



70
x
7

CHAINS

WHEN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE GOES WRONG

FORGIVE HIM. | GOD HATES DIVORCE. | PRAY MORE.
SUBMIT TO YOUR HUSBAND. | THIS IS YOUR CROSS TO BEAR.

JESSICA GHIGLIOTTI

My husband walked through the front door, a smug, satisfied smile on his face.

My heart sank. I knew.

*“You’ve done it again. You’ve been with **her**.”*

He chuckled. “Are we at 70 x 7 yet? Will you still forgive me?”

For all the Christian women who feel lost and confused in harmful marriages, to make sense of the senselessness, find the truth of God's Heart for them, and turn their Chains into Crowns.

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What is Spiritual abuse?

“And then she understood the devilish cunning of the enemies' plan. By mixing a little truth with it they had made their lie far stronger.” - C.S. Lewis

I am so sorry you picked up this book. Really, I wish there was no need for anyone to read it. But you're here. And I'm here. Which means that this darkness is real.

Put very simply, spiritual abuse in a Christian marriage is any attempt to use faith values, the Word of God, to get someone to behave in a particular way, usually for the advantage of the husband, at the expense of his wife.

Have you ever been told any of the following?

- You have to forgive him. Even if he keeps hurting you.
- God hates divorce. It doesn't matter if the marriage is destructive to one of the spouses, divorce is never an option.
- Die to self. This means letting go of everything you want in life, to put your husband first in all things.
- You sound really bitter!
- Be more submissive. He will treat you better.
- Give him more sex.
- Do not gossip. Keep his treatment of you secret.
- Look to your own sins. You are at least 50% responsible too.
- Trust God. Be patient and persevere.
- Give your husband grace.
- Talking about the bad parts of your marriage is “Speaking Death” and cursing.
- Honor your husband. Make yourself smaller and meeker, to avoid emasculating him.
- God is using your husband's abuse to your own good, anyways. Be grateful.
- This is your cross. Bear it patiently.
- You have a Jezebel spirit.
- Boundaries are acts of selfishness. Being “one flesh” means no boundaries.
- The devil makes him do it. It isn't his fault.
- “God told me.” Husband, pastor, or friends telling you God told them what YOU should do.
- God will change your husband's heart through you.
- Fear is a lie of the devil. Don't feel afraid of your husband.
- What are you doing to cause him to abuse you?
- God wants to redeem your marriage. Be faithful and wait on Him.

The enemy is so cunning! Since Eden, he has been mixing God's truth with his own lies. Each of these statements is scriptural. Each has a spark of truth. But in the context of a harmful marriage, each one serves the kingdom of satan, not the Kingdom of God.

Remember when Christ was spiritually abused in the desert? Each one of Satan's arguments sounded really good. Each one was based in scripture. There was truth on paper... But Our Lord showed us that we need to look at the big picture, not make laws out of individual verses.

He showed us to seek the true Heart of God.

Spiritual abuse is using God's words to disguise His heart.

If you have been told, read, or believed that any of the above meant you should enable a husband's selfishness, you have been caught in the chains of spiritual abuse.

*The wind howls and the storm rages. The tiny boat is tossed around.
"Come." You step out of the boat.
You walk weightless, feet gliding across the surface of angry waves.
Eyes fixed on His gentle face. But the howling voice of the wind grows louder.
The waves climb higher. You miss the security of the little boat.
You falter, unsure which way to go. The waves swallow you up.
His hand grabs yours, firm and strong. You are His.*

The voices of spiritual abuse howl like the wind around the woman of faith, as she clings desperately to her sinking marriage. But Christ is waiting to show her His Heart and walk her through the storm.

What is God's heart like? What does it mean that God is "love?" What is the nature of God?

Identity and Relationship.

That is who God is. He says "I am who am." He **is** identity. He is the origin of identity. All identity comes from Him. Nobody can say "I am" anything without it coming from the Great I Am.

Relationship. He is a triune God. One identity. Three persons in complete relationship. Relationship in perfect unity.

What do we get when we mix solid identity with pure relationship? What do we call that? Love.

God is love. Relationship + Identity.

My whole life view changed when I started reading the bible through that filter. Looking only for themes of Identity and Relationship. In Genesis, we see God created Man, and gave him Identity through the name and work He gave him. God actively pursued a relationship with Adam.

Then, when Adam was solid in his own identity and relationship with God, he was put to sleep. God made the Woman. He gave her identity as His daughter. He gave her relationship with Himself. Then, God woke Adam up and introduced two whole, solid people together. When they met, they both knew who they were in God.

The first thing Adam said to the Woman was to affirm her identity and value. He called her by name. He saw her as an identity created by God, (not something to be used for his own benefit) and entered a relationship with her.

Adam and Eve willingly lay identity and relationship aside, and this was named sin. We see the chosen people repeatedly forgetting identity and relationship. Then, in the Gospel, we see the Son of God make a stand for Identity and Relationship. For love.

So much so that He died for identity and relationship. On a spiritual level, He was sacrificed to restore our identity as children of God and heirs to the Kingdom, and bring us back into right relationship. On a purely physical level, He was executed for valuing the identity of the marginalized, and putting relationship with them above the laws and social norms, for speaking out about the lack-of-identity and relationship of the Pharisees... then finally admitting to His own identity.

On both a physical and spiritual level He gave His life for the same thing.

God's heart is for Identity and Relationship. His plan for marriage is Identity and Relationship. Love. His own image.

When God's Word is used to promote, nurture, and protect Relationship and true Identity in Him, this is the wholeness of truth.

But when His Word is used to justify the stripping of someone's identity and dignity? When His Word is used to promote one-sided arrangements instead of Relationship? When a woman is told that God does not want to see His nature reflected in her, and her marriage?

This is spiritual abuse. And it is devastating.

His word was meant to break our chains, and to crown us as adopted heirs of His kingdom... Heirs of His identity and relationship. But unfortunately His word is often misused to instead chain us the the bondage of sin. The sin of abuse.

What is stripped from women in emotionally harmful marriages? Identity and Relationship. In an abuse dynamic, she is denied real connection, both with her husband, but also isolated from others as well. And her identity is systematically pulled from her. It is given up in a million little ways to "keep the peace." It disappears under the guise of submission and obedience. Her identity is sacrificed on the altar of her husband's needs, wants, and preferences as she tries to "serve him." She ends up feeling like a non-entity. I described it as being a not-a-person. Others use words like shell, or ghost. It's a complete lack of everything that God is, and everything we were created for.

