

Dive Deep Interview with Ruth and Patrick Schwenk

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Jill Savage: Well, we are super excited for this dive deep interview, and we have, joining us from Northern Michigan, Ruth and Patrick Schwenk. And they are the authors of "For Better or for Kids," and I love the subtitle, "A Vow to Love Your Spouse With Kids in the House." So, welcome, Ruth and Patrick.

Ruth Schwenk: Hi, thank you. Thanks for having us.

Patrick Schwenk: Hello, thank you, thank you.

JS: Oh, my goodness, we are super excited. Really, the topic of your book is one that we're pretty passionate about because kids add a lot of chaos and it becomes really hard, our hearts get pulled apart. So, we're the parents of five kids, although ours are all grown now. What about you guys? Tell us a little bit about your family.

RS: Well, we have four kids, and we are in the middle of the teenage years, so we have three teenagers right now. So, we have a, one who's almost 18, he's graduating from high school. We have... Bella is 15, she's almost 16, Noah is 13, and Sophia is 11. So, that is the ages of our kids right now. We're in a, definitely in a different season than we were a handful of years ago.

JS: Yeah, yeah. Well, it... And you guys are embarking on one that may be leaving, maybe going to college. That's a whole different season of life as well.

Mark Savage: Right, right.

RS: Definitely.

PS: Yeah, it really is. We have just so enjoyed... Kids are, as you guys know, such a blessing and such a reward, as the Scriptures say. And every season is challenging in its own way, but every season is also so good and sorta precious in its own way. And so, yeah, we're definitely moving into uncharted waters with our oldest son heading off to college. So, we're... I'm not sure we're ready for that, but you raise them to release them and not to keep them. And so, we're trusting God on that.

JS: I know, I know. Well, it is, it's a sweet season, I will tell you that. We really enjoy it. 'Cause our kids are now 23 to 35, and we just really, really enjoy... Really, they do become friends as, when you become adults. You don't want them to be friends when you're raising them, you need to be their leader, their authority, but there is that benefit when you really do enjoy spending time with them.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

PS: Yeah, we try to encourage... We've had that same conversation a lot recently, and just... Because

we're in ministry, you talk to so many young couples that have young kids. And we're always reminding them, "Those years are so short, they go by so fast, and there is such a reward as they get older and just more of their personalities come out and all of the hard work, all the seeds you planted when they were two, three, four; all that pays off." And so, it is so much fun as they get older to have that different type of relationship with them.

RS: Yeah, you start to see those little things that you're like "Oh, okay, well, they were really listening."

[laughter]

RS: "They actually listened to what I said."

MS: Right. Yeah.

JS: Yes, that is so true.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Well, and what often happens, and this is why I so love the title of your book, "For Better or For Kids," I think I once read... Let's see if I can get this quote right, it was John Rosemond, who said, "Some of us act as if we've taken a marriage vow that says until, 'I will love and cherish you until kids do us part.'"

RS: Oh, right.

PS: Yeah.

JS: And it's... That's... I mean, unfortunately, that is accurate. Many of us operate that way.

MS: Right.

JS: So, let's dive in, just to this concept of keeping your marriage a priority in the midst of raising a family. So, what was it that motivated you guys to actually write that book in the first place?

PS: Yeah, you're so right. I love that quote, I had not heard that quote before, but it's so true. Yeah, I think of Jesus's words in Mark 10, where he's asked a question about marriage, and he reiterates God's desire and design from Genesis 1, Genesis 2, where he says that, "A man and a woman will come together, they'll become one flesh." And then, Jesus says, "Let no one separate you." And we tend to think of that 'no one' as somebody outside the family, instead of somebody inside the family. [chuckle] And so, it's so true, we don't typically think of guarding our marriage, protecting our marriage from our own offspring. And yet the reality, is as kids come along, as you move from married to married with kids, you begin to realize that there are other people that need our time and our attention, our affection. And so, because of that, there's less time sometimes, between the two of us.

PS: And so, I think we were beginning to experience that just as a couple, I think just personally. And just noticing that, boy, the marriage that we had and we had a great marriage, but we just

noticed that that there was a new challenge as kids came along. And then, as a pastor, I was seeing that in other couples that were our age or older, they were struggling with that. So, I think personally and pastorally, we began to notice that there really is something unique about that transition from married to married with kids. And so, that became a motivation for us to write the book.

