

Ep_45_Sobriety_Isnt_Enough_part_2

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sobriety isn't enough, tough love, firm boundaries, nonviolent communication, assertive approach, personal responsibility, setting expectations, self-care, finding purpose, emotional validation, recovery resources, overfunctioning, cognitive distortion, spiritual connection

SPEAKERS

Pam B., Bonny



Pam B. 00:00

Music. Hi. I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace,



Bonny 00:06

and I'm Lachelle Burkett with hope redefined, and I'm Bonnie burns of strong wives. We're so glad you're joining us. We are back. Welcome to another episode of hope for wives. Today we continue our discussion of how sobriety isn't enough to repair the marriage and build a mutually connected relationship. I want to mention that Lachelle isn't with us today. She had a prior engagement at a conference, so she won't be joining this conversation, but she will be back for the next one, so it's just Pam and I, and we'll miss you, Lachelle. So Pam, what can a wife do to help her husband in his recovery?



Pam B. 00:43

Oh, what a loaded question you have asked. Yeah, that's a trick question. And God bless us. Women who ask that, we want to help. We want to be supportive and help. You know, if he had cancer, we would give up everything to help heal him, help provide an environment that he could heal in. So it's good to ask the question in addiction. However, the answer may not be what you think it is. The answer is, tough love, remaining very, very firm in your boundaries, in what you'll tolerate and what you won't, use your voice to be clear about what you need. And you know, a lot of us think, like I did early on, and I learned the error of my ways. I'm gonna find him a therapist, I'm gonna find him a group. I'm gonna send him this article. I've got a video for him to watch, I've got a book for him to read. I need him to do this. I need him to not do that. I need him to see him doing all these things. And basically what I just talked about I now love, lovingly call ticking the boxes. And I often say I can tell my 22 year old college student go sit in that room, open up the biology book and turn the pages and read every word on that page. It doesn't mean when he exits the room, he's going to understand biology or

chemistry. It doesn't mean he's going to actually learn anything. It means he's going through the motions my husband because he didn't, you know, know any better, or he was just doing what he was told by his therapist. He ticked the boxes. But there was no heart change. There wasn't any real change in thought or behavior, really. It wasn't replacing the old coping mechanisms. There's all kinds of problems. It's like opening a Pandora's box when you try to help your husband in recovery by finding him therapy, by finding him groups, suggesting books and websites and podcasts. It's a slippery, slippery slope. Couple problems with that. Number one, it's over functioning. And when you over function, you sort of send the message that the other person isn't capable, and our husbands are perfectly capable of finding their own recovery resources. It suggests that it's part of our responsibility, and I'm here to tell you it's not. It is personal responsibility for each person to find their own recovery resources. A third reason why it's not a good idea is if it fails, if it doesn't do anything for him, if it doesn't help him, if he's not interested, if he doesn't get anything out of it, we feel disappointed. We're setting ourselves up for disappointment that we tried to help and it didn't work. So it feels like we failed, and it's not our failure, because it's not our responsibility. If

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Bonny 04:05

I were to answer this question, What can she do to help him in his recovery? It's really about boundaries and because it's and you're not helping him do anything, you're setting up your expectations. And I know that Pam, that this is your area, and that you have boundary classes, and we'll have that in the show notes. What is it? Clarity and peace through boundaries. So I know you use non violent communication with boundaries, which are very person centered and loving. And I love those things now. I guess my perspective on them are slightly different in that I tried that and it was not as effective as when I went. The more assertive route for my personal situation, my personal situation, he saw that nine non violent communication, even though I said what I said, and I tried to enact things that was also my problem in the beginning, that was seen as being kind and gentle, and when she's kind and gentle, then I don't have to do what she's asking. Therefore, in my situation, we use the non violent communication now because solid recovery, very person centered and loving, there was a space there where the wall of denial was still high, that I was more assertive, not aggressive, but assertive of I will not be in a marriage with this. And I realize all women have a different experience, and young mamas have pragmatic things to think about. I was in a space where it had been 30 years of an addiction, and I was done. What brought him out of his wall of denial, I truly believe, was my anger, and it was controlled. I Yeah, it wasn't rage in the beginning. What helped him in his recovery was my god, confidence, that, and I know you've said this too, Pam, I would, and I'm taking your So Pam says this, I'm saying it. I would rather live under a bridge than with a man in active addiction. And that's where I was at. I didn't have that sentence at the time his behavior had forced my hand. So what, what I did to help him in his recovery was I said no, no more, and I'm done. And I didn't, I didn't sending therapists. I didn't do any of that.

