# Dive Deep with Clint and Penny Bragg

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Mark Savage: We want to welcome you with us, Mark and Jill Savage, here in No More Perfect Date Night. Joining us are authors Clint and Penny Bragg, who have authored three books on marriage. Their next book, which is soon to be released is called *Marriage Off Course*. We are really excited to chat with them and bring their messages to you, and we know they will be of an encouragement to you. Welcome, and thanks for joining us.

Penny Bragg: Thank you.

Clint Bragg: We're glad to be here.

PB: We are.

Jill Savage: You guys are in Phoenix, Arizona, right? We were in Phoenix last spring and we fell in love with it.

PB: Well if you come back now, you'll be a little warm.

[laughter]

PB: Short sleeves--it's a little warm.

JS: Yeah, totally understandable. Well, you have written three books for marriages, and your most recent book is a book called Marriage off Course. I'm sure as authors, much of what you share about comes from your own journey. We'd love to hear just a little bit of your journey, your perspective, and what it is that you have to offer to readers.

CB: Basically, here is the quick version of our story. Penny and I met in 1987 and by 1989, I proposed to her. She accepted, and we were the little darlings in the church we were going to. We had a fantastic wedding and reception. We were kind of leaders in the church and led a lot of different things. Within two years, we were divorced. I didn't want to be divorced, but my sweetheart decided to pack her bags and leave.

PB: I was really at a point of a crisis in my own life with my family and I had this emotional distance. I just kind of kept pushing away from Clint. We can look back on it now and understand that all my childhood issues, my parents’ divorce, and things happened to me as a little girl just came up to the surface because marriage is so intimate. It tends to bring up everything, even the things that you've hidden or pushed down. I was distancing myself from Clint, and it was the perfect scenario for somebody else to come in. That's exactly what happened-my heart was pulled away. I was running, not only from him but from the Lord. Just prior to our second anniversary our marriage ended, and the church was devastated. After the divorce papers were notarized that day, it was like the parting of the Red Sea. You know, as far as the east was from the west. Clint moved to Florida, years after the divorce, and we never saw or heard from each other again.

CB: She had gone her own direction. I was thinking God had split us up, but in actuality it wasn't God at all. It was our own individual self-centeredness and pride, and we were standing our ground. We see with marriages that get into trouble, there's a contest going on to see who's going to be the high road, and who's going to be the low road. My heart was broken, and I was hurting. The pastor that we had at the time was a brand-new pastor, and he didn't know what to do with me. I spent two years in Vietnam and *“manned up”* and went my own way. I got real busy as a Triathlete and sold real estate. I was a teacher and did all these things, and finally I moved to Florida. I was moving 100 miles an hour from the massive pain that was going on in my heart. I finally crashed and burned about ten years into our divorce. I financially lost everything, and that was when I got to the bottom of the bottom. I avoided God for a lot of years, because I was so mad at Him. When I finally showed up in church and I finally was able to look at the cross, I finally yelled at God. I said, “*Man, why did You break Penny and me up?”* At that moment, I realized He didn't do it. I played a part in it. After I reconciled with God, I got a letter from Penny apologizing for the way that she left our marriage.

PB: In this 11-year gap, the same thing had happened to me that happened to Clint. It wasn't a financial bottom, but a relational bottom. I was breaking open before the Lord and working on my relationship with Him for three years before I finally wrote that letter. It was the last thing on the list of my reconciliation steps to do, but I kept putting it off because I was scared. I knew how I had left the marriage so inappropriately. I had never fessed up to the affair. My fear was, “*I'm going to open this can of worms and contact him, and he is going to let loose with 11 years of anger. This is just going to be horrible.*” But I told the Lord that if He found Clint, I would do what I should have done many years ago, and I would speak the truth. That letter found its way to a man who was broken. I had assumed he moved on with his life. All I wanted to do in writing the letter was apologize, finally tell the truth, and then move on with my life--get closure and move on. God used the very thing that I thought would bring closure to all that to bust our future wide open. That's just so like the Lord.

CB: Yeah, I got the letter, and at the bottom, it said, “*Would you write me a letter, or email me or give me a call?*” I chose giving her a call and...

PB: That was our first date night in 11 years.

[laughter]

CB: When I called her the first time, there’s a time difference of three hours. She was still working. I left a message saying, “*I'm going to call you at 8:00 your time. If you're there you're there, if you're not you're not.*” I called her and just expected to talk to her for about five or 10 minutes. We talked for five hours.

MS: Wow.

CB: We opened up everything that we never discussed when we were courting.

