

Season 3 Episode 10 Jason and Andi

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

Craig: And 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. 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. 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: Well, here we are again for another episode of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. And again, we are just excited this season that we're working with Roane and Eva Hunter and LifeWorks Counseling. We're teaming up for season three. I've used the analogy of the cartoon with the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other shoulder. You've got the divorce lawyers and the marriage counselors teaming up together to bring you this show. If you want to call it a show. The better half of the show today is my friend and cohost Eva Hunter. Eva, as usual, it's awesome to be with you today.

Eva: Oh, thanks for having me, Craig. I love doing this with you.

Craig: Another unusual thing for divorce lawyers, maybe not so much for Eva, but for me is to be sitting across the table from a couple. I usually take them one at a time, but today we're not. We've got Jason and Andi who are here, and they're going to tell their story. They're going to talk about something that our listeners have probably heard about, but might not fully understand. Maybe at the end of this episode, we'll all understand it a little bit better, and that is codependency. So, Jason, Andi, you guys are awesome. Big smiles on your face. Thanks for being here with us today.

Andi: Happy to be here. Thank you for having us.

Craig: Well, as usual, we should start with ladies first. So, Andi, why don't you tell us a little bit about your story. How did you and Jason find each other?

Andi: Both from Texas. I grew up in small town, Beaumont, Texas. It's a little oil town, cow town. Right before high school, I moved to Houston. That's where Jason and I met. We went to a little private school there in Houston and we've known each other since we were 14. Although my first memory of him wasn't until probably about junior year, he needed a prom date, but yeah, it all started when we were 16 and we've been dating ever since. He went to Belhaven and played baseball there, and I a good co-dependent wife, future wife, hopefully at that time. I went to MC; I rode on their equestrian team and we got married still in college at 19 and 20. Here we are now eight years into marriage.

Eva: Roane and I have both had the privilege of really getting to know you too. You've gotten to sit on our sofa in our office and I've just been able to walk through and see your journey and your growth.

Roane: It's been fun. It's certainly not the way I drew it up when Andi and I first met like any other relationship. I think we had planned on everything being great and we'd planned on being happily married and accomplishing all those goals, but God had other plans and thankfully He did because we ended up with you and Roane and getting to be a part of the great work that you guys are doing. Man, we're thankful for it.

Craig: Jason, I'll talk to you just a little bit. I'm a former baseball player myself, and the idea of one of my teammates talking about and working through co-dependency just seems almost foreign for a baseball team and an athlete. So, what led you guys into Roane and Eva's office?

Jason: Well, right. The baseball part of me just wants to reject everything that we're going to talk about today. But, I think the biggest piece is just that childhood drama that I experienced.

Craig: Well talk about that a little bit. What do you mean? Be specific for the most part.

Jason: You know, what I brought into our marriage was, was all the damage. Some covert, some overt, that my parents caused. What that looks like for me would be my dad, as great as he is, and as much as we had a great relationship around baseball, never spoke to me about anything. Life, women, dating, or spirituality. He was just really passive. Then on the other side of that, I had a mom who was so overbearing and controlling. A disclaimer, in case any of them hear this. I love both my parents.

Craig: Of course you do.

Jason: They did the best they could, I don't blame them. They have their own trauma that they did or didn't deal with. But all of that was packaged up with a bow and I carried that to Andi in our relationship. So, the mom piece and our story is huge. The trauma that a lot of that caused and by trauma don't necessarily mean that it was abuse or anything like that, but it was certainly traumatic events.

Life-changing events, the way that I view myself, those core emotions that I carry. Whether it be I'm not good enough, I'm not worthy, or that somehow Andi is going to fix me like my mom did or rescue me for myself like my mom did.

Craig: So, what I heard you say was your dad was present and involved in athletics, but otherwise not emotionally there. Whereas your mom was almost there too much.

Jason: She was there way too much.

Craig: Yeah. I feel you. Andi, what about you. So, mine is kind of the opposite of his. How I was raised, it was very much "it takes a village." My father passed away tragically when I was a child. That just started the compounding traumas in my life. So, I was raised in a home with a single mother who, once again, did the best she could do. Mom, if you're listening, I love you dearly. But however, with the absent father, I seek affirmation in men. It wasn't so much in a provocative way, so to speak. It could be as something as simple as this sounds terrible, but the science teacher even just getting called in class to say, "Andi, you did a good job." I probably looked at that a little too closely than the average child. That primed me to fall in love with this fella. You know, the cutie on the baseball team and put together now, thanks to our dear friends Roane and Eva. It set me up for a hard fall from where we are now. We're in a really good place now, but the, the turmoil that brought us here.

