

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



The Marriage Money Pit

This is Episode number 55 of Stay Happily Married, "The Marriage Money Pit."

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here by telephone with Dr. Kim Kimberling. Dr. Kimberling has been a professional counselor for over 20 years. He's the president and the co-founder of Family Christian Counseling in Oklahoma City. Dr. Kimberling has been married to his wife Nancy for over 35 years and has two grown children.

Welcome to the show, Kim.

Kim Kimberling: Thank you. Good to be here.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm really glad you could join us again. I know you've done the show before and I'm thrilled to have you back. It was great last time. Today we're talking about money, this whole idea of a marriage money pit. I mean, finances, big issue for every couple. And since the last time you were with us the economy has just been kind of in the toilet, I guess. Crazy, bad stuff is going on. I would assume that that is making money more of an issue in marriage than ever before, am I right?

Kim Kimberling: I think it's making couples maybe focus on it now where maybe they could kind of let things slide in the past. But statistically, any time you read a list that says the main problems that couples have in marriage, finance is always in there. It's usually on the top three of almost every list. So it's a problem I think continually for couples.

But I think you're right; with the economy it's just kind of brought it to the forefront and maybe couples couldn't avoid it like maybe they did a little bit in the past.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. I guess you could sort of borrow your way out of worrying about it --

Kim Kimberling: Right.

Lee Rosen: -- when your credit cards and 401(k) loans and all that. But now I guess we're hitting the bottom so people have really got to deal with it.

Kim Kimberling: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: I know you see couples that have been married for a long time and are dealing with issues, but one of the things that I know that you specialize in is seeing young couples -- people that are about to get married. I guess you call it premarital counseling.

Kim Kimberling: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Are those young folks -- do they even think about how they're going to deal with their money?

Kim Kimberling: You know, most of them probably don't. And that's something that we really focus in the course that I teach. We spend a full session on that, which isn't a lot, but it's probably a lot more than most of them would get otherwise; and just getting them to focus on how important that is. But, yeah, it takes a lot to get them to focus on it.

One thing I really encourage them to do is to be honest with each other where they are financially. I've had couples that didn't do that and they get in the marriage and then discover one of the other of them has debt that wasn't disclosed before. So you get trust issues from the very beginning in the relationship and I try to help couples see -- get it out on the table beforehand.

If you're honest with each other there, you can deal with it. But if you don't, later on it can be devastating to a marriage.

Lee Rosen: Wow. So you have seen people that have been dating, they get engaged, they go through all the wedding plan -- whatever they're going to do -- and they've been in and out of each other's homes and everything and they still don't realize the other one has got like a big credit card debt or something?

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Kim Kimberling: Absolutely. And you know, Lee, that's not just one or two isolated cases. I see that way too often.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Yeah, I'm not that clever. I don't think I could keep a secret from my wife. I'd leave the bill on the counter or something.

Kim Kimberling: I think some of it -- you know, these kids that I talk to -- and I call them kids. They're obviously young adults that are certainly getting ready for the second most important decision in their life. But they get out of high school or college and they have in the past got flooded with these credit cards and the opportunities of people extending them credit. And a lot of them just take advantage of all of that and all of a sudden find themselves way in over their head in a pretty short period of time.

Lee Rosen: Well, you know, and as you say that I can think of situations where I've worked with people that have been hiding debt even after years of marriage. They're getting the credit cards and not revealing that. So I guess it's more common than I might have thought at first glance.

Kim Kimberling: Well, I think you reminded me of a couple, a really nice, sweet lady. They had been married like 25 years. Her husband was a pastor in kind of a medium-sized church in a medium-sized community. And one of the things she enjoyed doing was taking the ladies in the church out to eat and buying them little gifts. And she had a little business on the side so I guess her husband never really thought about where she was getting that money. So when she came in to me, she had \$25,000 in credit card debt that her husband didn't know about.

Lee Rosen: Right. Wow. Amazing.

Kim Kimberling: So those kind of things do happen.

Lee Rosen: Well, let me ask you this. Now, are you an advocate of couples -- you know, some couples will keep their money totally separate. And then other couples will integrate everything. Do you take a position on what is the best way to go with that?

Kim Kimberling: I do. I really encourage couples to put their money together. And I know it's a trust issue. I know some couples that maybe had a first marriage that someone abused the money situation. Maybe they've been single and on their own for a long time and I know that's a little more difficult. But what I tell couples, it's got to be a "we" thing. And if you don't trust this person enough to put your money together, you probably shouldn't be marrying that person.

