

Episode_9_90-Day_Sex_Fast

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SPEAKERS

Pam B., Lyschel, Bonny

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Hi, I'm Pam Blizzard from Recovered Peace.

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And I'm Lichele Burkett with Hope Redefined.

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And I'm Bonnie Burns of Strong Wives. We're so glad you're joining us.

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Welcome to another episode of Hope for Wives. Today we're going to be discussing an intimacy building experience called the 90 day sex fast, or some also referred to it as a celibacy statement slash plan in recovery. So a 90 day sex fast is something that many couples will approach or learn about as they step into their recovery journey. And so we hope to start the conversation, share a little bit about our own personal experiences with this topic, and even talk about what does a couple do while they're in a 90 day sex fast. Before I ask these incredibly brilliant women to start speaking into this, I do want to remind our listeners that we are not certified sex addiction therapists. We are betrayal trauma trained and certified coaches. Through the app sets organization, we have our own betrayal story, and also our own experiences with something like a 90 day sex fast as well as walking with many of our clients and women in our community, we are really just trying to take a pretty broad stroke. Up to this conversation. When we started polling some of our communities, I think we got some real personal experiences and women wanting to know how to navigate particular nuances. And so we might do a follow up with a little listener q&a on this topic today, we just really want to give you guys a good understanding of what it is why we do it. What's the point all the good things, we do know that this is a delicate topic. Obviously, this is one of the core pieces of betrayal when it comes to these addictions and behaviors. So we want you to just really practice some great self care as

you're stepping into this, this episode. And just make sure that you're really just being very mindful about your needs. As we dive into this topic, and we're going to ask some purpose questions. I love purpose questions because they make me buy into whatever is being asked of me if I can understand the why I think for myself, it helps me step into the Okay, I'll entertain this, let me ask you, what is the purpose of a 90 day sex fast for her? Let's start with the partner first.

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So I think for her, there could be two different answers. Now, if she is the higher drive wife, the 90 day sex fast, I think will have a different purpose for her than the lower drive wife. For the higher drive wife, she might see a sex fast as punished as a punishment, yes, or a burden, a sacrifice. While I acknowledge yes and affirm that it could be it can also be a way for her to have some intentional conversations about sexuality with her husband, it's within reason every every couple is different. So if the wife does want to engage in sexuality, I don't think that's a wrong thing. However, I think sometimes hire Dr. Wives, and their husbands haven't had some, just some heart to heart conversations around sex. And so that's what I encourage my wives who are hired Dr. Is you know, you can go ahead and and explore your sexuality. However, have you just sat down over coffee and talked about sex, talked about what the lies he might believe about sex or talk about your need, what what you get from sex, just to explore all the nuances because what I'm hearing is a lot of times there's no intentional conversation, it just happens. They go into the bedroom and bam. So what happens with the 90 day sex fast is there is an intentional relearning between the two of you for the higher drive wife, relearning, what sexuality and sexual intimacy really means for you as a couple. Yeah. Now for the lower drive. What What a 90 day sex fast can do is relieve her of being pressured, manipulated, or demanded of having sexual intimacy. So she is completely free from any assumptions. She's free of any kind of demands. For for that couple. There is friendship building and emotional intimacy, building things that go on in substitution of sexuality or sexual intimacy. So the purpose for the lower drive I think, is just to have some relief, to really be able to sit back and think about how their sexual life has been and what she wants it to look like.

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I really love Bonnie how you You said every couple is different. There's just no cookie cutter plan or you know, steps that that everybody can take. But I think I can speak personally for me, I had so many and I've heard other women say this too, the wounding is at a very sexual level to, it can feel like a rape in barber Stephens research found that betrayed spouses felt many of the same fears and emotions, experiences as rape victims. So, for me, the last thing I wanted was to be sexual with my husband. And it was very confusing, because my urge was to pull him closer, pull him closer, because I felt like I was losing him. And so it was really confusing time. But it gave me some space to figure out what was going on with me sexually. I had changed my own sexuality, to sort of flex to my husband who because of his addiction, his sexual style was very intense. I wanted something more emotional, personal, it gave me time to think about what is it that I really do want? If I am ever going to be sexual with my husband again? What is it that I need from this experience? What needs to happen for me? What am I going to feel comfortable with taking back some of the things that I gave up for me, and I talked about this about having a relationship with sex itself? For me personally, it gave me an opportunity to reevaluate my relationship with sex. And what was that going to look like for me going forward?

