

Double Date with Mark and Jill: Marriage Mindset

Mark Savage: I can still remember when I first met Jill. We were out on a blind date with two friends of ours and I was taken back by Jill's beauty, her smile, her strength, her personality, all of that. And then we dated for three months, we were engaged, and then six months later we were married. But it was during the planning of the wedding that her strength and personality began to be a little bothersome. And then it was after our marriage, and probably for the first half of our marriage, that I was really bothered by that strength in personality. Yet what I've realized is, it wasn't what Jill did or didn't do, it was what I thought about what Jill did or didn't do.

Jill Savage: Yeah, those thoughts just get in the way so often. And we're not even aware of them. I always have had an internal strength, but I've never been one to be okay with sharing my fears and my struggles, particularly in the relationships that were close. I remember keeping those fears and those struggles inside of me and not sharing them with Mark. That was something he always longed for. He longed for that intimacy. When you think of intimacy you can think of it as "into me see". He longed for that emotional nakedness, but I didn't know how to give that. It wasn't that fears and struggles were the problem, it was what I *thought* about fears and struggles that was actually the issue. You see, our thoughts become the lens that we look at life through. I mean, think about a magnifying glass. If you have a magnifying glass and you even just hold it up and you're not looking at something really close, what you see on the other side will be very distorted.

MS: Absolutely. You won't be able to tell what it is that you're looking at.

JS: Right. Because we look through that lens, we're not seeing things as they are. Same thing if you have a camera and that camera actually has a special lens. I don't know a fisheye lens or...

MS: One of those fly eye lenses.

JS: Yes.

MS: That's got like 20 different eyes.

JS: Exactly. If you look through, you're not actually going to see what's on the other side accurately. You're going to see a perception of it based upon what the lens does. The same thing happens with our thoughts. We often see things through the lens of our upbringing, of our past experiences, our fears, our own struggles, and our insecurities. As we see things through all of those things, they actually distort what's standing right in front of us or the situation that's in front of us. So, what we're going to be doing over the next few months is we're really going to dig in and take a look at how our thoughts affect our thinking. Let's think about this for a moment. Conflict actually starts with our thinking.

MS: Emotions start with our thinking.

JS: Self-protection starts with our thinking.

MS: Feelings of love start with our thinking and feelings of un-love or not being loved start with our thinking.

JS: Even feelings of not loving start with our thinking.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Feelings of rejection start with our thinking.

MS: Being able to apologize starts with our thinking.

JS: Forgiveness starts with our thinking. What we think about forgiveness, what we think about the situation, what we believe about forgiveness, it all starts with our thinking.

MS: Assumptions, they start with our thinking. We are so quick so often to assume, and that starts with our thinking.

JS: So, when we teach at marriage seminars, one of the things that we talk about and even when we are coaching couples is: don't take the bait. Alright? We are coaching couples to be careful about taking the bait when their spouse says something that they're going to turn into an argument.

MS: Absolutely.

JS: Like always or nothing statements.

MS: Yeah. Or should.

JS: Right. We take the bait and we argue some little angle of that, and it doesn't help us. For example, I would say (and this isn't true at all), "You never help me with the dishes." Okay? That would not be true because you do help me with the dishes a lot, but let's just say I say that.

MS: Well then, I can go back to the times that I did help with the dishes.

JS: Even if it was only one or two times, because a big part of that statement that I made was true, but "never" is not accurate. In that case, you could instead hear the heart of what I was saying. I'm frustrated. Instead of chasing the one or two times that maybe you have done the dishes, you could tend to my frustration and my hurt and dig into that. That would be not taking the bait.

MS: Right.

JS: Well, we need to do the same things with our thoughts.

MS: Yes, because our thoughts can so quickly become riled up and then we start chasing those negative, hurtful, condemning thoughts.

JS: Yes.

MS: And those will drive us to a wrong outcome.

JS: Exactly. We really have to do the exact same thing and not take the bait of our own thoughts. We have to begin to recognize them and recognize that they often don't lead us in good directions.

MS: No, they lead us down the wrong path.

JS: Right. Not all thoughts are that way, but let's say negative thoughts—thoughts that are not giving life to relationships, thoughts that are not helpful, thoughts that are actually wrong, thoughts that are happening because we're looking at a lens. We're looking through a lens at the situation, and what we have to begin to understand is that those thoughts can begin to cause us to head in the wrong direction. We have to be resistant. We have to not take the bait.

MS: Right.

JS: The Bible actually talks about this. In fact, we looked up 2 Corinthians 10:5 in a couple of different versions, and each of these versions gives us slightly different wording to help us understand what it looks like when we begin to recognize that what goes on inside of our head needs to be addressed.

