



## Why Not to Give Up

*This is Stay Happily Married #112, "Why Not to Give Up."*

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm really excited to be on the telephone again, for the second time, with John Wilder.

John is a marriage coach from New Castle, Indiana. He's got 30 years of experience with pastoral counseling and he's been on the show before, did a great job back then and we got a lot of terrific feedback about how that show went so we wanted to have him back. We've invited him back today to talk about this whole question of why not to give up. I think a lot of folks give up awfully easily.

John, welcome back to the show.

John Wilder: Thanks. I just wanted to give you props. I got contacted by a couple people -- a guy in Germany who either listens to the show or read the transcript of your show.

I got contacted by a couple here in my hometown, a young lady been going to marriage counseling by herself for six months and had given up in disgust and read the transcript of our last show together and called me up. I met with her and her husband, did a four-hour session like I had previously talked about, was able to put the marriage back together.

They were separated. They were legally separated and just -- it was her last ditch stand to try to make the marriage work. We resolved the problems and put them back together.

And the guy paid me the highest compliment. He said, "You know, I was all prepared to hear a lot of psycho-babble and a lot of BS." He said, "I was impressed with the fact that you were just a straight-shooter, told us what we were doing right, what we were doing wrong and how to fix it." And he said, "Why don't more marriage counselors do that?"

And I said, "Precisely."

Lee Rosen: That's a good question, isn't it? Well, that is terrific that you were there for those folks and you were able to put it back together. That is fantastic.

Let me ask you this. When people come to you and they've obviously -- they're not coming if they don't have some serious issues. Nobody goes to a marriage counselor -- at least, I don't think many people go -- just because they're dabbling. I mean, they've got a big problem.

How often is it that when they get to you separation is already on the table, that that's already an option that they're considering?

John Wilder: Usually it's fairly common. I call it separation living in the same household. They're either sleeping in separate bedrooms, co-existing. The marriage has essentially ceased but they're co-existing in the same household. If they're not separated living in different households, quite often they're separated living in the same house.

Lee Rosen: Do they tend to be -- like you're living separate in the same house. Are they speaking and arguing or are they just ignoring one another? Or is it some of both?

John Wilder: Well, it's some of both. But a lot of what I get is that they just maintain an uneasy truce, minimal conversation, only necessary conversation. And the mood is pretty toxic, but especially for the kids. So it's incumbent that I get to the bottom of the problems as quickly as possible.

You know, the Bible commands, "Let not the sun go down on your anger." And that's one of the big problems with marriage counseling is they string it out for months instead of a few days or a couple weeks. So that's why I do four-hour sessions as opposed to one-hour sessions.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. That is really an unusual approach. I think you're the only guy that I've heard of -- I guess there are some folks that do these weekend kind of retreats, but in a regular practice your situation is pretty unusual, don't you think?

John Wilder: Well, it is. And I'm lobbying to change insurance regulations. See, part of the problem is the insurance companies control that and they tell the counselor they can only -- they will only reimburse for one hour once a week. And so they just fall into that plan because they want to get paid, but that's not what's best for the clients.

And so I tell people that the insurance is not going to pay for coaching; you're going to have to pay for it out-of-pocket. But it's generally cheaper than a divorce.

And this last couple I did pro bono; I didn't charge them a dime. They didn't have the money and I said, "Look, you've got three kids. They're going to be devastated if you get divorced. I'll do it for free if you guys will agree to meet with me and give it your best shot."

Lee Rosen: Well, it does seem like even if you're there for counseling by yourself, once you kind of get warmed up, the time is up. And I can only imagine --

John Wilder: Exactly.

Lee Rosen: -- when you've got two people there with a lot of conflict, I mean, an hour goes by in the blink of an eye.

John Wilder: Well, and that's it. Four hours gives you a block of time -- it's kind of the maximum you can expect a couple to sit there and hash out problems together. But it also gives them the time that they don't feel rushed, that they can deal with the problems.

And the other thing people are looking for is they're looking for a mediator who will take charge, who will tell them what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong and how to fix it. The problem with traditional marriage counseling is it's non-directive. You get a lot of "well, how does that make you feel?"

It's sort of kind of like the reporting shoving a microphone in somebody's face who's just lost a loved one and asking them how they feel. It's stupid. It's nonproductive. It doesn't resolve any problems. It doesn't help. It's just completely a waste of time.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Well, you have a different approach but it sounds like it works for a whole lot of people.

Let me ask you this. When we're talking about these folks living in the house and they may be doing the roommate thing, they're just not really -- they're separated in the house, as you described it. Is that usually, in your experience, that one of them wants it that way and the other one really wants to get back to things being back to normal, or do they both kind of -- are they both fine with this married but separated in the house?

