# Double Date with Mark and Jill: Forgiveness

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Jill Savage: Welcome to this month's Double Date with Mark and Jill. We are devoting our Double Dates, for the first eight months of this new year, to the God-tools that we talk about in our *No More Perfect Marriages* book. The concept of God-tools actually comes from 2 Corinthians 10:3-6. I love how this reads in The Message version. I think it gives us something to really, practically, hang our hat on. "*We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought, and emotion, and impulse into the structure of a life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.*"

JS: I love the part that says, "*We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies and tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God*." That's what we use our God-tools for in marriage. Oftentimes, what happens is we interact with each other by default, the way we've been doing for years, and years, and years. What we want to challenge you to do, and we challenge ourselves to do, at the same time, because this has been a journey we've been on, is to actually begin to recognize the **Y**s in the road. This is when we say to ourselves, “I can do it the way I've always been doing it, or I can pause, and go, ‘*Wait a minute, I have some other options. I have some tools I can use.’*"

Mark Savage: Yeah. I think of how often when we're learning a different way, how uncomfortable that is. It almost feels foolish or hopeless, but all of that is fueled by ourselves. What we have to do is look at the opportunity, seize it, and push through uncomfortable to create that new normal.

JS: Exactly. The God-tool we want to focus on today is forgiveness. This is probably one of the most underused God-tools we have in our marriage tool box.

MS: Yeah, I agree.

JS: I think we think of forgiveness for really big things, when something big happens, and we have to find it within ourselves to forgive. But that's really not what forgiveness is all about. It is about handling the condition of our heart on a daily, hour by hour, minute by minute basis. So we actually want to look at this question: *If I don't use our God-tool of forgiveness, what will I experience?* I think that that's important for us, and sometimes that's where we can actually find ourselves, and we think, "*Wow, that is me*."

The first thing that would happen, if we don't use our God-tool of forgiveness, is bitterness, growing a bitter root in our heart. Bitterness leads to discontentment and eventually disillusionment. It causes us to feel like...we almost get a martyr syndrome, because we grow bitter against our spouse for what they're not doing, or what we think that they should be doing. It begins to, actually, almost poison our heart.

MS: Yeah. We really enjoy gardening and I think of bitterness as one of the wild weeds like Morning Glory. It's a really beautiful flower, but that thing, one day, you can see a flower grow, the next day, it's like it's taken over everything. Those weeds will work to wrap themselves around the actual plant, and eventually, draw it down, and kill it. Unforgiveness is the fertile ground for bitterness. And bitterness will consume every aspect of your thoughts, your behavior, your actions, your beliefs. It'll consume your heart.

JS: If we do not use our God-tool of forgiveness, we experience a growth of bitterness. We also can experience physical and emotional exhaustion. Seriously, it just robs us of physical energy, when all we're doing is rehearsing arguments in our head. We all do it, don't we? You drive somewhere and you have this physical argument, aloud argument, assuming you're the only one in the car... I have caught myself doing that, occasionally, when somebody else is in the car.

[laughter]

JS: But we have those arguments, and we, literally, are expending physical energy, stress. So much of anxiety is stress-induced and so much of stress is induced by unforgiveness; our heart being tangled up, our soul being sucked dry, because we have so much unforgiveness inside of us.

MS: I think of, not only those arguments that we rehearse, that create that emotional and physical exhaustion, but also the lies that we rehearse in our minds. I am guilty of that. I've had to really battle against that, and sometimes, it leaves me exhausted. I'm not so much even having to forgive Jill, or another person, but really, to bring some forgiveness to myself, because I've believed lies.

JS: Exactly. Another result of unforgiveness is a hard heart. When we have a hard heart, we put up a wall around our heart. Our spouse can't get in. We're not interested in resolving conflict. We shut ourselves off emotionally, and even sometimes physically. That hard heart does nothing but separate. Remember, one of the things that we have talked about is something called the slow fades. A slow fade is when we have these things that separate our heart, just one inch at a time, two inches at a time. We don't really notice that, but when the inches become feet and the feet become yards, we start to feel the miles between us. When we use our God-tools, it stops those fades. In the same way, when we use the God-tool of forgiveness, then it softens our heart, and then begins to close the distance that our unforgiveness had put between our spouse and ourselves.

MS: Boy, that's good. That's powerful. That can happen so easily, that we don't even recognize it, or aren't aware of it, which is what makes it so dangerous.

JS: Exactly. When we don't use our God-tool of forgiveness, we often are self-protecting. That's part of that hard heart, as well. We build that wall up, and we protect, and then that puts distance between us and our spouse.

MS: For me, I self-protected by not being engaged, by not being present, by appearing to be busy. In actuality, I was just not wanting to be intimate. I'm not talking about sex; I'm just talking about being present in giving myself to you. That, in the past, was a way that I wrongfully chose to protect myself. It really flowed from unforgiveness.

