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**Intro:** Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

So, friends, officially, welcome to Season 17 of The Girls Night Podcast. I am super excited to be back! We have some really amazing guests lined up and I cannot wait to introduce you to them. Today's guest really doesn't need an introduction, because y'all already know him. Today, my sweet and amazing husband, Carl Wilson, is joining me back on the show.

I'm really excited about today's conversation. Today we're talking about how to plan holiday celebrations with your spouse and talk through your expectations.

Valentine's Day is this week, and so in honor of that, we're going to tell you the story of our very first Valentine's day together. Spoiler alert, it was a bit of a disaster. And we're going to tell you how we learned very quickly that talking to your expectations is a must for a healthy and happy marriage, one, but for happy celebrations throughout the year.

Here are just a few of the other things that we talk about in this episode. We'll talk about how to plan for special occasions like Valentine's Day or birthdays, and get on the same page about gifts and what you're going to do to celebrate. We'll talk about how to split up time between families during holidays like Thanksgiving or Christmas, and also how to think about what traditions you might want to create together.

We'll also tell you the story behind our new course, The Marriage Starter Kit, and how it came to be, what it's about. And I can't wait to tell you all about it. Friends, if you have ever felt disappointed after a holiday because things didn't go the way that you hoped they would, I think a lot of us feel that way, this conversation is for you.

But before we dive in, if anyone is still looking for a treat for themselves or for their significant other for Valentine's day this week, I have a great idea. So I'm so excited to share with you that registration is currently open this week for my two

relationship courses, my bestselling course, Love Your Single Life, and our newest course The Marriage Starter Kit.

Friends, I would love to have you join us for either one of these courses, and I want to tell you just a little bit about them. So Love Your Single Life is a four-week course that teaches a step-by-step plan to savor, enjoy and truly make the most of your single life, all while setting yourself up for amazing relationships and marriage in the future.

We've had more than 7,000 women join us for the course in the last few years, and I will honestly never get over the ways that God has used in women's lives. Registration for the course only opens up twice a year, and the next time won't be for at least another six months.

You can find out all about the course at [loveyoursinglelife.com](http://loveyoursinglelife.com). That link will also be in our show notes. Again, that's [loveyoursinglelife.com](http://loveyoursinglelife.com). And you can sign up there too. But make sure to do it soon because registration is closing again at the end of the week.

Next is the course that both Carl and I teach, and it's called The Marriage Starter Kit. This six-week course is for couples in their first few years of marriage. In it, you'll learn what you can do today to set yourselves up for the marriage, the family in the future that you both want.

So again, registration for both of these courses is open right this second. We've never done this before. We've never done it at the same time. But they're open right this second and they'll be open all week. So make sure to head to my website. It's [stephaniemaywilson.com](http://stephaniemaywilson.com). All of the information will be there for both courses. You can check them out and see if either of them would be a good fit for you right now.

The other thing I wanted to say is I know that some of you may be listening to this episode after registration week is over. If that's you, go ahead and go to my website anyway and check out the courses. That way you can see if they'd be a good fit for you and you can get your name on the waiting list there too. That way you'll be the first to know next time registration opens up.

All right friends, with all of that said, let's jump into the episode. Here's my conversation with Carl.

[00:04:00] <music>

**Stephanie:** You guys, welcome to Season 17 of The Girls Night Podcast. I cannot believe it's been 17 seasons.

**Carl:** That is really wild actually.

**Stephanie:** Seventeen. Right?

**Carl:** Yeah.

**Stephanie:** Carl, listen, welcome back to the show.

**Carl:** Thank you. Longtime listener.

**Stephanie:** That's not true.

**Carl:** Third-time guest. I am.

**Stephanie:** I don't know.

**Carl:** I don't know either.

**Stephanie:** Honestly it hasn't been recently because I think that the last time we recorded we were either sitting on the couch crowded around a microphone or we were sitting in our closet. And I can't really remember.

**Carl:** I don't know either. Probably closet.

**Stephanie:** Probably closet.

**Carl:** Probably closet.

**Stephanie:** So I'm really glad to have you back. We have a new setup that we're kind of working on here at Girls Night. We need something above here, so if you guys have any ideas, let us know.

But I'm really, really excited to start up a new season. I have big dreams for this next year. I also am so excited to have you here because we have something really fun happening this week. We'll talk about this much more at the end. But you guys who have been around here for a while know or may know that we, for the very first time last year, taught a marriage course. And it wasn't technically a marriage course, it was more like a marriage prep course. Right?

**Carl:** Yeah. We originally thought it was going to be for people who were engaged or about to be engaged and kind of heading into, what it looks like and it would be all things here's how to do engagement well, here's how to plan your wedding, a lot of

things. Mix of practical, but also all the other things that go into that. You know, how to make the most of this time together and also as an individual before your wedding.

**Stephanie:** And it was awesome. We loved the couples that we got to meet. We had like 50 couples join us, which was really, really cool. The thing that we ended up loving the most, Carl offered this to the guys at first and it was like one on one calls with him. And he would come out after doing a call with one of the guys...

The girls and I planned initially to do a Facebook group. And you would come out after the calls with the guys and you would have had such a good time that I halfway through was like, "I'm very jealous we're doing our own calls, too."

But it was on those calls that I feel like we got a better sense of kind of what we want to be talking about. I feel like our very best conversations the whole time throughout the course were with couples who were actually already married

**Carl:** There's just something different. Marriage is one of those things that is hard to understand until you've done a little bit of it. It's hard to know... Everything is just theoretical, and that gives it a different context. When it's not theoretical anymore and it's actually... the conversation changed from just, for example, if you have a fight about this in the future, these are some things to think about to "we're fighting about this right now, what do we do?"

**Stephanie:** Yeah. Yeah. Anyway, we have changed the name of the course. It was called Tie The Knot. But since it's really more geared towards couples who have already done that, we're calling it The Marriage Starter Kit. And we're super excited about that. And really it's for couples who are... really for newlyweds. But I know that we're probably going to have people asking us about this.

