MARGIN FOR MARRIAGE IN THE CHAOS OF LIFE (SHAUN AND ABBIE HALBERSTADT)

https://fiercemarriage.com/margin-for-marriage-in-the-chaos-of-life-shaun-and-abbiehalberstadt

[00:00:00]

- Selena: We are so blessed to have a couple on the podcast today and on our YouTube channel. They have 10 children, two sets of twins.
- **Ryan:** Oh my goodness!
- Selena: And she recently wrote a book about motherhood that we're going to talk about. But on Fierce Marriage here today we get to talk to them about how they prioritize each other, how they prioritize their kids and spend quality time with each of them. How do they deal with conflict? I imagine there's quite a bit.
- **Ryan:** I'm really anxious to hear how they have margin to have a healthy marriage when they have this many children at home, which we know, you know, children are a blessing.
- **Selena:** Yes, we're all for that.
- **Ryan:** And how in the world... you're finite human beings, how do you make this happen? So we're going to talk to them about not just that, but many other things as we interview Shaun and Abbie Halberstadt. So, hope you enjoy it. And we'll see you in there-

Selena: On the other side.

Ryan: On the other side. [all laughs]

[00:00:52]<music>

- Selena: All right, Abbie and Shaun we're so grateful to have you guys on the Fierce Marriage podcast, video, all the things that are happening right now.
- **Ryan:** Yeah. Hi guys.
- Shaun: Hey.
- Abbie: Hey.

- **Selena:** We know this is a sacrifice. Shaun, we're super glad to have you here.
- **Ryan:** You and I, man, we're just gonna be eye candy for the... let our wives talk today. [all laughs] But it's gonna be a good time.
- Selena: No. But can you guys just share a little bit about yourselves? Maybe how you guys met, a little bit of your love story, your family so our listeners can just kind of get to know you guys a little bit.
- Shaun: I guess first and foremost we're a couple of... Bible-believing, sinners saved by grace, first and foremost. A little bit about myself first. I guess just to kind of sum me up, you could call me a builder, whether it's building houses as a side thing, building software for a living, or building family by calling. That would kind of sum me up personally.
- Abbie: I am the helper to the builder and the words. So together we have 10 kids. People always ask us, did you plan to have 10 kids? And I think our standard answer is we didn't plan not to, if that make sense. So we weren't gunning for zero kids or four kids or eight kids or two kids, or two point seven, or whatever the number is.

We were both open to the Lord leading but in different ways. Because we met at a church volleyball group, kind of just crossed paths, but didn't really connect until I was the 20-somethings coordinator at our church and started sending out emails. He started email flirting with me. And I am such a sucker for words. And I was like, "Oh, this guy can spell he can punctuate. He's funny." All those things.

- Shaun: Yeah. I saw her, and of course right off the bat, she's super hot. So you know, that's good. And then I saw her emails and she was intelligent and articulate and funny in our emails. And I think the first time we met, we were actually playing church volleyball. And so she was athletic. So I'm like, "Here's a super hot athletic word nerd, which is just my kind of girl." [all laughs]
- Abbie: And then he proceeded to, during capture the flag game, pull a total Neanderthal move while I was trying to run across the line. Jumped out of the woods and tag me on the rear. It was like staking his claim. [all laughs]
- **Shaun:** Staking my claim. [all laughs]
- Selena: Bold move.
- Abbie: The interesting thing about all of that is that he was not a Christian during this point. And I had been a Christian since I was five. I had, you know, prayed the

sinner's prayer. I know there's a lot of controversy around the sinner's prayer and asking Jesus into your heart.

But I'd had the concept that I was a sinner that my sin had put Jesus on the cross and that I wanted to repent of that when I was little listening to bullfrogs and butterflies. That's a blast from the past, if you know that. And there are gonna be some people out there like, "I didn't know anybody else listen to that." Oh, yeah. [Selena, Ryan chuckles]

And I'm homeschooled myself and we homeschool our children, so that was kind of our homeschooling thing to do. But if you had told me as a person who had committed her heart to Jesus in some small form without fully realizing what that meant at five years old that I was going to date and then marry someone who had become a believer the same month we started dating, I would have been like, "No, that's not happening. That's... Mm-mm, that will not work. Thank you very much." But thankfully the Lord knows better than I do. So that is exactly what happened. So yes.

