

Ep_39.1_Dear_Pastor_pt_1

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SPEAKERS

Pam B., Bonny, Lyschel

P Pam B. 00:00
Music. Hi. I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace, and

L Lyschel 00:06
I'm Lachelle Burkett with hope redefined, and

B Bonny 00:08
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 diving into a harder conversation. How can the church better navigate walking with wives trying to heal from the impact of sexual betrayal? How can the church better navigate walking with husbands struggling with problematic sexual behavior and with couples presenting with sexual problems? Now we're not here to bash the men and women serving in leadership roles at churches, especially you lead pastors. I mean, we understand that you have a great love of people, and God called you to lead in this way. And we know that you put your heart and energy into shepherding deeply hurting people in a very messy world. However, we do believe this position you are in also calls for you to keep growing and understanding, and many of you are doing this on a daily basis. The three of us as professionals who also serve deeply wounded people are called to keep learning and refining how we help people, and we take that seriously, so we're engaging in this conversation to help you have richer understanding of this complicated plague of pornography and the fallout it has on wives and families of men struggling with this problematic sexual behavior. So we're going to start the conversation by sharing what we've seen done well in this area and what we've seen done poorly. So ladies, what are your thoughts around that

P Pam B. 01:39

I've seen the gamut I've seen not just pastors, but pastors and pastors, wives and teams, care teams and entire communities surrounding both people and supporting them and loving on them and accepting them and just being present for the couple. I've also seen the complete opposite. I've seen total devastation happen at the hands of people who call themselves a faith community. I have seen couples ejected from their faith community. I've seen wives given very, very damaging, hurtful, traumatizing advice that enabled the hurt and the abuse to continue and disempowered her even further, making her feel or suggesting that she was somehow part of the problem and part of the solution when she's just not. And so I think there's this just shows that there's so much room to grow, not just in individual churches, but in the Christian community as a whole. In terms of we've seen books that give poor advice. So authors, people on social media, Christian social media influencers could stand to use an upgrade on what betrayal trauma is and how these things are best addressed.

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Lyschel 03:32

I can just completely agree with all the things that you just shared Pam and the varying experiences that I've seen and personally experienced myself in my own story. There have been places, there have been churches, there have been communities that have done an incredible job, and there have been communities that have done a poor job. The distinguishing factor, I think, between those communities is that the ones who typically do a great job are communities who have had some level of either personal experience in this area, or they understand what it means to be a trauma informed church, and that they are able to look At this situation, that this relationship is going through this marriage, this couple, these individuals, and understand that there is trauma attached to all of this. And so how do we care for our our people, our congregation, through that lens, versus it being a just, not just, but a sin issue. I think that's the distinction I see between the two. I get to do a lot of time and networking through an organization called CILs, which is the sexual integrity Leadership Summit. It's a conference that's hosted each year, and it's specifically designed to. Quick leadership, church leadership, on what it looks like to care for their congregation through these topics. And it's powerful. But watching their the participants, the people who attend, the awareness that happens for them when they begin to say, Oh, this is this is trauma. This is all rooted in something from a long time ago, for him, potentially, if we're talking about the addict being the husband, and then they're able to look at a wife and even children through a different lens of understanding, oh, that is trauma, and that's what that looks like. So to give you some tangible examples of things that have been done well, we have seen churches come around and financially support a woman through her healing process, by paying for a support group or personal coaching or coming to a retreat intensive. And I'm telling you, that has been a game changer for these women, and the fact that they felt the care from their body, their local body, their local church body, and the those people who were supporting her were able to say, we don't know how to help you, but we'll pay to find somebody to help you, because you're important to us. And so women walking away with that, just that appreciation for the good referral have I've seen done really well. I also think that the church can only carry individuals navigating this stuff so far. Their resources are going to be limited. They're not going to be able to carry this guy from the beginning to end of his sexual recovery, but they do have a very important role in being the accountability and the community that keeps pointing their eyes back towards Jesus and who God has created them to be. But also there is a desperate need for them to be with individuals who understand, on a deeper level what recovery looks like. That's probably even the thing I want to make sure that is heard through this whole podcast, is that the church has such a valuable position with any couple ship that's trying to heal from

