

Q & A: REBUILDING TRUST AFTER IT'S BEEN LOST (TRUST AND BETRAYAL, 5 OF 5)

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Ryan: Selena Frederick, it is a joy to be back on the podcast.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Is my enthusiasm off-putting to you?

Selena: No.

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: It's good. It's leading me right now.

Ryan: It's leading you.

Selena: Because I need to be led.

Ryan: How are you doing?

Selena: Great.

Ryan: I did not believe you.

Selena: We got a lot going on. We were on vacation for a little while, got to get some good family time in for about four or five days.

Ryan: Isn't that crazy?

Selena: Four or five days.

Ryan: Our anniversary, our 21st anniversary is coming up on Friday. And that's four days from now, and you said, "Our anniversary is this week." And I said, "Oh yeah." So we got to do something fun.

Selena: Life is crazy. It's good. It's full.

Ryan: Yeah. It's been so crazy, in fact, that we've missed a couple of weeks on the podcast, which is very rare. It's getting a little less rare. But fear not. All right. We enjoyed doing this.

Selena: We're back.

Ryan: We trust that the Lord is asking this of us. So we will continue doing the Fierce Marriage podcast. Today, we're finishing up the fifth episode of a five episode series on trust and betrayal, recovering from betrayal. And today we're tackling questions and answers that we've received over the last month and a half or so.

Selena: That's why it was strategic to take time off. Give you guys time to write in questions. Yeah.

Ryan: Which we had quite a few. We're going to get through, I don't know how many we have. Eight. We're going to try to get through eight. It's going to be a bit of a rapid fire Q&A. So we trust that it will be edifying and helpful to you. And we'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:21] <music>

Selena: Well, I think we first of all want to just say thank you for taking the time to write in. There were a lot of questions on all the different platforms. We found a lot of different themes. And we hope that these questions that we do answer will kind of bolster and reinforce the last four weeks of what we talked about.

We talked week one about defining trust, what it is from a biblical perspective and talking about cruciform trust. If you haven't heard that episode, go back, listen to it. Week two, we talked about broken trust. Week three, repairing trust. Week four, building, maintaining trust. So kind of the peacetime activities.

If you haven't heard any of those, definitely go back and listen to them because I think that will help you understand the answers to some of these questions. But we will do our best to do them justice.

Ryan: So today the goal is to, of course, answer or at least address some questions, respond to some questions, give answers as much as we are able biblically. Here's the big caveat. Trust, rebuilding trust, betrayal, they're always very sensitive and they're always very contextually driven.

Selena: Yeah, and there's layers and complexities.

Ryan: So wives are predisposed or more likely, I should say, to writing in. And so we have quite a few questions from wives, a few from at least one or two husbands. But the big caveat is if you are not in church community and you are not... So in other words, the church doesn't just exist just as a place to go to on a Sunday. The Lord has ordained and placed over the sheep shepherds, pastors, elders who are responsible, who are trained, qualified. They have to meet the qualifications of being a shepherd. They have to have lives that are above reproach. They have to be walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

The Lord has ordained these people to care for His sheep. And so if you are without that sort of care, you are essentially a sheep who is outside of the flock, who is outside the pen, so to speak. And wolves love those sorts of sheep.

And so if that's you, that's one of the, but you'll see that theme arise here today as we answer these questions that... one of our big encouragements to these couples and to you, if you're not in a church, is to get into a church, not just any church, a good church.

And how do we define that? A church that has a pastor who is preaching from the word, a church that is governed biblically, that is a plurality of elders, meaning that there's more than one person making all the decisions. So get into a good church that at least falls into those qualifications. There's others, but those are the big ones. Okay, so we're going to dive right into the first question. Is that okay?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Okay. The first question, this comes from Ashley. Selena's going to read it because it's from a woman.

Selena: From a woman. "I have a question about trust. How should I deal with a husband who is not able to trust? I haven't done anything to break his trust. No affairs, no financial issues, nothing. There are walls up and anytime we have an argument, he automatically says I am going to leave him or find someone else. His lack of trust hurts me. I'm not sure how to deal with it."

Ryan: So we're going to try to hit these sort of somewhat rapidly.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: First thought, trusting is an action of love. 1 Corinthians 13, everyone probably had it right at your wedding. "Love hopes all things." Right? What is that? It's a placing of someone's faith in the best outcome in the person that is the

object of your love. It means you're not always suspicious. You're not always questioning. Obviously there's other things that play into that. Patience, kindness, gentleness.

Selena: Yeah, patience is a big piece of that because if you're always jumping to conclusions and that's your response, then you're not really exercising patience in trying to understand. I'm speaking to the husband, I guess. He's not exercising patience in trying to understand and learning to trust his wife and that maybe her motives aren't as bad as he is assuming.

Ryan: Right. So if you're not trusting, you're not loving biblically. And so if you have a marriage that is without that sort of trust that's being extended, then you are missing out. And that of course is going to create problems and you're not going to experience the love that you're seeking in marriage.

Selena: Well, and it begs the question of has the husband, we talked about cruciform trust. Like does he trust God? Does he have faith in God? Does he work out his salvation with fear and trembling? Is he in the word? Because if someone is in the word, then the fruit of a heart that's transformed, that has been saved and changed by God, there should be fruit that is born of that. And one of those fruits should be trust, right, and faith in your spouse.

And so if you're not trusting your spouse, if you're not having faith in them and they haven't done anything to cause you to distrust them, then my question is, where is your basis for why you're jumping to conclusions for why you're automatically feeling accused and hurt and not able to kind of meet your wife where she's at?