Craig: Well let's. I mean, yeah.

Jason: I think a lot of that had to do with what Andi said about how she was packaged perfectly to fall for me. I was packaged perfectly to fall for the girl in school that would mother me in a lot of ways. I was looking for a mom more than I was looking for a girlfriend or a wife. I wanted that rescuer, that savior, you know? We couldn't have found a better person to play those roles.

Eva: You guys say it so perfectly. I'm going to read a definition for you and I want you to tell us how did this play out in your marriage? So, the definition is: codependency is a compulsion to control and rescue people by fixing their problems.

Andi: Honestly, on the drive over here I had the wheels spinning in my head. Eva had prompted me what we would be discussing and I remember vividly, like I said, he went to Belhaven and I went to MC. Granted, we had been codependent for many years by then, because we've been together a minute. I remember him texting me many of times, granted, the schools are only 15 minutes apart, and him just saying "I had a bad day," and without even saying, "Oh, do you want me to come over and cheer you up?" I'd be like, I'm on my way. By controlling him that was offering control in my own life. I desperately wanted to fix him. I remember consciously thinking, "I can fix this guy."

Eva: "I can shine him up."

Jason: I think I'm a little bit different in that I need. What I wanted was others to tell me that I was okay. I wanted Andi to tell me that I was a man and that I was good enough. I needed guys on the baseball team to tell me I was a good ball player. I was just very needy and clingy. And that's that always having an overbearing or helicopter mother taking care of everything. Well, I never had any sense of self in that and so as much as she wanted to fix me, all I wanted her to do was to fix me. And to tell me that I was okay, essentially. So, I'm a little bit different on the other side of the spectrum of that, but again, very similar. I think it was just more of an inward problem for me and an outward problem for her.

Craig: Jason, I want to ask you this. And this is something that I experienced. I'm a little further beyond my playing days than you are, but I know that we as human beings, we need meaning and belonging. At least for me sports did that for me. I had meaning. We want to go out and win games. I had belonging because I was around a team. How did that work for you as you transitioned through that season of your life, where you were an athlete?

Jason: That's interesting you say that. Baseball certainly gave me that and I found much of my identity in baseball. It was only Belhaven, but I like to think I was fairly talented. I just missed my opportunity somewhere. Baseball offered me that, and I think the real issue came for me was that it exposed that identity crisis in that was exposed when my parents got divorced. That sense of meaning with my parents, that sense of family, all of that was kind of stripped away and became so depressed. It was a bad divorce. It wasn't clean. Uh, they didn't have you guys.

Craig: Well, there's no such thing as a clean divorce. I was standing what the average listener might be thinking. They're all difficult.

Jason: Right. And it was, it was just tragic. And so in making a bad decision in that state of depression, I quit playing baseball because I was just so depressed. I couldn't get out of bed to go play.

Craig: Y'all help me with the timeline. So, I know you guys have known each other since you were, I think you said 14. You guys grew up in the same town. You both transitioned from Texas to the great state of Mississippi for similar reasons to pursue each other and then to pursue your equestrian college career and then playing baseball. At what point in time did you guys get married? And at what point in time did your parents get a divorce? Help us establish the timeline.

Jason: Yeah, so my parents got divorced the fall of my freshman year. That's when I think it became evident that that was happening. If it hadn't happened, it happened by Christmas of that year, the Christmas and my freshman year.

Andi: I remember the announcement being a week after we had left for college. So, there was the element of not only are my parents getting a divorce, Jason's, but they waited for him to get out of the house. So that was also a very tough thing to walk through as well.

Jason: Right.

Andi: On top of just the transition of, "Hey, we're in school states away."

Jason: Then I quit my sophomore year. So, I made it through that entire freshman year by my shoelaces. Then halfway through my sophomore year, I just decided I couldn't do it anymore. It just got to be too much.

Craig: At what point did you guys get married?

Andi: The spring of 2013.

Jason: It would have been the spring of our sophomore year. I quit before we got married.

Andi: January, right?

Jason: Yeah.

Craig: So you guys left home, came to a new place, announced that your parents are getting a divorce. You're doing college, you're doing athletics. And then sure let's just get married.

Andi: That's exactly how it went.