Lee Rosen: Well, that's a good point. Right. If you don't trust them with the money, what do you trust them with?

Kim Kimberling: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. So when you see folks doing that -- and I guess for the people that it's easy for them to do, they just do it. They don't have to think about it very hard because it just come naturally for them. But when you're talking to folks that are struggling with how to integrate their finances, how do they approach that?

Kim Kimberling: Well, I think one is kind of the frame of mind that I try to help them get. It's got to be a "we" thing. If you're going to be together in every other area of your marriage, it just makes sense to it with your finances too. And I think in the Christian mind, if you look at that perspective that God really is the owner of everything and we're just the managers of it, that sometimes really helps the couple hone in on that point and at least they'll give it a try. And I think that once they do it for a while and do it in the right way, they would never change back.

Lee Rosen: Right. It just works for them.

Kim Kimberling: It works. And it becomes something that they do together and they can feel good about together.

Lee Rosen: Right. I think it's interesting. It's one of those things that until you have kids, if you don't integrate the money there is not all that much you're required to work on together. I mean, you're both living your work lives and you're dealing with family and friends and stuff, but you don't have to make a lot of compromises until you bring the money together.

Kim Kimberling: Absolutely. And so I think that to do that -- right. You've kind of got that piece in place. And then I think what happens if a couple does - - say one person loses their job, or they get into financial difficulty, or just the economy like we're going through now, they've already started working on this together and so they go through that difficult situation or those hard times together, where a lot of times situations like that can devastate a marriage and pull a couple apart.

Lee Rosen: Okay. I want to shift gears just a little bit, but let me ask you this. Do you feel like you see more couples in your counseling work that have planned a budget or folks that have not planned a budget? I'm wondering if failing to put together a budget causes you to end up needing more counseling.

Kim Kimberling: I think very, very few couples seem to have a budget.

Lee Rosen: At least the ones you're seeing, huh?

Kim Kimberling: The ones that I see, yes. And I think -- and of course Dave Ramsey does such a great job and has built a great business ministry on that whole deal and of course one of the things he stresses is helping people get onto a budget.

And one of the things we do in our class is give couples a budget and show them how to use it and really encourage them to do that. I think sometimes the danger with the budget is that you do it and then you don't follow it, because that really brings frustration. And then sometimes I've seen couples that do a budget and they kind of use it as a weapon or a -- kind of hold it over each other's head instead of using it as a tool that can really help them accomplish their goals and see where they are.

Lee Rosen: So you've got to do it, but you've got to do it right. It doesn't work if you're using it in the wrong way.

Kim Kimberling: Right. Exactly. And I think when they do that they see that it really gives them so much information. It gives them a lot of freedom. I think maybe sometimes people feel like a budget is going to tie them down. Maybe if people are in the workforce and their company's budget they always see, oh, my gosh; they're always cutting here and that they're always limiting us. But it doesn't have to be that way in a marriage situation. It can be a really useful tool in a marriage situation.

Lee Rosen: Well, do you advise people to even go so far as to budget in the fun stuff, the recreational expenses, leisure expenses, that kind of thing?

Kim Kimberling: I think they have to do that. You know, if you have a budget so tight you can't even go get a hamburger or go to a \$1 movie, you've really tightened yourself too much. And so I encourage couples -- and that may be when they're just starting on it maybe once a week they can go get a cheap hamburger and go to a \$1 movie. And as their income increases, they can allow more money. Maybe they can go have a nicer dinner. But somewhere they've got built in that they can go out and have some recreation at least once a week.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, and it just -- I mean, I'm listening to you and it makes sense to me. And if you don't use this as an exercise, if you can't use the money as an exercise to sort of figure out how to work together,

gosh, when kids come you're on overload. If you haven't already put those skills into place of working together as a team, I think it just -- that's when you're really in trouble.

Kim Kimberling: That's so true. Because couples tend to kind of drift apart a little bit once a child comes into life. And so, you're right, if these things aren't in place they're probably going to have to be put into place at least in those early stages of having kids.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. You can put that budget discussion on hold for a while but that kid has got to be dealt with right now.