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Pam B. 06:50

But that is nonviolent communication, that is part of it. And nonviolent communication is for her to know she's in integrity when she uses her words. And so part of non violent communication is I will and I will not. That is part of it. That's



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Bonny 07:07

where it was. So there was no feelings. It's in the that point.

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Pam B. 07:11

It's in the enforcement. It's it's in the enforcement of the boundary. Oh, hey, you know dr cloud says, I'm going to paraphrase. If words would have worked, we wouldn't need boundaries, right? Yes, and so non violent communication just gives her the confidence that I'm communicating and I'm doing it in a mature, healthy way. I know I can walk away from this conversation knowing I did everything right. I said it the right way. I said it with integrity and authenticity, and my voice of I feel that's me, my voice, I won't withhold my feelings, right? And

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Bonny 07:54

yeah, no, I Yeah, no, it was, but it wasn't couched in

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Pam B. 07:59

I don't think we're saying two different things. I think non violent communication inbound within using it within boundaries is just describes the communication part of it. But boundaries is absolutely about the enforcement of, I will not be in relationship. There's, there's nothing violent about saying, I won't be in this relationship if there's no recovery, there's that's not violent, that fits into the non violent communication theory. And that's absolutely what I said too. Is when you're not in recovery, I feel angry, and I will not be in relationship with anyone who has hurt me and betrayed me and deceived me in this way, who isn't actively doing something with the right individuals, right a CSAT or the right therapeutic resources to change. Nothing violent about that. I may say it with force and assertively. So I would, I would say not violent. Communication is absolutely assertive.

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Bonny 09:16

Yeah, I just say it is more gentle and kind. And I was not gentle. I was kind. I was kind because I didn't call him any names. And I think no matter where you are, you need to respect the image of God in the other person.

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Pam B. 09:32

And that's the beauty of nonviolent communication, is that it is centered around needs, and it acknowledges that the other person has a choice to not comply. I you know, there's a lot of different ways to say boundaries. To speak a boundary out no is a boundary. Walking away is about I'm not going to sit and speak a boundary if you come after me with a machete. I'm speaking my boundary by showing you my back and running right. Another way to speak. A boundary is I realize you have a choice. I realize that you can choose to stay in your addiction, to stay in that behavior. But as for me and my house, I will serve the Lord. And as for me, I'm walking towards recovery from this betrayal and from this trauma and from this brokenness

that you have caused me and the death of our relationship, I'm going to walk into recovery and healing from that, and you're welcome to come with me, but if you're going to stay there, I'm not going with you. You know, there's a spectrum of assertiveness and kindness and gentleness and and there's a really great meme out there that says, if you've always been passive and kind and soft and loving, then and assertiveness will feel like violence. So your current comfort level is not a good benchmark, right? Because you've never been assertive before. That was me. I was never assertive because I didn't want to come across as the B words, bold, witchy. Could it be in front of that bad, right? I always wanted to be soft. And would you please? Would you? Hey? Would you? Would you mind? Hey? Can you No? Once I started learning boundaries via this method. I felt confident that I have the right to ask for what I'm asking for and how you perceive that is on you, because I know I'm doing everything right.

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Bonny 11:35

And that Harriet Lerner book that you recommended about apologies has a section in there that talks about sometimes anger is what gets through to the person who is offended.

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Pam B. 11:49

Oh yes, and this is why I love this feelings wheel that I've laminated, because I can very comfortably say I'm mad. I feel angry. I can do it without raging. I don't have to raise my voice. I used to think I had to raise my voice in order to be heard. There was some truth to that. Everything stopped when I raised my voice. But that doesn't mean what what I was trying to get to actually got through like they say, sometimes, how you're saying something is louder than what you're trying to say, and so I'm perfectly okay saying, hey, you know what? I'm really frustrated. I am completely annoyed. I'm really mad, and I'm starting to feel a little bit enraged because this thing is happening. I'm aggravated. I'm feeling resentful, irritated, and I you know, those words have power, and that other and again, I need to hear myself saying it more than the other person needs to understand it, and I need to validate myself, and I don't have to yell and scream. But then my where I put my feet and where I sit my behind speaks louder than me saying, Hey, I'm really angry, I'm annoyed, I'm upset, but if I get up and leave and I refuse to engage, that's communication also that communicated my anger. Yeah, and a firm voice.

