

# OpenTheo

## Get Married with Brad Wilcox

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

For most of us, getting married and forging a strong family is the best way to build a prosperous, meaningful, and happy life. That's the message of *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*, the new book by University of Virginia professor Brad Wilcox. Listen in as Kevin and Brad talk explore why young people aren't prioritizing marriage, why elites don't preach what they practice when it comes to marriage, and why getting married is one of the best things you can do for yourself and for others.

Books & Everything:

*Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*

ESV Bible App

Light + Truth Podcast

## Transcript

Greetings and salutations. Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin D. Young, senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina, just outside of Charlotte, and a happy day after Easter Resurrection Sunday as we're recording this.

And glad to have all of you back listening. I'm joined today by my special guest. Who I've wanted to have on for a number of years with a lot of really good things that he's written books and articles and interviews and even good tweet threads.

You can still do that, or X, I guess. And that is Brad Wilcox, who is the author of a really important new book called *Get Married. Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization*.

Somebody just said to me, wow, that title tells me what I need to know. About the book.

It's a great title.

Brad is professor of sociology and director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, also has appointments institute for family studies. American Enterprise Institute has written a number of things academic and popular all over the internet and in published form. So Brad, thank you so much for being on LBE.

Great to be here this morning, Kevin. All right, so a couple of things I want to say right from the beginning. So I need to give a shout out.

I don't expect you to remember every student you have in all of your classes. My oldest son's girlfriend is a student at UVA. And she had your, I forget, I just asked her, your sociology, the family, class.

So she said it was a great class. So you get a shout out there from Inna Barnes, who is in your class. Now my son is at NC State.

So we are enjoying this epic ride. If, what's his name? What would not have hit the three pointer against UVA in the ACC tournament? We wouldn't be here. So tell us about your work at UVA.

How long have you been there? And do you find an audience that's receptive to your work on this topic and others? Yeah, so I've been here at the University of Virginia for more than 20 years. Also went here as an undergraduate. And then went away to graduate school and came back.

So I think at UVA, we have a pretty kind of pluralistic setting where, you know, there are students kind of from a wide range of prospective secular religious conservative, you know, liberal moderate. And so I think my audience is kind of more in the moderate and conservative and religious categories in terms of the students that I'm able to reach with my classes and other forms of interaction. And we are seeing actually encouraging enough more conservative groups here at UVA.

There's a group called Think Again and a group called the Blue Ridge Center at UVA. They're both kind of platforming more, you know, kind of heterodox slash conservative voices in Charlottesville. So I think there, since 2020, when things were kind of in a very progressive direction, we've kind of seen a course correction at the University and we're now creating, I think, more opportunities for broadly conservative voices to have, you know, some kind of representation, both in the classroom and in more public settings here.

So that's good. That is good. So the statue of Thomas Jefferson will stay up.

Yes, at least for our current president, I think that Jefferson statue is going to be standing. Yeah. You did your PhD at Princeton.

Is that correct? That's correct. Yeah. So I did a part of a symposium there last year because they're considering whether to take down their witherspoon statue.

I suspect it will be tucked away in a garage somewhere when they finally come to their decision. Yeah, although it may stand now. I think obviously there's been a pretty strong counter reaction to last, even six months, you know, so I think that may not be a problem.

And of course, I just don't, I don't understand a lot of this, you know, stuff because there's no perfect, you know, leader or another person. And so once you start down that road, I mean, you should just basically strip every statue and building of the names and figures. Yeah, don't name anything after any human being, except I'd say maybe Jesus, you know, he's probably the only one who can be safe.

Yes, right. So before we get into the book, and it is related to the book, I hope you don't mind me saying that this is very rare territory. I'm quite certain that you are the only guest I've ever had on this podcast who has the same number of children as I do.

So talk about your wonderful wife and your nine children, and what is the response you get from people when you tell them you have nine children? A lot of big eyes, you know, when you mentioned you got nine kids, as I'm sure you can appreciate. And yeah, my wife and I met here at UVA actually on April 1st, so fittingly enough for recording this day on April 4th day. So I think that was probably, she probably had a premonition, right? And so it took us three years to really seal the deal between meeting here at UVA and April 1st of 1992 and getting married in the summer of 1995.

And she may have had some premonition that she was going to have nine kids with me, and we didn't want to start too quickly. And yes, we've been married more than 28 years, I guess it is. And my wife is a tough-minded Irish Catholic woman who is smart, hardworking, lovely, faithful, and someone I'm extremely grateful to.

So pretty, pretty incredible. We have five adopted kids, and then we had four biological kids. We thought we could have biological kids, and then we had twins in 2009, and we only had three kids in 2007.

So we went from three to seven children in a little bit more than two years, and that was pretty, pretty hard, actually, to be honest, and I mentioned that in the book. And ironically, my wife, I think, took it all better than I did at the time. We had the recession hitting 2009.

I was just kind of overwhelmed with the financial prospects of providing for seven kids and having twins in all their demands back in 2009. And then we just adopted, you know, some more from Ethiopia, you know, not too long ago. So we just had a lot happening, and so that was pretty hard.

But the twins turned out to be our easiest kids, and so within about, you know, a year of having them, things kind of settled down. That was certainly a challenging moment for me personally in our marriage, just making that big adjustment. And when you start getting them by multiples, it's even harder.

Right. So anyways, that was a tough chapter, I'd say, in my life, in our marriage. But we will be on that in part because we have a strong Catholic and evangelical community of friends here.

In fact, in that first month after the twins came home, we had dinners being delivered weeknights Monday through Friday. So that was really both practically and symbolically, you know, a sign of support. That was incredibly.

Yeah, you think about that, that famous or infamous statement from Hillary Clinton that it takes a village, which is depending on your policy prescriptions could be terrible or could be absolutely true. It does, especially anyone with a lot of children, but any children at all knows, man, I don't know how we would, we would have one child let alone nine if we didn't have. Right.

Literal neighbors and Christian neighbors. And, you know, we have, you know, we haven't usually had, always had family nearby, but, you know, your church or other communities become your family. And it really is one of the things that, and we'll get into your book here, you know, coming at it in a little bit of a backwards way because this was sort of toward the end.

