

## HOW THEY REBUILT TRUST AFTER BETRAYAL

<https://fiercemarriage.com/how-they-rebuilt-trust-after-betrayal>

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**Ryan:** Greetings, fierce listeners. All right, today we are calling a bit of an audible. And no worries, we are going to continue our series on trust and rebuilding trust after betrayal. This is actually part of that series. And what it is, just to give you some context, is a few weeks back, we hosted a date night, a Fierce Marriage date night at our church, and we had invited a few other churches to send couples. It was a great time.

Actually, the reason for that date night is some friends of ours who are musicians who have an incredible redemption story were in our area, and they happened to have Saturday evening free. So he said, "Hey, let's have you come into our church, we'll do a date night."

So this audio that I'm going to play for you is actually the interview we did with them prior to that date night when they played their set, and they tell their entire story and has much to do with trust, betrayal, and rebuilding trust after betrayal has taken place in a marriage. So we hope this interview is encouraging to you. We hope that it kind of sets the stage for the rest of the episodes in this series on trust and betrayal that we will be releasing in the coming weeks.

So with that said, here is the interview. Stay fierce.

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**Ryan:** All right, so we're going to spend some time getting to know the Teagues. Who was here up for the last date night we had? You guys were here. I was here. Oh, wow, it's a lot fewer of you. So that's actually good. Some of you are going to get their testimony for the first time in all of its magnificent glory.

I will warn you, there is a bit of a spoiler in this interview. So sorry for that, but not sorry. So yeah, you guys, thank you for coming. Thank you for coming.

**Stephanie:** Thanks for having us back.

**Ryan:** Yeah. So in the interest of just helping us all know you guys, where did you come from? How did you meet each other? Why are you here in Washington State? What are you doing here?

**Stephanie:** Just real quick. Let's see. Well, we are both born and raised around the Nashville area, where the unicorns are actually from there and do music. But gosh, we met in high school. I was 16, he was 17 on a mission trip with our youth group to the faraway land of Philadelphia and you know, just fell in love pretty quickly. Not immediately. We'll expand. We'll expand later. Well, I got to hold some stuff back.

**Chris:** I was thinking, "How are you going to sum this up so quickly?"

**Stephanie:** And then ended up getting married in the middle of college and our marriage fell apart. Something happened there. And now we tell the world about our junk that happened in our marriage and what God did.

**Ryan:** You guys are a traveling band of two and you do concerts telling this story. Like you designed this career since college. I can tell it's something you totally predicted.

**Chris:** I dreamed it. She got a master's degree in education. So she was not planning this trajectory, but yeah, I for sure wanted it.

**Ryan:** So this is the spoiler alert. Your story is, and you mentioned it, Stephanie, is one of brokenness and it's one of healing, of course, and redemption. And now you're equipping couples with the hope of the gospel. So in our experience through Fierce Marriage, which by the way, we do the Fierce Marriage podcast. If you guys aren't aware of that. It's a water that we swim in often. That's how we met these guys was at a marriage conference in Timbuktu, Wisconsin. That was sovereignty of God right there.

But in our experience ministering to couples is that couples drift apart, and oftentimes it's slow, it's sneaky, it's quiet, and it surprises them. I can't tell you how often we get messages from people, I get phone calls from men saying, "Hey, my wife just served me papers. I didn't even see it coming. What have I done?"

So I want to talk to you guys about unity, specifically with that in mind, knowing that that is the drift that a lot of couples, they experience, don't even know they're experiencing it. That's why date nights like this are so important. If you could describe your thinking, your lives, because we're talking about kind of pre-crisis and then post-crisis. So describe your thinking, your lives in terms of your unity and your, I guess, your trust for one another. Chris, maybe you can run with this one. How did that begin to break apart?

**Chris:** Man, it's such a helpful question. For us, I think our drift was similar to most people in that, you know, we got married young and we just kind of had the

natural drift where we were just busy. Everybody's busy. And it's like you just slowly start to drift in that regard and your unity slowly breaks down over time. For us, it was a little different in other ways too. As you'll hear tonight, part of my story is that our worldviews actually began to diverge completely.

**Stephanie:** I have to hold this coffee. I know you talk with your hands. I'm just imagining it being thrown in my lap.

**Chris:** It's decaf, all right. Yeah, our worldviews. So I kind of went into this season of doubt and kind of agnosticism, functional atheism. And so our drift was really deep and our unity was really deep. But the thing was, she didn't know about it. So I think there's usually one partner that has an idea that something's going on or something is... And I think the way that disunity continues is either a spouse that's not listening to the other or a spouse that's just not communicating.

