Bob: There’s a lot of conversation in our culture today about raising strong young women. Mary Kassian says we need to make sure it’s the right kind of strong we are focused on.

Mary: We have this, you know, this girl power—the t-shirts: the “I am strong”; “I’m invincible”; “I am woman.” I think the culture is pushing girls/pushing women to be strong, but it’s not always strong in the right kind of way. Strength doesn’t always come in the same kind of a package—strength looks different ways in different people—and that spiritual strength is a far different kind of strength than the strength that the world promotes.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday March 16th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. You’ll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. So what exactly is the right kind of strong? How can we raise our daughters to be strong women? We’re going to talk about that today with Mary Kassian. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us.

Ann, I want to know if you—you never raised girls; you raised boys.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: If you were raising girls today—

Ann: Yes.

Bob: —would you get a #Girl Power t-shirt for them to wear? [Laughter] I mean, the whole girl power thing—it’s a big deal. Is it a good thing, or is it something parents should be worried about?

Ann: That’s not a loaded question at all—[Laughter]—lets just start right there.

Dave: Way to go Bob—set her up. [Laughter]

Ann: I do like the girl power thing, but it depends on how you define that girl power.
Bob: Yes; well, we [have] somebody to help us define it; and that was, by the way, a very skillful answer to my very-loaded question. [Laughter]

Mary Kassian is joining us, again, on *FamilyLife Today*. We were just talking about the fact that Mary was here at the very beginning of *FamilyLife Today*. She had written a book called *The Feminist Gospel*. The first time we had her was to talk about that book. She’s been here several times since then; she’s a part of the *Art of Marriage®* video series. She’s an old friend. Welcome back.

Mary: Thanks; so good to be here.

Dave: He did not mean *old* friend. [Laughter]

Mary: —No; he meant—[Laughter]

Dave: He meant—

Mary: He meant—

Dave: He meant a “longtime friend.”

Mary: He meant “longtime friend.”

Bob: —“seasoned.”

Ann: —“seasoned.” [Laughter]

Bob: Mary has written a new book about girl power; it’s about the right kind of strong. It’s to Ann’s point: we need to teach our daughters what real strength looks like; don’t we?

Mary: We do, because there is such an emphasis on women being strong in this culture. I mean, its upheld as one of the great virtues of womanhood—is that a strong woman is the kind of woman you want to be.

Bob: And speaking of strong woman, you are one.

Mary: I would say so.

Bob: Yes. [Laughter]

Let’s go back; and tell us the trajectory: if you had not met Jesus,—

Dave: I mean, I thought you’re going to ask her how much she benches. [Laughter]
Bob: No; I—[Laughter]

Ann: We are talking—her book starts out about arm wrestling.

Dave: I know.

Mary: It does; I was a good arm wrestler.

Bob: —if you had not met Jesus, where would you be today?

Mary: Oh wow! If I had not met Jesus, I would probably be a ranting, raving feminist; honestly.

Bob: You were headed in that direction.

Mary: I think so. I am the only girl of an immigrant family from post-war Germany. I have five brothers. Growing up, I was determined to prove that I was as strong and capable as my brothers were. And I did prove myself, you know, in many different ways.

Bob: For example—

Mary: I could keep up with them. I could, you know, balance and walk across the trestle; I could climb trees; I could throw a football; I could hit a baseball.

Ann: Mary and I would have been good friends.

Mary: Yes.

Ann: We would have been tomboys who shook the world together.

Mary: I was an absolute tomboy. You know, there was not—

Dave: Lets find out!

Mary: Let's find out.

Ann: Oh Dave—

Mary: He just brought a football; and it says, “Wilson.” [Laughter]

Ann: —has brought a football to the table.

Dave: I want to see you throw a football.
Mary: Okay; here I go.

Dave: Throw it over here and let's see.

Mary: There we go.

Bob: That spiraled.

Dave: I'm impressed; I'm impressed. [Laughter]

Mary: I held it the right way. [Laughter]

Dave: I just spiked it.

Mary: I held it the right way; I even got a little spiral on it—

Dave: That's good.

Mary: —almost three feet.

Bob: You had a job—tell us about the job you had that helped put you through college.

Mary: Well, after I finished high school/when I finished, I was quite young. I was 16 years [old] when I finished high school.