RS: Yeah. Well, 'cause I think what happens, is the focus... We get married and the focus is all on one another. And then, we have kids, and instead of continuing to cultivate our relationship, our focus then turns all to our kids. And then, of course, as they get older, in those... When they're really young... We wrote this when our kids were younger, and I think back to those years, and I was just trying to, I don't know, survive. I was exhausted.

[laughter]

MS: That's what... Yeah, yep. I...

RS: And so, yeah, you're being pulled in so many different directions that it's so easy to just say, "I can think about my relationship with my spouse later because I can't even wrap my mind around that right now, I'm just trying to take care of my kids."

JS: Yeah. And I think we also have the tendency to look at our spouse and go, "Hey, you can dress yourself, you can feed yourself, you can even take yourself to the bathroom." So, but...

[laughter]

MS: "You're good."

JS: You're good. These little people...

PS: "You don't need me."

RS: Right, that's right. These little people...

RS: "Take care of yourself."

MS: Yeah.

[laughter]

JS: So, I think that it becomes easy to make that error in judgment. But what we have found is, when we do that, our hearts start getting pulled apart. And that's really what we want to help couples not do, is that we wanna help them keep their marriage on the front burner, not the back burner. So, what are some of the things that you guys have done? Four kids, you're still four kids at home. What are some of the strategies you have used to keep your marriage at the top of your priority list?

RS: Yeah, well, I always say that... First of all, I feel like there's just different seasons, and it looks different in different seasons. And so, I think about like back to when our kids were little, we

always... They actually went to bed early. Now, we're in this season where nobody goes to sleep. Like, "We need to be by ourselves for a while." But when they're little, when they would go to sleep is the time that we could sit down on the couch... I know this is so simple, but we just don't think about it, especially in our digital age when it'd be easy just to go to our phone or something else.

RS: But at the end of the day, we would always just sit down on the couch and talk. We'd just hang out, and just relax and communicate. I think that's probably the biggest thing. And then, now, it looks a little different where... And, of course, we had date nights and stuff then. But now, as they're older, we have to go somewhere to be by ourselves to... 'Cause we're surrounded and no... And everybody goes to bed sometimes later than we do. So, that... We just... I think the keyword is being in... Is intentional, and just being intentional about setting aside time to be with one another and actually communicate was always huge for us.

PS: Yeah, I mean, I think... The other thing that we've tried to do in all of those seasons, especially as our kids have gotten older, is we try to redeem the time that we do have. And so, I think it's so easy as a parent, and a husband and wife to sort of focus on how busy you are, and everything that's going on, and all the time you don't have. And so, we've tried to really redeem the time that we do have. And what I mean by that, is that we've gotta go to the grocery store, just some of those normal errands that we have to do that take our time, and... Or the kids have a basketball practice. And so, we might go to the basketball practice, drop them off together, and then go get a coffee, or go get dinner. And so, just trying to look at some of those normal daily routines and rhythms, or weekly routines and rhythms, and redeem those for the sake of our marriage. Going to the grocery store; it doesn't sound very romantic, I know, but that's just been a really easy way for us to kinda turn that task into a way to just have time to talk. And so, we love that.

RS: Yeah.

JS: Yeah, that makes total sense. I remember reading an article years ago, and it was talking about parents of teenagers, and encouraging them to establish that one night a week, the teenagers had to be in their rooms by 9:00 PM, or 8:00 PM, or something like that. You don't have to go to bed, but Mom and Dad need private time in their home, in the living room, without kiddos. And it was kind of about teaching marital respect. And I remember the author said that one of the kids said, "Well, what if I come out of my room after 9 o'clock?" [chuckle] And the dad said, "Well, you'll see two naked people rolling around in front of the fireplace."

[laughter]

MS: Okay.

PS: That's enough to keep anybody in their room.

JS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, that would keep them in there.

JS: That took care of it, wouldn't it?

MS: Right. [chuckle]

JS: Oh, that's... When your kids get older, you can say things like that. Because you also want them to know that marriage takes intentionality, it takes time. And so, it's a beautiful way to establish that.

PS: Yeah, and it really... I mean, it really... Yeah, I mean, it's one of the best gifts we can give our kids. One of the greatest gifts we can give them is a healthy marriage. And so, you're right. I mean, to see... For our kids to see Mom and Dad making their marriage a priority is a tremendous gift that will serve them the rest of their lives.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Well, and definitely as they have children themselves, that pattern that you've shown them your whole... Their whole lives, they'll reproduce, where if it's not shown, then they'll know, not know what to do.