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When my husband actually brought the topic of 90 day sex FAST home, he learned about this and his recovery material. And if I'm honest, I had a mixed bag of emotions. At first, I had a lot of relief, like, Oh, thank goodness, like, Okay, I'm definitely a lower drive wife. But on the other side of it, I also was scared, I was very, very new in my recovery myself, I had not wrestled out that lie that this wasn't my fault, and that I hadn't given him enough sex. So when this was given to us as a, quote, prescription, I was terrified. And I thought this is so counter to everything that I have been told before, which was be more available, be more sexual BPPV. And now all of a sudden, you're telling me to stop doing it for three months. And so I just want to share that as part of my own experience of just the confusion that can come with this. So can I ask you guys in Barnaby, someone who's, you know, I would call a sex expert? And I think Pam would to what is the point of a 90 day sex fast? What is it for him? Like, what is the purpose in that?

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So for him, I think one of the biggest things is he's going to learn he can live without sex. For many of our addicts, sex is life. And John 1010, Jesus tells us that He is our life. So there is a spiritual component of putting sex in its proper place.

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addicts, whether it's alcohol or drugs, the addicted brain comes to think that the addiction and addiction behavior is life and without it, I will cease to exist. And

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the second thing a sex fast can do for the man in recovery, is it can help to start rewiring his brain. And I'm gonna let Pam talk a little bit more about that. But when you do anything as a habit, for years and years and years and years and years, there has to be some drastic re habituation. So this means that a 90 day sex fast, will eliminate all arousal, I think we'll probably get into more what it entails. But when when there's not that dopamine hit from that habit, it will help him to start into his recovery, and it will help his prefrontal cortex start to mend so the longer he is abstinent without any arousal it's it's a prescription for for clarity. Honestly,

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I like to to use the word prescription because in reality what's happening with any addiction is there's a set of chemical reactions happening in the brain and then the reward system learns to take control you know, if I'm having a bad day, the first thing my brain wants to reach for is potato chips. Because my brain at one point in my life long time ago, was having a bad day reach for potato chips, and no noticed that after the potato chips, I felt better, our brains want to do what is most efficient, not necessarily what's best for us, the brain just is focused on efficiency. And in any addiction, when the reward system is flooded like that, over and over, it does cut off access to the prefrontal cortex where logic happens, where I consider consequences of my actions. And so if the limbic system or the reward system is constantly engaged like that in addiction, then I'm not making good decisions, I'm not thinking things through. And so what happens is, these neural pathways get created like a well

worn path in the woods. And the brain does what it's always done, because that is the most efficient, the neurons in those pathways that fire together, wire together. And so when I want to change a habit, I need to stop those neurons from firing, I have to be mindful about it. It's not easy, but I have to be mindful about it, and I do it, I do a different behavior instead. And those neurons start wiring together. And those neurons start creating a well worn path in the woods to use a metaphor, I'm breaking the habit, I'm breaking the habitual behavior of the system of reward for my brain. And we have a really good video that we're gonna put in the show notes that talks about this. And using the map analogy of how our brain maps solutions.

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I really like your well worn path in the woods metaphor. There was a neighborhood pathway through one of my neighbor's backyards, where the kids would take shortcuts, and it was well worn this neighbor, put a stop to that the kids walking through his backyard, that pathway started to grow grass again. And wherever the new pathways the kids chose, it started to have the deeper groove, think of a sex fast is helping that grass grow back into that path.

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That's great. I love that I know for my husband, I can kind of speak for him, because he's very honest with me about in his recovery about what his addiction was like and what his mindset was, and how he thought he literally did say to me, it was a shortcut, going to my addiction in my addiction to behaviors was quicker and easier. And I didn't have to sit and sit with my feelings. And think through what my options were. Because if I did, I didn't know any other options at the time.

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So I guess the purpose for sex fast in the couple ship is to help the couple, discover other kinds of intimacy outside of sex. Other ways to be known to be seen and to be heard. We'll get to this in a minute of what those specifically can look alike, but it involves being creative.

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Okay, so what I'm hearing purposes is rewiring, changing of behaviors or habits, even beginning to create space for creativity and discovering something new. All right. Well, I think this is the next question I'm going to ask you guys I think is some of our listeners favorites. How have you seen this be a part of your personal story? I know we've we've shared a bit, I shared a little bit of my experience. I've heard a little bit. But what was this like for you in your relationship?

