

My Way or God's Way?

www.NoMorePerfectDateNight.com

Jill: Welcome to Double Date with Mark and Jill. This month's topic is going to be about doing things my way versus doing things God's way. It's a constant battle for us.

Mark: It is.

[chuckle]

MARK: One of the questions that we've had throughout the years, since we've talked about the affair and restoration, has been why did that happen? What was the cause? And as Jill and I have worked to recover, I have really begun to realize how much the issue for me was not activities, but it was the condition of my heart.

JILL: You know, the condition of our heart is directly correlated to the condition of our marriage. And if we don't look at what's going on inside of us, we will really miss out on the root of many of our issues. In fact, I would go as far as to say all of our issues in marriage.

MARK: Absolutely.

JILL: It really comes down to what's going on inside of us. So, while we talk about strategies and ways to communicate and all of that, those are all very important, but they can be just symptoms of deeper issues and if we don't deal with those deeper issues of what's going on inside of our heart, then we will be missing out on really making the change that needs to happen.

MARK: We aren't really talking enough about how much we operate from a mindset regarding marriage or our parenting or our life situations, that we are going to do things the way we want to do them. Now we cradle that in biblical truth sometimes, but many times, we want it to play out our way. And when it doesn't play out our way, then we start acting out other ways in which to manipulate, to control, to make that hurting situation become what we want it to be.

JILL: Absolutely. I have shared before that one of the places that I have struggled in the past and I continue to struggle, because it's my human nature, and I will always default there if I'm tired or not thinking specifically about operating differently, is having a critical spirit. And honestly, we find this particularly in a lot of marriages, wives being very critical of their husbands. I have to say there are plenty of marriages out there where husbands are critical of their wives, so it works both ways. But I think a lot of times, wives really do struggle with this. And when I really got serious about wanting to change that, I couldn't just say, "I'm not going to be critical." I could, but that would have just dealt with the symptom of the deeper issue.

JILL: And you know what the deeper issue was in that? The deeper issue was pride. Pride in my heart and it's that pride that was fueling the criticism--that my way was the right way, that my way

was a better way. If you come right down to it, there were times, not all the time, but there were times that I prided myself in being better at something than Mark. And then that would fuel criticism. So, this is the kind of stuff that we're talking about, is being able to go look at the challenges and the places where we seem to have a lot of conflict and where we frustrate each other and where we cause damage to each other, but going deeper and going "What's at the root of that?" or "What truth do I need to apply to change the dynamics here?"

MARK: Yes. In Genesis, we have Adam, who doesn't truly own the depth of his failure, but blames Eve. And I see that so often among men and most certainly, with myself. Now, I don't want to overgeneralize that this could be true of any couple, but most often, men struggle with honesty. We struggle with honesty because we don't want the argument, we don't want the fight. We struggle with honesty because it would reveal our heart and yet, deeper than that struggle, is the core belief that within family, within marriage we aren't good enough. We find ourselves not knowing what to do--we feel like we're a failure in our own home and that was very much me. And so, that was fueled by shame and the shame would not let go and I became very frustrated with God, "Why won't you take this from me?" And yet, it wasn't until I fully surrendered that God began to take away the shame that held me captive.

MARK: And by surrender, what I realized was that early in my life, when I accepted Christ, I accepted Christ as Savior, but I had never really accepted him as the Lord of my life. And because I had never accepted Him as the Lord of my life, when I repented of all that I had done regarding hurting Jill, having the affair, damaging relationships with my kids, that when I fully repented for the first time in my life, I looked up from my brokenness and said to the Lord, "I will do whatever you ask." And that's all lordship, that's a lordship conversation, "Lord, I'm going to do anything you ask me to do." Before I had danced with obedience. I had looked for ways to get around what I wanted to do. I also worked so hard trying to force Jill to be and to become the person that I wanted her to be. I didn't accept her and I wasn't accepting her because I wasn't accepting myself.

JILL: There was this battle inside of you and it's inside of all of us--between what I want to do and what God wants me to do. Too often we thin, "Well, I don't think that God's way is really going to work. So, I'll just do it my way." I mean, really that's the battle that goes on inside of us all the time. But the more we actually get into God's word, the more that we have our marching orders. I'll give you an example...one of the places I've really been working on is measuring my words and making sure that my words are bringing life. And that comes from Proverbs, chapter 18. Proverbs 18:21, says, "The tongue has the power of life and death." That's a pretty strong statement.

JILL: So, as I'm getting ready to say something that maybe I would have commented on in the past, I'll catch myself and ask, "Jill, is what you're going to say going to bring life or is it going to bring death? Is it even necessary?" Because honestly, sometimes half of the comments I make are not even needed, they're not even necessary. And so, I'm measuring those words out because I'm recognizing even though I want to say that... I'll use an example, when we're driving somewhere, I'm quick to comment on his driving or where he should turn or why did he do that and those kind of things that... I'm just throwing it out there, but then I catch myself and I go, "You know what? Not needed, not needed."

JILL: So, I have this battle going on inside of me between what I want to do and what God wants me to do. And God talks about our using our tongue so carefully, He talks about our words a lot. When you look up words and tongue and all of that in the Bible, you're gonna go, "Hey, the words

we say in marriage are really, really important. And so, that's what's going to guide me to do things God's way, rather than to do things the way I feel like doing them."