If you are engaged or if you have been married for however long or if you're seriously dating and the stuff that we're going to talk about sounds like a conversation you want to have right now, you're totally welcome to join us. But really, this is helping couples lay a foundation in their first couple years of marriage. We'll talk about it later. But anyway, that is why-

**Carl:** It's not that it's not for people who are engaged or about to be engaged, we just want to kind of shift the focus a little bit away from specifically the event and single day of a wedding and more into the beginnings of a marriage. So when we say newlyweds, that's kind of up to you all to decide if you are that.

So it's, we've been married for a year, are we still newlyweds? If you feel like you're still newlyweds or you want to just join, then yeah, you can be newlyweds.

We've been married for five years, are we still newlyweds? Yeah. In the grand scheme of things, do you qualify? Sure. It's more about attitudes and a specific timeframe.

**Stephanie:** So we'll give more details, like I said, later. If you want to check out the course, I'd say go to just my regular website. It'll be up top there. It's [stephaniemaywilson.com](http://stephaniemaywilson.com). I want to give you guys a million more details but I also really want to get into why we have you here today.

**Carl:** Totally.

**Stephanie:** Carl, before we dive in, I do want to ask you... I'm not going to ask you for a fun fact. But I think instead... So backing up just a little bit, today's questions were prepared by my amazing podcast producer Kate. Kate is just my right hand gal. I don't honestly know what I would do without her. So she put these questions together. So really Kate is our host today. She's sort of like our silent host.

But one of the questions that she had for the beginning, since we've had you do a bunch of fun facts, she wanted to just ask how we're doing. You know, we're parents of two-year-olds now and the last time we probably gave an update about how it's going was a while ago. So we're gonna start off with that. This is Carl, you're my husband.

**Carl:** I am.

**Stephanie:** That's that. But how are we doing right now?

**Carl:** I think we're doing awesome. I think that every day I love what we're doing as a family more. There are new and different, you know, challenges. The things that are hard now weren't even like an idea a year ago of like, what do you mean you want to run around the halls, not go to bed? You could not run around anywhere a year ago.

You have opinions now and your attitudes and all those kinds of things. So how that's changed our dynamic as parents has introduced all of these new questions and thoughts and feelings. We're thinking about, you know, where do we send them to daycare/schools, like preschool? And what does that conversation look like for us as a couple?

So I think that there's always something new. But I do like each part more than the one before as a parent and also as a husband, the things that we get to do and the way that we get to build a family and a life. So parenting, for sure, is one of those

things, like marriage, that's really hard to wrap your head around realistically until you're in it.

And I think that the tricky part is where with like marriage, you're married to... Like we change, we grow and evolve. But at this point in life, we're pretty much who we're going to be. Being a parent is totally different because they're not even close to who they're going to be. They're different week to week. So it's just constantly these two little moving targets running around all over the place. It's really cool, though.

**Stephanie:** They are hilarious.

**Carl:** They are very funny. They've inherited that and I love it. Well, it's up to other people to decide.

**Stephanie:** All right. I love that. I love that. Okay, all right, let's get to Kate's questions. The reason that I wanted to talk about Valentine's Day is because as you're listening to this, it may actually be Valentine's Day or it's Valentine's Day week.

**Carl:** Valentine's Day season.

**Stephanie:** It's Valentine's Day season. Like everything turned pink pretty much right after the years. Valentine's Day has always been really hard for me. I think when I was single, it was always this unwelcome reminder of my singleness. Even if it wasn't true, it felt like everyone around me was getting more attention, more love, more affirmation, more appreciation, more everything than I was. And I think that I expected that to stop once we started dating and got married.

But I think that the Valentine's Day conversation changes as you get married or as you get into a relationship because all of a sudden there's... because the comparison piece doesn't go away. You're seeing, you know, how many bouquets of flowers so and so's husband got them and you're holding one. It just is this holiday that I think sets us all up for massive romantic failure once we're in a relationship.

And I think the things that we learned really early on from some Valentine's Day fiascos have helped us out so much when it comes to all of the other big milestones and holidays that we encounter throughout the year, like anniversaries, this is when we started dating, Christmas. You know, I mean, they're just all kinds of celebrations throughout the year where everyone can end up disappointed if you don't do a couple of things. And I'm really grateful that we learned those things. So that's what we're going to talk about today.

I want to start off by talking about our first Valentine's Day.

**Carl:** Sure. We've told this story before, I think.

**Stephanie:** I know but it's really worth repeating.

**Carl:** Yeah, cool. Okay.

**Stephanie:** Okay. We'll do the short version. So Carl pursued me hard when we started dating. Like you pulled out all the stops. You were so thoughtful and intentional and romantic. Part of it was that you left the country very shortly after.

**Carl:** Yeah, we dated for two weeks and then I was gone for like two or three weeks. So I knew I had to like make an impression or you were-

**Stephanie:** You were going to like forget about yours.

**Carl:** Totally.

**Stephanie:** So you worked really, really hard to do really special things to me while you were gone. And we went on really great dates. We both really love food. We both really appreciate a good restaurant. We love traveling.

So because of that, for our first Valentine's Day, I thought that we were like steadily climbing up a mountain. And I was also really excited about Valentine's Day because this was my first Valentine's Day having a significant other in like a really long time. So I thought that it was kind of a train, like tick, tick, tick, tick tick ticking up. And I thought that Valentine's Day was going to be like the pinnacle dates.

In the midst of all of this, as we're talking about our Valentine's Day plans, you start telling me... I think that we were maybe hanging out one time and a Red Lobster commercial came on TV.

**Carl:** I think what happened it was... Well, no.

**Stephanie:** No, you got a gift card for your birthday.

**Carl:** I got a gift card for my birthday-

**Stephanie:** From where we worked.

**Carl:** ...which was at the end of October, and I've been saving it for just the right occasion. And I decided that this was the right occasion.