PS: That's right.

MS: And so, it's a good thing.

JS: Setting that template for them.

MS: Yeah.

PS: Yeah, I remember when our kids were... Oh, actually Tyler was six months old, it was the first time we'd been out on a date since we had kids. And we were so excited to go out on a date, and we felt like he was finally old enough to leave him with a babysitter. And we went out and all we did was talk about him, we just don't wait to get through dinner and get back. And so, we... It was probably the shortest date of all time. [chuckle] And so, we hurried up, and we ate our food and went home. I think we were gone for maybe 45 minutes. And now, as our kids have gotten older, of course, we're like, "Do we have to go home? I think they'll probably be okay."

[laughter]

MS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JS: Oh, I love that.

MS: Yeah, "They'll be good. They can call us." [chuckle]

PS: That's right, yeah.

RS: Yeah. Oh, well, actually, now that they're older, they are like, "When are you coming home?" [chuckle]

MS: Oh, yeah.

JS: It's so true.

MS: Well, so, as I think back to our teen years with kids, it was totally an exciting time, I loved having all the energy. And when their friends were over at the house, that was... I miss that, but what I don't miss is the chaos. It was just... There... It was chaos, even... It's just different with teen kids, versus little kids, but. So, how do you guys manage the chaos, and how do you keep time for yourself in the midst of that?

RS: Yeah, well, I think... Honestly, what I've tried to do, since they were little, was put just rhythms in place for how our days look, how our weeks look. And that, really, always has helped manage the chaos. Not that things are like, "Oh." I don't mean it like that, there is definitely chaos that happens. But I feel like that helps everybody, when we all have a plan, and we know what's happening in a day, or what's happening in a week when everybody's not wandering around mindlessly. But when they're older, they... It is a lot more chaotic just because they're bigger. They're bigger, they make more noise, they... [chuckle] But I definitely would say, the biggest thing for us has been those rhythms in a week, and in a day...

JS: Now, what does a rhythm look like? Define that a little further for somebody who doesn't know what a rhythm... What does that mean?

RS: Okay. So, well, I'm pretty laid-back, first of all. So, I do realize that my personality probably... Chaos doesn't affect me quite as much. I am pretty laid-back, but. So, what that... What I mean by that, is just that they knew around what time they got up in the morning. But it's not like I'm like, "7:00 AM, get up." They got up around 8:00 AM... Our kids are homeschooled, so they've been... They're here with us, so they have a little more flexibility with their time like that.

JS: Right.

RS: But they would get up around 8:00 AM, grab breakfast. Everybody's kinda quiet for a while. You know, that type of... That's when I say rhythms. Like what does, in general, our day look like? Then everybody kinda sits down to do their work, that type of thing.

JS: Right.

RS: And then, just the things that are important, like when are we going to... We... Dinner is a really important time for us. So, as much as we can... I know in different seasons in the year, this looks different, depending on what they're involved in. But as much as we can, just knowing that dinnertime, we're gonna all sit around the table together. I guess, that's what I mean when I say rhythms. What are those things that are important, the priorities that are important to you? I feel like that really helps with chaos because otherwise, we're kind of all running around, "Oh, I need to do this. Oh, but I need to do this." And nobody kinda knows what's going on.

PS: Yeah, I think kids, in particular, they feel what they can't articulate. And so, kids, I think, feel a certain thing, that they feel instability, or insecurity, or chaos. And so, I think, structure, some of those rhythms that Ruth was talking about, it cultivates stability and structure, security in a child. And so, I think, just some of those simple things of knowing, this is in general, what time we wake up, and family dinner. We've, for the most part, over the years, have had family devotions before bedtime. Just some of those types of rhythms for us have created some structure, some stability in

the midst of the chaos. [chuckle] And so, there's always gonna be chaos. And, I think, for me, one of the things we talk about, too, is not so much then what we do with the chaos, but just how we think about it.

PS: And there's a GK Chesterton quote that I'll probably butcher a little bit. But to paraphrase, he essentially says that, "You can't tidy anything without untidying yourself." And so, you think about the gardener who gets dirt on his hands, or the painter who gets paint all over his hands and clothes, but the result is a masterpiece. And so, I think, for a parent that's in those years, that I think just realizing that the part of producing the masterpiece is getting paint all over the place. And there's gonna come a day when we're gonna clean the easel, we're gonna put the canvas away, but the masterpiece will be there.

