**Double Date with Mark and Jill**

**When and How to Use Your God-Tool of Love**

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Jill Savage: Welcome to this month's Double Date with Mark and Jill. This month, we are looking at the God-tool of love. Love is a God-tool that most of us probably think we use all the time.

Mark Savage: Absolutely. We say, "*We love ice cream. We love*... " Jill loves chocolate, peanut butter. I love coffee. And I love you, of course.

Jill: Of course.

Mark: We just throw it around easily.

Jill: Today, we want to look at what the actions of love really look like. In God's Word, 1 Corinthians 13 is what we call the "love chapter.” It's one of those that is probably read at every wedding. It gives us some direction on love.

Mark: As a pastor, I've been asked to read this probably in every wedding. So, I just want to start with that. In 1 Corinthians 13, it says this, "*Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant. It is not rude. It does not insist on its own way. It's not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*"

Jill: Those are some powerful words. Several years ago, I decided that I was going to take 1 Corinthians 13, and I was going to break it down and challenge myself in it. I came up with some specific questions that I asked myself to really think through this chapter in the Bible. Let's see if we can maybe do a little bit of a love audit. So, let's think about this, "*Love is patient*." Here's the question. Am I patient with my spouse who is so different than I am? Good question. And the next one is, "*Love is kind*." Am I kind when it takes my spouse twice the amount of time to find something I can find in five minutes? Not that that ever happens in our family.

Mark: *"Honey, where's the ketchup?" "It's in the drawer on the right." "No, it's not. We don't have any."* And then she walks in and it's right there. [chuckle] I hate that. It's a conspiracy.

Jill: "*Love does not envy*." Do I wish my spouse were more like someone else's spouse? "*Love does not boast*." Am I quick to share what my spouse does well, or hide where they don't seem to measure up? "*Love is not proud*." Am I hesitant to share how I'm really doing out of a fear of what people will think? "*Love does not dishonor others*." I ask myself, "*Do I ever dishonor my spouse, demanding him to be something other than the unique person God has created him to be?*" "*Love is not self-seeking*." Am I ever selfish in my interactions with my spouse? "*Love is not easily angered*." How much energy do I waste being angry at my spouse? "*Love keeps no record of wrongs*." Do I have an ongoing list in my head about everything my spouse has done wrong? "*Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth.*" Do I keep my mind focused on God's truth about my spouse? "*Love protects.*" Do I protect this human being God entrusted me to, even when he frustrates me? "*Love trusts*." Do I trust that God has a bigger picture in mind for my spouse's life? "*Love hopes.*" Do I hope and believe the best for my spouse? "*And love perseveres*." Do I keep my mind on the future possibilities, rather than focusing on the difficulties and challenges I'm dealing with today? When we break that down, and we look at it in everyday language and in the challenges of everyday life, I think love is a lot harder to do than what we realize.

Mark: As you were reading that, I was thinking-a few years ago when we were navigating our crisis, I failed that. Every one of them would have been, “*ehh, ehh, ehh*.”

Jill: I think, a lot of times, most of us fail that.

Mark: Yeah.

Jill: To some degree, we struggle with this. I think love is a much harder God-tool to use than we realize.

Mark: Absolutely. We're either loving or unloving. We're not realizing that it's always a decision. We think, in our culture, love just happens and we'll know how to do this. For me, I got to the place where I had to really own that. I had no clue how to really love. Sometimes it's a feeling, sometimes it's not. It comes back to, "*Where are we going to find out how to love?*"

Jill: Right. Exactly. The place that we find out how to love is from the One who created love. God's word talks about love. We talked about it already in 1 Corinthians 13, but He gives us more. Honestly, He showed His love to us in some huge ways. Just sending His Son to earth was a huge act of love. Jesus dying for us was a huge act of love. God showed us through Jesus's life, the way that He treated others, what real love looks like.

