

Episode_12_Therapeutic_Separation

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SPEAKERS

Pam B., Lyschel, Bonny



Pam B. 00:04

Hi, I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace.



Lyschel 00:06

And I'm Lyschel Burkett with hope, redefine.



Bonny 00:09

And I'm Bonnie burns of Strong Wives. We're so glad you're joining us. Welcome to another episode of hope for wives. Today we are discussing therapeutic separation, also known as a healing separation. The type of separation we're discussing involves a marriage where there is a sex addiction, a therapeutic or healing separation is intentional and thought out, it is not the consequence of a knee jerk reaction. The purpose of this type of separation is to give space to the betrayed partner to begin to recover from the trauma of sexual deception, and to gain clarity. It is also an opportunity for the sexually addicted person to start focusing in on his recovery. And just a quick reminder, we're not see SATs or legal professionals, we are trained and certified by the Association of partners of sex addicts trauma specialists, we are coaches who work with betrayed partners. So let's dive in ladies. What are some myths about therapeutic or healing separation?



Pam B. 01:14

I know I was afraid. I don't know if it's a myth. But I was afraid that if we separated, that my husband and I would grow even farther apart, and that we would like it. And that we would, we would end up divorcing we would lose our connection. I was afraid.



L Lyschel 01:36

I think some of the myths I hear about therapeutic separation is that it's just a means to an end. And that if you're going to separate you might as well divorce. I hear this and a lot of my partners as they're wrestling with that decision. They have a sense of understanding like that's going to be really helpful for me, but yet, maybe their husband, the partner is the has the betrayer is not looking to separate. And so they'll use that as a way of saying, what's the point, just go ahead and divorce. If we can't do this in the same house, then

B Bonny 02:09

the myth I hear is the same that this type of separation is just one step toward divorce. When that's not, that's not the purpose.

L Lyschel 02:19

I think another myth could be another myth, or argument, I would even call it an argument that I've heard around this topic has been that it's not biblical, it's not appropriate for us to separate which I would begin to combat that with scripture about the separation is not necessarily not still living with a heart of unity, you still have a common goal, you're still working towards something. And I think that separation is modeled throughout all of Scripture, there's separation, there's a time for everything under the sun. But I do think that that's another thing of saying it's not appropriate as a as a Christian or believer in the Word of God.

B Bonny 03:06

You could use First Corinthians seven, when it says, Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent, and for a time, so that you may Devote yourselves to prayer.

P Pam B. 03:20

Mm hmm. And I think before people really understand, when they hear what a therapeutic separation entails, they don't understand what the purpose is or how it works. The fear might be well, we're, I don't want to go and date other people. I don't want my husband to go and date other people, or this just might be an opportunity for him to just go and live in his addiction practices addiction. And that's absolutely not the purpose. And you do put, as Bonnie just said, in Scripture, there are limits for a time for purpose. There are limits that are agreed upon in a therapeutic separation.

B Bonny 04:02

So in your personal stories, what role did therapeutic separation play, if any?

P Pam B. 04:09

My husband is probably still alive today. Because we did a therapeutic separation. But seriously, it gave me it gave me space to fully regain myself back. You know, many of us say I think we lose ourselves in the relationship and I certainly had and I needed to regain. What does Pam think What does Pam feel? What does Pam want and need versus worrying about? What does our marriage need? What is Jeff needed for his his recovery? So it allowed me the space to pull myself back. It also allowed me a lot of good time to lean into the Lord and to lean into The word and get a lot of comfort there and get my limitations out and just have a lot of really good deep conversations with God about what his plan for me was.

