

Dive Deep with John and Tricia Goyer

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Jill Savage: Well, welcome to our Dive Deep interview. This month's interview is with John and Tricia Goyer. And Tricia has recently written a book called The Grumble-Free Year. So, we thought it would be great to talk to them about what a grumble-free marriage might actually look like. So welcome, John and Tricia.

Tricia Goyer: Thank you so much.

John Goyer: Thank you.

Mark Savage: We're so glad you've joined us today.

JS: Yeah. So, tell us a little bit about yourself, where you live, how many kids you have, what do you do?

JG: Well, we live in the south now, actually. We live in Arkansas. We've lived here for about...

TG: Ten years?

JG: Almost 10 years now, yeah. Before that we were Northwest people. Raised mostly in northern California. Raised our first batch of kids in Montana, and then moved here, felt God calling us to Arkansas. So, we came this way, and then we got here we took on some more kids.

TG: Yeah, we've adopted seven, so we have three biologicals, they're all adults and out the house, and then we have seven that we adopted, from the ages of 19-9. He just turned nine, and so they're all at home. And then my grandma, who is 90 also lives with us. She's lived with this for 20 years. We had grandma move in, and she is still kicking. [laughter]

MS: Wow.

JS: Oh my goodness. Okay, so you have 10 total kids, if I'm doing the math right.

JG: Mm-hmm.

JS: Plus grandma.

TG: Plus grandma.

[laughter]

JS: Wow, and you home school, is that right?

TG: Yeah, we home school.

MS: Wow.

JS: You are a glutton for punishment.

[laughter]

TG: I know. I get tired. John hears all about it.

JG: Yeah, in huge capacity.

JS: Wow, okay.

MS: Wow, good for you guys.

JS: Well, tell us a little of your marriage story. How did you guys meet, and then how did you come to this journey of having a big family? Was that an easy journey for both of you? Talk about that for a little bit, I'd love to know your story.

TG: Oh, this is good.

JG: Okay, so first I'll say that my dad was a church planter and while we were there, I was actually in the Marine Corps at the time, but I'd come up on the weekends to come visit and kinda just be around my family and also to help support the church plant that he was working on. And I remember, a little tiny church, but I remember one day hearing some people come in behind me, and sit in the row behind me during the worship time, and I turned around and looked and there was this lady who I already knew, and there was, she was a teenager at the time. I was 19, I think she was...

TG: Probably 15.

JG: 15, 16, somewhere in there. And I was like, "Wow, she is beautiful, who is that?" So, I went to my mom who knows everybody, 'cause she's the pastor's wife and I said, "Who was that girl that was sitting behind me?" And she said, "That is Tricia Waddell. She is bad news, stay away from her."

TG: Yeah.

JG: So I did.

[laughter]

TG: That's right, he did.

JS: Really?

TG: I was bad news, yeah. I'm sure I was just there, I didn't go to church all the time with my mom. I grew up going to church, but my teen years was definitely not living for God. And then I became pregnant at 17, and then it was... Well, I was about six months pregnant when I dedicated my life to

God and realized I was going down the wrong path and it was during that time I started praying for a future husband, someone that would love me, and love my baby. And then I had Cory a couple of weeks before I turned 18. And then the day Cory was born... Okay, so I was 17, I went home from the hospital the same day. I think I had him like 3:30 in the morning, by noon I was home. And that night I got a visitor and it was John. He brought a teddy bear and a card, and he kinda helped all the young people in the church, and he just brought a teddy bear and a card that said that "If there was anything I can do..." And I'm like, "You're kind of cute." [laughter] So then my mom was like, I was talking to Darlene, and if John asked you out on a date would you go? I just had a baby.

TG: Cory was two weeks old on our first date, but John had saw a huge change in me, just since I dedicated my heart to God. And we started dating, and we got married when Cory was nine months old, and then we had two more kids right away, and then we thought, "Okay, this is it. We have three kids." Trying to be a good Christian family, and I started writing. So that was our journey. And then yeah, God completely introduced us to adoption, which it was not even really something we'd talked about or planned, and then now we have seven more.

JG: Yeah.

MS: Wow.

JS: Wow.