Mark: In 1 John 4:7 through 21, I want to highlight a couple of verses. "*Let us love one another for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*" And then in Verse 12, it says, "*If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us*." For me, I think of God as not an ambiguous object, but more of a loving father, which I had to come to know myself, because I didn't grow up with that. I had two men in my life who were supposed to be dad, but they were as toxic as can be. I had to come to the decision of, “*I have to learn how to love*.” As Jill and I were talking, we had the idea that... as we're talking about tools, "*Let's go to the tool maker*." That drew us right back to Father and to Jesus Christ. For Jesus, His love was so profound, He went to the cross for us.

Jill: He sure did. I love that verse that Mark just read in 1 John, because it says that, "*If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us*." I love that, because one of the things we talk about here at No More Perfect Date Night, is that a real marriage isn't perfect; a real marriage is two people being perfected. As we learn to love more intentionally, as we learn to carry that out, as we really do those love audits and recognize the places that we need to grow, that is how we're perfected. Being perfected is maturing. It's growing to be more like Jesus every day. As we talked about this, one of the things that we began to identify is that love is like a wheel. It's like a wheel, and the hub, I guess you could say, of the wheel, is decision.

Mark: Yes.

Jill: We really think, in this culture, that love is a feeling. But the truth is the feelings come and go, but we must decide to love, we must choose to love. We have decision in the hub of the wheel, but then the spokes and the outside of the wheel are many of the different elements of love. Let's look at each of those elements.

Mark: Yeah. In every element is decision. It hinges on that. These are not in order, because they're going to move with our relationship and with our life circumstances, but the first one is physical. That's sexual and nonsexual. Believe me, when I first heard the phrase "nonsexual," which happened to be...

Jill: Nonsexual touch.

Mark: Yeah. Nonsexual anything. [chuckle] It was from a woman counselor, and my wife was sitting next to me, I thought they were in cahoots. Because I thought everything came back to sex.

Jill: We need to show love to one another with physical touch, and that starts with nonsexual physical touch. It can be very loving to hold hands. It can be very loving to give your spouse a back rub, a foot rub. I'm a lover of all things foot rubs.

Mark: Yes. And backs.

Jill: That's right. Then that nonsexual touch also then makes it safe and desirable for sexual touch. It's difficult to just go straight to sexual touch, because just as human beings, we need to connect non-sexually, and for that sexual touch to feel easy to go to, validated. But that is an act of love. Physical touch, in some ways, depending on what your spouse's needs are and desires are... Especially if their love language is physical touch and closeness, that's going to be huge. We all need all the love languages, but if it's your number one or number two, that's going to be really huge. Physical love is a piece of the love wheel.

Mark: It is. A second piece is serving-caring for the needs of others. That is serving together in the home, outside of the home. It's serving one another.

Jill: It's just even the little things in serving. Just thinking ahead. Okay, in the winter time, we have a heated blanket on our bed. I feel loved when I come upstairs, and Mark has already turned on my side of the bed. Okay, that's just a little act of love. That's what serving looks like, where we think of the little things that could bless our spouse in some way.

Mark: Yeah. Many times, if I know Jill is taking off somewhere, I'll go out and start the car and get that warmed up for her. We'll work together on emptying the dishwasher. There are so many ways to serve one another. Jill helps me a lot in picking things up for me, when I need them at the store or...

Jill: Yeah. You're thinking of the little things that make a big difference to someone. Really, it shows you're thinking about them, which leads us into the next spoke, and that is thinking, because love means thinking the best of someone else.

Mark: Right. So often, I was guilty of this, thinking the worst and building that frustration. It was like a slow-moving avalanche, that became an out of control avalanche. That led to our crisis. Jesus teaches us to take our thoughts captive, and that's literally thinking the best any time, including those times that we're thinking the worst. We have to stop and think the best.

Jill: Right. Daily, I struggle with this. I will get frustrated at something, and so then that starts me thinking in a negative direction about Mark, and I have to stop and take that captive. In your case, six years ago, when things imploded, that would happen on a daily basis, but it was like you were building a case. That case was just getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger.