**Stephanie:** Yeah. I will add. And we hear these stories all the time because of us sharing our own, people feel safe to come and share theirs with us. And a lot of times there's the two players. There's the one that kind of outwardly looks like the rebel, you know, the one who's rebellious, who's doing the things they shouldn't be. And then there's usually the other one on the other side that feels like the righteous one who feels like the one that I didn't do anything wrong.

But for me, man, I think when I saw little things that didn't seem right, he was met with judgment from me instead of grace, more judgment than curiosity with his faith. He shared one time that he was struggling and I just assumed, "Oh, it's going to be fine. It's fine. Everything's fine." Like that's just how this world works, right? Like ignore it, assume the best and everything will be okay. And that clearly did not hold up for us for very long.

**Ryan:** Now, one thing, as we've gotten to know you guys... Chris, you mentioned the term functional atheism. One thing I appreciate about you is you are deep thinker. Like you take ideas to their ends. Stephanie, would you agree with that? He run... you don't run. I mean, you take it to the end of the path, which is why your testimony is so profound, frankly. But a lot of men I think have that functional atheism, but they maybe don't ask the hardest... It's not as overt or it's not as obvious.

So I guess maybe just so we can all understand and identify it, how would you describe functional atheism in a marriage or in the life of a husband? I know this is a hard question. Maybe.

**Chris:** No, I like hard questions. Within the context of a marriage, I mean, functional atheism to me broadly speaking is just... you know, I was actually agnostic too, in the sense that I didn't think that God was even knowable. I didn't know that I could even confirm that He was out there. and so functional atheism in that regard would just be that, you know, I'm living as if there is no God. And you can be in the church and do that. You could go to church for decades and live that way, as we all know.

And just within a marriage, I think for us, it was like the marriage was functioning. We were functioning. It didn't really look like. We didn't have huge fights. We didn't have these big knockdown, drag-out kind of issues. But it was this slow kind of, you know, death by a thousand cuts. The functional atheism part of it would probably just be that all of my hiding, you know, everything that I was keeping from everyone slowly just deteriorated our marriage.

Just like hiding and not living in community with your faith, not living your faith in community and hiding or trying to do it on your own, you're going to end up down a wrong path. And it was the same thing for us in our marriage too.

**Ryan:** Yeah, because God is the... He is love. He is our definition of love. So, to me, functional atheism in a marital context is love is whenever I feel like loving or whenever. Love, according to my definition, doesn't hold up, you know, when the hard stuff comes.

So you're gonna tell your story here. So we won't go into that transition, but specifically, you were able to reconcile, bring your marriage back together again. You're going to hear this story tonight. So don't worry. So in light of that, so now we're on the post kind of crisis, what did you do to rebuild trust? You decided one another state, we're going to give this another shot, but trust still had to be rebuilt, right? It didn't just overnight.

**Stephanie:** One thing we say all the time is that, you know, we're commanded to forgive, but trust takes time. That has to be earned back. And as the one, in our story, the trust was really broken kind of on your end. So that was something that I had to lean into and figure out how do we do that. I think, first of all, started with counseling for us, get help, seek help for anything large, small. I mean, honestly, it's better to start with the small stuff before it gets so big that there's just nothing you could do.

**Chris:** They say that by the time you're in counseling, typically it's too late. If you're in the ditch, you know... not to discredit counseling, but people wait too long. So getting in earlier is better.

**Stephanie:** So starting there. Because we tried to do everything on our own. Before we thought, "Hey, we're in the church, we're doing the right things. We know how to do marriage, you know, getting married at 19 and 20, which we clearly did not. So it being really intentional about getting help ourselves individually and as a couple.

Our counselor was fantastic with giving us practical ways to rebuild trust. One thing that we share a lot is he told us that for I think three months and you can set a timeframe in your own situation, but for three months, either of us goes both ways. We could ask any question that we wanted about what happened in our past about our time apart. And we had to answer. But after that time period was over, we had to put it to bed. You couldn't just out of nowhere, ask about it again.

It's that way of saying, Okay, we've dealt... you know, not necessarily that you're over it, but that you've asked all you need to ask. It's not helpful to keep bringing it up. Things will trigger you, yes, and that pain will still come, but it was so freeing to know. Because I'm someone that has to know everything, you know, to feel comfortable. So that was so helpful for us.

**Chris:** Yeah. I'll just close by saying, I think for the person who... and it goes both ways, right? Like she mentioned, there wasn't safety for me to explore whatever it was I needed to explore there. Her heart was a little more hardened early on in our marriage. For me, trust goes both ways. I had some trust to rebuild too. But the majority was on her.

So for the person who's learning to trust again, it takes the courage. It takes courage to risk trusting again. And for the person who's offended, it's going to be consistency. It's going to be repeated actions over time as long as it takes. I think that's the easiest way to sum it up.