**Stephanie:** It was like a \$20 gift card. So first of all-

**Carl:** I didn't know.

**Stephanie:** It wasn't like going very far.

**Carl:** Well, I guess I don't know how far that gets you-

**Stephanie:** I don't either. Maybe not a-

**Carl:** A lot of biscuits.

**Stephanie:** That's probably [inaudible 00:15:57] inflation. So you had this gift card, we're talking about this gift card, and you start saying I think as a joke that we're gonna go to Red Lobster for Valentine's Day. In your head-

**Carl:** It might have started out as a joke, in fact.

**Stephanie:** But then I kept-

**Carl:** In the way, yeah.

**Stephanie:** I kept thinking, like, "No, you're not really going to take me there."

**Carl:** And it became a challenge.

**Stephanie:** So every time we talked about it, I'd say, "Carl, what are we doing for Valentine's Day?" And he would go, "We're going to Red Lobster." And the more you would talk about it, the higher my expectations rose. Until we get to Valentine's Day, and what was your plan?

**Carl:** We were going to Red Lobster.

**Stephanie:** So I feel like you have to talk about why.

**Carl:** So for one because that's just all of what we were doing in all of these dates and everything. This was the other stuff, the other side, the romantic side, the fancy side, the pursuit, the wooing side of things. And it kind of, for me, this way of taking all of this stuff that's supposed to be this. But it's all artificial.

Valentine's Day is all the things, like expectations and stuff like that. Like this is all around you right now and you like this idea that it has to be something bigger and



better and more just because this one arbitrary day is like so backwards. So what if it's about the things that really matter? What if it's about just us being able to be anywhere and sit across from each other and have dinner and not have to be all this artificial stuff, but just be real stuff, and be together?

And the challenge of you don't think it's going to happen, and I am here to tell you that if you tell me that I won't do something, I will do that thing. If this is gonna go any farther, you need to understand this. And I need to understand that you are willing to say, "Yes, I will go to Red Lobster with you." Like that's what you want to do.

**Stephanie:** I feel like we should also preface this with I don't really eat seafood.

**Carl:** No, I've never been to a Red Lobster in my life that I know of.

**Stephanie:** So it was basically just like, this is a random chain restaurant that like-

**Carl:** Can we make this fun?

**Stephanie:** Can we make this fun?

**Carl:** Can we make this romantic? Can we make this...? Yeah. If we can have a romantic date night at Red Lobster, we can be romantic and in love anywhere. Sorry Red Lobster. Really if you love Red Lobster, then more power to you. Like I said, we've never been. One of these years we're gonna go. So I guess, spoiler alert, we didn't go to Red Lobster.

**Stephanie:** And we're not fancy. You'll hear our current tradition. If you're thinking, "I like Red Lobster," we're just like, we're with you.

**Carl:** Yeah, totally.

**Stephanie:** So when Valentine's Day came and... The day was a little bit set up for failure I think because like you, I think really genuinely we're gonna go get me flowers and like-

**Carl:** We just had a rough, messy day ever.

**Stephanie:** So it sort of just didn't happen the way that you planned. And then you come over to pick me up and I'm like, "Where are we going?" And you're like-

- Carl:** It's another one of those things for me is I appreciate flowers, I get the certain things you just have to do. The flowers is one of the things that like the surge pricing on Valentine's flowers, I just have such a hard time with. Go on.
- Stephanie:** So you come to pick me up and I'm like, "Where are we going?" And you're like, "We're going to Red Lobster." And I burst into tears.
- Carl:** Totally.
- Stephanie:** Just totally cried. I mean, really what happened is that we didn't actually talk about our expectations for that day. So we ended up finding, you know, kind of a random place to eat. We ended up having a good time at a place-
- Carl:** It was actually really cool. There was like live music set at the basement-
- Stephanie:** They had fixed the price menu or fixed menu or something upstairs.
- Carl:** Just the whole thing. Everywhere has the fixed menu. And what if I don't want your cheesy, again, surge-pricing steak, for... Anyway.
- Stephanie:** You probably do if it's cheesy.
- Carl:** Well, I guess it depends.
- Stephanie:** We ended up having a really good time. And that was-
- Carl:** It's the kind of thing where like... Sorry. I think it's the kind of thing where, like, places that just like people do weird... People do weird stuff. People do weird stuff and they totally become someone different on Valentine's Day. And in my head, I have this picture of a place that would never serve seafood, not Red Lobster, like serving oysters because it's Valentine's Day. And you're like, Stop it. Don't do that. Be yourself on Valentine's Day.
- Stephanie:** So what happened was we just need to talk about our expectations.
- Carl:** Totally.
- Stephanie:** We just needed to talk about, like, what does Valentine's Day mean to you and how do you want to celebrate it? So we did. Based on that night kind of not going well, the next Valentine's Day or for next year, we talked about it, and we're like, What does this Day mean to us and how do we actually want to spend it? And what we decided was you do get me flowers every year, which we can talk about for this year.

**Carl:** It's fine. I pick them out of the neighbor's yard. I don't.

**Stephanie:** I think you said that so quietly for someone-

**Carl:** Don't worry about it.

**Stephanie:** He said "I pick them out of the neighbor's yard" just for reference. So you do get me flowers. And we decided that instead of it being like bigger and better every year, Valentine's Day gift, we decided to give it a category. And because it's February and February is cold and kind of uncomfortable everywhere, we decided that we wanted to do soft things.

