**Season 3 Episode 9 Troy and Melissa Haas**

Matt: Welcome to season three of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm Matt Easterling.

Craig: I'm Craig Robertson. Matt and I are board certified family law attorneys with decades of combined experience serving Mississippians throughout our fine state.

Matt: In 2019, we began wondering if the struggles our firm deals with on a daily basis could be used to help the general public, and from there, the Robertson and Easterling podcast was born.

Craig: During the first two seasons, we had open and honest discussions with everyday people about their individual relationship journeys, with some ending in heartbreak and others in redemption, but all with powerful stories to tell.

Matt: In Season three, you will hear more of the same stories from other marriage and divorce survivors, as well as from our new co-hosts: Eva and Roane Hunter from LifeWorks Counseling. Eva and Roane are both licensed professional counselors, and we're excited to partner with them and hear the different perspective they're going to have for all of our listeners.

Craig: Speaking of listening, if you're new to our podcast and haven't heard seasons one and two, be sure to check them out on iTunes, Spotify, or your favorite podcast player. Now sit back, relax and enjoy today's show. What you're about to hear is going to help.

Craig: Okay guys, you're back with us for another episode of the Robert and Easterling podcast. We are sponsored by LifeWorks counseling and I am again here with Roane and Eva Hunter. Guys, thanks for being here with us today.

Eva: We're happy to be here.

Roane: Glad to be back in the saddle

Craig: Today, we are excited to have Troy and Melissa Haas. Troy is the founder and CEO of Hope Quest Ministry and Melissa does a tremendous amount of work with partners in the recovery process, so guys, thanks for joining us.

Roane: We are so glad to see you guys, and certainly glad talk with you on this podcast. Troy and Melissa have been part of our lives for a many years. When we lived in Atlanta, I was a part of Troy’s group, and Eva got connected with Melissa there as well. Even in the work that we do, I do a Monday night group called “Walking Free” because Troy, I don't know if you know this, but I have the spiritual gift of plagiarism.

Troy: Grateful to be a help!

Craig: Well, let's, let's jump right in and tell our listeners a little bit about Hope Quest and the work that you do.

Troy: Hope Quest is a family of ministries that walks with people impacted by addiction by helping them to experience freedom and hope. Really the bottom line is, the church often doesn't know what to do with people that struggle with addiction, whether that's drugs and alcohol or sex addiction, or really all manner of life dominating issue. The church doesn’t know what to do with them, and a Hope Quest really seeks to come alongside the church and believers so that people can really experience freedom and hope and really live the life that God has for them.

Craig: Well, I know enough to know that people who work vocationally in recovery have a story of their own to tell, so I know our listeners would be very interested to find out how you guys got into the work that you do.

Troy: Gosh, I would go all the way back 34ish years ago. I was fresh out of jail. I had just been released from my second felony conviction and thought I was going to go to prison, but God had another plan: I became a follower of Christ while I was incarcerated in Harris County for drug possession. I literally had been out of jail for like six months when I enrolled into a small Christian University. My first day there, I saw this woman walk across campus, this young lady, and she was the most beautiful, amazing woman I'd ever seen. It literally was love at first sight.

Melissa: For him.

Troy: Unfortunately, Melissa did not feel the same way about me and it took a couple of years, but the bottom line is we did fall in love and next year will make 30 years married. When we signed up for this thing called marriage, let me just say this: I thought I was getting this beautiful, smart, godly woman that would fix all of my problems. I thought the things that felt empty or not whole or messed up about me would be fixed by her because she was perfect. So, when I signed up to be married to Melissa, I really was signing up for my second opportunity in salvation, Jesus being number one, and Melissa was going to come right in there and fix the things that Jesus couldn’t.

Craig: Melissa, how did that work out? Did you fix him?

Melissa: Living victoriously in Jesus? No. Did not happen. You know, I think when I tell my part of this, I say it actually felt normal to take care of someone else's needs based on a lot of my growing up years. We say this all the time: we didn't know what we didn't know. What we thought was this beautiful, you know, meeting each other's needs really became a very unhealthy idolatry. I call it a two tick and no dog relationship.

