

Double Date with Mark & Jill: The God-Tool of Grace

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Mark Savage: Welcome to this month's Double Date with Mark and Jill. Today, we are tackling grace.

Jill Savage: It's a God tool that we need to be using each and every day. We go back to Second Corinthians 10:3-6, in The Message version. *"We are to use our powerful God tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God and fitting every loose thought, and emotion and impulse into the structure of a life shaped by Christ."* When we use our God tools, we are fitting our thoughts and our emotions and our impulses into the way that God would want us to actually respond. We've talked a couple of months ago about courage, which is a God tool we use on the inside. We talked last month about forgiveness, which is also a God tool that we often use on the inside. Occasionally, we do have a conversation about forgiveness with someone else. Grace is specific to the way that we handle our frustrations-particularly with habits, irritations, and the things that our spouse does that just kind of tick us off. But they don't really hurt us. It's not about us at all; it's about them and their idiosyncrasies. We need to pick up this God tool on a regular basis, multiple times a day most often.

MS: As we talk about grace, I want to first of all frame it with what God has to say about it. In the New Testament book Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul says, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Jesus Christ."* That really connects with the verse that you just read, that we are God's workmanship. *"We are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* What does that mean? It means that by grace, we have been saved through faith. It's not our own doing; it's a gift of God. As God has given us grace and has dealt with all of our "stuff", He's saying, *"I want you to walk in that. I want you to go be that grace-giver."* Peter also talked about that in II Peter 1:2. *"May grace and peace being multiplied to you."* I realized something about the way this sentence is structured: grace and peace are like twins, they go together. One doesn't come without the other. When you give grace, it brings peace.

JS: We crave that in marriage, and sometimes it feels like we don't have it because we're always bumping up against each other's imperfect. We don't experience peace, but what if it's actually in our control to experience that peace, based upon what we offer to our spouse?

MS: I think that what the Word is saying is that it is within our control. But we try to bring about change and create peace on our own merit and in our own way, and God is saying, *"Give grace."*

JS: Right, exactly.

MS: Grace and peace will come together.

JS: Without grace, let's talk about what our marriage actually experiences. Without grace, we will have a critical spirit. We will tend to see what our spouse *doesn't* do and blind ourselves, because that critical spirit is blinding to what our spouse *does* do.

MS: Some of us are internal criticizers, and some of us are external criticizers. I can be an internal criticizer and create that nauseous, toxic criticism inside my head, and on the outside try to be all good. But eventually that's destructive.

JS: Right, and I can do the same. I often have that critical spirit going on inside my head, but sometimes it will also come across in my tone or in the words that I say. When we do not use our God tool of grace, we become critical. A second thing that happens is we create a toxic relational environment. We become emotionally unsafe to be around, because we are always angry. We are always frustrated. We are always irritated. In a relationship where grace is not being used, where we are not pulling that God tool out, anger pervades. That causes people around us to feel like that they are always walking on eggshells.

MS: Yeah. We think that we can be critical of our spouse, and yet not critical of others. But we can't control it. Once that criticism starts happening and oozing out of us, it oozes over everybody and the egg shells are felt by everyone.

JS: Exactly. When we don't use our God tool of grace, we are constantly irritated by our spouse. We sit in a perpetual irritation. They can't do anything right, and that is not a healthy environment. It's not a healthy environment for your marriage. It's not a healthy environment for kids to be in, where they feel like there's constant nit-picking and irritation.

MS: I think even outside of our marriage, that constant criticism can happen in employee relationships and friendships. We're developing the criticism by continually perpetuating it in our thinking.

JS: Right. What also often happens is we become shaming. When we do not use our God tool of grace, we become shaming, because we try to shame our spouse into...

MS: Correction or submission.

JS: Yeah. And to stop doing that thing that bugs us. It's not really hurting anybody but we often become shaming, and then we ultimately force conformity. We're not okay with our spouse being different. We're not okay with our spouse having habits that frustrate us. What we need to do is we need to use that God tool of grace to handle all of those things. We need to recognize that grace is this beautiful gift that God has given to us. And guess what? It is a gift, we don't deserve it in any way, shape or form but He freely gives it. We give that gift to our spouse and he or she doesn't deserve it either; but yet it is a gift that we give not only to them, but we give it to ourselves as well. This is to handle those frustrating things. How do we know when to use forgiveness and when to use grace? Forgiveness is when our spouse has hurt us and we need to untangle our heart with forgiveness. Grace is when our spouse just irritates us. We need to offer grace space and let them be human and not raked over the coals for every different thing they do, every idiosyncrasy they have, every weird habit that they have.

JS: I often use my God tool of grace in handling Mark's coffee spills all over the kitchen floor.

Mark uses his God tool of grace to handle the fact that I lose my sunglasses everywhere I go. Neither of those are done on purpose or hurt someone. Before we were using the God-tool of grace, I would feel taken advantage of because Mark would spill his coffee on my freshly mopped kitchen floor. Before Mark was using that with me, he would be somewhat shaming in his response to me. "Jill, can you not hold on to a single pair of sunglasses?" The way that we were handling it wasn't healthy for our relationship.

MS: So far we've talked about what it looks like when we don't use our grace tool. Now, let's talk about what it looks like when we do use that grace tool. Instead of criticizing, we're accepting. We're accepting personalities and differences. We're also celebrating that acceptance and letting our spouse know that we're accepting them.

JS: Instead of creating a toxic environment, we actually are creating an emotionally safe environment. When our home is a place of grace, it is an emotionally safe place to be human, to be imperfect. We can do things differently than the way that other people in our home do things.

MS: Yeah. Instead of anger permeating our family and our marriage relationship, we are permeating our marriage with acceptance and allowing others to be themselves. We're allowing others to have differences, to have the personality that God's given them. We are allowing them to be who God created them to be.

JS: Instead of constantly being irritated with our spouse, we actually start looking at our spouse through a lens of fullness and abundance, instead of a lens of lack. We stop seeing what they're not doing and we start seeing what they are doing.

MS: Wow, that's huge. Instead of shaming our spouse or shaming others around us, we move to praise. We move to a celebration of thankfulness and gratitude for who they are and what they've done, even when they do it differently than what we do.

JS: Finally, instead of forcing conformity, we actually celebrate how God has wired each of us in our family. How God has made us differently and how we bring those differences together to create oneness. We stop pointing the finger and calling something that's different wrong, and we actually celebrate the unique way that God has wired you.

MS: Yeah. The bottom line is: when we utilize this tool of grace, we are going to walk through life happier and easier, and honestly others are going to want to be around us. In the New Testament in Titus 3:3 it says, "*For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.*" Those are strong words. But in essence, that's what happens when we allow ourselves to be consumed by criticism and shame. "*But when the goodness and the loving kindness of God our savior appeared, He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our savior. So that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*" As heirs of Christ, we are called to be grace givers.

JS: When we make our home a place of grace, it becomes safe and we reduce stress. I can't say it's stress-free, because life isn't stress-free. But we definitely reduce stress, and our home becomes a

place that people want to be. It's the same for our marriage. This is our reminder, to us and to you, to pick up whatever tool you need for whatever situation you're dealing with. Thus far we've talked about forgiveness, grace, and courage. You and I have tools that will make a huge difference in the ways in which we respond in our marriage. This is Mark and Jill Savage signing off with a reminder: *"A real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected."*