And I'll get back to the beginning, but I was really struck in one place. You said at the end of a chapter, choose your friends wisely because your friends, we all get that and parents, we understand that and we try to inculcate that in our children because they're going to influence you. But you also say not only are friends going to, you know, hopefully support you and you just gave a good illustration of that, but they defined for you what seems normal, what gets celebrated.

What gets honored. Say a little bit more about that because I think any young person, and I hope there are some young people who will listen to this. That sounds like just kind of trite parental advice, but we don't realize all the way through adulthood how much we are shaped by the assumptions and associations around us.

Yeah, so there's a guy, Nicholas Christakis at Yale has done some work on divorce and social networks. And what he finds is that if your friend gets divorced, if your sister gets divorced, your odds are divorced, go way up. But if they don't, they're pretty low, right? And the point there is that, you know, everyone has problems in their marriage and their life, right? And so it's sort of like, what do you do with that, right? And if you see your best friend in the face that's going to form normal difficulties over working family or, you know, friendships or, you know, differences in temperament, whatever it might be, you

know, in a marriage and family.

If in the face of those ordinary challenges, your friend gets divorced, you know, you're going to think about divorce when those challenges hit your marriage, right? By contrast, if, you know, your friend or your sister navigates, you know, these inevitable challenges and gets through them, realizes, you know, look, we can handle this, we can deal with this. Then when you hit those, you know, tough spots in your marriage, you're more likely to, you know, get through those difficult chapters without any other divorce court. And then kind of more constructive, I think just sort of thinking about, like, if your friends are active in your church, if your friends, you know, have, have, have you over regularly? And the husband's clearly kind of engaged in the work of the home and, you know, is doing good stuff with the kids and then you're going to be challenged as a husband and father to do the same thing, right? You know, raise your game, right? And by contrast, if your friends, you know, don't seem to be particularly intent on, you know, kind of cultivating a certain distinctive rich family life at home, if they make negative comments about their spouse or their girlfriend or boyfriend.

You know, if they're not particularly, well, obviously faithful thing to, you know, then your odds of ending up in trouble are going to be, you know, much higher. And of course, we saw this in South Carolina. There was that governor, that Republican governor, Sanford, Mark Sanford, who I think every year we're going to a big trip with his, some of his guy buddies, maybe from college or from early career life.

And they would go on these international destinations and you kind of look at the story there and they would kind of like go crazy, you know, when they were traveling internationally and he got in trouble, you know, in South America with his buddies, you know, doing some, you know, kind of dance with some woman in South America. And that's what broke up his marriage, right? So the point is, if governor Sanford had just been more care, I mean, in part, right, I've been more careful about his friendships. And what he did with his, you know, his male buddies, he might still be married today.

So tell us about the subtitle why Americans must defy the elites for strong families and save civilization. Just say a little bit about each of those and how getting married does those three things. Well, I mean, the first thing to mention here is kind of the last phrase, civilization, like what's the point there? Well, I'm standing here literally kind of in the, you know, in almost the shadow of Monticello, where Jefferson obviously spent many years.

And he was known in the declaration for penning those words, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as sort of three core marks of the American civilization. I think about life. What we can say, I think right now is the deaths of despair have been rising dramatically among other things in the US.

When it comes to liberty, understood kind of more economically. We know that millions of poor kids across the country really have no legitimate shot at realizing, you know, that

kind of liberty that we kind of take as core in terms of rising from poverty to relative affluence. At least the rags to riches going to the American dream.

When it comes to the pursuit of happiness, we've been seeing kind of happiness come down in a lot of different data sets in recent years. And when you look at like, what are the core factors driving these trends in happiness in the American dream and deaths of despair. And we're seeing with research from, you know, Gallup and on the despair that marriage is kind of one of the big factors regionally places where there are fewer married adults, places where deaths of despair are a lot more common, especially for guys.

When it comes to happiness, we're seeing across the country that the biggest factors is from a new Chicago study, the biggest factor there is, you know, the declining shares of adults who are married. And then Raj Chetty Harvard tells us that kind of the number one factor he's looked at for this ability to rise from poverty to affluence for poor kids across America at the community level is the share of two parent families. So I'm just saying kind of the civilizational piece there is that there's just a lot about the way in which the state of our union, Kevin, depends upon the state of our unions.

So strong families make for strong communities, strong families make for a strong country. And as the family has lost ground as marriage has lost ground, we've seen both communities in the country at large, you know, suffer as a consequence. And then for like, basically, when it comes to adults, you can kind of more directly, I mean, I've been in this business for a long time because of like thinking about the way marriage matters for kids, but increasingly I'm worried about how adults are suffering because they're not able to get married in the first place or stay married in the second place.

And what I find is that the number one picture of happiness for ordinary adults is a good marriage. You know, so adults who are in a good marriage are just way better off on a number of fronts, but including their individual pursuit of happiness than adults in the US or not, either not married or not in a good marriage. And that brings us to the first subtitle.

Let's define the elites. And when I first released the title back in August of last year, I had a couple of, you know, elites on Twitter kind of push back, including Matt Iglesias, a smart journalist, sent a left guy. And he's like, what are you talking about? The elites are the ones who are flourishing in marriage and family, Brad.

Why would you say defy elites? Well, kind of ironic because he'd written a story in Vox, a prominent progressive platform, basically saying the decline of marriage is not a problem. That was the headline for his Vox piece. And so he's like actually an exhibit A of what I'm talking about in the book.

And that is that, yes, our elites tend to do pretty well when it comes to their own private lives. They tend to get married, stay married, enjoy family-centered marriages, I would

say. I think Matt Iglesias, from what I've heard, would certainly fit that pattern.

Like he's married, got a son and everything seems great for them. But here he is in public, you know, about it almost a decade ago, I think, saying that marriage is decline is not a problem for the country at large. So it's kind of public messaging here is discounting the importance of marriage.

And we're seeing that elites are often denying or discounting marriage in public. And they're also kind of often attacking or sort of down pedaling a lot of the virtues that are required for strong marriage and family. And the most recent example that obviously is this big push for polyamory in New York Times, New York Magazine.

