

Season 3 | Episode 23

Marriage Reflections

Mike and Tracey Motoda, Kevin and Jamie Stark,
Greg and Gina Hubert

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to [podcasts](#) or find us at joniandfriends.org/podcast.

Today on the podcast, I'm excited to share some encouragement from three couples you'll recognize from previous episodes on the show. They'll be talking about the importance of good communication, respect, love and gratitude, especially when a disability is involved. I hope you're blessed by their words of wisdom.

Tracey Motoda:

Hi there, we're Mike and Tracey Motoda. I work at the home office of Joni and Friends.

Mike Motoda:

Tracey and I have been married for 13 years now, and we certainly understand the challenges and joys that a disability can bring to a marriage. But nearly 19 years ago, when we first met, I'll never forget what she told me before we ever met in person. She said, "I use a wheelchair to get around, but I don't let that get me down." And that's been as true today as it was back then.

Tracey Motoda:

That's right. I've been a power wheelchair user for 37 years now. And due to the physical limitations caused by a progressive neuromuscular disease, I rely on Mike for so much. I'm just going to embarrass him here, but the tenderness with which he has cared for me over the years has been such a powerful example of sacrificial love throughout our marriage. I am so grateful for his gentle and attentive care, and I try very hard to continually remind him how deeply thankful I really am. No matter if he's turning me over in bed at 3:00 in the morning, or fixing my lunch, I can always take time to express my gratitude and say thank you.

Mike Motoda:

Well, she flatters me, but she contributes equally to our marriage. And if I'm being completely honest here, she's the brains of this operation. She keeps me focused, inspires me through her faith and love for what she does here at Joni and Friends, and serves as an example of living out God's word for which I'm grateful for each day.

Tracey Motoda:

And while we're still learning a lot about this journey called marriage, we can say with absolute certainty that the daily realities of living with a disability have drawn us closer together and closer to God as we seek to adore and appreciate one another.

Kevin Stark:

Hi, I'm Kevin Stark and this is my wife, Jamie. Disability entered my life about 10 years ago when I fell down some stairs, broke my neck, and that resulted in quadriplegia.

Jamie Stark:

Communication between Kevin and I, when we're doing it right, it's really an expression of our love for one another, but when it breaks down... And it usually does because of an action that is not consistent with one and probably several Fruits of the Spirit.

Kevin Stark:

Actually, a good example happened this very morning.

Jamie Stark:

It did happen this morning.

Kevin Stark:

We were working through our daily routine of getting me ready and to go from the bed to eventually to my chair. This usually involves about two to three hours, muscles stretching and joint stretching, and then transferring me and completing my daily activities and then getting me dressed. Jamie expresses and communicates her love for me by doing a great job of planning ahead and preparing the medical supplies and the other equipment that's going to be needed for this process. Sometimes though, I do something that disrupts this routine and I want it now. Patience was never one of my strongest virtues, even before my injury. In this case, I wanted to start reading my iPad. This caused Jamie to have to work around me or simply stand there and wait for me to finish. So, frustration and raised voices resulted. And this was definitely not our finest hour.

Jamie Stark:

Not the finest.

Kevin Stark:

When I was honest about it, I realized that this was a recurring habit of mine. When I acted this way out of impatience for my wants, I had taken her communication of love in vain. My actions did not demonstrate patience and I apologized, which she graciously accepted.

Jamie Stark:

I really appreciated that Kevin apologized after the incident, but it was in the hours that followed that my heart was really convicted, and it had nothing to do with what Kevin had done. It was about me, my words and how they were delivered or how they were not delivered. They were not delivered with gentleness, and they were not delivered with kindness. It was no longer about what Kevin had done, but it was what I had done. And that's when I went to Kevin, and I offered my apology and he graciously accepted. It may seem like a small detail to bring up, but sometimes it's those little things that make a difference in the day, those recurring habits that can lead to frustration and a breakdown in our communication.

Kevin Stark:

It's true. Christ-like communication is important in our marriage, but when disability is present in a marriage or a family, it places a huge premium on effective communication. Hurt feelings, unforgiven grievances can linger and erode the trust and love for each other.

Jamie Stark:

You may have heard of the phrase you need to manner up, but in disability with our marriage, it causes us to Christian up. And for that, I, we, will always be grateful.

Kevin Stark:

Amen.

Jamie Stark:

Amen.

Greg Hubert:

My name's Greg Hubert and...

Gina Hubert:

My name is Gina Hubert. We were high school sweethearts and have been married for 33 years. Plus, we dated 10 years. Yes, that is 43 years together.

Greg Hubert:

It was in those years of dating that Gina and I formed a deep relationship with the Lord and were discipled by godly men and women, which formed a solid biblical foundation for what we were to experience in the years ahead. In fact, the family we envisioned having as newlyweds is nothing close to anything God actually gave us.