MS: One version says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

JS: Wow. We take captive every thought. Honestly, I mean, we have thousands and thousands and thousands of thoughts, so is it possible? We could argue that "every" there, right?

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: But bottom line, we probably need to take captive far more of our thoughts than what we ever do.

MS: Right. I think the idea of it is to be busy about taking those thoughts captive so that we're not chasing them down a wrong path when negative thoughts come up or critical or judgmental, or not life-giving thoughts. If those come up, we don't chase them. We don't take the bait.

JS: Right, exactly. Here's another one, this is actually from the King James Version. I'm not a huge King James Version person.

MS: Or fan. [chuckle]

JS: Yeah. But I was reading it as we were getting ready for this, and I loved this, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;" Now as you can tell, there's a second half of a sentence there. But I loved that it talks about casting down imaginations. Sometimes the thoughts that get us in trouble when we take the bait, they are imagined perceptions that happen because of that lens that we're looking at the situation through.

MS: In the past, those imagined perceptions would be that Jill is against me, that I can never satisfy her, I'm never good enough, and she is just trying to hurt me. You get the idea. Those are thoughts, so the idea of imagination is, they're made up. They're not true, but they're what I'm thinking and what I'm thinking is leading to my action.

JS: And it's so helpful sometimes for us to even think about, "Where did those thoughts initiate?" A

lot of times, they can initiate in marriage, but a lot of times they go further back.

MS: Oh, yeah.

JS: Maybe if you're in a second marriage, they started in the first, but you bring that lens into this new marriage, and you still look at your spouse through the fears or the struggles that you experienced in the first marriage.

MS: Or previous relationships, previous negative experiences, or even and most often, it's linked back to our childhood home in which we were raised. In my home, my birth father really abandoned us. He chose another woman and divorced my mom. My stepdad was a violent man, and so, all of those ideas of rejection and abuse carried me into adulthood, and they formed and framed my thinking. In fact, many times I would see Jill as my stepdad. I put those imaginary thoughts on her as if she was trying to do the same thing as my stepdad did.

JS: We impose those things upon someone else. Okay, here's another one. This one's from the Message. "We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity." Now this is the scripture we actually use in our book *No More Perfect Marriages* to describe the God-tools we need to be using in our marriage. I love how it says, "We are to fit every loose thought, and emotion, and impulse into the structure of our life in Christ." Man, to fit loose thoughts, loose emotions and loose impulses. We don't do that very well.

MS: No.

JS: Most of us react to one another rather than respond to one another.

MS: I think that what I've learned from Jill regarding our home is that everything has a place. Everything has a home when you're putting things away, and our thoughts can be very much the same way. When our thought comes, where does it belong?

JS: It's either a lie or it's a truth.

MS: If it's a truth, we want to hold on to it. If it's a lie, or if it's a negative, sinful, or judgmental thought, we don't want to hold on to it. We want to let it go. We want to throw it out.

JS: Right. Proverbs 23:7 says that as a man thinks, so is he. As a man thinks. Okay, that's just a few words, but that says a lot. Right there it's saying that our thoughts are very powerful. Our thoughts actually send us in a certain direction. Good or bad.

MS: Yeah, so if a man is angry all the time inside, he wants to blame it on his external circumstances or the people around him, but it's really not about them and what they do or don't do, it's about him and what he is thinking about what others around him or what his circumstances do or don't do.

JS: Wow. Yeah, that's so true. Same thing when we are critical of our spouse. It really comes down

to how we are perceiving what they do or don't do. How we are *thinking* of what they do or don't do. And we can change those thoughts. Alright, so then in Matthew 6:19-34.

MS: It says, "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." So often we think about this verse, and we limit that to money. But honestly, we can treasure a great deal of things in our heart. Those treasures can be a good thing, those treasures can be bad things. Those treasures can be positive, those treasures can be negative.

JS: You're right. In Matthew 15 it says, "But the words you speak come from the heart— that's what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying and slander. These are what defile you." Wow. I've read that one multiple times as we were getting ready for this, but I had not even pulled out until I just read it here the word "adultery." If you've been hanging around here very much, you know that's a part of our story. Think about where the thoughts played into that.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Usually we talk about adultery as the action, but the action didn't start with the action. The action started with the feelings and the feelings didn't start with just feelings. The feelings started with thoughts.

MS: Right. As I reflect back, what I was treasuring in my heart were disappointments, were the lies of not being good enough, were the failures, the conflict. All of that was like a feeding frenzy of disappointments, of negativity, and that was ultimately fueling bitterness and that bitterness is what bred these wrong actions that were fueled from my heart.