Shaun: So I was invited to that church group from a friend from college who just ran into me at a grocery store parking lot and invited me to this group. And through that group, I got plugged in with a small group of guys who were meeting regularly. And one in particular, I kind of shared my background with, you know, a believing mother, non-believing father, kind of ended up going the way of my father. [00:05:00] He and I weekly went through chapters in the Bible and discuss them with him, and the Lord drew me to Him through that.

So inviting people to do things if you run into them, that's big. I mean, he didn't have to share anything in particular. He just invited me to the event, and God worked it from there, you know?

Abbie: And you asked about our family. We've already given the spoiler alert that we have 10 kids. I had been in a former relationship engaged to a guy and we didn't align on numbers of children, birth control, all kinds of things like that. So I had this really strong conviction I was going to be like, anybody that I'm going to be with in the future needs to be on the same page. I don't want to do that again.

So second date, this guy's been a Christian for three weeks, second date I'm like, "I need you to know that I'm leaving my fertility up to the Lord. I might have like six kids. Like six. That's a lot." I mean, I tried to scare him off. I tried to run him off. I tried my best to make sure that he knew what he was getting into. And he was just like, "Sounds good. I like kids." [*Ryan, Selena laughs*]

Abbie:	I'm sure I said that the number that kinda have been in the back of my mind was eight. <i>[all laughs]</i>
Selena:	Okay.
Ryan:	There you go.
Abbie:	And I was like, "Oh!"
Shaun:	So we overshot both of those.
Abbie:	Yeah, we overshot both. Well, that's because we have two sets of identical twins. So we got a two-for-one deal twice. And the thing that people find the most fascinating about the fact that we have two sets of identical twins, which is not hereditary, it's not in near genetics, it's just special gift from the Lord, we have one set of identical girls, one set of identical boys, they are exactly eight years apart because they're born on the same day.
Ryan:	Oh, my goodness!
Selena:	Oh, that is funny! Wow.
Ryan:	Four birthdays on one day in-
Selena:	That's a party right there.
Abbie:	It's patience. [Ryan, Selena laughs]
Selena:	I see patience, yeas.
Shaun:	If you're gonna have 10 kids, you might as well have six birthdays. [all laughs]
Selena:	I love that.
Ryan:	So we're talking about marriage specifically on this side of it, and on the parenting side we will get into more of the logistics of that. But how in the world!
	I know people have come to us. Like one of the most prevalent issues couples that follow us that write in is especially around the season of having young kids and all the wonderful busyness and the demands, it's all very wonderful,

I know people have come to us. Like one of the most prevalent issues couples that follow us that write in is especially around the season of having young kids and all the wonderful busyness and the demands, it's all very wonderful, but it can take a toll on a couple's unity and their own sense of being close and just connected. So what are you guys doing to keep your connection strong? I mean, we have three daughters and it's a struggle for us. And we're in the marriage biz, so to speak. So what are you guys doing to keep your marriage strong and stay connected despite all the busyness that you experience?

- Shaun: Well, I'll start with, I guess, first and foremost being on the same path and being aligned with the same goals. You know, we want what the Lord wants for us, and we know that our foundation is the Bible. So we always know that we are in this together, we're working together. It's not each of us doing our own thing. You know, you need unity in that which is going to help you through all those struggles and everything that we certainly have. So to start with, that's what I would say.
- Abbie: Practically speaking, one thing that we've done even before we had kids is we picked the day of the week where we were going to be intentional spend time together. It didn't matter how much time we spent together. In any other form throughout the week we were going to spend those hours of 7 to 10 p.m. on Thursday evenings. Thursdays... I don't remember exactly. I think there was a scheduling thing that made it Thursdays but I don't remember what it is. Or maybe we're just trying to avoid Fridays because everybody does Fridays and we wanted to be-
- **Shaun:** We don't want to spend the entire time waiting in line at the restaurant.
- Abbie: Yeah, something. So as we had kids, we kept protecting that Thursday date night space. So lots of date nights at home. I teach fitness classes and have for 15 years. And I would take the little kids with me when we only had little kids to my fitness class, pickup takeout on the way home. He made sure he was done with his work. I would have tried to have gotten them down for naps like 30 minutes earlier than usual. So they go to bed 30 minutes earlier than usual. There's kind of some white mom math that goes on in there to make sure that they're ready to go down.