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Bonny 13:16

I think a firm voice is a little louder, but it's not screaming and yelling. I think for me too, when you're when you're kind, you're not using all of your breath, kind of gets back to the body. I think when you're assertive, you're using your diaphragm and you're really speaking.

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Pam B. 13:34

Another tip a therapist gave me, and this, this really helped me. I put my she says, Put your shoulders back, stand up straight and tall and take a deep breath and say your truth, speak your feelings, ask for what you need, and then watch the results as data, right? I may not always get what I'm looking for, but the result that comes back is important for me to acknowledge as hard, cold, hard data. But being able to stand up and put my shoulders back, I

felt more confident. I felt bigger, and I felt like, yeah, I have a right to say this. I'm not just shrinking back and we women, we're told to be thin, be small, take up space, don't you? Be soft. Be demure. No, it's okay. And again, it may feel aggressive or or more loud or angry, but it's just assertiveness. You know, we would if we were men, we wouldn't be having this conversation, right?

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Bonny 14:41

What would you say to a woman who is consistently crushed by her husband, who is sober but not in good recovery, her heart is just broken again and again?

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Pam B. 14:51

I'd be I would validate her feelings. Every emotion is real and her. Factual reality, her lived experience, and I would challenge her on some cognitive distortion, some thinking, maybe there is a 12 step phrase slogan that says, Why would you go to the hardware store for bread? If you know your partner has this mental challenge, this emotional mental challenge, why would you continue to return to that empty well, that doesn't mean just accept that He's forever going to be an empty well, but for this chapter of your life, is there a way that you can fill that need from within, within you, and a conversation with Jesus with you, in a conversation with your support team, whether it's a good friend who understands where you are and just accepts and is good at listening and seeing you, or with your support Group, how can you fill yourself while your husband is learning, while your husband is growing, keep expressing your feelings and needs. Don't let them off the hook. The kindest thing you can do for a person in recovery is to be truthful and honest about where you are and what you're seeing and what you need. Don't ever protect a person in recovery from the consequences of their behavior. Hey, when you XYZ, I feel ABC, and just be factual about the you know when you don't add, you know, character assassinations, when you're distant, when you're selfish, right? When you walk in the house after a day of work and you immediately go play video games or immediately go watch sports and you don't even say hello to me, I feel sad, scared, hopeless, confused, angry, be real. If you're crushed, I hear it, oh my gosh. I do hear it because our hope and our expectation, and when I say expectation, I mean not your standards, we kind of confuse those words. Sometimes an expectation is a prediction of what's going to happen. Keep your standards high. Hey, I want connection. I want to share transparent emotions. I want to know where your head's at, where your heart's at. I want you to be curious about where my head's at and where my heart's at. I keep those are my standards for a relationship, and the relationship comes first, and we tell each other everything, but my expectation in this month and this year of where you are in your recovery is a little bit lower because they're still learning to deal with their own emotions. They're and if they're in therapy, my gosh, they've opened up a Pandora's box of maybe childhood, family of origin, history or something else, or just emotions. They're facing their emotions for the first time. My husband said, You took away my Binky. You took away my Binky, and now I don't know how to deal with all this anger and resentment and sadness and grief and right? So you know it's it's going to be ugly for a little bit, and it's, it's okay to not constantly be going to your spouse for every validation and every connection. It's okay that we listen. My husband and I are in a really good recovery. He's not my only place to go. I need my group. I need my friends. I need other perspectives. That's what I would offer,

B**Bonny 18:48**

which leads right into our next question, beautifully, what are some practical tools a wife can implement if her husband is sober and still displaying dysfunctional ways of coping and relating to others? So what you have just described was when I, when I sat down to think about this question, is really the answer I had to this question, and that was wisdom I was given early on in marriage, which is no one person can fulfill all your needs. And so I had to shift. So the first thing I had to shift was my thinking towards God and and think of God first, and my husband second, amen, he's the only one who can fulfill all my needs. And you know, that was super hard for me, because I'm a tangible person, and I can't see God, and sometimes I'm so busy I can't feel God. So the first practical thing I had to do was, which is what we talked about in the other episode, about for the guys, is slowing down, and I had to slow down too, because I stayed so busy. Well, I stayed busy for two reasons when he was still in active addiction. One was for. Affirmation. I got a lot of affirmation when I was busy helping people, but the second was, if I was so busy, my brain couldn't think about it, I was distracting myself. So practically when I slowed down, I could feel God, I could hear him, and I could spend time with him. I had I intentionally carved space out of my life for prayer and Bible study, and it wasn't easy, because I was so busy, I had to start saying no to some things. You know, it took time, but I finally got more things off my plate so that spending time with God became a rhythm. It wasn't just a habit, but it was a rhythm of my life,