PB: All the secrets, things that happened. He talked openly about things that happened to him as a little boy. It was all clicking and making sense. Still, at the end of that conversation, we weren't talking about re-marriage or reconciliation. It was just all the light bulbs going on.

CB: The next morning, the Holy Spirit had me write her a letter. At the end of the letter, I said, “*You know you have always been the love of my life. Have you ever thought about reconciliation?*”

PB: When I got the letter, I thought, “*No, not ever...*” I was so aware of the grace of God, but also the depth of my sin. It never dawned on me that after unfaithfulness, he would still love me and want me back. That’s who Jesus is, you know. That's our story. We've been remarried now for 16 years.

MS: Wow.

CB: When we remarried, it only took two weeks to figure out we still didn't know how to be married God’s way.

PB: How to have a date night.

CB: We spent a year. We dedicated the year to God saying we would not take on any extra duties in our jobs or anything. We would concentrate on figuring out how to do marriage God's way.

JS: Wow, what a story.

MS: Absolutely.

JS: Oh, my goodness, thank you for sharing that.

MS: You do a great job in the book, highlighting this, but it's great to interact with you about the details of it. Wow.

JS: I'm curious what that year looked like. One of the things Mark and I talk about is that the home that you grew up in is where you do what we call your home internship.

CB: Yup.

JS: It’s where you intern on conflict resolution, faith, sex, you name it. We talk about how it's important to evaluate that home internship and determine where you need to do a new internship. Some of those internships were good and they're serving you well in your marriage, but others were not so good. His family handled conflict with rage. My family handled conflict by sweeping it under the carpet. Neither one of those are healthy. We obviously need to do a new internship on conflict resolution. I'm betting that some of that first year was you doing some new internships, in different parts of your marriage. Talk about that a little bit. What tools were you using to pursue those new internships?

CB: The way that you guys just described yourself is exactly us. She's into conflict, but I’m more like, “*I heard it, I understand it. Let's move on.*” I would sweep it under the rug. She's Italian and I'm German, and I didn't realize that her heritage, her culture, she has all of that.

CB: In that first two years that we were married, at the beginning when we had a problem, she would get right up in my face. Her hands would be going all over the place and I would be thinking to myself, “*What's wrong with her*?”

PB: I would be thinking, “*I'm just talking, this is how we talk.*” Part of that year of study was recognizing those differences in our family, the internships that we had and what we needed to do. We were so naive to this remarriage, we didn't even realize we should probably have some counseling here. 11 years is a pretty big gap.

CB: Yeah.

PB: But we did have the Lord first in each of our lives. Our number one tool is meeting with Him individually daily. That's a standard in our marriage. It is a nonnegotiable. You do not leave the house until you've met with Jesus. The other big one, Clint asked me about one morning just a few months after we had been remarried. “*Can I pray for us, just one minute in the morning, two minutes tops?*” He put his arm around me and started praying over me every morning. Oh, my goodness.

CB: The prayer was asking God to **protect** us when we go out into the world, to **provide** for our daily need and to be **present** with us everywhere we go. Those are the three P's that we talk about. We're on the road a lot. We don't leave the hotel room or the guest home before we pray. We know when we go out into the world, things happen all around us. But we could share stories for hours and hours about how God has spared us. Even when things were difficult, He still made it less difficult than if we had not invited Him to come along with us.

PB: The other tool is a Sunday night tool that we use so that we're in the word together once a week. It's our devotion time. Last Sunday night, it was his turn to lead. He had a story and a passage of scripture. Then we talk about our week. Is there anything we need to revisit from last week? That could mean conflict or something that had come up that maybe we hadn't dealt with. Then, we also look ahead a week and lay the calendar out.

PB: Where are our hot spots? We're going to be in two different places all week long. How are we going to connect? We assess the week ahead, and then we pray for needs. We do that every Sunday night at 7:30 and that has not stopped for 16 years.

CB: Our family, friends, friends in ministry know not to call us between 7:30 and 8:30 because we're not answering the phone.

CB: The last tool that we use is that we get away four times a year with the Lord. For us, it's about two-and-a-half-day journey. There are seven different areas in our life that we go to God and ask him, "*Show us what we need to do for the next 90 days*." It's relationships, spiritual, our finances, our home, our careers, big dreams and possibilities. Often in marriages at the beginning, they're dreaming big with God, and then the world gets in the way and they lose their dream.

PB: We look back 90 days and forward 90 days. It's like that Sunday night thing but in a bigger chunk of time.