They got easy meals that night. Didn't worry about nutritional value, just you know, get it in them and get them in bed. And that was the night that we looked forward to each week that we knew that once the kids were in bed, we were focused on each other, whether that was playing a game, watching a show, or doing those silly like questionnaires that you do to get to know each other, eating on the couch and just talking.

We've been married for 17 years in June, so 16 plus, and we've done that since we got married. And now we've graduated [00:10:00] because we have older responsible kids—our oldest are 14 and 15—to date nights out on the town, which feels like a super huge luxury. But I honestly liked the date nights at home just as much.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: Wow.

Selena: So good, guys.

Ryan: Wow.

Selena: Time together is definitely a struggle and creating that margin. I love your resignation to whatever the Lord has and working it out in the seasons that He's given you. I think sometimes we try to force something in a season that just isn't right and isn't there and the time is off. And so resigning ourselves, trusting that God's plan is perfect, the seasons are perfect. He's going to equip us and give us the strength for whatever that looks like. And also making that intentional effort to connect with our spouse. So good.

Thursdays are actually our date day too a little bit because we do our podcast Thursdays. We usually try to go to lunch. But yeah, that's just kind of our... Yeah. Thursday is a good day.

- **Ryan:** It's a magical day.
- Selena: It's a good day to do that.
- **Abbie:** Thursday is a good day.
- Selena: It's a good day. *[laughs]* I want to talk about your book, Abbie, but I think I'm gonna save that for Fierce Parenting.
- Abbie: That's fine.
- Selena: Gosh, it's so good. Anyways, small fan girl over here. I bought it and I was trying to get through it, but I'm like, "I can't... it's not something you can force like. I gotta go slow and methodical." I mean, you should just look at as writing everywhere. Anyways, not going there yet. Sorry.

Ryan: I will attest. I will attest.

Selena: It's really good. Intimacy. So I mean, not just physical intimacy, obviously. It's a good thing and it's a good gift from God. Spiritual intimacy. How do you guys cultivate that as a couple? And how do you do that with your children? I think we can kind of tap into children a bit and discipling them? How do you guys build that in your home?

- **Shaun:** Sure. So we start off every day with Bible reading together, and prayer time as a family.
- **Abbie:** Every day time permitting. We're not perfect at this. It's not legalistic.
- Shaun: But trying to safeguard that time as much as possible and ending the day with that as well. Whether it's deep or not, spending that time at the end of the day to, you know, share what's on our minds and pray over it and keep together like that.
- Abbie: And what he means by that is we do prayers and praises in bed. Like, as our heads are on the pillow, and we're about to drift off to sleep, he says, "Prayer or praise?" And I always choose praise. He's been asking me prayer or praise for like eight years, and I think I picked prayer like four times. [all laugh] But it's just the thing. So we just lie there and pray together before we go to bed.
- Selena: So good.
- **Abbie:** So I think that's just a really simple, sweet, kind of in cap to the day.
- Ryan: Wow.
- Selena: Love that.
- **Ryan:** A theme of what I hear you guys talking about is how these decisions are made long before the time is to live out the decision, if that makes sense. So like you've made the decision that every morning we're going to pray together, or we're gonna in the morning time permitting.

So I guess that unity, that alignment around that is not something that all couples experience. I'm trying to think, okay, so the couples that come to us and they say, "We want to do family worship. We want to pray together. We want to have that those moments, those Thursday nights together, but I have to work, I have to commute or the kids have to be at school, or they have to do all these other things."

I guess help us understand in your mind how you are actually prioritizing, setting up your life to facilitate what you actually do value, which is you know, the things of God, the word of God, praying, discipleship. You started out being Bible-believing, like God-fearing people. How did you set up your life?

And I mean, career wise, Abbie, you mentioned that you're a fitness coach, essentially. So talk about how do you set up your life? Specifically, what

decisions have you made to allow you to live out these habits that you're talking about?

Shaun: Well, I think, a couple of big ones. So I worked a regular job early on in my career. When you have that, you got to get out the door and then you work all day long and you get home after a drive, sometimes a long drive for a lot of people, you're just stressed out. You don't have a lot of margin left. So not everybody can do this.

