

Dive Deep Interview with Joey and Carla Link

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Jill Savage: Well, we want to welcome you to this month's Dive Deep interview, and we are spending time today with Joey and Carla Link. Joey and Carla are authors, speakers, and they really are passionate about encouraging parents and teaching them how to raise their kids well. Joey and Carla, we want to say thank you for joining us.

Joey Link: Yeah, hi. Thank you. It's great to be with you.

JS: Okay. And how many years have you been married?

JL: Go ahead.

Carla Link: 39.

JS: 39 years.

Mark Savage: Cool.

JS: Wow. You're going to hit the big four-o here, before you know it. That's a landmark anniversary. That's exciting.

JL: Yes, it's more fun to say you're almost 10 years from 50.

[laughter]

JS: Now that's true.

MS: That's the big landmark, I think. Yeah. Yeah.

[laughter]

JS: That's great.

MS: So, guys, go back to when you first met. What drew you to each other?

JL: [chuckle] That's a good question. We were working at a camp together, there was a lot of other people, but while we were working at this camp, it was like, the director said, "Oh, there's this great girl coming up who knows a lot about camping." And she ended up ripping my program to pieces.

JS: Uh oh.

JL: Yeah. [laughter]

CL: They asked.

JL: And so I had to go talk to her and, which I was totally opposed to, we started spending hours and hours and hours talking about that, which evolved into a lot of ministry. And while I think she's pretty, I think she's wonderful, what's amazing is that it drew our hearts together to serve the Lord more together.

JS: Very cool. Yeah. And how long did you date before you got married?

JL: Oh, that's a scary thing because... [laughter]

CL: How long did we date before we were engaged? Three months.

[laughter]

MS: That's like us.

JS: Yup. That was us too, three months.

CL: What kind of story did you tell your kids?

JL: [chuckle] We knew each other nine months before, and I was going to say something about it in the ceremony about that, the minister who was a great mentor to us said, "You better not use that number." [laughter]

MS: Right. The assumptions will fly. Yeah.

JS: So you hadn't known each other really very long before you got married, you were drawn to each other's likeness with your faith in that faith journey. But when did reality set in for your differences and challenges? And when did you first begin to experience maybe some frustrations? And what were they? Can you remember that?

JL: [chuckle] We struggled at the beginning because we had between two and 500 of our best friends come in every other day, it seemed like. Working at a camp, you have so many people come in, which took so much of our time because we're both working with them.

CL: Obviously not our best friends. That was a little exaggeration...

JL: Yeah. [chuckle]

MS: Yeah.

JL: But what came about was, we never had time for each other. We got married in March, well, then you get to April. Well, May, everything started going crazy with camping season around the corner. We didn't have days off, we didn't have time alone, we were working together in a way that we didn't realize it. Yeah, we didn't have the time together anymore.

CL: And we were living...

JL: On the grounds.

CL: On the grounds. In fact, we were living in a loft right above the kitchen.

JS: Okay.

CL: So people just climb up the stairs and walk in our door without knocking. So it wasn't private, and that was really hard for me.

JL: And how do we keep our friendship? That became the problem. We didn't have time for dating, we didn't have time for talking, we were focused on work and ministry more than anything else.

JS: How did you solve that?

JL: A year later, we left. [laughter] Left the camp. [laughter]

CL: Yeah.

JL: It was really the only way to solve it. We had no time, and so we started looking for options where we could actually have a normal life.

CL: We went to youth ministry. That was very normal. [laughter]

JS: Yeah, youth ministry's a little non-stop. [laughter]

CL: Going to ball games and Bible study every night of the week 'cause we're very into small groups even though that wasn't a thing then. Between the two of us, we were coming and going, but not at the same time 'cause I was meeting with girls, he was meeting with guys....this was obviously pre-kids.

JL: But we had more time off, we made more time there.

CL: Yeah, we did.

JL: We reset, and it was a good time.

CL: I did have to remind him that going on a water skiing trip with 50 high school kids was not a vacation. [laughter]

JS: Or a date.

