# Dive Deep with Justin and Trisha Davis

**NoMorePerfectDateNight.com**

Jill Savage: Welcome to No More Perfect Date Night. We are so excited to have this Dive Deep interview with Justin and Trisha Davis. They are the authors of a book called *Beyond Ordinary*. They’re also friends of ours. We've grown in our friendship over the last few years, because we both have a passion for marriage ministry. We're so excited for you to hear from them today. Welcome, Justin and Trisha.

Mark Savage: Hi.

Justin Davis: Hi, thanks so much for having us.

MS: This is awesome. We are really excited to talk with you and to share our time with you and others. Go ahead and tell us a little bit about your family and what your ministry is doing.

Trisha Davis: It's so funny.

JD: We have to check ourselves, because our family has changed so much in the past 11 months.

TD: Justin and I are pastors at a church called Hope City, on the north side of Indianapolis, and we are getting ready to celebrate our two-year church anniversary. So not only do we not know our children’s birth order anymore--we'll explain a little bit more about that—but we also sometimes forget how old our little baby church is.

TD: We've been in ministry for over 20 years, and we decided to plant our second church plant about four years ago. We launched officially two years ago. And last year, we adopted, and we have three biological kids. We just realized yesterday that we have one that just got married this summer, and is a senior in college, a sophomore in college, a freshman in high school, a middle schooler in elementary, and that's all we know.

JD: We've been married for 23 years, and it feels like three, and it feels like 300 all at the same time.

JS: I bet.

MS: I know.

TD: This year has felt like five years or more.

JD: Yeah, exactly. We started a ministry called RefineUs Ministries about eight years ago, just as an overflow of our own story and our own personal journey. Trish and I got married in 1995, with this passion to help people find their way back to God and come into relationship with Jesus. We spent the first seven years of our marriage in student ministry. And then seven years into marriage, we felt like God was calling us to plant a church. Our first church plant was born in 2002, and things went really well. But over the course of the first 10 years of our ministry, from 1995 to 2005, Trish and I had just become good ministry partners, but we didn't really grow as marriage partners. Our marriage imploded in 2005, when I had an affair with a staff member, who was also Trish's best friend. That was obviously a defining moment for us as a couple, and a defining moment for us as individuals too. I got out of ministry. Trish and I were separated for two-and-a-half years... no, two-and-a-half months.

MS: It just felt like two and a half years.

JD: Yeah. Exactly. We started going to counseling and really began to put our marriage back together, and I spent four years out of ministry. I grew up under the tradition where I never saw a pastor restored back into ministry, so I never thought that was really possible.

TD: We were loving life. Justin and I went to a small Bible college, near where you all live, and fell in love with God there, fell in love with each other, and with the local church. All we had known as adults, and married adults, was ministry. So, when we got out of ministry, it was almost kind of as if we were living our 20s in more of the traditional way. We were experiencing like, "*Oh, we're going to skip church*". We became those people that as pastors you get frustrated with.

JD: “*Why are they sleeping in? Why are they going to the lake*?” That was us.

TD: Justin became a headhunter placing commercial lenders in banks, and it was just so different from ministry. Nobody was really influencing our family from his work. He was doing really well and winning these President Club trips. It doesn't matter how many thousands of people show up to your church, they're not sending you on a President's Club trip. On our first one, I was sitting on the beach at Grand Cayman Islands. I looked at him with my iced tea, and I said, "*Cheers to never going back into ministry*".

JD: Yeah. We just felt like that was kind of the path that God had us on.

TD: And it was a good one.

JD: Then in January of 2009, there was a local church here in Indianapolis called Traders Point Christian Church. It's a pretty large church in our community, and their senior pastor and I had a mutual friend. This mutual friend set the senior pastor and me up to meet for lunch. He said, "*Tell me your story*." I cried my way through lunch, sharing our story with him. A few weeks later, he called and said, "*Hey, would you and Trish be willing to share your story on Sunday*?" Trish wasn't really about that. We've never shared it publicly. We'd help couples in our small group, or in the church that we were attending. This was before social media had really taken off, and we didn't want to be known, we wanted to be hidden. This was not something to be proud of, it was something to be ashamed of.