But I mean, early on in my career, I made the decision to go out and work for myself and the Lord bless that. That adds a whole lot of flexibility to my schedule. So for me personally, that's something that I realized not everyone can do. But that's something that we made the decision together to do early on that certainly helps in that area.

And then homeschooling our kids is another thing that provides so much flexibility to have the kids at our home all day long. [chuckles]

Abbie: Yeah. I make the joke that we are both cheating by homeschooling because we have them with us all the time. [00:15:00] So we have all that discipling time all day long, but also doing extra credit because we have them with us all the time. And we have to do that discipling all day long. That's coming from my high school Spanish teacher's vocabulary, and homeschool mom as well for that analogy.

And for me, for fitness classes I had to be intentional about the times that I chose to teach. Those have actually changed.

One thing that you said, Ryan, you were saying, you know, some people say, "I would love to see this happen, I would love to make this work, but I don't have the schedule that you have." And one thing that I say constantly to people is your walk with the Lord doesn't have to look like our walk with the Lord and what our family does.

Because people try to make it prescriptive, and they try to copy. And they say, Well, if you get up and you do breakfast and Bible reading at 7:30, then if I'm not doing breakfast at Bible reading at 7:30 then I am failing, and I'm doing it wrong. And I don't see anywhere in Scripture that it says breakfast and Bible reading at 7:30 is the holiest version of leading your family in worship.

So I've taught classes at 5:45 in the morning so that I would be home in time for Shaun to do breakfast and Bible reading. I teach classes at 4:30 in the afternoon or have done so so that I will be done with homeschooling. Right now I'm in a season where I can teach them at 9:30 and we do breakfast and Bible reading first, then I go teach when my kids are doing morning chores and getting themselves going because I've got some more self-directed ones, and I'll take the little ones with me, and then we'll come back and do school.

So I think being flexible, being open to the Lord's leading, letting and not trying to shoehorn your family circumstances into somebody else's formula are really important.

- Selena: So good. So good. You do that throughout your book entirely. I'm always like, "Man, she just nailed it again." To just hear you're saying, "You don't have to be like this. This is just me. This is how God wired me." Because, you know, it's a hard standard to live up to somebody else. But the truth is, is that you know, God...
- Abbie: You've lost it.
- Selena: Yes. You are our people. If you don't know, we do homeschool as well. We are so grateful for that time of discipleship and relationship. We love our kids. We love being around them. We're so grateful. And we echo that.

You know, he decided he was going to be an entrepreneur where you can work from home. And by God's grace, like Fierce Marriage has taken off and we're able to share the gospel with people as a word.

- **Ryan:** To be honest, it was really on a function of these priorities. We said we'd rather have the freedom and the flexibility than the security, quote-unquote, of a traditional job and the income. You know, that's false security anyway, right? And I think God's been gracious in that. But yeah, we have to be careful not to be prescriptive on others and say, "Well, you better quit your job and start a business, otherwise, you're not going to disciple your kids."
- Abbie: Yeah. Yeah.
- Selena: Right. Right.
- **Ryan:** That's a lie. So back to the marriage piece, I want to talk about conflict and communication. So communication is obviously one of the most important skills that a couple can cultivate. But specifically communication around conflict, and namely around chaos.

So I feel like our lives are pretty chaotic with the three... You know, our kids are eight and down. So eight, five, and two. There's a good bit of chaos in the household. What are some tangible ways that you've discovered? Now, this is undergirded by, rooted in Scripture. You're spending time with God together.

You value those things together. Now bring it up to like the day-to-day level. What ways have you found to deal with conflict in a healthy, constructive way? And how have you found the communication... how to use communication to get through those hard times?

- **Shaun:** You're talking between each other or kids?
- **Ryan:** Yes. Like say you guys are missing it. Like you say something boneheaded on the way out the door, and you know, it starts... maybe you never do that. I do that sometimes. And all of sudden you're in conflict, right? How do you reconcile through communication when you're in conflict as a couple?
- Shaun: I would say that's certainly something that's been a growing process through our marriage. I'm a bit introverted, and I don't communicate as much as I could for sure. I think I've gotten better at it. [Selena, Ryan chuckles]
- Abbie: Mm-hmm.
- **Shaun:** But earlier on, you know, my lack of communication could cause conflict for sure. And learning to also respond to conflict better in terms of defensiveness.
- **Abbie:** We both struggle with that.
- Shaun: I mean, I think a lot of conflict becomes conflict. There's like an issue. Someone feels some tension, and they've mentioned it. And we either mentioned it too strongly or when it gets mentioned we blow up or get defensive about it. I'm a very defensive person [00:20:00] when conflict comes my way.

