

Announcer: This is episode number 167 for Stay Happily Married: Discovering Your Amazing Marriage.

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Stephanie: Ever felt like ending your marriage after a bad argument or affair? There could be a better solution. Marriage is one of the most difficult situations you'll ever have to live through, from arguments and lifestyle changes to children and even infidelity. There never seems to be a rule on how exactly you should handle each of these different events that life throws at you.

How about a couple that's been through and seen it all. What if this couple, who had been through everything, took the time to write a go-to book for couples on how to navigate the rough waters of marriage? Jason and Debbie Coleman have been married for 22 years. They've been through it all and seen everything. They've dealt with infidelity, lifestyle changes, children and anything else that life could throw at them.

Instead of giving up and walking out, they decided to work through their issues and record their solutions into a book called "Discovering Your Amazing Marriage." I'm Stephanie Lockwood and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm joined by Jason Coleman. I'm so glad you could join us.

Jason: Thank you, Stephanie. It's so good to be here.

Stephanie: Great. You have this book, you have this website, and obviously there was a need for it, which is why you did it, so of the couples that you're seeing today what are some of the biggest issues that you're seeing out there?

Jason: Stephanie, I believe that the majority of couples out there struggle most really with poor communication and unmet expectations. And if you really think about unmet expectations, they're the result of poor communication. We have expectations of one another that can really cover a wide range of topics or aspects of life, and when not communicated as they should be, couples are typically let down. When communication between partners is poor, it really affects everything in life.

Other than communication, finance is another major issue, especially in the economic environment we're living in today, and once again that comes down to clarifying expectations.

Stephanie: Unmet expectations. What are some of the unmet expectations that you're seeing that couples aren't communicating to one another?

Jason: Goodness, it could be little, small things from who's going to pick up our son, Hunter, from a simple game after school, or I might have an expectation that Debbie is going to do that and she's expects me to do it. Miscommunicate and the poor guy is standing on the side of the road 20 to 30 minutes waiting for somebody. That's happened to us before.

Other expectations, when it comes to finances. How are we going to spend our money? What are we going to buy? We have a birthday coming up for a child. She might want to do something big and elaborate. I might want to do something a little bit small and thoughtful, but again in today's economic environment maybe we should save money.

In almost every aspect of life, you have certain expectations of one another. In fact, we recently had something with something as simple as a tube of toothpaste. For the first time in 22 years, and I'm not kidding you, she has her own tube of toothpaste. Because I put the lid on, she wouldn't and vice versa.

She said the other day, I want my own tube and it's a stupid little thing that costs \$2.50, but we finally figured that out. They could be huge issues; they could be little silly issues like that. We have to communicate what you expect of one another or you're always going to be disappointed.

Stephanie: Now, to these couples who are kind of on two separate levels of communication, it seems like this is situations that you've been through, you've figured them out, but what would you recommend to couples who do have trouble communicating, whether it just they're quiet or they're very passive aggressive. What's the best way you find to kind of get it out in the open?

Jason: Well, you say we've got it all figured out. I would certainly not say we have it all figured out, but we made mistakes in our relationship. And as far as us early on when we had that trouble communicating, we went to a counselor and that was a major problem for us, and it was especially for me because I wouldn't listen.

I would look at her when she talked, I would kind of hear what she was saying, but I would be off multitasking, I'd be doing my own thing and really wasn't focusing in on her. So what our counselor told us to do and this was an assignment every day, we were suppose to sit down and talk. I was to allow Debbie the freedom to talk about any subject for as long as she wanted.

The key was I could not interrupt. I could not get defensive. In fact, not talk at all until she was done. I could take notes, but I had to listen. That was her time and it wasn't until I truly began listening to her and giving her my undivided attention, then I realized that I wasn't validating her feelings and we were miles apart when it comes to expectations.

The answer here really is to practice the art of listening. Listen to each other because this does go both ways and really try to understand what your partner is saying or feeling about something. I just recently came across a study, I forget who did this, but they said that within 17 seconds of listening to somebody you've already either formulated your opinion or your response and most people try to cut off the other person with that opinion or response, and we don't listen for the whole conversation or the whole sentence and you can totally miss out.

Stephanie: That's very true when you think of all those conversations you have with people either you have a relationship with or just friends out to dinner. Usually we're very narcissistic and so as soon as we hear something we can relate to or we have something to comment on, we're usually the first to go ahead and do that before we hear the whole story or actually listen to what's going on in this situation. Very interesting.

There are a lot of different steps that couples go through, from the very beginning, from dating all the way to the end of it. One of the first things that a couple does after they've been serious is moving in together. It's one very big step that a couple faces. What advice do you have for couples to overcome the difficulties and even the shock that comes with living together, like toothpaste situations?

Jason: That is true. There are so many things that you really don't think about, like the little toothpaste thing. There are little nuances that you don't recognize when you date one another that when you start living together it could be a huge and total shock. I'd say your attitude plays a big role in overcoming these differences. I would suggest that couples don't try and force your habits or your opinion on your spouse and more importantly choose your battles.

