Dennis: That was something!

Bob: Okay.

Todd: So I got saved later. God graciously opened up my eyes. I was a self-righteous, pompous, I was quite a legalist. Theology was my bag and if you didn't line up and have every box checked theologically, I thought I *you* were the hell-bound sinner not me.

Dennis: Ok, let's back up one step before you end up telling us how you did come to faith in Christ. How did you persuade Susan to go out on a date and ultimately—

Bob: With a pompous, self-righteous guy?

Todd: I met her in church! Y'all! How's my 'y'all', by the way? We've only been in the South 10 years. How's it doing?

Dennis: Uh, C minus.

[Laughter]

Todd: Wow! Like my educational career!

We met in a church, I was asked to write a youth drama for some big youth meeting that was going on. The Pastor said, well, I know this girl who could play this role. I'm really, I do not believe I'm exaggerating. I was in a basement of a church in St. Paul, Minnesota and I saw a pair of red pumps connected to some ankles that had a white dress that had a big red belt on with an *amazing!* explosion of blonde hair. It was clearly the 80's and I immediately said that's my wife. We got married!

Bob: Wow!

Dennis: No, no, no, no!

Todd: Well, probably, not like that second. We got to know each other and stuff, but I knew that was going to be my wife!

Dennis: So how long did you date, before you asked her to marry you?

Todd: It was just four years.

[Laughter]

We had some ups and downs, look we didn't have mentors, and this whole courtship, we didn't have you guys to help us in the process. We made a complete hash of it. Nevertheless, God was kind, he gave me a much better woman than I deserved!

Dennis: So how did you propose to her? If you—

Todd: One of the worst days of my life! Can I just tell you? Thanks for bringing up another painful subject. Perhaps you'd like to give me a papercut and pour lemon juice in it too.

[Laughter]

This is one of the regrets of my life. This demonstrates what an arrogant thing I was. Guys, I had a suit on to propose to my wife. We were on the dock on the Mississippi River and I didn't want to get my suit dirty so I didn't kneel down.

Bob: Oooh, man!

Dennis: Wow!

Todd: So fast forward twenty years, now I've got a chance to do a 'make-good' on the proposal.

We go out to a special dinner and I bought her a ring to ask her if she'd stay married to me for another twenty years This is my chance now to get down on a knee and humble myself and ask her to stay married to me.

But this is what happens after twenty years. I start to push the table out and she said, "What's the matter? Is soethig wrong?" "No, everything is fine." I start to kneel down and she says, "What are you doing down there? It's filthy, get up!" And at that very moment I pulled a hamstring! So I'm on my knee going "Ow, Ow" (She says) "It's filthy, I don't think they've vacuumed in here!"

That was the romantic moment we shared where I asked her to stay married to me. That's what happens after twenty years! It was gloriously romantic.

Bob: Did Susan think she was marrying a Christian?

Todd: Yes, (said with hesitation)

Bob: You thought she was marrying a Christian.

Todd: Yes, but she would tell you she wasn't a Christian either. She was the church going type. It wasn't until she took a Kay Arthur Precepts on Covenant and reading through the book of Hebrews and studying it where she realized that book is true.

When she saw the imagery that the Temple was a picture of Jesus, that He came and tabernacled among His people; when she saw that the candlestick, that Jesus is the Light of the world; that bread on the table, that He's the Bread of Life; when He the curtain that was torn so we could have access to the Father; then she realized this Book is true, she got saved, too.

God was very kind to do it for both of us at about the same time.

Dennis: Okay, let's go back to your story; how you fell under the conviction of God that you needed Jesus Christ to be your Savior and that you weren't going to find your way to heaven based on your works.

Todd: Yes! Started listening on to guy on the radio called, Chuck Swindoll. Have you heard of him?

Dennis & Bob: Yes.

It started to make sense. His *Insight for Living*, so he takes the theology that I'd been learning but he brings it down to the road and I see what he's doing there. So we started listening and I say let's go and find a church like his.

We looked up his denomination in [pause] a phone book. [Laughter] remember those? So we looked it up in the phone book, went to the local church.

My wife stayed home that morning and I went, and it was the kindness of God that led me to repentance. There's no mistake about it. We should have a fear of the Lord. We should be afraid of His wrath, and His judgment. But ultimately Romans 2, we should see the One who is kind enough to save us from hell and want Him. So we become tear-filled converts, not just fear-filled converts.

