

How to Rebuild Trust

NoMorePerfectDateNight.com

Mark Savage: Welcome to Double Date with Mark and Jill.

Jill Savage: Today we're actually working on the topic of trust and rebuilding trust. It's a question that we get asked a lot.

MS: Yep.

JS: How do you rebuild trust in a marriage? Specifically, people talk to us about rebuilding trust after an affair. Obviously we share our story openly, and that's a piece of it. But rebuilding trust doesn't always have to happen after big things like infidelity.

MS: Correct.

JS: And rebuilding trust has to happen on a regular basis, just in the way that we interact with each other.

MS: Yes.

JS: Because sometimes we have bad habits that erode trust and when we become aware of those or our spouse communicates those, we have to begin to change those habits. Doing so, actually rebuilds trust.

MS: And rebuilding trust is so important on the little things, as well the big things. We found, from the many questions that we get asked, that it's a sticking point and they just don't know what to do.

JS: As we share some of the principles today that are so very important, a lot of them will apply to our journey of rebuilding trust after Mark's infidelity. However, I've also had to rebuild trust with Mark. I've had to rebuild trust in my mothering him. The way in which I would talk to him would be more as a mother than as a partner, as a wife.

MS: Right.

JS: And I've really had to change those things and he's had to learn to trust me in that communication. Another place I've had to rebuild trust is in having a critical spirit. Sometimes that's even hard when you're rebuilding something like that because we have to have the ability to give feedback in marriage. I help him see things that he maybe can't see, and he helps me see things I can't see. But when we have the history of a critical spirit, the one on the receiving end often categorizes everything as critical.

MS: Right.

JS: When you're rebuilding trust, you have to somewhat back off for a season of giving that kind of input so that you can get to a more balanced place. Then when I offer that input, I'm not being critical. I'm being your helpmate, I'm actually helping. And, man, it's hard. When we're talking about this whole rebuilding trust thing, we want to give you some specific principles to use. But we want you to understand it's not just for the big infractions of trust. It's for the little ones as well.

MS: Yes. The first principle is to **ask and answer questions**. It's a two-way street and a two-way conversation. I was committed to answering questions regarding the affair. In restoring trust with Jill, I would answer any question she asked, no matter how many times she asked it, and I would not be disrespectful to her or demeaning. Whether it was the first time or the 10th time she asked it within two weeks, or even a few years later when she had another question, I acknowledged her question and I answered it.

JS: Right. This one particularly applies to the bigger infractions of trust because I was really trying to understand what happened. I was trying to understand the dynamics of what had happened. And of course, when you're rebuilding trust, you have to be careful. Sometimes I had to ask myself, *"Will the answer to this question really help me?"*, *"Will it help me to rebuild trust or will it hurt?"* And every person has to answer that for themselves. I am very much a natural investigator. I'm a logical thinker, so I need to understand things to be able to move forward from them. If I was more of a feeler than a thinker, I don't know if some of the questions I asked would have been wise.

MS: Sure.

JS: I just knew I could handle the answers because I tend to process logically and I needed to logically understand what had happened in some of these settings. I would ask questions and I will say, in the first few months, after Mark returned home and we began to work on our relationship, I would ask those questions many times a day sometimes. I'm sure that you could have easily gotten impatient with me, like *"I've already asked that, I've answered that. I've answered that 20 times, when are you gonna move on?"*

MS: Right.

JS: A lot of times that's what we want to do, but...

MS: Right. I didn't do that, but I will admit that I found myself afraid. Was I answering the question the same way I did the first time? Not that I was hiding anything, but another principle we'll talk about in a few minutes will help answer that fear. From the beginning, I tried to be very honest with where I was and as that honesty revealed more and more things, then I was afraid. Was I consistent? Because I so did not want to break down trust or cause Jill to be fearful again.

JS: Right. Asking those questions, but making it safe. Here's a principle that is really important to understand: ultimately, the **trust breaker needs to be the trust maker**.

MS: Yes.

JS: The person who has broken that trust really has to create an environment that is safe for the other person to ask questions or express pain and frustrations. That really makes a big difference particularly in the bigger infractions of trust, when you know it's safe to be able ask those questions. That's the first one.