Ryan: So yeah, the insecurity is there and it needs to be-

Selena: It takes faith to-

Ryan: It needs to be talked about and dealt with and owned and in some ways grown out of.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: So not all feelings of insecurity are legitimate. We're going to talk later about taking thoughts captive. You probably heard that verse. Well, that's what this is. If you have a wife who is covenanted with you, who has taken a vow and has said to you that she loves you, and if you're expecting her to be perfect and her perfection is going to be the basis upon which you trust her or are suspicious of her, then you are an immature person and you don't understand how people work.

You said this. Start with this. Acknowledge insecurity. But then, like you said, do you know who you are in Christ? I'm talking to the husband. Is your security primarily rooted in Christ?

Then I would ask, honestly, what reasons might he have for being insecure? Because I'm not saying all of the insecurity is illegitimate. Is it something... so maybe not currently, but is it something, a relational thing he's experienced in the past? Could it be-

Selena: Yeah, family of origin.

Ryan: I'm talking to the man now. Brother, could it be that you have not built your self-image in a positive, godly way? What I mean by that is, do you have self-discipline on display? Are you overweight? Is that contributing to your insecurity? Let's talk about that. And let's get healthy. You don't need to be Arnold Schwarzenegger, but let's get healthy.

If your habits are off the rails, if you're not spending quality time in God's word, there's all sorts of reasons why you might be insecure. And those reasons may be related to spiritual disciplines. So I'm not saying it's those things. I'm saying you need to explore that honestly.

Selena: Ask those questions.

Ryan: And then start dealing with those insecurities and understand that trust is part of learning to love throughout that process. So more could be said. And if we had you here in The Forge, across the table from us, we could have more conversations around that, but hopefully that's helpful. Sound good?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Okay. Question number two, again, from a wife. So my lovely wife will be reading this. It's from Lucy.

Selena: "How do you find hope..."

Ryan: Could you use a more Lucy voice, please?

Selena: Low say. [both laugh] That's our Lucy voice from Narnia.

Ryan: The old-school Narnia. The British one. The BBC one.

Selena: Low say.

Ryan: Very chubby. Right?

Selena: Yes. "How do you find hope when the husband is defensive when asked about any of quote-unquote "his business" or when proof of hidden things, big or small, are brought to his face, but he still denies it, then starts raising his voice for being quote-unquote "accused" and not wanting to work through it?" So how do we find hope? How do you find hope when the husband's defensive?

Ryan: There's two aspects to this. She's looking for hope in the midst of the dysfunction. But then how do you deal with a spouse who is defensive about their sin?

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: So the first one, hope is found in Christ. That's a Christian platitude. So let's unpack that a little bit.

Selena: That's the foundation of where our hope is. We can't hope in others. I can't have hope in you if I don't first have hope in Christ.

Ryan: Exactly.

Selena: Does that make sense?

Ryan: It won't be a fully rooted hope. It will be a hope that's frail and prone to disappointment.

Selena: And a waver and... yeah.

Ryan: But I think we can't have hope in individuals. But yeah, they're frail outside of the hope in Christ. And so what does it mean to say I have hope in Christ? Well, our hope in Christ is ultimately this. Our life will end. And on the other side of that, Christ. Whether Christ comes or he tarries, right? He waits. We have hope that we will see our Savior face to face. And that reality will be more real and more magnificent than any hope we could have in this life. So that's the essence of Christian hope.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Now, how does that eternal hope work its way back into situations like this in our marriage? Well, in the middle of the situation, we have prospects of, in that hope, we have prospects of healing. The Lord would be gracious to us. He would give us peace right now. He would give us joy right now. And He would

grant to us, by His grace, healing in the relationship through - what? Repentance.

What is God's response to our repentance? Grace. One would even say that grace is the thing that initiates the repentance. Because we receive the faith from the Holy Spirit and that enacts the repentance in our lives. And then out of that repentance, sanctification, and growth and obedience. And that's hope in Christ.

Selena: Right. And I think some questions to the wife or the wives in general, and don't get too much in a tizzy, but what are you bringing to him? What are the things? What and how are you bringing these things to him when asked about-

Ryan: His business?

Selena: His business. What are those things? Are you policing him or is it coming from an act of love, an act of I really want to know what's happening in your life and we're married, and so we're supposed to be one with each other and being part of being one with each other and just knowing what's going on in each other's worlds and the struggles, the good, the bad, the ugly? There's no walls, there's no secrets, there's no privacy, there's no my business, his business. So how can we as wives ask that in the most God-honoring and gracious way?

Ryan: I think a lot of couples miss it right there as they forget the deeper reason, right? Instead of just calling out the sin, of course, that needs to be dealt with, but what's the big objective? We want the same thing.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: I want to be close to you. You married me, so you want to be close to me.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: So I'm calling this out because of that. Not just because it annoys me, not just because I want to be self-righteous, not just because I don't like it, but because we want the same thing.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: How disarming is that, to you as the person who's calling out, but also the person who's being called out?

Selena: I think what you said earlier, the eternal perspective is really what drives that ability to ask those questions, to have that loving tone. It's fruit of the spirit

that allow you, that give you patience and kindness and joy, even in the midst of conflict and navigating that. When you're living in the spirit, walking in the truth, flesh can't succeed. I mean, you just can't ask... You can't police your husband when you are loving him in the way that God has purposed you to love Him and instructed you to love him.