**Ryan:** Stephanie, how did you not grow bitter in this time? And I know that that was on the menu, right?

**Stephanie:** Sure. Yeah. I was there at first, you know, especially after he left. Honestly, I don't know how to say it other than just Jesus. I think when tragedy happens in your life, if you're a believer, I think we either tend to run away from our faith or we run towards it. And by the grace of God, I leaned into Him because I felt like I had nowhere else to go.

Also just being, I think, kind of a private person, I didn't have a lot of women in my life that I was open and could share with or felt comfortable sharing with. But for whatever reason, the Lord just completely sustained me through that whole season, changed my life while we were apart, showed me my own

sin and where my was hard, like you said. And then from that point, just knowing that I could trust Him with wherever my life was going.

As it became more and more clear that He was going to be a part of that again, I think we just got to the point of not only am I feeling like God is saying this is the story I have for you, but we were getting confirmation from the people around us, from our counselor that it just... we knew it wouldn't be an easy road, but we knew that that's what God had for us.

**Selena:** I hope I'm not getting too far into your show here, but your new album is called Stages and we chatted a little bit in the living room today about it. Just Chris and I on his way out. I've been listening to the lyrics a lot. We love them and maybe I... I know. I'm sorry. I'm just going to come out. But there's this one song about He doesn't waste the waiting. Can you just vamp on that just a little bit for us? Because I think no matter if you've, you know, dealt with something traumatic in your marriage or just in life, or you're in something now, it's like you're waiting. And that... I don't know, that song is very much ministered to me.

**Chris:** So I think it's so universal. Like we're all going to walk through seasons where we aren't getting what we want and we have to wait for it, or we don't know if we're going to get it at all. That is just so universal in the human experience. I mean, we could both attest to this. I think the messages that we get the most kind of like, you guys, like the ones that end up filtering to us because of our story are people who are either waiting or haven't gotten what they wanted and they're waiting on God to do what's next. And so the heart behind the entire project is that the way that you get through is not by going around it, not by going under it or over it, but the way out is through. I think that's a lyric on the project.

The way out is through. The way out of the wait is not by closing yourself off to the emotions that are inside of you, closing yourself off to this... to the real visceral experience of what it feels like to wait. It's actually bearing that to God, opening up what it looks like to actually wait and to give that back to Him. Because that's what He wants. He wants us.

**Stephanie:** I think also just knowing that... because we do say the weight won't be wasted and it was in a couple of our songs actually, but it's the idea that we're not just waiting until that ending happens. That God has us in that place and we'll do something in us during that waiting.

Again, we might hear some of these things again later, so I apologize. But for us, like the waiting for me, I didn't know if he was coming back. I didn't know

if this would ever happen again, but God used that time in my life in ridiculous ways that I wouldn't trade. That I wouldn't trade.

**Ryan:** I'd love to hear the how Christian community played a role in this process. Another theme among couples that writes in is oftentimes they're disconnected. They're isolated and in their pain, they'll even withdraw even more. Physically they won't show up, but also they won't open up into friendships and things like that. So maybe both of you could speak to this in your own kind of ways. But how did Christian community play a role? What role did it play in this repentance process and the forgiveness process and the growth process? Let's talk about that.

**Chris:** I think what forced us into community was tragedy and was desperation. The reason that we disconnect or we withdraw so often is because it's easier. It hurts to live in community. It hurts to show people who you really are. It's hard. But it's good and it's right. And that's what God created us for is for community.

So we had to lean into that. She did first because I left and she didn't have anyone but community. And we were so alone the first time through our marriage. As we walked through that, as we walked through what we went through, we just knew that we wanted things to be done differently. And that started with asking for help. It started with asking for input and having others who knew us walk alongside us, give us feedback and input, because we're not equipped to walk through life alone. We would love it. Humans, man, we would just... we would love it if we didn't have to rely on anybody else. But that's not how God made us. And we knew that we needed to lean into that because we weren't equipped to get through what we had to get through alone.

**Stephanie:** You said a lot of what I would say, but I know specifically in that time when Chris left, I had one friend who had walked through almost the exact same thing a year before. So to have her in my life to see what God was doing in her life, it was not finished. Her story was very messy and painful.

But I think the thing that so many people need to hear is that they're not alone. I think in the church we so often suffer alone because we feel like we can't share it. It feels like a failure. I felt ashamed. I felt embarrassed that I'm... You know, I was 23 and getting divorced. That's... it's not always accepted in the church. And so just the fact that you're not alone, walking through something hard like that, the power and community, it's just unmatched. You can't find that anywhere else.

