

# FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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## Taking Off the Mask

Guest: Catherine Parks  
From the series: Real (Day 1 of 2)  
Air date: May 6, 2019

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**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] I felt like, "Ohhh" it's going to be awkward either way, so I stayed. And, these were complete 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*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and 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, 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 our life and say, “Is everything good in your marriage? [Laughter] All we heard was how bad it was.

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

**Bob:** So, 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.” 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?”

**Catherine:** 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.” And I just think even in that psalm, he's doing that very thing. He's declaring God's praise. It's not about him. The whole point of him acknowledging that is to confess who he is and who God is. So, 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 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:** It's universal. I think social media reveals a lot of that, but it's in our nature. So, it's easy to point at that and say, “Social media is the problem.” But it's our hearts, we like to think we're better than we are and we like to project an image of ourselves that makes us feel 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. It is such a struggle for me.

**Ann:** How did that start then? What was your journey?

**Catherine:** Confession and repentance were always a part of my life. They were taught to me by my parents.

**Bob:** Wait, how did your parents teach you confession?

**Catherine:** 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:** This is something your parents made you do?

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

**Dave:** Do you know how unique that is?

**Catherine:** I realized it. At the time, I thought that everybody does this. But apparently not.

**Dave:** I mean, even the self-reflection . . . 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.

**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 that 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'd sinned today." The dad would ask that question. And he'd say, here is the key, "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. And it wasn't like everybody had to. 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 a grilled cheese sandwich in the VCR. You remember VCRs? [Laughter] So, in the slot she put, or it was a game console. Anyway, she messed it up. And she went it and said, "Daddy, you told me not to play with that and I put a grilled cheese sandwich in there." And 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 that she needed correction, but he said the first response was, "I am so excited" and he 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. [We] 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 eleven and eight 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. 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 come re-correct and come alongside of them and say that 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 comes in there and the security that I hope they have to know I'm going to be forgiven and there is freedom to come out with whatever it is. And seeing us do that, but 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 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 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 asking intentional questions drawing me out and saying, "What is going on in your life, how is your marriage, what is going on in this part of our life, 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-we're not even aware and 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 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, eleven and eight? 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 that they want to know their 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, and in my mind I think my kids think I'm weird and lame and they don't want to know me that well. But I think probably deep down they do. And 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 it! [Laughter]

**Ann:** She's good at this!

**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. So it was like the first time we ever sat around the dinner table and just one son was there. And it was really interesting that he wanted to know our story. And he started asking really probing questions.

**Ann:** Yeah, he would ask things like, "Did you and mom have sex before you were married?"

**Catherine:** Oh, man.

**Ann:** Right.

**Dave:** Yeah.

[Laughter]

**Ann:** Exactly.

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

**Bob:** Dad just shut down the whole real conversation right here.

**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. So, he heard the good, the bad, the ugly, and the victory. And 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 you kidding? We all pretend and cover and we aren't real. And it's such a breath of fresh air to say what would it look to be authentic and real in your relationships? And where would that take us?

**Ann:** But it's also hard to do that sometimes, especially in the church. I remember when our kids were little and I was in this bible study and 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." And I said all of that and there was absolute silence in the room. Nobody responded. And somebody said that we should pray for Ann. Which was sweet that they wanted to pray. [Laughter] But I was like, is nobody else struggling? Am I the only person? And I felt like-oh, I don't know if I should share that. And it's not intentional, it's just that 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. 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:** Yeah, 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 a bible study at another church and they did this. They would divide into groups of three or four women and 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 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. And so, 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 was also very concerned that people would see me leave and would judge me for it.

[Laughter] 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 people that I had known for years. 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. So you try to do it organically and everyone's like we don't know what to do with this.

**Ann:** Yeah, 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 here in this community.

**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 that a biblical community should be made up of relationships that are Christ-centered, grace-based, intentionally intrusive, and redemptive. And 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 it safe for me to be honest with you? Or am I going to get judged or are you going to think less of me? 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 each other's redemption processes.

**Dave:** You know, yeah. 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. And I hear so many times people in our church that say I tried a small group and it didn't work-I'm done. I'm always like, "no, try another." Cause I got in this group, I'll never forget, with some guys from other churches, whatever, and I hadn't started the

church yet, but anyway. Didn't know anybody. Seven or eight guys and 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 and I'd probably been there three or four times. And I'm thinking maybe these are guys I can do life with.

And I said to them, "Hey, anybody see the *Sports Illustrated* that just came out last week? Swimsuit issue; right?" And everybody in the room just looked at me like-did you just . . . "None of you guys saw that?" "Nope." 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. And I've told my wife and I just want to know if anybody here struggles 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.

**Ann:** They were minus the grace.

**Dave:** I literally thought, "I know some of these guys have struggled." And nobody here is willing to admit it and I felt judged. And I remember thinking that I need 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. And again, I'm not saying I found guys that look at *Sports Illustrated*. That's not the point. [Laughter] 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. And I would say to every guy out there and every woman out there, you've got to find a community and you've got to plug in there, that's real and that's also leading you all to Jesus. It will literally change your life.

**Bob:** 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. Authenticity, transparency-these are words I hear you using a lot when it comes to relationships.

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

**Michelle:** *FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife. And our goal is to develop godly families and marriages that change the world one home at a time. One of the ways we do that is through this radio broadcast, which is heard in 47 countries and in 4 languages.

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**Bob:** 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-we hope you'll be back as well.

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*.

**Michelle:** FamilyLife. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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