JL: Yes.

CL: Especially for one who's helping with the cooking, which I don't particularly care for. [chuckle]

JS: How long were you married before kids came along?

JL: Five years.

JS: Wow. Okay. And you guys have three kids?

CL: Yes.

JL: Yep.

MS: When your kids were younger, that takes a lot of time too, very similar to ministry, how did you make time for each other?

JL: We purposed to have dates. One of the things we started right early on in our relationship is, at our anniversary, we always went away for two, three days at a time. This was even before we had kids. But when we had kids, we made that a plan.

CL: We didn't have any money, we just went camping. But the man who married us who was a camp director, but he's also a pastor, he was really wise in giving us really good counsel about making time in the ministry for us. So we just chose not to give each other anniversary gifts, and we have still to this day... that's what we do. Even if we can only afford one night in a hotel, we do one night in a hotel, but it was always, always what we did.

JL: Right.

CL: Joey did have to kidnap me, Michael was only a few months old on our anniversary and Joey had to kidnap me to get me to leave him.

JL: Yeah, it didn't turn out to be the kind of night I expected.

CL: No, it wasn't but it was still important. [laughter]

MS: Yeah, yeah.

JL: It's hard for us momma's to leave our kids, it really is.

CL: Our first born, especially.

JS: Right. Carla when you look back on that though, what do you think about that now? Are you glad that you guys had that time?

CL: I'm glad that he was willing to take me on even though he knew I'd be angry. I'm glad that he was willing to make our relationship a priority. I'm glad for all of that. I did thaw over the weekend, so that was a good thing, but I do look back on that and we still have pictures of my dad--cause Michael never slept---with my dad sound asleep in the the recliner at two in the morning with Michael screaming in his hands 'cause he's the one who watched him.

JS: Aww, that's sweet.

CL: When I see pictures, I always just smile. Yeah, I had a good weekend, I'm glad you did too. [chuckle]

JL: But I liked being married before we had kids and purposely building a friendship relationship. I've encouraged our kids to do that too. Just because if you don't develop that, your life engulfs around kids, and you're going to have a relationship when the kids leave the house anyway, so why not have a relationship with the kids?

One of the things that we wanted to do in building our friendship was that we enjoyed what each other liked. Now, I remember, for one of our anniversaries we were staying up by her mother in Oakland, and she said, "Well let me treat you." So she took us to see the Ice Capades. Now, I will tell you that Ice Capades is not something on my bucket list. I have no desire for that. I can go ice skating, but seeing that is like, "Guys in tights doesn't turn me on, okay?" [chuckle] But she loved it, she loved it. So every year after that, I worked to see if I couldn't take her to see the Ice Capades when they came near us.

CL: And I learned the name of every single Los Angeles Dodgers player and kept on top of the stats, read them every morning in the paper because I wanted to be able to talk with him intelligently about his passion for the Dodgers. So that was a couple of things that we did to keep our marriage alive, and I will say this too for when you do have kids, Joey and I went on a date every Thursday night. We had a standard babysitter.

One situation I will always remember was a time our daughter's looked at us and said, "You are going on a date tomorrow, right?" I responded, "Why would you think we weren't?" And she said, "Well, you and daddy haven't been very nice to each other this week." [laughter]

JS: Ohhh!

CL: I continued, "Well why do you think then we need to go on a date?" And she goes, "Because you always come home happy."

JS: Wow. Interesting.

MS: Yeah, that's cool.

CL: For parents with children that's just something to remember. Your kids do pick up on all the little things that you're doing.

JS: Yeah absolutely. Wow. So one of the things I love of what you guys were just talking about is you really were intentional about stepping into each other's world and even valuing those things. You may have not *liked* the things that they liked, but you valued it enough to step into their world, and I think this is where in marriage so often, selfishness just really creeps in and we want to do what we want to do, not what the other person wants to do. But I think that that really is key, is learning to step into each other's world.