something like this, and when they know that, and they know what their position is that they need to fill. It's beautiful, but it's the churches and the leadership that doesn't understand either that they need to step into the mess. Because often times that's one of the reactions we see, is, I'm not getting in all of that. So you see this neglect and abandonment experience for the couple, or you see leadership attempting to function out of something that they really have time for. That is another place that I see such a miss is couples going to their leadership, asking for care and support and whatever that looks like. And consistently, what I hear is that pastors will make promises and they don't follow through. So they'll say, Hey, I'm going to get you those resources, or I'm going to connect you with this person, or I'm going to do this, and they don't follow through. And so then it leave. It leaves those individuals who are looking for care kind of in an abyss. They don't know which way to go, because they're waiting on these people that they appreciate and respect to give them the next thing. And so that is always my just encouragement to pastoral staff, is, if you don't have time to help, be honest about that, versus over promising and under delivering, because that under deliver creates a lot of pain, and that's where I most often hear about church wounding and a crisis of faith.

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Pam B. 08:50

And I think we want to also point out that safety is a big word that we talk about a lot. Trauma is about losing your safety. And women go to their church leadership to help them re establish their safety. They're looking for safety, and their church community is a safe place. That's how they view it. And so when they go to their church community leadership or small, even small groups, and they aren't supported. They're either ignored or given bad advice, harmful advice. That's another lack of loss of safety for them. And I think you said an important you made an important point, Michelle about understanding exactly what your role is and not trying to a lot of times I'll see a church leadership or care team not understand their limitations and. Seeing this as a faith issue, when really this is it's just as much physiological as it is psychological and emotional and spiritual, and sometimes the advice is just have more sex. Spice things up, be more available. Have the house clean, have somebody take the kids that it's seen purely as a sex issue for the wife and is seen purely as a faith issue for the husband. And I just can't emphasize enough that that's that's not truth. That's not what this is.

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Lyschel 10:43

There is a faith issue coming on. There is if there is a disconnection in his understanding of value and worth in Christ, Jesus, right? That is part of the situation. It is not all of it, right? And that's the mistake or miss. Maybe mistake is too strong, but that is the miss that I see consistently from from pastoral care, is they're only going after it through that lens and not recognizing that there's an incredible value of being able to do a both and right, that there is this clinical support that can help them, as well as the faith support. And that's what I mean by the church has a very, very vital role when it comes to walking with those who are wounded and damaged, and their role, their their position, the gift that they bring us, anybody who's a part of their body, is that is being able to say, let's talk about Jesus, let's talk about our Faith. How does all that incorporate? And there's a place and a time for that, but many times that's not the first thing that needs to be addressed. Many times it needs to be the clinical side that needs to get addressed first. So then we can get back to the place of saying, Okay, who are you in Christ? Jesus,

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Bonny 11:57

completely agree. What I will add is that the places I have seen it done well, I concur. It's usually from with churches who have trauma informed staff or the pastor is a former addict himself. That's what I've seen. The best care come from a pastor who's been a former addict, whether it was with pornography, alcohol, drugs, that understanding of the deep wounding and grace and holistic care that's needed come shines through from those men and Women in recovery. And I'm going to talk from the perspective of almost a fundamentalist church I was in that for years. So there's this concept of church discipline that lacks grace and humility and it's easy coming from a space of church discipline means it's black and white. It's a sin issue. It's a sin issue. Or, like Pam said, she's not showing up enough, it's black and white. But this, this addiction, whether it's, I'm gonna just lump it for all addictions, it's not that black and white. It is not where things can improve is is just stepping back into Jesus and looking at how he he interacted with people who are hurting, because he interacted with people who are hurting a whole lot differently than he did with those, the religious elite,

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Pam B. 13:47

yes, and he interacted with the sinner, the the abuser and That, I think that's a difficult word that churches struggle with is when there's abuse, and we have to nobody likes that word. Nobody likes that word. But I think we need to acknowledge that there is a level of disempowerment and wounding going on that will qualify as abuse. So and again, the mistake that churches make is saying, Well, this problem is rooted in in faith. You don't have enough faith, or you're not practicing your faith.