Craig: I am a little slow on the uptake. Troy has been making fun of Mississippi State off the air for a few minutes and I graduated from Mississippi State, so two ticks and no dog? Help me out.

Melissa: It's two people sucking the life out of each other, trying to get their needs met. When I think about our relationship, he needed a savior and I needed someone that made me feel beautiful and desired. These questions that we had about ourselves, you know, for Troy it was, “I'm uniquely screwed up, who could ever love me? How can I be somebody worth loving?” For me, they were “do I really have what it takes to be adequate as a woman and to be valued as a woman?” So, we looked to each other to meet those needs, and that's always a recipe for disaster.

Craig: Troy, I've heard a lot of people tell their story, but usually it doesn't start with “yeah the second time I got out of jail…” So back up a little bit, help us understand that.

Troy: For me, I learned early on to depend upon things outside of myself to cope with my anxiety, my depression, my fears, and my insecurities. So, that looked like pornography and being sexual with myself. It looked like being sexual with others. It looked like drugs and alcohol. By the time I was in middle school, I was acting out with multiple different people sexually. I was using drugs. I was using alcohol. I was using tobacco. So, my first arrest for felony possession of controlled substance came as a junior in high school at 17 years old. I had these life dominating addiction issues, and I tried different times in different ways to overcome them, but I never ever could until I became a follower of Christ while I was actually in jail for the second time I had been arrested for a second felony possession. That's where I met Christ as my Lord and Savior and became a follower of Christ and that's when things really changed for me. Up until that point, I had never been able to gain any traction in terms of stopping using drugs, stopping using alcohol, or just depending upon things outside of myself to manage all the junk that was going on inside of me.

Craig: So, Troy, when you became a follower of Christ, then everything was repaired in your life?

Troy: That's the interesting thing I remember early on- here’s another story for you. I remember reading this Bible verse, a great Bible verse, and ever since it's one of my favorite verses: 2 Corinthians 5:17. It says “if any man is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come.” I misinterpreted that verse. I thought that verse meant everything was fixed. My past didn't matter. I didn't have to be honest with my past. I didn't have to address my childhood sexual abuse that I'd never told anyone about. I didn't have to address, you know, all the different things that I had done, I was just going to move forward and everything was just going to be awesome because Jesus was with me now. While Jesus was with me, and has always been with me since that day, December 10, 1986, in the Harris County jail, I've had ups and downs because I'm human. I had to learn how to depend upon the grace of God and I had to learn how to walk with, trust, and appropriate the grace and power of God. That's been a very challenging journey.

Craig: So, you guys got together and you actually decided to pursue ministry full time?

Troy: That’s correct. So here we are, you know, I'm just out of jail, a class convicted felon, I feel called to help others and walk with others. Melissa grew up in the church and grew up helping others and serving others. She actually felt called to full-time ministry…

Melissa: When I was 13.

Troy: When she was about 13 years old, which is one of the reasons she was hesitant to date me- because of my story. She was afraid of my past and my background and here's this little girl, literally pure as snow, who had never actually been on a date before she went away to college. So, for us, we really both had a genuine desire and a genuine call to help and walk with other people. The challenge though, was we had a lot of undealt with stuff in our own hearts and lives. We had a lot of unaddressed traumas, a lot of secrets, a lot of addiction still going on in my case with still pornography and being sexual with myself, and then not knowing how to have a relationship with a female that wasn't sexual. So, there was a bunch of baggage and junk, and we just didn't know that how we were supposed to do that, by not learning how to be transformed and not learning how God wants to heal the trauma and wants me to be honest, authentic, and real. So, as I'm growing as a Christian and growing in ministry, and we're beginning to minister together preparing for the mission field, what I figured I had to do is figure this out on my own. As a pastor, I would pray and ask God to help me. I would pray and say, “God, I'm going to commit myself to you,” but then I never talked to anyone about it. There was all this hidden secrecy, this hidden sin, and it never got addressed and we ended up on the mission field as missionaries in east Africa for seven years, all of that still going on, me keeping it hidden very well and Melissa just trying to love Jesus and serve Jesus wondering why I'm mad all the time and wondering why our marriage is horrible. Yet here we are missionaries serving Jesus telling the unreached folks about the gospel.

