



## Episode 2

### May's Story: Grace on the Other Side

**Craig:** Welcome to the Robertson and Easterling podcast. Thanks for listening. I'm Craig Robertson.

**Matt:** And I'm Matt Easterling. Craig and I are board certified Family Law specialist. Or simply we're professional storytellers. Together we run one of the most successful boutique law firms in Mississippi.

**Craig:** As divorce lawyers, we are creative problem solvers who work with real people during the most difficult seasons of their lives. So, sit back, relax, take a deep breath. Everything's going to be okay. You found us and what you're about to hear is going to help.

**Matt:** Today's episode is a survivor story, one of Robertson and Easterling's former clients who unfortunately had to walk through a divorce but has come out the other side. She's going to be able to tell you about what it was like when she came to the crossroads making the decision about contacting a lawyer, what it was like going through the divorce process and how she has thrived since her divorce was completed. I think that everybody's going to get a lot out of the episode today and can't wait for you to listen.

**Craig:** This is May. May started walking through the process of divorce back in 2016. So, really thank you for the willingness to come and share your story and the vulnerability. Thanks for being here today.

**May:** Thank you for having me.

**Craig:** Can you go back to where you were emotionally... when you made the decision to seek legal help?

**May:** Well, I was... had been in a 14-year marriage which had been very toxic, abusive and a long, long journey. And I was emotionally, physically tired had explored years of counseling, years of seeking pastoral advice for my church and just felt like things were not changing. I could not see any hope or change for the future and just felt like I had to

do something different. So, I didn't really know what that difference was, I had never considered divorce for myself as a Christian. I just didn't feel like that was really God's plan. And so I just started praying about that and just to see where God would lead and ultimately, you know, through friends and advice of family and started exploring on the internet kind of happened upon your family law firm Robertson and Associates at the time and just started reading on the website, just kind of some about what the process of divorce looked like and just to give me some ideas or different direction to start thinking in.

**Matt:** Out of curiosity, when you were doing that, were you looking for a law firm specifically, or are you looking for just information

**May:** I'm always looking for information about what options I had again, my relationship was extremely toxic and extremely abusive. And I needed, I felt like protection. And I wanted to see legally in Mississippi, what were those options? I mean, could I get separated legally or what? what was out there to help protect myself and my children? And I just felt like I had to do something.

**Matt:** How long have you been feeling that way?

**May:** Well, again, I've been married 14 years, but I had really come to a really nasty place to where there was something that had to change and it was escalating to where I felt like I had to get out of the relationship. So, probably about six months prior to me seeking counsel is when I really felt like I had to make some major changes in my life.

**Craig:** We obviously practice in Mississippi and we are smack in the middle of the Bible Belt and a lot of people are conflicted. I mean, you know, most people, whether they are or not will claim to be a Christian here in Mississippi and I think among the Christian community, there is this huge fear about how that looks. Whether or not it's biblical for me to move through the process of divorce. Did you wrestle with that yourself?

**May:** Oh, horribly so. Actually, I feel like that's why I stayed in my marriage as long as I did, even though it was so unhealthy because I didn't feel like I had the option of divorce. And honestly, it was never on my radar to even consider that. But after I said, years of counseling and talking with pastors and trying to find a way to restore my marriage, fix the marriage, I realized you can't fix it, if you're the only one working on that, if the other party is not going to partake in the restoration process, it can't happen. And when my children started becoming subjects of the abuse, that's when I realized something absolutely had to be done. But my biggest fear it looking into divorce or Even pursuing that direction, even separation was the stigma, and what that was going to label me as a divorcee after the fact. And I dealt with that and still kind of dealt with that even after walking through the divorce process of dealing with what I felt like was the shame that came from that. But in hindsight, God's taught me just his grace is so much better and he has such a better plan. And that's just something I've been able to walk through, but it's a little scary on the front side of that.

**Craig:** How did you feel the day? I don't know that this is a milestone moment in anybody's life but it certainly would be a memorable moment when you walk through the doors of a divorce lawyer's office and you sat down what was going through your mind at that point?

**May:** Well, I was scared to death. But I had done the intake form on the website, which kind of helped walk me through my story and it helped me get my thoughts together. And then when I actually came for the first time again, I was just scared to be here didn't really know what to expect, but the office was super welcoming. And I never felt pressured toward making any decision. And that was very welcoming to me because I wasn't really ready to make a decision. I just wanted information. And I loved that that's how it was handled.

So, even just meeting with Craig and getting information about how the process worked or what my options were, just gave me peace of mind and I still didn't feel pressured at the end and just asked for some time to think about it. Let me go home and think through this, pray through this and decide what's the right decision for me and then ultimately came back and did decide that divorce was the right thing. It was the only option I had.