All the cute cats are just cuddly together. It's just a wonderful fun scene. And so polyamory obviously is just an example.

And we know that, again, in the real world that Americans who are married who embrace the classic norm of, you know, for swearing all others when it comes to fidelity are the ones most likely to be flourishing in their marriages. So again, I think our elites are often giving bad messages when it comes to both the values and then the virtues that are needed for us to build and forge strong marriages. And so that's why we need to defy the elites when it comes to their messaging.

Yeah, you say there's a great quote at the end of the book where you talk about this strange hypocrisy that normally hypocrisy is, you know, you say something publicly and then you know you don't live up to it privately. And it's really this ironic reversal with so many of the elites who just gave you an example. Publicly marriage isn't as important and it's probably just education or it's income.

And yet privately there is this, you know, familial bond and bourgeois values that you find. And so it's climbing the civilizational ladder and enjoying the benefits and then, you know, knocking down the ladder for everyone else who needs to see it and climb up it to get there. One of the questions and what you were talking about, you know, finding marriage.

I wrote something, you know, I said it in a few places in a blog post in a book, maybe 15 years ago, and I was just reflecting what I was seeing on the ground and churches. And when I talked about people not getting married, I really laid most of the blame at young men because I was seeing in the church, a lot of Godly women who are doing Bible studies and who are, you know, getting their life together and men who had a failure to launch and wear all the Godly guys for these women. And I've gotten a lot of pushback on that and I'm not sure if I would say the same thing 15 years later.

And my, you know, I'm not a sociologist, so it was very an impressionistic sense of things. But what do you say as a sociologist? Is it more difficult to get married and are

any of the man influencers on to something in the ways that they really appeal to kind of this aggrieved sense of manhood and masculinity in America? So I think, you know, your impressionistic perspective as a pastor in North Carolina is, I mean, maybe you could say ironically or appropriately shared by, I was in Utah a few months ago talking to some leaders in the LBS church. And it's the same story there, even in Utah, right? There are all these, you know, young women who are Mormon and they're having a lot more difficulty finding Mormon guys who kind of measure up.

And so, you know, I think that's a real problem, but the question is why, right? Why is this a problem? And so in the book, I talk about kind of the role of big business. I talk about the role of big tech. The role of big government played in, I think kind of fueling what could be called a kind of a male malaise for our teenage boys and for our young men who are spending, well, on terms of big business, you could talk about, for instance, just the role of, you know, gaming.

You know, and some of the biggest platforms are, you know, owned by some of our biggest companies, like Microsoft obviously owns Xbox. And so Microsoft is profiting from the way in which teenage boys spend hours and hours and hours in Xbox and they're not developing, you know, other gifts and talents that they could. They're not doing well in school oftentimes.

They're not getting physically fit because they're sitting in front of a screen. They're not developing hobbies. And I think probably most fundamentally what I'm worried about is the way in which the constant stimulation they get from screens may be undercutting their capacity to, to develop the kind of skills and virtues that would be linked to a decent paying trade, you know, like being a plumber or an electrician.

Now, obviously in the first few years, maybe throughout of being a plumber or an electrician, not always easy and gratifying the way the video game is. But you can make very good money today, especially, and, you know, by doing this. And so the question is, are there ways in which, you know, gaming is undercutting kind of the capacity for a whole sector of young men to flourish, you know, in life and at work.

And that affects, of course, their marriage abilities. That's, that's a quick sense of the, of the big business challenge, I think, facing us. And then on the big, on the big government, I think the way in which you've structured a lot of our disability and unemployment programs tends to keep, you know, a decent minority of men, you know, collecting money from the government without enough incentive to get back into the labor force.

I think that's also an issue. When it comes to education, it's also a major piece here. There's just no question, you know, in schools across America that boys are doing a lot worse than girls, the pedagogy, the substance, you know, the way they organize, I mean, lack of recess, all these things kind of have combined to kind of put our boys behind



girls.

And that, that also means that they're not going to be as likely to end up as, you know, marriageable men in the early twenties or mid twenties or late twenties. So these are the kinds of sort of larger issues that have to be addressed. If we want to help our teenage boys and young men flourish.

And then, of course, the other big thing here is that some of the, I've been criticized by women on the left, for instance, on this very point, I got, there's a New York Times piece written that said that I was basically scolding young men. They're not getting married and women for not getting married. And how can they get married because there aren't enough marriageable men out there.

They're not enough good men out there. I'm like, well, why is that the case, right? Why are we not. And there's no recognition there that part of the problem here is that too many young men are being raised outside of stable married homes.

And they don't want to talk about that issue. And then also, I think we don't offer a young men a constructive model masculinity for the 21st century and I don't seem to go back to 1955 obviously we're not going to do that. And we shouldn't do that.

It's 2024. But I think if you want young men to flourish, you've got to paint a vision for them that's compelling, that gives them a mission. And also, I think you would also reintroduce the value of marriage too, including marriage in your 20s, as things to kind of inspire motivate young men to kind of embrace life rather than retreat from it.

So these are some of the things, and so if we're talking about kind of helping men flourish, then we need to address these larger social issues and the cultural challenge of providing a clear and compelling model of masculinity for them too. Yeah, that's really good. And I think it's really useful for pastors to hear what sociologists say and sociologists to hear what pastors and theologians.

Because, you know, when I'm preaching through text on a Sunday, it's not my expertise to talk about governmental policy. And so I'm going to emphasize the sort of things that the Bible does, and that's going to have a lot to do with the sort of person you are and the way you're living your life and no apologies for that. At the same time, we need people like you and others to help see, well, what are the larger, you know, macro societal trends that are making virtue more or less palatable, seem, you know, the plausibility structures.

I wonder, Brad, what do you make of, you know, the number of surveys and data coming out now that show, you know, I just saw one yesterday that the gender gap in churches is shrinking. You know, it's always been, there's far more women and actually more men convert. I think that was, you said something about your own service yesterday.

