

# Dive Deep with Greg and Erin Smalley

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**Jill Savage:** Well, we are so excited that you have joined us tonight for our Dive Deep interview with Greg and Erin Smalley. Greg and Erin have been married 27 years. They are the authors of over 20 books, and we are excited to pull back the curtain on their very real marriage to find out the lessons they've learned and what wisdom they have to offer to us. So welcome, Greg and Erin.

**Mark Savage:** Yeah. Hi, guys.

**Greg Smalley:** Hey, thank you so much.

**Erin Smalley:** Hi, thanks for having us.

**GS:** We didn't know you were gonna pull the curtain back. I don't think we would've agreed to come on. [laughter]

**ES:** Thank goodness, it's not the shower curtain. [laughter]

**GS:** That's true.

**MS:** Yeah. That's another show. [laughter]

**GS:** Another network and another show.

**ES:** One we don't wanna visit. [laughter]

**MS:** Well, we are really excited to spend this time with you. Tell us a little bit about yourselves, how many kids, that kind of thing.

**ES:** Well, Greg and I have been married hitting 26 years on May the 30th.

**JS:** I said 27 in the beginning. I did it wrong.

**ES:** Oh, that's alright. We like to add up, so we'll go with 27.

**GS:** You're hopeful for us. [laughter]

**GS:** We like the optimism. Thank you for that.

**ES:** We do like that. We both work here at Focus on the Family. Greg is the VP of Marriage and Family Formation, and I serve on the team with him. I also see private practice clients in a local center here in Colorado Springs. We have four children. We have one married daughter, who's 24, and she's a nurse, and our 20-year-old daughter is entering nursing school, and I'm originally a nurse, so Greg is relieved that we have all of his physical needs covered as he ages. That'll be three

of us, my word. And so, then we have a 17-year-old son, he just turned 17 on Monday, and then a 10-year-old daughter. We have kids both through biological kids and then one through the gift of adoption.

**GS:** And we moonlighted at the air traffic control center. So, as you can see, we got our headsets and our mics, so if we have to stop, we're probably landing a big jumbo jet, so just bear with us. [laughter] We actually love working together and have been just privileged to be able to do marriage ministry now, going on around 20 years.

**JS:** Wow. So, Greg, your father was a very well-known marriage author. What's that been like to be a bit in his shadow?

**GS:** Yeah, what I so appreciated about my dad is he never pushed us, never said, "Hey, when are you gonna join the team." As a matter of fact, all through college I wanted to be a lawyer, and he was very supportive of that. And the more I watched what he was doing, as we would go to his marriage seminars and hear people talking about how he helped save their marriage, there was something that I thought was so cool about what he was doing. I ended up in seminary and then a counseling program and thought, "Man, I love doing this and would love to team up and partner with him." And my brother has done that as well, and my sister also does a lot of marriage ministry with her husband. And so, it's been great just to carry on that legacy. He's been with the Lord now for about two years, and everywhere we go to do seminars, people come up and tell us stories, "Our new marriage, it was terrible, and we watched your dad's videos and it saved our marriage." So, it's really neat to continue to see how God used him and my mom in their marriage ministry, almost for 40 years I think they did that.

**JS:** I love it. Well, we've been reading your book *Crazy Little Thing Called Marriage*.

**GS:** Yeah, you guys look like you're doing better, so it's good to see that it's working. [laughter]

**MS:** I wanna know why "crazy" isn't like capitalized and distorted! [laughter]

**ES:** Yeah, we were trying to be subtle with that message, not so obvious and overbearing. Well, I'm sure for you guys like us, it's this amazing journey full of ups and downs and unknowns, and there's crazy moments, and there's relaxing moments, and there's moments like we're in a canoe going down this river together. We never know what's around the next bend. And that's what we mean by crazy. This awesome journey that we get to be on together.

**ES:** Just a crazy adventure, but it's so awesome that we have each other to do that with, that we're not doing it alone, that we're together, and we never know what's up ahead.

