Bob: We live in the Instagram® era. We try to make sure that the image of who we are—not just the visual image, but the perception of who we are—is well-manicured/well-airbrushed. Catherine Parks says that inhibits real relationships with real, messy people just like us.

Catherine: I have a very good friend, Amber, who would kind of encourage me to open up. She just loved me for years until I started to realize that, you know, there is so much joy and freedom in letting her know what was going on. Once I started doing that with friends, they started drawing me out, and saying: “What is going on in your life?” “How are you doing as a parent?” I started to have the freedom to come out of that.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, May 7th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. What are the barriers that keep us from being honest and real with others, with friends, with our spouses? We’re going to explore what real relationships look like today with Catherine Parks. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. If there’s a category of television programs, where the category name is the opposite of what the program is—like if we said, “It’s a comedy show,” and then you tuned in and watched it, and you cried all the time, you would go, “They shouldn’t call that comedy.” There’s this one category of TV, where it’s just the opposite—that’s called reality television. [Laughter] And when you tune in to watch,—[Laughter]

Dave: I didn’t know where you were going, Bob.

Ann: Me neither.

Bob: —it’s the exact opposite. You know, reality TV is the most manufactured thing there is out there.

Dave: Unreal.

Bob: But we’re talking about reality today; and the reason we’re doing it is because Catherine Parks is joining us, again, on FamilyLife Today. Welcome back.
Catherine: Thanks.

Bob: Catherine is an author and has been with us before to talk about how you build a Christ-centered wedding. Now, we’re talking about how you have a level of relationship in your marriage and in your family, and in all your relationships, that gets past the surface and goes to reality.

Dave and Ann, you know, when we talk about communication at the Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway, there’s this pyramid that we talk about, where you go from just cliché communication and you move down—

Ann: —Level One.

Bob: Right—from cliché, to facts, to opinions, and then you get to your feelings; and now, you get to “Here’s who I really am.”

Real relationships should be with a limited number of people. There’s discretion that needs to be involved in being the kind of transparent you’re talking about us being.

Catherine: Yes; absolutely. I man, there’s a trust that has to come there before you can open up with someone. A lot of times, that’s time spent. Unfortunately, from Genesis 3 on, we’ve been afraid to be who we really are and to show—you know, from Adam and Eve trying to cover up with fig leaves and hiding from God.

I love my husband, but I still feel that need to cover up and not to let him in. That’s someone I’ve known—you know, we’ve been married for almost 14 years. There’s time and trust that’s necessary for a lot of these things to happen.

Bob: Can we talk about that? Talk about marriage and realness in marriage. We got married because we wanted transparency and intimacy. We wanted to be known and loved at the same time. We wanted somebody who would know us, at our core, and would still love us. I think that’s the longing of every human heart.

But then, you get married; and you feel like, “I can’t be real; because if you know the real me, you won’t love the real me.” Did you feel that, as a young wife?

Catherine: Yes; I mean, just on a very surface level. When we got married, my husband picked out the apartment without me seeing it—that we were going to live in—because I was in another state. He did a great job finding a low-cost apartment. [Laughter]

Dave: I can see where this is going!

Ann: Aw, that’s not good.
Catherine: I loved my husband, and I loved being married; but you know, I wanted to make this little apartment our home. And there were roaches crawling out of the cabinets every time I opened them. For the first week of marriage, I just cried myself to sleep every night; because I was afraid to let him know that I was failing in my role as his wife. You know, I put all these expectations on myself and all of these assumptions on him and what his response would be.

Instead of having an open conversation with him about, "I love you, and I know you did your best..."—any of those things—I just stuffed it all down inside of me. That’s kind of a silly example, but there are things like that still that I do. A lot of times it is my assumption about what he’s going to think.

Ann: Talk to the woman, who’s out there, saying: “I long for this in my marriage relationship; I long for my husband to be real. I long for him to want to know me, and he just won’t go there.” How would you encourage her?