I've had to learn to, okay, listen, let it sit, pray over it. And the resolution naturally comes when you let that kind of defensive emotion die down. And really process it and pray over it and realize, okay, even if there's some right on my side, there's a lot of wrong on my side too. And coming up with the resolution, so to speak, that is fair to both of us.

Abbie: And I think one thing that he is leaving out of his kind of being hard on himself with the defensiveness and the introversion, and the not communicating is that he gives me tons of grace. So he is not picking at me for every little thing. He is very kind and understanding and he's not going to create mountains out of molehills.

I'm not going to create mountains out of molehills, but I am more likely to unless I'm pregnant or postpartum. [all chuckles]

Shaun: [inaudible]

Abbie:I think I remember yelling something about, "You never serve me or help me"
because he was warming up pizza and didn't give me any at lunch. [all laugh]
I was really hungry. Oh, give this girl some food. I was pregnant with twins
again. And it was his fault. [all laughs]

But he's also very, very okay with letting things go. So I think that overlooking a multitude of sins is a strength of his. He's going to assume it's going to shake itself out in the end whereas I'm probably going to need to work through some more. So he's had to learn to not run from it when I want to talk about it. And I've had to learn not to come on too strong or to let things go and sit like you said, and maybe see if they resolve themselves because a lot of times they do.

- Selena: So good.
- Shaun: You know, she mentioned the pregnancy thing. You know, I think it took probably five pregnancies before it really started to get caught in my head this is a pregnancy symptom and I need to be more intentional, more graceful, more whatever, more helpful, more servant-hearted. You know, things I probably should have been doing all the time. But even more so when she's pregnant I need to pay attention to that. There's things you learn.
- Abbie: Yeah. I don't usually cry and I'm not usually very high or very low. I'm usually pretty steady except when there's hormones. And then I mean, I'm making myself sound like crazy person. It's still okay, but it can get pretty high or pretty low.
- **Selena:** It's okay. *[chuckles]* Understandable.
- **Ryan:** You guys clearly are looking to one another, right, to... You play off each other's strengths. I think that's where I want to take the conversation next, especially in terms of the marriage conversation. We're complementarians. We think there's a beautiful complementarity that comes through biblical marriage. And I think you guys are the same. We believe that's the biblical view of it.

Abbie, how do you look to Shaun specifically to be the man, the husband, the father, the head of the household? And then I would love Shaun to respond to that with how do you look to Abbie to be your helper? And how do you see that working itself out practically in your marriage on a day-to-day basis?

Abbie: I would say that the number one thing is something really obvious. And that's he's the primary financial provider for our family. So he travels a lot. Well, he has traveled a decent amount in the past. Ever since you know what he hasn't

traveled that much. But I have had to accept that as a reality of part of his work and to understand that my role, when he is traveling, and I have six, or eight or ten kids at home with me is not to complain.

I mean, we complain, jokingly, like, "I wish you were here, I wish you didn't have to go." But I have had to learn that adding stress to his already high levels of had to travel. Had to prep for this, I'm not in my normal environment, I have these people that need me to do things as he's doing installs of software or whatever. I really think in a lot of ways I have the privilege of staying home with my children even if I'm having to solo parent because I get to have all my comforts of home. You know, I get to have my own bed, I get to have all the things that are familiar to me. So that's the attitude that I tried to adopt to support him there. But primary provider and everything that goes with that I am hugely respectful or have lots of respect for how hard he works.

He is also the spiritual leader of our home. That's kind of a balance that we've had to strike over the years, having grown up without as much of that in my home. And so some but in kind of wonky ways sometimes. So we've had to figure out [00:25:00] how to let him lead where his strengths were and to encourage rather than nag.