A reversal of God's Heart.

I am always struck by the profoundness when wives describe their experiences as "hell." They don't know how absolutely accurate that is!

Hell is the state of being without Identity or Relationship for eternity. Existing in a non-existence. Unable to say the words "I am..." because there is no am and no I. A shell of consciousness on the outside, but a bottomless pit of emptiness on the inside. And without an identity, there can be no relationship. Nobody can see the lost ones. They cannot even see themselves.

We speak of flames and torture because that is what most people can relate to. Can understand. Because the concept of a non-existence devoid of all identity or relationship is completely unfathomable to most people. Most people, except perhaps those who have lived with covert abuse.

There is something I see over and over with women in destructive marriages. A shift that happens. At some point, flames seem more tolerable than the desolation of our marriage. I have said, you have said, almost all of us have said "I don't care if God sends me to hell, I can't live like this any more."

But we're already there! The lack of Identity and Relationship, (of all that God is) has created an extension of hell within our marriage.

That's pretty profound.

Marriage, that is supposed to be a reflection and recreation of God's Heart, a place of identity and relationship, has been completely inverted. Abuse creates a reflection of the heart of the enemy. Or lack thereof. Satan is the father of nothingness. Created to be the most glorious of all angels, he was the first one to cast aside Identity and Relationship. He is nothing. That pain of lack-of-self that torments abuse victims? Multiply that by all the atoms in the universe, and you might come close to the emptiness of the enemy. It is the opposite of God. The opposite of Identity and Relationship. And it is driven only by the need to strip all that is God from others.

Abuse remakes people in Satan's image. Abuse builds up Satan's kingdom.

And the cunning is that he will use scripture to tell us it is God's will.

Do I have a "Difficult Marriage?" or a "Harmful Marriage?"

Marriage is hard work. Beautiful. Life-giving. Loving. But hard.

Some marriages are easier, and some are extremely difficult. When women reach out for help, we are often reminded to be patient and persevere in a difficult marriage. That God stands beside us in a difficult marriage.

And I wholeheartedly agree!

Difficult marriages are real. And our churches and communities are right to offer encouragement, support and love to those struggling in a trying marriage. Living and loving through a difficult marriage is a path straight to God's heart.

God's marriage, after all, is often extremely difficult. He and His bride grieve the loss of their children. Other children are rebellious teens. The bride suffers an autoimmune disorder, where her body often attacks itself. Sometimes she is strong. Sometimes she is too weak to move. Their position in the world changes. Sometimes they are secure and prosper. Sometimes they are dismissed from their position, and left for beggars. Sometimes they are outright scorned and persecuted. It is an incredibly difficult marriage!

When we face difficulties in our marriage with faith, love, and perseverance, we imitate Christ and His bride. A difficult marriage should never be abandoned! What could make a marriage difficult?

- Grief of lost loved ones
- Anxiety over children
- Loss of jobs or homes
- Injuries
- Lawsuits
- Economic downturns
- Career stresses (deployments, travel, overtime, night shift etc.)
- In-Law struggles
- Persecution by employers, neighbors, friends, or agencies.
- Chronic health problems
- Mental health problems
- Past trauma

The list could go on and on. Get two or three of those going at once, and you have a very difficult marriage!

But do you notice what isn't on that list? Harmful behavior. Sexual coercion. Physical "admonitions." Cruel words. Lack of personal choice. Loss of free will...

Abuse. Abuse isn't on that list.

A difficult marriage has stress from other factors, outside the relationship between spouses. The spouses are a team, helping and supporting each other. They aren't always perfect at it. They snap. They sometimes take it out on each other... But overall, they get through it together. They apologize when they have caused harm, and learn to love deeper over time. They have each other's backs.

Abuse is internal. Abuse is built into the way one spouse feels entitled to a position above the other. Abuse is the belief another person is responsible for our own bad behaviors. Abuse is demanding your spouse sacrifice their personal happiness, wants, and needs for yours. Abuse is stripping your spouse of their identity. Abuse is always getting your way.

When most of your arguments involve an element of "He doesn't treat me right. I wish he would treat me better." or "She needs to stop being difficult and agree with me." or "He never apologizes when I tell him he's hurt me." or "She is irrational, so her point of view doesn't matter." or "He and I are both loving the same person... Him! I feel left out of it." or "Submit and do as I say..." These are all signs that what you have isn't merely a difficult marriage. These are signs pointing toward a structure of fundamental entitlement, and systemic abuse in the marriage.

How do you know it's not just a difficult marriage? When you feel unseen. When you always give in to keep the peace. When you feel pressured to have sex to keep him happy, even when you feel hurt and unloved. When you are told to forgive, but his actions don't change. When you change who you are, what you like, how you speak, and what you think to please him.

And this is not a reflection of God's heart for His bride.

And unfortunately... It's sitting next to us in the pews every Sunday.

I had a conversation recently with my deacon. He told me that a couple years ago, he wouldn't have believed there was much abuse at all in our church. But then he was assigned to the marriage and family ministry. Now he said nothing surprises him anymore. The most perfect looking families, the ones with eight beautiful homeschooled children, who volunteer at all the functions, who sing in the choir, who are always the first on a meal train... The wives in many of these perfect families have come to him with a grim picture of life behind closed doors. He can no longer perform baptisms without wondering if the infant was the result of marital rape.

The stories in this book are real, and shared with permission. Some are mine. Some are personal friends'. Some have been sent to me by brave women I've never met. (*Some are mine that I've put different names on because I'm not ready to share them just yet.*) Names have been changed, for safety. But the messages of spiritual abuse are very real, and happening all around us.

Law above People

Again and again and again Christ chose people over the institution. He bent the rules. Broke the rules. He didn't stone an adulteress. He healed on the Sabbath. This is His Heart. Identity and Relationship. Always people first.

It's radical. It's beyond comprehension. It doesn't make sense to us.

The law believes that sometimes the marginalized must be sacrificed to protect the system. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. If some women and need to be abandoned to protect the institution of marriage and preserve it for future generations, that's a cost worth paying.