John Wilder: Well, neither one of them are fine with it. Basically, they arrive at this because they've inflicted so much pain on each other they just want the pain to stop. And typically they see -- when they get to the place where they're separated living in the same household, they see it as just a stepping stone to divorce and they see divorce as a way to make the pain stop and go away. Unfortunately, that's not the case. The pain only gets worse when the divorce happens.

And I tell them, "Really neither one of you really want to get divorced; you just want the pain to stop. And you're giving up because you have not been able to resolve it amongst yourselves," because people get locked into battle.

Nobody wants to lose a fight. Nobody wants to lose a battle. And people get locked into battling each other back and forth, afraid to say uncle, afraid to lose the fight because a loser's always humiliated. You feel humiliated; you feel like a loser. And so instead of resolving the problem, they're trying to protect their turf. And so you need to just stop that and admit where you've done something wrong, fix it, change it, and negotiate a settlement.

That's basically what I do with couples is negotiate settlements with them. Each one of the individuals has something that they want that they're not getting. And so I point out to the other partner, if you don't satisfy the needs of that person, you're not holding up your end of the marriage and marriage of course has gotten dysfunctional.

Lee Rosen: Sure. Makes sense. Now, these same people -- roll back the clock -- they were in the church or at the -- wherever they got married and they were dressed in their best clothes and they were holding flowers and everybody was there and they were happy. How do they get from that to sitting in your office where they're barely speaking to each other?

John Wilder: That's a brilliant question. The problem is, is the churches have fallen down. They don't teach couples how to resolve conflict. And the Bible is full of examples of great psychology in peacefully resolving conflict.

See, what comes natural, due to our sinful nature, is fighting and battling. That's what comes naturally. It doesn't come naturally to peacefully resolve problems. And that's a learned skill; you have to teach that skill.

And that's the other problem with traditional marriage counseling is they don't teach conflict resolution. I mean, how in the world are you going to take a couple battling each other and put the marriage back together if you don't teach them how to resolve their conflicts? The marriage counseling is supposed to be an interim stop-gap measure. Well, if you don't teach them how to resolve the conflicts, they go back to the old patterns and end up getting divorced.

It's the old saying of "feed a man a fish, you feed him for a day; you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." Well, the churches and traditional marriage counselors are not teaching couples how to peacefully resolve conflict. That's just criminal in my view.

Lee Rosen: Well, I do think there is a lack of conflict resolution skills from -- it's not just churches. I mean, you hear it at every level from every institution. That is just not a skill that is being taught.

What do you see people doing in their marriages when they have conflict? Without this education, how do they try to resolve it? Or do they just give up and live in separate bedrooms? I mean, they must be trying something before they get to that point.

John Wilder: Well, what happens is they lock into a point of difference that they each feel strongly about. And instead of peacefully resolving the conflict, they use verbal clubs to beat each other, to try to win by using effective clubs. And clubs differ for different people, but the clue is it's trying to beat the other one into submission.

And so what happens is people will get tired of fighting and make up without truly resolving the problem. And then go on a little while and then they lock into another conflict and they battle each other. And they're just worn down and beaten down and hurt because their partner used a club to beat them with. Well, you don't feel loved when somebody's beating on you.

Lee Rosen: No, that is hard to feel that way. Can't argue with that. And I think you're right. I mean, everything you're saying resonates; it rings true. It sounds to me like -- these are the stories that I'm hearing in my practice, where people have just been beating down. They get to the point where there's nothing left and they are giving up.

You say, "Don't give up." And the title of this show is "Why Not to Give up." Well, why not? You've been beaten down. You're worn out. You're barely talking. You're living in separate bedrooms. Why not give up?

John Wilder: Well, the first thing and the main thing and the reason that I stay in the practice is because children are devastated as a result of divorce. You get married to raise a family, to have children.

A woman by the name of Judith Wallerstein did a long-term study that -- a landmark study on the effects of children and divorce and how they're damaged. And she found that children even into adulthood are permanently damaged as a result of divorce.

And there's another ministry that I'd like to give a shout-out to. It's the National Center for Father. Dr. Ken Canfield is the founder and president and he teaches fathering principles. But his research shows that kids in a one-parent family, girls are much more likely to become sexually active much earlier, become pregnant out of wedlock. Both sons and daughters are likely to abuse alcohol or drugs. It just goes on and on.

The other problem is you impoverish a family. You take a family that's barely getting by making ends meet and you split them up into two households. Now you have everything multiplied times two. And so as a result, the mother's impoverished; the father's impoverished. He goes on to marry another woman; perhaps the woman marries another man.

Well, now you're adding step-children in the household. Step-children do not respond -- the Bible talks about natural affection. Well, step-children don't have natural affection for a non-parent parent. They want their parents to get back together and they do everything in their power to split up the new couple, and generally do.