So the next year that—so this was our first year married—I told you that I wanted like a big spa robe. And we went to Macy's to go pick one out. so it's actually Valentine's Day-

**Carl:** I think because this was the nicest place. Macy's was the nicest place at the mall where we lived.

**Stephanie:** That's probably true.

**Carl:** Probably true.

**Stephanie:** Or it probably was before I had a wedding gift card.

**Carl:** Oh, definitely did.

**Stephanie:** We definitely had a wedding gift card. Like a vacuum-

**Carl:** We returned like some pans or something.

**Stephanie:** So we went to Macy's and we're getting a big fluffy robe on a gift card and this sweet woman was there. And we walk into the sexy stuff section at Macy-

**Carl:** The robes are tucked back behind like the lingerie, which is also just exploded all over the place because it's Valentine's Day.

**Stephanie:** It's Valentine's Day, right?

**Carl:** Yeah.

**Stephanie:** So we're walking through all of the lingerie and we get a huge robe.

**Carl:** You had giant, oversized robes.

**Stephanie:** So we're checking out and the woman is chatting with us and finds out that we're newlyweds. We'd gotten married-

**Carl:** Less than a year.

**Stephanie:** Yeah, less than a year ago. And she just lost it. Could not-

**Carl:** We watched her like short circuit there in Macy's.

**Stephanie:** She could not believe that we passed all of the sexy things and got the biggest rope we could find. And it was awesome.

**Carl:** That was a bow on the whole thing. We went to dinner.

**Stephanie:** Well, so what we decided for dinner is on the gift card it was not just Red Lobster, it was for like Red Lobster and-

**Carl:** The whole suite.

**Stephanie:** ...the whole Red Lobster group. So we decided that we're not big Red Lobster people, but we are really pretty serious Olive Garden people.

**Carl:** OG.

**Stephanie:** So that became our go-to. So on Valentine's Day, we go to Olive Garden and we buy each other soft things. You can't even make reservations at Olive Garden, which is kind of rough.

**Carl:** Fight it out.

**Stephanie:** And that is our Valentine's Day tradition now. And that's kind of how it came about.

**Carl:** So it's this culmination of like this part of who we want to be and how we want to be together that goes back to that initial Valentine's Day. And what was important to both of us in that time. After we talked about it and had the conversation, we were like, I just want to know that we're doing something thoughtful and intentional and that there's a plan here and that it's special to you because this is special to me.

And the same, I was like yeah I want it to be special too but I want to be our kind of special. I want it to not have to be this copy-paste of all of this hype and

commercialism. And I'm like, not like... you know, I guess my whole job is like commercialism. But I just, in the same way, want it to be something that is special to us.

And there's so much pressure. I think this is a part that people don't necessarily understand is like, for all the expectations that I feel like some people have, like women are just fed this whole world of expectation and then everything has to be better, and this comparison.

The mirror of that on the guy's side is, how can I ever get it right? Like, how can I ever get something big enough or do enough? Or how many roses is enough roses? And how many is too many? How do I know if I am supposed to send them to the office? Is that embarrassing? Is that unprofessional? Is that good? Maybe she doesn't like roses. I need to get different kinds of flour. Am I supposed to get chocolate? Do I have to get chocolate? She doesn't really like chocolate but am I supposed to just because it's Valentine's Day?

And like, jewelry or not jewelry? I don't really want to... We just kind of started dating. Do I need to spend a bunch of money on jewelry? They all look bad and they're all hearts and like... I don't know. At what point in a relationship is it okay or good or normal to buy laundry for somebody? Like we've been married for a while, is that something I feel uncomfortable buying laundry? Like just going in and talking to the people, like, is that a thing? All of this stuff is just running through guys' heads and it feels like a trap.

**Stephanie:** Well, and the lingerie thing is like, are you telling me I don't wear lingerie enough?

**Carl:** There's so many snares and pitfalls and places to go wrong and to screw it up. And so often I think it's not that guys don't want to be romantic. It's that the idea of what it looks like to be romantic is so distorted that it's impossible to put anything personal behind it, I think for a lot of guys. And women too I think. What does it look like for a woman to be romantic? Like, how does that work? Totally.

And It happens all the time. This is not new stuff. This is year round. And that's kind of the point, right? You don't just be romantic on Valentine's Day and that's the one day you cash in your "we're really in love" card. And then the rest of the time is like all downhill until you get back to February. Like no.

I think what we're trying to get at, what we try to understand is like, help me understand what's important on these particular days. And then most of our energy can go to making the other days really meaningful and being romantic in real life not in, I bet, Valentine's life.

**Stephanie:** I love that. And I really love our tradition now because it takes a lot of the pressure off. I don't know what it looks like to be romantic for a guy because there are less commercials about that. It's like I'm not gonna buy you jewelry. It seems weird to buy you flowers. I don't really like the chocolates that come in the heart-shaped boxes and are filled with the weird green pink goo stuff. Like, if you do let me know, I'll get you some.

**Carl:** Totally.

**Stephanie:** So having a category. This is what we get for each other. Maybe it's like a book or maybe it's... You know, we do this a lot. We've forego physical gifts for experiences a lot. So we'll go like, "Please don't buy whatever for me. I always want a plane ticket or the promise of one. It's "let's plan something, let's do something or let's go to a really nice dinner." I'd rather have that than most things usually.

But I think the point is there aren't any rules. We get to decide. But if we don't decide and if we don't decide together, we're setting everybody up for failure.

I think one of the fears, and I want to hear just what you have to say about this, when it comes to all of the things that fall under this category of special romantic, whatever, it's not just Valentine's Day, it's like date nights, who plans them, what are they, what do we do? I think that's a really common place to feel like you're failing as a couple at some point. You know, also like Christmas and birthdays and different things. I think that there's this feeling that it's not romantic if you have to tell someone what you want. I just want to hear what you have to say about that.

**Carl:** Well, I think that if you want people to have the ability to be creative and you want somebody to have the ability to like dream a little bit, boundaries actually help. Boundaries are actually super helpful. Like some guidelines are really helpful in helping people eliminate all of the options and focus on how do I make something meaningful out of a few choices that I have.

This is how part of the conversation to go, "I don't want to know all the things," or if you do, "I want to know all the things. I don't want to be surprised. I want us to talk about this so I know that we're on the same page." Like, cool. That's a choice.