Ryan: So we've kind of spoken generally. Now, really granularly. Okay. So you've got this wife who is calling out things about his business. I'm guessing phone history, conversations he's having.

Selena: Right. Just hidden things is what she said.

Ryan: So you can do with that what you will. The kind of the go-to is pornography and it's very common. Other one is a lot of husbands I've realized have hidden habits, whether it's smoking, drinking, chewing tobacco. I was in the South, I was actually in the Midwest this last weekend and there's a lot of guys who are like, Yeah, I was chewing tobacco and my wife, you know, she hates it. And I try to hide it from her." I'm like, what are you doing, man? Like, don't hide it. And then deal with the habit.

So I'm picturing that situation. Now, what does a wife do? So chewing tobacco is a bit of a weird thing. It's not healthy, but calling it a sin is maybe very nuanced.

Selena: It's different than dealing with pornography. There's going to be a different set of rules. I think, yeah.

Ryan: So a husband's living in sin, what does a wife do? Well, it's not outside of the scope of wifeness to call out a husband's sin. That needs to be crystal clear. If I'm sinning-

Selena: To help him.

Ryan: If I'm sinning, you should feel free. And I would want you to come to me and say, "Husband, this is a sin. Let's talk about this."

Selena: Well-

Ryan: Go ahead.

Selena: And wives, it may take more than one approach because honestly, I think you'll get defensive. People will get defensive and they'll just have their walls up and they'll start accusing, they'll start throwing... That's where you need to have your strength and resilience in Christ and say, Okay, I expect this. This is

going to happen. I'm going to bring it up again, though and we're going to talk about it." I'm not going to give up on this conversation. Because eventually, I mean, the hope is that your heart will soften, that you'll see I'm on your side. I'm not picking at you. I'm not trying to win an argument. It's not a competition thing. It really is I care about your heart, I care about the intimacy of our souls and our marriage, right?

Ryan: It needs to be woven within.

Selena: Absolutely.

Ryan: So now what? If the husband repents and says, "Yeah, you know what? You're right. The Holy Spirit is convicting me. I've been, I need to do what you're talking about. Let's move forward." Okay, great.

Selena: Praise God.

Ryan: You have repentance. You can begin to heal and walk out of that. Now, if that husband is not repenting, what is that wife's recourse? And this is where we go back to the church conversation. If you are without a church structure in your life and you're not being subjected to solid teaching, you are not submitting yourselves under the head pastorship, the pastoring of pastors or elders, then you're out on your own. If you're not out on your own and you're in a church that... now, so many churches get this wrong, but ideally you're in a church that is shepherding well, they know your name, wow, that's a revolutionary thing. Your pastors should know your name. Your pastor should know your name and they should know the names of at least your spouse.

Selena: Your children.

Ryan: Maybe your kids.

Selena: I don't know our pastors know.

Ryan: Be gracious to your pastor. Those kids have a way of being born and being little and hard to identify sometimes. But that pastor should know the state of his flock and that pastor should be accessible in a way that you could go to him. Because now, if the husband's not repenting, for the sake of your husband's soul, walking in unrepented sin is soul death. It's death to your soul. And so it's not tattling. In the name of loving, you say, elder, pastor, I need to meet.

Selena: It's biblical instruction.

Ryan: "My husband is in habitual sin. What do we do?" Now, then that elder will need to, that pastor will need to carry out church discipline. That's very foreign to many people. Church discipline is simply calling a sinner who is under your care, a member of your church to repentance. If that sinner says, "I hear you, I'm not going to repent," in other words, I'm not going to change, then that person then is placed under church discipline. What does that look like?

Well, simply, there's different ways to do it. But the most clear one is you are then not offered the Lord's Supper, communion. Why? Because that is for people who are... as a pastor, you're looking at your sheep, you're trusting that people who are regenerate are partaking in the Lord's Supper. People who have made professions of faith, they're partaking in the Lord's Supper.

If you are not bearing the fruit of your profession of faith, as somebody who is not you, somebody who is not God, I'm looking at the state of your soul, I'm saying, I can't confirm with you in good conscience that you are of the faith. Because the fruit is contrary.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: Now, that's between you and God, ultimately. But I have to say, you're not welcome at the table until this is dealt with. This is going to ruffle some feathers. Anyway, I'm not going to go any further on that. It's not about legalism.

Selena: No.

Ryan: It's about the Christian walk, which is of repentance, repentance, repentance.

Selena: And reconciliation. The hope is to bring back. It's not just to discipline and end there. The hope is to reconcile. The hope is to be brought back into the fold, to be brought back into freedom and get out from under, and not be a slave to sin.

Ryan: Yeah. And in the meantime, then you just love, love, and be patient. That's key. Be patient. Don't give ultimatums. If you don't have this figured out in a year, then I'm divorcing you. We'll have some other verses later, but that's not healthy, nor is it biblical. So that's Lucy's question.

Here's a question from Selena's friend, Anon. I'll read it since I don't know if it's Gallard, a guy, but I'll read it. "Your podcast series has made me realize I have zero trust in my husband." It's a woman. Or his character. "So I'm thankful that I have something specific to work on it myself. But how do you trust someone who proves essentially daily they are untrustworthy?"

She has zero trust in her husband or his character because he's continually proving that he's untrustworthy. Big question is what can you do? What can you do?

Selena: I mean, first off, I would say pray, right? Pray for him. Pray for you. Pray for your heart. Pray for your marriage that you would be able to build trust. I guess I would just start with prayer. And then of course, go to the Bible. What does the Bible say about this?

