Bob: Catherine Parks remembers going to a small group for the first time—a small group of women—where everyone was asked to share what was going on in their lives.

Catherine: The first time I experienced that, I wanted to get up and leave before they did that; because I'm not a sharer. But I also was very concerned that people would see me leave and would judge me for it; [Laughter] so I felt like, “Ohhh, it's going to be awkward either way,” so I stayed. These were compete strangers to me; but in a matter of 30 minutes, I felt like I knew them better than people that I've been friends with for years; because we had to be forced to cut through all of the superficial stuff.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, May 6th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. So, how do we cut through the veneer and get to what's real in our lives with one another? We're going to talk with Catherine Parks about that today. Stay with us.

Bob: And welcome to FamilyLife Today. I've got to tell you guys—I picked up a copy of the book we're going to talk about today, and I thought of you!

Dave: You thought of me?

Bob: I'm guessing, “If we got—

Dave: Was is called Awesome? [Laughter]

Bob: No; I'm guessing, “If we got a room-full of 50 of your closest friends and asked, ‘Give me one word that describes Dave and Ann Wilson,’ awesome might show up on that list.” [Laughter]

Dave: I doubt it.

Bob: Maybe

Dave: With my close friends, it would not show up.

Bob: But don't you think this word would show up?
Ann: Yes.

Bob: The word is real.

Ann: When I first saw the book, I was like, “Yes!—a book that somebody’s going there.”

Bob: Yes; because this is what—you guys have been unusually transparent about your life and your marriage. I mean, you know, I nudge Mary Ann and say, “Should we—you know, should we share?” and she’s like, “No! [Laughter] No; you don’t share stuff like that with people.” I go, “Well, Dave and Ann share stuff like that.” And she goes, “That’s Dave and Ann—that’s not you,” and “Don’t even think about it,” is the next thing she says.

Dave: We have people come up after a message on, you know, our life and say: “Is anything good in your marriage? [Laughter] All we heard was how bad it was.” [Laughter]

Bob: Well, we’ve got Catherine Parks joining us today. Catherine, welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Catherine: Thanks; it’s great to be here.

Bob: Catherine is back. She and her mom were here the last time she was here.

You’ve written a book called Real: the Surprising Secret to Deeper Relationships. Were you thinking of Dave and Ann when you wrote the book?

Catherine: No; that was—I had like a picture of them, up on the corkboard, [Laughter] just for inspiration.

Dave: I don’t think so.

Bob: What was the motivation to write this?

Catherine: I was actually teaching a Bible study on Psalm 51 at the time and doing a deep-dive into David's repentance after his sin with Bathsheba—sin against Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. I was really struck by the fact that his repentance—you know, he goes step by step through acknowledging his sin before God, and really is broken and contrite over it, and asking God to restore the joy that he’d had in his salvation.

One of the things I was really struck by is that this was public. You know, that psalm—and it says very clearly, after his sin against Bathsheba—it's acknowledged in the Psalm book—that's what is was. It was something that the congregation would have sung and would have had knowledge of. I was just struck by the fact that this is not very private
experience that he had—but it was public—and how relationships and repentance kind of go together in a beautiful cycle. I started studying that, and I was really struck by it.

Bob: So, David's example—I think you are exactly right—David's example, in Psalm 51, is a remarkable example; first, that you would even think to write a song, saying: “Let me confess my sin very publicly”; and then, “Give it to the choirmaster; and let's teach it to the whole choir, and we'll all sing it together.” That's like, “Who does that?!”—right?

Catherine: Well, at the end of the psalm, he talks about “Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones You've broken rejoice.” And he says, “Open my mouth and I will declare Your praise.” I just think, even in that psalm, he's doing that very thing—he's declaring God's praise, because it's not about him. The whole point of him acknowledging that is to confess who he is and who God is.

When we hide things, we're missing the opportunity to put ourselves in the right place and to acknowledge God's grace, and His mercy, and His love in our lives; and then to encourage other people to do the same thing.

Dave: So, why don't we?

Ann: That's what I was going to ask too.

Dave: I know you write about it in your book, but we hide.

Catherine: Yes.

Dave: And we hide a lot in the church because that's the place where we don't want anybody to see that we're not as perfect as we think everybody around us is. And yet, the Scripture is just showing us, “Go real; get real,” but we don't. Why do you think we don't?