TD: I'll never forget him looking at me and saying, "*You know, would you pray about it*?" I said, "*Listen, I have been in ministry. I know that Pastor prayer. Don't do that to me. The answer's no*." Then I prayed about it, and...

JD: He ended up interviewing us that morning, and it was really another defining moment for us. We were at the church until about 4:00 in the afternoon, just talking to people. At the time, we lived about two miles from the church, so we put our name, email address, and phone number in the bulletin. We thought, "*We want to help as many people as possible*", right? We had about 160 different people who reached out to us. It was overwhelming…we went from never talking about it, to Trish having coffee three times a week with women whose husbands were addicted to porn, or cheated on them, or left them.

JD: A friend of mine in Nashville at that time said, "*Hey, I know you're worn out with this whole thing, you should start a blog.*" I didn't know what that was, and I had to ask, "*What's a blog?*" He kind of explained it to me, so in February of 2009, we started refineus.org. We started with this block series called “*Eight Things That Destroyed our Marriage*.” God used that to begin a process and a journey for us of having a heart for marriages and having a heart to help people have the marriages that he has in mind.

JS: Yeah. Powerful.

JD: That's like a two-hour story in about five minutes.

MS: It's just so cool how God takes our messes and then turns them into his message. What we think is the worst thing, not wanting to minimize your story, or our story, but God takes those messes and transforms lives. We love the way that you live your lives honest and open, and we value that for ourselves as well.

JS: I don't know if you guys remember this, but it was your blog that I found while we were separated. That's how I grew to know you, and I reached out to you through that. Then we figured out we had all kinds of connections, and I didn't know that. We were separated at the time, and it was our dark season when I found your story. Your story was a part of what kept the hope going for me, that restoration was possible, and so I am grateful for that.

MS: Right. Thank you.

JS: I love the subtitle of your book, but I'd like for you to talk about it, because I think that understanding this is key for most marriages. The subtitle of *Beyond Ordinary* is, "*When a good marriage isn't good enough*.”

JS: Talk about that. What does that mean, when a good marriage isn't good enough?

JD: We were living in Nashville at the time we wrote the book, and a lot of people move to Nashville to write books. We were living in Nashville as pastors, having no desire to write a book. One of the things that we realized as we were going through our restoration process, is that we had the best marriage that we could create. We were going to seminars, reading books, checking things off the list, having date nights. I would not get in an elevator with a woman of the opposite sex by myself.

TD: And that really wasn't even our rule, it was like, “*If you're a good Christian couple, this is what you do.”*

JD: When everything blew up, we had to step back and go, "*Okay. Our marriage was good*," which sounds weird since it was littered with a pornography addiction and eventually infidelity. Leading up to that, if somebody would have said, "*Man, your marriage's in trouble*," we would have both said, "*What are you talking about? We love each other.*" So, the reason that we subtitled the book, "*When a good marriage isn't as good enough*" is that a lot of Christian couples aspire to have good marriages, but they don't understand why they feel so discontent, or empty or hollow.

JD: I think God doesn't want us to have a good marriage, he wants us to experience intimacy. Intimacy is one step beyond good. It's what we would call extraordinary. The premise of the book is not about an affair, but about how we oftentimes attack the symptoms of problems rather than dealing with the problem itself. A lot of couples will learn the love languages and focus on how we communicate better or fighting fair.

TD: And those are important.

JD: Right. I say that sometimes, and Trisha will say, "*You can't slam the Love Languages, it sold like 17 million copies*." I'm not slamming the Love Languages, but I am saying that you can know your spouse's love language, but if you don't tell them the truth, it doesn't matter.

MS: Right.

JD: If you're holding onto resentment, it doesn't matter how good your communication is because you're still a bitter person. Getting to some of those heart issues, not just behavior issues, was the goal, not just of the book, but of our relationship in general. That's what a marriage should be about.

JS: That's so funny because we said something very similar in our *No More Perfect Marriages* book. "*We were doing all the right things! We knew each other's love languages. We went on date nights. We had getaways, just the two of us*".

MS: Right.

JS: "*How in the world did we end up with infidelity as a part of our story*?" We would say the same thing, because we were doing much of that. But there is definitely a difference between the old Mark and Jill, our first marriage and our second marriage together.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Before the crisis and after the crisis. What would you say has made the difference from the old Davises to the Davises that are today?