PS: And so, I think, for parents, and a husband and wife that are in the midst of that chaos, that the hard years of trying to keep a marriage a priority and raise kids, things are gonna be messy and it's okay. Because what you're producing is more important, and what you're trying to produce with, by God's grace is the most important thing. And so, if you're... If you have the personality, you're trying to keep the house perfectly clean, and that... I kinda lean in that direction. And so, you have to let some of those things go. And so, there's more of a, I think, a mental perspective that you need to have, too.

JS: Yeah, man, that's so true. And I love that quote. That's powerful, really, really powerful. Thank you for sharing that.

MS: I think, too, as I... As we've really come to understand that journey of life, that a lot of the mirror back, I guess, from our kids, is that we learn how we maybe adopted unrealistic expectations, or perfectionism, or whatever, from the childhood that we were raised in. What are some of the lessons you've learned from your kids, or God has revealed to you as you've tried to raise your kids?

JS: Maybe even lessons learned about yourself 'cause man that...

MS: Yeah.

JS: Nothing better than a kid to show you the places in yourself that maybe God wants to work on, right?

PS: Yeah. If you wanna know who you really are, just ask your kids, right?

[laughter]

MS: Yeah, yeah.

PS: They'll tell you the truth. [chuckle]

MS: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, well, I'll start. I think that definitely, if any selfishness within me was... I mean, you are forced to let that go because it, there is nothing about yourself that... You have to give so much of yourself. So, I think that that was... That's probably, over the years, been the biggest eye-opener for

me is... My life verse is John 3:30, "He must become greater. I must become less." And I think really that sums up motherhood, to me, as well, and marriage, that it's just not about me. And I think that's probably the biggest lesson that's been reiterated over and over again in my life.

JS: Yes. Yeah.

PS: Yeah, one of the... I remember when I was doing my doctoral studies out at Biola University in California, one of the practices that my academic advisor had us do, is he talked about the practice of confessing your sins all the way down, which is quite a task, especially when you have lots of sin. And so, that has kept me busy for a lot of years, just that practice. And so... But he talked about the idea that there's always a sin underneath the sin, there's a desire underneath the sin. And so, for example, as a parent who gets angry, it's not enough just to confess the sin of anger, to confess your sin all the way down is to go, "Why did I get angry in that moment? When my son didn't listen to me, and I got angry, I, in my anger, sinned, but there was a deeper desire, there was some kinda relational deficit there. I wasn't looking to God to, for something. And so, therefore, I got angry." And so, I think just that practice sometimes of confessing our sins all the way down. And maybe in that moment, my anger was really about my own reputation as a parent. "I got upset because that made me look bad," or "I got angry because I realize, I can't control the outcomes." Perfectionists are big on outcomes.

JS: Yeah, yeah.

PS: And so, "If I can't control what next year's gonna look like, or who he's gonna be in 10 years, I get upset about that, perhaps in a moment, and so maybe that's the real desire underneath my sin of anger." And so, I think kids have a way of just... God uses different moments like that and I think paying attention to our emotions, and looking beneath the surface of those sins to go, "Okay, God, what is it that really led me to respond in that way and what is that telling me about my relationship with you? Where am I not trusting you, where am I trying to be you in this situation?" And so, kids are great sanctifiers. [chuckle] And so...

MS: Yeah.

JS: Oh, they are.

PS: As you pursue holiness, you have to be prepared to feel unholy.

RS: Right.

MS: Yeah, oh, no kidding.

JS: So true. What you're really talking about is digging... Not dealing with the symptom of sin, but the root of it. That's what you're talking about, is going deep. And it's kind of the same idea... If we pluck off a dandelion off the top, that dandelion's still there. But if we actually dig deep, and dandelions have deep roots, and we try to get down under that root and we pull it out, what a difference it makes. Then, that really allows us to mature, and grow, and change. And, really, to become more like Jesus, is every time we are digging those roots out, that's what we're doing.

PS: Yeah, yep, absolutely.

JS: Yeah. So, talk for a little bit. You guys have a new book coming out in September 2020. And do you mind sharing just a little bit about that and what prompted that book? Because I think that it's gonna be a really powerful offering. So, would you share just a little bit about that?