Ann: So you are strong and smart.

Mary: Ah, well, there you go. [Laughter] A good combination; don't you think? [Laughter]

Ann: It is.

Mary: So after high school, I started looking for a job. I applied for a job as a night janitor at one of the local department stores. They had never—this was kind of back in the time when girls didn't get jobs like that.

Ann: Well, Mary, it's not all of us that are going after that job right out of high school. [Laughter]

Mary: I know; I know.

Bob: Did you have a chip on your shoulder?
Mary: I don’t know if I had a chip on my shoulder; I mean, that was in the ’60s, when the rise of the feminist movement through the ’70s. That was, you know, after Helen Reddy’s: “I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman.

Bob: We could hear you roar.

Mary: “I am woman; hear me roar.”

I think that most of the women in my generation—or most of the women that were my friends anyway—we all had that kind of an attitude, you know: “We are going to take the world by the tail here.”

Ann: And I think that it’s showing that: “We’re capable.

Mary: Yes.

Ann: “We are strong; we can do this.”

Mary: “We can do this.”

Ann: Yes.

Mary: “We can do this; there’s nothing I can’t do.”

Dave: So, Bob, do you feel that? Do you feel what just happened in the room? [Laughter] I can just feel that: “We can do this! We are strong!” [Laughter]

Bob: —Like/like, “We’re done here.”

Dave: It’s like we aren’t even in here! [Laughter]

Mary: It’s like Ann and I are just connecting here.

Ann: We’re bonding right here.

Mary: We’re bonding here.

Bob: So did your—“We can do this; we are strong. I am woman; hear me roar,”—did that clash with your understanding of the gospel?

Mary: Not initially, because I came to know the Lord at a very young age. My parents raised me in the church. I came to know Jesus at a young age—gave my life to Christ. I didn’t really see a disparity there; initially, anyway.
But then, as I got older, I began to recognize that some of the things that I viewed as strengths really were not strengths at all; they were weaknesses really. I was strong enough to demand my rights; I was strong enough to be: “I am strong and invincible”; I was strong enough to run over people; but I wasn’t strong enough to have the heart of Christ, in terms of just bending, and being kind, and even submissive for that matter.

Ann: And you met a woman, along the way,—

Mary: Yes.

Ann: —that kind of changed your perspective of what a strong woman looks like.

Mary: Yes.

Ann: Tell us about her.

Mary: Her name is Pearl Purdy. If she reached five foot, I would be surprised; she was just this little wee woman. She was old; she was in the church that I grew up in, so I had known her.

She started to take an interest in me when I was in my later teens and started to invite me over for tea; and then, we’d go play shuffle board. We would just hang out. Hanging out with Pearl was/was an experience, because she was so different that I was. She was—she was older, and she hadn’t been educated; she did not have a college degree. I was going for my degree in rehab medicine at the time.

She did not have all those girl power things that my generation had been infused with. And yet, as I got to know her, I saw that the strength that she had—the strength of character, the strength of spirit—was something very enviable and something that I really wanted.

Bob: So what did you learn from Pearl?

Mary: Well, from Pearl, I learned that—that strength does not always come in the same kind of a package—that strength looks different ways in different people—and that spiritual strength is a far different kind of strength than the strength that the world promotes.

We have this, you know, girl power—the t-shirts: the “I am strong”; “I’m invincible”; “I am woman.” I think the culture is pushing girls/pushing women to be strong, but it’s not always strong in the right kind of way.

Ann: I had a very similar experience. I went to a nursing home; I was 19 years old. Dave and I had just gotten married, so I was young—young in my faith too. She was in her 90s. All the things that I thought were valuable, at that time, were: having a strong
voice; having a strong faith—that was important to me; family was really important to me; as a woman, I felt the pressure of outward beauty.

I walk into this nursing home, and this woman is in her bed. She can’t get out of bed, so she wasn’t mobile at all. As I started talking to her, she said: “I have lost most of my kids,” “My husband’s been gone for years,” “My family is gone.” I remember asking her, “What’s your purpose right now of life?” And she had this radiant joy about her that I was amazed at—I’m thinking: “You can’t walk,” “Your beauty is gone,” “Your family is gone,” “You really can’t do anything.”