JG: Yeah.

JS: So God introduced us to adoption as well. We had four biological kids, and then we adopted number five, but we stopped after one.

[laughter]

MS: Yeah.

JS: Just for a moment, from a marriage perspective, talk about what that was like? Were you both onboard...

MS: Right.

JS: When one of you brought up that? Or maybe after one or two and then you kept thinking maybe you'd talk about more, were you both onboard, or did that take a while?

JG: No, for the... We started out as a... What you'd call a blended family from the beginning.

TG: 'Cause he adopted Cory.

JG: I adopted Cory officially when he was six years old, but I was there since day one. Our first date that we ever went on, which was just, he was only two weeks old?

TG: Mm-hmm.

JG: Our first date, we go out for dinner and a movie, and we're sitting there, and the waitress walks up and says, "What a beautiful baby. You must be a very proud daddy." And I was just like, "Well, thanks." And kind of played it off. This is our first date. But it didn't bother me, but he's always been there. So, when we started, we started with a family of three. It wasn't that honeymoon stage of just two together, and so we never really had that opportunity to kinda figure that stuff out. So, we were figuring it out as with kids in the picture from very early on, and the others came in pretty quick as well. So, a young married couple, just only been married for a couple of years, now we're ending up with three kids. At that time, I was in college, so there was just a lot of stress, a lot of poverty, a lot of starving student.

TG: Yeah.

JG: That whole thing.

JS: Yes.

TG: Yeah.

JS: I bet.

JG: The pressures of all that.

MS: Yeah.

JG: Those were hard times but really forming times for us as we were trying to figure out who we were in the midst of all that, and... But then it kind of settled in. You know, we got our three kids. I always figured that's family. When you hit five, that's just big enough. You don't quite fit in a little tiny compact car anymore, so you must be a real family, and... But God had different plans for us, and I always figured that we would be empty nesters relatively young in life. And so, as we got close to that time when they're all grown, I'm like I'm not really done feeling like I'm done being a dad. So...

TG: And I think I was the one that brought it up first. I think when our kids were probably middle school years, John's just like, "No, we're good to go. You know we've never had the empty nest," and so I just prayed about it like if it was gonna happen, I didn't feel like I hounded him. It was just like I was open to it and then he brought it up, it was like, "Okay, this is the time," 'cause it just had kind of been on my heart, and we first tried to adopt from China. We did all our paperwork, spent a lot of money, and the doors closed right when our paper was in. They stopped adopting baby girls to the US, and so I was heartbroken. I remember a year after our paperwork was turned in, I got an email that if you ever are able to adopt from China, it might be five years from now, maybe. And I was thinking, "It's been all these years, I've been praying about it, and it's not happening," but it was that day that we actually, I got a phone call. Like later that day after like crying and finally saying, "God, do whatever you want, whatever child," got a phone call from a friend that I had met at MOPS and she had a sister-in-law that was looking to place her baby for adoption, and she was already seven months along. She had heard about our family and how China's doors had closed 'cause I had shared it with our MOPS group, and she said, "Would you be interested?"

TG: And all of sudden, three months later, we had a baby girl. And so that was our first one, and...

So we went from... Our youngest was 16 at the time and then now we have a baby girl, and then when she got a little bit older, we're like we can't just raise her... She's just so spoiled. So then we looked into foster care, and just God just put it on our hearts and we adopted a two-year-old and a five-year-old, and then I thought for sure we're done. We're done, just continued to just put the needs of kids in foster care, and I work with teen moms at our church and so many of them have aged out of foster care or are in foster care with their kids, and I thought someone needs to get these girls before they end up 16 or pregnant or aging out of foster care and pregnant, and he just put it on my heart.

TG: And then I remember one worship service, I just felt like adopt a teen sibling group, and I talked to John and in the same service we felt the same thing. And I reached out to a local organization, and said, "Do you have a sibling group of girls, and she goes, "I just got a photo of four sisters and here are their names," and we just like, "Okay, this is it." Like it was so... It went from three little kids at the time like I think seven and under five, six and under, or seven and under to... They were between the ages of 10 and 14 when we first met them. And so that's like we inserted them right in the middle and it really has been the hardest thing in our marriage.