**JS:** Exactly. Well, one of the things I loved is one of your first stories in the book, you talked about your first argument being on your honeymoon.

**GS:** Yes. [laughter]

**JS:** Actually, we could relate too. We had the same thing happen, but I'm curious, tell us a little bit about that. What was a lesson learned, or where did that first argument kind of open your eyes?

**ES:** I think so many premarital couples that we work with and we've worked with over the years have no understanding that it's not gonna be bliss forever. And we learned quickly that we were going to have our differences, that we were two different people with two differing opinions. We went to Hawaii and it got super spicy right away. [laughter]

**GS:** Yeah, the story is, we had an opportunity to go to Hawaii, so we had some family friends that owned a place in Hawaii and said we could use that.

**ES:** It was very nice.

**GS:** I wanted to find a waterfall, you know, one of those cool, gorgeous Hawaiian waterfalls and just play around. Well, we kept doing other things, and every day I'd suggest that, and it just didn't happen. Finally, our last opportunity, all these things happened, and it ended up being too late at night. The one waterfall I chose to go hike at, there was a "No Swimming" sign, so I couldn't get her to jump in the water and play around like I had envisioned.

**ES:** Well, because I was certain that if there was a "No Swimming" sign, there is a reason there was a "No Swimming" sign. As a nurse, I'm thinking that there's bacteria in the water, and we're gonna get deathly ill if we jump in that. And so, he jumps in, and he looks back, and I'm standing on the edge with my toes up to the edge of the rocks, and I'm like, "No, I'm not getting in."

**GS:** We argued about if that sign really was directed to us. I was saying this to other people, "We don't have to worry about it, we'll be fine." Well, a big conflict broke out to the point that I told her, "Fine, this honeymoon is ruined for me." I've since learned that may not be the right thing to say on your honeymoon.

**MS:** That would be in the book of *Do Not Say*.

**GS:** Yeah. You know, I heard someone say one time that, "Marriage shows you how selfish you are, parenting shows you how angry you are." And that's for me the lesson I think that I learned very quick. I didn't really understand it then. Looking back, I get how incredibly selfish I was. Proverbs 13:10 says that pride leads to conflict. And I think for me, that was the big "Aha". Looking back going, "You know what, I was pretty selfish." Well, let's be honest, I am pretty selfish, but especially back then.

**ES:** I'm writing that down, by the way. [laughter]

**GS:** You know, I wanted to jump in the waterfall and because she wouldn't do that with me, I was mad because I didn't get my way. And I think for the early years of our marriage, the piece that I so realize is just how selfish I was. I was 23 when we got married, and I just didn't know how to not be so selfish. And I think that's part of the beauty of marriage, is that it teaches you that if you're gonna make this work, you've got to really deal with that part. I mean, all of us struggle with pride, struggle with selfishness, but that really stood out. I mean I could give you plenty of stories where that's been true.

**ES:** Sadly, even this morning we were like, "How old were we when we got married?"

**ES:** So, we're doing the math, and we're like, "Oh, yeah, you were 23, and I was 24." We were

young at heart, and we didn't understand what we were bringing to the marriage. We had a lot of growing up to do, a lot of maturing to do, and thank goodness 26 years later we still have more growing to do.

**GS:** I think, one of the best verses that as a young couple you should memorize and so ingest it and get it, is Philippians 2:3 that talks about, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit." You know, selfish ambition is when I want what I want. My ambition is to get my way, which is usually selfish. Vain conceit is when I know I'm right. And that day, by that waterfall, I knew I was right. We could swim, the stupid sign didn't really apply to us, I want my way, and she's interfering with that. But I love the rest of that verse, that says, "In humility, consider others to be more important." And that's been a journey for me, really learning as a husband, "How do I apply that?" What does humility look like in those moments that, "Ah, I just wanna get in this waterfall! This is our last chance! What's wrong with you?" But I mean, that's life, right?