The second one is to be respectful of each other-that is, to speak respectfully to one another, to speak in such a way that is not demeaning or is not in some way even having the tone of "*This is stupid*," or exasperation. This is where you have to trust God to be able to help you do what you don't want to do. You're going to feel like being exasperated or frustrated, and expressing it in such a way that will actually cause debate instead of dialogue.

MS: Right.

JS: We want, as we're rebuilding trust, to keep things at a dialogue place.

MS: Yes. That issue of respect or the decision of respect was hugely important, that I would never want to demean or degrade Jill in her asking of questions. I felt personally that that was a sign of a truly surrendered heart, that if I had truly surrendered, then I'm an open book. I will respectfully have dialogue with you and not become angry or frustrated over your thoughts or your questions.

JS: Surrender is one of those God tools that we talk about in our book, *No More Perfect Marriages*.

MS: Yeah.

JS: It falls under the God-tool of humility, but surrender is a part of that. You really were operating in a very humble way of saying, "*I know that I wrecked your trust into a million different pieces, and I'm going to humbly begin to put them back together, one little piece at a time.*"

MS: Right. Absolutely. Yeah.

JS: That's the second one, is **to respect each other**. An important part of respecting is to **walk in each other's shoes**. And this really helps us to respect each other, even to have compassion upon one another. That is because, for instance, when I'm trying to rebuild Mark's trust from mothering him or being critical of him, I have to say to myself, "*I want to say this in such a way that is affirming and does not tear him down because I'm putting myself in his shoes. What's it going to sound like if I say it with the tone of voice that I'm feeling right now?*" Sometimes, that means I may need to change the timing of my communication because I'm not going to be able to actually express my thoughts in a tone of voice that is affirming. [chuckle]

MS: Yeah.

JS: That's another part of respecting, is walking a mile in each other's shoes, I think you were doing that with me, going, "*All right. I know her trust in me is in pieces and I understand that. I'm putting myself in her shoes and that's keeping me steady to answer those questions.*"

MS: Yes. Yes. That's true. Respect one another, walk a mile in their shoes.

The third principle is to **offer accountability**. I wanted to be trusted again and I wanted to be an open book, so I offered accountability. What that meant was I gave Jill freedom with my phone. I gave her passwords, I deleted accounts and communicated accounts that I had that she wasn't aware of. And whenever I traveled, I would travel with another person, another guy, especially if I was going back to the area where I had had the affair. I wanted to do whatever I could to build trust, and I was really sensitive to that.

JS: One of the things that was really helpful in that, is I feel like you used that principle that we often talk about. You **pushed information** to me, instead of me having to pull it.

MS: Yes.

JS: **When we push information to our spouse, it builds trust.** So you would be like, "Jill, I've got to make a trip to this city. I need to do that for business, but I've already thought through this and I've asked this person to go with me." And so, you were thinking ahead, you were rebuilding trust, and wow, what a difference that made, because I didn't have to pull things out of you.

MS: Right.

JS: I could totally trust that you were thinking about this, you were already putting accountability in place.

MS: Right, that was important.

JS: It was very important. For me also, in the rebuilding trust, with being critical, having a mothering tone or a mothering attitude, I have sought out some accountability from a friend of mine. Daily, we will text back and forth, "*How are you doing on this particular issue today?*" And that keeps it on the forefront of my mind.

MS: Yeah.

JS: "*How you doing on making sure that your tone with Mark is not demeaning, short, critical, the words that you say?*" It was very helpful. Again, the trust breaker is the trust maker, so I'm putting things in place that help me to become that better person.

MS: Yes.

JS: And you were doing the same.

MS: I was doing the same thing. That principle is offer accountability.

The next principle is to **forgive and to forgive some more**. When we're in the process of rebuilding and restoring, no matter whether it's on the small things or the big infractions, forgiveness is part of the journey. We're in the process of change, and change is not a one-time decision. Change happens with failure, with mistakes, with do-overs, which is what we have talked about before. Sometimes we need a do-over in our conversations, but to forgive and to forgive again, and to forgive some more is part of the process of change.

JS: Right. Let's apply this to both of them. If I come to Mark and maybe my tone is harsh, it felt like I was being critical. One of the things he has to do internally, maybe before he even addresses it with me, is to actually go through that process of forgiveness. That's not between him and me.

MS: Right.

JS: It's between you and God.

MS: Absolutely.