JG: Yeah.

TG: It's been super hard, super challenging. They come from a lot of trauma backgrounds, but I think... I mean those types of things could either push you apart or pull you together and I think it pulled us together 'cause we're the only ones that understand. Like people outside don't even understand what's going on and the challenges and all that the kids are facing and all we're facing. So I think we would stay up and talk about different things and how can we help her and what we should do about this. And it has really I think brought us together.

JS: Wow. Wow. Thank you for sharing that.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Let's dig into that just a little bit before we jump into Grumble-Free Year here. I want to know more. You're like, "This was the hardest thing in our marriage."

MS: Right.

JS: How did you... How have you pulled together rather than have it pull you apart? So, one thing I heard you say there is you've kind of strategized together, you know. But can you talk about that just a little bit more? What do you think that you have done that has allowed your marriage to strengthen through that hard time rather than disintegrate?

JG: Yeah. I would say that God has prepared us for this step in our lives, you know. My wife's a writer. I'm not. But I would say life is like a series of chapters that make up the book of your life, and that really is... As we look back, we see that God really has provided us a platform for us to build this on. There's no way in the beginning we could have taken this on. There's... I mean it would have destroyed us, and God knew that, and so God gives us what we can bear. And there's... Before we even moved to Little Rock about a decade ago, God was really working on our life about marriage enrichment and helping others, ministering into their lives in our church, and we were just eating this stuff up. A lot of the same topics you probably hear a lot, love and respect, and the five

love languages and...

JS: Sure.

JG: Sacred marriage and all of those things that we do in order to kinda build that, and a lot of it was us learning how to communicate with each other and how to also look to see at separating problems from people, so that we can tackle problems without attacking people. And those are just life skills that God worked into our lives before this happened, so that we could actually look at this and say, "These are problems we need to deal with. How do we approach these together?" And so, we did a lot of study and research into the different types of trauma. Trisha I'd say a lot more, but she faces them hour per hour a lot more than I do...

JS: Right.

JG: In dealing with diffusing issues, and angry children, and rage, and peeling back the layers. But even me just even understanding things like kids that come out of terrible situations will oftentimes sort of attack their primary caregiver, which in our case and many cases is the mother, because those are the ones that hurt them the most in the past. The ones that they felt the most betrayed of, and so they're going to target her or the primary caregiver. They're going to target them as evil, mean, but then they'll be super sweet around me.

TG: Which was exactly what happened.

[chuckle]

JS: Yeah, it was textbook and we both could see it and we would talk about these things.

TG: But we had read about it before we even adopted kids with trauma. We knew that this could either separate us, and they're gonna try. They're gonna try to push us apart, but we can be strong if we're together. But if we let them and try to take sides with the kids, and obviously it's not gonna work.

JS: Yeah, right.

MS: Right.

JS: Oh, yeah. I love what you're saying too about building a foundation because I think all of that marriage work that you did, did give you that firm foundation. One of the things we talk about in our book, *No More Perfect Marriages*, is the eight God tools. These are the tools that stop what we call the fades in marriage. Fades are when our hearts get pulled apart just one little quarter-inch at a time, but one of the God tools is wisdom. We need to be all about continuing education in our marriage, which is why we do, "No more perfect date night." You're really illustrating how that builds a foundation to build a family on, and I think that's huge.

MS: Yeah.

TG: Cool.

JG: We'd heard this before, that the kids look at our relationship together as the most important relationship that they can see, because they know that even when they're little, they pick up on that. They see that if these two people aren't successful, if they don't make this work, I have no other options. I have no world outside of these two people being successful, but we've seen that even in these older kids that are moved into their teen years, still vitally important for them. They get upset if we don't take a date night. We're planning our 30th anniversary next year and they're like, "You better go some place really fun."

TG: "You better go for at least a week."

JG: At least a week.

TG: Because, they've been torn from first their biological parent's home, they've had foster homes that were not good; they had a failed adoption before us. They know that if we aren't working together, that that's bad news for them.

JS: Yes.

TG: And they're very aware of that.

JS: Yes, so true!