It's also a choice to say, "You know what, here's some options. Take these and run with them." Or "Here's some things that I like or some things that I don't like," or "I've been really meaning to do this." And you may have to say it a couple times, or you may have to, you know, be more direct with certain people. That's part of learning how you communicate with the other person.

I think if you don't make yourself clear, if you really do have... this is a classic communication thing in married couples, and any couples, honestly. If you have a preference, but you don't state that preference, you don't get to be mad if that preference doesn't get honored. You can't assume that somebody will just intuit your preference.

And if you have an opinion or you have a particular desire, want something to be done a certain way, and you don't communicate that, then you don't get to be mad that it didn't just magically get done the way that you wanted it to be done. So that's a spectrum, right? Whatever that looks like for you and how particular you want to be or how specific about whatever the thing is, I really... I don't know, there's tons of examples. Like, "I really want jewelry. I really do want jewelry." And you have to be okay if somebody says, like, "No," or "Okay, cool, you're gonna get a toe ring this year." "I just really want a new toe ring."

**Stephanie:** I can make that happen.

**Carl:** But learning to be mutually flexible together, to both... I think that paying attention and working together to find the version of that that works for both of you, right? This goes back to the thing of like the really lofty expectations. There's a balance to that. There's another side that your partner, your other person is experiencing. And are you making it easy for them to do the thing that you want and to make you happy or hard to make you happy?

And I think that's the point, is like does it really mean more if they have to like jump through a whole bunch of hoops and guess and solve a crossword to figure out what you want? Is our job to make it doable and achievable and attainable to make us happy and please us or to make it really difficult?

**Stephanie:** I like that a lot.

[00:33:08] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Our sponsor for today's episode is a company I cannot wait to tell you about called [Jenni Kayne](#). Jenni Kayne has classic, comfortable, and California-inspired clothes from their cashmere knit sweater that everyone is obsessed with to the incredibly comfortable slippers that you'll never want to take off.

Their everyday basics and wardrobe essentials are timeless pieces that make it easy to get dressed in the morning and stay cozy throughout the entire day. They're the type of clothes that feels so good to wear, because not only are they comfortable, but they're made with quality materials that last.

Now I have to say my style has changed a lot in the last few years. First of all, it needs to be comfortable. Life is just too short to wear uncomfortable clothes, right? I also don't have a ton of time to shop these days or to get ready in the morning, so I want really classic pieces that are easy to mix and match.

I'm also trying to be better about sustainability. And so that means buying less items but keeping them for longer. So I want things that aren't going to go out of style anytime soon, and that aren't going to fall apart after being washed once or twice. That's why I am truly obsessed with Jenny and Kane.

Their aesthetic is right up my alley and I'm on a mission to basically wear nothing else. I'm not there yet, but I'm on my way. I just ordered their sweater coat in the oatmeal color and I cannot wait for it to arrive. With elevated everyday basics and wardrobe essentials, getting dressed and keeping cozy is easier than ever before. When it comes to investing in a uniform that will last, my trace is Jenni Kayne.

And of course, I love them even more because they have a special gift for all my listeners. Find your forever pieces at [jennikayne.com](http://jennikayne.com). Our listeners get 15% off their first order when you use the code GIRLSNIGHT at checkout. That's 15% off your first order at [jennikayne.com](http://jennikayne.com) and use the promo code GIRLSNIGHT. Treat yourself, friends. You deserve it.

[00:35:01] <music>

**Stephanie:** One of the things that Kate asked was kind of what our traditions are for different holidays. So I want to run through a few of them because we really have taken this Valentine's Day thing and used the same kind of method in so many different... Because like I said, there's the opportunity for disappointment constantly or comparison if you don't kind of talk through this.

So I think maybe the next thing is probably my birthday. That's been a tricky one. I'm a big birthday person. And I think that one of the things I've been learning about my birthday in the last handful of years is one, I like experiences.

So we've for a handful of years had to take a little break last couple years, things going on. But we would do like a hotel night. I really liked that. And it just felt like a mini vacation. Sometimes we would drive to like... I think we went to Chattanooga one year, and that's two and a half hours. We went to Birmingham, that's three and a half hours. I like that. It's just concentrated time together. We're gone for like 24 hours, it doesn't have to be expensive but it makes me feel special.



**Carl:** But that's a really good example of that flexibility, that mutual flexibility of like, "I want to do something new. I want to go somewhere new. And sometimes that's, okay, we're gonna, like go to a hotel here and like find way. And then it's like, Okay, I don't have to think about all the million things we could do. My criteria is, are we gonna go somewhere new and is it gonna feel new and special?"

And you have to, though, also be flexible of not believing, "This is the year we're going to Paris?" Like you're just setting yourself up. And I don't mean that in like a bad way. But it's the same thing, just the introspective version of like, Am I making myself easy to please? Am I approaching this with an attitude of "I need to be impressed" or am I approaching this with an attitude of "I am easy to please. I'm going to join my partner in making this great."

**Stephanie:** I really like that. So that's kind of what we started doing a couple of years ago. And I think that there are times for, let's go to Paris. And if you ever want to surprise me and take me to Paris for my birthday, you know that that's totally welcome.

**Carl:** Oh, yeah.

**Stephanie:** But I mean, also, we just haven't been in that place for the last...

**Carl:** Don't hear what I'm not saying, like... I'm not trying to lower the bar for the sake of lowering the bar and setting low expectations because they're easy to meet. Right? I'm saying that there is a mutual benefit to learning to dream within the bounds and learning to be satisfied and happy within the bounds of what's realistic for where you are at this moment in time. Right?

There are certain things that just aren't very feasible, given everything else that we have going on in our lives. And that's okay. It's okay for that to be part of where we are right now and to go, "Because of where we are right now, this is what the version of this looks like for us." And to find beauty in that.

