

Double Date with Mark and Jill

Your God-Tool of Compassion

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Jill Savage: Welcome to this month's Double Date with Mark and Jill. We have been going through the God-tools, the eight God-tools that we talk about in our No More Perfect Marriages book.

Mark Savage: Yeah.

JS: And this month, our God-tool is the God-tool of compassion. One of the things we've been trying to do is to look at, when we don't use this God-tool, what are we experiencing in our marriage? What is happening in our marriage? And so, we actually did a search on the opposites of compassion, and that really helped us to think through, what are you experiencing when compassion isn't there? And here are some of the words that we came up with: Harshness.

MS: Indifference.

JS: Insensitive.

MS: Demanding.

JS: And this one I added, it wasn't in the official antonym dictionary: Buck up.

MS: Yeah. [laughter]

JS: And so, those are things that are going on. We are harsh with each other. We are indifferent. We are insensitive, we're not being sensitive about the things that are going on, or that our spouse is feeling, or thinking. We become demanding that they do things our way, or we become demanding that they handle a situation different, and we have a buck up mindset, like, "Buck up, you've gotta be strong through this."

JS: Several years ago, because this was a big place of growth for me, one of the things that we also talked about in the seven slow fades is the slow fade of avoiding emotion. And when you avoid emotion, you often are not compassionate. I can't say always, but I would say that many avoiders, those who struggle with emotion, are low on the compassion meter. And I certainly was. I was doing a study of the character traits of God and I came across his character trait of being compassionate. God's word says that we're made in his image, and honestly up to that point I would have said, "Well, this is just the way God made me. I'm a straight shooter. I'm a logical thinker. I'm a tell-it-like-it-is person." And I would have used that to defend my lack of compassion. But in that moment, God really used his word to convict me, and I was like, "Wow. Okay. I have really got to learn compassion."

MS: Yeah. I think if Christ had come without compassion, because he's God, he knows everything,

he would've been navigating his journey demanding from people that they change, that they buck up, that they get over it. "Hey, I'm God, I know what's going on. Get on with it." And just think how that would have played out. Not very well.

JS: Exactly. And so, some of the contrasts between compassion and the opposites of compassion would be like: buck up *fixes*, but compassion *feels*. And what I really had to come to grips with is recognizing that I was quick to try to fix things. When Mark would share a frustration or just something he was struggling with, and it may have not even had anything to do with me, but I was quick to tell him, "Well, if you would only do one, two, and three, then you would solve this problem." So, I was quick to respond with a fix instead of sitting in his feelings with him, or recognizing his feelings, validating his feelings.

MS: Yeah. Definitely. I think, too, that compassion *builds bridges*, but a buck up mindset actually *blocks relationship* and it blocks the bridge, it blocks opportunity. And so, compassion builds a bridge into the heart and the soul of another person.

JS: Really, it also allows you to step into their pain, to be able to step into that place through the bridge that compassion builds. Because if not, we keep ourselves isolated from that pain. Maybe we're afraid to go there. Maybe we're afraid that if we affirm that in them it'll just make them more whiny. There's all kinds of thoughts that go in our head, but there's something very powerful. I'll even think of a very practical way. If Mark comes home, he's a contractor and so he is constantly putting out fires on his jobs, and some days he'll come home and be like, "It has been a tough day. It has been one fire after another." And I can just do the "Uh-huh" thing, or I can say, "Well, did you go into it with a good plan?", which would be fixing it, or I can stop what I'm doing, really hear him, and say, "Oh, that must be hard." And that leads into this next one, and that is that compassion drives *empathy*.

JS: So, empathy is to step into that person's shoes and to say, "Oh, that must be difficult," or, "I'm so sorry that it's been a hard day. I bet you're worn out." So, really stepping over that bridge and trying to get a sense, or sometimes even saying something like, "Wow, that must have been hard. Tell me more. Tell me more about what happened," because then I better understand his day, I better understand the things that he has faced, I better understand what has sucked the life out of him for that day.

MS: I think the power of empathy is that it hears. It hears what our spouse is saying, and it hears their heart, it hears their intent. And that empathy is such a powerful gift that we can give, whereas the buck up mindset really works to build a wedge between husband and wife, between people. God calls us to utilize that gift of compassion. In fact, in Colossians 3, it says this, "Put on then as God's chosen ones," so I'm in Christ, I'm to put on Christ, "holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience," the list goes on. Bucking up, harshness, indifference, insensitivity, none of those are on the list. Because he's never been that way with us.