P**Pam B. 20:43**

being a new baby Christian, coming from a different background. What I learned and what I found was worship. I couldn't feel God, or I couldn't see God. You're so right about it being intangible that someone suggested to me, well, that's really where you meet God, where, where we lift up to meet God, and God comes down to meet us is in worship. And that was so new for me, coming from the background, that it came from, but really pouring my heart into that. And it started with music that was just for me. I have a very musical background, so that was a language and an expression and a behavior that came very comfortably to me, but being able to worship in music and then taking it into other forms too, writing, Art, just sometimes, even just interacting in the world, trying to find little pockets of places to worship, is really where I felt more of that connection. And it's a me thing. It's not a God thing, right? God's always there, but it helped my human body and human brain be able to perceive more, and you're absolutely right. I think we all and we're culturally, socially socialized into and it's healthy to put our relationship first right, but we can let that pendulum swing way too far, and we lose our individuality. So this was a really great time for me to get to know myself again, get to love myself again. Focus on recovery work that helped me focus on what are my values, what are my rights. How do I take care of myself? How do I take care of my spiritual life, beyond just, you know, diet and exercise and those kinds of things. So being able to bring the focus back to me and take the focus off my husband was incredibly empowering and powerful.

B**Bonny 22:53**

And you've mentioned several times in the last episode, in this episode, of validating ourselves, and I think that was the second thing I learned about that no one person can fulfill your own needs, but you can fulfill your own needs to a certain extent, and that is through thinking of yourself kindly and thinking of your and saying encouraging words to yourself, even if you say them out loud, because when we hear something, it's different. It is it's a second layer of

encouragement. You can think it, but when you say it and you hear it, it enters your brain in a different way. So it's a double, double positive whammy. I could go weeks without any kind of positive affirmation from him, and a lot of times I receive the an unconscious kind of rejection, an unconscious message that I was lazy when I was starting to slow my life down. So by speaking encouragement to myself that, hey, I have the right to rest and rejuvenation, just like Pam was saying, when you realize what your rights are. He's not in charge of me. I am in charge of me, and I have that wisdom of Christ to know myself and to honor myself. What do I need? And that was important. That was powerful for me. That was a real shift to go from not just needing Dave's affirmation, but actually rejecting some of the messages that were coming from him. Because, I mean, they were, they were a byproduct of his dysfunction. You know, I know where they came from now, but being able to encourage yourself and to trust yourself. That's huge. I know a lot of women struggle to trust yourself, but you, God gave you that wisdom you have, the Holy Spirit, you can trust yourself. Amen,

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Pam B. 24:52

God gives us that. You know, it's shedding so much of this cultural messaging sometimes that, oh. Be good to myself is selfish, right? Self Care is selfish. Or, you know, I don't want to become narcissistic or think too highly of myself, like that's a danger. Well, okay, but you know, God did say love thy neighbor as thyself. So what does that imply? It implies that we should love ourselves. We are created by Him. God doesn't make mistakes. God doesn't make garbage, right? We it's okay for us to take care of his daughter. Mm, hmm, it's okay. And like I said, Jeff and I are we're in a great recovery. There are moments. He's got things going on. He's got a difficult season right now, with an elderly mother and other things happening and things going on at work, he can't always quote, be there for me, and that's okay, because I have learned to validate myself and take care of myself, and I know, you know, if I really had a really, really bad moment, that he would be there for me. Let's say I don't have these anymore, but let's say I had a trigger about past betrayals. I know I could walk in there and say, I need to talk about this, and because of where he is in his recovery now, because he really is in recovery or is recovered, he's able to stop and slow down and listen for me. But I I I think about first, before I go to him for my soft place to fall, I ask myself, Is he in a place where he can comfortably do this? And what are my needs? So I do try to try to balance that out, and this is one of the gifts of recovery, is that we do get this as the betrayed we get to, we get to do the work that lifts us up, that pulls back the beautiful parts of our individuality, the the you and me makes a we. There's still you and me in there, the you and me and the we doesn't the you and me doesn't dissolve into nothingness. I'm

