

R + E Podcast Season 4, Episode 11: Linda MacDonald

Craig Robertson: Welcome to season four of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. This is Craig Robertson.

Matt Easterling: And I'm Matt Easterling. We want to thank everyone who has listened to our podcast so far. If you haven't already subscribed, please do so on iTunes, Spotify. Or your favorite podcast player, Craig and I are having lots of fun producing this show and we hope that you're enjoying it as much as we are. It's really hard to believe we are already on season four.

Craig Robertson: That's right, Matt. We've really enjoyed sharing the life stories of some great people. And we have even more in store for you for season four. As you know, by now we are board certified family law specialists with one of the most successful boutique law firms in Mississippi as creative problem solvers, we take a holistic approach to the individual needs of our clients.

Matt Easterling: Joining us again this season are licensed professional counselors, Eva and Roane Hunter from LifeWorks Counseling. We're excited to continue our partnership with Eva and Roane. They provide a unique perspective as we help hurting people with the healing process.

Craig Robertson: We're also excited to introduce two new sponsors for season four, Kristi Tidwell and Kelly Englemann.

Kristi is a certified financial planner and the founder of New Path Planning .Kristi's own walk through divorce, coupled with 20 years of experience, make her a perfect advocate for others on a similar path.

And Kelly is the founder of Enhanced Wellness Living, Mississippi's leading functional medicine clinic. Her team's food first approach to healing along with a variety of lifestyle and regenerative treatment options sets you on a journey to take control of your health and live life.

Matt Easterling: Well, so now that we've told you what to expect this season, sit back, relax, take a deep breath. Everything's gonna be okay. You found us. And what you're about to hear is going to help.

Eva Hunter: Hey, this is Eva Hunter from LifeWorks Counseling. 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 are 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.

Kristi Tidwell: Divorce is the largest financial transaction in most people's lives. Unfortunately, the decisions surrounding divorce are having to be made when emotions are highest. Making choices about assets can feel intimidating, especially when you're not in the best frame of mind. Make sure you know how what you do today will affect your financial future.

My name is Kristi Tidwell and I'm with new path planning. I'll use my 20 years of financial planning experience to help educate and advise you during every stage of the divorce process, visit [New Path Planning](#) for more information.

Craig Robertson: All right. So welcome back to the Robertson and Easterling podcast sponsored by LifeWorks Counseling. We're excited that you're listening today. I'm always happy when I'm sitting next to my dear friend and co-host Roane Hunter.

Roane Hunter: Glad to be here once again, riding shotgun with you, Craig. Man, looking forward to today's show, it's gonna be really good.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, I'm really excited too, Roane. We have Linda MacDonald from the state of Washington with us today who wrote a very compelling book. *How to Help Your Spouse Heal from Your Affair: A Compact Manual for the Unfaithful* and Linda, thank you so much for connecting with us today.

Linda MacDonald: Well, I'm honored to be here.

Craig Robertson: Roane, you guys wrote a book recently.

Roane Hunter: We did, our book came out in November. Our book is called *Sex, God, and the Chaos of Betrayal: A Couple's Roadmap of Hope and Healing from Affairs, Infidelity, Pornography and Sexual Addiction*. And certainly, Linda's book is a book that we have used for years and recommended and referred to quite often because it's along the same vein and along the same lines,

Craig Robertson: Linda, let's just jump right in. Let's talk about your book and talk about why you wrote it.

Linda MacDonald: Okay. Yeah. Well, I grew up wishing my father would give up alcohol. Gave me this longing for reconciliation and peace in a marriage. My parents got along famously when he wasn't drinking. So it was pretty sad that the alcohol interfered and I think in the same way, that gave me a desire to help couples reconcile when there's some sort of chemical involved, whether it's alcohol or an affair. I remember being at a worship service one time and the Lord speaking to my heart saying, "I'm going to give you a ministry in reconciliation". And I sat down and I pondered that and I just tucked it in the back of my mind.