JS: That's a beautiful picture. We were thinking about, what are the things that kill compassion? Because I think this is really important for us to think about. What are the things that kill compassion? One of them is busyness.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Sometimes when we have too many plates going and we're spinning these plates, we don't have time or the emotional energy to be compassionate, so we really have to be careful. And that leads into a second one, and that's not having enough margin in our life. Margin is the white space in our life. Not every minute of our day needs to be filled. The reason we can read words on a page in a book is because of the white space behind the words. Well, some of us don't have enough white space in our life to really have the emotional energy for what relationships take, to be intentional about being able to slow down and stop and to be compassionate.

MS: Yes. Another way in which we kill compassion is minimizing. Jill and I, we have learned so much about minimizing, that it really works as a blockade in our life.

JS: Right. And so often it comes from minimizing our own feelings. That's what it was for me. I grew up in a loving, wonderful family, but we didn't do emotions. So, we bucked up. If life got hard, we bucked up. I naturally minimized my own feelings, and therefore, I'm quick to minimize others' feelings. And I've had to learn not to do that, but to truly be able to step into their world, build that bridge with compassion, and sit in those feelings with them.

MS: I also tend to minimize my own thoughts and feelings. And therefore, I don't take action with compassion, and that minimizing fuels lies that it won't matter, they don't need me, they got it already handled, I'll let somebody else do that. And all the while, Christ is saying, "No, Mark, you're my hands and feet to this, get in there, be compassionate."

JS: And then finally, defensiveness. Defensiveness is a compassion killer because in some way your spouse probably just communicated something that they're struggling with, something to you, maybe even something about you. And when we are defensive, we have just lost that ability to build that bridge of compassion into their heart and really hear them. And so, it's really, really important. I'll give you an example. Several years ago, I was teaching about compassion in parenting. I was actually talking on the topic of No More Perfect Kids, which is one of my books that I co-authored with Dr. Cathy Cook. I was talking about compassion and being compassionate with our kids. But a mom came up to me afterwards and she had tears in her eyes. And she said, "You know what, Jill? My husband lost his job six weeks ago. And every day when he gets up, I kinda bark orders to him like, 'How many resumes are you gonna send out today? How many jobs did you apply for today?'" And she said, "Never once have I been compassionate about what that must have felt like to be downsized in a company, and for the company to determine that they didn't need your position anymore, or that your years of experience wasn't valuable to them. I have never once done that." And she determined that she was going to go home, and she was going to use her God-tool of compassion to reach his heart. And she was going to apologize. So that's what compassion looks like in real, everyday life.

JS: So, let's talk practically, how do we use that God-tool of compassion? We want to give you just two quick ways to do that. And the first one is to learn to empathize and to validate. It doesn't mean you agree with. You may not understand your spouse's feelings. You may face the same situation they faced, and it wouldn't have sucked the life out of you, you wouldn't have felt rejected. But the truth is, *they* are feeling that way, *they* are struggling with it, and so you have to learn to have empathizing responses like, "Wow, that must have been hard," or, "That must have really hurt your heart." So those are empathizing statements, validating statements. "Wow, it must feel very dark to feel so down so many days in a row."

MS: And if they voice an emotion they're feeling, to validate that is to affirm it. "I am sure that you are hurting," or, "I am sure that you are fearful if you've lost your job." That wrecks our identity and so to affirm that is so powerful.

JS: Right. And you're using the compassion bridge. You're putting yourself in their shoes or at least you're saying, "Wow, that must be hard." Instead of trying to draw them out of it or fix them, you're sitting in that place with them. That earns you the right at some point in time to help them fix, if need be. Sometimes there is a problem to be solved, but you may have heard the old adage, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

MS: Right.

JS: That's really what compassion is all about. So, we need to respond with empathizing and validating statements. And then the second thing that we need to do is to step into their shoes. Put yourself in their shoes. Think for a moment what that might feel like, what that might be like if you had faced the exact same circumstances they did, maybe at their job or in whatever it is that they are dealing with.

MS: Compassion is such a powerful gift that we can give one another. And it's a tool that God has given to you that has such positive results, and those results will build love and affirmation. They build a deeper relationship than what we are even capable of because God's given us that tool.

JS: And the whole idea of the slow fades is that our hearts are being pulled apart underneath the surface. Things may look good on the outside, but they're being pulled apart underneath the surface. And when we use our God-tools, we pull our hearts back together.

JS: So, this is Mark and Jill Savage signing off with a reminder to use your God-tool of compassion. It's a beautiful gift to give to your spouse.