**MS:** It is.

**GS:** We bump into the differences in what we each want, and that's the part of learning how we work through that. But as an individual, I had to learn, "What does humility look like?" And I don't wanna be humble. [laughter]

**JS:** Right.

**MS:** I really loved how, throughout your book, you were honest with your challenges and all the romance secrets. I thought that was really fun. What made you go in that direction? The romance secrets?

**ES:** You know, we really believe that couples need to do two things: One, they need to learn how to fight well and handle conflict and manage conflict well, but then they also need to learn how to be proactive in their marriage. Because so often, after we get married, we get busy, we start a family, we're building careers. So many of those proactive things that we did when we were dating, you know, pouring into our relationship, our marriage, intentionally, we stop. And so really, we did kind of a meta-analysis of all the research that's out there and really looking at what are 12 things that we can be doing, proactively, to build a healthy marriage.

**GS:** And no one liked the word "traits, 12 traits", so, they thought romance sounded way better.

**ES:** For some reason. [chuckle]

**JS:** And secrets.

**GS:** I mean, right? We just don't wanna stay together, and either be married roommates or just living parallel lives. I married Erin with this hope of spending a lifetime on this grand journey, but really enjoying it, having fun, and romance is such a big part of that.

**JS:** We wanna get to those. We can't talk about all 12 secrets, but we wanna talk about a few. Before we do that, I want us to dig into something you talked about called: marriage scams. Like one is, "Marriage is easy when you find the one." And another one is, "Marriage is about being happy." But you said that there was one particular scam in there, that you were really concerned about, and we

loved this.

**MS:** "There's only one happiness in this life: To love and to be loved." So why is that so destructive?

**GS:** Yeah, it sounds right which is why it's a scam. We hear that again and again, "To love and be loved". The problem is, half of it, we'd say, is spot on. It's exactly what God laid out in the greatest commandment. And there's half of it that, we think, creates real problems within a marriage.

**ES:** Well, you think about the greatest commandment, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love others as you love yourself." And the truth is, our job is to love: love God, and love others as we love ourselves. But the culture sets it up that we have to find someone to give us that love. Nowhere in Scripture does it say, we have to find someone to love us. We are so loved. You look at Scripture, and throughout the message is that God loves us fully and abundantly, and yet, we often don't recognize that. Instead, we get married with the assumption that, "Oh, now you're gonna love me, and you're gonna fill this insatiable hole that I have for love." And that's just not the case.

**GS:** Yeah. The way that showed up for me is that I was constantly trying to get Erin to affirm me. I was trying to get her to make me feel successful. That was a part of the issues that I brought in, is that I always felt failed. And so, the way that I tried to get her to love me, was to make me feel successful. And we all do that, whether it's, "I feel unloved, so I'm gonna try to get this person to love me," or, "I feel rejected, so I want them to accept me." That's the scam, is that I need to find someone who will love me.

**GS:** As Erin said, God said that, "I so love the world." He didn't say that, "I kinda love you guys." He's lavished a love upon us. And the truth that we, first and foremost, need to rest in is that our Heavenly Father has so thoroughly and completely loved us, that I really don't have to spend time, effort, and energy getting my wife to love me, because he's doing that. And the more that I can connect with that truth, versus Satan's scam, which is spend all your time trying to get her to love you, the more I can live out the greatest commandment. You think about 1 John 4:11 that says, "Beloved." The word beloved means much loved. It says, "Beloved, as I have loved you." Look at how God laid that verse out twice, instantly he's recognizing our insecurities around love. He's saying, "Okay, listen, you're much loved, and in case you didn't hear that, because I have loved you so much." Then he lays out our job, our purpose in life, which is, "Beloved, as I have loved you, so you ought to love others." And it may seem like a really small thing, but that's been such a revolutionary idea for us to go, "I really am fully loved by God. Okay, rest in that".