Gina Hubert:

We were young and innocent, filled with anticipation in hopes of having our own big family. And in April of '92, after four years of marriage, our firstborn son Zachary arrived six weeks early, but healthy. Less than two years later, our second son Tyler was born. It was like a storybook, easy deliveries, healthy babies, and now a happy family of four.

Greg Hubert:

At this time, I took a job in Hawaii. As a family, we were so excited to be able to move to the Island of Oahu and live close to the ocean. Working as a salesman for a medical device company, I traveled the islands while Gina stayed home with our two young ones. It seemed picture perfect.

Gina Hubert:

But then, the tides turned. We noticed Zachary's development was beginning to decline. He began to lose language, eye contact, and wanted to isolate. So, we were quick to take them to the best doctors on the island. After many visits, exams and tests, we received the news that your son has ASD, autism spectrum disorder.

Greg Hubert:

It hit us as an eruptive sonic wave. Our souls dropped from under us. What does this mean? My mind swirled graphs what his life and ours might now be like with the presence of a disability. In fact, in the days ahead, while Gina and I were absorbing this news, she mentioned in passing that she noticed a similar decline of pattern of developmental delay with Tyler. "Nope," I said. "You're kidding, right? God wouldn't do this a second time. That's not even funny." Yet, sure enough, Tyler was officially diagnosed with autism a couple of years later.

It was at this time we pumped the family breaks really hard to listen to the Lord regarding any more children. Was God trying to tell us we were doing something wrong, or he didn't want us to have any more kids? After much prayer, we concluded that if God wanted to bless us with a third child, even a child with autism, we would welcome that child into our lives no matter how challenging.

Consequently, our third son Tate was born in 1997. And yes, Tate was diagnosed with autism as well. The family we thought we would have was nothing like we could have ever imagined. We looked to Christ for direction because in this world and even our church, many people, professionals and friends, did not know much about disabilities, especially autism.

Gina Hubert:

Well, here are three relational areas God has taught us to focus on in this journey of autism related to keeping our marriage alive.

First is our personal relationship with Jesus. Although we came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as children, the depth and authenticity of our faith was put to the test with the arrival of ASD in our family. And I could share story after story of major hardships with our boys over the years. Still, because we have a personal relationship with our loving heavenly Father, he has brought meaning into our lives. God did not curse or punish us by giving us three special-needs boys, but instead ushered us into a life we would never have chosen on our own; to live, love, and learn from three of the greatest teachers of God's love: Zachary, Tyler and Tate.

God has used our family to encourage and reach more people with the hope of Jesus Christ. People who are isolated, fatigued, and hopeless that would never have happened without autism in our world. Without God, I do not see how anyone can experience hope or purpose.

Greg Hubert:

Second is our respite relationships. In a survey Joni and Friends conducted in 2020, they wanted to discover the greatest need for a family living with disability in the United States. You know what that need is? Respite. Only 8% of eligible children use respite care support and get this, 75% of family respite care needs remain unmet. When families are asked what their number one need was, do you know what it is? Respite. In our experience as a family, regular respite or a break from the continual care of our boys was an absolute necessity, occurring at least every other week.

From the time the boys were babies, Gina and I would go on date nights. We always wanted the boys to understand that our marriage came first before they did, and we were in love. We saw through the years that their loud and exaggerated behaviors would subside when we spent regular time together. When the boys wouldn't sleep or were acting out and having extreme meltdowns, we would immediately reevaluate even in front of the boys, whether we were spending enough time together and if we were regularly getting out on dates. Relationships with our church, family and friends, afforded us regular respite for a sustainable marriage.

Gina Hubert:

And finally, our individual relationships. In the beginning of many marriages, individual same-sex friendships are often cast aside, thinking a spouse can fulfill all your needs. Once strong friendships gradually disappear, we all know that thinking is not true. But even more revealing is how difficult it is to find another couple having similar hurts with whom you can maintain a friendship. If you can find another couple who supports you and all four of you get along, well, bottle that friendship up and never let it go. We could not find one. So, we individually developed friendships. This way I could stay at home with the boys while Greg would go out with his friend or friends to be encouraged for a couple hours, or an overnight, a weekend to gain refreshment for soul. In like manner, Greg would encourage me to go and spend time with my friends. We have been doing this for over 25 years with some of the same friends. They know our family, our hurts, and it's a safe place to share our hurts and hopes each week.

Let me leave you with this verse in Isaiah 26:3, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."

Greg Hubert:

If you don't know Jesus personally, turn to him today. If you do know Jesus, trust in the rock of your salvation, for only in him will you find perfect peace, even in the whirlwind of disability. Your journey, I am sure is different than ours, but we are in the same world. Thank you for letting us share our story today.

Gina Hubert:

Thank you and may God bless you as you continue the messy, heavy lift of life to people created with God-designed abilities.

Crystal Keating:

Thank you for listening today. If you've been inspired, please send me a message or leave a five-star review on your favorite app. That's a great way to help other people find encouragement from these conversations. And to get our next episode automatically, subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm Crystal Keating and thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.

Episode link: <https://www.joniandfriends.org/marriage-reflections>

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