Ryan: 1 Peter 3:1-2 says this, "Likewise, wives be subject to your own husband, so that even if some do not obey the word..." that's what she's talking about. "...some do not obey the word they may be one without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct."

That's the big command we have. The big impetus or the big imperative is to love him, be respectful to him. It says be subject to your own husband.

Selena: Yeah. It's going to grate against you and you're probably... I hate to say self-righteous pride because I don't think that's what it is. I just think that you feel right and you want to bring him into that rightness. But how do you do that lovingly and not from a place of, you know, I'm better than you or I'm higher than you. I've achieved this? How do you actually bring yourselves together and say, "Hey, this is, this is an issue and I think that we are, you know, missing out on some of the goodness and intimacy in our marriage and the closeness, because I don't feel like I can trust you for A, B, C, and D? Can we talk about these things? Maybe I'm having trouble trusting. Maybe part of that's on me." Right?

Ryan: Yeah. Like you said, you have to talk about it and try to find different ways to get the point across in a loving way.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: And does he actually acknowledge that it's sin.

Selena: Right. And does he agree that it's sin or does, is he just, again, proving he's untrustworthy? And if he wants to change... right? You talk about repentance, then go. We got it. We're repenting. We're getting back on track of how to reconcile and how to become one again. But if he's not repentant, again, here comes the church leaders, right? Ideally you're in a church community. You are underneath the pastor, like we said.

- Ryan:** And it may come down to, let's just continue to pray for him because you know, he's continuing an unrepentant sin, it's causing damage in your marriage. We don't like that. But sister, endure in the name of loving your spouse and go to Christ. May this draw you closer to Christ.
- Selena:** He's sufficient for you. He will give you strength for every day.
- Ryan:** Yeah. The big question that we asked to start with this is what can you do? You can't be his conscience for him.
- Selena:** Yes, you cannot.
- Ryan:** And you can't change his heart.
- Selena:** No.
- Ryan:** You can pray, you can trust, you can follow the avenues God's given us. Things like calling a brother to repentance, things like going to church elders, like we've said.
- Selena:** For sure.
- Ryan:** But at the end of the day, you're going to have to trust Christ. And that's why we started with the Cruciform Trust. Go back to the very first episode in the series. All right. Louisa had a question for us.
- Selena:** "How do you move forward in marriage repair when your partner is unwilling to do the things required to build trust after betrayal and infidelity?" You asked one of these first questions.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Again, it's hard to know because we don't know this couple. But my first question is what is he or she..? I don't know if it's a man or a woman.
- Selena:** It's Louisa. Okay.
- Ryan:** It's Louisa. So what is he being asked or required to do? Because we automatically think they're legitimate things. Many things that you would ask someone who's broken your trust to do are legitimate, but not all of them are legitimate.
- Selena:** Sure.
- Ryan:** And what I mean by that is if he has repented, yes, that's the first step, then there needs to be counsel on what constitutes legitimate change. So, for

example, if a husband has been sneaking off and gambling, okay, well, a legitimate change is no more going to casinos, clearly. It's not like you say, "Oh, you gambled too much." "Now only gamble this much or only go if I'm with you." No, that's a legitimate thing to require.

If a husband has been caught on social media or flirting with other women, like it's legitimate to say, "Turn off the social media account. Get rid of the apps. That's legitimate."

If a husband's been caught looking at pornography or he's confessed of it, it's legitimate to say, "Let's put filters in place. Let's put behaviors, habits, routines, checks in place so that that is not easily accessible. That's legitimate. Here's what's illegitimate. No more internet, especially if maybe his profession requires him to be on email or he needs to be able to get on a Zoom call or he needs to do office work.

Selena: Right, right.

Ryan: Or like if he struggles with looking at porn on his phone, it may not be a legitimate ask to say, get rid of your phone because-

Selena: But it may be a legitimate ask to say, Hey, only during these times, in front of whatever, and let's put some stuff in place. Again, it's not about policing. That's not the bottom line. It's to reconcile. It's to bring sanctification. It's to bring unity and oneness back to the marriage, to rebuild trust, to be able to build integrity back into your relationship.

Ryan: Yeah. And here's my challenge to this husband or husbands maybe in this situation. Even in the rebuilding of the trust, you need to lead. So you don't just say, I broke your trust, therefore, take the wheel, wife.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Okay, you tell me what I need to do. What hoops are you going to make for me to jump through?

Selena: Right.

Ryan: There might be some of that. Let's talk and converse and let's... how can I...? But I need to lead in mining for ways to rebuild your trust. I'm not just saying, tell me what to do. That's a relegation of responsibility.

Selena: You're not responding. Yes.