**ES:** Yeah, and so it's not that we're saying that it doesn't feel good when your spouse affirms you, shows up in a loving way, or is appreciative. Those are great things, but then it's not that we're pulling and trying to manipulate each other to get that. It's like my very well-being is at risk, if you don't do this for me, but the truth is, as we can find rest between God and ourselves, that we've got this. And I love it when he appreciates me. I love it when he affirms me and tells me I'm doing a great job. That feels good. But, there's times that he's not gonna be available to do that, and guess what? I'm okay. I can rest in the fact that I am so loved, and that between me and God, we can do this job. We can do it well.

**JS:** That's beautiful.

**MS:** I know this last year, I really came to the awareness, looking back to the first half of our marriage, that I loved Jill based upon what I was going to get out of it. It really resonated with me in your opening chapters, where you kind of laid out that premise of love, that, "Gosh, I was doing that." I was really very selfish. I didn't even realize it. Back then I wouldn't have understood it, but now, looking back, oh, it was ugly.

**GS:** Yeah. And Mark, to your point, there's a freedom when I realize that God has truly met that need in me, and I get it, and understand it, and can see it, then it frees me up just to focus on, "Okay, so now, how do I spend my time, effort and energy loving her? 'Cause that's my job."

**MS:** For her, not based upon what she's gonna make me feel, or any of that.

**JS:** Once we receive God's love, then we have the ability to pour it out.

**ES:** Yes, absolutely.

**JS:** Alright, well let's dig into those secrets, and we'll let you guys choose which ones you wanna share with us. We'll just see how long we have, but if you had to share one of the secrets that you feel like is most important, what would that be?

**GS:** Yeah, I think one of the things that we have found that makes such a big difference is something we call life-giving communication. So, we have kids, we've got jobs, we have church, we just think of all the things we have going on.

**ES:** Soccer games for 20 years.

**GS:** Oh, boy. Yes. [laughter]

**JS:** And you're not done yet.

**ES:** No. We've got another eight years to go. [laughter]

**GS:** It takes a lot to manage our life, which requires us to spend a lot of time, doing what we call administrating our marriage: talking about logistics and schedules and to-do-lists and tasks, and who's gonna pick up this child at this time. What we quickly realized is that it so monopolized our communication, as a matter of fact, you found research that shows the average couple spend like, what?

**ES:** Yeah. It was so interesting and so bothersome to me in the same breath, that the research shows that the average couple in the United States is spending about four minutes a day talking at a deep heart level. So, four minutes a day, there's like 1,440 minutes every single day, and we're spending four of those connecting at a deep heart level. And so, we're spending a whole lot of time interacting around administrating, or we're in conflict, or we're just small talking about facts and just little things. And so, really, there's an opportunity there to take it to a deeper level. We long for that connection, for that intimacy. I've never met a couple that got married and said, "You know? I just wanna be roommates. I just wanna co-exist." Because we long to connect heart to heart, but we have to be intentional about that because these other types of communication will happen

spontaneously. The only one that will not happen spontaneously, we have to be so intentional, we have to fight for this time, is the heart to heart, the deep, heartfelt connection.

**GS:** Yeah. And there's a researcher that found that if you do that for 10 minutes a day, just 10 minutes...

**ES:** So, six more minutes than we're already on average doing.

**GS:** Yeah, just investigating the inner life of your spouse, so how are they feeling, what are they dreaming about, what do they fear, what do they want? If we take 10 minutes just to investigate that, and be curious, and ask questions. I even asked Erin, "What would be some questions that I could ask you?" And she said, "Well, I've got four." And I went, "Well, no. Think about it." [laughter]

**GS:** "Pray about it. You don't have to answer right now." She's like, "Make me think about it I'll have 20. How many do you want?" I was like, "Well, I could handle four. Four's good." So, she said, "Ask me how am I feeling," she said, "ask me how are things going between me and our kids, not administration wise, but just relationally." She said, "Ask me, how things are going between her and her friends. So, ask me how things are going between me and my girlfriends." And then number four is, "What's one thing God's been teaching me as of late?" And that's what I need; make it really simple. So, the trick is, "Okay, when can we have that 10-minute talk? Is it right before bed? Is it maybe in the morning over coffee?" We work together, and we've realized that the best opportunity a lot of times is to run down to our cafeteria here at Focus, grab food, bringing it back up to one of our offices and just sit there. And the questions she wants to be asked aren't the same as what I like. When she says, "How are you feeling?" I'll answer, "I'm fine. I don't know, good? Why? What do you think? How do you think I'm feeling?" But what I have learned is, I do better when she will say, "Yesterday, what was the high of your day and the low of your day?" That's real easy for me, and that gets us into good conversation. It's all about staying current and updated.