JD: Well, I'm old now. I was young then.

TD: The season we're coming out of, all these beautiful things that we've been a part of, of adopting our kids and marrying off our oldest child, has been amazing. Then we birthed a church, and we were portable. Then a year into being portable, we were gifted a building. So, we moved into a building and we are rehabbing that. It's been an intense year, and I think that's just life. Your viewers may be listening to this and know what that is. Maybe you're in a season of small kids, and because it's all you know, you think they'll be small kids forever. I promise you they won't. But when you haven't slept in three years, it's like "*I can't deal with my life right now.*" Maybe a job has been really hard. It used to be a really good job, but now times have changed, technology has changed. There's always that season. Sometimes people want to put a bow around their marriage to say there was the *pre* Justin and Trisha marriage, and the *post* Justin and Trisha marriage. The hard thing is, what stays the same is life. Life is hard.

MS: Oh, right.

TD: I say that to say that this year could have been another affair year. It could have been another escapism to pornography, because the stress level was so high. What changed us then, continues to change us now. The first thing I would say is, we just live in truth, and truth is hard. Sometimes we don't even know the truth we're trying to hide. There are not always words to our wounds, and you can't heal a wound you don't give a name to. This past year for me, change and letting go has been a wound, and I had no idea. That's something that we've been processing. Truth, being truthful, that I'm in a dark place right now. I just publicly shared yesterday or the day before, that I took a sabbatical and I didn't announce it. I had no plan for it. It was just sitting across the table at date night and telling, Justin, "*I'm flamed out. My heart's not good. I don't want to be at church. I don't want to be on this date night and I'm not mad at you. It's not that not in love with you or I don't love my church or my kids. I'm tired. I am so unbelievably tired*". I gave a wound a name, and then I could heal it.

JS: Trisha, you wouldn't have had that conversation before the crisis?

JD: She would've, but I would've tried to fix it or talk her out of it.

MS: Oh, yeah.

JD: I wouldn't have heard it. I would have said, "*Well, you can't be tired. We have a church to lead. You can't be tired. We have people counting on us. You can't be tired. You're a spiritual leader"*.

MS: Right.

TD: We talk about this in the book. It was the Messiah complex, and the reverse Messiah complex. In the Messiah complex was Justin, that he could fix everything when something was broken in me. The reverse Messiah complex was my expectation that Justin was to heal all this. It all resided around him. "*If you would just do these things, then I wouldn't be the person I am today.*" That's what's so different. Our wounds aren't as personal to one another, even though we are the first person to take out our wounds on each other. When you recognize that it's not personal, the second tier to that is not only living in truth, but brokenness. Brokenness has a posture that lives open-handed and says, “*Whatever it takes*.” We cherish so much that in my brokenness, I was willing to be humble with the truth of where I was. I was supposed to preach this weekend, and in my mind, I thought, "*I'll take a month off and then I'm going to be awesome*." Then I took a month off and I said, "*I'm not ready*."

TD: It doesn't disqualify me. I don't have any moral issues going on. I'm just not fully rested yet, and it takes a lot to write a message. It takes a lot to exert what you guys do as a ministry; it’s sacrificial. If it doesn't come from a place of overflow, then it comes from a place that's unhealthy, and then you start the path of hiddenness.

JS: Oh.

MS: That's such a powerful message to us and to those who are listening. Jill and are really working hard to deepen our love relationship with each other, to build healthy love and boundaries and honesty, and taking care of ourselves. Those are all important pieces of loving ourselves and loving one another. I love how this has gone today because I think it will be a powerful encouragement to every one of us.

JS: Justin, I'm more the fixer in our relationship. For me, that's also been a place of growth in our relationship. Mark is the feeler in our relationship. If he's down, I want to tell him why the sun is still shining, and that it's not cloudy outside, and I think my words are going to make a difference. But I've had to learn to validate and empathize and not try to talk him out of where he is. I'm curious: if the old Justin would have told her, "*You can't be tired,*" what does the new Justin do when she says, "*I'm empty, I'm at the end of myself, I need a break*"?

JD: I don't get it right all the time, because we go to each other for the first things. I try not to talk about church. We worked together in our marriage ministry, we worked together at the church, so it was hard. There are times that I don't get it perfect, but I think the big thing for me has been my motivation. I still share words of encouragement, or what I believe are words of wisdom, or direction.