And especially if you find an authentic, vulnerable group, you know, a small group. When we had just started going to a new church before Chris left, and we got hooked up with a small group, and as little time as we spent with them, I sent out a mass email to our group the night that he told me he wanted to leave. Because I knew. And immediately I got a phone call from somebody to talk. And that was so new to me. And so that was so powerful because I had not had that before.

**Selena:** Amen. All right, we got two more questions here because we're going to wrap it up. If you haven't gotten dessert, please feel free and have permission to go get some. I just see emptiness here, and I'm like, please go ahead. But we want to get really practical for a minute. What are some daily or regular practices that you might engage in to nurture kind of the unity and trust in your marriage today?

**Chris:** A super easy one. I'm stealing this from my friend, from our friends Brett and Jana. But they do this thing called tea time. It's super easy. You don't have to have tea, just any beverage, wine, could be wine time. But the acronym is TEA. This is really just to connect. It's just a quick way to connect. It's just thankful, something you're thankful for, something you're excited about, something you're anxious about. T-E-A, TEA time. Yeah, it's amazing. If you're struggling to share or if you find it hard to get those conversations going with your spouse, that is just a really quick way to open a door and begin.

**Stephanie:** And for us, a lot of times that happens on the porch after our kids go to bed. We very rarely... we're without kids for a week, so this is kind of like working/date week, which is exciting. But for us, you know, knowing the young child phase of marriage is really tough. So a lot of times we'll sit down and say, Hey, which night, which night are we doing date night? Because if we're not intentional about it, it will never happen.

**Chris:** Calendar it.

**Stephanie:** Yes. Put it in your calendar. Again, for us, most of the time that's at home. But it's just the intentionality of, okay, we're setting this day aside. We're aware of it throughout the day. We're going to make sure kids get in bed at a certain hour. Maybe we eat grocery store sushi, or maybe we get, you know, a bottle of wine, whatever it is. It's just intentionality.

**Ryan:** Grocery store sushi in Nashville.

**Stephanie:** You know, it's not great, but it's okay.

**Chris:** That's a bold move.



**Stephanie:** You don't get sushi from landlocked states generally. That's very good.

**Chris:** How much do you like sushi, Chris? We like it so much that we eat Publix-brand sushi in a landlocked state.

**Ryan:** No comment other than that. I love TEA time. We should try that. We do our heart checks is what we call them. We ask each other these questions. What book is in your hand? What voice is in your ear? Usually, that's a podcaster, pastor, message, things like that. And what is God stirring in your heart through those things? That just opens up a whole opportunity to talk about what really matters. And not the weather, not the schedule, not the kids, but what's going on in your heart.

Okay, last question. A lot of couples here may not be immediately facing crisis or lack of trust or having to rebuild. Some of them are. But how would you advise couples who have couples in their vicinity that are needing to rebuild trust? Are you seeing there's a disconnection happening, whether it's unknown to them or if it's known to them, or if they've recently come out of some crisis? How can Christian couples love those couples well and minister to them in a way that will really get through all the noise?

**Chris:** This is going to sound really unsatisfying and probably challenging, but I've had people ask similar questions about like, gosh, we just love what... you know, after we tell our story, there's just this reciprocity that happens. And people come up to us after shows and be like, We just love the, what you talked about with the community that you have. How do you start that? How do you get that going?

And I just say, you got to go first. Like you gotta be broken and honest first. To create community, to encourage couples who are struggling, to give them a safe place where they feel like they can tell you what's going on, I know you're gonna have to pray for these opportunities. But you just gotta be real. You gotta let other people know that you're not above problems, that you have hardships too. It opens people up. There's this thing. When they see you broken or they see you needy or they see you struggling, even if it's something simple, you know, just a daily struggle, it opens people up.

**Stephanie:** Practically, I think that looks like... it looks like opening up your home to them, you know, inviting them over. Cook them a meal. That's an easy ask. Like, Hey, come over for dinner. Or bring your kids, we'll have games or a movie or something because it's presence. Presence is so powerful.

You know, if you're in a stable place in your marriage, having a couple there that's maybe not doing so great. Just seeing that example, seeing what marriage can be, what it should be, or, you know, that... and like you said, with vulnerability, it's really powerful.

And then again, practically it could mean going through a book together. There are so many resources out there for how to rebuild that trust. I know you guys can speak into that too.

**Ryan:**

Well, excellent. This has been a joy. You guys, thank you so much for sharing even more. You all are in for a treat tonight. They're incredible musicians. I'm going to talk you up a little bit. Great musicians. Incredible people. Their testimony is a miracle and we get to witness that. So thank you for being here. Let's give them a round of applause.

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