MS: That's so fascinating how our kids, they see it and then that brings them security. Jill and I have always said that when mom and dad are good, the kids are good. I'm thinking with your most recent book that's soon to be out, how do you keep 12 people... Right 12? 13!

JS: 13, counting grandma.

[laughter]

MS: How do you keep 13 people from grumbling?

TG: Yeah, that's a good question.

JS: Tell us the story of your book. What made you do a grumble-free year? What did that look like and what did you learn?

MS: Yeah.

TG: We've overcome a lot. Even with the kids, getting them settled, all these sibling groups together in a home with all of us just getting settled. We overcame anger and trauma, and a lot of counseling, but there was this underlying discontent where everyone's always grumbling. You tell someone to do their chores or remember to do this; everyone was doing it. And I was a grumbling 'cause all of a sudden there's all these people and a huge mess and no one's picking up after themselves. We were just like, "We need to do something." My agent and I had talked about well if you do a book about it, you can talk to your kids, see what they think, see what John thinks. I talked to John, he was like, "Yeah, we need to do this."

[laughter]

TG: It was just exhausting, the amount of grumbling go on in our home. Then we actually were going on a road trip, I was asked to speak in Seattle and they said, "Bring your whole family, we have a house for you to stay in." I'm like, "Do you know my family, how many kids we have? They said, "Yes," so we did a road trip from Little Rock to Seattle. We had talked about maybe doing this later in the fall. Well, by the time we got there it was May. I'm like, "I think we need to start this now. We've been on the road with each other for 2500 miles; we need to even start working at this. We were at a restaurant, and we just brought it up with the kids, "Let try to go a year without grumbling."

TG: And we told them, "If you work on it for a year, we're gonna all work together, dad and mom and all of us, 'cause all of us grumble, we'll do something to celebrate, like a family cruise." Then they were interested. Before, any time we wanna change something it's like, "It's too hard or I don't wanna do it," but that gave them enough motivation. We did a three-day Mexican cheap cruise, there was five people in a room. It was not extravagant, but it was enough for them to like, "Okay, I wanna do this." Some of them were like, "I don't think it's gonna happen. It's gonna be too hard", but when I sat down and said, "We're gonna memorize this first, we're gonna do this", they were willing, because they had the end goal of the cruise. Which my end goal was their attitudes, but they looking just for that vacation.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Wow!

MS: That's neat!

JS: Wow, okay. You were looking at it, what it was gonna do for your family, but what did it do for you? What did God show you? What was inside of your heart, and behind some of your own grumbling?

TG: Oh my goodness! Even before I could help my kids, I had all these projects we could do. But God's like, "Let's look at you first." I grew up in a home where it wasn't loud fighting, but there was grumbling all the time. Like, "Oh, it would be nice if we could go on a vacation, or I wish someone had helped me over here." It wasn't even...

JS: Which is kinda like sarcasm, that's full sarcasm.

TG: Yep.

JS: But we don't think of sarcasm as grumbling, but it is.

TG: It's really martyr, it's a martyr thing, 'cause it's like, "I wish someone would help me." And I was like that. I would hold everything inside, and we even talk about... Our big marriage struggle about 15 years ago was I had an old boyfriend contact me, and I'm running around, I'm a busy mom, we just had the three kids at the time. But I'm feeling like, "I'm doing everything, no one is helping me." I'm keeping all these grumbles side, and all of a sudden, this person is like, "Oh, you're so beautiful, and you need help and no one... Everyone takes advantage of you." And I was like, "Hey,

wait," just through email, and pretty soon I realize, "This is... " I'm being drawn to this attention, and I know it's not good. And so, I asked some friends, like, "You need to pray," and then I ended up talking to Jon, like, "This is what's happening." And I was able to break off communication, but it was a big struggle.