But when the Law got in the way of loving people, what did Christ do? When he had to choose between law... or the dignity of a person's identity and relationship with them... There was no choice. Love was always first.

On a spiritual level, we know He died as the sacrificial Lamb of God to take away sins... But on a purely human level? On a human level He was executed. Executed for the dangerous crime of putting the sufferings of individual people above the institutionalized common good. The law. This is why He was hated. This is why He was arrested. This is why He was flogged. This is why He was mocked. This is why He was tried. This is why the religious leaders were so desperate to find a reason, any reason, to justify His death.

Would this Jesus be willing to sacrifice a suffering wife to be harmed in an abusive marriage? Would He tell her and the children to stay in a home where a heavy silence fell when daddy's car pulled into the driveway? Would He urge them to stay in a place where joy was extinguished, and where fear was a constant friend? To protect the status quo? To make others feel more comfortable because they have placed their security in law?

Yet we use His words to do exactly that.

So is this a book against marriage, then?

Wow, Jessica. You're really passionate about this. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with how vocal you are. You sound almost like a *feminist*. Shouldn't you be more meek... and Christ-like?

Well, let's talk about that. What was Christ like? When was He ever angry? Did we see Him angry at the suffering for wanting healing, instead of bearing it patiently? Did we see him angry at the sinners who were crying out to Him for help?

Off the top of my head, I can think of three things that made Jesus angry.

We often see Him miffed at the Pharisees for hypocrisy, and placing law and institutions above the sufferings of individual people.

We see Him get hangry and curse a fig tree.

But what is the big one we all think of when "Jesus" and "Angry" are in the same sentence? The temple. Money changers. Buying and selling livestock. Tables overturned. A whip.

Wow, Jesus, shouldn't you be more, I dunno, Christ-like?

Buying and selling in the temple. "You have made it a den of thieves." Commerce. Exchange. Profit. Self serving. Gaining. Instead of a house of prayer, seeking unity, relationship and connection with the living God, Our Lord was enraged to find it being used to sell things in the name of God.

Travelers who wanted to offer sacrifice were being taken advantage of, having to buy at the temple. Essentially, they were put in the position of having no other option but to serve the merchants, or else they could not be clean in God's eyes. And the priests (who received a healthy cut) were happy to reinforce this idea. Serve the merchants on their terms under law... or go to hell.

This made Jesus very, very angry.

Now, please take a deep breath for what I'm about to say. Maybe go fix yourself a cup of tea or put on your fuzzy socks. Hear me out. I do, really REALLY love marriage. Our Lord's first public miracle was at a wedding. Throughout the bible God calls himself the Bridegroom and his people the bride. Marriage is sacred. Marriage is beautiful. And it is from a deep respect and love of marriage that I write this book.

Okay? Okay.

But not everyone who goes to the altar for a wedding is approaching for a marriage. This is a point Pastor R.C. Blakes Jr makes. He'll say you had yourself a wedding, but you ain't got yourself no marriage! Just wedlock.

God hates divorce. But was there ever really a marriage?

Jesus overturned tables and chased merchants out of the temple with a whip for buying and selling in God's holy house. And yet today, at the altars in our churches, we are buying and selling every single day. But not just lambs and turtle doves. We are selling women. Selling them as wives, to men who have no intention of being husbands. (*How many of us have said "I feel like I'm married to a single man?"*) Right there in the holy, of holies, selling them into **bondage**, instead of marriage.

And doing it in Jesus' name.

A man with a fundamentally entitled view of womanhood and married life isn't there for a marriage... He is there for a transaction.

And the church will tell the woman, once they are declared man and wife, he pretty much owns her. She must serve him. Submit to him. Honor him. Obey him. Give him unlimited access to her body. Be his helpmeet. Forgive him no matter what he does, even if he continues doing it. Never speak about anything he does to her. Accept that she was probably to blame anyways. Apologize. Try to please him better in the future.

And never, ever leave. Leaving, even if it's for her own safety (physically or psychologically) is never an option.

And in this book, I hope to show that this isn't God's plan for the beautiful gift of marriage!

When these rules are followed with an abusive man, this isn't marriage. It isn't an image of how Christ loves the church. It isn't holy. It isn't about relationship, unity or connection. It's ownership. Lives being bought in the temple, then sacrificed on the altar of the law. But instead of sheep, oxen, and doves, it's women. Our sisters, daughters, mothers, friends. Us.

What do you call it when someone is contracted, must serve and obey without question, has no say over their body, or life? What is it when someone can be punished by another for not being pleasing enough? What is it when someone is forbidden to have opinions, speak their mind, or choose their own destiny? To only do what another tells you. To be charged with keeping another person happy, with household services, sex, support, adoration... And to know this is forever; you may never leave. It is slavery.

Slave trade in the temple.

Serve the merchants on their terms under law... or go to hell.

Am I anti-marriage?

Did Jesus drive the merchants from the temple because He was anti-worship? Not at all. He loved the temple. It was the house of His Father. He loved worshiping there. He loved teaching

there. He loved ministering to the hurting there. He loved it so much He could not allow anyone to make a mockery of it.

So yes, we're making a stand here. We're flipping some tables. We're calling out the truth.

Not to argue against marriage...

But because true marriage deserves to be fought for.

And so do the King's daughters.

The Bride's Song

-Jessica Ghigliotti

🙄 *I think our marriage needs some help. He doesn't treat me right.*
🙏 *Well do you give him all the sex he's wanting, every night?*

🙄 *The things he says are cruel and harsh. I cannot live this way.*
🙏 *Be more like Jesus! (lest you be judged.) Forgive him everyday.*

🙄 *I'm scared to breathe; whatever I do is never good enough.*
🙏 *Your fear is of the devil. Cast it out with perfect love.*

🙄 *I always seem to disappoint, and dread each coming fit.*
🙏 *Try harder to please him in all things. You are his wife. Submit.*

🙄 *I've lost all sight of who I am. My identity was shelved.*
🙏 *That's good! Become whatever he wants. Good Christians "die to self."*

🙄 *But sometimes I just want to be me, to do what I want as well!*
🙏 *Oh now we see what's really wrong, you have the spirit of Jezebel.*

🙄 *I feel I have no voice. I have needs. He doesn't care.*
🙏 *Just focus on serving him. This is your cross to bear.*

🙄 *Then there's the porn and lies, and seeing other women.*
🙏 *You anger God to gossip! Why are you sharing his private sin?
(Besides, as we all really know, his sin is truly yours.
For if you kept him satisfied, he wouldn't walk through other doors.)*

🙄 *It really is a pattern. He does the same things again and again...*
🙏 *Wow you are a bitter soul! Never bring up past sin.*

🙄 *Then there are the times he forces sex against my wishes.*
🙏 *There's no such thing as rape in marriage, your body now is his.*

🙄 *He really does some hurtful things. Our home life is a wreck.*
🙏 *Take that beam out of YOUR eye before talking about his speck.*

🙏 Yes I have sins, but his are more than specks... I've been through it!
🏰 Well, he's not really sinning like you. The devil made him do it.