Catherine: I mean, it's universal. I think social media reveals a lot of that, but it's in our nature. It's easy to point at that and say, “Well, you know, social media is the problem,” but it's our hearts. You know, we like to think we're better than we are, and we like to project an image of ourselves that makes us feel like we are in control or like we don't need someone outside of ourselves.

Ann: Catherine, has it always been easy for you to be real?

Catherine: No, [Laughter] which is really why I wrote the book; because it is such a struggle for me.

Ann: How did that start then? What was your journey?
Catherine: You know, confession and repentance were always a part of my life; because they were taught to me by my parents.

Bob: Wait; wait. How did your parents teach you confession with them?

Catherine: Yes; yes, you know, the Scripture talks about “Don't let the sun go down on your anger.” They took that very literally; conflict was resolved before we all laid our heads down at night.

Bob: Was this is something your parents made you do?

Catherine: I think we saw my dad, especially, was just very intent on confessing his own sin. You know, if he wronged us in any way, that was just a part of the rhythm of our family; so I think it was modeled for us. I don't know that it was ever forced or compelled in some way.

Dave: Do you know how unique that is?

Catherine: I realized it. You know, at the time, I thought that “Everybody does this”; but apparently, not. [Laughter]

Dave: I mean, even the self-reflection—you know, most of us would say: “You tell me your confession. I don't have one; I don't need one, but you do.” And your dad and mom modeling that—

Catherine: Yes.

Dave: —that is powerful.

Bob: When I was doing interviews for the Art of Parenting® video series, I forget who it was who said this; but they said that “We had a rhythm at our home, where we would, at the dinner table, I'd ask the question, “Let's talk about how we sinned today.” The dad would ask that question. And he'd say—here is the key—he’d say, “Let's talk about how we sinned today; I'll go first.”

Ann: So, he modeled it to them.

Bob: And we would talk about something, and then they’d go around. It wasn't like everybody had to—

Dave: Yes; right.

Bob: —but it opened up the normalcy of this rather than pretending, “We're not as bad as we really are.” It's like, “Let's be real about this.”
I remember a guest we had on *FamilyLife Today* once, who was talking about how his daughter had come to him and confessed that she had put—I think she put a grilled cheese sandwich in the VCR. You remember VCRs?—right? [Laughter]

**Dave:** Oh, yes.

**Bob:** So, in the slot, she put—or it was a game console—anyway, she had messed it up. And she went and said, “Daddy, you told me not to play with that; and I put a grilled cheese sandwich in there.”

He said: “At that point, I had two options,”—right?—“I had the option of either correcting and disciplining what she had done that was wrong or celebrating with her that she had confessed, on her own, to what she’d done.” He said, “Now, she needed correction,” and all that; but he said the first response was, “I am *so* excited that you should...”—in fact, he said, “I took her out for ice cream”; because she had confessed. This is something that's a *missing* part of a *lot* of family dynamics/a lot of *marriage* dynamics—never get as real as maybe God wants us to get.

**Catherine:** The night before I came to do this interview, we had a lot of conflict in our home. My kids are 11 and 8, and emotions were running high. I had this experience with my daughter, where she was very broken over sin; and I was very broken over sin, and being able to sit in that.

One of the things we talk about a lot in our family is that we're on the same team. As parents—especially, when you're raising your kids—and they're making decisions that you don't agree with and, especially, when they're making decisions against your authority, it's easy to have this “us vs. them” mentality that you slip into. Anytime that we can kind of re-correct, and come alongside of them, and say, “We're actually all on the same team and we're fighting the same enemy,” and “You're not my enemy,” and “I'm not your enemy,”—there's this normalization that kind of comes in there and the security, that I hope they have, to know, “I'm going to be forgiven, and there is freedom to just come out with it—whatever it is,” and seeing us do that. I don't know that would have been part of our family had that not been modeled for me.

**Ann:** What did that look like with your relationships with girlfriends—of being real/of not being real? How has that affected you in your marriage *and* in your relationships with girlfriends?