And then I followed some other threads who said similar things. But you see this, more young men are skewing conservative while young women, especially single women, are skewing much more liberal. And you see men who are, you know, and you take on the, you know, very bad sort of mansions or all the way to Jordan Peterson or Ben Shapiro or, you know, or Brad Wilcox or, you know, their Christian influences.

What do you make of that? Is this a real phenomenon? Is it good or is it bad? How do we who are concerned about marriage make sense of this and harness this in a good direction? So I think it is a real thing. And yeah, in my own parish, which is a large parish here in Charlottesville, Virginia, we had a good number of people coming into the church in one way or another on Saturday night for the Easter vigil. And I was just struck that like, for the, I mean, I'm sure it's happened before, but really kind of was very clear that a majority of these new members were men.

And, you know, the Catholic Church in particular, actually, I would say for much of the last, well, two centuries, maybe, has, besides obviously the clergy been dominated in many respects by women. And I've had some even critics on this Twitter thread saying, are you against women in the church? No, of course not. I'm just saying we've been kind of living in a reality where women have tended to dominate the life of the church.

And it's interesting just to kind of see that it looks like maybe that's that's shifting now where we're young men are more likely to be kind of taking a step, you know, a decisive step towards embracing their own faith. And I think that's happening for two reasons. One is that I think young women today are more likely, especially if they're college educated to be moving to the clear left.

And if they're single, especially. And so for them, I think, you know, religious faith is less appealing and less attractive. It doesn't kind of fit as easy with their worldview that they're, that they're gravitating towards.

So that's part of the story. And then I think, too, young men are looking for an institutional reality that is affirming them as men and affirming their identity as men. And the idea that they have a distinctive role to play in the life of, you know, the family and the church and the broader community as well.

And I think that's happening more, including in my own church, which is a new development. So I think we have this sort of secular development where young women are moving to the left, often through social media and higher education. And then young men are not often feeling comfortable with what's happening around them.

And they're looking around and seeing that other social media influencers are more likely to firm their identity as men in masculine masculinity. And then they can find off in some kind of messaging to coming from a religious community that affirms them as men as well. So I think that's what's happening sociologically now, but I think the opportunity

is that religious institutions can do the work of trying to figure out what it means to be masculine and feminine in this moment.

Again, not going back to 1955, but trying to offer something that's constructive for people in a time and an age when there's a lot of confusion about what it means to be, you know, male and female. And then I think also at the same time, we've got to keep a real eye on online influencers, like Andrew Tate and Paul Davis, who are offering often a very kind of misogynistic and atomistic, you know, he didn't stick and he didn't stick to me. And obviously, Andrew Tate basically says, there's no ROI on marriage for men.

And so just, yeah, get buff, get rich, use, but not invest in the opposite sex. And, you know, don't, you know, don't make a gift to yourself to, you know, someone else, don't get committed. And so we've got to, I think, be responsive to that message and to understand its appeal to young men who feel like there are too few voices and figures who are speaking to them as men and giving them, you know, a model masculinity that's, you know, that in some ways connects with their experience of, you know, of life.

Yeah. That's good. I want to follow up on that, on that question with somebody who's at the very beginning of the book.

First, I want to mention a couple of sponsors here. Grateful for Crossway and for their sponsoring of LBE and want to mention in particular their audio Bibles. So you can get the ESV app and they have a whole bunch of new voices who have recorded the whole Bible and some, some wonderful British voices, which Americans often appreciate.

So Michael Reeves, Kristen Getty, and others. So go to the ESV Bible app and find a way to listen to the Bible. It's a great way to read through the Bible, but also listen through the Bible and you go to Crossway.org for that.

Also want to mention our second sponsor, Desiring God, Their Light and Truth podcast, which are classic sermons from John Piper. It's one of the, you know, probably 10 or 12 podcasts that I regularly listen to. And they're curated by Dan Kruver, who's also the host.

They're about 20 to 25 minutes. So perfect for a commute or a jog. So check that out, the Desiring God podcast.

So thanks to Desiring God and Crossway. You say in the book, Brad, at the very beginning, you talk about your students at UVA. So you have, you have the cream of the crop there.

Great students, great institution. And you say, however, they do suffer from one big blind spot. They are overwhelmingly preoccupied with their education and future careers to the exclusion of love and marriage.

And then on the next page, I mean, these statistics, which they almost beggar belief. One recent poll found that only 32% of young adults ages 18 through 40 think that marriage is essential to living a fulfilling life compared to 64% who think education and 75% who think making a good living is crucial to fulfillment. It's quite possible that, you know, I grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I went to a public school. I was in a good Christian home and in a church that I was just ignorant of all this. But it does seem like growing up in the 80s and the 90s, if I would have asked my peers and my friends, what do you want to do? It seems like they would have said somewhere, I want to get married and I want, I mean, even the guys would have said that.

Yeah, they might want to make money. But these statistics are just, I say, they're incredible, but I do believe them. So what are you seeing on the ground with your fabulous students at UVA and how do you address this? And are you able to change anyone's mind on these things? So I think we're kind of living in a context where the race to get into the right college, you know, for the better achieving students and where kind of all the different images they see on these screens.

You know, are leading people astray. And my wife actually gave me this idea of, you know, the King Midas story, right? So I caught the Midas mindset now where it's kind of a desire is for education, building your own brand, vectors of peace, and there are times actually on building your own brand, vis-a-vis colleges and applications. And then the career, it's all about the career.

And I can talk to my students that length about their plans for education and their jobs are going to do this, this and this and this. And it's all very clear, right? And then I asked them, well, would you like to get married? Oh, yeah, I'd like to get married at some point. Well, what's your plan for that? And it's just silence, right? So they're not being kind of habituated.

They're not being helped to understand that, you know, what they do now in their late teens and early twenties could have a big impact on their success and love and marriage later in life. So that's the challenge. In terms of kind of getting them to move beyond the Midas mindset and to realize that love and marriage are often more important, you know, for most of us than our professional work.

I mean, I talk about things like obviously happiness and, you know, bring in couples who have gotten married and reflect on their own life experiences as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers to kind of just get them to realize that there's more out there than just a good job. And so I think hopefully both the statistics, but even more so, Kevin, obviously the stories that they hear from the visitors to my class, give them a real world perspective on the importance and value of family and marriage that reorient for a decent share of them, I think their perspective. And then one thing that I do is that it's a

very interactive class.