- Ryan:** Instead, lead through this. And part of that leading is saying, okay, let's get an elder again, get an elder involved, get a godly friend involved.
- Selena:** Somebody to encourage you.
- Ryan:** What boundaries do you think are healthy? But he needs to lead through that because the bottom line is, if he's not leading the trust-building process, he's not leading. And if he's not leading, he's failing as a head.
- Selena:** Right. And that doesn't instill trust in his wife.
- Ryan:** So how would that make you feel as a wife?
- Selena:** If you are leading this charge to rebuild trust, to start doing the things-
- Ryan:** But what if you're so hurt? Sorry, I'm interrupting. But what if you're so hurt, so resentful that you think my business is going to fail?
- Selena:** You try to lead this-
- Ryan:** So it's not easy.
- Selena:** It's not at all. No. And I'm not saying that it is.
- Ryan:** And I'm just telling you, if this were me, this is about my response. Okay. "I've shattered your trust. I recognize... I'm sorry. I have failed you as your husband. I failed you as head of this household. I want to rebuild it. I want to prove to you that I want to rebuild it. I understand that you don't believe me right now. And it's going to take time for you to believe me and to actually feel that. I'm willing to wait. And I'm willing to do the actions that are rebuild trust, even if you think the actions are illegitimate. I will do them."
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** And so I think that's how you maybe begin building that bridge.
- Selena:** Yeah. And leading in that situation.
- Ryan:** Yeah.
- Selena:** Yeah. It's hard because leadership requires trust of the individuals being led in their leader, right? Like, in order for you to legitimately lead, I need to trust you. But you also have to-

- Ryan:** And I need to be willing to lead even if you don't trust me.
- Selena:** Exactly.
- Ryan:** And that's part of leadership is seeing what's on the horizon, even if you don't, and saying, Okay, trust me. Like, you've not given me that trust that I'm just going to keep holding your hand and I might drag a little bit more at times. Maybe dragging your feet a little bit more at times. We've been there. Have I ever been wrong ever in the history of our marriage? Yes, I have.
- Selena:** Somebody asking that and I was like, Aah, yes.
- Ryan:** I'll tell on myself. Okay. Samantha has a long question, but we kept it in here because I think it's worthwhile. Let's do Samantha's question.
- Selena:** Okay. "Hello, Ryan and Selena. I know you've talked about being unequally yoked on your podcast, but I did have a question that I would appreciate your input on. My husband and I have been together for 18 years. For most of those years, we've been on the same page with regards to faith. We did not practice any particular faith since neither of us were religious. There was no issue in that area of our life. Recently, I have felt called to Jesus and have begun studying the Bible and attending church." Praise God. "I feel guilty going to church sometimes because it feels like I have to choose between time with my husband and time with God. My husband would never stand in the way of me doing this, but he does let me know his displeasure with the church. He grew up with religious parents and has a bad taste in his mouth from things he watched and experienced when he was growing up. He genuinely believes that church and organized religion only spreads hate and is a way for bad people to pretend they're good. He has only grown further away from God since then. To call him a skeptic is an understatement. Since I'm on this journey, he has expressed concern about it changing our relationship and hurting our marriage. I don't want this to happen or for him to feel insecure, especially since I have found my faith well into our marriage. How do I help my husband see that I value our marriage and him? Will I continue building my faith? How do I show my husband that our marriage doesn't have to change in a negative way?" That's a big, big question.
- Ryan:** So to summarize, she has come to faith. They weren't Christians when they got married. She has become a Christian. She feels torn between her faith and her husband because her husband is not Christian.
- Selena:** Non believer, yeah.

Ryan: And so she feels like she has to choose between God and her husband. And now he's beginning to express that she's changing and that is causing him to feel like she's drifting away from him.

Selena: Which might be the case with unbelievers and believer, right?

Ryan: This tension is real, right? They are now unequally yoked. So there's going to be this sense that they're going around in circles. The analogy of being equally yoked, we shared it a while back. I'm going to share it again. But it's a biblical analogy where you've got two oxen and you want them to be of the same size. You don't want a 2,000-pound ox paired with a 500-pound mule. But what will happen is the yoke will be unequal because they both share a yoke as they're pulling the plow. The yoke... it'll be uneven. It'll be lower. It'll chafe the animals. The ox will go faster than the mule, pull more. They'll go in circles. You can't plow a field that way.

So that's what it's going to feel like. But that's okay, because that chafing, I think, is maybe what your husband's feeling, is that you're plowing and he's not, but you're still yoked. And so I would say, you don't want to unnecessarily cause division.

Here's the encouragement. There is no reason for you to have to choose between God and your husband. Now, if your husband's saying, no, I'm not going to let you go to church on a Sunday, you're going to say, I love you. I'm going to do this for an hour and a half on Sundays, but how can I make it up to you another time? Like whatever the time that that's taking away, then I'll give it to you.

Selena: "You're welcome to come." And always invite, always keep the door open, of course.

Ryan: And that's just a really practical way to do it. But I want to read these passages because I think they'll be an encouragement to you. "Likewise wives..." We've just read this, 1 Peter 3:1-2. I'll read it again. "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct." In other words, love him better than you did before. Show him better than you did before. Take more time to express your love. Show him even the love of Christ, of course.

Selena: Right. I think that's the more loving thing that you're talking about.

Ryan: Let him see the joy on your face. Let him feel the peace in your heart. All those fruits of the Holy Spirit now indwelling you, just bear those fruit.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: That fruit. Second verse, 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says this, "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. But how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"

Paul is talking about this situation. That's exactly what he's talking about. He's saying, if you're the believer and you are married to an unbeliever, live peaceably with your unbelieving spouse. That is your burden to bear. And do that with Christ and joy and all that.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: And he's giving an out now here, too. If that unbeliever decides to leave, he's saying, "Be at peace in that case." But you are not given permission to leave. So you stay. You're long-suffering. You're loving. And just bear the fruit and love your husband.

And as with all things, communicate with him. We said it before. I'm going to say it probably 100 more times before the end of this month. Tell him, "We want the same thing. I want you to feel loved. You want to feel loved. I want to feel loved by you. You want to love me. So let's get on that page. We're on the same team."