PB: My large family can be very overwhelming for Clint, or it was at the beginning. Now he's used to us. We'd be going to an event and he'd be saying, "*Where are we going? Whose birthday is it?*" I'm like, "*How could you not know whose birthday it is?*" "*Are we supposed to have a present?*" "*My present is in the back of the car. I already got it...* " You know, that kind of stuff. When we look at it in a 90-day chunk, he writes down, "*Okay, so this one is on this date. Then this family member's coming.*" That makes him feel less overwhelmed. That’s a simple tool.

CB: Yeah.

JS: Now he's kind of inside the circle and he's in the know. Wow, you just gave us so many good things.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Oh, my goodness, I love that. Clint, was praying together comfortable for you from the beginning?

CB: It really was because by this time, I had really gotten into a real intimate relationship with Christ. I was kind of evangelizing for Christ and trying to do everything that you're supposed to do. I'm a first-generation Christian. My dad became a Christian about six years before he died. He died when he was 45. He was an infant in the Lord and wasn't really a spiritual leader, even though he was a good guy.

PB: I wasn't comfortable with it at the beginning. As strange as that sounds, it caught me off-guard. The Clint that I had married years ago, for those two years, was very authoritarian, very military. So I thought, "*Oh, what if*?" I was such a leadership woman that I had to let him take that lead. And at first, I was like, "*What are we doing?*" Then my heart just started to melt. I'm not a morning person, either. He'd be up, "*Woo-hoo, we're going to pray together in the morning.*" I'm like, "*Oh my goodness.*"

PB: If there was conflict, I wanted to deal with it before we prayed together. But with all these things, we've learned to still pray together. We might stand a little farther apart.

CB: There are some days I'm really mad at her and I'll say, "*It's your turn to pray.*"

PB: Yeah. [laughter] "*Don't touch me*."

MS: Yeah.

PB: It's gotten more comfortable now. A lot of guys would come up to Clint and say, "*I can't do it. I don't even know the words to say.*" We made these sets of prayer cards, and we want to tell your community about them. They can just email us, and we’ll send a set of 40 prayer cards. It helps the husband take the leap, because all he has to do is put his arm around his wife and read.

JS: Oh, that's wonderful. We'll make sure that we include the email address to get those.

MS: Yeah.

JS: One of the things we do talk about is that you’ve got to push through awkward to get to a new normal.

PB: Oh boy.

JS: That's what you're talking about there.

MS: Right.

JS: You’ve got to push through that awkward. I appreciate that you were uncomfortable with it, but I would bet that now you're not.

PB: Not at all.

CB: No.

JS: In fact, it's now normal for you.

CB: Yeah.

PB: Normal, yeah.

JS: Yeah, that's good. The other thing that struck me is--I don't know that anybody in any of the interviews we've ever done has ever talked about the cultural background differences. We've talked about differences, but not cultural background, Italian, German. Oh, my goodness, that's huge.

CB: I was going to say something that touches on that. I didn't get Penny and her family, and the Italian thing until the Lord sent us to Rome Italy in 2006 for our first year of full-time ministry. We were working with a couple trying to help bring them back together. They were separated. The husband’s sister had a miscarriage and was in a hospital and he asked if we could go to the hospital. I said, "*Sure let's do it.*” We loaded up and went to the hospital, we got on the floor where his sister was at, and there must have been 50 or 100 Italians. They were all in each other's faces, their hands were flying all over the place. I said to Penny, “*We're in the wrong place; we probably shouldn't be here.*”

PB: I said, “*No, this is going to be the grandparents on both sides…everyone's just talking*.”

CB: That was the first time the Lord let me know that this was like Penny's family.

JS: And this was Penny's normal.

PB: Because Clint is trained in military emotionally, you disconnect, move on. But in the Italian culture, everyone rushes to the hospital no matter what it is.

CB: Yeah.

PB: It's a sign of disrespect, if you don't show up at the hospital.

PB: Then we were sent to Germany just a few years ago, and I understood the meal times, so much better. The role of his mom, there were just so many things about their culture. I got to see it in other people, and then it didn't seem so weird.

MS: Yeah. That's powerful.

JS: That is huge, to understand that, if you've ever seen the movie, "*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*”, you can appreciate it really does illustrate what it's like to have that strong culture. I think it’s great to really talk about that and how it affects our relationship and how we often misread each other's actions and reactions. We put our own spin on what something means when it may mean nothing, other than they're just living out their normal. Yeah, so that's huge.

MS: Yeah. I love your plan with prayer, with gathering together, and I think that's been a theme for us as well. We’re just working to deepen our prayer life with each other. For years, that was awkward for us, so we wouldn't do it. And now, in the second half of our marriage, or the other side of our crisis, it's a different ball game.