Craig: Melissa, talk about your experience in that regard.

Melissa: I think what I would say is mine and Troy’s marriage was the perfect storm because of a lot of the beliefs we had- from my perspective, I grew up in a church environment, which basically taught God, plus you is enough. So, both of us, even though we were doing it differently, were self-reliant in different ways. Understanding one another, scripture, what does that really mean to live in spiritual community with other people? We had not a clue. So since we live in Africa, we know this is true: the lone wildebeast at the back of the herd gets eaten. Right? And so, when you're living in a self-reliant place, just relying on God and not letting other people into your life, (1) you believe everything that you think; (2) you get caught in patterns of behavior that are tied to emotions; and (3) you don't know how to manage. All of that was true for both of us. Troy was leaning out of the marriage, so he would feel shame and anxiety that would become anger. He would blow up and he would leave and act out sexually. I didn't know how to deal with emotions either. I thought all negative emotions were sinful, so I spent a lot of times just praying for God to change me and make me a wife so Troy could love me, believing all the time that the problem was somehow my fault, right? I was taking responsibility and being overly responsible, feeling like if I could just be a good enough wife, if I could just be a good enough Christian, we shouldn't have problems in our marriage. Right? A + B should = C. So, we both got locked into these rigid thinking patterns that left us alone and isolated from each other because there was so much pain in our marriage, but also vulnerable to temptation and to patterns of addiction left on main behaviors.

Troy: I'll say this guys, were both miserable. Our marriage was not a good marriage. We were externally doing our best to put on a good face, but those that were closest to us knew we fought all the time…

Melissa: You fought. I cried.

Troy: Yeah, she cried, I fought. I would pursue her and she would just kind of try to run away. Not pursue her in physically abusive way, but just angry all the time and frustrated all the time, more so at myself, but I mean, you can only beat yourself up so long, then you start beating up those around you when you have all this undealt with stuff in your heart and life.

Roane: Yeah, we find the easy target: those closest to us.

Troy: Absolutely, and Melissa was an easy target.

Roane: Sure.

Eva: We say in the counseling office, that intimacy is the cure. Connection is the cure, and when you don't know how to do that…

Roane: What do you know?

Eva: Yes.

Roane: You don't know what you don't know.

Eva: That's right.

Craig: So how did you guys create a breakthrough in your life?

Troy: God created a breakthrough for us. You know, we came home on furlough in 1998 and I was desperate to change. I remember praying, I remember reading books. I remember memorizing scripture and nothing worked. I just remember praying God, you're going to have to do something here because I don't know what else to do. The thing I never did was tell anyone what was really going on. I remember going to a counselor, and we went to marriage counseling, went to a marriage intense therapy in 1998 in Colorado on our furlough, and I remember sitting there in that counselor's office, wanting to tell him the truth and tell him what was really going on, wanting to tell him about my behaviors and my past, but being terrified to do. I really wished I would have done it then, but here's what God did. Melissa was pregnant with our second child. I was up in Sudan doing some work at a refugee camp with some volunteers from a church in Virginia, and then I flew down to join Melissa for the birth of our second child. I got called into my boss's boss's office. And I thought to myself, you know, why would my boss's boss want to meet with me? And I couldn't think of anything other than he must be willing to commend them for being such an incredibly awesome missionary. I literally could not think of another reason why he would want to meet with me. We walked into that meeting that day. Melissa met with all the wives of these men. I went into my boss's boss's office. My boss was there as well. Another man was there, and they confronted me with some stories that they had heard. I knew at that moment that the truth was going to come out whether I wanted it or not. I really at this point was completely out of control. I was about to get what Melissa describes a God's merciful 2x4 unveiling what had been secretly going on in my life that I'd been trying to keep it.