🙏 I fight back tears throughout the day, and sob most every night.
🏰 Your suffering is how God wants to lead his heart to Christ.

🙏 I feel so broken down. I don't know what to do.
🏰 I prayed and God told me this is exactly what He wants for you.

🙏 I'm truly at my breaking point. It has to change. It must.
🏰 How shocking that you call yourself a Christian, but don't trust!

🏰 (We don't!) But if we believed abuse exists, well you deserve it.
We pray for your poor husband, who we know is a true servant.

🏰 For shame, to suffer such a wife! So bitter and defiant.
Repent of your wicked ways! Be obedient and compliant.

🏰 Now go back to your husband. There's no escape. Of course.
For God says destroying His daughters is fine...
But God Hates Divorce.

Let's see what God's Heart really says about this.

Forgive Him

Lie: No matter what a husband says or does, a wife must always forgive him. This means wiping the slate clean, not holding the past against him and never holding a grudge or punishing him to get even. God wants you to forgive and forget, and focus only on your duty of being a good wife. The Bible says so.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. - Matthew 18:21-22

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15

So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them." Luke 17:3-4

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Matthew 6:12

Is there anything more fundamental about following Christ than the sacrificial forgiving of sins? Without the forgiveness of sins, we have no Jesus. That was the reason the Word of God became man! To take on the price of our sins, that we could be forgiven.

We know that in extension of that, our faith tells us to forgive others. Turn the other cheek. Forgive 70 times 7 times.

Amanda's Story

Amanda asked her pastor to meet with them. She was desperate for help. He greeted Amanda and her husband of 19 years warmly, handed them steaming cups of coffee, and asked what was going on.

The usually composed Amanda burst into tears. She told him about her husband's lying. How she couldn't trust anything he said. He would say "I'm coming straight home after work." Then instead, he would stay out until 11, not answering his phone. When he finally would come home, he would deny ever saying he was coming straight home.

He would spend money, then say he didn't. She had found secret credit cards. One in HER name! He would tell elaborate stories of how he had helped someone out that day... only for her to later find out it was completely made up. He would promise to watch the kids, then not do it. On and on. She felt like she couldn't trust anything from him any more.

“Amanda.” the pastor interrupted her firmly. “I think I see what is going on here. You came in here with this long list of years of things your husband has done. Years of unforgiveness! Your heart is hard with bitterness. Here, let me pray with you. We can ask the Lord for repentance and a softened and forgiving heart toward your husband.”

Amanda’s body felt rigid with shock and disbelief. “But what about HIM repenting for how he has been treating me???” She almost yelled.

“Amanda, you need to calm down. Unforgiveness is stealing your peace. Remember, you are not to let the sun set on your anger... Has he lied to you TODAY?”

“Well, no. I don’t think so.” She answered.

“There you go.” The pastor leaned back in his chair as if the problem was completely solved. The rest of their meeting was solely focused on what forgiveness should look like, how Amanda was NEVER to bring up something that had happened in the past, and how seeing “patterns of behavior” was really just her sin of unforgiveness. She was to let go of every lie, as soon as it happened, without even drawing attention to it, and treat her husband like he was the most trustworthy person on earth. When things didn’t add up, she wasn’t to ask questions or give it a second thought, because that would make him feel unforgiven. She was to just trust God and let go... and never speak death into her marriage by criticizing her husband publicly like this again.

Everything got so much worse after that pastoral counsel.

Angie’s Story

Angie’s husband’s sister called her on the phone one afternoon. After a few pleasantries, Beth said “We need to talk, Angie.” Then she basically told Angie what a horrible Christian she was for thinking about separating from her husband for a while. “Let’s bring this before The Word.” Beth suggested. Both women pulled out their bibles, and she read a bunch of verses over the phone. She quickly built up a convincing cast that Angie owed him forgiveness. Angie had felt so much resolve that morning, but now she faltered. Maybe Beth is right? She knows her bible much better. Angie had told her that she was often raped by her husband. She had told her several times. Beth knew that he does this when he’s angry at his wife. She knew the last time was because of something tiny Angie did that somehow offended him.

“I’m so sorry he is treating you that way. He is wrong. But remember, Angie, your forgiveness will cover the multitude of his sins.” she assures her crying sister-in-law. “You can’t choose what he does. But *you* can choose to follow Christ yourself. You can choose forgiveness. Do you want to be judged? Then don’t judge him! Angie, God wants you to keep forgiving. No matter what.”

So she forgives and forgives and forgives. But she’s so anxious, having to watch his moods every evening. Trying to gauge how he feels. Terrified that she’s done something wrong. Feeling hypervigilant to see if he’s happy, and it’s safe to fall asleep at night. She finds she is growing to hate the word “forgiveness.”

She loves God, though, so if this is His will...

Jo's Story

Jo had been sleeping in the spare bedroom for months. She just couldn't stand the thought of her husband touching her. Not with the way he ignored her. Once upon a time, she had looked forward to a life of connection, and thought being married meant not being lonely ever again. Oh how naive.

Being married to someone who refused to acknowledge her was a whole new level of loneliness.

Oh, in public it was different. In public he would put his arm around her, smile at her, talk to her. He would even brag about what a wonderful woman she was. He would put on this big show of a happy relationship. Everyone they knew was convinced. He must be a great husband!

But as soon as they were alone in the car driving home, he would go silent.

