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You, God, and Your Marriage

Guest: Nina Roesner
From the series: 12 Truths to Change Your Marriage (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: There is a very thin line between offering helpful advice to your spouse and attempting to control their behavior. Here is Nina Roesner.

Nina: We are blind as can be in that area. We think we're helping, but really, we're manipulating and controlling because we have an agenda and an outcome that we are looking for. Anytime that we have that going on, what we're saying is that we know what's right; and we've closed the door on what God might do. There's no open opportunity for something different. We've decided we're the source of truth, and we're back up on the throne again which is not our place. It inhibits what God is going to do in our marriages and our families.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine. How can a wife be her husband's ally and not attempt to control every decision he makes? We're going to talk with Nina Roesner about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I may have said this before, but—and this could get me in trouble again—but I just need to test this hypothesis. It just keeps coming back to me.

Dave: Oh, boy.

Bob: I believe that the besetting sin for most men / kind of our dominate life sin, for most of us is passivity. You'd agree with that; wouldn't you?

Dave: I would agree with that.

Bob: I mean some guys, instead of being passive, they are hyper-aggressive; but for most guys, it's just kind of check out / be passive.

Ann: I think for women our sin / our go-to sin would be that we try to control.

Bob: [Whispers] I'm so glad *you* said that.

Ann: I said it for you, Bob.

Bob: It has been my observation that women long to be safe and secure; and somewhere in their heart and mind, the idea is: “For me to be safe and secure, I need to be in control of everything in my environment. If I’m not in control, I’m out of control. Then I’m unsafe, and I feel insecure.” So, I do think guys may have a little more risk orientation—a little more—the safety and security is not as big a deal for men.

So, I do think that in the heart of many women there’s this idea that—“I must control my environment. I must control my world. I must control everything around me in order to feel safe and secure.” It takes a while before women get to a point where they go—“That strategy doesn’t work.”

Ann: I don’t even know for myself. I think that would be true for many women. I don’t think, for myself, I would put those words, safe and secure—that could be the underlying issue; but I think there’s a pride in me that says, “I am going to do this, and this is how it should be done.”

Bob: “I know best”?

Ann: Yes—“Too bad, nobody else can see the right way to do it.” That’s so much pride on my part.

Bob: The reason we are talking about this is because this desire to be in control, which is there for a lot of women, is one of the things that is at the heart of a book that Nina Roesner has written called *12 Truths to Change Your Marriage: A Respect Dare Journey for Wives*. Nina is back with us on *FamilyLife Today*. Welcome back.

Nina: It’s great to be here.

Bob: Would you say control has been an issue for you?

Nina: Sure. [Laughter]

Dave: I was going to say, “Way to go, Bob!” We’re going to go right out here.

Nina: Wow! That’s a great question. Yes.

Bob: Do you think it’s related to safety and security for you, or is it something else?

Nina: There is safety and security, and there’s a desire to be right and to be known and to have things go well—a little bit of a Type A, perfectionism thrown into that. It means I know the right way that things should happen, and the problem with that is there’s probably 48 ways to do something.

Bob: Right.

Nina: The deeper my relationship has gotten with Jesus Christ; the less that that is an issue because I realized, “Oh, when I’m trying to control, I’m—oh, I’m the source of control. Wait, that’s God’s job. Oops, I’m sitting on the throne again”—yes—which is what you were saying earlier about pride.

Ann: Right; right.

Bob: So, we had this situation not long ago where it was an unusual situation. I was in the passenger seat of our vehicle. Mary Ann was driving, and we approached an intersection. She turned on her blinker to turn right: “That’s not how I go to get to where we were going. You go straight, and you turn right up here. You don’t turn right here. It is longer to go this way.” She turned right, and it dawned on me—before I said, “This is the wrong way to go”—it dawned on me: “Huh, this is how she chooses to go. This is a different way to go.”

Now, I’m doing the math in my head. I can show her on a map—[Laughter]—

Ann: But you didn’t say anything to her?

Bob: I did not say anything to her, and the reason I didn’t is because—

Dave: You’ve learned.

Bob: —most of the time I’m driving and we come to that intersection—and for years, she’s never said to me, “I wish we’d go that way. I like that way”—she just lets me be. Here’s what we started saying to one another. There will be circumstances or situations where I’ll decide something, and she’ll just look at me and go—“We are so different sometimes; you know what I mean?” It’s like—

Nina: That’s wise.