PS: Yeah, we'd love to. It will be, by far, our most personal book. I was diagnosed with a type of blood cancer in January of 2018. And so, went through about five months of what they call frontline treatment, primarily oral chemotherapy, weekly injections and infusions, to drive the cancer as deep as they could. And then, I went through, that same year, two different stem cell transplants at the University of Michigan. And so, went through my first one in July of 2018, and I went through, I guess, my second one in October of 2018. And so, by God's grace, they were able to put that cancer in remission. And so, it's been almost a year-and-a-half, I guess, now, where that's been in remission. No signs of cancer. And so, I'm on a weekly maintenance regimen that I'll likely be on the rest of my life. And so, the book then really came out of that experience.

PS: I think I had, as a pastor, preached on passages, like James 1, "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds." I believed all those things that the Bible said, and yet when you're in the midst of chaos, when you're in the midst of real, deep, hurt and disappointment, and you feel disoriented and disillusioned, your good theology gets challenged. And, "Do I really believe that," or "Is that something I really hold on to?" And so, we have a book coming out in September called, *In a Boat in the Middle of a Lake*. And it's really based on the story of the disciples and Jesus; they're in a lake, in a boat with Jesus, based on Mark 4. And just what those disciples learn about Jesus, but also, what they learn about themselves, and how really chaos is a much better teacher than a classroom and there's just some things that God can only teach us out on the water, that he can't teach us on dry ground. And so, it's really that story of just how trials uniquely transform us.

RS: Yeah, and we wrote it really with also just sharing some other trials we faced in our life as well. And, really, for that person who feels, like he said, disoriented, and disillusioned in their suffering, wondering where God is in the midst of it all? So, our hope is that it can reach the person... Whoever is in the midst of that suffering, just looking for some hope from God.

JS: Yes. Oh, I'm excited for that book, you guys, I really am. I think that it's gonna have a really powerful reach. Talk, for a moment, about what marriage was like during that really dark season of all that cancer treatment. I mean, life [24:56] ____ pains. What happened in your marriage with that? What were some of the trials that you found yourself facing, or maybe lessons learned?

RS: Well, I would first say, that I think how we... Our faithfulness over the years really prepares you for things like that. And so, I think that's what I, we always say to couples, or parents, or just to the individual, the daily life that we live, seeking God and learning and growing, really prepares us for the suffering that we will all face at some point in our life. And so, I think that that's really the backdrop to then say that, "I feel..." Not that it wasn't hard, but, "I feel like God was so faithful over the... He prepared us to handle, the best we could, something like this."

PS: Yeah, we... I should probably just back up and say, we're not experts in suffering. I know that there will be people who are watching this, and there will be people who will read that book that have suffered far greater than us. Since I know everybody's suffering is unique, everybody goes through trials that are uniquely painful to them. And so, we feel like we're fellow companions sorta limping along together by God's grace. And Ruth is so right, there were so many times where we sat

in the waiting room... Sorry. There were...

JS: It's okay.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Take your time.

PS: So many times we sat in the waiting room at the Rogel Cancer Center at the University of Michigan, and you... [chuckle] You look around, it's like, you realize how grateful you are to have built and cultivated a good marriage on the foundation of Christ. 'Cause you look around and there are many people that are sitting in that waiting room alone, and we don't know all of their story. We just... I think what we learned, is what Ruth was saying, is that all of those years of cultivating a good marriage, and rooting it in Christ, and being faithful and being gracious with one another, and just doing all of the small things, that the reward was that when the storm hit, when we moved from dry ground to being out in the middle of the lake, we had a kinda faith and a kinda relationship that was able to sustain that.

JS: Yeah. Yeah.

PS: And so, so many... Statistically, you guys probably are aware of those statistics. So many marriages don't survive tragedy, or disillusionment, or whatever it is, whether that's cancer or something else. And so, we're just very grateful for God's grace in the midst of that, and grateful for the years of building a strong foundation in marriage. As a pastor, I almost... Every time I perform a wedding ceremony, I almost always tell the couple that the walk down the aisle is short, [chuckle] but the walk-through life is a lot longer. And what I mean by that is that it's easy to walk down the aisle, but it's not as easy to walk through life together.

JS: So good.

PS: So, I think, just that discipline of persevering, and being gracious, and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus who's the author and perfecter of our faith. We're just so grateful for the way that He has sustained us in the midst of that and drawn us closer a deeper love, a greater understanding of what Christ-like love is really all about. In those moments when feelings are not there, emotions are not there, when you're absorbed with your own pain, you're hurting, and yet you still choose to love one another, be committed and be faithful to one another, now we're getting closer to understanding what real biblical love is, what real Christ-like love is.