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The sex fast for us was a total game changer. And a little bit of my background is that before I became an app, SATs coach, I was a Christian sexuality author. Early in our journey, I took some of his blame. And so I went all on board, I was gonna learn all there was do about sex. And I did. But in the process, I found out the sex was for me, too. In that journey, I discovered a lot about myself. And in

the bedroom. When the third discovery happened. The 90 Day sex fast was a hard stop. For me, I was all on board, I knew exactly what it was for. I'd already studied about it, before I knew that I was going to need it. And there was a lot of anger for me to know that I had done all this work on myself and my sexual identity. And I know there was some anger. But now as I think about it, it really was God's blessing. And it was God putting some things in place for me, so that we could get through this, but I understood that the sex fast was for his rewiring. And really for me, it was a blessing relief, because like Pam, I did not want to have sex with him. I was disrespected, disgruntled, objectified I just all the things happy to have that three month break, but I also knew that in that three month break, I desperately wanted to connect with him emotionally and I wanted to connect with him on other levels outside of the bedroom. I still Love the man. So yeah, the sex fast and that halt and give being given permission to say no without any any regret and guilt and shame. It's a hard No. And it's fine. It's fine for a hard no and it's sex is completely taken off the table. Because the expert says it Patrick Carnes says that that celibacy contract is part of his, you know, 30 activities for recovery. But also we learned that this also means arousal, no arousal, whatever might bring arousal gives him a dopamine hit. So even lingering kisses stopped, you have to determine for your own marriage, what's appropriate, but side hugs holding hands, no arousal. No. We were watching rated G Disney movies. Anything that hinted at sexuality stopped in that time. We started some great conversations, we took weekends, and we would go away. And just to hike one weekend we live in East Tennessee. So one weekend, we went towards Middle Tennessee and explored some falls to go see waterfalls, you know, and that was it was good stuff. All that was good stuff. And then when we did come back together again, we built a new bedroom experience for us the 90 day sex fast was very beneficial.

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So for me, I had been on a sex fast for many, many years, my husband was sexually anorexic. So the 90 day sex fast was something that had to be different for us when I learned about it. And I learned about the benefits. I used it to challenge my own feelings, my own impulses, because just because my husband wasn't having sex didn't mean, I didn't feel sexual, or I didn't want to have sex, I still had arousal. And so I used it for an opportunity to challenge myself. And here's, here's another thing, you know, in our culture, we laugh without the four bases. Right? Oh, second base, third base, I have come to the view of the philosophy that there's really no and it's different for every person, but I have about 20 bases. And the first 16 of them are non physical. Okay. And then I wanted a emotional connection. I wanted to hold hands non sexual touch, I wanted a backrub. Without any expectation of it leading anywhere I needed more hugs, I needed more. I needed more affection. And so I wanted to make that real clear to my husband. Because with my experience or past sexual experience with my, what I didn't know at the time was my husband was had a sex addiction was there was no bass one, there was no bass two, it was just basically bass three and four. And I do not want that back again. I did not want that back. So I used that time to figure out what I needed and how to articulate that. So that was like, for us and learning experience for both of us.

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So I mentioned earlier in the podcast that one of the initial sex fasts that we did, I had a lot of fear and uncertainty because it was attached to still some really poor belief systems that somehow another sex was going to keep him sober. And that wasn't true. This assignment, this exercise, whatever you want to call, it felt very counter to what I was understanding, but there was levels of relief. Okay, so that was the first time we did a sex fast. The next time we were encouraged to do a sex fast. If I'm completely honest, we were in the throes of infertility, and we were attempting to have

a baby. So then I started feeling really punished eventually. Probably not in the best of ways. I finally just said, I'm not playing this stupid game with you. I want to baby right and so I I kind of said no to the 90 day sex fast because I put my desire and my need above his right and that was unhealthy. But that was just the reality of it. And then the next time we did a healthy sex fast or you did an entity sex fast, we didn't actually complete the sex fast. We ended up having sex before the 90 days was up and I will tell you that there was a ton of shame came with that experience because both of us were trying to do it right. So we just didn't understand we still just have to remember that we didn't have anybody really walking with us except for his men's material. And a few close friends. It was just this like desire. To get it right, and then kind of this, Hey, you can't do that thing. But yeah, then we're married couple, and we want to be intimate with one another. And so we didn't, we didn't make it through the whole 90 days. And we had to really wrestle through that. And I don't think we spoke to each other about our personal shame for several weeks, like I think we felt like we were teenagers again. And we had snuck in and done something really bad, but we were not talking about it at all. Once we started to recognize that that shame was back actually attached to our sexual relationship. Again, it shifted, and then suddenly, we were ready to start talking about it sex fast for us have been complicated. We've done a lot of different kinds, good, bad or indifferent. I wholeheartedly support and agree with what you guys had said about it reestablishing brain connections, though, I've read all the science, I've watched a lot of those videos, I think that that is valid and true. I have caught you know, the colleagues and professionals who have studies to prove it. And so I support it, for sure. But just in my personal journey, it never really, it was never textbook. And I kind of want to share that for our listeners, like, I think they need to hear all of us say it didn't go exactly the way that we thought it was supposed to go. But I still think that our heart and our motive in it is is a huge component of what we're doing. What would you