Catherine: I mean, the first thing is—that’s an expectation that you have to give to the Lord; because when you put that on your spouse, you’re setting both of you up for failure. It’s a hope that is right to have; but ultimately, we know that the Lord is the only One who can truly satisfy the needs that we have. Being able to give those desires to Him and pray for that to happen—I think the Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of doing that.

I, also, think we assume that the other person won’t want something; because we’ve never broached the subject.

Ann: That’s a good point.

Catherine: The first step, I think, after praying is just to say: “You know, I’d like to be able to talk to you about some things,” and “I’d like for you to listen and for us to be able to pray together,”—inviting them into that. That’s what it took for me—was someone inviting me into something I would never have done on my own.

Bob: I don’t remember a specific time, but I know this happened early in our marriage—when Mary Ann would start to have a conversation with me at that level of intimacy, where there’s transparency and there’s reality going on—but because she didn’t start the conversation by saying: “I want to talk to you about something that’s really important,” and “I’d like you to listen carefully,” I thought it was just kind of a normal, surface-level conversation. She’s baring her heart about something, and I’m kind of watching ESPN out of the corner of my eye.

Ann: Oh, Bob!

Bob: I didn’t know! Nobody told me, “Oh, we’re having one of those kinds of conversations.”
Ann: What would’ve made you know?

Bob: If she had said: “Hey, there’s something I want to talk to you about,” and “This is important to me. When would be a good time for us to talk, where I could get your full attention?” rather than to just start having it.

Because here’s what happened—Mary Ann would start having that; and I would not engage at the level of intimacy that she was looking for, where I was really listening, and nodding, and caring about what she was saying. Then she’d go away and say: “Well, I’m never trying that again. It doesn’t do me any good to bare my soul. He doesn’t care.” All of a sudden, you’re moving toward isolation instead of toward oneness.

I need to own that I was not as alert as I should have been to what was going on—paying attention to the dynamics. It helps—whether it’s a wife or a husband—it helps to give us a little “Heads up. This is important. I’m trying to move beyond the surface to talk about what’s really in my heart here.”

Dave: I do think it also gets into the fear of confession. Define “confession,” because it’s really at the heart of why you wanted to write this book—to talk about confession and repentance—and then, talk about, “Okay; if this is what it looks like, how do we get over that fear?”

Catherine: First, I think it’s helpful to have a definition of repentance. When we talk about repentance, we’re talking about something that happens between us and God. Repentance really means “to turn,”—to turn the other direction. We’re going in one direction, away from God; and when we repent, we’re turning around and walking in the other direction. We confess our sins to God first and seek His forgiveness, which He has promised us and already given us in Christ—in His life, death, and resurrection—the finished work that He did on our behalf.

Then, after we have repented and confessed our sin to Him, we have the opportunity to confess sin to one another. I want to make sure we have that in place first; because I can confess my sin to you, and you can’t forgive me in the same way that God can. You cannot absolve me or give me that assurance that I am forgiven that God can, because my sin isn’t before you as much as it is before God.

Ann: What does that look like? You know, a lot of times, people will go to God and say, “I’m sorry for this.” Do you think confession is deeper than that?

Catherine: Yes; one of the things I try to get into in the book is getting to the root of the problem; because a lot of times, what I’m going to confess is: “I yelled at my child,” or “I had this really negative thought about this person.” But what you’ll notice, when you look at Psalm 51 of David, is that he doesn’t confess murder; he doesn’t confess his sexual sin. He confesses the deeper root issues of his sin.
Bob: “Against You and You only have I sinned.”

Catherine: Yes; exactly. When we talk about repentance, we’re not talking about just a laundry list—you know, like in my childhood—like, “I’m sorry I did this,” and “…I did this,” and “…I did this.” It’s: “Lord, reveal what’s in my heart. What’s the real root? Where am I not believing that You’re good enough, and I’m trying to seek things on my own that are not things that You’re giving me?”

Bob: This was the paradigm shift of confession for me. Confession is really agreeing with God that what He says is true.

Catherine: Yes.

