FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Get Out of the Doldrums

Guests:	Steve and Misty Arterburn
From the series:	The Mediterranean Love Plan (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: Has your marriage drifted? Has it become less than you hoped or wished or dreamed it might be? Steve Arterburn has some thoughts for you.

Steve: Marriage is a phenomenal institution; but it requires work to get to the phenomenal. Otherwise, it is all doldrums. If you're not going to do the work, you're never going to experience a relationship where you're on each other's side, you're willing to humble yourself, admit you're wrong, repair, get back in the boat; and then, you get to experience this gift that God has given us that so many people have given up on of sexual intimacy and romance way into the later years of life.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. So, how can your marriage move from the doldrums to a place where there is some fun and excitement and enjoyment? We're going to talk today about that with Steve and Misty Arterburn. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. You ready to get some tips / some hints today? A little help? Some toppings for the pizza like I've been talking about?

Dennis: Yes, *The Mediterranean Love Plan*—it's a book authored by Steve and Misty Arterburn. Misty, Steve, welcome back.

Steve: Thank you.

Misty: Thank you.

Steve: Great to be here.

Bob: You know there may be some listeners who are tuned in right now who recognize Steve from *New Life Live!*, the radio program that he cohosts that's heard on many of these same stations. Steve is on the pastoral staff at Northview Church in Carmel, Indiana. He is a well-known author.

And I'm just sitting here thinking, "Misty, you don't often show up on *New Life Live!*. Why is that?"

Steve: She's a mother.

Misty: Oh, it's not my thing. [Laughter]

Dennis: Well, all the listeners who go to his church know that the real secret behind Northview is not Steve.

Bob: No, it's the stunts.

Dennis: No.

Bob: Oh, I thought you were going to—

Dennis: It's Mark Crull.

Bob: Oh, that's a good point.

Dennis: That's the key to that church.

Bob: He's the lynchpin; isn't he?

Dennis: And the reason he is the lynchpin is because he was my personal assistant—

Bob: I remember when he was your assistant.

Dennis: —for a few years.

Bob: Then, he said, "I can't handle this anymore."

Dennis: That's exactly right. [Laughter] And he fled to sanity and went for the church.

Steve: Well, I'll tell you. I'm very fortunate to be at that church because Steve Poe is the lead pastor; and he and Mark are quite a team, and they are doing an amazing work in our community and all over. As I was telling you guys, we have three campuses in three different prisons. It's just phenomenal to see what they do. So, you must have trained Mark very well.

Dennis: Oh, I did. It was all about me, no doubt about it. No, Mark was a great guy; and I heard you bragging on him.

So, I had to do that here as well.

You've written a book, and you talk about the secrets of romance. You know I think a lot of marriages begin to die because they get into a place in their relationship that's also a

place in the ocean. It's called the doldrums. It's where there is no wind to fill the sails—for sail boats—and you can die in the doldrums. When the weather has no wind, you can suffocate because of the heat and the oppressive nature of the weather; and a relationship without romance can do the same thing. Comment on it because I know you've counseled hundreds of couples over the years.

Steve: Yes. Well, I know this. If you're in a relationship and you think it's all up to you and you're in the relationship under your own power versus daily asking the Holy Spirit to enter into this relationship and be with you and guide you, then, you're going to run out of wind and romance.

I am so sadden by the stories of so many people. They'll never divorce, but they're absolutely miserable in their marriage. What we've tried to do is try to provide a path and a process to get that back.

Marriage is a phenomenal institution; but it requires work to get to the phenomena. Otherwise, it is all doldrums. If you're not going to do the work, you're never going to experience some of the things that we talk about in this book which is truly a relationship where you're on each other's side, you're willing to humble yourself, admit you're wrong, repair, get back in the boat; and then, you get to experience this gift that God has given us that so many people have given up on of sexual intimacy and romance way into the later years of life.

Dennis: I'm convinced a lot of couples come to the *Weekend to Remember* because they're looking for some fresh wind—

Steve: Yes.

Dennis: —in their relationship. And on Friday night—Bob, you know; you speak—you ask people to hold up their hands who have never been at a marriage conference—

Bob: Right.

Dennis: —and over 90-percent, hold their hands up. I think if they were honest about, they had to fight through something to go—"Does it mean we're not well off as a couple if we go to a marriage conference? Does it mean on marriage is in trouble?" No, it doesn't mean that.