**Catherine:** That's what's interesting; because it was a part of my family, but I think some of it is just my personality. I have a very good friend, Amber, who for years, would spend time with me and kind of encourage me to open up. She was always opening up with me; but I always kind of held her at arm's length and thought: “You know, she needs me, but I don't need her,” and “I don't need to be open with her.” She just loved me for years until I started to realize there is so much joy and freedom in letting her know what's going on.
Once I started doing that with friends and they started—really, with intentional questions, drawing me out and saying, you know: “What is going on in your life?” “How is your marriage?” “How is this part of your life?” “How are you doing as a parent?”

I started to have the freedom to come out of that and to even start thinking about what was going on. I think that’s part of it, too, is that people—we’re not even aware—we’re so busy, and we’re going so fast, and we’re not really aware of what’s going on.

**Ann:** There’s not much time for self-reflection.

**Catherine:** Not at all. And then, all of a sudden, you blow up; or something happens and you’re kind of hit with it in the face.

I think anytime we can kind of insert this into the rhythm of our relationships, then maybe we’re preventing some of those explosions from happening; because we’re aware of what’s going on in our hearts.

**Ann:** Do you think kids long for that with their parents as kids get older? Even your kids—11 and 8?—do you feel like they long to know you?

I’m seeing this generation—I’m hearing, more and more, of high school kids saying, “I want to know my parents. I want to know who they really are,” and “I want to know their heart.”

**Catherine:** Yes.

**Ann:** And that can feel intimidating to some adults.

**Catherine:** It’s interesting, because I hadn’t really thought about that. In my mind, I think my kids think I’m weird and lame; and they don’t want to know me that well; you know. But I think, probably deep down, they do.

I’m going to turn it on you: “Did you feel like that with your own sons, growing up, that they wanted to know you better as parents?”

**Dave:** Hey, look at that—I like that! [Laughter]

**Ann:** She’s good at this! [Laughter]

**Catherine:** I want to learn from you!

**Ann:** What would you say?
Dave: Well, you know, it's interesting. Our third son was left at home when the other two went off to college. It was like the first time we ever sat around the dinner table and just one son was there. It was really interesting that he wanted to know our story; he started asking really probing questions.

Ann: Yes; he would ask things like, “Did you and mom have sex before you were married?”

Catherine: Oh, man.

Ann: Right!

Dave: Yes. [Laughter]

Ann: Exactly.

Dave: He's 17 years old and I'm, "I gotta go get something to drink right now."

Bob: Dad just shut down the whole real conversation right here. [Laughter]

Ann: That's beyond real.

Catherine: Yeah. [Laughter]

Dave: A new book called Unreal.

Ann: But our other boys never asked any of those probing questions. But this son really asked a lot of deep things.

Dave: And the cool thing about it—which is what you get out of the book as well—is when you do confess: “Here, I'm not hiding anything; I'm going to tell you the truth,”—what ended up with that son, in those conversations, which were really over dinner—it sort of became something we looked forward to—is he heard our “Jesus” story. He heard the good, the bad, the ugly, and the victory.

I love what you said because it isn't just the church. We get ripped, I think, sometimes, at church—that we're so fake at church. Everybody's fake; come on! Who are we kidding?” We all pretend and cover, and we aren't real. It's such a breath of fresh air to say: “You know, what would it look like to be authentic and real in your relationships?” and “Where would that take us?”

Ann: But it's also hard to do that, at times, especially in the church. I remember, when our kids were little, and I was in this Bible study. I was saying: “You guys, I have lost my cool. My two-year-old is out of control; I'm out of control. My life is out of control. I don't know what to do. I feel like a bad mom; I yell at them.” I said all of that, and there was
absolute silence in the room; nobody responded. [Laughter] Somebody said, “We should pray for Ann,”—which was sweet that they wanted to pray—[Laughter]—but I was like: “Is nobody else struggling?!

**Catherine:** Yes; yes.

**Ann:** “Am I the only person?” I felt like, “Oh, I don't know if I should share that.”

**Catherine:** Yes.

**Ann:** It's not intentional; it's just this—people don't know if it's okay. And if it's okay—and if somebody will be beside me, saying: “It is okay, but let's pray. Let's go before God. Thank you for sharing that, because I understand it and get it.” I think that's important in the church.

**Catherine:** Yes; absolutely. And one of the things, when I teach on this topic, I force the women to get into little circles and to practice this.