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Bonny 27:03

still me, right? Yeah, and that was kind of the third thing that came from this phrase. I was told, you know, that no one person can fulfill your needs. I went out and found my own purpose, outside of the kids, outside of the house, outside of the Dave of the Dave outside of Dave. But yeah, I it. It took, like I said, took me a while to clear my plate so that I could go look for this purpose, and it ended up being a non profit in the town I lived in that worked with wounded women and women in generational poverty, and it was real eye opener. It helped me see life from a different perspective. And there was a lot of struggle for those women, and it made me see that even in their struggle, I saw hope, I saw tenacity, and I saw joy. There was a lot of laughter with with women who didn't know how they're going to feed their kids next week and

so but that gave me purpose, and I found myself again. And I've heard over and over with my my clients and my friends who've been betrayed. I lost myself. I lost myself, and I had but I found her, and I I prayed to God to show me the way. It wasn't that I went seeking for this thing. It fell in my lap, and then I saw that it was God's gift. So finding your purpose and being open, open to a purpose, I think, is huge in finding the me again.

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Pam B. 28:44

And I bet listening to your story, if you're anything like me, you found character aspects and strengths you didn't know you had. Yeah, I right, yeah, there's beautiful parts to us that we're not even aware of until they're until we have to pull them out. So that is, again, one of the beautiful gifts of recovery and bringing the focus back to us. Yeah, absolutely,

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Bonny 29:12

yeah. I had to do things where I just had to pull up my we hear, pull up your boots and go for and that's not always a good thing. We need to feel our feelings, and we need to sit in the pain and not just walk through it.

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Pam B. 29:25

We need to take a mat, right? Yeah, take up your mat, your

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Bonny 29:29

mat. I had to take up my mat. Find God's strength and confidence to do things I had never I had never been in a court room. I had never gotten a background check at the police station. I you know, I had never heard some of these heinous stories of childhood sexual abuse. I had never been a minority in a neighborhood before. You know, so. Those things were good, those things were good. I needed to do those things, but it took a lot of it took it took timid little me. I mean, I, let me not say that I'm not timid. But it took some strength. I didn't know I had right to go into situations I'd never been in before, right? So, but that was a gift, and I do it all over again. So Pam, what hope can we leave our listeners, the

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Pam B. 30:26

gifts of this recovery that we just talked about, the hope in that, the relationship that we can deepen with Christ, the relationship with ourselves that we can deepen. There are so many jewels and gifts and strengths and opportunities beyond my relationship with my husband, my relationship with my husband is important, but it doesn't always have to be the pinnacle. The goal, the number one focus. It's okay to divert for a little bit. I mean, he's gonna have to, also, he's gonna have to be sort of self focused, because they don't have good self care, and they have to learn good self care, and that's okay. We can be apart, but together.

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Bonny 31:22

So the hope I want to leave is that if you're still in this hard space, he's sober, but but recovery is being hard fought for. I want to remind you of Exodus 14:14, which says the Lord will fight for you. You only need to be still, and it's hard to be still when we want to help and we want to fix and we want to do and we want to send those podcasts. We want to text, text those blog posts, but taking a step back and resting and watching and observing, as Pam has said so well this episode, we can rest in the Lord. He sees what's going on. And, you know, he saw what was going on with Joseph. The story of Joseph is really one of my favorite stories, because he went through some really horrible things that were not his fault. The calamities didn't end. There was one on top of another, on top of another, but the Lord was always with him. And in the end, in the end, there's a beautiful ending. And while I can't foretell the future of each wife who is in a marriage with a man who has problematic sexual behavior, I know that the personal end for you, in your faithfulness, you will have the years that the locusts have eaten. They will be restored to you, personally, somehow, some way, I don't know how, but that is a promise we have, and I just want to leave that promise with you. Well, thank you for joining us today. We hope to be a bright spot on your recovery journey. If you have found wisdom or help or insight or a laugh or two with us, if you would consider making a donation towards our publication costs, we would greatly appreciate it. There's a donation button on our website and also in the show notes. So thank you for being here with us, and we will talk with you again soon. Bye. You.