CL: And if I can just add this, that we still do that, because when Michael got old enough to love

the Dodgers with his dad, I was relieved because he took over that responsibility for me at times. But now we're empty-nesters, and this year I've been easing back into it...learning every Dodger name. I sit down and watch the games with him every night there's a game. It's just something he loves to do, and I'm very willing to spend that time doing it with him. And I don't spend it reading, I don't spend it doing other things, I spend it sitting down, just like we are now, and asking him questions about things that I don't understand about baseball.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Wow.

CL: You need to keep going all the years; you don't get to a point of complacency where you think you don't need to do that anymore.

MS: Right.

JS: So at 39 years, you're still doing that, and you're still being intentional about it and...

JL: She's a wonderful woman. [laughter]

CL: I can tell you which Dodgers hit the most home runs for the year. I'm good. [laughter]

JS: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you don't necessarily love the Dodgers but you love Joey. Is that right?

CL: That's exactly right. You couldn't have said that better. I'm willing to do that because I love Joey, and I want to love what he loves, at least like what he likes. [laughter]

CL: But I will say that we went to a Dodger game in Cincinnati over Father's Day weekend with our daughter and son-in-law. Amy and I spent the entire time talking about other things and Joey and Nathan watched the game.

JL: That was still good. She's right there with me.

CL: So I wasn't loving the Dodgers enough to watch the game when I was there in person, I was much more interested in spending time with my daughter.

JS: That's okay. [laughter]

JL: You can do both.

MS: That's cool.

JS: So let's turn a corner here because you two have really survived a very severe crisis in your marriage, and I think you have so much wisdom to offer to others. 12 years ago, you were in a horrific car accident, both of you were in it, both of you were hurt but Carla was extremely hurt, and it has changed your life together and her life individually in huge ways. Carla, you're pretty much in a wheelchair.

CL: I'm wheelchair bound.

JS: Yep, wheelchair bound, and so when you think about that, that's been the last 13 years of your marriage, almost 13 years. How has that changed the trajectory of your marriage and what are some lessons that you have learned in that horrible crisis that you could share with others? What are some of the ways that God has grown you, lessons He's taught you, things, wisdom that you could share with others?

JL: Wow. That's a lot to unpack.

MS: Yeah.

JL: [chuckle] There's a verse when I used to teach on marriage more, that stood out so much to me from Song of Solomon. You're probably very familiar with it, "She's my lover and my friend" and I think that too many marriages aren't based on friendship; they're based on love that can come and go at different times and look differently. But when I married my best friend, when that accident came along, it was like "Okay, I've got to take care of her." Carla was in the hospital for three months, two months without a mind, and there's all kinds of things that are built into that. It's a whole story, but she has a lot of physical, emotional, mental needs. She's not the same person she was when we married. So going back to the dating issue and doing things together...that's hard for us to find things that we can actually do together anymore and even from a handicap lifestyle, it's very difficult. We may have a lot of handicap laws, but we don't have a real handicap-friendly society for doing things that normal people do, that can walk.

CL: Shopping's an ordeal. You just can't get a wheelchair around.

MS: Yeah.

CL: You can't do it.

JL: Try a closed door with a wheel chair.

CL: And I won't go shopping on busy days because it's even worse. But that's not really the big thing. The big thing is that Joey took a caregiver role, and a caregiver is your boss, he's like an employer because he tells you what to do.

JL: So if you couldn't submit before, look out, right? [laughter]

CL: And being wheelchair bound, that takes away all your independence and as you know, I was very independent like Joey. So that was very, very difficult. I am mentally adjusting to that on top of my body issues on top of fighting pain and I have had nerve damage, so I have extreme pain. There's never a moment in a day that I'm not in pain, and so that's very, very difficult because when you're fighting pain all the time that takes your emotional and mental energy.

JL: Let me speak to that for a moment, Carla. Because with the pain, what's really intriguing is I don't know she's in pain because she fights it so much. I'm thinking the medicine's taking care of it, but there's times that she will speak to me in a harsh way which doesn't bode well for me, and we've

got to talk that through. Now it'd be very easy for me just to assume that she's upset with me, or she doesn't like me. But it's...