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Bonny 14:36

I will say another reason that churches may deal with this poorly, and is from a lack of true self assessment on their own, problematic porn viewing the Barna Pew Research in 2016 although it's old or it's now 70. Years old, I think it's still valid that nearly 60% of men who church, who attend church regularly, are viewing porn at least once a month, and those who self identify as fundamentalists are 91% more likely to look at porn and just a lay person. Definition of fundamentalist is that if you're not a part of our particular denomination, your salvation is in question. So there's a lot of rule following in those church bodies where grace is not preached from the pulpit on a regular basis. And I can say all this because I came from that background. I understand it. Those people love Jesus, but there's not a lot of grace. If leadership is viewing pornography, they also are coming from a disordered brain around sexual experiences. The blind can't lead the blind. It's a cliché, which means that if you don't know, if you don't know how to get out of the bondage and the shackles, you won't be able to lead anyone else to freedom, either. So what would you tell pastors about the consequence of problematic porn viewing on the wife and on the family? What are the consequences that she experiences and that the family as a whole, you know, endure and experience

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Pam B. 16:40

she experiences hurt and wounding, of course, but she also experiences a feeling of disempowerment. Very often there's isolation. When there's an addiction of any kind, these people tend to isolate, whether it's isolating into the addictive behavior itself, or just isolating

people tend to isolate, whether it's isolating into the addictive behavior itself, or just isolating into video games or TV or hobbies and a loss of emotional intimacy and emotional support and confusion, because it's just not widely known how to deal with problems like this. She may not even realize what his specific issue is, but she's feeling very, very alone, and she needs community more than anything. So

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Lyschel 17:33

the way I like to try to offer a visualization to others as they're potentially going to sit across from a desk, couches, whatever from this couple. The first thing I'm going to say is, is that this is not a marriage problem. This is an individual problem that is impacting a marriage, and that is important for you as a care person to understand that, because oftentimes the couple doesn't even understand that she has a very high tendency to take blame for the brokenness and the lack thereof because of the narrative she's potentially received for so long. So immediately, when she hears there's porn, she takes that on herself, as I'm not enough. Yes, one of the most common phrases that the enemy uses to steal, kill and destroy, right? I'm not enough. So many times they approach their pastoral care staff looking for marriage fixes, and the sooner you can help usher them into the understanding that this is an individual problem impacting the marriage, not a marriage problem impacting an individual, the sooner you're going to get them help in the right order. And so being able to look at them as while they're coming in as an entity, and they're coming in as a, as a, as a unit, you really need to care for them as individuals in the unit. And the way that I have described this before is oftentimes in this season, when they are recognizing they need help, it is as if he got to take off in an airplane that day, and she literally had a crash. And so they are going in very different directions, and they have very different needs, right? If you were emergency vehicles, and you've got a guy who just took off in a plane, and he's learning how to fly, you're not going to need the level of emergency care that you do when you have a plane crash, and you've got people rushing in to help. And so it's important to understand they're both having a different experience. Now, oftentimes I do sit with wives who are still in that what I call the encourager space, which means she is so ready to do whatever needs to be done to fix him, because once he gets better, then she'll get better, and after a period of time, she will eventually come to a place of understanding that that isn't what it looks like to have your hope in Jesus. That's what it looks like to have your hope in your husband. And that will feel very, very defeating, and it can feel very concerning, because now she's going, what do I do because he's not getting better, my husband's not getting better, and I'm not getting better, so there's a hopelessness that comes over her. This is why I say it's so important for us to look at them as separate entities, two people coming in to make this relationship that's in, that's in crisis, in an effort to be able to minister and care for each of them differently. But the thing I will say is it's so Pam already said it community is where healing will happen, but it has to be the right community. It needs to be safe community. It needs to be community that she can feel vulnerable. She's allowed to be vulnerable and not put together, and she has an opportunity just to tell her truth. I heard you say the forgiveness thing, and I said to a pastor one time he we were talking about this subject matter, and he said, you know, he goes. Now that you're talking to me about this, he goes, makes me think about this one couple, and the husband has been doing his work. He goes to his group every week. He's really great at what he does, but, man, she just can't get over it. She just can't get she's just bitter, and I don't know what to do for her. And I responded, and I said that is a woman who's never been given permission to grieve. She's been told that she needs to move forward, but no one wants to talk about the damage. We would never expect that of someone if their house burned to a ground, to the ground. We would never say to them, let's not talk about the house. Let's not talk about all the memories that you lost in