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advise somebody who was trying to do the fast and have the couple had a slip? Would you advise them? I know, you'd advise, Hey, give yourself some grace, would you advise them to start over from the beginning? Again,

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I've had a few clients in this situation. And so I totally give them grace, because only they know their marriage? And if that's the way she is connecting with her husband, and she needs that to feel safe. Absolutely. But what I've like in the beginning, when I said at the higher drive needs to have intentional conversation. I think that's what I would suggest to the ones who have not been able to make the 90 days is like Michelle was saying they walked around for three weeks without talking to each other. I encourage Go ahead, what what's holding you back from having that conversation with him to clear the air? And if you both sit down and say, Hey, this isn't working for us, how can we make it healthy and have sex?

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I think Bonnie, I think your answer to that leads us really well into the next question that we were going to talk through, which is what does the couple do while in a 90 day sex fast? Because here's what we didn't do. We didn't talk about it. We didn't discuss, we didn't dream about something

different. We did nothing. We had no plan, all we did was not have sex for 90 days. And so I think that what you're leaning into is giving us a little bit more coaching about what do we do while in a 90 day sex fast?

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Well, there is several things you can do. One thing that I can offer as a resource is there is a recreational inventory sheet from another website that i can put as a PDF in our show notes. This is something you look through it, and you evaluate these recreational activities, whether you and your husband would like to do them together. And maybe you've never sat down and said, Hey, what kind of fun can we have together? Because that's, that's part of growing your friendship. And that's part of what how to grow and grow different kinds of intimacy outside of sexual, the emotional, the spiritual, that comes from building your friendship. So go back to dating. You know, what do you do for fun? What can you add, and, you know, include the family, and not include the family if you have small children. But it's it's about having some fun. Also, I would suggest if financial intimacy is not something you've had, sitting down with your books and your checkbook and your finances and going through that and talk and dreaming about where you want to have goals with your finances is a type of intimacy, creativity, it goes along with the recreational stuff. But if you both like art, if you both like music, make music together, if you sang, if you play instruments, go throw up, go throw some pottery together, thinking outside of the box of what you can do to date again. I mean, that's the basic of it from from my perspective,

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I so I so agree and I just love the way that you weave friendship into that that we need to look at each other as human beings. And and friends. I think that's what Jeff and I had going for us is that for a whole year, before we ever even became romantic is we were friends. We were buddies. We're platonic friends call each other on the phone all the time. And throughout this journey, I was able to take a step back and see him as a friend. I love how you point out there's other types of intimacy, you know, financial intimacy, intellectual intimacy, spiritual intimacy, praying together is a is a beautiful intimacy.

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So I'm going to recap what I heard you guys kind of talk about throughout this podcast about what we can do during a 90 day set sex fast. I heard connect differently. Funny, use that phrase a few times connect differently than way the way you've connected before. Talk about your relationship with sex. As an individual, this is how I connect with it. This is how he connects with it, talk about that relationship. Share what lies you have around sex. This was a big one. Bonnie actually gave me that question for my, like my personal marriage. And when we sat and talked about it, it was very eye opening. When it was hard to get to that conversation. I won't lie. But once we were able to do it, there's a lot of validation and affirmation for both of us. Like we didn't realize they weren't nearly as misaligned as we felt. And then the next one I heard was consider what your new sex relationship will be and talk about it. You don't

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also have I have this. I don't know if you've seen this. It was originally posted at bloom. I loved this podcast, it was intimacy reintegration. Karen strange, founder of Center for sexual and relational health. And she just as I listened to them talk about really bringing sex back in to the relationship, she hit on all the betrayed spouses needs for safety, for being seen for being heard. And how talking, being able to develop a comfort, we're talking about sex, this is what I like, this is what I don't like, sitting rub my feet. Nope, not like that a little to the left, right, harder, faster, whatever, like having that non sexual physical intimacy, being able to talk about it like that. It's it's, it's our culture, it's so taboo, we don't talk about sex. Right? It can be very difficult, but this is a really good podcast I would love to include in our show notes.