She took my hand, and she squeezed it. She said: “Oh honey, my Jesus has me here every day for a reason; so when my eyes open up and I wake up, I think: ‘I’m here again? Lord, You must have something for me.’” She said, “You walked in today; I thought, ‘This is who I am here for today.’” I was astounded!

Mary: Well, that’s bringing tears to your eyes—

Ann: Yes.

Mary: —even now

Ann: Because my identity was all about in what I looked like, what I did, what I was saying. And this woman—her total identity and purpose in life was to serve and love Jesus. I had never seen anything like it before. Just that one encounter had a great impact—just as Pearl—you had many encounters, and it really had an impact on you.

Mary: Absolutely. I think, when we see it—as women, when we see that—when we see true strength; when we see the kind of strength that knowing the Lord infuses into a women’s spirit, it is a strength that is of a far different quality.

I think that’s why the Bible talks about: “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” Being strong in the Lord is a different kind of strength; because I am not relying on my own strength, and I am not relying on me. The world teaches us, as woman: “Rely on yourselves,” “Rely—you are strong”—you know—“Be strong; proclaim your rights—

Ann: —“push for your rights.”

Mary: —“push for your rights.” Yes; “Push over people” even.

Ann: Yes; even in meetings, I remember being like: “I have to say something,”—

Mary: I know.

Ann: —“I have to say something; I need to lead.”
Mary: Exactly, exactly! “Be a leader. For heaven’s sake, don’t ever let a man tell you what to do,”—that’s the message that we get, as women, in this culture.

Yet, the message of strength in Scripture is so very different; because Scripture teaches that any woman, who relies on her own strength, is a weak woman; and any woman, weak or strong, who relies on the strength of the Lord is strong and is a strong woman.

Dave: So let’s talk about that. I want/I want to know what you ladies have to say about the right kind of strength for a woman. Obviously, that’s the title of your book; but here’s my question: “How is it different than strength for a man?”

Mary: I think that we are different as male and female; and so strength, perhaps, looks different. I think that the path to strength is the same—the path to strength is through submitting our lives to Christ and following His ways—but I think that, as we do that, God makes us more of who we really are.

I can testify to this—and I’m sure Ann can as well—that as we begin to embrace God’s strength for us, we begin to see who we are; and we begin to flourish as who we are. That tomboy girl, who was growing up, all of a sudden, learned more and more about who she was as a woman; and then, was able to step into marriage—and then learn who to be as a wife, and who to be as a mother; and how to be strong as a mother, how to be strong as a wife, how to be strong as a woman.

The path to getting there is submission to Christ and taking on the strength of the Lord; but I think what He does in our spirits is He just brings out more of who we are. So if I am a woman, He’s going to start bringing more of that out.

Bob: We tend to think of strength in culturally-defined terms.

Mary: Yes.

Bob: The Bible points us to a different kind of strength: it’s the strength to know when to keep your mouth shut;—

Mary: Yes.

Bob: —it’s the strength when to know when to pull back and not engage;—

Mary: Yes.

Bob: —it’s a strength under control—the Bible calls it meekness.

Mary: Yes.
Bob: What we think meekness—is to be demure, and over in the corner, and you never show any strength. No; Jesus was meek, which meant He had the power to call legions of angels, and He said, “But that’s not what’s appropriate in this moment.”

Mary: That’s right; and so learning how to walk in the strength in the Lord is learning how to respond appropriately, given whatever situation that you are in. Being a strong woman means, sometimes, “Yes, keeping your mouth shut and not responding in kind.” It’s responding, giving good instead of evil, in response to evil.

Bob: To Dave’s question though: “Is it different for us? Should we be strong in a different way, as men, than as women should be?”—do you think?

Mary: I think so. I think that Scripture clearly teaches that strength in a man shows up in terms of just a protective oversight and—in terms of just guiding his family—being the head of the home, and the rock for the kids, and the hero for his wife and for his kids. I think that’s a different texture to it.

Certainly, strength in a woman is just as important; its vitally important, in fact. But Scripture teaches that strength in a woman is a strength that is/knows how to respond in the right way, that is open to joining in with the direction of the whole family, and in pulling in the same direction as her husband. Strength in a woman is a nurturing strength. Strength in a woman is a compassionate, and it’s a mothering strength. Even if you don’t have children, it’s a strength that is nurturing and caring for people.