She could sit down next to him and ask "How was your day, dear?" He wouldn't even look up. She could ask important things like "What would you like me to do about the kids' school this year?" He wouldn't respond. Even simple yes or no questions, like "Has that check cleared yet?" would go unanswered. He would talk to her when it suited him... But never at her instigation. She felt like she was either insane, or invisible.

And if he was mad at her, he could go hours or days without a single word or any eye contact.

Finally she couldn't take it anymore. Being sexually available to a man who treated her like nothing the rest of the time was physically painful. Her body stopped responding to him. She felt gross at the idea of sex. So the spare bedroom had become her refuge.

Which is why they ended up in this marriage counselor's office. He wanted her back in his bed.

Jo tried to explain to the counselor how deeply hurt she had been by her husband's stonewalling. How she didn't even know which company his life insurance was through, because he refused to answer any and every question.

"She expects an immediate answer." her husband said. "But I need time to think before I reply."

Jo started explaining that there is a difference between needing a minute to think... And just ignoring another person.

"What you need to realize," the counselor said, "is that men have a harder time communicating than women. He might not be able to spit out answers as fast as you want them... And maybe he needs some alone time when he's upset. You, though, need to forgive him.

"A communication problem isn't a sin. But your unforgiveness is.

“You need to forgive him, and go back to living like his wife. He will work on learning to communicate better... And your homework is to work on forgiving anytime he doesn't communicate how you would prefer.”

70 x 7 (My story)

I hated Saturdays. Passionately. Vehemently. Hated them. Dreaded them. Pleaded for them not to come.

Saturday was when he worked with HER. She was a supervisor, and could come in wherever she wished. And Saturdays were particularly appealing. The weekend crew was skeletal. Most offices were empty. Most coworkers were home with their families. The facility was quiet, with lots of deserted places to disappear to. I knew what happened on Saturdays.

Like always, he had promised. Like always, I had spent Saturday having panic attacks.

Dinner was on the table, the house was tidy, and the baby was in my arms when he walked through the door. He handed me his car keys to put away. One look at his face was all it took. I knew. The smugness. The self-satisfaction. I had to turn away from him.

I looked at myself in the foyer mirror, feeling utterly rejected and worthless. I watched as the tears slid down my cheeks. One of them dropped on the baby's head.

“You did it again.” I was almost whispering. “You promised. You begged for forgiveness. You did it again.” He came to stand next to me in the mirror. “How many times does this make now?” My voice was trembling, defeated. “You've had sex with her what, 11? 12 times now? You promised if I forgave you last time you'd be done.”

He laughed. “Well, are we at 70 x 7 times yet? Will you still forgive me?”

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’”

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiving a Debt

Yikes! A parable like that makes it pretty clear that forgiveness is not optional. No torturers for me, thank you very much! So... So what then? I guess that pastor or church elder must be right. I guess my husband must be right. I guess my bible study friend must be right. I need to forgive this debt.

But... Are they right in what *exactly* that means? Does it mean maintaining the status quo, going back like nothing happened, and just trying to be a good wife to your unkind husband? Does forgiveness mean doing nothing, and just praying he doesn't harm you again? Are forgiveness and reconciliation the same?

Forgiving the debt means two things:

First, we stop looking to the person who broke us to fix us. We release them of the debt of fixing the damage they caused our hearts. If any single psychological trait could be held responsible for keeping women in bad situations, this would be it. Needing the person who harmed you to heal you. More on this in a minute.

Second, we let go of a desire to punish. In the parable, the unforgiving servant wanted his debtor to suffer until he was repaid (and so the King handed the unforgiving servant over to the punishment of torture himself.)

That's it. That's all forgiveness means. Releasing the debt and not seeking other punishment as revenge.

Jesus is Lord and Master, God and King. He knows us better than any amount of research will ever allow us to know ourselves. He is the ultimate Psychologist. All his instructions are meant to free us from the effects of sin. Both our own sin, and the sins of others. Free us spiritually, physically, and psychologically.

His instruction to forgive is for our own benefit. It's for our freedom, not our bondage.

The One Who Broke You Can't Fix You

Let's dive into some light psychology for a minute, okay? In the abuse cycle, spouses circle through specific phases. In the beginning is the "Love-Bombing" phase, where it feels like a

honeymoon. He is perfect. He thinks SHE is perfect. He absolutely adores her and shows her in a million ways how much he wants to win her heart.

Then comes the “Devaluation” phase. This is where he begins to find fault in everything she does. It starts small, and escalates over the course of months or years until when he looks at her, she sees only contempt on his face. These two phases cycle back and forth. He devalues, then realizes she is pulling away, and he love-bombs again. Then as soon as she’s hooked on his love, he withdraws again and devalues. When she has had enough and he fears losing her, he love-bombs again. And back and forth it goes. In the beginning the devalue phases are brief. As time goes by the devaluation gets longer and more severe, and the love bombing is ever more rare, until it disappears altogether.

Let’s talk about what this does to her brain.

He becomes both the source of her pain, and her comfort, or rescuer. This creates a conflict that is impossible for her to reconcile. This is the same thing that makes children so attached to their abusive parents. It’s the same reason captives fall in love with their captors. It’s the reason the famous hostages in the Stockholm bank became fiercely loyal and protective of their kidnappers, resulting in the coining of “Stockholm Syndrome.”

The more the wife looks at her husband, longing for him to rescue her from the emotional damage he has inflicted on her, the more she remains stuck in an ever strengthening trauma bond.

How many times have you talked, argued, pleaded, cried, screamed trying to get your husband to “understand” how wrong what he just did was? Pouring all your energy into desperately hoping to convince him of your hurt? See your pain? Acknowledge the damage he just did? He stands there, acting like you’re crazy, and you throw yourself into the mission of “making him see” that insulting you was hurtful. That stonewalling you was hurtful. That lying to you was hurtful. That swearing at you was hurtful. That cheating on you was hurtful. That draining the bank account was hurtful. That misusing you sexually was hurtful.

It’s an impossible task! The more she shows her pain, the more he acts like he has no clue what she’s talking about. And the crazier she starts acting.

He knows it was wrong. She knows he knows it was wrong. So why does she so desperately need to hear him say it? She is a perfectly sane, reasonable woman in other circumstances. Why does she act so crazy trying to plead a hint of apology from his lips?

Because she is an addict.