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Lyschel 05:14

We did not specifically do a therapeutic separation, but we did separate. And you guys know that I'm story, a storyteller. So I'll tell the story, because I think it always gives women a little bit of validation about their experience. Our separation was a consequence to a relapse. And so when this first happened, and you know, we had been my husband had been navigating sobriety, if you've listened to other podcasts, you've heard that part of my story where he was sober for five years. And then he began to use an act out with pornography at work for three months, and was at risk of losing his job, he got busted, had to come home and confess to me that he had been busted at work. And at this point in time, we had three small kids, we had a three year old, a two year old and a six month old. And so we had I, that was a boundary and a consequence that we had already established mutually years before. So quite honestly, like most women, I don't know if I ever really thought, Gosh, I am gonna have to implement this. However, when the moment arose, I definitely implemented it. In the immediate moment, my husband was very willing to implement it, and honor that, and so on and so forth. So he left that evening. But it did not stay that pleasant. Because days later, as he was wrestling to find a place to sleep, the reality of things were starting to set in, a lot of his poor coping, and bad behaviors started surfacing. And things got to be really aggressive, he would call me and just verbally just unload on me about how mean I was. And I didn't have the language for therapeutic separation, knowing what I know about my own story, and then seeing couples be able to pull in this therapeutic aspect to what they're doing is, I see a night and day difference between the two situations, I will tell you that that is the most dependent I have ever been on God in my life. I have so many particular stories about just my surrender and my crying out for the Lord, to make this look different. And for days set, probably the first three days or so I would wake up every morning and pray, Lord Is today the day he comes back. And at first it was like an anxiousness like I don't want him to come back. So tell me Is he coming back because I'm trying to brace myself. And then it became a place of longing. Like I really wanted him back. I was drowning in my in my pain, but I was also drowning in single mom stuff. And so eventually, my prayer shifted to, I just felt the spirit really encouraged me. And I just began to pray, bring him back when you're ready for him to come back. I don't have a great therapeutic story. But I do have a great God story in the middle of that separation. But I can also see how having the tools that we're going to potentially share in our resources and things like that to this conversation. It would have really shifted the levels of anxiety for me in the unknown. I think I always had this fear that I was going to mess it up, like, well, what if I brought him back too fast? Or what if I didn't bring it back fast enough or whatever, right? There was so many what ifs. So that is my personal encounter with that is it was a separation, but not a therapeutic separation.

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Bonny 08:50

My personal story doesn't involve separation at all. And even though the third D Day was huge and painful, and I was dysregulated, my husband spent so much of our married life on the road with business travel, I felt like separation would be triggering to me, because that's where a lot of the acting out happened was on the road if he was gone, and not in the house for an extended period. I felt like that would dysregulate me even more. We chose to start early recovery, you know, in the same house. But that was it's a personal decision. And everybody's decision is different, and it's totally fine. Whatever you decide you need to keep safe.

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Pam B. 09:37

Absolutely. And I think this illustrates how there's a spectrum of do you need it or do you not need it and what's the benefit? Is it going to benefit us or is it going to cause more problems? In our case, it was such an earthquake and a shock to both of our systems. He that he was discovered exposed He had worked so hard not to, it was a shock to him. And it was a shock to me, because it was a relapse. And we were both in such a highly charged emotional state that we couldn't help but trigger each other, just at the sight of each other. So it was really good for us both, that we took some time apart, I made sure that it was really structured, I made sure that there was a document of boundaries, like we're not going to date. This isn't a separation and anticipation of divorce. In fact, one of my boundaries was we will not say the D word for 12 months. This is anticipation of us healing and doing our recovery work, and coming back together. So there were goals set forth for different recovery work to be done, and how we would come back together, that we would date at first, before he would come back home. And that gave me a feeling of structure and safety and stability. And that there was hope for the relationship going forward. Not please don't think that any of this happened just overnight. I have been dealing with this for years and years. And I had had multiple discoveries over the span of 26 years. And so this was a result of finally doing the research to figure out what do I need? How do we move forward with this in a healthy way, just as CO parents, even if we ended up divorcing? What's the best thing for everybody, not just for me or my husband, also, for our child,

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Lyschel 11:41

when you were able to articulate that this separation was for reconciliation, versus divorce with your husband? Did that change anything?

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Pam B. 11:53

Oh, it took the pressure off of us both. Neither one of us wanted the marriage to end. But neither one of us knew how to move forward from this place. Because the relationship that we had was obviously destroyed. We knew we loved each other. We knew we wanted to stay together as a family. And so saying, Okay, we're going to take the D word off the table, and saying this is for the purposes of doing the work. That took a the abandonment, the fear of abandonment off.

B

Bonny 12:29

One thing I will add about my personal story is that therapeutic separation is my boundary

One thing I will add about my personal story is that therapeutic separation is my boundary consequence for a relapse. So that is something that I will utilize, if necessary. So let's move on to some practical pragmatic things that we can share with our listeners, what are some practical thoughts or suggestions in regards to that therapeutic separation,

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Pam B. 12:56

don't wing it, get professional advice, get a professional in there, who is going to help you come up with a shared goals, shared values, a shared agreement, shared boundaries, on how you're going to use this time. Right down to I mean, we had boundaries around which bathroom he could use when he came to visit, to get somebody in there to sort of moderate that discussion, and help you identify what appropriate, what healing activities should be happening. While you're in that space.