JD: My motivation isn't to get her fixed, so she can do something for me. My motivation is to actually help her heart heal. It's not necessarily what I say or when I say it, but rather why I'm saying it. Why am I writing a scripture down? Is it to manipulate things to try to get her to be more spiritual so she'll feel better about herself? She'll ask me, "*Are you saying that because you want me to be fixed or just because you want me to hear it?*" I don't try to be manipulative. If you're a manipulative person, you probably don't realize you're manipulative, and that's what makes you so good at it. Understanding my motivation behind some of the things I'm saying is actually more important than what I'm saying.

MS: That's good.

JS: That's been probably one of your big growth areas is loving me, not to get something in return.

MS: Oh, right.

JS: It's kind of the same idea.

MS: Last year, I realized how much I spent the first half of our married life loving people based upon what I was going to get in return. Learning to love Jill, because of who she is, because of who Christ is, is the driving force. But, man, that's foreign.

JD: I'll give you a good example. About two weeks ago, we got into a little bit of a discussion about when Trish was going to start re-engaging. I said something about, "*People at church are waiting to meet with us, waiting for counseling. I don't know what to tell them*." She said, "*Tell them the truth*." The next Sunday at church I was talking to a guy in the lobby, and Trisha wasn’t with me at the time. The guy said, "*I really want to get together with you and your wife*," and I said, "*Well, we'll look at the first or second week of August.*" He said, "*Wow, you guys must be uber important. Are you traveling again?*" I said, "*No, actually, my wife couldn't get out of bed until 10 o'clock every morning, last week. She's in a really dark place, so she's not doing any counseling until August*." He said, "*Oh, wow. Alright*". I thought, "*Well, guess that worked*.”

TD: To be fair to Justin too, I didn't plan this sabbatical.

JD: I won't call it a melt-down, more like a shut down. You had to shut down so you did not melt down.

TD: Yeah. I didn't know why. I'm a huge, huge believer in counseling. We would not be married today without our counselor. At first, it was this checklist of things that I needed to do to continue to be a good wife, a good mom, a good pastor. I didn't have the capacity to do them. I think that marriages oftentimes are struggling with somebody's personal lane of issues that spill over into the marriage relationship. It’s very rare that those deep-seated root issues came out of their marriage. It's carried over from your past, growing up in your relationships.

TD: What happened this month in my marriage is... I'm emotional about it. Justin became my safe place. He's a safe place to land. He meant his words and his actions meant them. I sat in the staff meeting this Tuesday and looked at him as we were talking about what I'm speaking on this weekend. It was like the Holy Spirit said, "*This is not right. You're not ready*." I don't have any ill will. There's no immorality. There's no bitterness, I'm just tired, and my heart isn't rested. When I looked over at my husband, and he was so gentle and so kind to me in front of our staff. It made me feel loved. I think it made my healing expedited because I had that room to continue to rest.

JS: That's beautiful.

MS: Yeah. That's well said.

JD: And I know I'm going to get some points on this interview, but...

[laughter]

JS: That's good stuff, though. That's why we love you guys, because you are honest. We love the real stuff, and the deep stuff. One place that I have grown immensely, and am still growing in it, is in compassion. Justin, it sounds like she felt some compassion and sensitivity from you.

JD: When you lose everything, you appreciate things much more and everything is right sized. I just knew her not speaking Sunday wasn’t the end of the world. The church isn't going to fold up and close down. Maintaining some of those perspectives, I think, is really good. Some of the things I used to get upset about or not be compassionate about in the past were so small and minuscule in the grand scheme of things.

TD: The bittersweet part of it, is because he does believe in me. He would be frustrated because he believes that in my gifting, he wants me to be the one to deliver whatever it is that needs to be delivered. There's a beauty in it and, again, it goes back to whoever's watching this. We all have that "*it*". It may not look anything like ministry, but your season of life and your capacity to be able to engage the way that you want to…it can be hard at times, but the beauty of it is when you do it as a team. Instead of fighting with each other, you fight for each other. Not to be sacrilegious, but it's almost magical.