And so I have, you know, I'll bring up into large class. So I will bring up like a third of the class at one point and tell them that, look, in today's world, about a third of you are never going to get married. You know, this is like we're heading to uncharted demographic waters here in America.

And so if you'd like to avoid becoming demographic, you know, tied of non-marriage of permanent bachelor them or permanent bachelor at them, you know, maybe you should be more intentional about devoting as much time and attention to love and marriage in the next 10 years as you have, you know, anticipated doing when it comes to your career. And the same thing, we do the same thing later on when it comes to, you know, childbearing, because it looks like now one in four young adults today will never have kids, which again is record territory, you know, so the most common number of children that a woman and who was the statistic. Thirty-five, yeah, right.

Yeah. It's your model, model category zero. And if you go to Spain, I was doing a trip to a university in Spain last summer, you know, that's, it's much more advanced in Spain.

This whole kind of like, you know, kids thing, you know, so, yeah, so I think they have to realize that, look, there's basically a demographic tsunami coming our way from, in effect, from East Asia where it's already quite well. Developed in South Southern Europe, too. And, you know, unless you want to be caught, you know, underwater, so to speak, you know, to make up this metaphor without a spouse and without children, then you need to be a lot more deliberate, I think, than you had thought.

And certainly your parents need to realize, like, a lot of the parents of my students at UVA want their students, their kids to focus only on educational work for like the next five, six, seven, eight, nine years. And they think that they're going to turn 28 or 29 or 30 and just, you know, snap their fingers and find a wonderful spouse. And like, no, actually for a lot of you, that's not going to work that way.

And so maybe it's better to keep an eye out here at UVA for someone who would be, you know, a good friend and a good wife, a good husband. Yeah, you know, it's the, what's the metaphor in, instead of being the foundation for your life, it's the, you know, the achievement. Yeah, it's the capstone.

It's what you've done. Once you've done all the trips and you backpack through Europe and you have multiple degrees and you've had, you know, a fun time, you know, pursuing your career. And like you said, it's not only that it may not be there, but it doesn't necessarily get easier after you've, not only to find someone, but just yourself.

Sure, it's possible you get married early. There are certain immaturities that maybe haven't been worked out of you. But if you're 30 and you've had nine, 10 years of living

completely, you know, independent and you've developed all your own habits, especially if people haven't come from, you know, families where they've already had to negotiate with lots of siblings and what it's like to live with with other people, you're really developing habits.

It doesn't mean that you're a bad person, but you just develop habits that make it very difficult to then turn the corner. And I've seen this too in the past from ministry with people who think, well, I'll just, I'll wait, I'll get all those things. Maybe I'm married, but I'm going to wait eight, nine years till I have kids.

And again, maybe there's some good motivation, but it's also really short-sighted because I've just seen so many times with great sadness. Sometimes those people have difficulty having children. In fact, that's much more common than people think.

Or then they're, you know, 32, 33 and kind of the clock is ticking and they have a couple of kids when they look back and think, man, I wish we had done this earlier. And one of the themes in your book that I really appreciate, you know, it's right here in the subtitle, Save Civilization. That's, that may sound like a publisher's a grandisement, but it's really not.

When young people, you know, are gripped with a desire, as young people are, to do something and make a difference in the world, they hardly ever think, well, you know what? If you get married and you have kids and you stay married and you love those kids and you give your life away to others more than to yourself, you're doing absolutely one of the most important civilizational things you could ever do. How do you help? How do we help either church, school, communities help people understand that that really is making a difference in the world? Yeah. I mean, I think part of this sort of challenge there is to recognize that what happens in your home doesn't just affect your own kids and your own adults, but kind of it carries out into the broader neighborhood and town, city and state and nation.

So we know, for instance, that Utah has the highest rates of mobility for poor kids because in part they have the most two parent families in any state. So helping young adults understand and appreciate, again, that what happens in terms of their own love life and marriage and family down the road matters, not just for them and their kids, but for their, you know, for the cause of social justice would be one thing that I would say. There's also like really powerful writing on this from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, you know, when he was in prison by the Nazis, you know, a lot of different writings, but one of the things that he stressed was the way in which kind of marriage is in office.

You know, I think the danger, even in my book, is to sort of think about it as like just sort of a path to happiness, you know, and not to sort of see that there's a responsibility there as well that obtains. And, you know, Bonhoeffer talked about it, kind of you're occupying a position of responsibility for your spouse and your kids and your family, but

matters not just for them, but for the entire common wheel or the republic for the common good. And so again, trying to get people to realize and appreciate that.

I think we could even, you know, in certainly in public schools, but also in private schools, we could do a lot better job of educating our teenagers and high school students about marriage and love. And, you know, kind of, I think because, you know, they see a lot of things on their screens today that are destructive and false. And then, you know, everyone's got complicated family situations at home to, and they're, you know, their parents have done things wrong and, or whatever, they're even worse.

And so I think it'd be helpful too for schools, both private and public to do a better job of kind of underlying the importance of marriage and family for our adolescents. Recognizing that sort of adolescence and early adulthood is when all these kind of attitudes are formed and kind of prepping them for adulthood. And then giving them to some constructive both ideas, but also maybe experiences in terms of developing virtues that would equip them for being better spouses and parents once they go on to have families of their own.

And I think you use the language of there's a difference between stigmatizing someone or behavior and valorizing the behavior. And I think this is one of the difficulties that I know pastors feel and just lots of people feel in talking about it. On the one hand, you get nervous because you think, and you say this in the book too, you know, to be raised in a single parent home and you talk about some of your own story.

It's not a death sentence. There's lots of people. In fact, most people will probably turn out just fine.

So we don't want to make it sound like if you don't have the two parent norm that your life is ruined or you can't please God if you're in a church or you can't do anything of value to your community. And at the same time, I think because we're nervous about that too many people end up then valorizing or just not talking about it. One of the things I've found it's easier for me because the things we're talking about here, Brad, the people, probably most of the people listening to this podcast, certainly the people in my church would say, I'm so glad somebody's saying this.