**JS:** On really what's going on inside your spouse's head and heart.

**GS:** The inner life.

**JS:** Yeah. Oh, I love that. Alright. Secret number two?

**ES:** Yes. One that I would choose is being healthy individuals.

**GS:** I thought she was picking sex. Rats!

**ES:** I know, it's so funny to see which ones you go with, which ones I go with. I was waiting to see, and you went with communication, so I'm going with healthy individual. [laughter]

**ES:** So often when we marry we think, "Okay, so we're gonna complete each other. We're one." But the truth is that marriage is only as healthy as each of the individual components. So, in math, two negatives make a positive. In marriage, that is not the case. And so, continuing to be a lifelong learner and striving to grow individually and understanding, "What's going on for me today? Why did that bother me? Is there an old wound that's there that I need to investigate? Go to counseling, be intellectually stimulated? Take care of myself physically?" And so, really being intentional about

being two healthy, whole individuals coming together, so we have something to offer each other.

**GS:** And that's been huge for us. I need it real simple, so just give me a couple of things to think about. Part of what we encourage couples to do is to figure out then what gives you rest, and what gives you life? And those are two very different things. So, for me, what gives me rest is music. If we go and do a seminar, we finish, we get on the plane, Erin's an extrovert, I'm an introvert. Erin's now warmed up, all this talking and relating and communicating and teaching...

**ES:** I can get on the phone, I can text. Even to the point where we did an event in Alaska, and we got on the airplane, and immediately Greg puts on his big noise-canceling headphones, and I'll look over...

**GS:** It's the best invention ever.

**ES:** Yeah, I'll look over and I used to take it personally because I'm like, "Okay, are we done talking? You don't wanna talk to me anymore. Is that a clear message?"

**GS:** "We're done."

**ES:** So, we did this event in Alaska, and he has his headphones on. We just sat down on the airplane, and there's a woman sitting next to me, and I was working on my last book at that point, *10 Things A Husband Needs From His Wife*. My computer screen was up, and I was typing, and I could tell she was reading what I was typing, and I wanted to type, "Please stop reading what I'm typing." And I end up in this huge conversation with her, and she says, "Hey, have you ever heard of Focus on the Family?" And I'm like, "Oh, we work there." I'm hitting Greg and saying, "Hey, she knows Focus on the Family. She listens to the broadcast."

**GS:** I'm pretending I'm asleep.

**ES:** Yeah, I know.

**GS:** I'm not getting into this.

**ES:** He turns his volume up. [laughter]

**ES:** But for me, having a conversation like that after an event as I'm relaxing on an airplane, it brings my heart rest. It also brings me life, but definitely rest, and it's just much different for you.

**GS:** Yeah, so figure out, what is it that you do that really truly brings rest, and then what causes your heart to come alive? So, for me, we live in Colorado and so there's a lot of gorgeous mountains. I love to hike, but especially love to fish. So, you put me on a stream, what God's created, this beautiful Rocky Mountain stream, and I'm getting to fish, that just stirs my heart alive. And the test of all this is that if you're really taking good care of yourself by figuring out rest and life, then you should have more to give to your family. So, your family should benefit from that. If I go to play golf under the guise of I'm taking good care of myself, and yet no one benefits, then I don't think that's what God's instructing us to do. I need to have in order to then give that out.