JS: *"Okay. Lord, I forgive her for what just happened."* In my mind, I do the same thing, I forgive him for what just happened. Then, when we address it, we have just down-shifted emotionally.

MS: Right.

JS: Our anger and our offense is downshifted and we're able to actually address it in a way that maybe we'll be able to have some dialogue, instead of debate.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Here's the other piece about forgiveness. I think a lot of times we think about forgiveness as once and done, especially when trust has been broken and you are really picking up pieces. When I think about the affair and recovering from that, I probably had to forgive a thousand times. And I'm not exaggerating. Maybe he would reveal that he had an extra email account that I didn't know about. I respond with, *"What? What is real this day?"* I don't even know what's real. Then I would have to go through the forgiveness process. When I would find out about the different places where they had met, I would have to forgive for each piece of information that I had. That was all about keeping my heart cleaned up and keeping it out of the bitterness range, not letting the enemy get a foothold in what was going on inside of me. Really, that keeps my heart available to God and it keeps my heart available to Mark.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Forgiveness is a huge, important part of rebuilding trust.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Right. The next principle is to **watch your expectations**. This was one that was really helpful for me, because I remember sitting with my counselor. Mark had come home, but he had revealed something to me that I didn't know. I remember saying to the counselor, *"When does this stop? I need everything out on the table. I can't do this because I just start feeling like I'm rebuilding trust, and then I learn something else and I feel like we go back."*

MS: Yeah.

JS: I remember the counselor saying to me, *"Jill, you have to adjust your expectations. This stuff*

usually happens in layers. It's not an, 'Okay. We're just going to get everything out on the table.' There are things that Mark may forget to reveal to you because it just hasn't even crossed his mind. There are questions you'll ask and it'll make him think of, 'Oh my gosh, I have never told her that.'" Really, my counselor helped me adjust my expectations to recognize that rebuilding trust, revealing information to each other about places where maybe trust has been broken often happens in layers, and to have those expectations.

MS: Yes. For me, in watching my expectations, I had to accept that sometimes I was afraid and that I had to grab hold of courage and still communicate the honest answer. Also, there were times that I did forget. I was emotionally and mentally a huge mess and unraveling that was like a balled up piece of yarn that we had to work out slowly. That was where honesty was important; I would answer with an honest, consistent answer.

JS: There's a lot of fear in rebuilding trust.

MS: Sure.

JS: But you have to push through that fear and do the right thing.

MS: Right. Yeah.

JS: Then, finally....the last principle that I think is so important is, when you're rebuilding trust, you have to **balance risk with hope**. In the same way that the trust breaker is the trust maker, the one whose trust has been broken has to be a risk taker. There's just no way around it. A lot of times, people think, *"I don't know when I'm going to be able to really trust again."* As Mark would be accountable and open up his life to me, and open up all of the dark nooks and crannies where he was keeping things hidden, I was starting to feel like I could trust him in many areas, but I had to be willing to risk again. There were times that I just had to say, *"There's no 100% assurance that this isn't going to happen again,"* although I saw that he was a man of integrity. He was very broken, he was very repentant. That helped me to be able to risk.

JS: When you think about you trusting me again, some of the conversations, you would risk having maybe a hard conversation. In the past, I would have come back critical to you.

MS: Correct. I had to risk trusting her, and risk accepting her, and believing that she was working for the best of our relationship.

JS: Sometimes, the conversations both of us would have is, *"This is kind of a hard conversation and I'm scared to death..."*

MS: Right.

JS: *"But I need to put that out there."* Well, that was kind of a clue of, *"Okay. Handle this conversation."*

MS: Yeah. *"Gently, with gloves."*

[chuckle]

JS: Right, exactly. Sometimes, it was just even preparing the other person for, *"I'm going to put something out there, I'm scared of how you're going to respond. But let's see if we can do this better than we have in the past."*

MS: Yes, that's so true. Yeah.

JS: Building trust, rebuilding trust is an important part of every marriage. It doesn't matter if you've experienced those big infractions or if you're just dealing with the everyday stuff. It's part of what we have to do when we put together two very imperfect people.

MS: Yes.

JS: Those imperfections bump into each other, and then that trust gets broken.

MS: Yeah.

JS: This is Mark and Jill Savage signing off, with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected.

MS: Thanks for joining us.