We all struggle to live it out as well as we want, but they agree with it. Why is it so hard to say what seems to many of us to be, thank you sociologists for proving what has seemed to be sanctified common sense. Sure.

So I think there are a couple of reasons why it's hard for us to kind of speak truth into the space. You know, one is that, you know, since the Moynihan report, a lot of people sort of see this as a racial issue, not recognizing that today it's really a class issue. We're seeing working class whites obviously across states like North Carolina and southern Virginia floundering when it comes to marriage and family, you know, a lot of family instability

there too.

So it's not, it's not as much a racial issue today. You know, I think we're also I think seeing that since the 70s, obviously a lot of people experience divorce and some kind of family complexity and no one wants to be seen as kind of like, you know, shaming the people. Their mom or their sister or their brother or whatever, you know, for their own, you know, situation their own.

And then I think our leads to our use to choices. They're used to having lots of options and choices. They want to keep their options open when it comes to, you know, love and sex and marriage and family and they often make good choices, but they're just used to having lots of choices and they don't want to have anyone kind of, you know, restricting their their choice that when it comes to these things.

And then I think the final piece that I would talk about just the kind of the power of the kind of progressive ethos in elite culture, you know, just this assumption that the arc of history is moving upwards in a better direction, right? And then every single innovation that comes down the pike when it comes to love and sex and family is good. And polyamory is obviously the most recent example of that. We're just going to kind of take it and baptize it.

You know, this is a good thing. You know, it's new. It's progress.

And so there isn't like the, I think the recognition is Burke, you know, told us many, many years ago that oftentimes customs and traditions have emerged for valuable reasons. They serve important social functions or Chesterton, obviously, at the same time. It's a fence.

If you turn on the fence, you know, often things will come in that need them to dissipate and didn't want in your, you know, in your backyard, so to speak. So I think elites are too wedded to a certain progressive narrative or worldview that makes them unable to see how departures from certain norms. And certain values have ended up hurting a lot of people.

One of the, you have a lot of good phrases and terms. And one of them I liked, I'll maybe steal it. I'll borrow it.

I'll let people know I got it from you. But you, because this, this will preach, so to speak, to even people who are very convinced by everything you're saying, you talk about. Obviously, you know, to have an affair is very damaging to a marriage and often ends a marriage.

But you have this, these two interesting phrases, lesser infidelities and attractive alternatives. And you're talking about people who, maybe it's the first step toward a in person affair, or maybe it's just not just. Maybe it's an unhealthy eating away at the



marriage.

What do you mean by these and what are the dangers for, for people listening who say, of course, of course I don't want to go, you know, have a commit adultery. I know that's bad, but a lesser infidelity and attractive alternative. How do those creep up into marriages in really damaging ways? Yeah, so my colleague, Jeff, do and I have done some work on kind of on the internet, basically.

And what we see is that a decent minority of Americans today are like having some kind of interaction with an old flame, you know, someone they date in high school or in college. And they're not married to you. They're married to someone else, right? I think that's kind of potentially like a lesser infidelity.

And we mentioned that people are doing that are less happy in their marriage. And we, you know, we don't know exactly why it's the case, but it's certainly the kind of thing. If you want to strengthen your marriage, probably not a good idea to spend a lot of time hanging out with your old boyfriend or girlfriend, you know, on Facebook or some other, you know, Instagram platform.

So I think just being kind of careful, both in person, but also online today, not to be cultivating relationships with people who are appealing and attractive in some way to you and would take your time and attention away from your wife or your husband. So that's sort of one thing that I would talk about. And then in terms of just sort of attractive alternatives, you know, just recognizing that, you know, in some ways more in the real world that, you know, that we meet plenty of people and that it's, you know, it's natural.

It's biological to have some kind of, you know, attraction to someone else who is not your spouse and just to kind of be, you know, given that reality be prudent. And I think when it comes to like travel for, you know, for work, when it comes to, you know, other situations, you know, just being, having some kind of norm that you have for yourself or with your spouse that you worked out that governs how you handle situations where you could get into trouble. You know, I think drinking, obviously would be, you know, another example of that.

And but the situations where I think especially corporate travel is one place where people can get into trouble. Or when they're traveling again with male friends or female friends away from their spouse, as with Governor Mark Sanford, you know, people can kind of get into situations where they're making bad choices that end up hurting their marriages. So part of the virtue of prudence I think is undervalued in this context.

Yeah, it baffled me when there was, you know, such an uproar, you know, years, several years ago with Mike Pence rule, which is, you know, first the Billy Graham rule that you don't have a, you know, a meal with someone other than your spouse. And, you know, and I suppose there's, yeah, a setting, you're on a work trip and there's three of you and

you're at a restaurant and, you know, but it does. I mean, I just can't fathom that my wife would appreciate or think it's a good idea to say, you know what, we don't need these, these prudish sort of rules.

And I want to really honor you and your independence there that I'm sure it's fine. And even even I come across some Christians who want to valorize, you know, that men and women can be friends. And of course they can be friends and we don't want to be, you know, weird about it as if, you know, every, you know, a man, every woman is, you know, some pot of her's wife, temptress or something.

That's not a way to relate to women or to honor them. But it is the case that I can't imagine my wife ever saying, you know what, Kevin, I wish you would just have more close relationships with other women in your life where I'm so happy. You know, if you would have this, this meaningful interaction online that I don't see anything, but somehow both men and women convince themselves that they're the ones who won't get burned by it or it's just a little bit of fun.

And here, you know, maybe the pastor preacher in me is coming out, but I appreciate when someone from another discipline points to the same realities because this does, even from purely, you know, self-centered reasons, this is not going to end in greater happiness for you. Right. And I want to be careful here just in terms of being on the record.

I mean, I think there are different communities have different kind of standards for how you set the bar, right? And so I had, you know, an Orthodox Jewish woman come into my religion class at UVA and do a great presentation on her experience and her approach. And not at this point, the first time it happened, I wasn't particularly aware of their customs. I went to shake her hand after this presentation and she went, you know, in her tradition, they don't, you know, there's no shaking her hands, right? So there's, we can sort of set the bar here, you know, that's right.