So when I went through marriage and family therapy training and I got out, my focus was-ended up being with couples whose relationships had been harmed by infidelity and I seemed to be successful at helping couples work things out together. However, oftentimes I would get a spouse in there who had been the betrayer, they'd wake up, smell the coffee and they wanted to

restore the marriage and then they kept doing stupid things that would undermine their efforts and it would wreck the trust, it would invalidate the betrayed and alienate them, and sometimes it would defeat the very thing they wanted. So I wrote an article along those lines and then later put it in the form of a book, because I just wanted people to know that you can avoid these missteps and potholes and that there really are some practical steps to being able to save your marriage and here's how to do it.

Craig Robertson: Linda, I'm in the business of people who do stupid things. I've made a career out of the stupid things that people do and you corrected me. I've said for years that an affair is usually a symptom of a marriage that is already diseased, but you had a different take on that.

Linda MacDonald: I was taught in therapy school that you can't do couples therapy if someone is under the influence of a drug. For example, alcohol or some other substance. I have found that that is also true with couples where one person's involved with someone outside the marriage. There's a change in the brain chemistry that the more forbidden a relationship is, it gets the hormones going and it actually changes the amount of hormones flooding the pleasure centers of the brain. And so the more barriers that there are, the more heightened the chemistry and that changes the dynamic. No person can compete with that and so even though maybe their marriage was good, Dr. Shirley Glass talks a lot about that, how a lot of marriages are happy, the person has other reasons for stepping out of the marriage and sometimes it's the chemical high. Sometimes it's the need for novelty. Sometimes it's a midlife crisis. Some people say it's because they're grieving and they're using it as an antidepressant. Because there is a high in seeking a forbidden relationship outside of a marriage. So no, seasoned marriage can compete with that.

There has to be a treatment for the person who stepped out or some sort of "aha" that wakes them up to reengage with their spouse. So, it creates its own weird dynamic, just like alcohol does, you know, the person that's been betrayed ends up being over-controlling, just like you do when there's an alcohol problem, it just goes on and on. So there's all kinds of factors that are involved.

Craig Robertson: When I was a young lawyer, I had a therapist friend tell me that "strange nookie" is one of the strongest drugs known to man. I don't know if they have that word in Washington state or not, but down south here, that's a Southern term for stepping outside of marriage.

But, Linda, wow, that's fascinating, your description of that. And it just rings so true to me. And working with couples. In your book, you talk about five options, betraying partners as they peer into the futures of what their relationship with their life might look like. Talk about that to our listeners.

Linda MacDonald: Yes. Well, I look at them as having about five options. One is the worst and that would be leaving the marriage for the affair partner. I do call this the mass murder option because of the degree of trauma. It creates for the spouse, the children, alienates the children, they lose respect from all their friends. The carnage is massive.

Craig Robertson: Well, and I'm glad that you brought that up Linda, because, I don't have nearly the training or expertise that you do, but just from a, you know, just a veteran divorce lawyer's perspective. I tell my clients often that if they try to pursue an affair partner, that it will never work. There will always be chaos and tension. And the blended family dynamic will be next to intolerable and you call that the mass murder option. How fitting?

Roane Hunter: Linda, when the first time I picked up your book, and that's at the introduction and I just, that first one, the mass murder option that hooked me because just doing the work that we do it is that is just- that's reality. And of course, when you're in some type of an affair, it's just total fantasy. As you said, the brain chemistry's off. There's lots of things that are going on. And it's a fantasy world. It's not the reality of living with another person and that fantasy, those chemicals will die down. And I always tell 'em, you're probably gonna be back in my office in about two years with a new one. Right?

Craig Robertson: It's the nuclear option. Just go ahead and push the button. Because there's going to be disruption.

Linda MacDonald: Yeah and statistically 90% of affairs fail before there's even a marriage before nuptials and 75% of marriages begin as affairs fail. So overall, whatever affair a person's involved in, it has a 3% chance of becoming a long term marriage. Right?