JS: That's another risk. The lack of intimacy is a result of unforgiveness, when we're unable to be emotionally intimate with our spouse. It's a result. Then, the final result of unforgiveness is a lack of closure in conflict. Oftentimes, we hear couples say, "*There's never closure. We argue, we argue, we argue, until we just both walk away, and then we never have any closure*." Well, usually, that's because we don't ask for forgiveness. We don't own our own part. We don't offer forgiveness. Forgiveness is really what brings closure.

JS: Let's go back and look at each of those and see what the result is, when we choose to use our God-tool of forgiveness, when we choose to pull out our God-tool to smash a warped philosophy. The Perfection Infection is a warped philosophy. The Perfection Infection is when we have unrealistic expectations of ourselves, of our spouse, of marriage. We unfairly compare ourselves, our spouse, our marriage, to other marriages, and to other people. When that happens, discontentment is fueled. We constantly battle the Perfection Infection, so when we use our God-tool of forgiveness, it is our way of actually being able to manage the imperfection in our relationship. Because we're just on this journey of being perfected together, but that means that we are imperfect and we're going to struggle.

MS: I think of another phrase in the verse that you just read, and that's building lives of obedience into maturity. All of these God-tools are all about building lives of obedience into maturity. This tool of forgiveness, Jesus had so much to say about that, because His goal was that we would become mature. In Luke 11, Jesus modeled this prayer for us, and from that prayer, He said, "*Forgive us our sins, as we, ourselves, forgive everyone who is indebted to us*." What do you mean that they're indebted to us? Well, here's the crazy thing about unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is like we put people and all of their ways in which they've hurt us, whether that's a little hurt or big hurt, we pool them together, and we cause them to be spiritually indebted to us. We bind ourselves to them in our soul.

JS: And that verse that you just read comes from the Lord's Prayer.

MS: The Lord's Prayer.

JS: One that we often just recite, but it actually has some powerful wisdom for us, particularly with this God-tool of forgiveness.

MS: Yes. I think of, in 2 Corinthians 2, the Apostle Paul says, in verse 5, "*Now, if anyone has caused pain,*" and then he says, "*And this is to all of you*." All of us have caused pain, all of us will cause pain, but again, our vision is to build lives of obedience into maturity. "*For such a one, the punishment is not enough, but you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, so that he may be overwhelmed. So I beg you to reaffirm your love to one another*." This is what forgiveness is, forgiveness is saying, "*I'm going to bring comfort, and I'm going to bring forgiveness, and I'm going to reaffirm my love for you*." That's huge.

JS: It is, absolutely.

MS: In Colossians 3:12, this is the last verse, it says, "*Put on then, as God's chosen one, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive*." Really, forgiveness isn't just a good idea; it's a freeing idea.

JS: It is. Going back to what we were talking about earlier, when we have emotional pain and physical exhaustion, when we choose forgiveness... and you'll have to choose it, you will not feel like forgiving. But when we choose to use our God-tool of forgiveness, we actually experience improved health, an untangled emotional soul. What a difference that makes for us. When we have a hard heart, that's tangled up in anger, and hurt, it's unavailable to God. When we use our God-tool of forgiveness, we experience peace, a peace, that the Bible says, "*That passes all understanding*." In other words, it doesn't even make sense. My environment hasn't changed, my circumstances haven't changed. But my condition in my heart has, so I can experience a peace that doesn't even make any sense.

JS: When we self-protect, and we offer forgiveness, we begin to experience trusting God to protect instead of trying to do it ourselves. When we build up walls in unforgiveness, and then we use our God-tool of forgiveness, we experience vulnerability in our relationship. We begin to be able to be real in our relationships. Regardless of whether our spouse is reciprocating or not, we're experiencing a new level of vulnerability and intimacy, because of the way that we are responding. Then, when we experience a lack of intimacy, because of unforgiveness, we experience an increased intimacy, when we're able to forgive. Finally, with that lack of closure and conflict, when we forgive, we actually experience resolve, and we experience that closure that we long for in conflict.

MS: Forgiveness, friends, is all about putting on Christ. When I chose to forgive my stepdad for all the violence he brought to my life in my childhood, I made the decision that I was going to forgive him, and I also made the decision that I was going to put on Christ. I was no longer going to let him control me, by keeping me bound up in all of the things that he had done. The freedom that came from me putting on Christ, picking up the tool of forgiveness, was crazy amazing, and it was noticeable to me, to Jill, to everyone else around me.

JS: One of things that I think is important…we often think of forgiveness as something that needs to happen between two people. Sometimes, especially, if there's conflict, and you need closure, and you need to bring some resolve, and you need to own your part, sure...

MS: Right.

JS: But what we're talking about, with forgiveness, is hard internal work that you need to do yourself. When we do that hard internal work, it may involve having a conversation with someone; it may not. It may just be between you and God, and choosing to get your heart untangled, so it's available to Him again.

MS: Well, this is Mark and Jill Savage, and today, we've given you that tool of forgiveness. We are trusting, and hoping, and praying alongside of you, that you are going to use that tool, even today, before the day ends. As we sign off, it's with the reminder: *a real marriage isn't perfect, but it's two people being perfected.* We'll see you again.