The divorce rates on subsequent marriages are much higher than original marriages. And so that thing of you want the pain to stop and you want to be happy again and you think, "Well, I'll get married again," it only compounds the problems. It doesn't resolve it.

And now you have two sets of children who are devastated, and then you have the third or second divorce and they're devastated all over again because they wanted the divorce, but once they got it they realized that they don't have any continuity in their lives. They don't have any bedrock things that they can count on. Things are in a constant state of flux. Kids need security and the security is stripped away from them.

And so I tell couples, unless there is adultery or alcohol and abuse or beating, you need to stay together. You need to resolve your problems and stay together because it's tough on the kids.

I did a Bible study in a prison last year -- or a jail -- and I asked the guys there -- there was about 30 guys. "Raise your hand if you grew up in a single-family household." All but one raised their hand. And the one who didn't raise his hand, he was mentally defective; he was in there for killing a guy. But all the rest of the guys raised their hands that grew up in a single-family household.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Okay. And I think those are great reasons. I mean, to distill it all down, your position is figure out a way to stay together because there's a lot of horrible fallout for kids. What if you don't have kids? Why should you stay together? Or should you?

John Wilder: Well, even if you don't have kids, people need a significant other in your life. You need somebody to watch your back. You need somebody there when you're sick who can sign for you, who is there for you.

Medical studies show that people get better 40 percent faster and can endure 30 percent more pain if they can hold a hand of a loved one. When you're single, you don't have that significant other in your life, there's a medical reason -- many medical reasons that you should have, because you just do better when you're married and have a significant other watching your back.

Lee Rosen: Right. Makes sense. Everything I have read and heard is 100 percent in agreement with what you've just said.

So they get into your practice and you're going to do these four-hour sessions. You're going to make it work and you're foundation is you're trying to help them with conflict resolution skills. And you're basically trying to help them get back on track and reach agreement. Where do you start with that? How do you teach these people that are so far apart to resolve conflict?



John Wilder: Well, the basic thing I do is listen to each side. People want to feel respected. And in order to feel respected, somebody has to be willing to listen to their point of view, their complaints, what they view as wrong, what they view the other person as doing wrong, hear them out and acknowledge that, and then listen to the other side. And then we have a basis from which to work.

Until I can understand the family dynamics and what's wrong and what caused the breakdown, it's stupid to try to move forward with trying to fix it until I understand the problem.

Lee Rosen: Right. It absolutely makes sense. We've covered a lot of ground today and I've gotten a feel for your approach to all of this. And I've gotten a feel for your thoughts on it. Anything else we need to throw out there or add to the mix?

John Wilder: Well, again, I would like to say that people -- if you're having conflict, traditional marriage counselors have a 75 percent failure rate. And it's because the way they do it -- one hour once a week, it just doesn't work. It doesn't work in any other paradigm.

If you have strep throat, you don't want to hear a doctor say, "Listen. I'm going to give you a little bit of antibiotic today and you come back next week and I'll give you a little more. In 24 to 28 weeks, we ought to have that strep throat all cleared up." It just doesn't work in any other paradigm and yet they think it's going to work in marriage counseling and that's the place where you really need the multi-hour session.

So the other thing is that marriage coaches, you don't have to go to their office. You can do it by phone or by IM. And there are marriages coaches who are in it because they care about people and are willing to do it pro bono, free of charge if necessary, or on a reduced rate because they're in it because they're trying to protect the kids and turn this country around.

So I would invite anybody, if you're thinking about getting divorced, do a little research. Find some marriage coaches. All you have to do is punch it into your search engine -- "marriage coaches" instead of "marriage counselors" -- and research it for yourself. It just makes so much more sense.

Lee Rosen: Well, John Wilder, New Castle, Indiana marriage coach. Thank you so much for being with us today. I appreciate your perspective on things. Thank you.

John Wilder: Well, I hope we can do it again.



Lee Rosen: It would be great to get John on with someone -- experienced marriage counselor who does this in the one-hour increments in the traditional way. They would have quite a debate, I'll bet, because there would be a lot of conflicting opinions there. Fantastic.

Special thank you to John Wilder for being with us today. You can get in touch with John and you can find out more about his coaching services by shooting him an e-mail. He's [MarriageCoach1@yahoo.com](mailto:MarriageCoach1@yahoo.com).

Thank you so much for listening today. I appreciate you joining us. We will be back next week, just like every week. In the meantime, if you have feedback, comments, suggestions, ideas, we get some great feedback from folks; we love to hear it. Two ways to get up with us. You can e-mail us at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com). you can also call our comment line at (919) 256-3083.

Until next time, stay happily married.

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