PB: I think I was so overwhelmed about emotionally, physically, sexually, how was all this going to happen when we had sexual sin? Especially on my part. I remember we called our marriage mentors, and they came into what would be our married home and said, “*We're going to pray through every room of your house.*” I'd never done anything like this before. When we got to the bedroom, I started to cry because that was my big worry. And we got down on our knees with our marriage mentors around that bed and they prayed for intimacy in our marriage. They prayed for that sexual sin, the shame, if any images were to come, and we just melted before the Lord. That really was kind of our first taste of the power of prayer together in marriage. “*Let's just be honest, how is the sexual part of our relationship going to work? Let's pray about it.*” We didn't know we could pray about that stuff.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

JS: What a beautiful gift they gave to you.

MS: Wow. In your book that will soon be released, you described some strategy points along the way, and then talked about some ideas to navigate having conversations. Were any of those chapters your favorite?

PB: I would say the hardest one to write, which was the hidden springs chapter about personal wholeness, is probably our favorite just because of what we know that means in coming into our own wholeness with Christ. That happened individually for us before we ever reconciled. Before we remarried, we met halfway across the United States together. We met in Denver. I was coming from California, he was coming from Florida. One of the things that we did during that weekend, was to lay out our journals and our sexual history; kind of a timeline of how that looked. It wasn't something we planned to do. It was just a tool that God gave us, so that's why we put it in the book.

PB: We got honest and put that stuff down on paper in the light and said, "*You know, this happened to me when I was a little girl, I never told you about it.*" He said the same thing and shared something. We saw the power of becoming whole in Christ and putting things out there. That chapter is titled Hidden Springs because you’ve really got to dig down deep in the desert. We live in the desert now, so we know this.

CB: That timeline is a very powerful thing. Usually what happens is that we assume things because of our normal that we grew up with. We assume the other person knows our normal and knows exactly what the reactions should be. When we've done this timeline with couples that are really struggling, they start discovering things that they didn't know about the other person, even though they went through that event together. It could be a loss of a job, if one person was down and the other person thought, "*Great. We get to go someplace else*." Or a miscarriage--how it affected the woman, but they never talked about it, and the man didn't know what to say or do. When they do that timeline, they start matching up what their feelings were at that time, what they were thinking. They say, "*Well, I didn't know that about you. Oh, why didn't you share that with me?*" Well, you don't know what you don't know. For the timeline, I will have them activate things that really affect them emotionally, and they put it on there. That sets up a communication dialogue between the two and it's beginning of the healing that can take place.

JS: Let’s take just a moment. Of course, we want people to tap into your book, and your resources. But let's just say right now, somebody's not able to get it. How would they do a timeline--what would that look like for them to do this exercise? At least just maybe a first or second step.

PB: Sure; take a little piece of paper or put paper on the wall and tape it together and then draw a horizontal line down the middle of it. Above the line you're going to be listing your positive life events, whatever that means to you. Below the time line is your negative life events. Start with your birth and ask the Lord to help you recall. Just start plotting these out with God and keep asking the Holy Spirit, "*Show me, what else?*" It's usually easier to list the positive things. We get into those negative life events and we want to stop. You know, "*This is too painful*." It's going to bring emotion up; you have to know that going into it. When we're doing it with a couple is we give them each a different colored pen and we say, "*Have at it. Use the same timeline, let's just go for it.*" He's got his blue pen, she's got her purple pen and they make their timeline out. Usually, marriage is a high life event for both. Then you start having them chart out from their marriage forward and you start to see interesting things. For example, a couple that we were working with, it was his graduation from...

CB: Seminary.

PB: Yeah, seminary, his was higher than high. For her, that was an ultimate low point. She was so exhausted. She was so wiped out from dealing with the kids while he was in school. They had come from Italy, and they were living in Texas. She had been discriminated against and called names, because of her language and all kinds of things.

CB: Their flag, the Italian flag, and the Mexican flag almost look the same. In Texas they thought it was a Mexican flag. So, yeah…discrimination.

PB: There was all this cultural stuff going on.

PB: Exactly, so they see, "*How could we have the same event?*" His graduation, for her, was a low and for him it's a high. Those are the rift points. Those are those breaking points. A couple can do this, it's a fun date night thing, where you can go through building parts of it. It's going to provide a lot of conversation.

CB: We have one couple that, it takes about 100 feet because their timeline's 100 feet long and they...

PB: Roll it out.