JS: Oh, that is so true.

MS: Yeah.

JS: I had breast cancer six years ago, and also went through chemo, and radiation, and surgery, and the whole shebang. And I know, for me, it also really increased my compassion for pain. And I'm a much more compassionate person, having gone through that. I think I'm much more compassionate in our marriage, just having experienced that as well.

MS: Yeah, I... You definitely find yourself... And you guys kinda hinted to this, but you're in a

community that you really, that you were forced into, that you didn't really sign up for.

RS: Right.

MS: And definitely, I think, what I liked about this book is the conversation. So often, we don't talk about the suffering or the hardships, unless it's a super big story. But so many of us face these types of challenges that, just to get people talking about it, I think, will be powerful. And definitely, I'm a guy who I ideal... I had unrealistic expectations, I probably lived there, but I really thought, once I came to Christ, there'd be no more storms in my life, that I was a mind-bender. [laughter] Yeah, yeah.

PS: Like, "Wait a minute, why is my life getting harder, not easier?"

[laughter]

JS: So true, oh my goodness. So, guys, you're 20 plus years into marriage. What are you at, 22, 23?

PS: It'll be 22 in August, August, yeah. August 2020, we... Twenty-one years, 22 years.

RS: Yeah, 22 years.

JS: Okay. So, you're there. If you had to offer wisdom to your younger self, this is maybe when you're first married, maybe when kids started coming along, and you could just offer yourself one piece of wisdom, what would that wisdom be, now that you look at it through the rearview mirror and you have a little bit more wisdom?

RS: Well, mine is... I think I would just say not... This is kind of funny, but not to be so emotional, not to take everything so personally. I just think that we can make a big deal out of the little things that don't really matter. At least I can, maybe I'm the only one. [chuckle] But I think that would probably be... That was the first thing that comes to mind, is just not to be so emotional and take everything so seriously. Just there's a lot of stuff that you can just let go.

[laughter]

PS: She won't share any of those examples, but...

JS: Right. [laughter]

PS: Yeah. I think, for me, there's probably so many things, and I... But the two things that come to my mind... And I love alliterations. The people that hear me preach, they always make fun of me 'cause all my sermons are three points and they all start with an A or an L or... So, there's two Bs that come to my mind. And so, they're, I would probably tell myself that marriage is a blessing, so enjoy it. And so... Again, the older I get, and I think, especially in the light of, in light of the last two years, every day that I [chuckle] go to bed and wake up, and I get to do that with Ruth next to me, that's a gift. None of us are entitled to tomorrow, and none of us know what next month or next year... And so, I would say, "Listen. If you're a young couple just starting out, you walked down the aisle, and now you're starting to walk through life, it is a blessing, God gives it to you as a gift, and enjoy every ounce of it because it goes by quickly."

PS: And then, the second thing, the second B I would add, is that it's a battle. And so, fight for it. And so, it's a blessing, God graciously gives it to us, and we ought to enjoy it and thank God for it every day, and see it as precious. But it is a battle, and you see that in the beginning of the Bible. The very first thing that Satan attacks is a marriage, is a family. And so, from that perspective, there's not much that's changed since that moment. And so, as much as your marriage and our marriage is a blessing, it's also warfare, it's a battle. And so, I think, as a couple, we've gotta be aware of that. And that's what Peter says in the New Testament, 1 Peter 5, "Be alert for your enemy. The Devil prowls around, and he's looking for somebody to devour." And so, I would say it's a blessing, enjoy it, but it's also a battle. And so, fight for it, it's worth fighting for.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

JS: Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

MS: And to fight as...

RS: A team?

MS: As a team, as partners, rather than fighting against each other, I think is vital because so many of us do. We fight with each other, versus for each other. So, I have a question. Are you... I don't know you, Patrick, but lots of emotion today. Are you more emotional since the cancer? Or have you always been that way?

PS: Yeah. [chuckle] Ruth is laughing 'cause she, she could probably answer that.

MS: Okay. I'll ask her.