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Another thing that a couple can do towards the end of the sex fast and preparing to reintegrate is something called sensate focus. In a nutshell, it's you give each other massages, but not for the purpose of receiving. It's for the purpose of experiencing. So if you're touching your spouse, you think about how their skin feels? Is it soft, warmth, that kind of thing. And the person who's receiving it thinks about the touch, is it a firm is a gentle is it gliding, but there is absolutely no expectation of sex. And actually, the philosophy behind it is, if you are going to engage in sexual activity, it needs to be an hour after sensate focus, because it's psychological shift between the two. I will tell you, it was an amazing experience for me personally, because I had never been touched like that without the expectation of sex. That was my experience. And for his I've read now, I'm not going to speak for my husband. But what I have read is that many addicts are touch deprived as children. And this is very affirming for them. It's like re parenting kind of theory, and it's just taking care of your inner child. And so I have a couple of resources that describe the sensate focus that we'll put in the show notes.

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I would look forward to seeing that myself. Absolutely. I grew up in a family where we hugged a lot, there was a lot of hugging, there was a lot of hand holding, there was a lot of command, let me put my arm around your shoulder and hug you tight. And it just didn't I can see it in my family, my husband's family, they just didn't grow up that way. They don't interact that way. Now. Now when I see my sister, the first thing we do is we hug and we hang on for a long time. And I can see that my husband definitely grew up touch deprived.

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That can be a really sweet experience for both of you. Something I wanted to add, Michelle, when you were saying the messages we get from well meaning but ill equipped people who just give you more sex, you know, it's it's just sex he knows more sex. I am here to attest to anyone out there who might be questioning that. It is absolutely not about the sex. Our marriage went from me being a low drive to us being equally matched. And I was equally matched and very interested. So and then to find out that he had this addiction. I absolutely knew it had nothing to do with what was going on in our bedroom, because he, he has said to me, and he has said to his Samsung Groups, because he can share what he says he has told them of anyone. He had no reason sexually to do this. So I just want you you all to know, listeners, your lack in the bedroom has nothing to do with his addiction, if there is a lack.

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So our final question is, how can we offer hope to our listeners, when it comes to a 90 day sex fast?

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I think I would go back to the thought of what a fast is in the Bible. So Jesus went out to the desert to seek God. So a fast is gives you the opportunity, the time and the space to seek God. There's also many other facts in the Bible, Moses, Joel, lots of lots of examples. But I know in the New Testament, we have Jesus, which what better example Do we need. So I would say that the purpose from a biblical perspective is seeking a new relationship with sex. And I know that in First Corinthians seven, it talks about Do not deprive. But above that First Corinthians seven, four, where it talks about the wife does not have authority over her own body, but yield it to her husband, in the same way, which means likewise, mutuality, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but yield it to the wife. And then of course, it says Do not deprive each other except for mutual consent for time. But you know, if you go on down there, he says, This isn't a command, it's a concession. There were people within Corinth that saw celibacy as more spiritual. So Paul is he is encouraging married people to have sex with each other, because there was so much celibacy, but he's not saying that one person trumps the other with their desire.

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Yeah, and I think it's important to highlight what you said, which was Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent, and for a time, and I will say that in each of our sex fasts, it was a mutual consent, we both came to an agreement that that was what needed to happen from different angles, but it was definitely mutual consent. And it was for a period of time, we knew that it wasn't forever, it was for a season so that you may Devote yourselves to prayer, which is exactly what you're just unpacking Bonnie, that is the purpose of fasting is to realign re, you know, devote all the things. That's the point of what we're doing.

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There is a therapeutic reason for the fast for the 90 day fast, that it's neurobiological and that it is healthy. It is it's good. And when done for the right reasons. We're done with some guidance, I think some expert guidance. You know, don't try this home alone, on your own, can be really, really productive and positive, especially when you do it together with your arms linked together. When you're shooting for the same goal together, then it can be incredibly powerful for your marriage.

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And you talking about having some professional guidance. We'll also put in the show notes. It's called the couples guide to intimacy. It's about sexual reintegration. And although it's older, and it does have some co addict language in which you can just take your Sharpie and mark it out. But the content is amazing. And it actually describes a healthy sex life so well. So I would highly encourage

you to get that. As you're working through your sex fast and looking towards reintegration, I think that's the whole goal of the sex fast is to reunite again, it's not forever, like, like Michelle saying, it's just for a season. And it actually can be very sweet.

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Thank you, lady, so much for this conversation. I think it's going to be such a gift to our listeners and being able just to clear out some of the clouds and confusion and give them a little bit more language around what this is. So we would just want to thank you all for joining us and we hope to be a bright spot in your recovery journey. If you'd like to leave us a question or comment, please go through the contact button on our website. Also help a friend by leaving us a five star review on iTunes so others can find us. Thanks for joining us.

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Bye

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bye