TG: I realized I was empty because I was holding my grumbles inside. I wasn't communicating what I needed, and how I needed connection and help, and that ended up having a black hole. And so, after that, that's when we really started getting into the marriage books and working on stuff. We realized I need to learn how to communicate, he needs to learn how to communicate in a way I could hear, and I need to communicate in a way that he can hear. And then, once we started working on that, it made a difference. And so, as we dug, again, into The Grumble-Free Year, all of a sudden I'm like, "It's a lot of me going back to that martyr complex." Of course, we've adopted seven kids. It's gonna be hard. I cannot expect to have a clean house or to be able to finish our work project on time because it's just a lot of people in the house. And so, again, it came to me, "Talk to Jon, communicate about it, instead of just grumbling and holding everything inside." And so, it's kind of like upped our communication again, as we're going through like, "Okay, I really want to grumble about this, but what can we do? What's a solution?" And John's really good at like, "We can do this, and we can work towards this," and coming up with things that can help our family instead of me just grumbling about it.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Wow.

MS: So, Jon, what was that like when she came to you and said, "Hey, this is happening with the emails and the attention from an old boyfriend," what was that like for you?

JG: Well, to be completely candid, it was pretty crushing. It feels like your heart's just being squeezed and killed. That's what it feels like. So, really hard, because it was real, because the emotions were there, the feelings were there, and to be honest, even the fear is there. The fear just hits you right in the face and says, "You don't know if tomorrow she's gonna be here or not." You just don't know. And so, you're just dealing with this in the midst of all this. But in the midst of all of that, we cried a lot together, we prayed a lot together. I was really, really so proud of Trish and how she engaged with some of her friends, a whole group of them. She had a group of accountabilities for writing that she worked with, and she opened up to them and said, "This is my struggle. This is where I'm at," and some of them even came by to pray with her and... But really, it came back, for us, I think it was... In fact, I know it was.

JG: God revealed this to us. We were one night just holding each other and crying and praying together, and I told Trish, "I'm not ever leaving. I am here." And I'd never really thought about it that way before, 'cause I tell her, "I love you," all the time, but to say, "You are forever loved. I am not ever going anywhere." And it broke something in our lives between us. And looking back on it, I could see, I grew up in a family where my mom and dad, I never had any doubts that they wouldn't be there. They had struggles. They're now an older couple, and I hear them pick at each other every now and again. I still have no doubts about their commitment to each other. So, my world view was completely different than where Trish was at, who never even met her biological father until she was 28.

TG: 28, yeah.

JG: And multiple people in her mother's life before we even got married, and in fact, the day we got married, her stepfather came to me, handed me a wedding gift of \$100 check, and then also told me, "I'm serving divorce papers to Tricia's mother tomorrow."

TG: On our wedding day.

JG: On our wedding day. Well, actually that would have been on Monday, he said. "And I just want you to go ahead and tell her for me." So, here we are leaving on our weekend getaway. And so, this is her story. This is her story of time after time just these rejections, these abandonments, and... And that really broke something in both of us to realize that, is that a lot of these things are motivated by fear. An exit strategy, a plan B, instead of being able to really put yourself all in when so many times, you've been abandoned and rejected and left alone.

JS: Wow, oh my goodness, you guys, thank you so much for sharing that.

MS: Yeah, thank you for that, honestly.

JS: And you know what I hear, is you took a really hard, difficult situation, and you could have blown up; you could have been unsafe, really, and you... But you weren't. You dug in and said, "What do we need to do?" And Jon, I love the insight you had into Tricia's heart, because one of the things we talk a lot about is that your past affects your present, and you were seeing that there was this rejection thing in her, and that really, what she needed in that moment was for you to tell her that you're not going anywhere. That's huge, and I think a lot of times we lack that insight into our spouse's heart wounds, and man, you had that. And you know, we actually had a similar situation that happened, and it was me.

JS: Mark was going to Bible college, we had two small children at the time. I was working, I was doing daycare in my home, and I was working at a dinner theater at night. And I had a dance partner at the dinner theater, my acting partner, and I became very attracted to him and I found myself looking more forward to going to work than coming home. And I had to do the same thing that you did, Tricia. I came to Mark and said, "This is what I'm experiencing, and it's really scaring me," and I was grateful. He was actually safe for that, and we said, "Boy, we need to move our relationship from the back burner to the front burner. We need to be more intentional." I quit the job because we knew that we were in a dangerous place.

MS: Yeah.