A trauma bond is one of the most addictive substances known to man. Her brain and body have been conditioned, through repeating cycles of this mess, to look to HIM as the “fix.” He is the source of her pain. And also her rescuer from the pain.

Have you ever noticed at what point an emotionally abusive husband finally does offer comfort? At what point he finally does offer a half apology? Or even say “I don’t understand, but I’m sorry you’re upset. Can I hold you?”

It's not when he actually inflicts the hurt. It's not during his wife's passionate insistence that she is RIGHT to feel hurt... It's also not the next week, when she has managed to self-soothe or find other sources, healthy sources, to rescue her from the pain. Nope. It's at the exact moment she is about to give up on him. He watches and waits for her to pour everything she has into trying to win his comfort (from the hurt he caused, mind you) and the second her emotional pockets have been squeezed empty, he is there to rescue.

And do you know what? The more desperate she felt for the comfort, the higher the price she paid for it... the more powerfully she becomes addicted to it. It's the drug of choice. It feels soooooo deliciously exquisite, after the hurt and the pleading and fighting and crying, to sink into the long-awaited comfort. Sooo good. And the demonic cycle of abuse can continue. The chains are stronger than ever.

But God has the cure to the trauma bond.

I believe Christ calls us to forgive SPECIFICALLY as an antidote to our own damaged psyche. Forgiveness (*true forgiveness not the counterfeit of ENABLING that leaders like to baptize as forgiveness*) breaks the cycle. Forgiveness says "Yes I am hurt, but I am not looking for you to heal me, thank you." Forgiveness relieves the abusive husband of the debt of paying her back. It acknowledges the loss as very real, stands up, dusts itself off, and says yes, you broke me. But I don't look to you to fix me.

When he damages us, and we feel that desperate need to "make" him make it better, but instead we force ourselves to release him and take full responsibility for our own healing, that is the first step to forgiveness.

Why is this important? When we stop looking to our husband who harmed us to fix us, we look instead to God. We look to ourselves. We look to others. We look to a counselor. We look to YouTube videos. We look to books like this one... And HE stops being the savior. We free him of the burden of being the savior, and allow him the free will to choose to just be the abuser.

And the trauma bond begins to heal.

Every single time a husband damages his wife, and after the abuse she turns to him for comfort, weeping into his strong arms as he strokes her hair and kisses her cheek... The trauma bond is strengthened.

Every single time a husband damages his wife, and after the abuse she ignores her urge to turn to him, and finds comfort in healthy ways... the trauma bond is weakened. Making it easier to make wise, Spirit-filled choices for herself.

God's true plan for forgiveness frees us from abuse.

Letting Go of Punishment

The second part of forgiveness is letting go of all desire to punish, all desire for revenge.

It's human nature that when someone hurts us, we want to hurt them back. Even more so when they don't apologize, acknowledge their wrong, or try to make amends. So if we only follow the first step of forgiveness, and release a wrongdoer of their debt, our human nature will drive us to do something to "get back" at them.

This is where reactive abuse comes from, and it is a huge problem for several reasons. Reactive abuse confuses the lines in the legal system, and can be used to make you look like the crazy abusive spouse. This can fool police, DV specialists, pastors, counselors, judges, and child advocates. We will go more in depth in a later chapter.

Reactive abuse, or "getting back" also usually does even more damage to a hurt wife's heart. She knows she is a good person, and feels remorseful and ashamed of getting even in anger. It can even lead her to believe she completely deserves the next round of his verbal, emotional, or even physical or sexual abuse. Her mind has a hard time holding onto the image of herself as the good person she once knew she was. And worse still reactive abuse can become a habit that spills over into other relationships in her life.

Getting even is just never a good idea.

So God, in His wisdom, protects us from this! He commands us to forgive. He tells us that all punishment is His, and His alone. Forgiveness means we stop acting above our pay grade, and let God be God. We let Him deal with the wrongs of others how He sees fit.

So... don't expect my husband to fix the hurt he caused, and don't do things to get even with him. So to please God I'm just supposed to be a doormat after all!?

Not. One. Iota.

Bankruptcy Hurts Your Credit Score

Yes, the debt is forgiven. The lender will not go after you to get what they deserve, what you took from them. You're not going to jail. There will be no punishment.

But that doesn't mean you deserve to be trusted. They might never lend to you again! Your credit is destroyed. It takes years, and consistent hard work to prove yourself trustworthy again.

Forgiveness is letting the person who took from us declare spiritual bankruptcy against us. Their debt is wiped clean; we don't hold them accountable for fixing us. They are free from punishment; we let go of the desire to get back at them in other ways.

Yet we do NOT keep lending more to them.

This is where many voices in the church are missing the mark. This is where the pastor, friends, elders are off base. And this is where the abuser is allowed to milk his wife's heart and soul dry of joy and hope. We call it grace, fully sanctioned under the misunderstood name of forgiveness.

Can you imagine a bankruptcy court looking at a creditor and saying “This person who owes you money has declared bankruptcy... Therefore you must, under penalty of law, continue to lend him as much money as he wants. He must be restored immediately to a perfect credit score, and given whatever he wants. Any attempt to protect your assets will be a breach of the law, and punishable by death.”

Is that justice? Is it even mercy, enabling a spendthrift to continue recklessly misusing other people’s money without consequence or accountability? It doesn’t make any sense.

Yet we slap God’s name on it, and do exactly that. We tell a woman that yes, her husband treats her horribly... But! She needs to forgive him his debt and instantly go back to placing full confidence in him. Forget the abuse ever happened. Never bring up that he has done this before. Don’t hold back, but give him everything she is. Why does this make sense? Oh, because Jesus, obviously.

Then we take His words, that were spoken to set us free with restored dignity, and instead twist them into chains. We bind the woman with the belief that Jesus is on the side of her abuser. We say her desire for safety is selfish.

Let’s be clear. Restored trust is NOT part of forgiveness. We owe forgiveness. We do not owe trust.

Restoring the Damage

One of the most damaging religious lies around forgiveness is that obedience to God means “just getting over it.” Forgive and forget.

As if forgiveness is a microwavable instant solution to harm. We are told grace is sufficient, and if we still have hurt to deal with, it means we haven’t really forgiven... Or maybe even that we don’t have the spirit at all!