Jason: Well, I thought it would fix everything and it didn't. I was looking for her in the marriage to fix all those broken parts of me that I was hiding. The shame, the codependency, the anger that I had towards my parents, just unresolved anger issues. I thought in getting married one, I could convince her to love me the way that I wanted her to love me. And then two, I thought that it would kind of complete that void that I had. Which as it turns out through a lot of work and self-discovery was that God-shaped hole that I was trying to fill with anything and everything else.

Andi: I was just going to say for comedic relief for a 19- and 20-year-old at the time, we also didn't want to go home. We didn't want to pay for two apartments.

Jason: This is true. This is true.

Andi: So that was a logical conclusion.

Jason: It was a lot cheaper to get married. It was in our minds.

Eva: Did y'all do that privately? I can't remember.

Andi: Deciding to get married?

Eva: No, when you got married. Was it a wedding?

Andi: I like to say it was a shotgun wedding, but every time I say that Jason makes fun of me. We didn't think we were pregnant or anything. We invited just our close friends. I want to say. There was 20 people altogether.

Jason: In true Mississippi fashioned way we had a crawfish boil.

Andi: We did actually. Mind you, we were 19 and 20 with a cooler on the porch. But we just picked a spot on the reservoir under a shady tree and yeah.

Craig: But there was no guns involved.

Andi: No guns.

Jason: Not that we're going to own up to at least.

Craig: Fair enough. So, okay guys. You're 19 and 20 years old, you get married. How that worked out for you?

Andi: Not well at all. Not well at all. Oh shoot. We had a session with Roane and Eva on Monday and looking back, obviously it was our dysfunction was our normal. But, I don't

know how we survived is the only word that comes to my mind. It was chaos. We didn't know how to have a conversation apart from what do you want from dinner that didn't lead to fights, throwing cups, and things of that nature. We stumbled along through our first year of marriage. Right on our one-year anniversary, we were 21 or so at that time is when it all hit the fan. Thankfully we reached out to a dear friend of ours that helped guide us to our first counselor. That really helped get us back on our feet. Is there anything you wanted to add to that?

Jason No, I mean, I, I thought you summed it up well. One, we weren't capable of having those conversations and two I noticed it was really hard to be married to my mom. Every argument we had, it was an argument with my mom, not my wife. Every time she would say, "Why didn't you do the dishes?" Which I'm terrible at doing the dishes, it was my mom scolding me. It wasn't my wife asking for more help. So, it was hard to be married to my mom. I think just all the unresolved anger, the unresolved trauma. There was nowhere for it to go, but towards her. When she would come home and I'm already angry, for whatever reason, she didn't stand a chance. She kind of took the butt end of that for a long time. Until I think it finally exploded.

Andi: We had a fight trying to decide what we were going to do for our first anniversary.

Jason: No, that was fun.

Craig: Well happy freaking anniversary.

Jason: Yeah, exactly. Eventually that led us to feel harden. I sat with Phil on my own for probably two years before you joined in.

Craig: Help me to understand this because I'm hearing from two relatively young people. Obviously, you got married very young and the marriage was not working. You said you felt like you were married to your mom because any kind of correction or instruction you rebelled against and brought up some of the childhood unresolved trauma that you talked about. So, what led you guys to a marriage counselor instead of a divorce lawyer? Because some people listening to this, obviously I'm a divorce lawyer. Even though I'm really for marriages. One year in, you're kids, why go to a counselor at that point? And how did you get directed in that direction?

Jason: For me, at least in that, I loved Andi and I wanted to be with Andi. I just didn't know how to love her. I wasn't taught that and I don't think any, I would say there's not very many dads out there that teach their sons how to do that in the right way. I didn't want to leave her, but what I was hungry for was offered kind of through Phil and some other guys that knew. Phil Hardon again, he's a counselor. And so, once I kind of got on his couch, he kind of offered me the community, I guess, is what we call it here. The deer camps and the men's group stuff. When he offered me that and I got a taste of it that's what I really wanted.

Eva: Hey, this is Eva Hunter at LifeWorks counseling. At LifeWorks our couple's 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 soul of connection.

Matt: 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, enjoy part two of today's show.

Craig: Yeah, Phil's been on our show before and so I would encourage the listener if you're interested in what Jason's talking about to go back and listen to our podcast episode with Phil where he talks about the men's community and his approach to helping men live out their authentic self. Jason, it sounds like that's what you found and that's what you gravitated toward and that's what made you start looking inward.