**ES:** Yeah, and for me, I think of when he gets up at 4:30 in the morning to drive up to the



mountains to fish, I'm like, that is the last thing I would do. That would definitely not bring me life, but sleeping in and meeting girlfriends for coffee, and actually, I just recently discovered as I've started seeing clients in private practice, how life-giving all of those things are for me. And so, it's much different for me than it is for him, but it's recognizing that that's okay. And my job is then to support and encourage that because I know that ultimately I'm gonna benefit and our kids are gonna benefit. And he's my helper with that as well. But ultimately, it's our job to make sure we're well cared for between us and God.

**JS:** Oh, I love that, and it reminds me of something we talk about in No More Perfect Marriages. We say, "When I'm a better me, we're a better we."

**ES:** Ooh, I like that. I like that.

**GS:** You could write that on a t-shirt. I like that.

**ES:** And bejewel it. [laughter]

**JS:** That's great. Alright, so those are two secrets I love. Secret number three...

**GS:** You know, another one that has had such a powerful effect on us within our spiritual relationship together, Erin is responsible for her walk with the Lord, and I'm responsible for mine. Someday we'll give account of that, we'll answer for that. But he brought us together, made us one, and so we need to have a shared spiritual relationship as well. And one of the things that Erin and I believe is that this thing called oneness, that God's created, so this gift of marriage in becoming one, we call it the superpower of marriage. It's a powerful thing.

**JS:** Okay. Why is it a superpower?

**GS:** Well, because what Erin and I could do together is far greater than anything that we could do on our own. On our own, we can be full, we can be whole, complete within God. But, then there's that synergy of bringing us together as one. There's a great verse in Genesis. So, it's when the first time in recorded history, all the people had convened together in one city, Babylon. And now they're building this tower, and God looks down, and you can almost get the sense that he's shaking his head going, "Really?" Because they were building the tower to show how wonderful man was. But he says something really interesting. He says, "When the people come together, when they speak the same language, when they're united, then nothing for them is impossible." And that is so true for marriage. When Erin and I are united, when we're one, when we're speaking the same language, we're on the same page, when we're pursuing some shared vision together, there is nothing that's impossible for us. What we like to help couples understand is to steward this superpower, this oneness, we've got to learn what are we passionate about? Like serving God, loving others, how will we uniquely do that? And one of the most powerful ways that we did that within our marriage was even around adoption.

**ES:** And that was an individual dream that I brought into our marriage. I'm adopted, and so before Greg and I got married I asked him, "Would you be open to that some day?" And I think he would have agreed to anything at that point. I should have probably asked for more.

**GS:** She had her chance. [laughter]

**ES:** So, it's something that was a unique dream. But coming together, I mean our whole family got on board, and we worked toward the end in mind, and that was bringing our Annie home. And our whole family was working, moving in the same direction. Our financial decisions were all in correlation, and so it really is discovering what is it that God is calling us to together? And so many of my friends are heading into the empty nest season, and I would say this is the number one question that I'm encouraging them to ask each other, and to pray about. Pray about it individually, pray about it together. I mean, you're together for a reason, and God knows what that is, and you're both uniquely created. So, what is it that God is gonna do? Ask him. Be looking for it. And after we adopted, we really determined that marriage ministry is what God was calling us to, and it has looked different in different seasons, but it's been awesome. There's something so intimate, as you guys know, about ministering together.

**MS:** Right. We just resonated with that as well, and we've really been giving intentionality to understanding our shared vision.

**JS:** Our shared core values, which helps you identify that.

**MS:** To articulate that and then building around it rather than competing. When I read your book too, I really liked how you handled that part on shared spirituality. So many couples ignore that part, or don't know what to do, and then they do nothing. Do you have any ideas or guidance on that?

**ES:** Yeah. I would say one of the greatest things that couples can do is to get into a small group, a married small group. Because for us, that has been such a safe place for us. If there's challenges, or just even learning and growing together, then we have that community around us of other married couples. I mean, it is just such a blessing to our marriage. What else would you say?