Craig Robertson: You hear these statistics that half a marriage has failed, but that's not totally true because most first marriages actually work out. It's the second and third and fourth marriages that really pull the statistics down.

Linda MacDonald: That's true.

Craig Robertson: All right. So that's number one. That's the mass murder option. That's the nuclear option.

Roane Hunter: Everybody dies.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, everybody dies and we end up with our fantasy world affair partner. What's the next number?

Linda MacDonald: The next one is to leave the affair partner as well as the marriage. So, you may leave the marriage, but you don't connect up with the affair partner afterwards. You go on to somebody else and that's only slightly less torture. That's what happened in my case. And, I'm grateful. I don't have to run into the couple from hell which is what I call it. The constant reminder of the person that helped break up your marriage, it's intolerable for the children.

And so even though it's pretty awful, it kills the marriage. And the person that you were involved with probably feels used because you didn't choose them. They had this fantasy, maybe that you would choose them and there's a risk that you will never find your perfect soulmate. I had a friend tell me that his father left his mother years ago and he later told him after his fourth marriage, he said, you know, your mother was the best thing that ever happened to me. So,

people just have this unrealistic expectation that they're gonna find their soulmate out there and there's a lot of carnage, but it's not as horrible as making your family have to deal with you and the affair partner as a couple.

Roane Hunter: That's the one you call the murder option, right?

Linda MacDonald: Yes.

Craig Robertson: I don't know if it's in your book, but you know, there's a double mass murder option where the- the partners change places, betrayed husband ends up with betrayed wife and betrayer husband ends up with betrayer wife.

Linda MacDonald: Yeah. And on the one hand, it seems like double murder, that would be weird. That would be weird in family dynamics, graduations, birthdays, all that stuff. The kids are just, their minds are bent, but on the other hand, sometimes the spouses themselves probably get a little bit of comfort being with someone that knows all the dynamics, knows the other people involved and knows what it's like to be betrayed.

Craig Robertson: Well, clearly that's the connection point is they've both been betrayed and there's, they reach out to one another, they comfort one another and you know, It sounds odd, but it actually happens more than maybe our listeners.

Roane Hunter: We call it, we would call it trauma bonding.

Craig Robertson: Absolutely.

Linda MacDonald: Yes. That's a- that's a good word for it. That's a good word for it.

Craig Robertson: All right. What's the third option, Linda?

Linda MacDonald: It's to stay in the marriage, but to make no effort to save the marriage. You're just kind of a lump on a log, expecting your spouse to get over it without taking an active role. It's- I call it failure by default and the negligent homicide option. You're neglecting the marriage and the person you're sending a message, "You're not worth my effort. You're not worth my loyalty and you're not worth the ground I walked on." I'm gonna take a passive role. I'm not gonna do anything. And this often ends up in a very acrimonious divorce as well.

Craig Robertson: Right. I'm gonna stay, but I'm not gonna do any work. I'm-

Roane Hunter: do anything.

Craig Robertson: I'm just gonna stay in the house and we're gonna coexist and we're gonna, we're gonna suffer intolerably until we can get the children outta the house and then we'll decide what we want to do. And, wow, what a miserable way to be.

Roane Hunter: I'm choosing misery.

Linda MacDonald: Yeah. For both people.

Roane Hunter: Yeah. Everybody's miserable.

Linda MacDonald: It's kind of a lazy option too and it's entitled people. Narcissists tend to make that kind of a choice. They think it's all about them. So they're more into their own self pity than they are in empathy for their partner, that kind of thing. So, they just torture over the long haul with, because of their inaction.

Roane Hunter: Yeah. It really, in essence, I think It's kind of the classic victim role. They're just living life as a victim and still blaming their spouse for their affair, so I'm entitled and it gives me this false power of being a victim somehow.

Craig Robertson: So, Linda, I didn't realize that we were gonna be talking to a therapist with a background in criminal justice because we've talked about the mass murder option, where you leave for the affair partner and we're talking about negligent homicide and homicide. So what's the next criminal act that a person can commit?