[laughter]

PS: I grew up with two older sisters, so I was... I remember preaching a sermon. I got very emotional in it, and a woman came up to me after the service, and she said, "I just am so thankful... You just have such emotion. And so, thank you." And I said, "Listen, it's nothing spiritual. I grew up with two older sisters." [laughter] But no, I joke about it. So, I have probably always been an emotional, and I do believe that's just, that's a work of the Holy Spirit in my life, and maybe a little bit of growing up with two older sisters that are 10, 11 years older than I am. But cancer has softened me, also, as well. And like you guys were saying earlier, that's one of the gifts that walking through something hard gives us, is that it, I think, pries us off of being dead center. It opens our eyes to the people around us that are suffering and hurting, and it causes us to be less self-absorbed, and it definitely softens us. And so, yeah, I was emotional before, but it's... I'm emotional on steroids now, after the cancer.

[laughter]

JS: Right. I understand.

MS: Yeah. Wow, that's beautiful, really. Yeah, yeah.

JS: Oh, my goodness, I love that. I love it. Well, you guys, this has been a great conversation.

MS: Yeah, thank you.

JS: We're so grateful for you being willing to take the time, and encourage everyone that is listening to this. We have one question, and we end all of our interviews this way, and that is: Do you have a favorite date night activity? And if so, what would it be, either together or separately?

PS: I can't wait to hear this. I'm interested to know the answer to this, from Ruth. So, I'll let you go first. [laughter]

RS: Well... Because... I don't know. I just like to... My... This is so boring. I don't even wanna say 'cause they're gonna be like, "Oh, that sounds fun." But really, just going... I just like when it's like, "Oh, let's go..." Well, 'cause we can do this now with teenagers. "Let's go out to eat tonight." "Okay, where do you wanna go?" "Okay, let's go." And just having a, just like an hour or two together at one of my favorite restaurants, is honestly, that's my favorite thing, I think.

PS: Yeah, that's what I was gonna say. I know that doesn't sound super wild. And so, I... We just love... We have so many great restaurants here in Ann Arbor, and so we love to just go out to eat. And then, there's some great book stores in Ann Arbor as well. And so, we'll go grab a bite somewhere, and then go to a bookstore and kinda walk around. I could live in a book store. I would be completely content, the rest of my life, in a book store. And so, that's one of our favorite things. And then, we are like die-hard... I don't know if I should admit this or not, but we are die-hard Michigan football fans. So, we love Jim Harbaugh.

JS: Oh, yeah.

PS: And so, in addition to that, it's almost, without question, inevitable that we will drive by Schembechler Hall. And Schembechler Hall is the practice facility for the U of M football team. And so, we'll go out and eat, we'll go downtown Ann Arbor, go by a bookstore. And then, almost every time, we'll just drive by Schembechler to see if we can see... Just kinda get close to the stadium, and...

RS: Okay. And I have to tell him all the time, "No..." Literally, almost every time, "No, you are not going in there. You can't go in there. What are you gonna say?" I'm always holding him back. [laughter]

PS: The team doesn't know this, but I'm the unofficial chaplain for the football team, so. They don't know that yet. [laughter]

JS: I love it.

MS: You keep 'em prayed up, I'm sure.

PS: Yes, I do. I do prayer walks around the stadium, which they need right now, but... [laughter]

MS: Right. Our son-in-law is a die-hard Michigan fan, too.

JS: Oh, he is.

MS: And it's like, from his kid's birth, they came out with Michigan...

JS: Yep, little shirts and they've got little...

MS: The shirts and...

RS: Oh, that's funny.

PS: Oh. I love it. I love it.

MS: It's so...

JS: So true. Well, I love that. It's just the simple... I mean, really, you're just like, "Hey, let's just spend time, the two of us." That's what you're saying. You use it to go eat. We started doing something... And it was based upon somebody... One of our interviews. Somebody mentioned that they do, what they call, adventure dining. And so, we've changed our date night to adventure dining, and it's, we make ourselves go to a restaurant we've never been to before.

PS: Oh, yeah, I love that.

RS: That's fun.

MS: That is fun.

JS: And it probably is kind of fun, it just... Occasionally, we go to some place that's a favorite. But for the most part, we're trying something new together, which is good because marriage does become pretty routine sometimes. So, we have to inject some adventure into that routine.

MS: Yeah, yeah. That's been fun.

PS: I love that.

JS: Well, good stuff.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Well, this is Mark and Jill Savage, along with Ruth and Patrick Schwenk, and we are signing off with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected.

MS: Two people being perfected.

JS: Thanks for joining us, guys.