Now, obviously, men and women—there’s a lot of overlap, and we are all called to do all those things—

Bob: Yes.

Mary: —and yet, I think the texture of it is different, given if you are a male or a female.

Bob: These are not exclusive categories.

Ann: Right.

Mary: That’s right.

Bob: Men—men can nurture, and women can lead;—

Mary: Absolutely.

Ann: Exactly.

Bob: —right?
Mary: Absolutely.

Bob: But there are characteristic categories—if they are not exclusive categories—and to try to deny the characteristic nature of them is to try to blur the lines. There is a reason why I have more testosterone in my body than you have in your body.

Mary: That’s right.

Bob: There is a reason why you have estrogen in your body than I have in mine. That’s by God’s design, and it’s there with an intent and a purpose; right?

Mary: Yes.

Ann: I also think women can be sometimes more competitive than men. I know that I used to be in meetings, thinking, “I know I need to push forward. I need to push forward.” There was a part of me that was so competitive, even with women, that I wouldn’t lift another woman up; because of my insecurity, really, and my competitiveness.

I think a strong woman learns how to lift others up. As we understand who we are in Christ, we start seeing the beauty in each other; and we start complementing and drawing out greatness in each other—not only women—but kids and our husbands of not having to one-up; but “Let me lift you up.” There’s a strength in that.

Bob: So when you see the rush, over the last ten years, every Disney movie I can think of has been about strong girls.

Dave: —and Marvel.

Bob: Marvel has expanded—

Dave: I mean,—

Bob: —this cinematic universe—

Ann: Absolutely.

Bob: —to make sure that the women can take the guys out just as easily. Is that a net good thing for parents, raising daughters today; or is it that problematic?

Mary: It teaches our young girls that they are on the same playing surface as the guys and that they can compete with the men in every possible way; so that they’re as physically strong. It’s not true; [Laughter] they are not as physically strong.
Bob: Yes, because average guys can out-run women, and we are seeing that. Guys, who identify now as women, come into women’s sports and beat them. We go, “This isn’t fair!”

Mary: It’s the end of women’s sports, really—

Ann: Yes.

Mary: —is what we are seeing. Is because/because the guys will do better at it, because God created their bodies differently.

I think, when we deny that—when we give women this image and give our young girls this image that we are just the same—we are setting them up for failure. We’re setting them up for failure in life; and we’re setting them up for failure in relationships, especially. Because they will go into a relationship, thinking: “I am just like one of the guys. I’m going to interact with this guy like one of the guys, and I’m going to take charge of the relationship,” and “I’m going to tell him what to do, and I’m going to wrestle with him when he doesn’t agree with me”; and it just does not work well.

What I am seeing is—women, who have been raised in that culture, and who even go into marriage with that, and then, years down the road, it’s not working.

Bob: Yes.

Mary: It’s just not working there. The relationship hits up against the wall; and they’re struggling with what God’s directives are, in terms of marriage. They don’t know how to relate in what the Bible identifies as a womanly way.

Ann: And that’s exactly what I did in our marriage. I almost destroyed it; because I watched my mom, thinking: “She’s so submissive; she’s a doormat! My dad tells her everything; she’s [timid voice] “Okay; I’ll do it.” The way she served, I thought: “Oh my goodness! He’s just taking advantage of everything.” I thought to myself, “I will never be like that.”

And so I come into our—

Dave: —and she wasn’t! [Laughter] I’ll just tell you!

Ann: —I came into our marriage with a voice—with a: “I’m going to be strong. You will not walk all over me. I’m going to tell you what to do.”

Let me tell you—that had devastating effects on Dave. Because he is a strong leader, too, we would butt heads. I would critique him; I would continually nag him—thinking, you know, “I’m doing it well; why aren’t you?” It really has a terrible effect on men when we treat them as our sons and that we know better.
Mary: Yes.

Ann: It was devastating to you; wasn’t it?

Dave: Yes—and you know, we obviously got through it—we are on year 40 now—but I wanted a strong woman. That was one of the things that attracted me to Ann—she was a strong leader woman; and yet, then in our marriage, it crushed me; you know? I think it comes back to the right kind of strong.

Mary: —the right kind of strong.