Bob: —“you just made a choice that would be completely different than the choice that I would make.” We’ve recognized that it is not a right or wrong. It’s just different. Although I have to tell you, the other day, we were driving home from church. I was on my scooter, and she was in the car. She was ahead of me, and she turned at this particular intersection—

Dave: Oh, here we go.

Nina: Yes.

Dave: You’re going to prove to her.

Bob: —and I got home before her on the scooter proving that my way is actually the shorter way to go. [Laughter] But it’s not as scenic as she would point out to me. So, there you go.

Nina: There you go.

Bob: There is the difference. Let's talk about this desire for control and how that plays into the respect issue that you are dealing with in the book.

Nina: So, what comes to mind right now is a situation I had with my middle son. He was working on his car, and something had happened. It was very upsetting to him. Some catastrophic failure occurred which could not be repaired, and he got very emotional about it. Things were thrown, and words were said. I'm just standing there, and I'm like—"How can I love him well in this?"

Ten years ago, as a mom, I would have probably been—"Oh, yes; let's talk about how you're feeling. Oh, this is.... Here we can make it better. Here's how to fix"—I would try to fix it; right? Instead, I was just with him—just with him in his angst, in his emotion, and all of that. When he was done with all of that, he looked at me; and he goes—"You didn't do anything." I said, "Yes; did you want me to?" He said, "No; not at all." I said, "Are you okay?" He goes—"Yes; I am."

So, a year later, he brings this incident up; and he says to me, "You let me do that, and I didn't get any judgment. It wasn't even about you." I felt amazed and astonished that simple thing had even happened and that he even noticed it; but—and I think this happens all the time.

We have these opportunities every, single day just to be with someone instead of trying to fix them because when we try to fix someone / fix their situation, what we are communicating—and this is disrespect—what we are communicating is: "I don't think you can handle this. So, let me show you how it needs to be done. Let me show you." With kids especially what you are communicating is: "I don't think you're capable of figuring this out." Even if they are doing it wrong / even if we know better, we still need to learn some things by experience.

Ann: Especially teenagers.

Nina: Exactly; because they are trying to separate. We need for them to not live in our basements when they are 25. That's kind of a goal; right? It's—have them be independent, make decisions on their own, and all of that. We cripple them when we communicate that they can't handle these things.

Ann: What does it look like to be with someone when they are angry or they are going through something?

Nina: So, it can look like the behaviors that we want when we are trying to be a good listener; right? But it's a whole different experience when we are actually with them, and we're listening with our heart because—and we're fully present, and we're not owning what they're going through. We're not taking responsibility for their feelings. We're simply present with them as they go through whatever they are going through. We don't have a desire to change that.

The recognition is that—"Oh, this person is really hurting, or they're angry"—even when it's at us. I mean seriously. This is when you start to know—"Oh, I'm kind of getting this." When there

is a bunch of “you” language launched at you: “You didn’t do this, and you didn’t do that. You didn’t do this.” Those words hurt. They are accusations.

When we can sit with that with somebody, that’s when we know that God is really working in our hearts. So, we’re able to sit and listen, and then we ask the person, “How are you? What’s going on?” You’re curious. You want to interact with them. You’re exploring, and you’re validating their feelings versus arguing and saying, “You shouldn’t feel that way.” If we ever say that to somebody else—you want defensiveness? That’s how you create it.

Dave: Yes; there it is.

Nina: There you go.

Dave: I know that, as a man, when Ann is with me, all I can tell you is it feels like respect because for years in our marriage—and we’ve talked about this / we’ve written about it—it was like she was telling me—it was back where we started, Bob; it was the control thing—“Here’s how you should parent the kids. Here’s how you should lead them spiritually.” It felt disrespectful. I didn’t even have a word for it.

Nina: Yes.

Dave: All I knew was I got angry or I withdrew which are symptoms of a man feeling disrespected; right? Then she changed—and again, not overnight—but started being with me and not critiquing / being with me and applauding / being with me and affirming. I’m like—“Wow. This feels great. I want to be with this woman.” I realized later it was—it felt like respect.

Ann: I think, before, I had the attitude like—“Oh, let me help you to be better.”

Nina: Right; and that puts us in the judgment seat—

Ann: Right.

Nina: —which is sin on our part.

Ann: Mm-hmm.

Nina: So, we’re pointing fingers. We’re blaming. We’re accusing. We’re doing all these things that really destroy relationships because who wants that.