**Ann:** How do you do that?

**Catherine:** It's actually something that I learned from—I was visiting a Bible study at another church, and they did this. They would divide into, you know, groups of three or four women. One would go first and just basically confess what she's struggling with—what’s going on in her heart and in her life. And there were a few things that you knew, going in: 1. It wasn't going to leave the circle. 2. It wasn't a time for tips or advice—

**Ann:** See, that's a good; that's really good.

**Catherine:**—because women love to give tips and advice.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Catherine:** That's what we do.

**Dave:** Men never do that, but women do—they really do. [Laughter]

**Catherine:** And then, third was that the person next to you was going to pray for you in a minute; and then, it would be her turn to share.

The first time I experienced that, I wanted to get up and leave before they did that; because I'm not a sharer. But I also was very concerned that people would see me leave and would judge me for it; [Laughter] so I felt like, “Ohhh, it's going to be awkward either way,” so I stayed. These were complete strangers to me; but in a matter of 30 minutes, I felt like I knew them better than people that I had known for years; because we had to be forced to cut through all the superficial stuff.
That happens every time I teach on this, and I make the women do this. You can see the fear in their eyes; and then afterwards, so many come up to me and thank me. But it just doesn't happen organically; you really have to force people to do that. You try to do it organically; and everyone's like, “We don't know what to do with this.”

**Ann:** “You are weird; get out of here!”

**Dave:** I've actually wanted to do this—I haven't had the **courage** to do it at my church—I've thought about it; I've said it from the stage; but I've never said, “Let’s do this.” I want to put a sign above our front door that says, “No masks allowed.” You know, as people walk in, it’s like: “Please take them off here. Please know that it's okay to take them off, in this community.”

**Ann:** That's what I was going to say too.

**Bob:** We've used a phrase at our church that is not original to us—it's something that I heard from Paul David Tripp. He said a biblical community should be made up of relationships that are Christ-centered, grace-based, intentionally intrusive, and redemptive. I love those four; because the reason we're *not* disclosing with one another is because we don't know that we can count on you being grace-based and Christ-centered—so: “When you get intrusive with me, is that safe for me to be honest with you?” or “Am I going to get judged? Are you going to think less of me?” or “Do I need to project an image to be accepted here?” And then, the redemptive part—the reason we're doing this is not so that we can [say], “I got dirt on you, and you got dirt on me,”—it's so that we can be involved in one another's redemption processes.

**Dave:** You know, yes; that's—

**Bob:** Isn't that great?

**Dave:** —that is so well-said.

I have a story similar to Ann's. When we moved to Detroit, almost 35 years ago, one of the first things I wanted to do was find men that I could do life with. I hear, so many times, people in our church that say: “I tried a small group; it didn't work. I'm done.” I'm always like, “No, no; try another,” because I got in this group—I'll never forget—with some guys from other churches, whatever. I hadn't started the church yet; but anyway, didn't know anybody—seven or eight guys we got in there.

I don't want to admit this; but talk about being real—we'll be real. It was February, and I go to the group. I'd probably been there three or four times. I'm thinking, “Maybe, these are guys I can do life with.” I said to them: “Hey, anybody see the *Sports Illustrated* that just came out last week?”—swimsuit issue; right? Everybody in the room just went like—just nobody—just looked at me like, “Did you just...” I said, “None of you guys saw
that?" “Nope.” I said: “Well, I did. And I just want to tell you I've confessed. I struggle. I wanted to look at these women in their swimsuits, and I did. I've told my wife, and I just want to know what you guys—anybody here struggle with that?”

_Every_ guy there said: “Absolutely never!” “I’ve _never_ thought of that,” “I would _never_ look at that,” and “It is _deplorable_ that you, a Christian minister, would look at that.” You know what I thought and know what I did?—never went back.

**Bob and Catherine:** Yes.

**Ann:** That was minus the grace.

**Dave:** I literally thought, “I know some of these guys have struggled, and _nobody_ here is willing to admit it.” I felt judged; and I remember thinking, “I have got to find another group.” I didn't give up. I found another group; and 35 years later, I _know_ these guys. I found them—we did life together.

Again, I'm not saying, “Hey, I found guys that look at _Sports Illustrated_!”—that's not the point; right? [Laughter] But I found guys that were willing to be _real_; and at the same time, say: “There is a God that can meet you and give victory in the middle of that.” I want to talk about that next time; because, out of confession and out of a community of realness, is freedom.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** There's a lot of that in your book, and we've got to talk about that; because I would say to every guy out there/every woman out there: “You've _got_ to find a community, and you've got to plug in there—that's _real_—that's, also, leading you all to Jesus. It will literally change your life.”