There's one thing that Debbie does that absolutely drives me crazy and it has for years. She chews ice and she chews it constantly. In the car, on the computer, even in bed while she's laying there reading before we go to sleep or whatever she's munching on this ice and it's annoying. It's something that I deal with and I just ignore because A, she won't stop and B, is it really that important? It annoys me, but I know that I have a lot of annoying habits that she puts up with.

It's all just part of the compromise. Our relationship and our desire to be together is much bigger than the ice chewing or other little annoyances. Have a good attitude, have an open mind and don't try to change the other person is how I would answer that question.

Stephanie: That is very interesting that you say that, not to change the other person. I know there's a certain limit for what people can put up with or tolerate, especially living together with certain things, but I think we have a lot of people who go into the situation where there's something, maybe about their spouse they're not particularly fond of, but they're kind of convinced in their head that maybe once they're in a relationship or once they've grown to love the other person enough

that these habits would change for the other person. Have you seen things like this? Is it actually possible to change habits like this or have habits changed or is it really true that you can't change someone?

Jason: I think sometimes Stephanie, things can be changed, but I kind of relate it to hiring. If you've ever hired an employee, if they don't smile and they're not enthusiastic in the interview, what makes you think they're going to be enthusiastic and smile when they're on the job? How you see them in an interview is how they're going to be. How you see your mate when you're dating that's pretty much how they're going to be.

I do think people change. We change with age. We change with circumstances. Kids can have a huge impact on our habits and our daily routines, and I imagine we'll probably talk about kids shortly. I think we can change, but again it goes back to how important is it really? If there's things that are just annoying on the surface, if we try to make those the big hill that we're going to die on, we're going to be constantly battling with one another. I don't know if that really answered your question, but sometimes you can change, but some things you just have to let go. I'll go back to my first answer. Choose your battles, it's not that important.

Stephanie: Good. You know, moving in one big step when people move in together, there's the combination of finances, which is always interesting. Like when you're dating someone or if you're newly married, obviously you're unsure or unaware of certain habits that maybe your spouse had before you moved in with them. You never knew that they snored or left the cap off the toothpaste, but finances is where it can get very difficult. They say money can be the root of all evil and especially in a relationship it can be toxic. How important is it for both partners to have similar goals or plans for their finances?

Jason: It's critical. It is absolutely critical. We're seeing this right now with our oldest daughter who is 20 and she's dating. One of them is a spender and one is a saver, and that's typical in most relationships. If you're both one or the other, it could vary in degrees. For example, if I'm a saver and Debbie is a saver, my idea of saving might be totally different from Debbie.

Most things it comes down to is just communicating your thoughts, your ideas, your goals. I would say how important is it? It's critical that you're on the same page and you're thinking on the same page, and you're thinking on the same level when it comes to money because that could impact a lot of different things.

Stephanie: Right. When couples are a spender and a saver, how do you recommend going about facing that? That can be a very touchy topic of money for a lot of people. How would you recommend them sitting down to communicate about these topics?

Jason: When we talk to couples, we suggest that they individually write out a budget, which includes all household income as well as all debts or liabilities, and it has to be a balanced budget. Then they exchange the budgets and they view them and they discuss them. Hopefully, you'll be able to compromise much quicker and more efficiently than say, are you the House and Senate because these guys never agree on something.

In our household, we have to. Compromise has to be reached. We don't have a government to fall back on. We can't borrow continually, so we have to agree on it. I'd say there are two quick suggestions I would give on money. First is this, if you have dual incomes, you have to combine them into a family bank account and take the sum of both incomes as your household income.

Stephanie: That's right.

Jason: Couples that have my money and your money, they typically fight more about money than those that have our money. In our relationship, in our marriage, Debbie was a stay-at-home mom for 17-18 years or so and so she virtually made no money. Every once in a while we'd be doing something and she'd say, when it came to a financial decision, well, you make the money. I don't care. No dear, it's our money.

Now that she is working still everything is combined. It can't be a his and hers. I hear people at work and other friends I have, they talk about who pays the bills with their money and it just doesn't work that way. You're in this together for better, worse, richer, poorer and it doesn't mean that I'm richer than you or I'm poorer than you. It's all together.

However, the other thing, if you can give me another moment is the second suggestion I'd say is that you have to discuss charitable giving. This could be based on your upbringing or maybe religious convictions. Maybe one part of the equation here, you or your spouse maybe wants to give to a church or some charitable organization that the other person doesn't want to. This has to be discussed especially early on in the relationship, because this can lead to resentment and frustration.

Let me just say for example, I want to give 5% of our income to our local church and I want to give 3% to, let's say, breast cancer awareness. Debbie doesn't agree with either of those things. She doesn't think we can afford to give away our money. We have a problem. She might feel resentment due to the fact that her standard of living is decreased, and now we have 8% less money to spend.

Maybe I would have to compromise on the percentages. Maybe I would give to the breast cancer awareness and not to the church. Or maybe we'd have to do something, but a compromise has to be made, because if I'm just adamant we're going to do this, you can just imagine the frustration, the resentment is going to

build and it's just going to blossom into other issues I don't even want to think about right now. Communication is key, and we have to be on the same page with our spouse.