Jason: Right. That was kind of the beginning place for us. Because after a year, maybe two years, I can't remember exactly. Then Andi started sitting with us. We started doing kind of some couples therapy, but the issue that we ran into was it wasn't so much couples therapy. It was Jason and Andi sitting on Phil's couch talking about Jason. The stage of life we were in that that's all I had to offer and probably all we could handle at that point in time. But, I got into the men's community. I started meeting other guys who struggled with this codependency who had gone through it before. That's what I really wanted. Divorce was never something that I even. I mean sure in an angry rage, I'm sure I threw it out there as a threat once, but I never wanted that.

Andi: No, I appreciate what you said that it wasn't an option for you, but just to kind of backtrack to my side of it. Shame was a huge role in why I didn't consider it. Simply from the standpoint of I was Miss Independent or so I thought at that time. For instance, my mom had to sign a permission slip for us to get married after I'd followed this fella across state lines. I was not about to go back to mom and say it hit the fan I'm out. So, I was like, let's maybe work on this before we throw in the towel.

Eva: What has been the most instrumental for you as a couple to get to where you are today to have the marriage back on track and really growing?

Andi: For me, at least it's been a part of a women's community. I felt to an extent I raised myself. Because I've been so involved in a women's growth group, I guess you would call it, I've been not only parented, but also sistered. If I could put a word on that. It's a family unit and I'm able to get filled up through that community and not solely through Jason. For the longest time, one of our issues was we looked to each other for the cups to be filled. And when he couldn't fill my cup that wasn't good and vice versa. So, we've been parented by

our respective communities. He's involved in his men's community and I'm in a women's community.

Jason: Yeah, I think important to note for me in this I got started with the kind of recovery journey with Phil and really, I wasn't ready or mature enough to start doing that kind of work; to really start digging into self-reflection and understanding myself or my story better. I just learned how to better cover it all up. I would say a couple of years ago, things kind of came to a head in that Andi kind of found that out. That I was still really codependent. I still needed her to fill me up and I wasn't going to be okay on my own. It wasn't until that, I like to describe it as God pursuing me, and that's what it feels like now on the other side of it, so to speak. But it wasn't until I got serious about doing the self-examination, understanding what's going on inside of me, understanding my story better, and then getting plugged into groups where I'm real and honest with other men that not only help tell me who I am, because Andi, as much as I love her, she's not a man. As a woman, she cannot tell me how to be a man. I need other men to tell me how to be a man and to teach me how to be a man. Once I started digging into that and I got real and honest that's whenever the growth came. I think for me specifically to the point where I didn't take a broken little boy to Andi all the time that needed to be coddled and pat on the head and told "Good boy" and "You're good enough", and "I love you" and that sort of stuff. The turning point was whenever I decided that I cared enough about myself, that I didn't want to live with that shame or the guilt, or the constantly needing affirmation from Andi to be okay with myself.

Craig: There's a famous line from the Jerry Maguire movie where they look at each other and they say "You complete me." Jason, what I think I'm hearing you say is that's really too much to ask of your wife or of your husband to complete you. You can't get everything that you need from your life partner.

Jason: That's why I actually cannot watch Hallmark movies or listen to old country music anymore. I want that kind of fantasy romanticized relationship with Andi and well, you know we're both humans and we both have real jobs and we both have real lives. And so she, when she doesn't fulfill that, I can get those crazy voices spinning in my head that somehow something's wrong with me, or even worse, something's wrong with her. When the fantasy doesn't match up with the real, it's a problem.

Craig: Oh, that's interesting. You know, plugging our former podcast episodes. We did an Enneagram episode with a girl named Sarah who's an Enneagram Four. She talked a lot about that. So, Andi, what's it like being married to a Four who's trying to do better?

Andi: I think should start off with my fault. So, I'm a Nine, the Peacemaker. So, while he's, I know y'all, can't see me, but I just am reaching out. Have y'all seen *Of Mice and Men* or have read the book?

Eva: I've read the book.

Andi: Yeah, you've read the book. You know how Linny he just loves the little birds so much that he squeezes him. And so that's how I felt for a period of time. And now the joke on Roane and Eva's couch is, he's Linny, but I'm the porcupine. But all that to say, um, Jason

explained it really well. The romanticist part and maybe in the Nine, shoot, I wanted to provide him with all those things. I don't think I told you this, but when I was cleaning out the office the other day, I found this is so sweet, actually, but wraps the story together. We were probably 17 sitting on the couch and we were idealizing our future. Do you remember where I'm going?