CL: And I'm thinking he should just *know* I'm in pain. So he'll say, "I wish you wouldn't speak to me in that tone of voice." I just am looking at him like, "Could you give me a break?" So we've had to work through those issues and...

JL: And if we didn't have the basic communication conversational skills built on friendship, we would be assuming bad things.

CL: So for the caregiver role, we've had to move beyond that and find the lover and the friend and keep that all going. But in truth, in dealing with a lot of it pain. But pain is pain...no matter if it's physical or emotional. So I think that for couples who are going through any kind of pain, whether it's a child who's rebelled and has left home or physical pain like we deal with, they need to cleave to each other. They need to be willing to ask the hard questions and to get through the pain, especially when you know it's not going to end like mine.

JL: I didn't know she was in pain always though.

CL: I thought, "The last thing he wants to hear one more time is, 'I'm in pain.'" So we learned to give numbers, so he can tell what level of pain I'm at. But he just finally told me, "I never assume you're in pain, I just don't think that way." So I've had to be more consistent saying, "I'm at a five or I'm at a ___ whatever I'm at," then he kind of knows what to expect from me.

JL: I think if you go back to 1 Corinthians 13, one of the verses in there it says that, "If you love someone you'll always believe the best in them." And I don't think that's something we always do.

CL: And I will say that I am very fortunate that Joey has always looked for things that we *can* do together. When we were in Mexico on a trip, he got me on a jet ski. [chuckle]

MS: Wow!

CL: I got to go out in the middle of the ocean and see the dolphins. And it was a joy. And so I've done that a couple of years. And of course the following year when we were with a couple of our kids, I am the only one who was knocked off the jet ski. The kids are screaming, and I'm like, "I can swim." [chuckle]

CL: I had my lifejacket on, "I am fine." "Well how are we going to get you back up?" And I said... "That is your dad's problem." [laughter]

CL: I bobbed while he figured out how to get me back on. Because he is willing to say, "Are you up for this?" he's always looking for things we can do together. And I respect that because I don't have the energy to look.

JL: We recently borrowed a 1963 Olds convertible from a friend of ours. Got her in there, and oh we're sitting in there snuggling, cruising down the road, pulled into a Sonic drive in and started smooching while we ordered. [laughter]

CL: We decided that everyone needed to see old people making out. [laughter]

CL: Of course it wasn't in our town, so we were fairly safe, but. [laughter]

JS: That's great. And so you know what I see is that you guys are still figuring out ways to have fun together. Of course, there's a lot of muck you have to get through to get through to the fun.

But the other thing I was just thinking about when you were just talking about the whole pain thing is that *we don't see things as they are. We see them as we are.* And so Joey, I think about you going... "Well, I don't think of you being in pain," because Joey's not in pain. So I think what you are illustrating there is how often we need to push information to our spouse that helps them to connect with our reality. And I think a lot of times we want our spouse to pull it from us, or we assume they'll get it, but we literally have to push it. And that's what you're doing Carla when you're saying, "Hey, I just need you to know that today my pain level's at a five." You're pushing that info to him, and I think that is so very valuable.

JL: Yeah. I would agree with that, but part of that's because of the mindset that I have. I don't want to look at her as being handicapped. So I'm looking at her as being normal like me.

CL: I still go to Mayo Clinic often, well every few months, and the best piece of advice my primary care doctor gave us at the very beginning was, "The more you live a handicapped lifestyle, the more handicapped you will become."

MS: Oh.

CL: Even though I'm wheelchair bound, I'm still in a manual chair. So as Joey said, "I don't want to see you as handicapped," and I don't see myself as handicapped either. So we really work hard to live a life... Even though our normal's very different from most people's normal, to live a life that has joy in it. And really attitude is a choice, and you really have to just keep focusing on the positive and not on the negative.