TD: It is what I believe God meant for marriage to be. It's like the sacred ordained relationship, where they are your person. You can't explain it, and that’s why you do what you do, because you want other couples to experience it. You want your children to experience it, and you have to fight for it. Those moments of just raw intimacy of being fully known and fully loved. There's nothing that compares.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Yeah, but it's scary, isn't it? One of the things we talk about in *No More Perfect Marriages* is the eight God tools, and one of those God tools is courage. That took courage, on your part, Trisha, to say, "*I am depleted, something needs to change here*." And it's taken some courage for you, Justin, to be her protector in that. Would you agree?

JD: It's interesting that you say that. One of the things that Trisha said in the previous process is just, "*I feel like such a failure*." I said, "*What you should feel like is very courageous, because failing is choosing to do the thing that's going to cause you to meltdown; courage is choosing to do something different."*

JS: Oh, goodness. Well, this has been good. I want to ask you, could you identify just one or two things that you see as common patterns, that couples should pay attention to? We talked earlier about the difference between chasing symptoms versus root issues. What are some of those root issues that you see couples tripping over quite often, and what practical steps would you offer to our members as you think about those?

JD: That's a good question. As Trish talked about, speaking truth, living with brokenness, I think those two things are important. One of the things that I've noticed about our culture is we equate activity with time. Some couples spend more time sitting in lawn chairs at a football game, or soccer game, or a baseball game than they ever do one-on-one together. We're doing a lot of activity together, but not a lot of time is really spent together. It's carpooling here or travel basketball there, or nine baseball games in a two-day span here. Coupled with that is then the absence of spiritual nourishment, because a lot of that stuff takes place on the weekend. I just feel like a lot of couples are living in the same house, but they're not really sharing life with each other. They have the same address but they're just living parallel lives.

JD: I would just encourage people to do an inventory of how much time are we really investing, because you can be home every night for dinner, but you don't have to be there. Especially with smartphones and social media, there's several different ways to escape. You don't have to be addicted to pornography to step out on your marriage; you can be addicted to Facebook. I see couples that come to our conferences or when we speak at different churches, and they say, "*We just don't know each other anymore*." I ask them, "*Well, outside of doing the business of marriage, how often do you really spend time together*?" "*Well, never*". "*Well, how can you expect anything to be good that you're not investing in*?" I think it's just one of those expectations, if you really want to have a good marriage but you're not willing to put in the time, there's no other thing in life that would work out that way. I can never go to gym and I'll be in shape. I can always eat unhealthily and be in shape. Nothing ever works that way, but we expect marriage to be that way.

JD: Well, that's my one thing. I don't know what your one thing is.

TD: My one thing is where everybody will roll their eyes because it's like, "*Oh, Trish, seriously?*" I've been a Christian since birth, but your best marriage is an overflow of your best relationship with God.

MS: Yeah.

TD: Coming out of the season that I'm coming out of, there are other things that have happened, some relationship things that have been a challenge, and God has walked me through. It's this reminder that when we feel fully known but fear we won't be fully loved, we become different people. We become guarded, we become bitter and we become angry at the world. No matter how this is going or other relationships or the season of life is going, when I remember that Jesus is undeniably faithful, always faithful, there's a spirit of peace and joy and belonging and value and worthiness that allows me to be the person I so long to be. When you fight for that, crazy things happen, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

TD: Know your spouse's love language, know your kids' love language. Those are so important.

Go to counseling if you feel like you've got some issues. We’ve all got issues, we just live life. When you lean into God, the Holy Spirit starts prompting you. Instead of, "*Hey, let's do our Tuesday date night at 7 O'clock, and make sure we both wear matching outfits. We're going to eat steak, it's going to look like this,*" you just say, "*God, how can I love my husband today?*" The Holy Spirit prompts you and you're like, "*Really, that sounds dumb? But you're God, I guess you know what you're talking about, right?*" You go through with it and then...

JD: God told you to buy me a new pair of shoes?

[laughter]

TD: But there have been moments where Justin's like, "How did you know?"

JD: I'm the shopper and the diva.

JS: Same here. That's what he is too.

TD: I hate shopping.

JS: Me too.