Here, I have a question—this raises a question in my mind for you, Ann. Because this is an important question I think that a lot of the women, who are listening, will be asking themselves—it’s like, “Do I need to become weak in order to have a good marriage?” Here’s my question for you: “Do you feel that you have given up strength?” or “Do you feel that you have gained strength; in terms of just doing life, and womanhood, and marriage the way that God says?”

Ann: It’s the title of your book: It’s a Different Kind of Strong; because I realized that it took more strength to go to God first—to say: “God, should I say this?” “God, should I say anything?” “God, what is my heart?” and “What’s behind my actions of trying to be so strong?”

As I would go before the Father, He would celebrate my strength; but He would direct it into a different way—a different response; a different kind of love. I realized my strength was coming out of insecurity instead of my strength coming out of who I was in Him.

Bob: You would say you have more power and influence in life and in your marriage today than when you were trying to tell Dave what to do.

Ann: Absolutely! Because words of love and life have a greater effect on the people around us than words of critique and criticism.

Dave: And I would just add this—this is what, Mary, your book is all about; and we will talk more about it—I think my wife is stronger than she ever was when we first got married. And it’s all because of what you said earlier, Mary: “Her strength comes from the Lord.”

Ann: Yes.

Dave: There’s a submission to Jesus/a surrender to Jesus that is not weakness; it’s the opposite. It’s almost like when Jesus said, “If you lose your life from My sake, you’ll find it.” You think, when you empty yourself, you’re going to lose everything; and yet, you’re filled up with power and strength.
Ann: The fear is you’ll lose yourself.

Mary: It’s such a paradox.

Ann: Yes.

Mary: It is such a paradox that, in laying it down, we gain it.

I think that no where do you see that more than in terms of women’s strength. I have women, all the time, telling me that: “I was so afraid; and yet, when I surrendered to Jesus—and when I began to do life His way and when I began to do womanhood His way—I truly became who I am; and I became stronger than ever before.”

Bob: Second Corinthians 12—Paul with his thorn in the flesh—asked God to remove it; God says, “No,”—and He says: “In your weakness I will be made strong.” Paul says, “I rejoice in that weakness, because the power of Christ strengthens me in that.” I think that is applicable for all of us; certainly applicable for what you are talking about in this book, The Right Kind of Strong, which is a book that we have in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center.

You can go online at FamilyLifeToday.com to order a copy of Mary’s book. Again, it’s called The Right Kind of Strong by Mary Kassian. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order; or you can order by calling 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, here, at FamilyLife®, we would hope that moms, in particular, would be having conversations with their daughters about growing up to be strong women. Over the years, we have tried to develop tools and resources to help facilitate that. One of the most popular resources that we have ever put together is something called Passport2Purity.® It’s a weekend getaway for a mom and a daughter—or for a father and a son—where you would get away together before adolescence arrives in the years nine, ten, eleven, or twelve—and talk about the changes that are coming: talk about dating, and sexuality, and those kinds of issues with your daughter. The whole idea of the weekend is for the two of you to begin a conversation that is going to continue throughout the teen years.

We have talked to thousands of parents, who have taken their kids on one of these Passport2Purity weekends. We feel so strongly about how important something like this is that, right now, we want to make available the Passport2Purity kit, which gives you everything you need for the weekend: the audio you listen to, the workbooks you go through together, instructions on how to execute it as a parent. We want to make that kit available, along with a copy of a book by Vicky Courtney, called 5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter or 5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Son. You
can decide which of those books you would like to go with your Passport2Purity weekend.

We are making that available when you make a donation to help support this ministry. Because we think this is so critical, we are asking, if you would make a donation to help continue the outreach/expand the outreach of FamilyLife Today, we’d love to make these resources available to you—both the book by Vicky Courtney and the Passport2Purity kit.

Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make an online donation, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY; and be sure to request your Passport2Purity kit, along with either of the two books by Vicky Courtney about conversations with daughters or conversations with sons; and then plan a time this spring or this summer when you and your preteen can get away for a weekend to talk about what really matters and help get them ready for their adolescent years. Again, donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a donation.

Now, tomorrow, we are going to continue the conversation about what it means to be a strong woman. Mary Kassian’s going to talk about how easy it is for strength to erode from our lives; we will talk more about that tomorrow. I hope you can be with us.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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