Craig: Wow. So, who hit you with a 2x4? Was it Melissa or one of those guys?

Troy: You know, it was those guys. I would say this, it was a gracious two-by-four, all the way around. It was painful, but the whole step of the way the men that met with me and the women that met with Melissa, they sent us to a counseling center in Fresno, California, where I was able for the first time in my life to be honest, to talk about what had been going on, to talk about my childhood sexual abuse, to unpack all the different trauma and beliefs and really be honest for the first time and to really come to grips with how much I had hurt Melissa.

Eva: Melissa, what was that discovery like for you?

Melissa: You know, it’s very interesting, I can remember at this point in our marriage because we were so disconnected, I felt so lonely, I couldn't make sense of what was going on, I started praying Lord, you're just going to have to kill him or kill me. I can't live like this. So, the day that he got sent home, I can remember sitting alone. I went back to the place I was staying at and I was just praying and crying because Troy denied everything initially. So, before he left, I said, okay, either the enemy has won the biggest victory in the world, or you're a liar and God will show me what is true. So, as I was just praying, I really felt like God was wrapping himself around me and whispering into my ear, Melissa, I am answering your prayers. I'm answering your prayers. And for me, I didn't know what that meant except that God was for me and he was for. That gave me enough peace, to survive as things unfolded. I had our second child and Troy confessed that some of the things were true, so at least I knew that we weren't being fired for no reason. We needed to be gone. That gave me peace to just kind of buckle in and let God's agenda unfold. It's really painful, you know, so much stripping away of everything that had propped us up. You know, the loss of our ministry career, the loss of our peers, our colleagues, our friends, we made a life there. It really was just a stripping away of everything both of us had relied on because the only thing that was propping us up was ministry at that point. Our marriage was disconnected. The only thing that was propping his life up is this is good stuff we were doing for God.

Troy: I'll say this, at Hope Quest, we work with a lot of pastors and people coming out of full-time ministry, and it's so easy to ignore the things that are going on in your heart because of the good things that God is doing through your life. We all must examine our hearts, we all must look at our marriages, and we all must look at what's going on quote unquote behind closed doors. If things aren't right behind closed doors, eventually that's going to come out. So, I encourage folks don't wait for God to reveal everything. Get help now. Turn and find professional help and talk to people that can navigate your difficult steps through this, because there is a path forward. There is hope, but it involves being honest and it involves letting others into the mess. Our marriage was a total mess, even apart from all the other stuff. I mean, people expected Melissa to divorce me because when they heard what I had done, it was a no brainer. You know, Melissa, you should leave because Troy has not only been an angry mean husband, but Troy has been unfaithful and you just need to move on, Melissa. But thankfully Melissa listened to God and let God shepherd her through that process. I'm grateful to God and Melissa for that.

Melissa: I think what I would just add to that is God cares for our souls more than he cares for ministry. More than even cares for his own reputation.

COMMERCIAL: Hey, this is Eva Hunter at LifeWorks Counseling. At LifeWorks, our couples intensive is focused on developing healthy relational dynamics and true intimacy. Couples do not have to have it all together or even be sure they want to stay together. Couples that have been on the brink of divorce with papers filed have not only stayed together, they have built something new from the rubble left behind. Real issues are addressed using experiential therapy and a systemic framework for ongoing growth and healing. Couples develop a growth plan that emphasizes personal growth and inviting the other to show up, connect and journey together. LifeWorks counseling, the science and solve of connection.

COMMERICIAL: Hey, I'm Matt Easterling. Thanks for listening to our podcast. I hope you're finding these stories insightful and comforting. If you relate to anything you've heard so far, or if you just want more information, you can request a consultation right from our website by completing a simple online form. Of course, you're also free to just give us a call. Family law is all we do. As experts, we have the information and advice you need to move forward. Whatever that may look like for you. We would love to be in your corner. Until then, sit back, relax, and enjoy part two of today's show.