TD: One particular time, there was nothing major going on that I had told Justin, not like how this season has been. I'll never forget waking up and going to the bathroom, and Justin had written a scripture on my mirror. It's what I needed, not to hear from Justin, but from God, and Justin allowed God to use him as a conduit to His faithfulness. That's where romance takes on a whole new level. Practically speaking, if you feel like you're in a dark place with God, or you feel like he's not listening, one of the best practices you can do, there's nowhere in Scripture that talks about journaling. There is something powerful that you take what is in your head, and what is in your heart, and you pin it down. Even if it's the darkest parts of your heart, there's something where you can physically see it. It almost becomes like an altar.

JD: You're released from the hold it has on you.

TD: Yes. Even if I don't know what God's going to do with it, it's this tangible expression that I've done something. Oftentimes that is just the spark you need to get back into God's word. It's just the spark you need to say, "*Dang, I've just written the same thing for five straight days. I need to go back to counseling. I need to confess this to my spouse.*" That becomes a game changer in the daily habits of having a healthy marriage.

JS: Yeah. One of the things we talk about is that when I'm a better me, we're a better we.

TD: Yeah.

JS: And being a better me can be, "*I've strayed from God's word, I'm not spending time with Him. I've got some junk in the trunk and I'm all tangled up on the inside. I need to make an appointment with a counselor.*" I like how you said it earlier, we all have our own lane, and it bleeds over into our marriage together. I appreciate that, I think it’s a good word.

TD: I'm glad you didn't schedule this for about two weeks ago, because it would not have been good.

JS: Yeah, you're in a little bit better place.

MS: Yeah.

TD: A little bit better. [chuckle]

JS: I know you're still in your season of rest, so thank you that you were still willing to chat with us. We have one more question. We try to ask all our interviews this question and that is: what is your favorite date night? This is No More Perfect Date Night, so we encourage couples to spend time together. What's your favorite date night activity or date night story, or anything like that that you could share with us?

JD: We love going out to dinner. There's a restaurant here in Indianapolis that has the best shrimp cocktail. If we had one place to go, we would go there and have their shrimp cocktail.

TD: Now, what's my favorite thing to do?

JD: Watch Marvel movies?

TD: No. [laughter] It happens every night.

JD: Oh, watch the sunset. [chuckle]

JD: That's right, that's not date night, that's just every night.

[laughter]

JS: But that's special!

TD: But that's what we most often get to do together.

JD: We’re doing this interview on a Friday. I was playing basketball on Monday. I twisted my ankle so bad I could barely even walk today, five days later. We were going to go out on Wednesday night. I texted Trish, "*Hey, let's order a pizza for the kids and let's just go out to dinner."* I came hobbling up the stairs and she said, "*You can barely even walk, I'm not going to make you go out to dinner.*" So, we ordered pizza for the kids, we locked our door, we got Chinese, and we watched Infinity War, because it came out that day on Amazon. It was not what we had in mind, but it was not so perfect date night.

TD: No, there were kids fighting in the background, and we were just eating our food like, "*We're not on.*"

[laughter]

JD: Trisha said, "*What's that noise?*" I said, "*I think it's the movie. I don't think it's the kids*."

[laughter]

TD: We turned the TV up a little bit more so we can't hear.

[laughter]

JD: We could have just cashed it all in, and she could have been frustrated with me that I wasn't feeling well.

MS: Right.

JD: I'm 45 and not 25 anymore, but she was still committed to try to make it happen and it ended up being a fun night.

JS: That's cool, and you're right. So often with those little irritations, that's where the enemy comes in and really begins to pull us apart. She could have been mad that you twisted your ankle and that now it was affecting you, and everything just tumbles.

JS: Instead you decided, even though it didn't look the way you wanted it to, you were going to redeem it for good and stay committed to spending that time together.

MS: Right.

MS: Well, thank you, guys, this has been awesome.

JD: Thanks for having us.

JS: Yeah. Justin, would you be willing to close our interview in prayer and pray for those that are listening?

JD: I’d be happy to. God, thanks so much for this time together today. Thank you for the Savages and for the ministry that they have to so many couples, so many parents. And, God, I pray for every single person that's watching this video, that you meet them right where they're at, that their marriage is perfectly positioned to be the marriage that you have in mind. They just have to choose You every single day and choose one another. Give us the courage, give us the stamina, give us the perseverance to fight for each other and not just with each other. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

MS: Amen. Alright. Thank you guys.

JS: Thanks, guys.

JD: Thanks!