Linda MacDonald: The next one is to make a bungled, haphazard effort to save the marriage.

Craig Robertson: Do it wrong.

Linda MacDonald: Yeah, they just do everything wrong. They just run by the seat of their pants. They get no guidance and they say really hurtful things like, "Well, you should be over this by now". and "I said I was sorry". And so they rely on their own judgment, which only magnifies the partner's pain and it leads to a more drawn out blood letting of the marriage till it dies. I call this the detain and torture option.

Craig Robertson: And just like bleeding out in a bathtub, just yes, slowly but surely. There's death.

Linda MacDonald: Yes!

Roane Hunter: These are the best descriptors.

Craig Robertson: I know! I was in such a good mood when we started this show today and just look at it. It's just getting worse, although Linda's lovely. And what's number five, Linda?

Linda MacDonald: Number five is to make a heartfelt, well advised effort to save your marriage.

Craig Robertson: And that's what it is, that's what we're looking for. Everybody wants that.

Linda MacDonald: Yes. Yes, and we can't do it by ourselves. To think we can do it without any help, it's like a football player thinking he can play a game without a coach. You just can't do it.

Craig Robertson: Climb Mount Everest without a Sherpa.

Linda MacDonald: Yeah, that's right!

Craig Robertson: You need a Sherpa. Who's been there before, who can lay the ladders down for you as you walk across the deep crevices.

Linda MacDonald: I like the idea of a Sherpa. An outside expert that can come in and help and walk alongside you. It dramatically increases your chances of saving and improving the marriage. That the long term rewards will come, even if there's initial pain, because there, of course there's pain on disclosure and working it through, but if you work through it in a well advised way, you have a much better chance of healing the harm that you've caused. Even if your spouse chooses not to reconcile in the end, you can look back with pride, knowing that you made a concerted effort to undo the damage, learn some valuable lessons and reduce some of the fallout from the affair.

I can't tell you, even though I help people and they do end up doing the repair work, but even if the spouse later leaves, if they know that their partner that betrayed them, made an effort. And if the kids know, it heals their hearts. You've made apologies. You've taken ownership. You've gotten rid of your rationalizations, they can live with that much easier than somebody that keeps justifying what they've done. So, I call this the character building and possible resurrection option.

Craig Robertson: This is probation. This is getting into a rehabilitation program and not being a repeat offender.

Linda MacDonald: I love that. Exactly.

Craig Robertson: Roane, this is the work that you and Eva do day in and day out.

Roane Hunter: Yeah, we do. And, as you said, Linda, I think of Dr. Judith Wallerstein's book that was based on her 25 year landmark study on children of divorce, *The Lasting Legacy of Divorce*, I think is the title. One of the takeaways from that book is that the children, where one parent actually gets healthy, emotionally healthy, the children far better than even children that are with parents, where there's just the chaos and the fighting.

Craig Robertson: Right, where they stay together, but nobody does any work.

Roane Hunter: Nobody does any work. So, in divorce, when one person decides to go do their work, as you say, in this last option, whether they stay together or not, everybody's gonna be better off in the long run.

Kelly Englemann: Hi, I'm Kelly Englemann, family, nurse practitioner, and functional medicine provider. I founded Enhanced Wellness Living, Mississippi's leading functional wellness clinic, with the understanding that one's healthcare plans must be in congruent with their beliefs and values and Enhanced Wellness Living, treatment is focused on you as a whole, rather than just looking at your symptoms or what particular disease state you have.

My team and I partner with you to understand the root cause of your symptoms and educate you on creating a lifestyle of wellness, energy, vitality, and longevity. Combining my first approach to healing with inspiration, education, integrity, empathy and balance. We empower you to take ownership of your health for your life.

Enhanced Wellness Living is proud to offer a variety of lifestyle and regenerative treatment options, including sexual wellness programs. Take control of your health. Live life well with Enhanced Wellness Living.