MARK: Yeah. And for me, the word that I use very closely linked to humility is surrender. And for the first time, I completely, totally surrendered my life, almost to the point where I felt like I didn't even know what to do, but it was different because when I was so frustrated in my marriage before, I didn't know what to do. But I would battle with Jill and argue with her because I was trying to make her see it my way and in surrender, I stopped fighting. I stopped arguing and I stopped demanding and I accepted. That was huge, that was a huge change for me because before, I hadn't accepted. I was unwilling to accept, because *I* knew what was best. *I* knew what was needed, *I* had the vision of my life and my family and after that all broke down, I realized that I knew nothing. I had no idea what was needed or how to make it happen.

JILL: But actually, when you did that, it became a sense of strength in you. I saw it. I literally saw that begin to happen. So, how do you have that kind of surrender, but balance it out to not be a doormat? You're not talking about being a doormat.

MARK: No.

JILL: You're talking about letting God lead your life, your thoughts, removing self from the equation and in doing so, it's like, it's the Scripture that says, "When there's less of us, there's more of God." And I totally saw that in you. You actually became a stronger leader in taking that self out of there. So you're not talking about becoming a doormat...

MARK: Well, I can answer that. I'm not talking about being a doormat and that's what we fear. What I'm talking about is taking on your full identity in Christ. And I spent the first half of my life trying to be what other people wanted me to be. Trying to be what you wanted me to be and for the first time in my life, I was saying, "Lord, what do you want me to be? And I'm going to be that." And so, my personality is more quiet. At times, I'm exuberant and the life of a party, but my nature is to be more quiet and reflective and that's the person that I worked on becoming, was being submitted and surrendered to God, that I would be who God created me to be... That I came out of the womb created in a particular way and that I wanted to live that out in the second half of my life. I was worn out trying to be what everybody wanted me to be and I was going to live my life being who God created me to be. And so, I'm believing that what you have seen has been that change and that transition.

JILL: Right, I would agree. And I think, I know for me, as I walk out less of me and more of God, often times what I feel like God asks us to do goes against what we feel like doing and there's this battle between us that just goes on inside of us. And we need to recognize that that is there. That's also the place where the enemy comes to steal and destroy. Well, this is a place where he begins to destroy because he keeps whispering, "*Yeah, go ahead, say that because you feel that. Get that out there*". Not that you don't express your feelings, but you do it in a way that is not damaging to the other person. So oftentimes, I have to back up, I have to forgive, I have to go through my own personal internal processing before I bring it to Mark because if not, it's going to be World War III and that's not going to help anybody.

MARK: Right.

JILL: So when we're talking about this battle between doing things the way I want to do them and doing things the way God wants me to do it, what we have to recognize is sometimes what God asks us to do is *opposite* of what we feel. It's completely opposite and doesn't even make sense from a worldly perspective.

One place that I have shared that really led me through the dark season of our marriage was Romans 12:9-21. And in Romans 12, it tells us how to treat somebody who's not loving us, who's not treating us well. And these were my marching orders when I was walking through that very, very dark season. And one of the verses says, "Out-do one another showing honor." Well, I'll tell you, Mark's having a relationship with someone else. He's left. I don't feel like honoring him, I don't feel like showing honor to him, but yet, I knew that's what I needed to do.

JILL: I needed to treat him with respect. And so, honestly, "Lord, I don't even know how to do that." And He just showed me that each and every step of the way. Sometimes, there were times where Mark would say something to me, we'd be having a phone conversation and I wanted to lash back, but I slowed everything down and I prayed. "Lord, I don't even know how to respond to that. Well, I know how I *want* to respond to that, but that is not good." And so, all that's going on in my head and there's literally silence on my end. I'm slowing things down so much, "show me how to show honor in this very, very difficult moment." There's another part of the verse that says, "Repay no one evil for evil." Okay, don't we do that in marriage? It's just tit for tat.

Mark: Mm-hmm.

JILL: *You're gonna do that? Fine. I'll do this.* That's really the way we begin to operate.

MARK: When we're defensive in our conversations, when we're battling in our argument over a point that ultimately we've lost sight of the point, we're just fighting.

JILL: Mm-hmm.

MARK: We're not living out our spirit-filled life.

JILL: Right.

MARK: And for me, that was a great example. I didn't even truly understand that I was doing this, but I was functioning under the world's mindset or my natural mindset, that said, "I know what's best and I will do whatever I want to accomplish what I believe to be best." And it was so destructive.

JILL: So, we go back to where we started, that the condition of our marriage is directly correlated to the condition of our heart. And so, as you look at those places where you bump into each other's imperfect, as you look at those places where you continue to have issues over and over again, what part of self is in there?

MARK: Some common ways that self appears is when we work to hide ourselves from being honest and we hide behind fear or we shut ourselves down because we don't want the argument. Another way that our self appears is that we try to control or to manipulate our spouse, to force them to be what we believe to be true and to be right. Another way is anger and rage. There're so

many ways that our flesh or our natural self will raise up and those are the times in which we are working to control the situation, to make it become what we want it to become, not to be what God wants it to be.

JILL: And so as we bring this to a close, this is where we have to die to self. But recognizing that when we actually do that and we begin to do things God's way, it may feel very backward, but it's the way that relationships work best together. God has created a plan for us to interact with each other in a way that deals with the imperfections of this world and the imperfections that we constantly deal with with each other. So what part of self just keeps getting in the way?

The more that you deal with the condition of your heart, the better the condition of your marriage will be.

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.