So the pastor, lovely man, at the end of his sermon said, I want everybody to close their eyes, for just a moment. I want to read something to you. It was something that has made the rounds of the Internet, but it was basically Jesus writing a letter to you.

It was Jesus saying—and I'm going to get verclempt over this—Jesus saying I saw you wake up this morning and I was hoping that you would take a moment and stop and talk to me. But you didn't. But that's okay.

I'll wait for you because I love you. When you walked out the door, I gave you a sunrise so that you would think of me and perhaps talk to Me. But you didn't, but I love you.

Well, he read through this entire, and I realized by the time he was done, what a sinful, wicked, ungrateful presumptuous man that I had been to never stop and thank God for my wife, and for fine things, for Him, for His Son.

I had been a rebel from sunup to sundown, never thinking to thank Him for His good gifts, let alone for His Son. It broke me. I am not a pretty crier. I sat there in a—guys, snot, [making sobbing noises] crying.

And he said, 'you're dismissed.' [more sobbing noises] And I just sat there while everybody left. Just broken. God did that for me for weeks to the point where I had to pull off the road because I couldn't see through the tears.

He had convicted me of my sin and that's what was missing the first time around. The first time I thought it was cool, a 'get out of hell' pass. This time I'd seen the sacrifice of the Father in sending His Son and how I had not lived in response to that. He crushed me, so there was a guilt that led me to Him.

Bob: Todd we have that in common, because I had many years of active involvement. I was leading Young Life clubs, sharing the gospel with people as an unconverted person. Somebody took me to Romans 3 and said this is describing you. "There's none righteous, no, not one. Nobody seeks after God." God brought me to the end of myself.

As you describe yourself and your story, I'm thinking, how many folks listening, how many folks going to church this Sunday, how many folks who think, it's all good. It's not good because they haven't understood the reality of their sin, their need for a Savior.

They've just wanted the 'get out of hell free' card.

How do you help somebody like that, who is listening right now, understand there's a difference between what you think Christianity is and what it really is.

Todd: This is going to sound like hellfire preaching. We used to do this a lot because it is in the Bible. But it's should be reasonable. Too much hellfire preaching is 'turn or burn', 'you're a sinner, you're going to hell'. God gave us a tool to know what we are truly like. A mirror called the Law of God. Jesus actually took that Old Testament Law and He magnified it in the Sermon on the Mount.

"You have heard it said, thou shall not commit adultery. But I say look at a woman with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart. Because He knows the Psalm that says, 'Will He that made the eye will not also see? Will He that made the ear, not also hear?' Everything, I think is being recorded by God.

It will be opened up and revealed. And every deed done in darkness will be brought out into the Light. So a man or a woman does well to ask how will I do on that day? Rather than waiting for my day in court, when I will have no chance for appeal, when the sentence will be final, when the gavel of justice is slammed down, if God says guilty, it's done! So we do well today to look in the mirror of God's Law and ask: Have I lusted? Have I lied? Have I stolen? Did I dishonor my parents?

We have to be honest with ourselves and say of course we have done all that!

Dennis: Guilty!

Todd: And when we understand that God is not going to be tricked by a clever lawyer, He has seen the crimes because the crimes have been committed primarily against Him. He knows what the record books are because He's witnessed it. Because He's just and because He's good, we sometimes think, well, if God is loving, He'll let me go!

Because He is loving, He can't let you go because He loves justice and He loves fairness. So because of these attributes of love and justice, God *must* give us what we deserve. Some would argue, hell seems to be a little extreme, eternal conscious torment, that's awfully harsh. I understand that, but our sins by their nature aren't so spectacular. The problem is the One whom we have committed the crime.

For instance, if I lied to my son, I know what's going to happen to me, Nothing! He has no power. If I lie to my wife, I'm going to spend the night on a couch. Lie to my boss, I can be fired. Lie to the government, you can go to jail. Same crime, different penalty.

Why? It's the one against whom we've committed the crime. We commit our crimes against the Sovereign of the universe! Our crimes are worthy of eternal, conscious torment. Until a man or woman is willing to be honest about that, and tremble before a just and holy law, they are not ready to be saved because God resists the proud but he gives grace to the humble. My plea, if you're hearing my voice, is please be honest with yourself. Consider the things you have done, your lack of gratitude, how you treated your parents, how you haven't loved God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Maybe you have looked at images you should not have looked at, maybe you've done things you don't have a skeleton in your closet. It's a graveyard.