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Lyschel 13:36

I think that's a key phrase that Pam just gave us, which was healing activities. A lot of times I see couples wrestle with the idea of a therapeutic separation, because they again, the belief system is still the marriage is broken. So therefore, if we separate, then we're not working on the marriage. But the reality is, is that we're going to go back to this again, sex addiction is not a marriage problem. Sex addiction is an individual problem that impacts the marriage, when something like this happens, you've got to be able to allow the individuals to do the repaired work that needs to happen, which is the healing like Pam, just use that word healing, that there's two individuals in this relationship. I see this get really complicated for couples who are really seeking out which is not a bad thing, but a lot of biblical counseling or pastoral counseling. Because oftentimes, what we would call in the therapeutic world is, you know, in clinical world would be the client of the pastor is the marriage, they will very much see a disconnect and saying, Well, you can't separate because now we're not working on the marriage. If you're not doing the marriage, quite honestly, my response would be maybe that's exactly what needs to not be happening right now is that they need to be doing individual work in order to to come back from that therapeutic separation healthier. The other thing I think I want to offer as a practical thought I've had couples who did not understand what therapeutic disclosure or therapeutic separation is. And all of a sudden she's like, well, he didn't just relapse. So does that mean I can't ask for this separation, like, we're still not good, she still doesn't feel safe in her home, she's still not functioning well, he would tell you, he's doing great. He's going to group he's doing all these things. And my response to you would be, sometimes a separation has to be initiated by one person, it's not necessarily going to be a mutual agreement. And it may not come on the heels of an earthquake, like Pam talked about. I've had women who've been trying to do this journey for a while. And all of a sudden, they get this terminology or this week, that's an option. I didn't even know even to give a person permission to say you can do a therapeutic separate separation in your home. And they're like, Are you kidding? I had no idea. Because you're giving them different tools. And there's a different way of going about doing this. So I think it's like the timeline doesn't have to be right after? Because I know that when we opened Barney used that phrase,

B

Bonny 16:05

it's not the consequence of a knee jerk reaction. Yes, that's

L Lyschel 16:09

it. So this isn't understanding that this may or may not be this may or may not happen right after an implosion in your home, because that's where I think a lot of women get can, like caught up and they're going well, is this a knee jerk reaction, I'm implementing a response or a consequence to a boundary and my consequences, therapeutic separation, and so there's some sifting out there. And

B Bonny 16:33

so what makes therapeutic separation different in a marriage with sex addiction, is that it can be initiated by just one person where were Gottman and other LM FTS licensed marriage, family therapists. They want both person spouses on board with it. Where if she is feeling really unsafe and dysregulated, and he is a super big trigger, and she needs this, she can ask for it.

L Lyschel 17:02

Yeah. But I think I would also say that I think it's still a therapeutic separation is still a mutual agreement, because it's going to require work on both people can initiate it. Okay. Does that make sense? Yeah. Oh, yeah. So absolutely, she can initiate it. But the reality is, is that if he's not willing to respect the boundaries, if he won't do you know, like, with some of my clients, my coaching clients, I will give them a worksheet, and I'll be like, Hey, take this and go work with your, you know, your marriage therapist, and they each need to do their part on the worksheet and he's unwilling, that's not a mutual separation. That's her doing it therapeutic separation, and him, not him just being separated. So therapeutic separation does require both parties to actively engage in the process.

P Pam B. 17:47

I've actually had client, one client whose husband asked for therapeutic separation, and she didn't understand what it was. And so she was shocked. And she thought it was one step towards divorce, it really actually was a good idea for him to take some time alone, and start working on his issues. And that can seem kind of ironic, when there's betrayal that, hey, you've taken all these actions without me without my consent, not for the marriage against the marriage. And now you want to take some more time, when we look at sex addiction and the usual Root Cause being a deep trauma. There's some times the person needs to take some time and start digging through some, some deep abuse issues and neglect tissues. And they may need some time alone to do that. And it's health care. It really is we we call it therapeutic for that reason, because it's for your mental health care. If she says no, it needs to be a discussion, right? If she has an issue with it, it's really important to find out what her fears or her thoughts or her values are around separating.

L Lyschel 19:01

Okav. as Pam started sharina. literallv. mv betrayed wife face came up and I was like. Oh. heck