Craig: Well, Melissa, I'd like to hear from you, though, that couldn't have been simple because everything in your life had been completely stripped away, and as Troy pointed out, nobody would have blamed you for leaving him. Help me understand, help our listeners understand why you stayed.

Melissa: There are different levels of why I stayed. On a spiritual level, I really didn't feel peaceful about going. In my conversations with God, I kept hearing the words “wait. just wait on me. I am doing something.” On a practical level, as Troy began to unpack a lot of his trauma and to be honest, authentic, and real, the way he related to me changed. There was not the big angry outbursts and the criticism and the things that, and I say this hesitantly because I know sexual betrayal is so painful, but for me in my marriage, I can wrap my head around sexual addiction and the roots of sexual addiction. What was most painful in my marriage was the way Troy treated me.

Troy: And the anger.

Melissa: Yes, and the things he had said in his anger- that never feeling like I could get it right. Always feeling inadequate, always feeling like a failure. For me, the shift in the way he treated me by actually cherishing me and listening to me gave me enough trust that there was real transformation happening that we could wade through the sexual betrayal, the infidelity together.

Roane: So often we talk about sobriety. You have to get sober from whatever the acting out behavior is. That's very different than recovery, which recovery is really the sanctification process that we are in the rest of our lives. You know, a lot of times people think that it if I would stop this behavior everything will be good, but that’s just stopping a behavior. The true change is, as you're saying, Melissa, you saw it, you experienced it. We always use the term, and I'm sure y'all do too, but it's just consistent action over time.

Troy: Well, and you Roane, road, I'll say this for me- that's one of the reasons we started Hope Quest and in particular, the residential treatment program, I got to spend about six weeks working on just my addictions and stuff before Melissa joined me. It was in that context and in that program that I got some traction so I could even see things clearly and be a bit sober and started to be honest and change the way I related to her.

Craig: Let’s talk through those guys. You are in ministry full-time; you're living in Africa. You are accosted by a group of men with two by fours. And what happened then? I mean, because I know you guys are in a great spot now and you've continued a different type of ministry, but talk about that transition.

Troy: I got on an airplane and flew from Nairobi, Kenya with a couple of stops in between and ended up in a residential treatment center specifically for missionaries that really has become a model for Hope Quest and a model for our residential program. It was there that I got honest for the first time. It was there with a counselor. Support groups and church and all of that is great but counseling with a trained, skilled therapist is so incredibly important to this overall recovery process. So, we dove in, and we were actually there for seven months intensely working with therapists, counselors, and support groups, just working to kind of rebuild, being honest, can tearing down the lies and admitting the lies and some of the things believed about myself, and then beginning to put things back together. That's why we're just firm believers in this therapeutic process,

Craig: I’m fascinated by your story, but I'm thinking from a practical standpoint, you guys are in full-time ministry. You have people who are coming around you because of that ministry background. What would you say to the average person who can't put their life on pause for six months? Nine months? A Year?

Troy: Yeah. What I would say is find some people and a therapist. If I'm a guy talking to another guy, I'm going to say, find a therapist and find three or four guys that can come around you and can walk with you that you can be completely honest with and that is a first step. If you can find some trustworthy people and a therapist that you can come and be honest with, the rest of the steps will unfold themselves. If you'll commit to those relationships and a process, the process will unfold.

Melissa: It just takes time. You know, one of the things that I've often remarked is we were so screwed up we needed a lot of intense help at the beginning. Not everyone needs residential treatment. There’s a level of dysfunction or unhealth or sickness that means you need to have a time away at residential treatment, but a lot of times what people need most is to be honest, and to have support, and that can happen without totally pressing pause on your life. It may lengthen the process but it will still happen over time.

Eva: We really do see a difference for the clients that do go away for residential treatment and come back. It is a huge difference. It just really does speed up the process.