Steve: No.

Dennis: It means you're investing in your marriage.

Misty: That's right. It is hard to break down that wall and walk through for help for the first time with a counselor or going to a *Weekend*; but what I find is we're not going to

have healthy marriages on accident. We do have to invest, and we do have to make it a priority and make time for it and do those things.

Bob: Here's the thing I see with a lot of couples—because I know how you get to that doldrums place. You're busy with other things—kids, work, neighborhood, church. All of that stuff gets you busy. The amount of time you are spending with one another investing in one another starts to shrink. You get in a rhythm of that. Pretty soon, there is just this drift toward isolation that has occurred; and you start to look at each other and go, "I used to like you, but I'm just not even feeling that anymore right now."

Steve: Right.

Bob: And when you're in that place and somebody comes along and says, "Here you need to read this book, and you need to have fun," you go, "I don't even think I have the motivation"—

Dennis: Have a heartbeat.

Bob: Well, it's kind of like—"I'd like to be there, but here's the risk involved. If I try these things and we don't get there, I'm going to feel worse than if I just stay where I am." So, a lot of couples will say, "I'm just going to maintain the status quo rather than risk it"—

Steve: Yes.

Bob: —"reach out, initiate, and find out that it's not reciprocated."

Steve: Well, what we hear is what we've provided here are things that everybody can do. You don't have to get a ticket to the Mediterranean to experience these things. They're simple, but they're—

Misty: Yes, they're not really secrets; are they?

Steve: They're earth-shattering. [Laughter]

Misty: I mean they're kind of obvious.

Steve: Yes.

Misty: You know play, spend time together, have a relationship.

Bob: So, here is what I'm imagining. A wife hears this and goes, "Okay, that's where we are. So, I'm just going to suggest to my husband, 'Why don't we make dinner together tonight?' And he is going to go, 'Why?' Make dinner? No.'"

Steve: So, here, I'll tell you why: "So, honey, when I'm making dinner, what does that do for you?"—because I make dinner for her.

Misty: It's by far my favorite thing. [Laughter]

Bob: Really?

Misty: It's wonderful. I do obligatory cooking.

Bob: Yes.

Misty: I do—it's got to be productive, efficient. We've got to get everybody fed. I feed a lot of people. I do a lot of cooking. Steve likes to tinker, he likes to be creative, and he likes to take his time. Now, he makes a gargantuan mess; and sometimes, I do need an oxygen mask over that.

Steve: Bring that up—yes.

Misty: But it is so wonderful. It's lush, and it just communicates care to me. It is—I can get off the clock, and he just takes care of me. I love it. I love it.

Steve: Now, that's a pretty good result, I'd say.

Bob: I was seeing a little sparkle in her eye as she was talking about it right there.

Steve: Me too.

Bob: Just the imagination of it was doing something.

Steve: Yes. All of you have to do is follow directions. [Laughter]

Bob: There on the back of the box.

Misty: Then, he ordered a little thing to come every week.

Steve: All the ingredients are there.

Misty: All the ingredients—

Steve: Just follow directions.

Misty: —and the instructions.

Bob: But you're saying he's doing that for you, not with you?

Misty: No, but I quite enjoy it watching the whole process.

Bob: Oh, so, you stay in the kitchen while all this is going on. [Laughter]

Steve: Oh, yes, she's there.

Misty: Yes.

Steve: The living room and the kitchen are the family room, and we're all there. The kids are there, and I'm doing this; and we're interacting and stuff, but I see delight in her eyes. And a guy like me, it's not easy to produce delight in anybody.

Misty: And he loves the response when I devour and enjoy what he creates.

Steve: It's a small thing—

Misty: It's a partnership.

Steve: —but it's a big thing.

Dennis: It is a big thing. I'll tell you. I will never forget being invited into this handmade log cabin—not like any you've ever seen. It had thousands of square feet—that the owner had built over a seven year period, and they invited me to come and have dinner with them. It was a dinner that started at about three o'clock in the afternoon with the preparation of the food. He, actually, kind of sat me down out of my fast food mentality and invited me into their home—

Misty: Yes.

Dennis: —into the relationship that he and his wife had. They brought me in there, and he was explaining all this—that eating is the culmination—

Misty: Yes.

Dennis: —of the preparation.

Steve: Yes.

Dennis: And it was a delightful meal. I have never forgotten this.