no. Right? Because I you just have such it could be such an advocate for her. But then it was like so quickly. I remember even my own season of separation. So let me give this to our listeners. Because Pam is absolutely right. In hindsight, this is what I became to understand happened in our separation. The first thing was is what we I think we talked about off before we started recording, and I think we've mentioned before is my husband and I were consistently triggering each other. So we were in a state of hyper vigilance. We were never going to actually get through that unless we just started ignoring it because it was just like, we're like these bumper cars we just kept running into each other. But here's the other thing. And this is more from a spiritual side every day that my husband was gone. I remember feeling there were days I would just battle being resentful because he was living at my brother in law's which was a single guy with other single guys with beer in the fridge. IGE and a motorcycle and the living room, because that's what guys do when they don't have women to keep them together, right? And I remember just being enraged about that's what he gets to go do while I'm home with our three kids. Like, are you kidding me right now, here's what I didn't know that the father was doing in my defense, but also because he loved my husband so much. What he was doing was he was showing my husband what is inheritance would be, if he stayed on the course he was on, because my husband had the eyes to be able to see that this lifestyle was not what he wanted. He didn't have the joy of his kids in that house, he didn't have the safety of a wife, he didn't have food in the refrigerator. He didn't have people just on a schedule, and like the comforts of what Garen had grown accustomed to, he had lost all of that. I never, ever could have convinced my husband of that. And let me tell you how many times I yelled that, which was, if you keep doing this, you're gonna lose all of this. And he's like, okay, but you know how like, it's kind of the same thing is like when people tell you that, childbirth is really hard. And you're like, Okay, that sounds great. Because you've never had a baby. And then all of a sudden, you're like, wow, like, you can't understand it until you experience it. Right. Okay. So that was the first thing that was a big aha moment for me was understanding that God was talking to my husband, he was doing something that I was not capable of doing. This was the other thing that my husband said to me later, not having me available to hold all of his emotional trash put him in a place of desperation for the Holy Spirit. And he said, and that was the first time he had ever asked God for forgiveness. And I thought, You gotta be kidding me. Right? I just had never clicked because here's part of my forgiveness journey was, I was a quick forgiver, or a fast Forgiver. Because I was trying to alleviate that length of pain, I knew it was a duty, I should do this, so on and so forth. And so every time there would be disruption, I would do my best to get back to a place of creating peace in our relationship. And so I would be like, I forgive you. It's good. But not having me sitting across the kitchen table from him. 24 hours after he had done this relapse, and me not giving Him forgiveness suddenly moved him to a different posture with God being like, if she doesn't forgive me, then what I can't tell you that that's the truth for every man who's going to navigate separation, right. But I would just add that to what Pam is saying, Pam, what you were saying is, it was a mental health thing, this man was doing something good, as he was asking for separation, to really unpack his stuff. And as a woman who has been hurt by that, I do not want to, I am not going to give him an Attaboy. But what I will do is lean in on God's agenda. And trust that he's got something in that separation that I can't even possibly understand

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Pam B. 23:01

you. Here's a cliché absence makes the heart grow fonder. Sometimes that's true. We don't want to rely on it as a tool, I was really quick to forgive too. I was always like, Okay, we'll get through this. It's alright, to forgive you. Let's just forget that this happened and move on to the

next thing.

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Bonny 23:19

Well, I don't have as much profound offerings as you women do. What I can offer is some really pragmatic things about the fold, about the therapeutic separation. How long is it going to be typically it's 90 days, but that can fluctuate between couples and situations, who's going to leave the house? If there's children involved? Typically, it's him because mom needs to stay home with the kids where all their stuff is and where the kids are safe and comfortable. And like Pam was saying, when he comes back to the home, how is he going to act? Are you going to let him just walk in? Or does he need to knock and act like a stranger and use the guest bathroom? Does he need to relinquish his keys? Who's going to pay the bills? How are your finances going to be handled? During that time? What I'm kind of going off of is a blog post by Vicki Tidwell Palmer that we will put in the show notes. I think we're also going to we've each got some different resources, PDFs that explain therapeutic separation that we will put in the show notes so that you have just a variety of things to read and to make this your own. If it's something you're going to have to walk into, or you choose to walk into. How are you going to communicate? text email, can he call you? how safe do you feel is if you're not real safe with them. I've had clients no no phone calls, no texting, only email. And then but the most important thing I think, you know, just as a coach looking at all this and not a person Then who has experienced it? What are your goals? In order to come back together? What do you need to see? This can be recovery behaviors, other kinds of milestones that you together, agree upon? And then what's it going to take? After you, you come back together and you end the separation? What do you need to see continue in order to stay on this positive trajectory of healing?

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Pam B. 25:29

I think also to what needs to be in there is how do you talk to the children? You know, age appropriate? How do you explain this to the kids so that they can continue to feel safe and loved and not at fault. And we know that being as honest as possible about the high level details of what's happening is what's best for kids. Because kids can pick up on things that we don't really think they can pick up on. But they're smart, and they're intuitive. And so being honest with them, and including them in the plan and asking them if they have any questions, or, you know, do they have any needs, any concerns?