**GS:** I think what we are expected to say is praying together.

**JS:** And why wouldn't you? [laughter]

**GS:** It's true, but I would say everybody expects that.

**JS:** Well, couples struggle with it. That is incredibly vulnerable.

**GS:** Yeah. And one of the ways that Erin and I struggle with that now is these stupid cell phones. With these smartphones that we have next to our bed, it takes her longer to get ready for bed, and so I'm already in bed, I'm looking at my phone, she comes, she's looking at her phone, and all of a sudden, we're drifting off to sleep. And it's become what we call a sacred space invader. Remember the old video game Space Invaders?

**ES:** That's an old goody.

**GS:** Yeah, I know. It's a classic. It'll come back, okay? Someday. But these phones rob us of that because we choose to look at our phones versus connecting, talking, especially praying together. What I've loved about praying together is that I learned things about Erin that maybe I wouldn't have known. Because I ask her, "Well, if we're gonna pray together, what could I pray for you about?" And then she'll say things, and I'll go, "I didn't know you were doing that tomorrow. I didn't know you were struggling there. I didn't know that friendship was creating some challenges." It is a

great way to deepen your knowledge and understanding of one another. But there is something so uniting about when a husband and wife together grab hands. We have a rule. I don't know how this came about, but anytime someone prays, we join hands.

**JS:** We do the same.

**GS:** Yeah, like you prayed with us before we started, and I felt this hand on my leg and jumped.  
[laughter]

**GS:** I thought, "Hey! Oh...well we're praying." But there is something uniting that you learn about each other, and it doesn't have to be elaborate, it doesn't have to be a prayer that would be appropriate some coronation or some big event. It's just, "What can I pray for you about?" And then share that with the Lord.

**JS:** And you know, one of the things when we started, praying at night in bed with the lights out was probably the first step for us. It felt awkward, but there was something that was a little safer with that, and it was a good place to start. And so, I know a lot of times couples struggle. Because what we often say is you've got to push through awkward to get a new normal. And so, it's going to feel awkward if you've never prayed together as a couple, but what you're doing every time is you're creating a new normal for your relationship.

**GS:** And it's not about the words. It's the act of holding hands, and just saying these words back to God, that's what creates the intimacy. But not only do you have to push through the awkwardness or even the vulnerability, but just now with cellphones, just making sure you're not prioritizing something over that experience.

**JS:** So true. That's not something we've ever really dug into, but sometimes technology is really robbing us of that intimacy.

**MS:** It's a challenge.

**JS:** It is. Alright, well we have time probably for one more quick secret.

**ES:** The last one. Which one is it gonna be?

**GS:** I'm gonna pick time together.

**ES:** Yeah, that's what I was thinking. You got it! Time together.

**GS:** Plus, you wrote it on a piece of paper in front of me.

**ES:** No, I did not. [laughter]

**ES:** It was just at the top of the list and I saw it. We really encourage couples to look at this, because it's easy to say you need to spend time together, but what kind of time are we spending together? And again, being intentional about it. So, we encourage couples, again, for the 10-minute daily pause, is what we call it, and making sure that you're connecting on a daily basis for 10 minutes, just to check in, and just to pause because we run at such fast paces. It's just to hit the

pause button and go, "Hey, how are you? What's stressing you out today? What are you most looking forward to?" I always love when we say, "What are you looking forward to in the next three months?" It's like the greatest thing that is out on the horizon, "And why are you looking forward to that?" And I love that.

**ES:** And then secondly, to really spend time on a weekly date outside of the house. So, you have your daily pause, and then a weekly date, just getting out of the house and doing something together. It doesn't have to be expensive, doesn't have to be elaborate, but as I'm sure you guys have heard the research about how when you do something new together, that it recreates those neural pathways that were firing when we were first dating. And so, just simply do something new, a new adventure. If you wanna go to dinner and a movie, go to a different restaurant, drive a different path to the theatre, see a different type of movie, or a different genre. So, it's an opportunity that we have every single week to make sure that we're getting that time outside of the house.