Stephanie Walters: We hope you're enjoying this episode of season four of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm Stephanie, the voice on the other end of the phone when you call. If you think you need to speak to one of our attorneys, you can request a consultation from our website or simply call the office.

Getting legal help is not only the best way to take control of your future. It will give you the clarity needed to feel better. You owe it to yourself and more importantly to your children to take initiative, be brave. And now please sit back and enjoy the second half of our show.

Craig Robertson: Well, thank you for listening. We're back with Linda MacDonald and my dear friend, Roane Hunter. We have been talking about the five options that betraying partners have as they look into the future as they peer into what's next for them as they think about the next chapter.

And they've got mass murder as an option, where we just head off with the affair partner or, you know what I like to say, double mass murder, where there's a changing of the partners. And then a murder where the marriage ends, but maybe the affair partner is not pursued. And then negligent homicide where everybody stays, but nobody does any work. And then detain and torture. Well, we do the work. We try to fix it, but we just do it all wrong. We don't have any help. We don't have one, we try to climb Mount Everest without a Sherpa. And then last what my friend Roane specializes in and Linda, when you were in practice, you did. We build character and hope and pray and dig in to create resurrection where we've got people who have gone through adversity who are resilient, who move through to the other side.

Let's talk about forgiveness because obviously, Linda. You know, sometimes people stay together, but they don't really achieve forgiveness. And you are an expert in forgiveness. Talk about the three types of forgiveness and how you see that play out in these situations.

Linda MacDonald: The main type that seems to cause problems is what I call premature forgiveness and I'd say Christians are especially prone to this. They want to patch it up. It's a way of avoiding pain. It's a way of trying to resolve something without having to dig deep. And, what it does is it just buries the pain underground. They forgive, they do things like, well, I had one gal come to me who her husband had an affair with and he disclosed it. Good for him. Usually people just find out, but anyway, she immediately said, I forgive you.

Well, I see her 10 years later and she's dying inside because they never did the work of repair and in a weird way, it robbed him of a process of having to work through comforting her,

recognizing the depth of the sorrow, and working through his own repentance. And, her heart just stayed raw, whenever there was a sermon on adultery or David and Bathsheba or anything that came on television to do with this, she would just feel like stabbing pains in her heart.

And she wondered why that quick forgiveness didn't work. Well, we had to unpack, we had to unpack our feelings. Have her process them. And then we invited husband in and he was great. He did not realize how tortured she was, how hard she had taken it and it gave him a chance to grow and respond in a healing manner.

So premature forgiveness, sometimes it's just somebody trying to be nice and because they're scared they're gonna lose their spouse if they have any kind of reaction, they end up being the one to do most of the work, they over accommodate. And they also feel a lack of self respect. Like they feel really foolish, but they don't talk about it and so it really does prevent the healthy repentance process and the processing of grief and all that. So I see premature forgiveness as very unhealthy, codependent, and not the route people need to go.

Craig Robertson: Well, it sounds like avoidance. I mean, are they simply avoiding this big thing? This big trauma that they experienced?

Roane Hunter: Oh yeah. I know Linda, you operate from a Christian framework and so do we, and it's one of the things that we do see. It's not that uncommon where the betrayed partner will over spiritualize it. What it really is, it is avoidance. They're using God to not deal with the pain, to not work through the process.

Craig Robertson: Well, it's a Jesus bandaid.

Roane Hunter: It is. Oh yeah. I call it the Magic Jesus Bus .All this stuff is just magically gonna go away and it just never works that way. That's not reality.

Linda MacDonald: No. And, on the psychological side, Emily Brown, her theory is that people that are vulnerable to couples, that are vulnerable to an affair, usually have a difficult time with resolving conflict. Their conflict avoidant or intimacy avoidant. So that just is another picture of some underlying issues that they have not learned how to deal with.