there. We need you just to move on. Have some grace for the guy who set the house on fire. Forgive him and go it's not a realistic expectation of people who are navigating their pain. And so that's you kind of alluded to that Pam, where the first step for a woman whose relationship is being impacted by problematic porn viewing is giving her permission to be sad and grieving this and broken and also understanding that that may feel foreign to her right away, so she might wrestle it, and you just need to find the patience to be like it's okay, it'll come, and just be able to support her when you see the grief come.

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Bonny 22:37

What I would say to a pastor about the consequence of problematic porn viewing for the wife is that she may be experiencing some behaviors out of him that you don't see in public. Porn rewires brains, as Pam has just alluded to very well. Porn also creates this relationship. So this guy has a relationship with his porn addiction, and he's going to protect that at all costs. And that can show up as looking like defensiveness, that can look as emotionally, verbal abuse, anger, all things to control the situation. So what I would say is, if she is sitting on your couch telling you about behaviors, you would never dream from this person. Believe her. Believe her. My mother used to have a phrase that says, You don't know what goes on behind closed doors. And I think every married person understands what that is, what that means. There are things that go on that the public will never see. But believe her, because porn viewing brings with it, Pam's Pam's term constellation behaviors, and they are not good behaviors. They're behaviors that protect this, this addiction, to protect his coping mechanism. So when you hear things, I'm just going to say it again. Believe her. Please believe her. Ladies, why don't we talk about how the family can be impacted by this and what pastors should know,

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Lyschel 24:24

I think it depends. There's a lot of things that can impact the family if the story becomes public. So I have an example of a couple who's who the husband was actually a pastor. He was a campus pastor. His story became public, and the church, I don't agree with the way the church handled it. Pam had talked about ejected from their community. That was very much their experience. He was fired immediately, and then asked the congregation. Was told, Do not contact this couple. They need time to heal. And what that was communicating is, is that, especially for the wife, she lost everybody, because that was her. That was what she did. She was a pastor's wife. Her investment was in that church and those people, and that instruction made her lose her community. On top of that that so think about that as a community across the board. Because she didn't need that community just to hold her, you know, tissues. She needed that community to help her with child care while she was trying to navigate the next day. She needed that community to come around and help her bring a meal, because she's just overwhelmed by grief and uncertain. I've had relationships for the husband has lost his job because of his porn use, right? And so there's a lot of impact on a family that doesn't is not always obvious on the surface, right? Because that job loss might look instantaneous, but goodness, job losses have long term impact on families. Those are a few things. The other thing I'll say is, is that if there's been emotional abuse in the family and the relationship, and that is not going to just be limited to the wife, right, there's that's going to take some pretty stinking good skills for him not to also have any forms of abuse with his children. And so I think it's important to keep that in mind that when you're trying to care for a marriage there, and there's children involved, those children need help too, whether that means they need a safe