Bob: I don’t know if women feel the same way, but I think most guys—and Dave, you’re a natural athlete; so, it may be that there’s not a sport that you’ve tried where you go—“Yes; that’s—I’m not really good at that”—

Dave: Like curling.

Bob: Yes; we'll take that.

Dave: I'm not real good at that.

Bob: So, if you go out and do that a few times and you go—"I'm not naturally good at this"—you're probably not, next weekend, going to say, "I'm going to try that again."

Dave: Right.

Bob: It's not fun to do things that we're not good at.

Dave: Exactly; yes.

Bob: So, we're going to gravitate toward those things where we do have some skill / some aptitude. Now, if your wife is along and she's pointing out to you all the ways you're not good at something, then you're going to say, "Well, I don't want to keep doing this if I'm not good at it." Who wants to keep playing something where they fail all the time; right? But if your wife is along going—"You know you've got some potential here. I mean, you've got some natural aptitude here"—that changes the whole dynamic from "You're not good at this" to "You could, maybe, be something here."

Nina: The word that pops into my head is encouraged; you know? When you are given respect, you are encouraged. There is more courage inside of you to go do the next thing. You'll try again.

Ann: I just talked to a young man who said, "I don't think women cannot control." He said, "I think it takes an act of God for them to see because they don't even realize they are doing it." Do you think that is true?

Nina: Yes; we are blind. We are blind as can be in that area. We think we're helping, but really, we're manipulating and controlling because we have an agenda and an outcome that we are looking for. Anytime we have that going on, what we're saying is that we know what's right, and we've closed the door on what God might do. There's no open opportunity for something different. We've decided we're the source of truth, and we're back up on the throne again which is not our place. It inhibits what God is going to do in our marriages and our families.

Ann: So, how do you encourage women in being able to see the truth of your statement?

Nina: Yes; so, on your face; right? Humble yourself. Confess that this is in you, and He will point it out when you start doing it again and again and again. You'll do this over and over throughout your whole life, and you struggle with it when your kids are sick. You want to protect, and you overprotect. We struggle with this stuff over our entire lifetime.

But if we have zero awareness of it, then we're really damaging the relationships that we have with people. A good way to make sure that our husband and our kids don't ever ask us for advice and don't ever want to spend time with us is to make sure we give advice and we tell them what to do.

Bob: Nina, how did you get from "I think I married the wrong person," to where you are today?

Nina: I have not done this myself. This is what God has done in my life. So, I went from being a stressed out, vigilant, hyper-controlling, got-to-have-this-goal, agenda-driven person to—"Okay, God, what are we doing?" So, He's really in control of my life.

Yes; I've got stuff on my agenda; but He's my first thought. He wants us to have a relationship with Him. I mean He wouldn't have sent Jesus to die for us / to pay for our sins so that we could have relationship with Him—we were so separated. Then I have the interaction with the Lord that enables me to be present in a moment and listen to His voice instead of my flesh or that other guy.

Bob: What you're describing—what came to mind immediately for me is Galatians 5:16 which says, "Walk by the spirit." Walking by the spirit is getting your life in sync with what God is doing and walking in that direction; but it goes on to say, "Walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Those are the two things that are at odds here. What is the spirit—what does God want me to do today versus what are my appetites saying / what are my desires saying / what's my agenda for this day? If you're not walking by the spirit, then you're going to follow the desires of the flesh, and those will lead you in a bad direction.

It's not bad, as you said, to have an agenda / to have plans; but to start off by saying, "Here's what's on my to-do list; but Lord, what's on Your to-do list today? What is it that You want me to accomplish, or how can I in the midst of what I'm doing be aware of Your presence and be sensitive to your agenda so that it's—getting the laundry done is less critical than loving the kids in the middle of the day—

Nina: Yes.

Bob: —and making sure that I've connected with my husband relationally rather than making sure my to-do list is complete.

Dave: I love how Paul wrote the word walk in the spirit not step. So, for me, it isn't just get up and start with God which is so critical. It's like—"What about all day? I've got to keep a walk." I mean when I'm driving in my car, I've got vertical music going. It's like helping my mind worship God. What am I filling my mind with? It's just a continued walk. So much of what we've talked about today is for wives to respect their men, and I was going—"Everything you ladies said applies to men loving and respecting our wives as well."

Nina: Yes.

Dave: I would challenge every man and every woman to start on your knees. What would that look like to walk with Jesus and then live that out to be with your wife? We talked about wives being their husbands—same thing. If I was with Ann in her life, she would feel loved and respected.

Bob: And can we just say that this is where your heart and mind has to be saturated with the word of God.