Roane Hunter: We talk about in our book, we talk about the intimacy disorder that's always present. I believe that's true in most marriages, because we didn't see true intimacy and always have to say this in my office. You know, when we say intimacy, we're not talking about sex. , we're talking about emotional connection. But they didn't see it modeled by mom and dad, nobody talks about what that looks like, nobody teaches you the skill set that you need in order to be able to do that and certainly one of those is conflict resolution.

You know, oftentimes we get the couple coming in and they want to, like, work on communication and conflict resolution. Well, and then we know that there's much deeper stuff there, but at the root of it, it is a lot of skills that you have to learn in order to be able to live together and resolve conflict and differences and all those good, good things that we need in order to have a healthy relationship.

Craig Robertson: So premature forgiveness is our first type of forgiveness. What's number two, Linda?

Linda MacDonald: It's reconciling forgiveness. This is something that needs to be done with another person. And again, that's where Christians, a lot of times think it's the unilateral thing, but the unilateral forgiveness is more of a parallel process. It's not one that brings you together when reconciling, the people are moving toward each other. It involves both of them and the key, well, there's a couple keys, but on the part of the offender, it's learning the process of repentance and the part on the injured person is learning how to be honest about the depth of the offense, being able to name them, share the grief, share their triggers.

And so- but the offender can just do way more than they think they can do. If they can walk through the process of repentance. You know, John the Baptist said, bring fruit in keeping with your repentance. There needs to be evidence of it. I just recently studied a little bit about the life of Judah and Judah made some pretty bad mistakes earlier in his life.

But at the end, he's the one that's advocating. He's empathetic. He doesn't wanna see his father, Jacob wounded again there before Joseph. He's just willing to stand in and take whatever he needs to take to preserve his father's life and Benjamin's life. And so I just think that repentance makes such a difference and that's when Joseph breaks down weeping because he saw how repentant Judah was, and that he saw that he had sinned and he saw the harm that he had done to Joseph, and he didn't wanna do it again to his dad. And, that was very moving and it's a fresh Bible study for me. So, it's really moving to me too, cause I did not see that in my own situation, which we'll talk about. I like to do an acrostic with the word repentant.

It doesn't cover every little aspect of repentance, but I really like it. I have the R standing for showing regret and remorse.

Roane Hunter: Mm-hmm.

Linda MacDonald: Contrition makes such a difference in the heart of the other person. You can put up with almost anything. If you see true regret, remorse and contrition, that is very healing for this offended spouse. Another one. The E is eager to repair and apologize and you see this in 2 Corinthians 7, when the church had not been too tolerant of a guy that was in deep sin. And when Paul confronted them, they changed their minds and they became eager to make repairs and to do it differently. So eagerness sends a strong message.

The P stands for producing fruit, which we just talked about. E is for empathy, being empathetic with your spouse, caring that they're wounded, not being coldhearted. The N in repentance is no more secrets. Bradshaw used to say we're closest to people with whom we share our secrets, but the opposite is true. We don't share our secrets. It really creates a barrier.

Craig Robertson: Right. We're as sick as our secrets.

Roane Hunter: Yeah.

Linda MacDonald: We're as sick as our secrets! Thank you very much. Yes. I forgot his exact line.

T is for truthful. No more lies. You know, I would say that couples in recovery, if somebody turns around, because they've been in a habit of lying and they lie even about something, not related to the affair, it can just shut down the recovery process just like that. And so, I had one couple where I really thought they were getting close and he lied about something really stupid, but that did it for her. It's like he has not changed. He could lie to me again. And so becoming truthful is critical in the repentance process. Repentant.

A, accepts responsibility. They're not just blaming this "Oh, if you'd been this, I wouldn't have done that", that kind of thing. They accept personal responsibility for their choices. The N is they make no more excuses. And the T is that they become transparent.

And so when they do their work on their side, then that enables the wounded spouse to more safely feel like they can move toward their partner and begin that process of all their angst, distrust, hurt. And eventually, come together for a bridge of reconciliation.