MS: Yeah. Wow, that's good. So if you could go back and give wisdom to your younger self, your younger married self, what would that be?

JL: What year? [laughter]

CL: Be patient. I think that when we started living together when we were married, we had never done that before of course, so I was expecting him to accept everything the way I did it, and vice versa. And so he came into me and this is our first year of marriage and said, "You're not folding my jeans the way that my mom did before you put them in the drawer." [chuckle]

JL: That was a bad thing to say, I will tell you. [laughter]

CL: It was not wise. And I looked at him and I said, "Well I fold them so they fit in the drawer, number one, and number two, who's going to be folding your jeans for the next 50 years?" He goes, "Well, you are." I said, "Then you'll get used to it." [laughter]

JL: Same thing with my shirts, my socks, underwear, everything!

CL: I did though learn to cook your favorite meals the way you liked them. I stood my ground with the laundry, but I gave in in a lot of other areas. [laughter]

JL: The wisdom I would share is different. I think it's too easy to assume what someone else is thinking behind the terms, phrases, words they use. But the assumptions I had while we were dating are a whole lot different after you say, "I do."

CL: Your knight in shining armor turns into a man walking around in a tin can, and your princess turns into that...

JL: Witch.

CL: Yeah whatever. But I think that the main thing is we didn't know to ask clarifying questions.

JS: So can you explain what a clarifying question is?

MS: Right.

CL: "When you said this, this is how I took it, is that how you meant it?"

JS: Gotcha.

CL: That's a big one.

JL: Versus, Carla, assuming "Oh, this is what he means, when it's not." If I assume, we all know what assume means.

JS: I know. [laughter] We won't go there on this video but yes.

JL: That's good. [chuckle] But if I assume, "Oh well, she really said that to hurt me," rather than considering maybe she's in pain. I might ask, "Oh, are you in pain? Or did you really mean this?" Those kind of questions find out what she really meant, what was her intent, what was the motive. And too many times, we assume the wrong motives versus right motives.

CL: And when we were first married, it wasn't pain and it wasn't kids obviously, it was busyness; busyness got in the way. So he'd ask me a question and I'm thinking a mile a minute in another direction, so I just bark out an answer, and then he would get upset. He'd hear the tone; he wouldn't hear the answer. I didn't understand how he was affected by my tone, it took me years unfortunately to get that, how big that was to him because he wasn't telling me.

I practice clarifying questions every single time I go to a doctor. At the end of the appointment, I say, "May I tell you what I think I heard you say"? And then I just repeat it back to him because I want to make sure I got it. So we do that with each other, "Can I tell you what I think you just said?" Or sometimes I'll email him the next day, "This is what I got out of our conversation yesterday, did I get it right?"

JS: So you're doing reflective listening, you're reflecting back, "This is what I heard you say." And

that is clarifying to make sure that you're not reading something or hearing something inaccurately. Because we assign meaning to things, and the other person may not have actually meant it that way.

CL: And the other thing is I think every couple deals with is when one of them says, "Could you get this done? Could you do this for me?" Well, I always thought I had to drop everything, get it done right then. So I learned finally to say, "Do you want me to stop what I'm doing and do it right now, or can I get it done after dinner?" That was probably one of the most helpful clarifying questions we learned to ask was to give a timeframe to those kinds of things.

JL: And we have had even more so now because with your limited mobility. I'm not thinking about the stuff you can't reach, can't get, can't do, and so she needs it, well, I'm doing a bunch of other stuff [chuckle], I've got a different agenda for the day and even for the moment or hour, but when it gets right down to it, "Do you need this now? Or when do you need this?" We just don't communicate, people don't communicate and we need to be better at asking clarifying questions.

JS: Yeah, that totally makes sense. Good wisdom. You guys, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. We are grateful for your honesty and your willingness to share your journey with us. And so this is Mark and Jill Savage, and we're signing off with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect, a real marriage is two people being perfected. Thanks Joey and Carla.

MS: Thank you!

JL: Yeah Mark, you too. Lord bless you.