Stephanie: Exactly. Another thing that is I think very important, not only agreeing on finances, but the way to raise your children. We have couples who are expecting, we even have people who already have children. Obviously, it's important that you come up with a way to raise the children, but what would you say to couples, especially, maybe young couples who haven't experienced what it's like to have a child in the house yet? What do you recommend to them who aren't sure exactly which way to go with raising a kid and they have different opinions on the matter?

Jason: Wow, Stephanie. When you mentioned that question I'm brought back to 20, 21 years ago when we were expecting our first child. Bringing a baby into the house impacts everything. Finances, moods, your lifestyle, sex, shopping habits. Your life will never, ever be the same after you have a baby. It's similar when you add second, third, fourth or whatever child, but especially that first one, your life will never be the same.

I don't want to sound too simplistic or like a broken record repeating the same line, but it really comes down to talking things out and your expectations and communication. There are major issues, such as the name of the baby or the question: do we find out the gender of our child? Our grandparents never were faced with that decision, but with technology we have so many things we have to decide on now and it can create a difference of opinion. Remember, mom is already stressed because of changes to her body.

Even simple decisions like what crib to buy, or do we buy a baby jumper or what type of car seat? What color should we paint the baby's room? We were talking to a couple who absolutely fought over the color of the room and hello? There could be so much stress involved and usually it's elevated, like I said, due to the hormonal changes in the wife. The husband has to be a good listener and he has to value his life.

I'm not suggesting that as guys we bend to everything our wives want, but come on, if she wants blue and I want green, we're going with blue. It's not that important. That's what she wants, so it just comes down to communication.

Stephanie: So you have to pick your battles. I know you have four children, correct?

Jason: Correct.

Stephanie: You've been through it, hectic schedules with school, after school activities, plays, sports, anything that's happening. It's really hard to find time for one another because, let alone with one child kind of taking up and monopolizing time as

they're growing and they're learning, you have four. How did you and your wife deal with that with staying connected to each other while raising children?

Jason: Well, this is an easy one to answer and it's something that other people just look at us, and they're like, you guys are crazy, why are you even worried about that? It's something we've taught our kids from an early age, and that's that nobody and I mean nobody gets between Debbie and I and here's an example, Stephanie. When we're walking together as a family, whether it's around the neighborhood for a walk or in the mall, the kids don't walk between us.

When we're sitting down as a family like at a movie, or dinner or school concert or church or somewhere, the kids don't sit between us. It's me, it's Debbie and then it's kids, the kids can be on either side. We just stress it to them. They know we love them. They know we'd do anything for them, but my first priority is Debbie, Debbie's first priority is me and then the kids.

It doesn't mean we love them less, but our priority is us together and the kids know that. They just know that nothing they're going to do is going to come between us. As far as how do we keep that time fresh, I would say date one another.

Stephanie: Date one another.

Jason: Date one another. It's a really simple concept. Think about it. Stephanie. No man that I'm aware of has ever asked his girlfriend to marry him on the first date. You spent time getting to know one another, and it was fun just to hang out. We suggest that couples remember what they felt like when they were dating. The excitement, the anticipation and why not feel those things now?

When a couple is dating, they are most likely very intentional in scheduling time and arranging their schedules to be together. Do you do that now with your husband or your wife? Unfortunately, probably not. There's work. There's the stress of running the kids to school concerts, to the sports, whatever, and then you get the leftovers of one another's time, and I'm suggesting that it shouldn't be that way. Try to get around that.

Maybe, you send your wife or your husband an invitation for a date in the mail? I don't mean an email, actually spend money on a stamp. It's pretty cool to get something in the mail from your husband or your wife. Just do impulsive things. Like a couple months ago, and we wrote about this in the book, I was at work and Debbie dropped by and just put a rose and a card on my windshield while I was at work.

My co-workers, they didn't see anybody doing that, but they looked out and saw a rose or something on my car, and the unfortunate thing is they thought I had a

mistress, they were wondering who left me a rose and they didn't believe it when I told them it was my wife. People just don't do that anymore.

There are simple things you can do. You can if you're a woman, maybe you write I love you on the back window of his car in lipstick. It's not going to hurt anything, but it's something different, it's creative. You can go to the dollar store, spend \$12 and get helium balloons, fill them up, red balloons with hearts or something, stuff the balloons in his or her car while they're at work or at the grocery store. Just little impulsive things to say, hey I love you, let's go out, let's have a date, let's be intentional.

Stephanie: Nice. So the trick to keeping this marriage working and romantic is to keep dating. I've never heard that one before. Very good. Jason, thank you so much for taking the time to be on the show with us today. To find out more about Jason and Debbie Coleman, you can visit their website at [youramazingmarriage.com](http://youramazingmarriage.com) and we will have a link to that in the show notes. Their book, "Discovering Your Amazing Marriage", is actually available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

Thank you so much for joining us. I hope you'll join us again next week. We always love hearing from you. To comment on this or any other episode, just call our listener comment line at 919-256-3083, or you can actually email us at [comments@stayhappilymarried](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried). I'm Stephanie Lockwood and until next time stay happily married.

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