JS: I really appreciate that. Cool, very cool. Well, you guys, this has been such a good conversation. Oh my goodness. Talk to us first before we close out here. I have two questions for you. The first question is, if those that are listening, those that are tuning into this conversation and they want to reduce the grumbling, dial down the grumbling in their own head, in their own heart. Maybe individually, maybe as a couple, what would you say would be the next right step to help them do that?

TG: Yeah, that's a really good question. I think really, when it came to me, I had to realize, I was focusing on the negative instead of focusing on the good things that God has done in my life. Every

time, it's not just enough to stop grumbling, you need to turn it to gratitude. Every time I'd grumble about, "John's not helping me or the house is a mess." I'd say, "I am thankful I have a husband who is working and supporting us. I am thankful that we have clothes, even though they're strewn across the living room." And so, really, it is... The Bible talks about capturing every thought and taking it obedient to Christ, and it really is turning those grumbles into gratitude and thankfulness. And then also when you feel like grumbling to another person, praise something that they're doing good instead of just, "I don't really like how you did this. I am so thankful for this, this, and this that you did do." And the more you focus on thanking them and praising them pretty soon those grumbles don't matter as much 'cause you're turning your heart and your attention towards gratitude and appreciation within the family.

TG: And we've seen it with us, and we've seen the ripple effect with the kids. When I start thanking them. And "Brit, you're doing a great job on cleaning the kitchen. This one part of the counter is really clean." All of a sudden, my daughter is like cleaning the rest of the counter really good. So, we've seen the ripple effect. And then when their sibling hands them an apple. Thank you for handing me the apple. It's like the ripple effect can go on. So, turning it into gratitude is huge.

JS: So when you think of your family before the grumble-free journey and you think of your family after, what's the difference?

JG: I would say what I have observed was the difference before was so many things were expected, as opposed to appreciated. And I think that's where we get trapped because... And this is a pride issue, but we start thinking that we deserve any of the good things in our life, and we don't deserve any of the bad things in our life. And the difference is, is that the bad things are so small in contrast to the good things in our life. We have the hope of Jesus Christ and we have eternity with the creator of the universe. Contrast that against anything in this life, and the Bible even says we deserve death for our sins, and so but we lose that, and so we are no longer thankful, we are just looking at, "Well, I expected that."

JG: And all of our kids, particularly ones that came out of foster care, there was all these people in their life that were taking care of their needs. Whether it's teachers or foster care workers or volunteers that actually help with the kids that work in these things, and for Christmas you make a list and everybody just fills in and put all those things in the list and that's what you get for Christmas, but it's... When you don't get that list for Christmas, it's like "I'm gonna grumble because I didn't get everything that was on my list that I wanted." But changing that to the point of... We don't get you gifts because we pity you because you're a child with no family, we get you these gifts because we know you, we love you, we know that you'll really enjoy these things. And this is our reflection of our love to you. And changing that mindset from expectation to appreciation is what I've actually been seeing that a lot more in their lives, even as a result of this.

JS: Oh I love that.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Thank you. Well, we have one last question, it's one we ask at every one of our interviews. And that is, this is called No More Perfect Date Night. We'd love to know what your favorite date night activity is.

TG: It's my favorite and John goes along. We go to a sushi place that I love. It is so good and so John's like, "Where are we gonna go?" 'Cause we try to every week or every two weeks, we try to go on a date. Our 25-year-old comes and watches all the younger siblings. And I'm like, "Sushi?" And he's like, "What about this?" And I'm like, "Oh but that sushi's so good." But he would rather have dinner and a movie. So, we did that last time. We just this last weekend we did a dinner well, quick dinner and a movie, but so I'm like "Sushi, and just talk," and he's like, "dinner and a movie." So once in a while, let him have his dinner. [laughter]

JG: Most of the time I give her the sushi, but it keeps her happy, and she enjoys it. And I actually enjoy sushi too.

MS: Cool, that's so fun.

JS: Oh, I love it. I love it. Well, thank you guys...

MS: Yes, thank you so much.

JS: For being so honest and sharing your wisdom. This has been rich; it's challenged me. Man, I'm gonna be paying attention to the grumbles in my head. So, this is Mark and Jill Savage along with John and Tricia Goyer, and we are signing off with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected. Thanks for joining us.

[music]