Troy: Yeah. Well said, Eva, does it speed up the process? You may be able to get better over two years of weekly therapy, but if you can go and just the intensity really makes you cram a year and a half worth of work in the 90 days. Then, now you're, you're just building on that when you get out. So, I agree. And that's one thing I attribute our success to, and the reason our marriage made it is we had the opportunity to intensely focus and, no offense Craig, but residential treatment is typically cheaper than divorce attorneys.

Craig: I take no offense to that at all because we've talked to financial advisors even on this podcast before, and a divorce is by far and away, the biggest devastating financial event in a person's life. So sure, taking off three months from work buckling down or making some types of changes I completely agree is a cheaper alternative than a divorce. How do you know whether or not that type of intensity is merited?

Troy: I think what you do, and our favorite clients have at the least done, is some level of work with a therapist. Things blew up, the two by fours are out; you get connected with a therapist like Roane and Eva and then you do some assessments there and you kind of figure out how long this has been going on and what attempts have already been made to overcome. You think about if there has been periods of sobriety and you get some professional insight and help, and then you weigh all that, and then you decide if it’s really going to be best to go this intense route because you don't think you can survive two years of back and forth and slow movement. For others, it becomes very clear there's a path forward here that does involve outpatient counseling and support groups and things of that sort. The biggest key is letting others who know what they're talking about speak into that process. That means sitting down with someone at LifeWorks counseling, coming in and doing an assessment with us. We've had guys, in fact, we've had guys from Jackson come over for the day, go through a battery of assessments, sit down and talk with the counselor and then we decided together, hey, this is what's best. This is a good “Plan A,” and this is a good “Plan B.” Letting someone else help you make those decisions is I think the biggest thing of importance, because anytime we try to make decisions, especially about important stuff like this at a time of pain and crisis, we are prone to make bad decisions. So, letting others know what's really going on and letting them help us make those decisions usually important.

Melissa: Our sexuality and our private behaviors, you know, our coping strategies, alcoholism, etc… the things that we think we have control over are the things, that we think are totally ours. Those are the hardest to make decisions about it.

Troy: Wise decisions.

Melissa: Exactly. If any of us were struggling with a physical illness, we would go to the doctor and we would trust what they say. Right? We might get a second opinion, but we would do what they said, because we know we're not experts in the body. But many of us who struggle with life dominated behaviors believe we are the expert of our life, our mental health, and these private areas of our lives. So without getting an opinion, we'll make a decision thinking “Oh, well, I can, I've got this. I can just stop this behavior,” and often what we find is people who try to stop but can't we call it hitting bottom. I reached this point where I have to say, “I can't do this by myself.”

Eva: Melissa, what would you say from your experience helps the partner begin to heal?

Melissa: Oh my goodness. I think the first, most important thing that helps a partner heal is some honesty and ownership on the addict's par, admitting “I did this and this wasn't about you.” I think the second thing is having a safe community in which to process that hurt without a lot of pressure to make a decision. So, the first step would be honesty and ownership by the person who's struggling with the addiction to just talk about what's really happened and to be fully and completely honest and have a full disclosure about that, and then for the partner to be in a supportive community where there's some people are just holding her or him while they deal with the pain, grieve the losses, work through the trauma without a pressure to make a decision one way or the other.

Troy: I'll tell you this story real quick, any time we've ever worked with someone that made a quick decision, and that's a decision to stay or to go, a decision to give up or to try to save things, it was a bad decision because it was made quickly without that supportive environment without that patience and saying, you know what, let's give God a chance to work here. Let's give God a chance to do what only God can do and then God will guide that process if we will allow it.

Craig: Well guys, let's hear the rest of the story. So, the missionary career is taken away from you and you go spend this time of intense work, what happened next?