**ES:** And then we encourage couples also to have an annual adventure. So once a year, plan a getaway, just the two of you. There's something so wonderful about taking the time away from kids, getting out of the house and, plus, you're planning this adventure together, and so you can pour into that and get super excited about, "What are we gonna do there? Where are we gonna stay? What's our goal for this time together?" Connecting and having fun. And maybe we want to talk about the vision for the next year in our marriage. But especially if you have young kids, it's hard as parents to hand them over. But find some good friends that have kids the same age, swap child care, and then do the same for them. It's life giving to have time, just the two of you, because that's how we started. And then eventually when we empty nest, it's gonna be the two of us again.

**JS:** Yeah.

**ES:** So, to keep building that yearly.

**GS:** Yeah, so that's really what we target, a daily pause, and that's just to keep current. So, we're asking those deeper inner life questions. That weekly date is to have fun and the excitement that Erin talked about. And then that annual adventure; there's something about when we get away, it brings life back to our marriage. It's given us something to target, and I love simple, so: daily pause, weekly date, and annual adventure.

**JS:** I love it. Well, that actually takes us beautifully into our last question for you, and that is, we call this No More Perfect Date Night. And so, we love to ask our interviewees what their favorite date night is. Do you have one?

**ES:** We do. We love to buy the ticket package for the local theater, we enjoy going to events, concerts, theater, right? Would you have said the same thing?

**GS:** I would have.

**ES:** Okay.

**GS:** Yeah, I love that. And it gets us, again, out of the ruts in the routine of the dinner and movie, kind of date night, which is fine.

**JS:** So, you're not talking about a movie theater, you're talking about live?

**ES:** No, like live theatre.

**GS:** It's the Broadway series that comes through Colorado Springs. So, it happens four times a year, and so it's not like we do this once a week. But we just love that, sometimes we get dressed up, and we go have a fun dinner.

**ES:** Downtown.

**GS:** Yeah, I one time remember, as we were sitting in the theater, and there was a song that came on that I recognized from early on in our dating experience, and as this song was being played, I thought, "I didn't even know this was in part of this play." And I told her, "I love this song." And she went, "Oh, it's like one of my favorite songs."

**GS:** And then I had this memory flash, and I said, "Do you remember when we were first dating, and this song came on? Remember you gave me that look? And so, I pulled over to this parking lot, and we sat there and listened to the song and smooched? Remember that?" And she smiled and went, "That is an awesome memory. But that wasn't me." [laughter]

**GS:** I still think it was her.

**ES:** No. And I always tell him, "We went to college together, so I can tell you who it was if you'd like me to share."

**GS:** No, no, no. [laughter]

**MS:** Yeah, don't say that.

**GS:** Yeah, so the moral of that being, if you're gonna reminisce, just make sure it's about your wife.

**ES:** Yes, that's helpful.

**GS:** Not a different date. [laughter]

**GS:** But we love that. So, we love getting out and going to the theater.

**JS:** Oh, that's inspiring. That's very fun.

**GS:** Spend money on your marriage.

**ES:** For sure, invest in your marriage. Yeah, so we save for that and buy it every year.

**JS:** Good. Well, this has been a fabulous conversation. Thank you guys so much.

**ES:** Thank you.

**GS:** Absolutely. Our privilege.

**JS:** We are grateful. Greg, would you be willing to just pray for our couples that are watching this before we say goodbye?

**GS:** Absolutely. Lord, we love you God. Thank you for marriage, thank you for this amazing gift, this journey that we're on together Lord; for that oneness, that really is a powerful thing. Lord, help us to be good stewards of that. Lord, if we're feeling like disconnected roommates, Lord, if this is a hard season, God, thank you for always fighting for our relationships, bringing the right people, Lord, the right counselor, Lord, whatever we need to strengthen this relationship God. And we just trust that you're all for our marriage and thank you for fighting for that, Lord. And we want to do the same, Lord. So, help us to fight for our marriage as you do. It's in your precious name we pray. Amen.

**All:** Amen.

**JS:** Well, this is Mark and Jill Savage and Greg and Erin Smalley signing off, with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect, a real marriage is two people being perfected. Thanks for joining us.