Dave: Oh!

Ann: It's so funny you went to Galatians, and I thought of Psalm 5. It starts with David saying, "Listen to my words, Lord. Consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God. For to You, I pray. In the morning, Lord, You hear my voice. In the morning, I lay my requests before You and wait expectantly." I like that too. Even, I think, of young moms who may not be able to get out their Bible, and they may not be able to spend this time with God; but before you pick up a phone and start looking at social media—

Nina: Yes.

Ann: —of any kind, say, "God, I give You my day today. Help me to hear You and walk with You all day long. I surrender it to You"—to be the most important thing you do all day.

Nina: Yes; it really is.

I was at home making marinara—and this is a couple of years ago, but it was just such an impactful thing. My husband was in the kitchen too. He is cooking something, and I'm cooking. I got a text from this horse person that I needed to schedule something with. So, I go over, I look at my phone, I come back into the kitchen. He says, "Who is that?" I said, "Well, it was Hank, the horse guy." He says, "Oh, hmm." There's this look. I'm thinking, "Okay? Wait." He said, "So, I didn't know you had a texting relationship." I'm offended—like, just hot right then.

So, I was quiet in that moment, and I was listening. I was like—"Lord, I'm feeling really upset"—and that goes back to what David was saying in that psalm. I'm like what is this with me." I said, "I need to go upstairs for a few minutes. I'll be back." So, I left the kitchen because if I had stayed, there ain't nothing pretty going to happen there."

Ann: That was great self-control.

Nina: That's the fruit of the spirit. Yes; that was nothing I was doing. I assure you because I've had experiences where it has gone the other way—right; you know?—and done the wrong thing.

So, in that moment, I went upstairs, and I was just like—“Lord, what is this in me that is so defensive? I know what’s true here. What’s going on?” I just sat with Him, and I listened. Then I emerged from that different. I went downstairs, I put my hand on my husband’s shoulder, and I said, “Can we go outside and talk for a second?” I said, “So, this happened in the kitchen and the texting relationship thing. Tell me more about that. How does that make you feel?”

He said, “You know what? That is just my own junk. I’ve been travelling. We’ve been in Montana. We’ve been caring for my mom, and we haven’t seen each other much. I just miss you.” I said, “You know what? I miss you too.” It was so amazing because that’s what God was showing me upstairs—was that the two of us hadn’t spent time together like we usually do. So, we, then, spent a few minutes saying, “Okay; what are we going to do to spend more time together because we need that?”

That conversation could have been a missed opportunity had I taken offense and received accusation and then launched a defense verbally. Think about that cycle. It happens every day in our homes, and that is what is to be avoided. So, only through spending time with Jesus will His spirit speak to us and give us that self-control. The Holy Spirit will then help us hear from God so that we can—we get out of His way, and we love in this world which is what we’re supposed to do.

Dave: Boy, I would say, if you’re listening right now and you’re thinking, “I want to fix my marriage; I’ve got to go talk to my husband / I’ve got to go talk to my wife,” I just heard you say, “No, no, no; go talk to God first about your marriage before you talk to your husband or your wife about your marriage.” Then there could be a very interesting coming up. It could be really beautiful.

Bob: It’s something I’ve heard you say—“If you want to get the horizontal relationship right, make sure the vertical relationship is right.”

Dave: Go vertical.

Bob: I’m looking at your book, *12 Truths to Change Your Marriage*; and you look at the Table of Contents and say, “What are these truths?” You would expect something that would be kind of hands on practical—

Ann: More practical tips.

Bob: It’s not that these are not practical things—because they are—but I just love—truth number one: What you really believe about God and the Bible impacts your relationships. Oh, that’s where we need to start with all of this. Number two: God is someone you can have a real relationship with. Number three: If you follow Christ and He is Lord of your life but you’re still a sinner and always will be, that’s okay. The more you get to know God the more you’ll see your own sin. We’re on truth number five, and we’re just now getting to your marriage.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: Right?

Nina: Yes.

Bob: Because the first four have been—“You’ve got to make sure your walk with God is right.” That’s why I appreciate the book / I appreciate your ministry because it’s not just about here are practical ways that you can spice up your marriage or deal with conflict. All of that is important, but it’s got to start with a framework of—“Here’s how you can be in sync with what God is doing in your life and in your marriage, and here is how that will then spill out to a better relationship with your spouse.” Nina, thank you for writing the book. Thanks for being here.

Nina: Thank you.

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