Kevin higher and lower in terms of, you know, work, lunch, you know, coffee, fine. But I think the point I'm getting at in the book is just to kind of have people be a lot more cognizant of the reality that it's, you know, it's easy to kind of get into trouble, especially when there's a difficult chapter in your marriage or your life. And that's, I think, when you're more likely to be vulnerable.

And so to having some kind of norm that you've worked out often with your spouse about how you're going to handle interactions with attractive alternatives, both in the real world and online, I think is helpful. And then the other piece that I would say here too is just, it's about sunlight, right? And so if, if whatever you're doing in terms of like work or, you know, life in the, in your religious community, whatever, you know, if you feel comfortable kind of speaking openly about working on some kind of, you know, fundraising committee for your church, you know, you know, if it's all like above board,

you know, that's a sign, right? But if you're feeling like the need to sort of like not tell certain things to your wife or your husband about what you're doing with someone, then that's probably a sign that that this is a, you know, a situation that you should be a lot more careful about. And so the book is designed and partners to kind of get people to realize that in failure is a major cause of marital instability, divorce, obviously, and problems.

And so our culture doesn't do a good job of kind of giving people some guidance about how to handle this. And I think different communities are going to, you know, handle this in somewhat different ways, but it's just good to have some norms to help navigate these new realities. Yeah, and the metaphor of light is important.

If you got something on your phone that you're hoping your spouse doesn't see, it doesn't find a way to know about it. Right. That's a warning sign.

That's trouble. Yeah. So the book is about how marriage tends to increase happiness.

It's a great predictor of happiness. But you also talk about within marriage certain ways of men and women relating to each other that tend to increase that happiness. So you say, for example, your chapter talking about men provide, protect, and pay attention.

So say a little bit about each of those words and why that tends to yield a wife feeling more satisfied and happy in a marriage to a man who does those things. So what's striking, I think, is that we've got a lot of discourse in the Academy and an immediate kind of that would suggest to us that maybe a classic masculine virtues are no longer important, you know, for ordinary women today. And when I talked to both kind of more right leaning and left leaning women more secular and more religious women, I tended to find that women tended to express appreciation and or kind of satisfaction in their relationships, both kind of in person interviews, but also kind of in the statistical work that we did for the project, when the men in their lives were physically stronger, when the men lives were described by the women is more protective of them.

It's probably not just sort of a physical thing, but also just like if like you're out of a social gathering, right? And the boyfriend or husband is kind of making sure that his wife or girlfriend is sort of, you know, well situated and feels comfortable. That's like, that's kind of protective too. It's not just sort of like, but also walking.

I mean, in the book, I talk about a couple who are dating and they're on the subway. And at the end of, you know, their journey almost like there are four people in the subway car with them. Sorry.

There are four of them in the subway car. And one of those guys leaves the car. There's just this couple and then this other guy in the subway.

And he's kind of beginning to approach them in a menacing way. And her boyfriend at

this point stands up and confronts this guy. And you know, and luckily they just about coming into the next station, they were able to quickly leave the subway.

But just by standing up in a protective way and putting himself between this, you know, this bad actor and this woman, she is, you know, very appreciative of this. And they go on to get engaged and get married and, you know, they're happily married to you. But this sort of incident was formative for her in developing an attraction to him.

So that's an interesting example of guys being protected and not being valued by women even today in 2024. And then providing women who kind of rate their husbands as better providers are more happily married. And then when they're when they've got kids in the household, if the husband is employed full time, you know, they're more happily married than if he is not employed full time or if he's a stay at home dad.

So, and I know plenty of, you know, stay home dads who've done great and, you know, good marriages, et cetera. But I'm sort of saying in general, we see is that women are looking for guys who are, you know, reliable providers who are protective, who are physically fit. And we should tell guys this, you know, guys who are, you know, teenagers and young men and looking to get married and guys who are married, you know.

But obviously the big thing to add here is that provided that he is attentive, emotionally and practically in the marriage. And then for when it comes to housework and childcare, this is where it gets a little complicated. So for more progressive women, not surprisingly, sharing housework in some kind of meaningful way is valuable to them in terms of the quality of their marriage.

More traditional women, housework, you know, they're more comfortable with a kind of a division of labor, but they do want their husbands. This is across the board liberal, conservative, religious, secular wives. They're definitely looking today for husbands to be engaged pretty fundamentally with the kids.

So fatherhood is a big part of a successful marriage. So again, when you could put all together, you could sort of, you know, basically protect, provide and pay attention both to the wife and to the kids are the three P's that would be linked to happier wives in general in America today. And I don't think our elite culture does a good enough job of telling men that and I'm also telling women to that sort of the, you know, the set of things that tends to help marriages.

That's really good. I was thinking you were talking about protecting. I remember when my wife was pregnant with our first and the due date was coming up soon and she was painting the nursery.

You know, that nesting instinct was coming in and she was painting and I came in and she was in tears and there were probably some some hormones happening, but I was

not being a particularly good husband. I was confused as husbands sometimes are when their wife is crying, what's going on? And she was talking about, you know, the paint fumes or did it have lead and, you know, what, what would this be doing to the child inside of her and would she get sick. And, you know, just me thinking very rationally was this is not a very, I'm not following your concern here.

I've not heard of people painting, you know, their nurseries and children coming out backwards. So I was just trying to, I was just baffled trying to understand what do you want me to do. It'll be fine.

Everyone paints their nursery. And she very helpfully verbalized it for me. She said, I want you, I want to know that you'll protect me and the baby.

There was a, there was an emotion, there was a sense right there. Okay, I don't know if this is a legitimate concern I have or not, but I want to know that you're listening to it, you're hearing it, and that you own it because if I'm concerned about it, you're concerned about it. I wonder, Brad, do you have three P's or some some pithy phrases in the other direction? What, what are men looking for? What do the, the studies say yield male happiness in marriage? Yeah, I mean, and to be honest, you know, I looked at this more from the perspective of what I could communicate to men in this book.