person within children's ministry that they have been told that they can talk to just a process, because they don't understand the shift in their family dynamic, whether it's because dad lost his job and they're trying to figure that out. You know, it's amazing what kids will do, how they will insert themselves into the story, and what that means for them. But also, if the story is given and it's very public. That's incredibly humiliating for children, right? And they didn't get to decide that. They didn't get to choose that, that, that this, this, this issue, this, this problem in their and their family is putting out on display. And so how are we supporting our kids or and I would even extend it like I've had have, sorry, I keep thinking of different couples, but I had one couple where the the daughters, the wife's parents, went to the church. And I know I'm talking about pastoral care specifically, but husband acted out, was removed from leadership. So husband and wife leave the church. Her parents are members of this church, and they're trying to figure out how to navigate this. There's impact there. Like, it's, it's, it's interesting. I mean, you know, so just trying to help a pastor understand the consequences greater, far greater than just him, far greater than just her and him. But the way that it does ripple through also family. I would talk about church family. If this comes up in a small group, what are you doing to talk to that small group, to ask, you know, to answer questions and help them understand that there are safe places for them to talk to other people. Many times when addiction comes out in a small group, they're usually not the only one struggling with some sort of addiction. And so that can create a real sense of upheaval, whether it means that individuals feel like they need to hide more, or it creates an upheaval in the group doesn't feel safe anymore. So those are some thoughts around the consequences.

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Pam B. 28:51

There's a phrase in recovery circles that says you're only as sick as your secrets, and with any addiction, the addicted person becomes a master of deception, and there's research done about kids growing up in environments where there's a high level of secrecy in the family. And so be assured that the children in the family have been affected and impacted by this long before there was discovery or a smoking gun of pornography or infidelity or other kind of disempowering behavior. One mistake you don't want to make is protecting the children from all the truth and trying to shield the children from the fact that anything is going on, more than anything, they need to be validated, because they do sense that something is happening, something's off, and that can affect their sense of safety. They know something's going on, but the parent. Saying, and everyone around them saying, everything's fine, everything's great, everything's cool. And yet deep inside, they know something is being withheld from them. And when we don't know what it is, it's being withheld, it's just human nature to try to fill in those blanks. And so there's age appropriate disclosure that can be made to the children, just even as far as saying, hey, yes, there's some problems going on, but mom and dad are addressing it. We're going outside for help. We're on it. There's at least one parent and so know that the children have been affected, even if you've been told, Oh no, the kids don't know anything about it, kids sense that there's secrecy happening in the family.

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Bonny 30:51

Yeah, kids are smarter than you think. They do really pick up on those, those undertones and what you describe Well, happened recently with a friend, advice from the leadership was just to tell Dad, tell them that dad had decided to take some extended vacation because he had been let go of his from his job. I asked her if she thought that continuing deception was what she

wanted, and could she possibly be honest on a developmental level with the kids that daddy lost his job, and we're working on finding a new job, and we're here for you, and we will keep things safe, and we love you, and this has nothing to do with you. It's

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Pam B. 31:38

it's important, because, you know, we talk about generational sin, this kind of dysfunction can be generational. And that's that's how we see it can be generational, is in the secrecy and in the cover ups. And we're teaching kids to cover up, to put a good face on it, that no matter what happens, we always have to look like we're fine. Everything's good when it's not. And we need to teach kids that it's okay to not be okay for a while, but that, you know, the parents are taking action and doing something, but we need to validate them that their gut is right, otherwise we're creating more lack of safety, which, ironically, can create unhealthy coping mechanisms, and sometimes it's addictions, and sometimes it's porn or sex addiction. So in this case, honesty is an ounce of prevention.

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Bonny 32:39

So what kind of hope would you offer? And let's talk to pastors. Okay, let's what kind of hope would you offer the pastors in this arena?

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Lyschel 32:51

Here's the hope that I have for pastors. It is first, Corinthians, 12:12, which is There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit, and so we are formed into one body. Didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves are free. We were all given the same spirit to drink. So the body is not made up of just one part. It is many parts. Suppose the foot says, I am not a hand, so I don't belong to the body, but saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. And suppose the ears say I'm not an eye, so I don't belong to the body. By saying this, it's not it cannot stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye. How could it hear if the whole body were an ear? How could it smell? God placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be, if all the parts were the same. How could there be a body as it is? There are many parts, but there is only one body, and so it goes. The scripture goes on to read more about the taking out the different parts of the body. I share this because I know that most believers have an appreciation for the diversity of the Body of Christ. This is another example an opportunity to have an appreciation for the diversity of the Body of Christ. It's not an expectation that you're going to know how to minister to every single thing that walks through your door. It's impossible, right? And so the sooner we start to understand that we need more pieces and parts of the body who are equipped to do what they're supposed to do, right? I was made to do this. I've been told by many pastors, this is clearly a passion that God has put inside of you. And I'm like, Yes, it is right. So take advantage of those types of resources, of those people who are doing the work, who are in the trainings, who are growing in their understanding of how to care for someone wounded in this way. Uh, take advantage of that in your body, whether that's in your physical walls of your church or in the body of Christ as a whole. So find those people, find those people that can be good referrals for you that you feel confident you can do that with. Um, the other thing I'll say, so that's my that's my