Bob: We tend to think confession is the laundry list of: “I did this wrong,” “I did this wrong,” which is a part of it. But if you don’t get to the point, where you say, “This is God’s way; this is what God wants; this is the way I should be walking, and my behavior is out of sync with what God wants.” It’s not just: “I’m sorry I did this wrong”; it is: “Here’s what God wants; here’s my behavior—they don’t match up.” Now, we can go, “I regret that my behavior does not match up with what God wants.”

And then, repentance is saying, “I’m going to turn from what I’m doing and go in the direction of what God wants me to do and start living according to what God wants.” They do go together. I think it’s important for folks to recognize confession is not repentance.

Catherine: Yes.

Bob: Because some people will say, “I’m sorry,” and they will say, “I repented.” No; you didn’t repent if you said you were sorry—all you did was confess. That’s halfway there; but until you say: “I’m sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?” and “I want to live differently.

Catherine: “I want to turn.”

Bob: “I want my behavior to look this way.” Now you’ve gotten to the point of repentance.

That’s so important in a marriage relationship. If we are going to confess to one another and repent of our behavior, it’s got to go beyond just: “I’m sorry I did this,” and “I was wrong”; it’s: “My behavior needs to be different.”

Ann: It’s deeper; it goes to the heart. When the heart is turned, you take a totally different path.
**Catherine:** You know, I had childhood experiences that terrified me with confession. I had—I was probably seven or eight years old, and we were leaving the church service. My dad noticed me stick a tissue/a dirty tissue in the little space between the back and the seat of the pew. I didn’t know he noticed.

**Dave:** Oh, that’s bad. [Laughter]

**Catherine:** Can you even imagine?!

**Dave:** Wow.

**Catherine:** I get home; and my dad calls me aside, and he holds out this tissue. He talks to me about someone’s job is to clean this up, and this whole thing. The next day, I had to go to the church, apologize to the janitor, ask his forgiveness, and then help him the rest of the day clean the church.

As a kid, I’m thinking: “This is absolutely the worst thing I have ever done in my life,” and “My dad is the worst man in the world.” [Laughter] And now, that I’m a parent, I think it’s genius—you know?—because what a watershed moment for me—to realize that my thoughtlessness was affecting other people. What ended up happening is that I got to know this man, who cleaned our church every week, that I never paid attention to. There was a bond that was formed there and this relationship built.

We think confession means beating ourselves up, but confession is really meant to lead us to joy. There’s a pastor, who has passed away, named Jack Miller, who wrote some books. He talked about this church in Uganda; and he said that there is—that the congregation there had an unusual habit, where—if they met someone on the street from their congregation, who looked depressed—they would say: “Brother, have you confessed your sin today? Have you seen the cross of Christ today?”

I think that second part is so important; because if we’re just confessing our sin and dwelling on the things we’ve done wrong—but not taking them to the cross and experiencing the joy of forgiveness—then we’re missing the whole point. The point is to worship God for what He’s done for us.

**Bob:** —and not just the joy of knowing that God has forgiven you—but this is where grace in the midst of relationships—if you want to have real, you can’t have real without grace; because if you try to be real in a place where there’s no grace, nobody’s going to open with that. In a marriage relationship, the reason we’re not real with one another is because we do lack grace with one another.

**Dave:** And here’s the amazing thing—you’ll never—like that’s an exaggeration—you’ll probably rarely get healed of that struggle.
And back to what Bob, you said earlier—if you go back—I just pulled it up again—James 5:16, which is really interesting what he says; it's almost like surprising—he says: “Therefore, confess your sins to each other.” You expect him to say “…to God.”

It’s like, “Well, wait…to each other.” It’s almost assuming you’ve already talked to God about this repentance. He says, “Confess”; and then look what he says: “Confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that—you may be healed,”—which is really interesting to think—because we’ve done this; right? I’ve confessed my sin to God; I repent with God—it’s a private thing. I’ve got this gossip problem, or a money problem, or a porn problem: “We’re good.” And then, you fall again. I go back to God: “We’re good.” You fall again. It’s like, “I’m not getting healed!” I am forgiven—we do confess, and we receive forgiveness/grace from God.