Troy: We’re working on our stuff and beginning to kind of just see what life might look like after the two by fours and after the mission field. We were going to stay in Fresno and just kind of start over there, but then I got a phone call from a pastor in Atlanta named Johnny Hunt. Johnny calls up, actually he calls four different time and I'm refusing to return his call because I'm embarrassed. I don't know what to say to this pastor dude. Finally, we talk and he says, what are you and Melissa going to do? I say, I don’t really know what we're going to do but we're thinking about staying at Fresno. And he says, “why don't you come to Woodstock, Georgia and let us love on you for a while?” So, we packed up and we drove from Fresno, California to Woodstock, Georgia just to continue our journey, but instead in the context of the church, that would just love us and hold us and continue to give us space and room to grow and make decisions. Out of that came the call to start a support group for men and wrote some materials. Those are the materials Roane uses on Monday nights and Roane was a part of that group. We have groups now all over Metro Atlanta and really in many places around the country. Just safe places for guys to get together, and that's what I felt called to do- just create safe places for Christian men to come together and talk about, “hey, this is what's really going on. These are the secrets that I'm struggling with. I need help.”

Melissa: For me, I kind of put our recovery in years. The first year, I agreed to losses. When we moved to Georgia, I was still in the grieving process of all the losses, trying to come to terms with who am I. If I'm not a missionary, who am I? What if we never do ministry again, because I felt called to ministry just like Troy did. So, God began working in my heart the second year of recovery. I think Troy did more of the grieving and coming to terms with all the losses. And I really began working on God recreating a lot of my beliefs and transforming me. I started the spouse’s group because there was nothing for me.

Troy: She wrote a workbook because there wasn't a workbook out there available.

Eva: I really loved that workbook. It was so life changing for me in our journey and then I use it today with other partners and groups here in Mississippi,

Craig: How did you guys support yourself financially during this transitional time?

Troy: So that was a beautiful thing. This church, First Baptist Church Woodstock supported us. They gave us a place to live and gave us help with babysitting. We began then to help other pastors and other men and other partners. For 15 years, I was on staff at First Baptist Church Woodstock leading Hope Quest, but also leading a ministry called City Refuge which was a dream and a vision of passionate Johnny Hunt. I was walking with ministers and families that needed a break from ministry for variety. We literally helped several hundred families, pastors and their wives and their children, and that church just loved us and walked with us and afforded us the opportunity to continue our healing journey that our marriage might survive, but not just survive, thrive, and then to begin to help others. Now we see the fruit of that one phone call and Johnny Hunt saying, “Hey Troy, come to Woodstock and let us love you for a while.” Now, literally thousands of people have been helped through Hope Quest because of that phone call and that church and that pastor's willingness to walk alongside someone who had fallen to help them be restored again.

Craig: Our listeners can't see me shaking my head because that seems so opposite…

Roane: That’s not the norm, as y’all know well.

Craig: Of what y'all know well churches and communities do…

Roane: Sadly.

Craig: When there is this type of revelation. It seems they more often run the other way.

Roane: Or shoot the wounded.

Troy: Yeah, well said Roane. I think those two things- they just want to run away because they don't know what to do or they just want to shoot the wounded because they the church has been hurt, and that's one of the things I love about just the ministry here at Hope Quest is that we come alongside, not just individuals, we come alongside churches because there is a better way for churches to deal with addiction. There really is a better way behind every addiction there's a story. I did not wake up one day and say, you know what? I want to ruin my marriage. I want to hurt my wife. I want to hurt the cause of Christ. I didn't wake up one day and say that, there's a long story that leads up to that day. But the beautiful thing is God rewrites people’s stories through counselors and organizations and churches and believers that will walk alongside others and be honest, authentic, and real.

Craig: I want to talk a little bit about this because it seems that not everyone who has an affair or who looks at pornography, practices rise to the level of addiction. So to the woman who might be listening right now who has discovered that their husband is having an affair, how do you know?

Melissa: I would say kind of the hallmark of addiction, and when you know from a clinical perspective, we say something as an addiction when in spite of negative consequences, I continue the behavior. Right? In spite of really bad things happening in my life, I can't stop doing the behavior. So, affairs fall into a different category. A lot of times affairs are indicative of disconnection in the marriage and people not leaning into each other. A lot of times, it's because people are emotionally immature and don't know how to have emotional intimacy. So, that doesn't necessarily mean there's an addiction, but it does mean there's a lot of problems in the marriage.