**Craig:** Did things get better immediately or did they get immediately worse?

**May:** No, they got harder. So...

**Craig:** That's what I would expect of course.

**May:** Yeah, no filing for divorce and serving papers and still living in the same house with a spouse that's difficult was challenging, but I kept getting reassurances from family friends, hear the staff and just praying through that, that this was the right path. And this was the only way my life was going to get better. And it was just part of the journey. So, it was hard, but it was a journey well worth it to get getting myself protected as well as the protection for my children.

**Matt:** Would you say that the realities that came out of your consultation, were they better or worse, different, the same is what you expected? I guess coming in.

**May:** I'm not sure I had exact expectations coming in because I feel like I knew very little about the laws or how that process worked for divorce or separation. But I felt like I left informed where I had a very clear idea of kind of what my options were and what those paths would look like and gave me information to take home and really kind of mull over in and kind of swallow and decide kind of what was the right path for me.

**Craig:** May unfortunately, we did have to file for divorce for you and move toward what we call a temporary hearing and a temporary hearing you'll recall is a lot of times the first step in a contested divorce, where the judge or chancellor tries to re-establish some rules between folks that the family dynamic has broken down. And so you went to court, as I recall, and you had to testify in court, talk to our listeners about what that's like, let's

start the night before you're getting ready to go to court. What's going through your mind? What are you hopeful about? What are you anxious about?

**May:** Well, I had never been in a courtroom or before a judge. So, that was scary in itself. But I felt prepared because we had kind of rehearsed or discussed what that day would be like in court. So, that gave me some confidence and knowing kind of what to expect when we got there. And then when I did arrive to the courthouse, we were able to go into a holding room.

And kind of go through maybe what to expect or just kind of prepare and let me kind of rehearse testimony and what I needed to share, but basically, I was just telling my story. Once I got into the court room and got before the judge, that was actually a better experience than I thought it would be. Because the judge was welcoming. And we basically just told the story again, out loud for the judge to hear. And ultimately, it was a great day for me because we got everything we wanted in that hearing and got protection for myself and my children and that was a victory.

**Matt:** So, you're following that temporary hearing, your case settled pretty shortly after that. Right?

**May:** Correct.

**Matt:** Okay. So, from beginning to the end, from when we filed for divorce to when the judge signed the final judgment. How long was your case?

**May:** Like 90 days, which is unusual and actually the first time I came here, Craig told me to prepare for at least a year long process. But I think God in His goodness realized that I had enough and made that process go so much faster for a multitude of reasons. So, it was about a 90-day process start to finish.

**Craig:** So, you found yourself divorced. And what you had anticipated your life was going to be like was different. The ink had dried on the divorce paperwork. Where did you find yourself in that season of your life?

**May:** Well, it was a new period of finding myself again, I'd lived in a very difficult marriage for a long time and had put so much of my time and energy into trying to work through that or fix that or you know, just make that work in some way. I feel like in a lot of ways I lost myself. And so it was a new season of learning how to be a mom on my own and make sure my children were adjusting well and re-engaging things that I enjoyed in life that I had forgotten about. So, creating new habits or finding new hobbies and just kind of plugging back in. And keeping myself surrounded with friends and family and support structure was important too. But really just having the relief of eating out of such a toxic environment. I can't even explain how I felt like such a huge weight lifted off to not have to live in that in a daily basis was just... it was just overwhelmingly good to just have some peace.

**Matt:** Oftentimes, I hear people that are very concerned and rightfully so, about how their children are going to react to a divorce or the idea of their parents breaking up. Could you talk a little bit about how your children handled it and how they adapted and move through that process?

**May:** That's hard, that is the hardest thing I had to do through this journey was talk to my children about getting divorced from their father. And their reaction was not fun. I had shielded them a lot from how negative things were just trying to protect them. And so, they really didn't see it coming. And so it was heartbreaking for them, which meant it was heartbreaking for me to watch them through the process, but I kept having to tell myself that they would be healthier on the other side of this because the environment was so negative, that I knew in the long run, this was going to be a better outcome, even if the pain was real in the short term that there would be healing in the long term.

And so just listening to them and letting them be open, letting them express their anger, which happens sometimes too and there were up days and down days for sure in that process and I'm... to be honest, these three and a half years outside of the divorce now but there's still a little bit of roller coaster some days with them dealing with the fallout of the divorce and kind of what that looks like.

**Craig:** You talked about rediscovering yourself. What was that like for you specifically?

**May:** Exciting and eye opening and just kind of getting back to things that were a joy to me when I was younger before I ever married and just kind of enjoying learning to enjoy life again and finding joy in things that I've just forgotten about. When you're living in a negative place you forget there's so much joy in life and in the world. And just getting back to that just brings a breath of fresh air.