When we realize that we are in big trouble on that day, then we're ready for the good news. God is just but He's loving and He sent His Son to die for sinners and I mean any sinner.

Dennis: To that point, if there is a boy or a girl, a mom or dad listening to this broadcast and go, that's me!

Todd: Yes.

Dennis: I'm ready!

Todd: Yes.

Dennis: Explain what the faith surrender to the King of Kings is to accept what God did on us as lawbreakers who had offended Him?

Todd: Okay, let's just say, gentlemen, it's a little chilly where we are today, so I say, fellas, let's just jump in my car and drive to Mexico. It's warmer there. So we jump in, I take the steering wheel because I tell you I've been there and I know the way. We start driving and hours go by, and you notice some signs. The bank thermometer sign, it's actually starting to get colder not warmer. Instead of palm trees, you're seeing pine trees. All of a sudden you see a sign that says, Canada 118 miles.

I've taken you in the wrong direction. Let's think this through step by step. What do you want me to do? Number one: After pointing out the signs, you want me to agree with you. You're right, I'm wrong. (2) But you don't simply want agreement, you want me to stop. (3) But you don't want me to just sit there on the side of the road, you probably want an apology, I'm sorry, I've sinned against you, please forgive me.

But there we sit on the side of the road. Fourth, you'd like me to turn around. But not stay just pointed in the right direction. Fifth, you want me to start driving, Sixth, you don't want me to stop till I get there.

That's what we expect, so does God. It's called repentance. It's not about perfection but it's about recognizing I have sinned against the God who died for me. He's shown me the signs, I've sinned against Him.

I'm sorry and I want to turn and go in a new direction because I want the one who saved me. That's repentance and it's connected to something called faith. It's not a mere mental assent. It's as if you are flying in an airplane and you discover that you were going to be crashing soon, but there's a parachute, and you wouldn't just go, 'that parachute could save me', you'd put it on.

You must put on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Salvation is available to anybody who is listening to my voice right now if you will humble yourself, repent, and put your trust in Jesus Christ.

Bob: This is a pretty big decision. Does a guy just make it in a moment and say 'okay, I'm in'?

Todd: No! If you read Luke 9-20, it's a drubbing. (a sever thrashing). Grace is free. Period! When you recognize, when you esteem the sacrifice of the father, Jesus' call is to deny self, to die to self, to start living for the One who died for you. It should really be a no-brainer. It should be because I want that! II don't want the old life. I know what that brought. It brought pain, it brought misery, it brought guilt, it brought shame.

He'll cleanse it, He'll clean me, He'll give me a reason for living, He'll give me a hope for the future. That's the God I want. That should be pretty easy.

Dennis: At that point, as you count the cost of repentance and make the turn, there may just be in the pit of your stomach two conflicting emotions. First of all, feeling sick at your stomach, 'man this is going to cost me'. You know what? It cost Christ, so you can accept what He's done and you can be declared not guilty. You can be declared forgiven.

But secondly, there's going to be joy because at that point you are turning away from the Law and toward a Person. Christianity is a relationship with Almighty God. Bob quoted Romans chapter 3 and that same passage got my attention, too. It was the Person of God, Almighty God who chased me down as a young man and said, I want a relationship with you. I want to know you as you do life and I want you to know me because I am the Life.

So what you experience is not only the relief of being forgiven, but you've got the purpose, the relationship and you have the hope to know where you're headed as you continue down that road for the rest of your life.

Bob: When that conviction comes, you simply—

Dennis: Yield!

Bob: —say okay. I surrender. I'm in.

Dennis: I'm in! It really is a surrender. And by the way, that surrender has to continue to occur on a daily basis, not that you get born again every day, but you surrender to the Lordship of Christ moment by moment, saying to Him, not my will, but your will. And you agree to follow Him in doing whatever He has for you to do today.

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.

FamilyLife's mission is to effectively develop godly families, the kind of families that change the world one home at a time. A key part of our mission includes strengthening marriages and families all around the world. We want to do whatever we can do to bring timeless truth to bare on the challenges you face as you seek to strengthen your family.

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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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