JS: Yeah. Man, that word "feeding frenzy..." That is what happens up here.

MS: No kidding.

JS: There's a feeding frenzy. And it could be just little things. I don't know, you've asked your spouse to put their shoes away 20 million times and they never do. And what happens? You begin this feeding frenzy. "He always. She always. I'm the only one." And it begins this mess that happens up here which feeds feelings, which then feeds actions, which then produces results.

MS: Right. When we're in a feeding frenzy up here, the outcome is that we decide not to say anything. We kind of go inward and when we move inward, we feed and fuel that bitterness.

JS: Right. So, what we want to do is spend the next few months looking at this concept that our thoughts affect our feelings. Our feelings affect our actions, and our actions affect our results. So, if we want different results in our marriage as it relates to any part of marriage, we need to go all the way back to our thoughts and how we think about the situation. Then that will lead and guide how we feel, which will lead and guide our actions, which will then produce different results if we will learn to push our thoughts in some different directions.

MS: Right.

JS: So, what we want to do is give you some specific ways to take your thoughts captive in this

particular group of teachings that we're going to share with you. Romans 8:6 in the New Living Translation says this, "So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the spirit control your mind leads to life and peace."

MS: So, if we take that same scripture and we add the word marriage to it, let's hear that. "So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death in your marriage or death of your marriage."

JS: It could be death of it. Death in it is just...it's not life...

MS: Your roommate.

JS: That interaction that you just had was not life-giving.

MS: Right.

JS: Okay.

MS: "...letting the spirit control your mind leads to life and peace in your marriage."

JS: Right. So, we want to learn how to take our thoughts captive. We're going to be doing that in each of our Double Date teachings over the next few months. It comes down to this. You've got to retrain the brain. Here are three specific steps that will help you to do that. The first is to become more aware of your thoughts.

MS: Yeah. And I want to just say that it's totally possible to retrain your brain. If you were ever in my brain, you would see that it is being retrained. If you were ever in my brain, you'd probably be scared to death. But I have been working hard at retraining my brain and one of the ways that I've done it is to keep a negative thought journal or to just keep a journal. Journaling is powerfully effective.

JS: I've never been much of a journaler myself, but I am a list maker. This is an area of growth that both Mark and I have been working on over the last probably eight years. I just keep a list of beginning to recognize my negative thoughts. The places that I say something about myself, say something about Mark, say something about marriage, just keeping track of those is very eye-opening.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Awareness is the key. So, the first step is to become more aware of your thoughts. The second step is to renew your thoughts.

MS: To renew your thoughts is to take those existing current negative thoughts and then determine what the truth is regarding them. So, if I'm feeling critical about a situation with Jill, what's really the truth about it? Well, the truth could be her personality led her to think differently than I think, her personality led her to respond differently...

JS: It could even be that she is really tired. She did not get sleep last night. I know that she had

insomnia and I'm recognizing that she's physically exhausted.

MS: Right. I think to renew our thoughts regarding any of our situations grows compassion. I read an interesting statement that said that a person who is compassionate and full of gratitude has less negative issues in their life and less negative responses. I think that's true.

JS: That's so true. Ephesians 4:23 says, "Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. " "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you have learned and received from me," "me", being God (Philippians 1:8-9a). We need to be intentional about what we are thinking about. So, we recognize and we're aware of negative thoughts that are not helpful. But then, we're renewing them, replacing them with thoughts that are more accurate.

MS: Right. Fix our thoughts on what is true, what is honorable, what is life-giving. For me, sometimes I have to write that down. Going back to the journal, write that down, and when I write it down it seems like my brain captures that.

JS: And then number three is, expect the negative thoughts to come. Expect them. You're human. They're going to come. They are red flags, it's not to say that we don't address things that need to be addressed, we do. But what we're trying to do is we're trying to identify things that we are addressing that really come down to what we're thinking.

MS: Right.

JS: Maybe we don't even need to talk about that because that's really about my own skewed perspective and not about what you just did or said. Maybe it's a place where I just need to give grace, like that example that we gave. Like if she had a sleepless night last night, she's probably going on three hours of sleep, I just need to give grace and let that go. So then when we expect the negative thoughts to come, we identify them, we evaluate them, we let them go and we replace them with life-giving thoughts. That is a beautiful gift we actually give to ourselves and to each other.

MS: Others aren't creating what's going on in our head, we are creating that. So, as we create that feeding frenzy, we dwell on that and focus on that, and it becomes very destructive. By taking our thoughts captive, we want to eliminate that feeding frenzy.

JS: Yeah, exactly! Thanks for joining us. This is Mark and Jill Savage, with a reminder that if you change your mind, you actually can change your marriage.