But let’s go back to the bankruptcy analogy. If I’m a small business, and I forgive you a significant debt... My books may be in the red. Sure, I’ve forgiven you. It’s no longer your responsibility to fix this. However, I’ve still got a problem I need to address. I will have to make plans, adjustments, and work harder to restore the financial loss.

Or what if I am your neighbor. I have a beautiful house, and do my best to care for it. Then, one day, you throw a ball through my front window. The window shatters into a million shards of glass.

You are unable to fix it, so I forgive you the debt. Which means I take on the responsibility myself. Forgiveness isn’t magic. It is a huge gift because it has a COST. The person who forgave willingly took that cost on themselves. I now carry the responsibility of fixing my window. Until it’s fixed, I am the one suffering the discomfort of cold winds blowing through my house. You are forgiven... Because someone else is paying the price for you.

Isn't this exactly what God did? Mankind could never repay the debt of sin. God took our debt on Himself. When He forgave us, did the debt just magically disappear? Into the ether, poof. Just gone. As if it had never happened in the first place.

No. Jesus forgave us by taking on the burden of our debt... and PAYING it himself. Suffering for it. Agonizing for it. Dying for it.

Forgiveness is a gift because it isn't free.

Do we look at Jesus on the cross and say "Hey! You said you forgave me! So why are you trying to make me feel so guilty by hanging there in agony? Watching you carry my burden is making me feel uncomfortable. You're just rubbing it in my face. You know what? Suffering on that cross is just proof that you don't forgive me at all."

Of course not! The Cross is the price of grace. It was not cheap.

But that's the way we treat forgiveness in an abusive marriage. The church today wants the fast answer. Cheap grace. We look at the wife and say "If you forgave him, then you wouldn't still be hurting. If you forgave him, then you wouldn't need boundaries. If you forgave him, then you wouldn't keep burdening him with your feelings. Watching how much you are hurting from what he has done is making him uncomfortable. That's not very loving of you to subject him to that. If you really forgave him you wouldn't inconvenience him by paying this debt."

Forgiveness without the cross.

We demand that she keep forgiving, keep taking on the debt of the continued abuse herself... and at the same time FORBID her from handling that debt. So emotionally and spiritually she keeps going further and further in the red. Deeper and deeper in debt. She has voluntarily released her abuser from helping to heal the hurt, but the hurt still needs to be healed. Now it is her responsibility. But when she tries to take responsibility for fixing the damage and healing her wounds, we throw guilt and shame at her, and tell her she is sinning against God.

What does paying the cost, and restoring the damages of emotional abuse look like? It looks like setting up boundaries to have space to heal. It looks like seeking support. It looks like giving less. It looks like leaving the kids with your husband and spending an evening with girlfriends. It looks like alone time. It looks like crying, and expressing hard feelings. It looks like pouring what you need into yourself. It looks like taking a class, reading a book, starting a hobby. It looks like backing away from intimacy with the person who harmed you, to focus on healing that wound. It looks like learning how to advocate for your needs, say no, and have your own back. It looks like personal growth and development. It looks like chasing a passion, accomplishing a goal, leaning into purpose (as you define it, not as someone else defines it for you.) It looks like needing more help. It looks like letting the laundry backup, eating a frozen meal, and declining sex, to spend time reading a good novel in a bubble bath. It looks like finding safety through boundaries, even separation when necessary.

But what does Christian culture call it when a wife does these things? Selfishness.

And what about when she does these things IN RESPONSE to being harmed? Unforgiveness.

And then it goes even further to tell her that her husband's continued abuse is actually her fault, because she is trying to heal instead of "serving him."

Would Jesus ever tell a woman to let her neighbor continually damage her house, forgive him and take on the responsibility for making repairs, and yet FORBID her from actually fixing the damage because the noise from the repairs annoyed that destructive neighbor? Would He tell her the continued vandalism was her fault, because she willfully insisted on making repairs? That if she would only stop trying to maintain her house, the neighbor would stop damaging it more? Leaving her no choice but to suffer exposure to the elements, in a house that was continuing to be torn down around her?

Yet we tell wives to do just that all the time. We tell them in Jesus' name.

And call it forgiveness.

Restoring the Relationship

"You have to forgive me." is a magic button every abuser uses to avoid consequences. It's abuse bulimia. Heaping all the harmful behaviors he wants onto his plate. Thoroughly enjoying every last crumb of his power and control. Then as soon as he's done, he uses forgiveness to purge it all away. He just pulls the magic forgiveness lever, and it's your job to flush away all that yuck.

The husband uses his wife as a sort of false savior. Forgiveness without repentance. He uses her as a crutch to avoid facing his own sins, by making them her responsibility to clean up. If he ever catches a glimpse of his own problems, he can instantly declare that it is HER problem of unforgiveness.

Just like that, the burden of guilt is on you. The second he pulls the forgiveness lever, it's completely your responsibility. He has no consequences to face for his indulgence in cruelty. And if all traces of his abuse are not instantly washed away, then you are the one at fault. You are an angry, bitter, unforgiving wife.

In this way he enjoys the privilege of cheap grace, forgiveness without repentance. He uses her to be a "Christian" without the need for Christ.

An abuser uses "forgive" to mean "I didn't do anything and should see no consequences or boundaries." He wants the relational slate to be instantly wiped clean, so he is free to abuse again.

And sadly this false idea of forgiveness is backed up by many Christian leaders and counselors. They'll say that it doesn't matter what he does, your duty of "forgiveness" means you are obligated to give him complete trust, and a restored relationship.

The reality is that this entitlement to forgiveness-on-demand allows him to act abusively... without BEING an abuser.

Just like someone practicing bulimia may routinely overeat, without being fat.

If you are forced to wipe the slate clean, delete the database, and “forgive and forget...” Then you can’t see patterns. In fact, saying “I see a pattern of repeated hurtful behavior...” becomes the sin of unforgiveness. And often the abuser then gets YOU to apologize and ask forgiveness!

In this dynamic, his behaviors can never cling to him. His abuse can never accumulate on his character. He can never become “spiritually obese.” He can abuse... without feeling like or being seen as “an abuser.” Because all memory and consequences for his vice are flushed away by his wife. On demand.