**Cassie:** We hope you're enjoying this episode of Robertson + Easterling podcast. I'm Cassie, a paralegal and the client care coordinator. If you think you need to speak with one of our attorneys, please request a consultation from our website or simply call the office. Getting legal help is not only the responsible thing to do, it will make you feel better. You owe it to yourself and more importantly to your children to take initiative. Be brave. And now please keep listening for the second half of our show.

**Craig:** So, you're obviously a beautiful human being. And I'm sure that trying to navigate the dating world as a newly divorced person was challenging. What was that like for you?

**May:** Well, right after the divorce, I didn't feel like I was open to reentering anything. Because I had just been so wounded and so hurt in the marriage. I didn't think I wanted that ever again for myself. But God in His infinite goodness, realized that that wasn't what was best for me. And so, the idea of dating was very intimidating, especially as you know, a middle-aged lady.

That was just kind of something I really didn't think about, but in different meetings with friends and kind of interacting with people post-divorce and just kind of refinding myself

happened to cross paths with a friend who said, Hey, I have this guy that you should meet. So, I don't really know that I went through a typical dating scenario as much as just kind of had somebody that played matchmaker that kind of helped connect me with somebody new.

**Matt:** How's that relationship going?

**May:** Well, I'm remarried to that amazing man. And so yeah, we dated for a short time after... a little while after I've been divorced. And this felt like he was an amazing match for me and a wonderful dad. And so, we have married now and I have gained three step sons in the process. So, now we have five boys between us. And just kind of watching how God brought his life and my life together and blend those pieces together and watch our children come together and mesh as one big family is just been such a blessing in my life.

**Craig:** What advice would you give for a person who is contemplating divorce or who might be walking through a divorce? Is there anything that you would have done differently?

**May:** Not that I can specifically think of because I feel like I've really tried every possible way to make my marriage work. And then when I got all the pieces together in front of me that were the options of what options I had toward divorce, separation or whatever and made that choice. I never second guessed it, I had done everything possible to fix it. And when that didn't work, I could walk forward in divorce with confidence, knowing that there wasn't any other option for me.

**Craig:** Had you made up your mind when you came to see us for the first time that yes, divorce was the path that I wanted to travel.

**May:** No, I just came really for more information. But once I got the information, and felt informed of what the options were and really spent some more time in prayer, that's when I felt confident that that was going to be the right fit.

**Matt:** If you had to ever again, do you think you would have started walking down that path sooner?

**May:** I can't say that because now in hindsight seeing how everything has unfolded and meeting my current husband, the timing would not have worked out any other way. So, I feel like God had a specific time frame and journey for me. And that was just the way it was supposed to play out for me. So, could it have saved me some pain and heartache in that hard marriage? Yes. But I just felt like it was supposed to be that way. So, I don't think I would have changed that.

**Matt:** A lot of times we see people in our office, they'll go through a season of time where they're trying to fix their relationship trying to do everything, they can to make it work. But then there's usually also a season of almost denial where they know, okay, I've done everything that I can. This isn't changing, it's not going to change, but they sort

of stay in a pattern of denial as to you know, maybe if I don't shine the light on this, I won't, you know, it's not real. Did you experience that at all? And was there a period where you knew it was over but couldn't bring yourself to go there? Or did it take actually coming into this office to really understand that it was over?

**May:** I think I went through that before and after coming into the office, I definitely went through that before I ever sought out information about a divorce. Again, thinking that divorce wasn't an option, even though there was really no marriage left. I mean, it had been destroyed long before with the abuse and the toxicity, but I just felt like I needed to keep walking the steps and going through the motions to try it.

If I just kept being better, doing more working harder, I could fix it, and eventually had to come to reality that that wasn't going to change anything. And then even after I came and started the divorce process, I was warned that it was going to be a rollercoaster. I was going to have good days where I felt like Yes, I'm doing the right thing and I would have another day where I would be regretful and think, what have I done? Why am I getting a divorce? And I absolutely went through that for a while, but just kept walking the steps forward because I knew that was the right path.

**Craig:** Have you experienced challenges with your ex, post-divorce?

**May:** Definitely, that is still a work in progress. He hasn't changed who he is, so it's still a difficult relationship. And it's difficult to co-parent when there's an unreasonable, other, you know, ex-partner in the mix. And so that's a journey as well, having to work that out. And thankfully, we have a very clear visitation and in custody arrangement and so we can always go back to that to kind of help set parameters. And I wish it were different, but it's not and so we just walk that out the best that we can.

**Craig:** You're a successful person and you've been good at a lot of things that you've tried throughout your life. What did it feel like for you? You had been a mom and a great mom, you are a mom and a great mom and the first time that you had to drop your kids off for a visitation period, what did that feel like to you?