CB: Over the last two years of their life, they went through a lot to get through all the junk in their life and get it exposed and talk about it. The first thing is just getting started and to be honest, transparent and authentic. Satan wants you to keep those things stuffed down inside, he wants you to keep those secrets so that you can't have life and have it abundantly. People don't understand that once you expose it to the light it can never harm you.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Yes, you're right, it's when we keep it hidden in our heart that it does its worst on us personally, and on our relationship. That's one of the things we try to help couples to see. We tell them, "*Don't take the bait because you're chasing the wrong thing. I know it feels like it's about you, but it's really probably something that's going on inside of him or her right now.*” What a powerful exercise. That might be one we do on a date night.

MS: So much of what you're doing really resonated with me, because we're saying the same thing, but just maybe approaching it a little differently. In some ways, you've taken what we have been doing and taken it deeper. That made it a very powerful read. Your book is very pointed, but practical.

JS: Yeah. I love that. You guys, this has been so good.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Thank you for your honesty and your openness. Gosh, we could talk for another hour.

MS: I know.

CB: Yeah.

JS: Well, we tell our couples that if they give us 30 minutes a week, then we'll improve their marriage, so we try to stay close to that. Sometimes it’s closer to 40 minutes, but we have one more question for you. This is No More Perfect Date Night. So obviously, we encourage couples to intentionally spend time together. I'm wondering what is a favorite date night activity for you, what do you most enjoy doing together?

CB: We like to go to the movies and so we... Friday night’s our date night. It's a non-negotiable, so every Friday night we go. There are times at the theater where it's all R-rated movies. We don't go to R-rated movies, it's got to be PG or PG-13. So if there's nothing out there we'll go to Netflix, or we'll go to on-demand and see if we missed something that was at the theaters. We do like to go to a theater, especially here in Arizona. They have these theaters now where they have recliners and you can just kick your feet out which is pretty awesome. What do we do after the movie then?

PB: This is my favorite part of the date night. We go to this frozen yogurt shop and not only have the frozen yogurt, but we talk about the movie, the characters, how it made us feel. Was there anything that we could relate to in our marriage? And to be honest, this all kind of happened more poignantly. We went through a very significant loss in 2011, we lost my brother tragically, very traumatically. It sent a shockwave through our marriage, through our own family. It was so hard in the grief, I didn't even want to leave the house, to be honest. In going to the movies, we could kind of disconnect from the world and enter this other story. It was a way to grieve together because we would go at first to some emotionally charged movies. We didn't realize that's what we were getting into.

CB: Yeah.

PB: And the first couple were like, "*Oh my gosh*," we're just bawling our eyes out. We realized this was allowing us to put words to some of those feelings. It became really powerful for us to then talk afterwards about what it would trigger in me about my brother or in him about his dad. He hadn't really grieved the loss of his dad, because he was in the military at that time. So, we don’t just go to be entertained. Sometimes we go to something fun, but it's a great conversation tool for us.

JS: Wow, that's a neat idea for how to use the movies. I think most of us stop short of that.

MS: Right.

JS: We see it as pure entertainment, but it can be a good conversation starter. What I love about that is when we are dating, we naturally do that.

CB: Yeah.

JS: We naturally are dissecting and talking about what we thought or felt about something. I think we stop that after we get married, and life becomes so daily, so that’s a tool to keep the conversations going deeper and to explore. I love those questions, “*What did that trigger in you? What did that make you think of? What did that make you feel?*” Those are powerful, powerful questions.

MS: Right. And in your book, you do a great job of the chart with all of the emotions and the feeling words. So that will be another great resource for all of us, when the book is available.

JS: Yeah, when does it come out?

PB: It comes out on November 20th.

JS: November 20th of 2018. People will watch this video at all different times, so I want to make sure that that's clear and we'll make sure and include a link for it as well.

MS: Right.

JS: Wow, you guys. Thank you.

MS: Yes, thank you. Thanks.

CB: Thank you for having us. We really appreciate the fact that you took the time to look up the Braggs.

MS: Yeah, absolutely. You're going to continue to be a big impact for Christ and the Kingdom and for marriages. Thank you.

JS: Absolutely.

CB: Yeah, keep doing the same work that you're doing. You're doing a wonderful job as well. People need to get connected not just not to God, but to each other as well and God has to be first. If they have that, it changes the whole dynamics of the relationship.

MS: Yeah, absolutely.

JS: It's a game changer for sure. We want to thank you for joining us, for those of you that have joined us for this interview. This is Mark and Jill Savage and Clint and Penny Bragg signing off with a reminder, “*A real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected.*” Thanks for joining us.