Mark: Well, and then I had the case built, and then I was just justifying my negative out of control thinking.

Jill: Right. And all of that because of the lack of love, not using the God-tool of love. Another spoke of the wheel is spiritual, because love is a very spiritual experience. We can only love when we can receive God's love. That was one of the places where you really struggled. You really struggled loving, but you had never really basked in God's love for you.

Mark: No. I didn't. Honestly, it came down to the fact that I didn't believe He loved me. I had never experienced that love from the men in my life, and that harbored and became a terrible, festering cancer.

Jill: Right. And this is why we're so big about digging to the root of things, because I think on the outside you would have said, "*God loves me*."

Mark: Oh, absolutely.

Jill: But deep down, you really didn't believe that.

Mark: Right. Right.

Jill: Another spoke of the wheel is verbal; verbal expressions of love. That is where we say, "*I love you.*" But the verbal comes up short when our actions don't match our words. It's important that we verbalize our love for one another, that we tell each other that we love each other. But we have to realize that all these spokes work together. When our actions match our words, then that's believable to our spouse.

Mark: And that's why we've produced on this page a copy of 1 Corinthians 13 that Jill read, so that you can download that and copy it off, and discuss love, and grow that verbal element of love.

Jill: That brings us to the next spoke, and that is love is growing. This is the place where we were talking in 1 John earlier about our love being perfected, so it's growing. We're learning to be more like Jesus. We're learning to love more like Jesus. One of the big things that Jesus did is He loved unconditional. God loves us unconditionally. That means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and there is nothing I can do to make God love me less. That's huge. Now, is there nothing I can do to make my spouse love me more, to make my spouse love me less? That's a little scary.

Mark: Oh, right.

Jill: Is there anything Mark can do to make me love him more? Is there anything he can do to make me love him less? Well, my love's not unconditional. It's not going to be perfect on this side of heaven, but I can keep growing it away from being conditional. "*If you do what I want, I'll love you, or I'll act loving to you,*" that's conditional love. Unconditional says, "*Regardless of what you do, I love you."*

Mark: What I've found is that growth has to be decided individually throughout marriage, that if you're not fertilizing, if you're not adding to that marriage by growing it, it's going to stagnate and die. It's going to run away with you.

Jill: The next spoke of the wheel is action. All we've already been talking about, the physical, the serving, the thinking, those are all action items, but love is active. Being an active person who is deciding to love is an important part of this love journey.

The final spoke in the wheel is feelings. You can't really decide about the feelings, per se, but we think it belongs on the love wheel, and that's because feelings are a part of love. What we need to understand though, is those feelings do come and they do go. That's a normal ebb and flow of relationship. The more we are actively loving, we are serving, and we are verbalizing our love, we are showing our love. The more we do that, the more the feelings will likely follow.

Mark: Yeah. Think about a wheel on your car. If the tire or the wheel runs out of air, it's going to become flat or it's going to become low enough that you're limping along. We would guess that, for each time that we're just kind of limping along in our marriage, we're not having the best or the vibrancy that we desire, it's not because of feelings. It's because one of these has been neglected, one of these elements have been neglected. Your wheel has a flat side, and we want to help you have a well-rounded love life that is a blessing to yourself and to others.

Jill: Absolutely. We hope that this has been helpful. We hope it's been challenging. We hope that you'll print out the love audit, the 1 Corinthians 13, for marriage. Keep that somewhere where you can ask yourself on a pretty regular basis, "*How am I doing?*" You can even further discuss it, if you and your spouse are watching this together. But you have a God-tool of love, and we want to encourage you to use it on a daily basis, on an hour-by-hour basis, on a minute-by-minute basis.

Mark: Yeah. We are so thankful that you have joined us today, and that you are on this journey in marriage, and that you are going to have a successful time using this tool of love.

Jill: This is Mark and Jill Savage, signing off with a reminder to love well.