I think it goes all the way back to the Red Lobster thing of like, it wasn't about this, because we had gone on a lot of dates and stuff like that. But we weren't making a ton of money at the time. We were both working at this nonprofit and we're trying to like-

**Stephanie:** I think at the time you were saving for the ring.

**Carl:** I probably was saving for a ring. So there's all these other factors that go into it. And sometimes you go, you know what, it helps you appreciate the different pieces of it. And I think that shouldn't be lost.

There is a world where guys are lazy and don't think about how to do something special and don't think about how to take what's available to them and make something really great about it. And I'm not trying to get off the hook or let those people off the hook because it's... But I do think I understand why that happens. If you feel like you can never win, what's the point? If you feel like you're just going to be disappointed.... Okay, I don't know.

**Stephanie:** I might as well not try and not fail then.

**Carl:** It sucks. But I understand it. I'm not making excuses for it, I just understand it.

**Stephanie:** I think one of the things that we have also learned over the years is, and this is more about date nights, we haven't really in the last... I guess there was a minute there where we... I think our date night is every Tuesday. I don't know, it was a while ago. I don't remember if it was Tuesdays. But we haven't been regular every weekday night people in like years.

And I know that that works for a lot of people. In theory, we're like, "Yeah, we're in for that." In practice, we don't have it in us to get dressed and go out and do a big thing once a week. So anyway, I wanted to say that just in case, because I know that that's really commonly passed around relationship advice that like you need a really solid weekly date night.

**Carl:** I think it's a moment of intentional connection.

**Stephanie:** That's what I was gonna say is we decided a long time ago... I know we've shared this before. We've had just wonderful vacations and dates and things. Like I said, we love food, we love beautiful things. That's something we really, really appreciate and value is great experiences. We've had our fair share. But we kind of discovered pretty early on that our favorite dates together were usually us going to Chick-fil-A or someplace like really, really casual.

**Carl:** Red Lobster.

**Stephanie:** What?

**Carl:** Just...

**Stephanie:** Going through these really casual, like Red Lobster, and eating there, having a conversation with each other, just taking all the pressure off. And then usually we go like walk around Target or something afterwards. And I feel like we've had our funniest conversations, some of our best conversations when the night or the day is just lower key.

I remember we were in Hawaii at this gorgeous, gorgeous hotel and I remember thinking, "Today has felt hard for some reason. I feel like our last Chick fil A day was more fun than this day in Hawaii." And it was just a weird day. But it really is.

I'm the kind of person that they can put a ton of pressure on something and that can zap it, have a lot of its joy. So I have to really battle that on vacations and on, you know, fancy dates, whereas there aren't any expectations for really casual date. So I feel like I'm just able to enjoy it more.

**Carl:** There, for sure, times to do activities and to go do new things and to mix it up and to experience something that you haven't done before. And I think that's an important dynamic and a really good practice is to do new things together. But it doesn't have to be all the time. Everything doesn't have to be a new thing.

Sometimes it is when you don't have to think about, you know, the setting and what you're doing, you don't actually care about how you look that much, then you can focus on other stuff. It just frees up your brain a little bit and frees up your attention and your emotions. And there's something to be said for eliminating some of the noise.

**Stephanie:** So that's my birthday. For our anniversary we pretty consistently do a hotel night and a nice dinner. We don't really do anniversary presents, do we?

**Carl:** No, not really. It's just a choice. It's in the middle of other stuff. We're usually traveling somewhat in the summer and on 4th of July, so there's other things going on. And so we just try and carve out a little bit of time in the chaos and again, have it be special not... It's so many other things going on, usually in the middle of summer.

**Stephanie:** But that's something that... we don't skip that ever.

**Carl:** Totally.

**Stephanie:** That's always something that we carve out time for. It's not a maybe, it's an always. And it can be different sizes. Usually, it's a close by kind of hotel or something, you know, or we're visiting your parents and we sneak off for a night, something like that.

And then I think that the other thing I'd love to talk about is Thanksgiving and Christmas real quick just because I know that... The thing that I love about all of this is that we get to define this for ourselves. We get to say what's important to us and then we get to act accordingly. And I feel like we've done that probably with

the most creativity at Thanksgiving and Christmas. So maybe let's talk about Thanksgiving and kind of how he celebrate it.

**Carl:** Okay.

**Stephanie:** Do you want to go?

**Carl:** How do we celebrate?

**Stephanie:** Well, one of the things that we've done in the past is we have done it with both of our families. Well, you guys were so gracious to invite my family out from Colorado to come and spend Thanksgiving with you in Indianapolis. So it made her Thanksgiving huge. But that's a really important holiday for you guys. It's been one that my family hasn't really loved for...

My grandparents or my dad's parents lived in Colorado with us or by us, so we always celebrated Thanksgiving with them. But they passed away when I was pretty young and so then it was just us at Thanksgiving. And I didn't love that. So I think if it were up to me, I probably would have just skipped Thanksgiving. It just felt like there was just something missing every year. So getting to join in with the Wilsons, and you guys love Thanksgiving, and it's always a huge deal.

**Carl:** The eaters.

**Stephanie:** The eaters. And then to be able to invite my family into it, too, has been really cool. So I think that's also something that we get to decide is like what size holiday is this for us?

**Carl:** There's this piece of like... This is just kind of how my... I don't know how it began and kind of I think organically of like, just yeah, of course, you can come to Thanksgiving. Before Steph and before Steph's family it was just like friends and people were just kind of became one of those things where, "Yeah, come on." And we just kept adding chairs to the table, you know. So I think it became this natural extension to just go, "Why choose? Why have to decide? Why can't we just do this together?"

And I think that that's this attitude goes two ways. It's just that, why choose? And not everybody... That's tricky. But really it's an option to just be... You know, a lot of people make a big deal about having to choose around Thanksgiving and Christmas. And so just everyone's come out, nope. Just everybody go together. That's something that we did even when I was growing up. There were moments of that.