Kim Kimberling: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: Yeah, I hear you. Let me ask you this. Now, debt; that is a big problem, especially now where people are just in -- have a got a lot of debt piled up, the credit card debt we keep hearing so much about and all of that. Is that a problem in a lot of the marriages you're working with?

Kim Kimberling: I would say -- I'm not sure percentage-wise but I think it's an issue with a number of couples. And again, it's interesting sometimes when I work with a couple that has debt and I'll ask them how much debt do they have? A lot of times they really don't know because they almost are afraid to sit down and just put it on paper. And so I tell them the first step is, "Let's see how much you've got."

And then I like the concept of using the debt snowball, where you list all your debts and you take your smallest one and begin to pay that off and apply that money to your next one and have a plan where you're paying it off. So really encouraging couples to get out of debt. It gives you so much freedom when you've gotten out of debt.

Lee Rosen: Right. Oh, yeah. Just the pressure I see from people with that kind of debt, they need -- that freedom is exactly what they're shooting for. So what do you do if you're paying off these debts and you're making progress? Do you see couples that -- are they celebrating that? Are they acknowledging it? Or are they just kind of -- they just move on to the next debt? There needs to be some happiness built into this, right?

Kim Kimberling: Yeah. One of the things -- and I do that with couples. Almost anything, any task that they attack as a couple, whether it's improving their communication or conflict resolution or debt or any of those kind of things -- making a budget -- to celebrate their success. Just really reward themselves, whatever that is for them.

Maybe it's going to get an ice cream cone. Maybe it's going out to dinner. Whatever it is, just celebrate that together and that just adds a really important piece to that puzzle.

Lee Rosen: Do you find -- we're kind of hitting the gamut here. I mean, we're talking about working together on the finances, putting your money together. We're talking about the family budget and we're talking about paying down debt. I mean, it sounds like those are probably the core ideas. You've got to have a budget. You've got to work together. You've got to pay down the debt.

Do you find -- are husbands more excited about working on this or wives more excited? Do you notice any sort of gender distinctions about who really wants to take the lead on this kind of project?

Kim Kimberling: That's kind of an interesting question. My first instinct is to say that it seems like the women get a little more excited about it. And I think because if you -- we talk about this premarital counseling, financial security is very important to a woman. I tell couples that in most situations -- most women will work in our society today, but most women want to know that if they didn't work that their husband would be able to provide for them, even if they had a lower standard of living. So I think the idea of lowering the debt and making a budget is very appealing to a woman because it relates to her in the way of security.

And then hopefully the husband, just by being the leader in the home, says, "This is what we need to do." And he's the one who helps initiate and helps follow through with that.

Lee Rosen: Well, we need a big screen TV.

Kim Kimberling: Don't we all?

Lee Rosen: I mean, budgeting may need to wait. We've got to have the 50-inch flat panel. You know, this is the real world, man.

Kim Kimberling: It's so hard to do. And it's so easy to buy those things because you just see over and over. I mean, you can go into one of the nice stores and you can buy it and you don't have to pay anything for 18 months. Well, that just sounds really good to a lot of people but that 18 months comes pretty quickly and a lot of times the interest rate that's tacked onto that can be devastating.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Kim Kimberling: So, delayed gratification. One thing that I use myself, and I teach couples, is what I call an impulse list. And Nancy and I count in our budget -- have an amount that both of us can spend without really consulting the other, just kind of a freedom part in that.

But once we go over that amount, like if I go into one of my favorite places -- like an appliance store or -- an electronic store is my weakness -- and I find something that's over that, I'll write that item down and I'll write about how much it was and I'll put the date. And my deal on my impulse list, I've got to wait three weeks before I go back and buy it. And during that time I research a little bit, make sure that's the best price. But Lee, 90 percent of the time I don't ever go back and buy that thing. It's just putting it off a little bit.

Lee Rosen: Three weeks later you're over it.

Kim Kimberling: We're very impulsive. Yes.

Lee Rosen: Right. Three weeks later I had already bought it. I bought it three weeks ago and three weeks into it I'm tired of it. Yeah, that's my system.

Kim Kimberling: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: Right. And then I'm stuck with it forever.

Kim Kimberling: Yes. And the payment.

Lee Rosen: Exactly. No, that's a great idea. I love the impulse list. Now, you mentioned a couple of times premarital counseling. And I know that one of the things that you do is that you offer a marriage prep course. And fill us in. Most of the listeners here I think are married, but we all know people that are getting married. What are you doing, exactly?