Selena: Yeah. And maybe even asking him questions like, Hey, some of your experiences... No one's ever experienced a perfect church. No one's ever experienced believers being absolutely perfect. And so, unfortunately, husband, some of the things you experienced growing up were wrong. Maybe there was unrepentant sin. And maybe, yes, what you observed was people acting good and they weren't actually changed from the inside out. You have a front-row seat, husband, to your wife and the work that God is doing in her. Christians are not perfect. They're just acknowledging their imperfections and repenting to Christ.

Ryan: That's the definition of a Christian.

Selena: Right. And so the husband might need to just kind of walk through some of his own experiences. And you talked to him about that. "Honey, I know you felt these things. I know you experienced these things. But I'm telling you, that was wrong. That shouldn't have happened. And here is the true faith. Here is what should be going on. And I'm loving you in this way because I value our

marriage, because Christ has told me to lay down my life. And so this is what this looks like."

And correcting some of those wrongs. And I think that that could be a path towards freedom in terms of he's scared. There's clearly some fear that has happened from the past. And he's afraid that things are going to change for the worst. And you can, as a wife, where God has a hold of your heart and you can definitively and securely say, "Hey, that's not the case here. And let's address these things. This is not how it should have been. This is what the Bible says. Here's where we are. I have so much joy and peace about this. I'd love to share it with you."

Ryan: That's good. Excellent. We're into three more questions.

Selena: Oh, my. Okay.

Ryan: But we're going to we're going to rapid fire.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Now, this listener viewer, this is where you're going to have some additional charity, because there's some heavy topics. Abuse is going to come up here also. And like intrusive thoughts about a past that your spouse has.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: So please give us charity. But we're going to speak some truth, Lord willing. "Abuse is part of our..." This is Nate. "Abuse is part of our story and now the reason my wife is asking for a divorce. I've done some good work to find the reasons and repent. My wife doesn't trust this and says she'll never feel safe with me. I'm standing for my marriage, but struggling to show my wife I've changed. Any thoughts on how to show I've changed?"

Clearly, whatever the abuse was, I'm guessing it was physical abuse, which obviously is a horrible thing for a wife to go through. How can you prove to her that you're not going to snap again? If you're prone to anger, how can...? I mean, that's really hard to prove. So there's no way around this. You have to give it time.

Now, she's already initiating and asking for the divorce. So you're going to have to give as much time as you can. But time, repentance where it's due, and just love and then submitting yourself. I think this is huge. Coming back to it, submitting yourself to local church leadership.

Selena: Yeah. And I would add to that, you know, if your marriage does end, where do you go from that? And do you run to the Lord? You're standing for your marriage? That's great. But if the damage has been done and the consequences are just flowing down from that, it's a hard thing. So my prayer would be run to the Lord and find yourself in Him and anchor yourself to to who He is and trust that, you know, no time is wasted. No matter the experience, the Lord is going to use that to sanctify you, to bring you to holiness more and more. Right? Grace upon grace.

But who can who are we to say that, you know, just because... you can't just show that you've changed. Like we said, it takes time. And if the time's not there and the damage has been done, you need to walk that path as well.

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: And we would say do that in a church and do that with believers.

Ryan: I'm just going to say this. A wife in this situation has been abused. Her husband is repenting of that abuse and of course, get to safety. I think the wife, as much as she is able with the help of community, with the wisdom of people around her, hold out for that evidence, for that evidence of heart change.

Selena: It's a big ask.

Ryan: It's a big ask. Obviously, it's situational.

Selena: You can't do this alone. You need people in your-

Ryan: People are going to be upset that we're saying this. But I'm trying to think biblically about it. Because if it's something that has gone on for years and you've seen a pattern of him saying he got better and he didn't, saying he fixed it, he didn't, I think you might have a pretty good case for divorce, right? Because abuse and abandonment, that's one of the things that we have in Scripture. That's not always the case, right? And I don't know what he means by abuse in this situation, so it's, again...

I'm just trying to add some different color to this because so often people are like, Oh, no matter what, you know, no matter what, the man will never change. And there's never any reconciliation after this line has been crossed. I'm saying that's not a biblical way to think about this. Let the cards fall where they may. But that's what I read in Scripture. Do you agree or do you disagree?

Selena: I think there can be reconciliation. But, you know, as a wife, and if you feel afraid all the time and you're going to be hurt and physically, yeah, I don't know. Has she held out long enough? Has she, you know-

Ryan: That's what I'm asking.

Selena: Those are the questions to ask.

Ryan: I don't think a wife should move back in if she's afraid that she's going to get hurt. That means that he's not-

Selena: Right. I don't know that there are thoughts, again, on how to show you've changed. Again, like you said, time, repentance, where it's due. And that's kind of the lane he has to be in. Like, there's nothing else he can do.

Ryan: He has to fix it. He's not off the hook. I'm just trying to add a fully biblical perspective. Okay. Anon asked this. "How do I help my husband through intrusive thoughts taking his mind captive?" She sounds like she had infidelity. She was unfaithful while they were dating. She confessed it seven years into their marriage. So I think that the trust was broken. His view of his wife and their dating/their memories and their wedding day are all tarnished and he has constant thoughts and visions haunting him, I'm guessing of her in this other-

Selena: Affair.

Ryan: Affair, this relationship.