It’s interesting that James says, “No; the way to get healed is you’ve got to bring a person in now.” Again, it shouldn’t be, “O goodness; I have to tell somebody.” No; it’s like somebody you trust/somebody you’re in relationship with; and I am going to be honest with them—say: “I’ve got a struggle that I’ve talked to God about, but I’m struggling with it still. Can you help me?” What James is trying to say is—there’s a part of the human DNA that needs humanity/community to get to true freedom and healing.

Bob: I talked with a pastor one time—and this goes to your point that you made earlier, Dave—he said, with that verse—he said, when somebody comes to you and says, “There’s something I need to confess,”—whenever they’re done confessing, the next thing you need to be able to say is: “Yes; I’ve struggled with that, maybe in a different way,” or “…in a different…” In other words, for you to say, “Oh; huh,”—

Ann: “Too bad for you!”

Dave: Yes.

Bob: —all of a sudden, no healing; it’s going to shut down.

As we hear one another’s confessions, we have to enter into that. It’s the confessing to one another that builds the safety.

Here’s where I love what Matt Chandler says—he says: “In our church,”—he says—“it’s okay not to be okay. It’s just not okay to stay there.”

Dave: Right.

Bob: It’s okay not to be okay—I can say, “I’m not okay,” and everybody’s going to go: “Yes; we get that. We’re not okay either.” But now, we can’t just stay there and think, “Now, that we’ve confessed it, everything’s good,”—no. That’s the repentance part of this—that’s where being real works its way out; right?
Catherine: Yes; absolutely. I mean, you look at 1 John 1 and the fellowship that we have is from walking in the light. John is very clear: “If you say you have no sin, then you’re lying, and you make God a liar.” For us to sit there in silence, and not be able to say, “Yes; I’m struggling too,”—maybe with something different—we’re missing the opportunity to fellowship with each other by being in the light together.

Ann: While I listen to us, I’m just thinking, for me as a woman, how important it is to set an atmosphere of love and grace; and also, to probe—to ask God—like, “God, how can I ask my husband questions that don’t make him feel insecure or like he’s in trouble, but wanting to know him and wanting to know his heart?” Sometimes, it takes someone in the family taking the initiative of first going to God: “God, help me to do this. How can we go deeper in our love relationship with one another?”

That’s where the first place it goes is God—being intimate with Him/knowing Him—that’s where it starts. Then, we can ask Him for wisdom, “Father, how does it look for us to go there, as a family?”—that we offer grace to each other when things are exposed that may be hard to hear.

Bob: Catherine, I think our listeners can probably tell that just this conversation around this subject has—I mean, there’s been a lot of back and forth/a lot of dialogue. You’ve scratched the surface of something that I think is the longing of every human heart. It takes time; and it takes intentionality; and it takes an atmosphere of grace. But this is what we want, and the joy and the reward of it is so profound.

Dave: Let me add this; I would love to add this, because I would like everyone to think this—and it’s in your book. In terms of being real, here’s what we do—we wait for somebody else. I would say: “You initiate it. You go first, and watch what happens.”

Your dad modeled that for you—we were talking about that earlier. It’s like: “Wow; what a model!” I want to be that dad/that man. I want every person to think: “I’m not going to wait. I’m going to confess and repent. I’m going to lead the way.” I’m telling you—it’s a magnet. People are drawn to reality, because it’s the heart of God.

Bob: Well, let’s hope people will rally around the book, Real—read it together and, then, say to each other, “Okay; who wants to go first? I will,”—right?—because you don’t ask who wants to go first; you volunteer it; you model it; you step out; you risk. It may be that the group looks at you and goes, “Oh, you’re weird.” Okay; go find another group; right?

Now, if it’s your family, you can’t go find another group; [Laughter] you have to stick with the ones who brought you. But maybe you try it again the next night; and after a while, some of the ice starts to melt and people go, “I can really be real, and I’m not going to get in trouble; and you’re still going to accept me and love me.”

Thank you for writing this book.
Catherine: Thank you so much. I’ve learned a lot just being with you today.