And then I also want to make sure that I'm letting him father the way that he fathers best, as opposed to saying, "That's not how we change diapers. Sorry, can you just let me do it because I would do it so much better." It's not that I've never done that but I don't admire that in myself when I do. So my goal is always to honor the fact that we want to be unified, but each have our own unique twist and take on things.

- Shaun: You know, my wife has a lot of spiritual wisdom gleaned from a childhood of being raised in the word. I think my calling as a head of the household, so to speak, is not to be the boss and dictate everything. It's to guide to serve, to be an example, to make sure that we are together as a family in the word and in prayer, and seeking the Lord's will, and making sure as I examine that, are we on the right path together? And seeking the wisdom that the Lord's blessed her with, seeking the wisdom of our families, of people from the church, and helping with that. Not to dictate every little thing that has to be done just so. That's not my job.
- Abbie: I think there's something, I think it's in Proverbs 31, that says the heart of our husband trust in her. And he has exemplified that to me. Like he's not micromanaging my grocery budget. He's not micromanaging how I homeschool. His heart trusts in my home management skills. So I really desire to live up to that, you know? That's a huge responsibility and a huge honor to

have his trust in that area. I'm really grateful for that. We like working together.

- Selena: Yes. I remember reading on your book I think you guys you did two DIY house projects with like how many kids under five or something like that? You gotta like each other to even do something like that. *[laughs]*
- **Shaun:** They were not old enough to help. *[laughs]*
- Abbie: No. No, they were not old enough to help. No. [Selena, Ryan laughs]
- **Ryan:** I love hearing you guys go hard on that. Just to speak to Shaun, where you were saying... one of the big realizations in my own heart was that as the head of our household I don't lead my family by serving. Instead, I serve them by how I lead, right? So I'm serving in this way as leader not because... It's not my job to just get it on my way all the time. But no, it's how I actually submit to Christ and how I serve my family is by leading them toward Him. So I just lobe hearing your heart come through that.
- Selena: Final question here. It could be an encouragement or some advice to a couple who might just be struggling in their marriage, they're struggling to connect. They're just kind of drowning in the day-to-day. What would you guys say to them that couple?
- Shaun: Do the thing that you kind of probably in the back of your mind know needs doing and you don't feel like it. It's like smiling makes you feel better. Doing the thing you know needs doing. And you got to push through that obstacle. It's when you get over the obstacle that things get better.
- Abbie: And if you don't know the thing that needs doing, if you're like, "Oh, can you tell me what that is?" ask the Lord. Because it says that if you ask the Lord for wisdom, He gives it freely and without reproach. So I think we probably think that if we don't hear an audible voice from heaven we didn't get an answer. But probably I think most of the time when I ask the Lord for wisdom about how to best serve my husband, he comes home, he goes in his office, he looks down, and this thought occurs to me to make some cookies and take them to him.

Like that's not revolutionary, but that probably was wisdom from the Lord that that was going to pick him up. You know, and it's something so simple that I can do with the kids, you know, and involve them. And he's told me over and over again that always is a blessing to him. So I think we can overthink stuff and the Lord does give us wisdom even just in the simplest ways. Selena: Well, thanks, guys, for sharing your time with us. We are going to jump on another. We get to record with you guys one more time on Fierce Parenting and talk to you, Abbie, a little bit more about your book. But we are so grateful to have you guys on. It's been such a blessing.

Abbie: Our pleasure.

- **Ryan:** So for any couples who are watching this, where can they find more information about your book, Abbie? I know they can find it on Amazon, but is there any specific places you'd like to send couples?
- Abbie: Christianbook.com is a great place they always have the best price for it if you order multiples. And the thing that I'm hearing over and over again, I sound like a ridiculous used car salesman saying this, but they'll order lots of copies. [00:30:00] But what's happening that I did not expect is people are buying it for their sister and their granddaughter and their aunt and their cousin and their friend. So christianbook.com is a great place to go to get a really good discount, but to order enough that you get free shipping. Or find somebody else's book to buy-
- Ryan: That was a perfect pitch. [Selena chuckles]
- Selena: I love it.
- **Ryan:** That was awesome. All right, thanks guys for joining us and we'll see you on the parenting side.
- Abbie: Sounds great.

Ryan & Selena Frederick

PODCAST NOTES

- Recommended resources
 - <u>M Is for Mama: A Rebellion Against Mediocre</u>, Abby's book.

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