Selena: I think we chose this question too, because there are a lot of people that deal with intrusive thoughts, especially when trust has been broken, right? It's hard to not imagine what's happened after it's happened. That's probably one of the biggest battles you face as someone whose trust has been broken. And so how can... as a believer, you know, yes, she cheated on him, he feels betrayed, he's struggling to forgive. But the call is still the same as believers, right? We have the freedom to forgive. There's freedom in forgiveness, right? It's a command. It's an imperative.

The Bible tells us we need to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Every thought, whether that is an intrusive thought. Anything that is not honoring Christ, that is not obeying, that is... What is it? Whatever is true, whatever is good, whatever is lovely, whatever is praiseworthy, think about such things, dwell on these things. That is the call.

And maybe it feels like some days I got this, but other days it's a super tall order and I don't know that I can meet it. Well, the thoughts may not be flowing, but we still need to chip away at it, right? As a believer, we still need to make the effort. We still need to kind of try to walk in that. Because all it does really... yeah, it does steal kind of the joy of those memories of your wedding day, you know? It can. But the wife can't change... You can't control his thoughts for him.

Ryan: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Him living in functional unforgiveness and then failing to take ownership of those thoughts, to put those thoughts to death.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: Now, if this was a year ago, it'd be a different conversation. Right. So not all things that pop into our mind deserve bandwidth.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: It may not be fixed today, but it should be less than yesterday, even if it's just a tiny bit. So as long as he's unable to forgive to that extent and take those thoughts captive, it will always hinder their closeness. It will hinder their marriage.

Selena: I think my question is what... did she just tell him and this is kind of like the trauma of the fallout right now? Or has he been having these intrusive thoughts for years? Right.

Ryan: I don't know how long ago. She confessed it seven years in, but I don't know how long they've been here.

Selena: Right. I'm saying it'll look different. It should. Like you're saying, every day to day, it should look different than when the bomb is first dropped.

Ryan: The big question is what's his trajectory is, you know? Because if you look back to the month after he found out, that's going to be different. But if that trajectory from that moment to now is headed toward full forgiveness, full-

Selena: Reconciliation.

Ryan: I won't say forgiveness. I'll say full healing. I'll just use that word. So here's the good news too. We've heard stories, we know people who have been through similar situations and they've been healed. Like they've been by the power of God, through the grace of repentance, through the grace of reconciliation, the grace of learning to love again and experience Christ's love even more deeply.

My big concern for this husband and others who are in this situation, if we are unable to forgive, that's a warning on the dash that I have not experienced the forgiveness of Christ quite as radically as I probably should. Meaning, what am I forgiven of? And how perfect is Christ? And how perfect is his love? He has extended it to me free of charge. Not only that, He has paid the debt for my sin. Right.

Selena: He's imputed His righteousness.

Ryan: If that reality is so... if it's visceral in front of your eyes, that's almost a surefire antidote to this. Take that for what it is. I'm just saying, focus on that aspect of being loved in Christ, that while you were still sinners, you were dead and you've been brought to life by his perfect, unwavering grace and love. Okay, now he has asked me, and there's a parable in Matthew 18 that is a harrowing warning to people who fail to forgive. I don't know that he's not forgiving. I'm just saying that that's-

Selena: He's battling. Yeah, he's battling.

Ryan: He's battling it. So I think there's one more, and I'm not going to read it because it's a long one, but basically, Trisha wrote in, and it's about her husband who works with his boss's daughter who is younger and beautiful. And the boss's daughter's husband, they have two kids, the boss's daughter has moved away. So-

Selena: The boss's daughter's husband has moved away because he got a job out of state. And so the wife-

Ryan: Trisha who's writing in-

Selena: ...has noticed-

Ryan: ...having a hard time because the boss's daughter is showing some signs of flirting. Flirtation.

Selena: With her husband.

Ryan: With her husband.

Selena: With Trisha's husband.

Ryan: And it's a lot to kind of keep straight. Yeah. It's a scenario where if your spouse goes to work and there's somebody at work that you're worried is going to be kind of seducing your spouse or causing temptation or whatever.

Selena: And nothing like super inappropriate, she said, but just things that she as a wife has noticed in get-togethers or when they've been around each other and phone texts or whatever. And the husband's just kind of like, "I don't know what you're talking about." Which is, I guess, good, but also like-

Ryan: So my take on this is, as a husband, a wife's intuition is not to be quickly discarded.

Selena: Sure.

Ryan: If she's sensing something with motivations in that woman or something that you're not seeing, husband, she's there to help you. She's a helper fit for you. Let that be a superpower and help you to see things more clearly. Right. And in that process, talk about it. Your wife, "How can I alleviate this concern that you have?" In this case, it seems like there's been some excessive communication. And a guy who was oblivious will bite on that bait every time. She'll be like, "Hey..." She'll text about work and then it'll turn into like, "Oh yeah, I went to this movie." And turned into like this playful banter and he's just like being courteous and responding. And probably it's a friend, right? So you're kind of enjoying it, but not in a flirtatious way.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: But she thinks it's flirtatious. And so like, how can you-

Selena: And she may not be meaning to do that. Of course, if her husband's gone, she might be feeling lonely. But we have rules for this kind of thing. We don't text anybody else of the opposite sex or anybody else's spouse without them on the text. Their spouse on the text. So I don't text his friends without their wives on the text.

Also, as a wife, instead of... I'm not saying she does this, but I think wives have the intuition to just pounce, right, on this lady, this girl who's got her husband's away. She's got two kids. Don't even... Ladies, stay away from my man, right? This is kind of our stance.