Steve: I'm sitting here thinking, and here's a meal—you're still talking about that meal.

Dennis: It was not about the food, though—although the food was spectacular.

Steve: The process and the interaction and the connection—it's something that builds a relationship. If that grand—in that grand log cabin—event is still on your mind, imagine what repeatedly once or twice—a week a guy stepping in and doing this with his wife—what that does to build some bonding, security, trust. It goes so far. It's saying, "I'm not wanting to take from you. I want to give to you. I want to put something back." I don't know—there are very few things that I've done that have put that kind of delight into her heart because she is off the clock; but we're still connected in the process.

Bob: At the speed of life today, a lot of listeners are hearing us talk about this, "taking time to prepare a meal;" and they're going, "You've got to be kidding me. We're driving through somewhere five out of seven times a week to get something because we've got so much going on. This sounds all nice, but who has the time for the grocery shopping and the menu planning and then the preparation and all of that?" Well—

Steve: If it's not important, you will not have the time.

Bob: That is exactly the point.

Steve: If it's not a priority, you won't do it.

Misty: And we can't do every single one of these things all the time. So, maybe, that's not the top one on the list right now; but hopefully, we are making time to eat together as a family and as a couple.

Bob: You know what the top one on the list is; don't you?

Misty: Tell me.

Bob: You know what—I mean it's where I went first in the book; right?

Misty: You know.

Bob: So, the guys who are listening are saying to themselves, "All of this stuff just sounds like foreplay.

Steve: In many ways, it is. You're talking about the final chapter in the book where we document and also give you some pretty great stories about Jewish women being the most sexually fulfilled group of women; but I want to tell you something.

The thing that we uncovered as we were writing this—and the researcher found this—there are some Jewish rules about sexual intimacy that a rabbi will give to a man. It almost sounds like a role reversal from our Western culture. Things like sex are a woman's right and not a man's right. A man has a duty to give sex to his wife regularly and ensure that the sex is pleasurable, which is one of my key things: More bad sex is never going to be a good outcome for anybody.

You have to do, well, what we did. You have to go get some help if that doesn't work; but there are so many things in here that honor a woman versus objectify her or depersonalize her like we see in Western culture. When you look at this, you can see why they would be so sexually fulfilled because it starts with honor of her—honor to the kids from the man and then honor to her.

Misty: And also, contained in all of that, it's really a trust relationship. She's trusting that he's going to tune into her sexually, that he wants to be fulfilling for her. So, the pace is going to be together and synchronized. So, what we say is that sex must submit to trust.

Trust is the highest aim.

Steve: Yes.

Misty: Sex isn't the ultimate fulfillment of the relationship. It's a byproduct of love, connection, commitment, trust, and all the integration of the full relationship.

Dennis: And Misty, let me just add something to that. In our culture now because of sexual harassment, I'll bet you there are a lot of wives wondering, "Has my husband done that? Has my husband ever sexually flirted with someone at work, someone in the market place?"

I'll tell you. It brings a smile to my wife's face because more than once I've looked at her after another announcement has come out—and there has been a number over the past few months—which I think may be a part of God beginning to bring our country to healing—

Steve: I do too.

Dennis: —and bring back the dignity of how we relate as man and woman to each other and husbands and wives, sexually.

But when I look Barbara in the eye and say, "I just want you to know I'm glad I don't have to worry about some shoe dropping"—

Steve: We had the same conversation.

Misty: Just this week.

Dennis: —"of somebody somewhere somehow making an announcement that I've been unfaithful to my wife." That builds the kind of trust, Misty, that you were talking about.

Misty: That's right.

Dennis: And you're right. It does allow another person to give themselves to one another.

Misty: And we're watching for that as wives. We're looking for those signals; and when a spouse is doing all these other things, those are signals to us that we're connected. He values this relationship and the fullness of my person and all that we share together. So, those are all affirmations of our connection. So, that helps me trust.

Bob: So, a couple who is listening to this conversation, and they say, "Okay, we've been in the doldrums; and we'd like our way out. So, what would be a good step one, because I don't know which one of these chapters to go to first? How do I figure out how to initiate and begin this process to get from lethargic to loving one another again?"

Steve: Well, I think as we've heard from folks, everybody picks a different one just like we've talked about here. Everybody's got a favorite one.