Kim Kimberling: Well, our basic class is a nine-week class and we meet for about an hour and 15 minutes to an hour and a half a week and we go over basic topics. We hit finance. We hit communication. We hit conflict resolution. We hit the sexual relationship, the spiritual relationship, just almost everything that we feel is a really important component in marriage.

So during that we also have a couple of assessments that we use. One of them is a tool that really helps in communication and understanding the personality type of the person you're marrying. And because of their personality type there's a certain way how best to communicate with them.

And then we use another assessment that goes over about nine different areas of the marriage and it helps the couple see if that's a strength area for them or an area they need to work on. And that assessment ties in very closely to what we teach in our class. So if they show communication is an area to work on, they can go back to what we taught them in communication, use those tools to improve that communication.

So that's been a class that I've taught about 11 years and we've had hundreds of couples go through. And our divorce rate is less than 10 percent from the couples that have taken the class and married. So something has worked in there. And I think a lot of it is just helping couples take time out. They spend a lot of time preparing for the wedding and we just say let's take a little bit of that time and prepare for your marriage.

Lee Rosen: Wow. That is a really impressive statistic, less than 10 percent ending up divorce, given that we know the national numbers are more like 50 percent.

Kim Kimberling: They are.

Lee Rosen: So that is really amazing.

Kim Kimberling: One other thing in that area we have about 12 percent of the couples that decide not to marry after taking the class. And that helps our divorce rate because they're making the decision on this side of the altar instead of the other side.

Lee Rosen: Well, and boy, what trouble you save yourself if you do realize this is just not a good decision. That's terrific.

Kim Kimberling: Right. Exactly. And then we have that available to -- we have it in a DVD set and we -- last year we have started online classes. So couples can register online and they can take the class through the Internet. So we've tried to make it available because I can't go everywhere and teach it live so we've tried to have a number of different ways that couples can take the class.

Lee Rosen: And the website where all of that is, is prepformarriage.com, is that right?

Kim Kimberling: That is it. Yes.

Lee Rosen: Okay. I'll put a link to that in the show notes. Now, something else you mentioned -- and I just want to go back to it for a quick second

-- is you mentioned Dave Ramsey. And probably most of our listeners have run across Dave Ramsey, but he is a great resource. Give folks a sense of what he's all about.

Kim Kimberling: Well, Dave is -- his big thing, of course, is his Financial Peace University course and that seems to be taught in most major cities. I see it here in Oklahoma City; he taught a number of times at different churches and different places. But Dave really helps people understand how to take care of their money, how to get out of debt, and really it's a lifestyle I think is what Dave teaches, of being smart with your money.

And Dave speaks from experience because he's the guy that went bankrupt. And since that time he re-assessed things and came up with some things that worked for him and those are the things he teaches now. And he's been very, very successful at that. And what I appreciate about Dave, he has so much wisdom in his teaching.

Lee Rosen: Well, and obviously those of you that are listening to us, you know all about podcasts. And Dave Ramsey's show is a radio show that I think is probably three hours a day or something, one of these where folks call in. But they put out a free podcast of that that you can download from iTunes, which, I have never been to one of his courses or anything but I have found -- he's a very interesting. He not only gives good advice but he does it in a very interesting and entertaining way.

Kim Kimberling: Yes, he does. He makes it fun. I think everything he does -- and we need some of that when we're talking about something as serious as finances. He has a very good sense of humor; that helps a lot.

Lee Rosen: Yep. Absolutely. So Kim, I appreciate you being with us. Thank you so much for joining us. A lot of good advice.

Kim Kimberling: Thank you. Good to be here.

Lee Rosen: Let me mention to you prepformarriage.com, the website that Kim has. I would definitely check it out. You can pick up a copy of his latest book, *Living the Marriage of a Lifetime*. You can subscribe to a monthly interactive online class. You can check out the blog. A lot of good stuff there.

I will also put a link in the show notes to Dave Ramsey's website in case you're curious about that as well.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will listen in again next week. I am really appreciative of all your questions,

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comments, e-mails, all the things that you're sending, and would love to hear more from you. You can call our comment line at (919) 256-3083. You can also keep sending e-mails at comments@stayhappilymarried.com. I really appreciate the ideas for upcoming shows and your feedback about the shows we've done. Anything you'd like to say, we would love to hear it.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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