But also it's one of those places where I think we just get into, whether it's traditions or just habits, or just the way that things have always been done, we forget that we can do it differently, we forget that we can offer a different alternative to the way things have been done.

Every family is different. There are some things that are, "You know, this is the way we do things," and some families that are "this is the way we do things," and some that are more, you know, go with the flow or whatever.

With your family in particular, this Thanksgiving example, I don't know that it was very intentional like way ahead of time. I think that when we talk about all of the things marriage planning and starter kit and all this stuff is what do you do in this situation? And you can plan a bunch of things out but you can't plan all the things.

And your family won't be ready to plan all the things and it'll just be hypothetical. So sometimes you just have to realize in the moment, I think, that like, Oh, we're doing that now. Now the things that we're deciding are things that have the opportunity to be the new way that we do things, or for us to do something different or to not.

Like we could have had some conversation way back when and said, Okay, when you get married, the first Thanksgiving we're gonna go to my family and the second we're gonna go to your family. And by the time you actually get to Thanksgiving, that's all out the window. So you can either get upset that it didn't go the way you thought it was gonna go or you can just roll with it, and say, "Oh, we're planning it now. Now is the time when we're deciding what we do this year."

**Stephanie:** And every tradition had a year one.

**Carl:** Totally.

**Stephanie:** We probably did Thanksgiving with my family flying out to you guys probably three times.

**Carl:** Yeah, something like that.

**Stephanie:** It became this really beautiful thing. I mean, then COVID happened and the girls were born and so now we make more people come to us. That's why I didn't continue in exactly that form. But there's a first year for everything. I think, you know, Christmas for me has always been super, super important. I just love it. I want to be so present for it. I want all of December to feel like magic.

I think that in some ways, in the last couple of years, I've had like a bit of an epiphany, I guess, about Christmas. I think that when we're growing up, Christmas is done for us. It's something that our parents are putting together. You know, I saw a lot of things this year about Christmas magic is basically like mom and dad or mom and all the stuff that she's doing after everyone's gone to bed.

So I think that there's a long time when it comes to Christmas you're really receiving, and you're receiving the plans that other people have made, and you're just a participant along for the ride. And last year, we had or I guess two years ago now, we had just a series of things happen that kind of messed up our Christmas plans.

And I remember just being kind of taken aback by it and bummed out. And there were all these things that I thought were going to happen for Christmas that didn't really happen because I didn't really take very much initiative. And so I kind of just was hoping that Christmas would feel a certain way, and I was looking around being like, "Why doesn't it feel this way?" It's because I didn't really participate.

So the last couple years, there have been all kinds of things about the holidays that are really unpredictable. You know, this last year was travel, the year before it was Omicron. You know, they're just all kinds of things.

But this last year, I spent some time thinking about the things that make Christmas feel really magical to me, and I just decided that I was going to be the captain of those things. And it doesn't mean that I'm the captain of everything. But it just was like, I love zoo lights. I just love it. So I made sure that we got tickets in Denver and in Nashville. We went to zoo lights twice.

I really wanted to do Christmas pajamas, your mom started that tradition. And we weren't going to be with them on actual Christmas, and so I was like, I'm not letting that not happen because Kathy Wilson's not here. We're doing Christmas jammies. So I ordered them like a month in advance.

We did Christmas cookies, because also having kids I realized, like, this was the first year that the girls can do something like that. And it just sort of clicked in my head that it was like now's the time. Like this is when some of these Christmas traditions-

**Carl:** This is your one.

**Stephanie:** This is your one. Like I get to decide what we do as a family. And I think part of it, you know, as you're creating these different traditions for yourself, you get to decide what to add, you also get to decide what to toss out. Like, we didn't do any

ornaments this year because we were like, we have two two-year-olds, nobody wants to play that game. So we just didn't put up a single ornament. But we did all kinds of other things.

So I think that was just really empowering for me this year to decide that not only do we as a family get to make our own traditions but me as Stephanie, I get to make traditions even just for myself. Like I can say on my birthday, I start the day by taking myself here or deciding that you and I are gonna go here. I can make those decisions. But also I get to set that tone for our family in a lot of ways too. And then we get to also as a couple.

**Carl:** Yeah.

**Stephanie:** Last question. What happens if you and your spouse have different opinions about how a holiday should be spent? Like if it's really important to me to do Christmas at my parents' house and it's also really important to you to do Christmas at your parents' house, or if I think Valentine's Day should be celebrated with a brand new piece of jewelry every year because that's what my parents did or something. Well, that's not true. And then you think Valentine's Day is stupid. Also not totally... a little true. Not totally true.

**Carl:** I don't think Valentine's itself is stupid. Let's get clear about this. I think that all of the extra that's been added on to sell chocolate and overpriced flowers is stupid.

**Stephanie:** So what do we do if something is important to us?

**Carl:** It's not any different than any other part of your relationship where there's a disagreement about what's important. So it's not exclusive to, I think, holidays. I think if it's really important to you that the laundry be done a certain way and it's not important to me, then we have a conversation about it and we figure out like, What's the most honoring thing? Do I just suck it up? And this is totally hypothetical. But like, do I just say, I know this is ridiculous, but like, "Yeah, I'll do that if it's really that important to you."

We constantly are given this choice between "Is this a point where we're going to take a stand or I'm going to take the opportunity to just honor the person?" And I think this is a really important thing. Honor is such unrecognized part of every healthy relationship.

We talk about love and we talk about trust and we talk about, you know, a lot of other words. But I think that honor doesn't get brought up very much. And the best way that I can describe—there's a lot—but one of the ways that honor is realized is

that honor is about valuing the person over the request. The requestor is more important than the request.

So I may think the request is really dumb, but I don't think you're dumb. I may think the request is really stupid and ridiculous, but you are not stupid and ridiculous. So I will go along with the stupid, ridiculous request to honor the person because I love and respect the person making the request. There's a big piece of that. How do we mutually honor each other?