**May:** That was difficult, because of what they had been through and because of the negativity and abuse patterns, that their dad still has visitation rights and so releasing them to him without any kind of other party there was hard because I was fearful for them. But then I had to recognize their dad and they need a relationship with their dad. And so over time, that became less difficult. And in a good bit of time, I realized that also gave me some freedom to have some time for myself to heal and to reflect or just to do something that I enjoy. And so it gives you some you know, we have every other weekend visitation schedule in it and it gives me some downtime where I'm not having to be a mom and can focus on being a wife to my current husband or just enjoying life, you know, without having children.

**Craig:** Right. I know every situation is difficult. But I tell especially my female clients that you know, those periods of time that the kids are not with you really gives you an

opportunity to rediscover who you are as you said the things that bring joy to you and to kind of to refuel yourself and to energize yourself so you're ready to be the best that you can be. Did you experience that as well?

**May:** Oh, yes, definitely. It is actually a joke now in my marriage now because I'm like, of all the things about divorce the silver lining is that every other weekend, you get to send your kids away and you can do something fun. So, I mean, I love my children and I want them all the time with me but when they're not there I can have freedom to enjoy, go for a weekend trip or you know, whatever we need to do. And so there is definitely that is a nice break from full time job of being a parent.

**Craig:** And I think that and again, we as southerners, you know, we love our kids, we love our family, we're very family centered. And even in my own life, you can almost get lost in your kid's activities, in your kids friends and everything that they've got going on in their life and sometimes you lose who you are in that season. And you know, it's not all bad, whether you're married or whether you're a divorce that you know, sometimes to take time for yourself, you know, to reenergize yourself to do those things that bring Life, that you can be a better version of yourself when you come back to those people that you love,

**Matt:** Right. And this may not have been the case in your particular situation. But one of the more common things that we hear when it comes to issues in a relationship or when problems started, some of that goes back to not having any type of balance in your relationship and becoming completely focused on nothing but your child or your children. And people not only lose themselves, but they lose their relationship, you know, the connection that they have. And it happens frequently, where people come in and they still care for their spouse, but they've just become like roommates. It's like they're both coaches on the same team. And it's important to focus on your relationship and it's politically incorrect to say that you need time away from your children, but everybody does. Everybody needs time to pour themselves into each other and into themselves. And That's what helps you be a better parent.

**May:** I definitely would agree with that and being remarried is there's a whole new marriage and relationship to foster and to build and to grow in, it's a blessing to have time where it's just the two of us to focus on that when I don't have the children with me. And then when they are with us, which is majority of the time, it's a blending of a new family. And there's beauty in that as well. So, it's just a balance of enjoying both times.

**Matt:** And now your children get to see a great example of what a good loving relationship is supposed to look like.

**May:** And that's one of the things I'm the most grateful for is that they are saying what a proper healthy marriage should look like and I'm so thankful they're getting the advantage of seeing that and living in a home where that is exhibited, that they did not have before,

**Matt:** Right. So, many people, you know, they say, well, we've got to stay together for the kids and they put off resolving Marriage that has already been determined dead, you know, and they think they're doing it for the children. But at least I believe that that's a misconception. I mean, you are teaching your children, they're observing you, they're watching you. And that's their idea of what a relationship is. And that's not a healthy, you know, example for them to learn from.

**Craig:** All right now, as we're coming to the close of our time together, is there any advice that you would give May to the person you are three and a half years ago?

**May:** I would say as scary as the process is if you feel like you are at the end of your rope, and you have attempted every way to restore your marriage and it's just not possible. I was terrified of being a failure. I was terrified of being labeled a divorcee and the stigma that was attached to divorce. But I would say that God has such a better life for you. And there's so much great on the other side and I was not treated at all, like I expected to be treated by others being divorced people accepted me, they loved on me and just encouraged me. And that was not what I thought was going to happen. And so if you're fearful of walking through that journey, I would just say, have courage, that there's something better for you.

**Craig:** That's just beautifully said, thank you again for spending time with us today to let other people hear your story. And just the growth that I have witnessed in you has been really remarkable. So, thank you for letting us be a little part of that story.

**May:** Thank you.

**Matt:** Absolutely, thank you and your testimony today is going to help a lot of different people. And we appreciate you being so open and honest with us and kind of pulling the curtain back so to speak. I hope you come back sometime.

**May:** Thank you so much.

**Craig:** You've been listening to the Robertson and Easterling podcast. Thanks for spending time with us.

**Matt:** We'd love to hear from you if you need our help. You can request a consultation from our website in less than five minutes. If you liked our show, please subscribe to our podcast so you'll be one of the first to know when our next episode drops.

**Craig:** Have a great rest of your day. And remember, there's nothing wrong with arming yourself with information. On behalf of Matt and our entire team. Thanks for listening.

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