Craig Robertson: Well, Linda, help me contrast that because you mentioned this idea of unilateral forgiveness when you first started talking about reconciling forgiveness, help me understand the difference.

Linda MacDonald: Reconciling forgiveness is a two person process. Unilateral is one way. That's like Jesus on the cross saying father, forgive them for they know not what they do. He unilaterally forgave them, even though they weren't sorry, they didn't recognize what they'd done and so unilaterally created a parallel process where people on a road are not gonna come together. You don't trust. They have not [earned] the trust. You're not closer. You have to put up boundaries. You have to process your pain alone with God, close friends, and a therapist. It's a lonely process, but it's still necessary because if we don't figure out a way to get healing and to let go, then we are poisoned.

And I've seen a lot of people that just stay in their stew for a really long time. And I would say, I have the most hope for Christians because they understand this and they've experienced God's forgiveness and that can soften their hearts. I also think that they need healing, but they have to offer it one way in their hearts. It took me and my own situation. It took me years of identifying specific sounds, and trusting those to the Lord.

Craig Robertson: Well, this sounds like the work that a person would do in the mass murder option. So they've been left, they're left behind and they're left to pick up the pieces by themselves. There's not going to be reconciliation. There's not going to be stepping toward one another, but there still needs to be healing on the part of the person that was left behind, the non-offending spouse, the person who is grieving the loss of the relationship. So, unilateral forgiveness is just that internal lonely work that one has to do to put one foot in front of another and carry on living.

Linda MacDonald: Yes. I would say the first four options lead to a lot of need for unilateral forgiveness because the other person has not moved toward them.

Craig Robertson: Right.

Roane Hunter: Mm-hmm.

Linda MacDonald: In a meaningful way.

Craig Robertson: And Linda, you didn't just- you have personal experience with these things that you write about. Talk about that as it relates to this idea of forgiveness.

Linda MacDonald: Thanks. Yeah, I- as an infidelity specialist, I think I never thought I would go through the experience in my own life. I just believed that repair was possible and did not see my husband's vulnerabilities. He had some unfinished grief, there was- he was developing his own little narrative and had fallen in love with a woman at work.

I had married the man of my dreams, who was in full-time ministry. And it seemed like a really solid person that I really respected. But at a time when our oldest was in college and another was finishing high school, he got involved with a woman at work. The way he presented it to me is and said he had a crush on her. I believed him. So I only knew this, you know, small amount of the story, which is almost always the case. It's like an iceberg. You just, you just get the surface.

Craig Robertson: Right. The top part doesn't sink the ship. It's all the ice below the surface.

Linda MacDonald: Exactly, exactly. So I noticed him distancing, treating me coldly, being detached, and I just assumed it was a fantasy, but I was the day that I saw him not look into my eyes. And he was leaving for a trip. All of a sudden, I knew he was actually thinking about leaving me and I freaked out and I started shaking all the time and I could hardly function. So we went through, he finally admitted the truth, but I would say that was a few months later. In the meantime, I'm just a wreck and never expected to go through this with him, let alone just in my life. And he had a lot of rationalizations, changed his theology. He got into hyper grace, you know, "God will forgive you no matter what you do. So you can do whatever you want." kinda stuff.

After 11 months, they broke up, but he never got his heart back from me. And so I went through two years of betrayal and abandonment trauma, that stigmatized loss where you see people comforting your friend that lost their husband to death, but nobody's putting their arms around you, all that kind stuff. I thought my career was ruined as an infidelity specialist. All that I had nightmares for a couple years. Had to have some real- I tried talk therapy, but I would say. Right brain therapy that got to the, where the memories were and the trauma, kind of a prayer therapy that someone did with me. I mean, three sessions and I was done with nightmares. And nothing else worked.

So, anyway, I think the thing that motivated me to continue on that journey of getting well was I had started trying to date and I still felt just like a mess on the inside. And we went to this media bistro party. He was a DJ and we had to put a label on our shirts that said what part of the media we were involved in and I just said, I was a writer.