If you believe that God will not forgive your own sins if you remember any harm that was done to you in the past, then you cannot see what is being done against you. If it is reinforced that God will punish you for noticing patterns, then you are blinded from recognizing systemic abuse.

Christ gives sight to the blind; he doesn’t blind those who are whole. Blinding someone isn’t in the spirit of God’s love. It doesn’t fit with the Jesus we meet in the gospels.

And eventually, He opens your eyes.

When women in emotionally abusive marriages do begin to see the truth of what is being done, they usually describe it as feeling like scales are falling off their eyes. Or fog is lifting. Or muddy water has been made clear.

Sight restored.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with forgetting. Or making the waters murky. Or bringing in a fog. Forgiveness is about clarity and peace. If you are feeling foggy, or confused... then this isn’t godly forgiveness. It’s a counterfeit. And it is chaining your heart to the abuse.

So when can a relationship be restored? There are three main things necessary for a relationship to heal. And without any of these, the results will be toxic.

1. The harm stops. Permanently. Period.
2. The harmed person forgives. This is a lifelong process, and is internal. Forgiveness does not mean the harmed person owes anything to the abuser.
3. The one who harmed voluntarily chooses to take responsibility, with no expectations of gratitude or appreciation. (Can I be frank? Most abusive people will never, or can never choose this path.) Continued relationship requires choosing to help the harmed person carry the burden of debt they have taken from you. For as long as necessary.

Without any of these 3 things, a relationship cannot go back to the way it was and be healthy. What I usually see in an attempt at reconciliation is an abuser stopping the harm temporarily, and expecting praise and gratitude for not abusing. Like a Pharisee making a show of repentance. Or, an abuser who tries to help with healing for a while, then gets frustrated when the person they harmed isn’t healing on their schedule.

Neither one of these is repentance. Neither one is a safe situation to reconcile with.

Both are continued abuse bulimia.

And

One of my favorite movies is Disney's live-action Cinderella. The incredible, otherworldly color. The poetic prose. The tender acting. The ridiculously swirly dresses. I love it!

My favorite scene, though, is near the end. The King comes to find Cinderella. He speaks to her of her own value. He asks her to be his bride. They walk arm in arm towards the front door. They are about to cross over the threshold and leave the abuse behind, cross into a world of grace and identity and relationship. Cinderella stops. She turns around. At the top of the stairs, her stepmother is watching her. Their eyes meet. The foyer feels thick with memories. Years of abuse hang over them.

The King watches intently, waiting to see what his beloved will do.

"I forgive you." Cinderella says, matter-of-factly.

The viewer feels an immense weight fall from Cinderella's soul. She turns back to her King. He smiles even more tenderly at her, and wooshes her out the door.

She completely and totally forgave... AND she left.

Forgiveness AND boundaries.

As the scene fades, the narrator comes on. "Forgiven or not, Cinderella's stepmother and her stepdaughters would soon leave ... and never set foot in the kingdom again."

Forgiveness. AND boundaries. AND consequences.

Cinderella chooses to forgive what was done to her. She chooses where she will or will not be. Then she walks free, allowing her King to do as he will, in his authority. And the King deals with them in the way he decides is best for his entire kingdom.

Christian women in abusive marriages are being told there can be no "and." We are told, by husbands, pastors, or well-meaning family and friends, that the command to forgive robs us of our "and." We are told if we set boundaries for what we will or will not allow, then we are being "bitter" and unforgiving. We are sternly warned that we bring judgement upon ourselves, by saying "I will not be treated this way."

They say that what forgiveness really means, is that Cinderella must stay.

The King sees her value, but wants to leave her there. Commands her to stay there. That it is his royal wish to see his beloved forgive, and forgive, and forgive, and forgive... yet never cross the threshold out of abuse. Never say "I forgive you, love you, AND I will not allow you to mistreat me."

Even Christ's forgiveness comes with an "AND!" Your sins are forgiven. Go AND sin no more.

I believe in a King who smiles tenderly at our "AND."

70 x 7 Rose Petals

When is the exact moment we can say a rose opens?

A simple flower like a daisy opens in a single morning. One minute, it is closed tightly in a bud, the next it is in full bloom.

An old English rose though? It is never really finished opening.

From a tightly closed bud, the rose will loosen slowly. Softly. One petal after another will slowly unfurl. As each petal pulls away, it reveals another layer, still waiting to open. It continues to open for its entire life.

Can you hurry it? Can you force the petals open early? Pulling them away would only damage the rose.

And why would you want to hurry it? The rose is perfectly beautiful at every moment of its life. Doing exactly what it is supposed to do. It's a process to be savored.

Forgiveness isn't a one time thing. Especially for significant harm. It's a lifelong process.

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus knew this. What if instead letting someone perpetrate the same abuse against us seventy times seven times without setting boundaries... What if we are to forgive the SAME harm seventy times seven times? Like endless rose petals, new layers of forgiveness are always opening. As each layer unfurls, another layer of forgiveness is waiting to be discovered. What if Jesus was giving us permission for this to be a beautiful, intimate, and personal process, instead of microwavable "forgive and forget" instant reconciliation?

Forgiving abuse has nothing to do with allowing someone to continue harming you. It has nothing to do with pretending there wasn't any harm done, or instant healing. It has nothing to do with continued relationship with the person.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with the person who harmed you at all.

When you forgive, you are a rose that delights the senses of God. You bloom for Him. Daily releasing, laying the hurt at His feet. Layer by layer. Over and over. Seventy times seven fragrant petals.

What was our lie for this chapter? *“No matter what your husband says or does, you must always forgive him. This means wiping the slate clean, not holding the past against him and, never holding a grudge or punishing him to get even. God wants you to forgive and forget, and focus only on your duty of being a good wife. The Bible says so.”*

Let's replace this with a truth:

No matter what your husband says or does, Christ wants to protect and heal your soul by bringing you into the truth of forgiveness. This means not holding the one who hurt you responsible for your healing, and not cheapening the meaning of forgiveness by enabling sin. God wants you to forgive and find freedom from the bonds and ties of trauma and sin.

(Thank you for reading the first two chapters of “70 x 7 Chains.” The book has a tentative release date of Spring 2020. Be sure not to miss the release! Follow Jessica Ghigliotti on Facebook and join the mailing list at jessicaghigliotti.com)