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Lyschel 26:10

I think I will just add, if these are as Bonnie's listing out all these categories, I can only imagine trying to do that on my own, and how overwhelming that would be to try and think about, I gotta figure out my own needs, I gotta figure out the needs of my kids. I gotta think about the relationship itself. And so I just really want to encourage our listeners seek out a coach. So ladies,

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Bonny 26:35

as we always do, we want to leave our listeners with some hope. What hope do you have to

as we always do, we want to leave our listeners with some hope. What hope do you have to offer around therapeutic separation?

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Lyschel 26:46

I think the hope that I can share with our listeners is

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Pam B. 26:52

that the information

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Lyschel 26:55

that we've shared in this podcast today has been intended to strengthen a relationship. And the individuals that are a part of the relationship more than it is about dividing the relationship. And for me, I think that carries incredible hope, towards some sort of reconciliation, restoration, rebuilding, whatever word you want to use, to grow, mature and heal. I also think that the other the scripture to support some of this that we've talked about today is the first Corinthians seven, five, where it says Do not deprive each other, except by mutual consent, and for a time, so that you may Devote yourselves to prayer, then come together again, so that Satan will not tend to you because of your lack of self control. And this was Paul talking to the Corinthians. The the aspect of this about being mutual consent, I think is important. And that was a bit of what we were really trying to stress in this conversation is that a therapeutic separation is something that is intended to really strengthen the marriage, strengthen the relationship and add to it, but it should be, it could be, we encourage it to be mutual consent.

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Pam B. 28:22

I go back to a metaphor that was given to me that marriage is a three legged stool. And there is the there is the wife, the husband and the relationship itself. And if any one of those two are not strong or broken, the other, the other to fall. And that therapeutic separation, trust the process, for it to be therapeutic. Therapeutic separation allows those two individuals, the husband and the wife, to go off and become stronger, so that the marriage can become stronger. And my my, the hope that I offer is trust the process Julene into the Lord, lean into the word, strengthen your relationship in with prayer and worship during that time. And trust that. Therapeutic means health care. It's health care for the marriage for you and the marriage.

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Bonny 29:29

And I'll just take your lead on that pan, you're talking about the three legged stool. I'll talk about a triangle where God is at the top and you and your husband are on opposite corners at the bottom as you use this time apart and you may have more capacity, more mental capacity, shift that towards growing not only your mental health but your spiritual health because an am As he does the same, which I would hope he would, to use that time to grow spiritually, you'll climb up the corners of that triangle, and you're both heading towards God. And the

consequence of that is when you do shift back into a couple ship mode, you'll be closer together, because you'll have spiritual growth under your, under your belts. I mean, it's an old analogy. Some of you, I'm sure know it. But the closer we get to God, the healthier our relationships can be, not that they will be, but they can be. And so my hope is that you could use the time of therapeutic separation to the most benefit possible. Before we say our final goodbyes, Michelle and Pam are going to briefly tell you what they have going in their respective communities right now.

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Lyschel 31:00

Within hope redefined, we are consistently offering online support groups. So I do invite you to check out our website to see what groups we're actively offering as well as we are always building a webinar library to help with really specific topics. In this coming this next month, we're actually going to do a a two day workshop on creating a relapse plan. And this is intended for partners, women who are trying to figure out what they need in the aftermath of a relapse. This is a big part of us really being able to identify our next steps. And so we'd love to have you join us check out our website for registration, or even a copy of the webinar.

P

Pam B. 31:54

I'm really excited because I have a program that I've been working on. For a long time, I've done a lot of research, a lot of reading, regarding boundaries with your sexually addicted spouse. And this program that I've put together, spends a lot of time up front, on what we're protecting with boundaries. And it goes into the who, what, when, where and why of boundaries, creating your spaces in advance of how you're going to enforce boundaries. Very specific and practical advice on how to communicate boundaries with love, and compassion, and how to deal with pushback. And how to get peace and clarity when you're enforcing your boundaries. And I've gotten a lot of really good feedback on it. And I'll be offering that again. And if you go to recovered.piece.com/boundaries You can get more information.

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Bonny 32:56

Thank you. And for the strong lives, I have a reclaim your sexual identity small group in process right now the next one will be offered in the fall. We discuss what is healthy, godly sexuality. We talk about myths from culture and myths that have bled over into Christian Christian teaching. We also look at what is our sexual identity? Do you even have words around that we work we work a lot on on that aspect too. And we do some grief work around what we've lost. So but But it ends it ends well because by the end of it, you will have a lot more understanding of what a healthy sexual life can look like. So thank you, listeners for joining us today. As always, we hope to be a bright spot in your recovery journey. If you find these episodes helpful, please go over to iTunes and either give us a five star rating or have a review and those reviews help others find us. So we will talk with you again in two weeks.