Well, I ran into a journalist and she said, "Oh, what are you writing?" And so I told her, "Yeah, I'm writing a book for betrayed, abandoned spouses." "Oh, my mother went through that" and I said, "Really?" I said, "How is she now?" And she said, "Oh, she's an alcoholic. She keeps her blinds drawn, she's hopelessly depressed. She won't even hardly leave her house." And I said, "How long ago did this happen?" And I'm thinking five years, right? 20 years ago. And that's all I could see the whole rest of the night. 20 years. You could feel like this for the next 20 years. And that's when I realized, this isn't just gonna happen. My recovery, I'm gonna have to scratch what- I'm gonna have to be intentional. Like Steven Covey talks about. Being intentional. And so I was. I sought a lot of help, read a lot of books, wrote a ton in my journal. I still haven't found the book that covers the double trauma of having both experiences. Most of the books out there are about recovering your relationship, or they're about betrayal trauma, which is great, or abandonment, trauma or divorce, but nobody puts both of those experiences together and that's- that's my next project.

Craig Robertson: Awesome. That's great, Linda. Thanks for sharing that in our, in our last few minutes that we have together, there's a happy ending to that story though, or I guess a happy middle to that story. Talk about that. Talk about how you were able to move through that divorce, and love again.

Linda MacDonald: I think finding somebody that knew what they were doing with trauma helped a ton. I'd say God's word became diamonds to me because he had used so many scriptures out of context that I needed to study them in context in order to realize God does love me. He's not throwing me away. He doesn't support what my husband did.

I just had to reexamine the character of God, those kinds of things. And then, gracefully, you know, the Lord brought a really wonderful man into my life. He had been through betrayal and was very empathetic and we just hit it off. And so we've been married. It'll be 18 years in May, and we have four kids between us, eight grandchildren. His family adores me, which is really nice and he enjoys my company, which was one of the things my former husband said. He didn't like hanging around me and I just feel loved and accepted and my career has taken off. I'm just shocked.

I think I got more credibility from what I'd been through because I understood the pain of the betrayed. I still have a desire to help people do the repair work when they can. It is still my view that it's the optimal view, but if somebody's not gonna change and they're not gonna grow, then it's just gonna lead to more sorrow. So God has- the theme of our wedding was redemption. You know, God redeems. Before I got married, the first time I went to a women's retreat and the theme of the retreat was God is a redeeming God and the speaker made a statement I will never forget. She said, "No matter what we go through in life, there is nothing beyond God's ability to redeem." And I had no idea how much I was gonna need those words. Many years later.

Craig Robertson: Well, Linda, our listeners can't see your face, but I can. And you've just got such a light about you and such, just a positive energy about you and I really, really appreciate

you sharing your wisdom and your time with us today. Tell our listeners where they can connect with the work that you do.

Linda MacDonald: I have a website. Linda J. MacDonald, M A C like the farm, not the hamburger joint. lindajmacdonald.com. And my book can be found on Amazon. There's some other titles that are a little bit similar to mine, but I'm the only Linda MacDonald that wrote that book and I'm working on the new book called The Betrandanment Syndrome. I know that sounds weird. The Betrandanment, I combined betrayed and abandoned, Syndrome: Healing Your Life from the Compound Wounds of Infidelity and Unwanted Divorce.

I have lots of resources. I have podcasts, I have webinars, I have blogs, free things to print out that chart on the three kinds of forgiveness is on there under resources, so yeah.

Roane Hunter: Man. Linda, it's just, it's so good. You and I actually connected on LinkedIn originally. And then, we did a Zoom call together and just got to know each other and certainly feel like I know you a lot better and a lot more after doing this and it's just so encouraging, the work that you do. Just even your own story is such an encouragement and so hopeful. And I know it has been for so many people and will continue to be. And just love being on this journey with you and fighting in the battles that we get to fight in. It's been awesome. Thank you.

Linda MacDonald: Thank you. Thank you.

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