encouragement and my hope. There's a couple resources I'd love to share, and we'll put them in this, in the notes, the show notes. So there is a new book out called the Healing Church, and it's by Sam Black. He's the Executive Director of covenant eyes look Bonnie's got it with her. And he actually just recorded a podcast on pirate monk, which is another podcast we're familiar with and appreciate. And so hopefully we can even link that particular podcast in our show notes, so you can kind of get an idea of where Sam stands. But his book is an incredible resource for leadership, trying to understand how to continue to heal the church through sexual depravity. And so that would be one of them. And then also, covenant eyes has a document on their website called the prepared ministry, and it's a guidebook for churches to really understand how to protect and care for their churches through pornography. So it talks about the education for the for the leadership team, what does that look like? And then moves into some really practical step by steps, policies, conversations, different things that they can be doing for their leadership team, to equip them both to care for others, but also to be an excellent team and function well in in this area, this is so important, and I can't stress it enough how important our pastors are for us. So I just pray that these words landed particularly special in your heart, and that you'll do something with it.

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Bonny 37:00

Well, the hope I'd like to leave is that it's the Holy Spirit that convicts people of their sin. So church discipline isn't necessarily the answer to this. And I also understand that this is messy and it's uncomfortable, and if you're a theologian, not a counselor, it's tremendously difficult. Recently, my own preacher stood up and said that he has an MDiv, you know, masters of divinity. And how many counseling courses did he have, studying all the theology? Zero. So it's okay to acknowledge that you might be ill equipped in this area. And like Michelle says, round up your resources. Round up your trusted resources. You can refer people out, because we as coaches do that there are things we are not equipped to do and in the in the effort to care the best we possibly can, for the for our wounded, our wounded ladies, we often refer them to a counselor who's more specialized in her particular wounding. That's just caring well, it doesn't mean that we don't feel we're equipped to do certain things, but there are other things we are not well equipped to do. So I just wanted to give you that permission to refer and to know that you don't have to convict people of their sin typically, and I know we'll probably talk about this in the next episode, but typically, these guys know what they're doing, and they're just in bondage. And so if there's a different approach to helping them heal for the wives, again, believe her,

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Pam B. 38:50

this subject is overwhelming. It can be very, very overwhelming. But the hope that I want to leave churches is that, fortunately, there's education out there. There's knowledge out there. In Proverbs 18:15, the heart of the discerning acquires knowledge. For the ears of the wise seek it out. And I implore you to seek out some information. The root of addiction is trauma. The addiction of porn addiction, or sex addiction, creates trauma for the betrayed. Fortunately, learning about trauma and how to approach it doesn't require a medical degree. A layman can understand how to help a person feel safe, how to bring emotional stability for that person, and the phases that a person needs to move through to address that trauma, and there's some free

resources that is addressed. Towards churches that is trauma informed and how to learn about trauma and how to how to love on and provide comfort and support and encouragement for that person dealing with trauma, and we can include those in the show notes.

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Bonny 40:21

Thank you for joining us today. We hope to be a bright spot on your recovery journey. If you'd like to leave us a question or comment, please use the contact button on our website, which is hopeforwives.com and that's [hope for wives.com](http://hopeforwives.com) Also, if this podcast has helped you, please leave a five star rating or review on iTunes to help other people find us, because when we reach 500 ratings, Apple podcast promotes us in a different way. We'll talk to you again soon. Bye, stop time you