Jason: I know exactly what you're talking about, yeah.

Andie: We wrote down everything we wanted in our future house. We were envisioning the future. We had it all mapped out. To this day, it's still what we want. But, that just gives you an idea of what we were working with in terms of the idealist. We were obviously still working towards that. I'm just so thankful that we have the opportunity to work towards that.

Jason: You can imagine who led the charge I'm putting together the future dreams.

Andi: You told me it was because you had the better handwriting.

Jason: Yeah, it was because I had the better dreams.

Eva: So you guys did one of the couples intensives. What was that like for you?

Andi: Goodness, that was so amazing. We had been, and mind you we had done couples intensives before, and certainly those helped, but those mainly just worked on communication. The best way I can put it.

Jason: It wasn't deep enough.

Andi: It wasn't deep enough for what we needed to address. Jason and I, a little over a year ago in August, we're kind of at a crossroads. We decided we needed to make the switch to Roane and Eva. We'd been working through that journey through their steps. We came to them in June and it was the right time and it was just so perfect for what we needed at that time. It was level two, for lack of a better word. Help me out.

Jason: What I appreciated about it was that it's husbands and wives in there together talking about real stuff together because we all have the same fights. We have the same arguments and our traumas very similar. So, we bring all that to the table. When you can see another couple going through the process or struggling through the process, you recognize things in yourself, or vice versa. They may see Andi and I are working through something on the Karpman triangle and they've had the same argument that we've had. It's nice to know one, you're not alone and two, there's other people going through it. Then you also see the other side where you and Roane are and how much we look up to that. So, I just think **Jiminy and Will** did a great job. It was deep. It was well planned and well thought out and you learn so much more than that.

So, when your wife says X, you say, Y, it's the why's behind what we're doing. The parts of the brain that are functioning and all that.

Craig: I do want our listeners who are interested in this to check out Roane and Eva's website because notwithstanding what most people think of when they think of divorce lawyers, we are very proactive in encouraging our clients to do everything they possibly can do to attempt to save their marriage. I've said this before on the podcast, but a person who is facing difficulties in their family and their marriage really are standing at the foothills of two equally difficult mountains. One is that mountain of reconciliation and things like the couples intensive that Jason and Andi have spoken about that. Roane and Eva, a sponsor through LifeWorks is one of those tools, guides, if you will, to help couples who are committed to that journey of reconciliation. But, there are some couples, unfortunately, for whatever reason who it just doesn't work. However, that second journey, that second mountain of life changed through divorce is equally challenging, equally difficult. That's a personal decision for the individual person to make. But, Jason and Andi, it sounds like it wasn't really, even on your radar screen, you guys were committed to each other. Mama had signed the papers to let you marry this guy and you guys started really doing the hard work. That's what I've heard is that two people committed not only to each other, but doing your own work. Andi, just as we're wrapping up today, what has been the most instrumental part of this journey of restoration, this journey that you and Jason have taken together to just have this incredible partnership.

Andi: We've always had someone in our lives a little bit wiser than us. At different phases in our lives, it was different people. What helped us, the person who helped us year one, so thankful for them almost want to tear up because they pointed us in the right direction for the right person we needed at this time. Right now, Roane and Eva are who we need and we hope we can repay the favor someday. But if I could just put it end cap on it, it would be always be surrounded by people that are a little wiser than yourself.

Craig: Jason, what about you? I'll end our show today with this thought. If I could hand you a microphone and put you in front of a room full of people, similarly situated, what one bit of advice would you give them on the road to living a freer, more fulfilling marital relationship?

Jason: The most important thing that I have found for me and what has been most instrumental for me and what I tell all guys is, you've got to get plugged in somewhere. So many guys walk around and are spiritually, emotionally, relationally, just dead. You see it all the time and I'm not here to bash the church, but you see it in church. You see it in the grocery store. You see it at kids sporting events. The guys got to get plugged in. For me, what that looked like was the deer camp community that Phil and Ron lead. It was sitting on a counselor's couch and doing that work and better understanding your own story so that you can be the husband, the man, the father that God intended you to be. I just think that if guys would do that, they would not be disappointed. God works. He will reward that seeking if you're willing to do it.

Eva: Well, thank you, Jason and Andi for coming and being our guests today. You two have just, it's been a pleasure to hear your story, to walk with you. I look forward to continuing the journey with you.

Jason: Thank you.

Andi: Thank you guys. We really enjoyed it.

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

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

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