**Bob:** What does James 5 say?—“Confess your sins, one to another, and you'll be healed.”

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** I don't think that's mystical; I think that's practical.

**Dave:** Yes; the community is a big part of it.

**Bob:** Exactly; but the fear of being real—all of us face it.

**Ann:** It can be paralyzing.

**Bob:** “Can we…” “Are we safe to be real?” And when you find a place where it's safe to be real, it's so liberating; and it's so _encouraging_. That's what is at the heart of the book.
that Catherine has written: *Real: the Surprising Secret to Deeper Relationships*. I'm thinking about husbands and wives who need to be real with one another. I'm thinking about parents and kids who need to be real with one another. This would be a great book for—not just a small group to go through—but maybe a family to go through and to talk about: “What would ‘real’ look like in our family?”

We’ve got copies of Catherine's book, *Real: the Surprising Secret to Deeper Relationships*, in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to order your copy. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. Our number is 1-800-358-6329—1-800-“F” as is family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” And the book, again, is called *Real* by Catherine Parks—*the Surprising Secret to Deeper Relationships*.

You know, as we’ve been having this conversation with Catherine today, I've been thinking about the President of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, who joins us; because authenticity/transparency—these are words I hear you using a lot when it comes to relationships. [Laughter]

**David:** That's a high value. I do—I use them a lot. I think it's the only way to live, really. One of my favorite things to witness in ministry is when a group of people, like Catherine described, get to the really honest places that Jesus invites us to go. The real restoration work happens in community and go to the places they don't normally process. It just reminds me of a Larry Crabb quote, where he says, “Everyone's normal until you get to know them.” [Laughter]

I think it’s true, and we all want to go there. We all desperately want to be fully-known and want to have this type of community, but we avoid it so often and are hesitant to go there; because there's risk involved, and it's real risk. I think one of the biggest reasons that prevent us from going there—and sometimes, in Christian community is that—sometimes, too often, when we go there, the response we get is an overly simplistic spiritual platitude that shuts off the conversation instead of someone moving toward us. Instead of someone being present like Jesus being present, and holding the weight and the tension—He can handle that. Us, being there with them in that moment—extending God’s grace to them in a transparent moment, and seeking to understand more of the pain that they have in their lives, and what's really going on—before we give intentional Christ-centered input into their lives.

**Bob:** Yes; that can be fearful. I mean, I think we avoid intimacy because we're afraid; and yet, when we press into it, there’s a richness there; isn't there?

**David:** It's always worth it—every time.

**Bob:** Yes; that's good, David. Thank you for that.
You know, I think what we’re trying to do, here, at FamilyLife, everyday, is help couples grow closer/help families grow closer—help us all be better at the second commandment. Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,”—that’s the first commandment. And the second, He said, is to love your neighbor as yourself. That starts in our marriages/in our families, and it spills out from there. And our commitment, here, at FamilyLife is to provide you, regularly, with practical biblical help and hope for your marriage and your family.

That’s made possible because listeners, like you, believe this is important for them and for others in your city, in your community, and in our world. We’ve had some friends, recently, who’ve come to us at FamilyLife. They have offered to match every donation we receive during the month of May, dollar for dollar, up to a total of $550,000, which is a very generous offer. We’re hoping to take full advantage of this matching gift. If you make a donation today, your donation will be doubled—it will be matched, dollar for dollar. If you become a monthly Legacy Partner during the month of May—and agree to make a donation each month—every month, when you make a donation, that donation will be matched, dollar for dollar, until the matching-gift fund is depleted.

In addition to having your Legacy Partner donations matched, as a new Legacy Partner, you’ll get a certificate so you and your spouse, or a couple you know, can attend a Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway as our guests. The Weekend to Remember is our thank-you gift to you for becoming a regular financial supporter of this ministry. And you can find out how to donate or how to sign up to become a Legacy Partner when you go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com; or call if you have any questions, or if you’d like to sign up as a Legacy Partner or donate over the phone. The number is 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about the things that get in the way of cultivating transparency and authenticity in relationships. How can we break down some of those barriers? Catherine Parks is going to be back with us tomorrow. I hope you can be back as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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