I think, you know, in these discussions, it's helpful for, for women to speak more to women in terms of, you know, their advice for how to be, you know, successful wives and, and mothers, rather than to have me as a man says men want their wife to be more attractive. That's, that's just a hard thing to, to want to really put into print. Yeah, but I mean, certainly found that, you know, on the one hand, things like 11 respect, were valuable for both women and men in, in their marriages, but there was a slight weighing which, you know, statistically love was more important for the women and respect was more important for them, but it wasn't a huge difference.

I think I talk in the chapter two on gender about how men are more inclined to focus on sex in marriage. Although it's interesting there is it's sort of the reports of sexual satisfaction are kind of equally important for both husbands and wives, but just in terms of like, you know, men are more likely to look to physical intimacy in marriage than, than wives are. And so one of the things that I, I kind of pick up on in both in the gender chapter and the religion chapter, I think, is the weighing which, from my perspective, religious couples have an advantage here.

And the advantage is a kind of ethic of generosity, right? And so I think because men are more on average, and of course, they're exceptions, but on average to be oriented towards, you know, physical intimacy, more often than wives, that means that, you know, if, if the wife is a little more flexible on that side, that's going to be good for the husband. But at the same time, if the husband kind of gets the message that, no, this is, you know, I'm, it's been a bad day, I'm tired, whatever else, you know, this is not the

time for physical intimacy. And he gets that message and is, you know, like, okay, fine, you know, then everyone's happier, right? So I just, there's kind of, if you're generous in a variety of domains of your marriage, you know, you're kind of, you're going beyond what you're maybe inclined to do in the moment, you know, in terms of serving your wife, serving your husband, you know, on a number of fronts, and you're flexible and you can compromise.

I think that also applies to when it comes to the domain of physical intimacy. And I think religious wives are probably more flexible on that score and, but also religious men are more flexible in terms of not pushing any issue when it's not, you know, when it's, it's not seen as a good time in the moment. And what's interesting, too, is this is new.

So I find in the book that about two thirds of church growing couples have sex at least once a week and less than half of secular couples, married couples, have sex once a week or more. And this is, it looks like a new development. There's a thing called the general social survey that shows a widening gap between religious couples and secular couples in there, likely to have having sex on a regular basis in favor of religious couples.

So all that stuff about, you know, church lady on a Saturday at live and that you and I grew up with and other pop cultural, you know, messaging that kind of tells us that religious people are prudes and, you know, all conflicted about their, you know, their sex lives. I'm not saying that doesn't happen, but I'm saying it's interesting is that in this moment today, what we are seeing is that both sexual satisfaction and sexual frequency are generally much better off for religious Americans than they are for secular Americans. And that's in part I think because when faithful couples are doing things well, on a number of fronts, you know, there is more room for not just regular physical intimacy but, you know, a satisfying sexual relationship.

You mentioned the church lady, the Dana Carvey dressed up as the church lady on the Saturday Night Live and could it be, say, and you know, just super prudish hyper vigilant about norms and I've thought about that often because you, you wouldn't do that because the the stereo, the cultural stereotype of someone who is hyper attentive to saying the right things, doing the right things, that kind of school Marmish Tisk Tisk is not a church lady, you know, it's, you know, I would say, you know, well, you can imagine the sort of person that it might be, you got to say all the right words, you got a, you can't fall a foul of any of the progressive nostrums, which may be one of the reasons. I mean, you see it, comedians are often the canaries in the coal mine. What comedians are going to poke fun at what they judge to be the sacred cows in their culture.

And that's why you have, you know, even very vulgar comedians that some conservatives are, because they're saying things that other people are thinking kind of like maybe Dana Carvey was saying something that other people had experienced. So your book is wonderfully refreshing. It's, to me, common sense, but it's also very well

researched with lots of good stories as well.

And so I encourage people to get it. I'm going to give you the last word, but I'm going to first read your last word and then you can add anything to this. You say the very end of your text.

So for your own sake and indeed the sake of our civilization, I urge you, if you are married, honor your commitment to love and cherish your spouse and any children you may have all the days of your life. And if you haven't tied the knot, then with wisdom, seek out one worthy of your heart and get married. It's one of the best decisions you'll ever make.

Great ending. And just why is that the heart of the book and why has that been such an important part of your own scholarship and professional career, that message? Yeah, I think it comes down to actually this. We're now seeing, obviously not just kind of what I call the closing of the American heart in terms of fewer people dating.

And we're seeing obviously the closing of the American heart on full of Kevin in terms of fewer people having children. And, you know, when I was driving my kids to school, you know, last year was driving and texting something very pedestrian to my wife about probably travel soccer and we're one of those bad families that have some kids doing travel soccer. And so at the end of the text, you know, my youngest child, you know, number nine pipes up from the backseat and says to my wife, hearing that this text is unfolding, you know, in the car.

He says, I love you. I love you. I love you.

So here's my wife kind of starting her day. It's like 745 in the morning about, you know, and, you know, here we are 50 something middle aged adults in America today. And this is the message she's getting, you know, on her phone from, and she knows it's her son, not her husband.

That's just adding the beauty and power of marriage and family is that, you know, you can be 50 something, you know, woman and you look at your phone and there's just little message that says, I love you. I love you. I love you.

And then you know, it's your youngest child. And you know, he does love you so much. And that's such an incredibly meaningful and powerful experience to have that, you know, as a way to begin your day.

And so my hope right with the book is that there are more Americans who kind of have that experience, you know, both in their 20s and 30s, but also in midlife, you know, and they don't end up, obviously, if they do have that kind of experience, you know, dying in death of despair, which is the way unfortunately too many Americans today who don't have a spouse and don't have a family are, you know, are ending up in a different part of

our culture. Brad Wilcox encouraged everyone to get the book, get married, why Americans must defy the elites, for strong family, save civilization. This came out in the last couple of months.

So Brad, thank you so much for being here and thank you to all the listeners for life, listening to life and books and everything. The Ministry of Clearly Reformed, you can get episodes like this and other resources at [clearlyreformed.org](http://clearlyreformed.org). And until next time, glorify God, enjoy him forever and read a good book.