Roane: There’s work to do.

Melissa: There’s work to do for sure and there's hope for reclaiming a marriage.

Troy: I don't know how many of your folks listening to this program are in the greater Jackson area or in Mississippi as a whole, but I go back to say what a blessing LifeWorks is. To answer your question, what makes all the difference is having people like Roan and Eva and counseling ministries that you can go to and say, “help me sort this out. Don't judge me. Don't tell me what to do, walk with me and help me sort this out.” Because folks like Roan and Eva and our entire team, if you know what to do, then you can walk with someone and help them make informed decisions and really understand what's really happening. Is there an addiction here? Is there not an addiction here? Is this a one-time affair, but the addiction is pornography and masturbation and maybe even workaholism. There is definitely an addiction at play here. It's just not the affair. The affair is a symptom of this other stuff that's going on. So, having professionals that can walk with you through this process of figuring out what's really going on, what are my options? What can I do that? That's the help there.

Craig: Right. It seems like you're just boiling it down to getting wise counsel, that seeking smart people outside of yourself to speak into your circumstances.

Troy: Yes, because when we are alone with our problems and we don't let others speak into them, others who are wise and safe, we will make bad decisions and we will make things worse not better.

Craig: I'm so fascinated with the work that you do. Talk a little bit more about Hope Quest. I know you've got really rich content on your website. Talk a little bit more in detail about the work that you guys do there.

Troy: What we try to do is we try to, to take people, especially folks that need a more intense bit of help and take really good Christ centered truth from the Bible delivered by people who love them and love Jesus and blend that with clinical excellence. Christ centered and clinical excellence together are a powerful force in helping folks find real freedom and real connection and real victory. So, we try to do that through residential addiction treatment, through assessments, through helping folks figure out on the front end what to do and by helping churches figure out what to do. We also do outpatient work and stuff like Roane and Eva do. We have an intensive outpatient program that's more for local folks in the greater Atlanta area, but the bottom line is we've tried to be the church's resource for addiction help, because churches don't know what to do. When addiction pops up in a church, we want to be that place they call and they say, “hey, we don't know what to do, help us.” We then try to walk with them then in figuring out what their next steps are.

Craig: Listen, this has been so interesting to hear about your story most importantly, and then how that led to the work that you guys do. If someone wanted to connect with you and your ministry, how would they do that?

Troy: hopequest.us is the best way. It is our website and there's a lot of information there. There's a place where you can ask for more information. So, hopequest.us. Look us up and reach out to us and let us know how we can best help.

Roane: So good to just sit with you guys once again. You guys are a light in this dark world and y'all certainly do great work and even more importantly, y'all are just two great people. We love you guys. Thank you.

Troy: I appreciate you guys a bunch.

Craig: You've been listening to the Robertson and Easterling podcast. Thanks for tuning in.

Matt: If you need our help, we're here for you. You can request a consultation from our website 24 hours a day. It takes less than five minutes. If you like our show subscribe today on Spotify iTunes or your favorite podcast player so you can be one of the first to know when our next episode drops. You can also join us on social media. We're on all the major platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Craig: Have a great rest of your day and remember: there is nothing wrong with arming yourself with information. On behalf of the Robertson and Easterling family, thanks for spending time with us.

COMMERICAL: Hey, this is Eva Hunter from LifeWorks counseling. At LifeWorks, our counselors seek to integrate healthy, faith-based principles with sound clinical skills. Whether you're struggling in a relationship or have feelings that hinder your ability to be all you're created to be, one of our trained counselors can help. We seek to partner with you as our client to find the freedom to live the life God intended for you. We offer our experience, strength, and hope to promote healthy relationships built on intimacy and trust. LifeWorks counseling, the science and soul of connection.

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