If you keep asking me to do ridiculous things just for the sake of doing ridiculous things, or if we really took a step back and objectively talked about it, understand why this is important to you, and what part of it is really important to you, I think we would come to a place where there's understanding in the nuance and it doesn't have to be so absolute. Like not everything has to be so absolute. There's room for understanding and compromise and figuring out a scenario that allows us both to agree on how we go. But I think beginning with that place of honor, and honoring the requester more than the request is a good place to start.

**Stephanie:** I really like that. And I like also the idea of... I mean, just really what about this is important to you? And being able to really identify that. Because you know, for the Christmas example, if it's really important to you to wake up on Christmas morning and be with your family and do whole Christmas morning thing, well, I would say that's important to both of us.

We have for years just done more than one Christmas. And I couldn't tell you, on any given year... We usually swap between families, we'll do one family leading up to Christmas and then we'll do Christmas morning with them. We usually fly on Christmas, like in the afternoon or something. And then we usually will do second Christmas the next day.

But I couldn't tell you which year was like actual Christmas. We just have several each year. We just pretend and just do it all over again. And it's so special. So when we can figure out what the actual thing is, what's really important and then take some of the parameters off of it, peel back some of the rules. Like, okay, well, what if we could have two Christmas mornings? Well, like, one of them's not technically Christmas morning, but I have a feeling you're probably not gonna remember which one if you give it a couple years.

And you get to decide. You get to decide whether that's a deal breaker for you or not. Or you can decide having two Christmas, you know, each of us having Christmas morning with our families is important to both of us. So let's have it be important to both of us and let's do both, and both decide to like really show up and participate.



**Carl:** This is probably a different episode of the podcast. But the more we're able to transition our own happiness and satisfaction and fulfillment into our ability to be flexible, versus somebody else's ability to be accommodating, we're going to be a lot better off. So if I can trade my own flexibility around those situations, if I can teach myself to be more flexible in those situations and not be reliant on other people's ability to accommodate me and for them to be flexible for me to be happy, then I'm going to be happy a lot more often.

If you're very particular and you want to be very particular, then you either have to deal with being disappointed a lot that other people weren't willing to be your particular brand of particular or find somebody that has no will and just will do whatever you say and deal with the consequences of that.

But if you want someone who has opinions sometimes as their opinions are going to be different than yours, and you're going to have to learn to like you guys have to figure it out. And sometimes that means you do things differently, and they do things differently. And your collective ability to agree on how to do things differently and embrace the fact that you can do things differently means you'll be happier more often than not.

**Stephanie:** That was good. I like that. We're running out of time or we're out of time. But just to kind of finish up, if there is anyone listening who is a newlywed or-

**Carl:** Whatever that means.

**Stephanie:** Whatever that means. Or if you're anywhere in kind of the transition into marriage, I think the reason that this course is so important to me is because I feel like I was just talking to somebody about this.

When you're engaged, everyone's in your corner and everyone's asking you questions and giving you advice and talking to you, and you just are so not alone. But it's like kind of as soon as you get married, it feels like people sort of forget about you or just sort of move on or don't know what questions to ask you. They say, like, "So how's married life?" And you get to decide whether you say it's great or whether this is the moment or the person that you want to talk to about something hard that may be happening.

I know that for a lot of couples they're like, "This is good. This is good. It's going well. I think. I don't totally know what I'm doing, or we don't know what we're doing but we think it's going well. You know, but we don't know what to base that off of or we're kind of struggling in a couple ways but it seems really early to decide to sign up for full on counseling. Is it too early? I don't know."

There just isn't a lot for couples after you get married, and it is an enormous life transition—one of the biggest transitions you ever go through in life. And just over the last handful of years, it has just not sat well with me that we just leave... There's premarital counseling but there's not, after you're already married, let's give you a hand through this. And I just think that that's really needed. So that's why we created this course. If you think it sounds like it's up your alley, we'd love for you to join us.

**Carl:** There's a lot of people who don't have access to premarital counseling or in a way that's meaningful and will connect with them. I think, like we said before, that even if you do, it's not going to hit the same because you've never done it before. You've never experienced a lot of the same things. So that transition from "Well, if this happens, then..." versus "this is happening. Now what?" is really meaningful, and is why we think that this is really important because it's not the... I don't know. The parts of marriage that we need people to help us navigate aren't hypotheticals, and it's just hard to do ahead of time.

**Stephanie:** Again, all the info will be on my website. It's really easy to find. [Stephaniemaywilson.com](http://Stephaniemaywilson.com). Easy for me to say. Carl, thanks for coming on the show.

**Carl:** Babies are coming home.

**Stephanie:** Okay, all right, we're gonna go get them. Thanks, guys.

[01:03:34] <music>

**Outro:** Friends, isn't Carl amazing? I just love him, and I'm so happy that you got to hear our conversation. Now, don't forget that if you ever want to find the links for anything we talked about in our Girls Night episodes, you can always find those over in our show notes. Just head over to [girlsnightpodcast.com](http://girlsnightpodcast.com) and you'll find links for everything, including links for The Marriage Starter Kit, and the Love Your Single Life courses. Don't forget registration for both courses is open this week only and we would love to have you join us.

All right friends, that's it for today's episode, but we have so much good stuff ahead this season. And with that in mind, now is the perfect time to make sure you're subscribed. Subscribing to the show is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. We won't send you an email or anything, it just makes sure your phone downloads the latest episode when anyone's released.

And I did want to take a quick second to ask y'all a favor. If you enjoyed this episode or if you've been a Girls Night fan for a while now, would you take just two

quick seconds to leave us a rating and review on iTunes? Those reviews help out our podcast so much and it really would mean the world to me. So if you take two seconds to do that, I'd be so grateful. Friends, thank you so much for joining me for Girls Night. I'll see you next week.