Well, wife, another way that maybe you could approach this is, you know, notice, man, her husband's gone and she's got two kids. I wonder if there's a way that I could bring her a meal or maybe we could have coffee or maybe I could watch her kids for a while so she can go out and, you know, get her nails.

I don't know. Just do girl things or get some time away, right? So she can kind of refuel and be ready for the next day with the children. So how can she-

Ryan: Enter the situation.

Selena: ...take that higher road, right, of saying, "Hey, you and me are secure. I've just noticed some things about how she's acting. Can you just have your antennas up?"

Ryan: "She seems lonely."

Selena: "She seems lonely. She's got two kids and nothing else. Let's invite her over for dinner. Bring her into your world. Bring her into your house." And then make your husband kind of aware of the things and don't make it an issue. But I think just, "Hey, hubby, these are some things I've seen. Can you just take heed, take warning? If there's stuff going on, like, let's get it out in the open." But like, "Hey, how can we love this girl, you know?"

Ryan: I hadn't thought of that. That's great. If that's something that is on the table that they could maybe try to do and she doesn't feel like that's out of the-

Selena: She said that they're friends with them and they know the boss's daughter. So if it's appropriate, do it.

Ryan: And then if it doesn't alleviate kind of the transgressing of those boundaries, those boundaries need to be reiterated. And he needs to maybe take the lead on that. Not maybe. He needs to take the lead on that because he works with her and he's the husband. And what does that look like? Well, figure it out. Figure out how to-

Selena: You can just clearly talk to him.

Ryan: "Hey, this is a little uncomfortable. I feel like maybe your texts are a little bit too casual. I'm just going to add my wife to this thread or just don't even talk about it. Just add your wife to any thread that she's... Anytime she texts you, just throw your wife on there.

Selena: Yeah, do it.

Ryan: My wife and I have this thing and I haven't really been enforcing it. But whenever I text another woman for work, I like to have her included. Since you're friends, it shouldn't be a problem, right?

Selena: Right. And if it is a problem, then clearly there's some other agendas at play. So either way, protect your marriage, stand up for it. But look outward as well as how can you love the person that's out there? Because again, we don't know motives for sure. I would rather err on the side of compassion than to just assume that they're out to get you.

Ryan: Yeah. So here we've addressed some really specific questions about betrayal, trust, rebuilding trust. And I think we've done it hopefully in a general way enough that... in a general way enough. Is that even a sentence? In a general enough way. English, it's hard.

Selena: Yeah, it's hard.

Ryan: So that you can apply some of the broader principles. The themes that we want you listeners, readers, or viewers to take away from this, it starts with trusting the Lord. True trust starts with the trust that you have between yourself and Christ. Have you placed your full trust in him? It's only then that we can place a right trust in the horizontal relationships that we have with one another.

In that, what are the big themes? Communication. We have books, they're called *How a Husband Speaks*, *How a Wife Speaks*. Those are written entirely for this point to help people communicate better because it's the way through most marital problems.

Selena: It really is. It really is.

Ryan: And then what's another big theme? Church. You are not designed to be an island unto yourselves.

Selena: amen.

Ryan: You need the body of Christ. You need pastoral care. Because these situations get very sticky and they get ugly and they get difficult and it's emotional and it's charged and it's... You can't see it clearly. If you were offended at any point in this, it's because of that. Because we don't know your situation and whatever we said did not resonate with you because we don't know your situation because it's sticky and emotionally charged. And so you need someone, not just a podcast, not just a book. You need a human being filled by the Holy Spirit to help shepherd your eternal soul in this situation.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: So those are the themes. We pray that you take those away from this. We shared the gospel throughout this, but I'm going to share it one more time. The gospel is the good news that we are sinners in need of saving and we have a Savior who has saved us. He has paid the price for our sin and given us in return for our faith, which by the way, He provides. He gives us the faith to believe in Him, lets us have eternal life. Praise God. That is the good news of the gospel. And that is what we are presenting to you here.

If you want to know who Christ is, we want that for you. Number one, find a friend who's a Christian. Say, "Can we read the Bible together?" Let's start with John. Let's start with maybe even the book of Romans, which is a headier one, but man, is it fun?

Selena: It's a good one.

Ryan: There's a lot of deep stuff there. Go to a church where they preach out of God's Word, man, and that'll get you well on your way. If you don't have either of those two things, go to this website, thenewsisgood.com, and that'll get you headed in the right direction.

Let's pray. Lord, as we finish out this series, we ask for Your grace over the ears and the eyes of those who have been a part of this. I pray that you would provide healing in their lives, help them find deeper trust through whatever trial they've been through. I pray that you would show Yourself present in their situation, that they might feel that You are there with them. They might walk through this in a faith-filled way, not in a way that is just by their own strength, but in a way that is trusting You more and more. We love You, Lord. Thank you for Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: If you're here with us, thank you. This podcast would not be possible if it weren't for our Fierce Fellows. We're in The Forge here, and The Forge is now part of the Fierce Marriage ecosystem. And now here comes Louisa. Hi, Louisa. Can you see her on the camera?

Selena: A little bit.

Ryan: Louisa's having a bit of a funk. She's in the funk right now, but now she's smiling. Our family is provided for, in large part, by our Fierce Fellows. If you want to be a part of that, go to fiercemarriage.com/partner. That is one way you could do that if the Lord leads.

All right, I'm going to sign off for now because Louisa is commentating this podcast episode. So this episode of the Fierce Marriage podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in about seven days. Until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Referenced scripture**
 - 1 Peter 3:1-2
 - 1 Corinthians 7

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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