I think, you know, whereas I love the playful part of it, there are some people—especially younger folks—where they start is in the physical part. They get in shape together. They exercise together. They're outdoors. They're really building their longevity by good eating habits and fitness and all of that; but I would have to say—and Misty, what do you think—that most women resonate with the attunement of a man sitting down and wanting to look into her eyes and find out what's really behind all of that.

Misty: That's really powerful.

Dennis: Can you unpack that, Misty, and explain what you mean by that word, attunement?

Misty: I love that word. It's one of my favorite words, and it's one of the most important words.

So, first, I want to be in tune with God. It's synchronizing with the Holy Spirit and being able to receive from God. So, being connected in a secure attachment with God, then, allows me to be open to an attachment that is secure with my husband and hearing one another, getting in the same space, and breathing mode together where I can be aware of his emotional state or the challenges that he's facing. He can be present and aware and able to contain what's going on in my heart.

So, we are present together and synchronized, and we can empathize and support each other. And if we're not synchronized and we're at different paces or we're going in different directions, it's very hard to have a meaningful connection.

So, yes, I always go to that one first; but I would also just say, “A: Start. Just pick one; keep it simple. There are 13 suggestions in the back of each chapter. Just pick something that’s digestible for you, and effort matters.” When I see my spouse trying and that he’s made it a priority to reach out—and it’s very scary sometimes—I can see that he’s making an effort. If it doesn’t play out like you hope it will, just the fact that he’s making a priority really matters and can begin a shift.

Bob: If we have hurt one another in our marriage, if we’re in isolation because we wounded one another with our words or our actions and we look at this and go—“Okay, I’m going to try this as a way to work my way back,” we’ve got to address the hurt before we can try to pursue the warmth; don’t we?

Steve: That’s right. And to Dennis’s point of all the sexual harassment cases—and maybe, it will be different by the time this airs—but Dennis, I have not heard one person say, “Yes, I was that horrible man, but I got some help. Now, I’m not that man anymore.” No, they’re saying they’re sorry they got caught, really; but I want to hear the people say, “Yes, that was me, and I’m a different man now.” We’ve got people that are able to say that in the Christian community.

Bob: Yes.

Steve: They saw the error of their ways. So, yes, do whatever it takes to repair your character so that you’re bringing that into the marriage. Otherwise, this is all a waste of time. It’s all fake.

Dennis: The Gospel is all about taking lost people who are in need of being repaired, redeeming them, and then beginning the long process over a lifetime of making them whole. The big word in the Bible is called sanctified—

Bob: Yes.

Steve: Yes.

Dennis: —being made like Jesus Christ.

Steve: Right.

Dennis: There is no shame in being a broken person, coming to church. In fact, one of the big problems today is we’ve got churches filled with broken people who aren’t relating to one another; and everyone is sitting there thinking, “I’m the only one who is dealing with this issue”—wondering if the shoe is going to drop.

Steve: Right. And why not do something about it before the shoe drops so that if it does, you can say, “Yes, and I’m in the process of getting better. I’m fixing this. I’m addressing this;” versus waiting to see if you get caught.

Bob: You know we've talked about this already; but the foundation for all of this has got to be a passionate pursuit of Jesus. Your relationship with Him is foundational to all of this. To try to build a romantic, passionate marriage on top of some other foundation, well, Jesus talked about that in Matthew, Chapter 7; didn't He?

Dennis: That's just what I was thinking as well, Bob. Jesus closes His most famous sermon, The Sermon on the Mount, with two different homebuilders.

One was a homebuilder who built his house on sand and the other on a rock. The same storms, the same winds, the same rain beat on those houses. One fell; the other stood. "The one that stands," Jesus said, "is the one who hears these words of Mine and does them, who connects with Me, and who digs down deep." One of the other gospels tell the story of those two builders; and it says, "And the one man dug down deep to the rock."

Bob: Yes.

Steve: Yes.

Dennis: That's the process. Christianity is not a one-time experience with Jesus Christ. It is a lifetime pursuit of Him where you don't give up when you fall; and you realize Christ is there to be able to lift you out of the doldrums / out of your own errors and to put you back on the right road.

I just appreciate you two and all that you are doing to build marriages and families around the country, and I hope folks will get a copy of your book, *The Mediterranean Love Plan*, and begin rebuilding love, romance, and redemption in their marriage.

Steve: It all honors God when you do it, and it's a lot of fun to be a part of that kind of marriage versus the doldrums.

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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