Bob: Well, it’s been great to have you here. I do hope listeners will get a copy of your book, Real: The Surprising Secret to Deeper Relationships, by Catherine Parks. We have it in our FamilyLife Resource Center. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, I’m still thinking about this concept of real relationships, especially in the context of marriage. David Robbins, the President of FamilyLife® is with us, again, today. Hey, David.

David: Hey, Bob.

Bob: This is something—if we want to get to oneness in marriage, we have to get past the fear, and have the grace, to be real with one another; don’t we?

David: Yes; with our spouse and with, I think, other close friends, who will really speak grace and truth into our lives. The whole conversation takes me back to a park bench in Pisa, Italy, around two-and-a-half decades ago. It was the first time I ever asked another person—and he was somebody I trusted—and I took the risk to ask, “Are there any blind spots or growth areas you think I don’t see?”

I wanted it; but then, what came was something that really led me on a growth path. My friend went ahead to continue and share that people respected me, but they didn’t think I was real. They didn’t see me struggle ever. He’s had people say to him, “Hey, I’m coming to you—not David—because I don’t feel like David’s very safe to go to.” That conversation was, sure, hard to hear. I was ready to hear something. I don’t know if I was ready to hear—

Bob: —“…wounds of a friend.”

David: Right; but it had a long-term effect on my life. It was the beginning of a journey of: “How do I project a false self? What are ways that I’m inauthentic to other friends around me?”

I began to grow in that/began to value that. I began to realize that risky conversations actually lead to greater closeness and togetherness. Certainly, with a spouse, it’s essential; I mean, it is what leads to that oneness. Being able to have those honest conversations that lead to grace, and truth, and formation in Jesus—that leads us closer together.
**Bob:** We used to call people like that “posers.” And in marriage, we can be posers with one another. I think what you’re exhorting us to—what Catherine has exhorted us to today—is it’s time to drop the masks and be real, like you, David.

**David:** Yes.

**Bob:** In fact, let me be real with listeners, here, for just a minute. Here, at FamilyLife, our mission/our goal is to bring practical biblical help and hope to marriages and families every day. This program is committed to helping to effectively develop godly marriages and families. You make that possible when you, as a listener, step up and become a financial supporter of this ministry. You either make a one-time donation, or you become a monthly Legacy Partner.

During the month of May, we’ve had some friends of the ministry, who have come along and said, “We’d like to incentivize/we’d like to motivate FamilyLife Today listeners to join the team and help this ministry continue to reach more and more people, regularly, with biblical help and hope for their marriage and family.” What they’ve agreed to do is match every donation we receive this month, dollar for dollar, up to a total of $550,000.

So, if you go online today—or call us and say, “I want to give $50”—that will release $50 from the matching-gift fund; and your donation will be doubled. If you sign up and become a Legacy Partner today and say, “We want to donate $30 a month,” or “…$50 a month,”—whatever it is that you want to do. Every month, for the next year, when you make a donation, your donation will be doubled; so your entire year’s worth of giving will be matched.

In addition, if you become a Legacy Partner today, we’re going to send you a gift card so that you, as a couple—or a couple you know—can attend an upcoming Weekend to Remember marriage getaway as our guests. It’s our “Thank you,” for becoming a regular financial supporter of this ministry.

The “being real” part is: “We need your help! The cost of syndicating this radio program is not completely covered by our Legacy Partners. That’s why we need more of you to join the team and be part of that group.” If you’re a long-time listener—if this program is having an impact in your marriage and in your family—would you consider either a one-time gift or becoming a Legacy Partner? You can do either of those when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com; or call us if you have any questions, or you’d like to sign up by phone/make a gift by 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 how to tame the tongue: your tongue/your kid’s tongue. I’m talking about their speech—about the things that you say that you wish you hadn’t said; the things that they say that you wish they wouldn’t say. How do we help correct bad speech?—sinful speech in ourselves and in our kids. Ginger Hubbard’s going to be here to help us with that. I hope you can tune in 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 tomorrow 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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