

***Press the Escape Hatch – NOW!***



**WHEN CRISIS MODE IS ALL YOU HAVE**

Sometimes you just wish there was a secret hatch you could slip through to escape your situation. It feels like too much. And it might be. Only you know when enough is enough. I've been there. Even after doing the *Confessions* bible study, so please hear me out before you implode!

Crisis can be good.

You know why? It forces us to do something. It takes fear and pushes it to the side. Few things in our life can be the catalyst for change as thoroughly as crisis. And so, my friend, if you are reading these words and cannot concentrate because of the scream in your heart that says, 'I can't take it!' Please know, you are not alone...

Even after all that I'd done, prayed, waited, forgiven, prayed some more, shouted, cried and cried – submission, it seemed wasn't working for me. Oh, I'd written this study, taught the course, gave retreat speeches on the virtues of a gentle and quiet heart, yet somehow I was misinterpreting my situation. It's not hard to do. There's a fine line between forgiving a wrong done to you and just not dealing with. Actually, I was managing, so it seemed. The spats that began ensuing between my husband and me, fell mostly to him. I just ignored it. Or did I?

Let's be clear; just not saying what your heart feels, is not submission and it's certainly not going to make it go away. It makes it worse.

## *Cynthia's Confession:*

Stan and I had been working on a complete home rebuilding project of a rental property we'd owned 28 years. In so many ways, this was the culmination of many loose ends in our marriage and was a good and needed venture. I tried my best to put this need above my own and went along with all that was asked of me during this time. (Just to give you an idea, at one point in the project we were peeing in a bucket. But I digress.) It wasn't an easy project, but few undertakings of this magnitude are. I had to give up much of my comfortable life and activities and basically be chief bottle washer for the project. It was okay much of the time, but on occasion, I would resent not be treated kindly. I felt like I was giving up a lot, my husband felt like he could treat me like a laborer. I don't want to get into 'he said', 'she said' details, but what I want to stress, is that there were times I felt like I didn't deserve this kind of treatment. There were times that this task and this life and these choices were for the birds! To add insult to injury we didn't have any evening diversions and so now my husband's nightly alcohol routine was unavoidable. Basically, I just quit saying anything to keep the peace.

Now, let me back up here to say that this was not a new situation. I'd been praying specifically for help in the alcohol department and in the previous year more specifically against the demon of addiction that was getting a strong grip over Stan. But now, out of my element, and a little frayed, the situation became exasperated.

Enter Crisis. My brother passed away suddenly and my world turned upside down. As I helped my mom pick through the pieces of his life, I kept getting the sense of how quickly it all disappears. Everything you hold dear is just that fragile. Others may want your stuff (and my brother had a lot of nice stuff he 'willed' away), but for as long and hard as you work to make a mark, it can be gone in a heartbeat. And, for me, I realized that I didn't want to live with regrets. Something snapped inside of me. I saw myself going through the motions of my marriage without any heart. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I had a clear idea of what I was not going to do any longer. I was not going to miss this one precious life I'd been given.

I tried bringing this up with Stan. He listened and offered some unhappy sentiments of his own; and we tried to patch things up. But I felt like a patch couldn't bind the hemorrhage that was my life bleeding out to nothing. I honestly can't even tell you where these feelings were coming from (at the time). I know I hadn't been in God's Word like I normally am...but it was something deeper than I can explain. I felt like I had to hit the "Escape Hatch" – that if I didn't act right then I would go back to a life of misery. I gathered up all my courage and told Stan I was leaving (we were in another state at the time). To his credit, Stan said he didn't want me to go without him. That he would leave, too. And then I had to start the painful process of being real with him

and real with myself. As I laid out all the little things that were adding up, they seemed trivial...overcomeable. Even Stan's nightly drinking ritual, he said he would quit that moment.

I only half believed him. He had quit before. I wasn't trying to force a change on him, I was trying to lay out a future that was worth living for. But what I realized on that tearful, gut-wrenching day, I hope can also help you take a look at the truth of your situation.

1. Are you being honest with your feelings?
2. Do you have areas in your marriage that you feel MUST change?
3. Do you trust your mate sexually? If not, why?
4. Are you willing to forgive? (this is not a circumstantial question – not “yes, if...”)
5. Have boundaries been crossed that you feel need to be re-established? (or established for the first time)
6. Are you willing to continue working on your marriage – even if it means separating for now?

I recommend that you answer these questions privately and prayerfully. It may take days or even weeks. It's nice if you can let folks know you need prayer, but it's hard to hear or heed advice when you're in crisis-mode. What you don't want is to get “talked out of” your stance. (Or conversely, you don't want to get bolstered up to act rashly). You feel this way for reasons only you and your spouse can understand. Once you have answered the questions above, please pray over them and begin praying for a time to share your true feelings.

What I found was that both my husband and I needed a change – needed something to force it. It felt like my whole world was crumbling beneath my feet that day – but the only thing that was dying needed to die; the lie I was living.

### Making things right in your heart

In Chapter 1 of *Confessions of a Strong-Willed Wife* – the heart chapter - we address the role of the heart in marriage. I recommend you look at – or relook at that chapter – as it specifically concerns divorce. The question of undoing the covenant bond of marriage has been asked for a long time. We read in Deuteronomy that Moses permitted divorce. And because of this (and also to trap him, the Scripture says), the religious leaders asked Jesus his opinion on the subject.

Matthew 19:8 (All scripture passages are New American Standard): *“ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.’”*

Hard heart in Greek is literally *sklerokardia* – a word the medical community would call hardening of the arteries. Anyone who's been in a difficult marriage doesn't have to imagine what that feels like. It will literally kill the heart over time. The Lord is not telling us to commit

to a slow, painful death. The beautiful truth of the New Covenant in Jesus's blood is that we are given a heart transplant – *"I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit within you. I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."* Ezekiel 36:26

Yet my heart was choking – even my new, Jesus-given heart was hardening – because no matter what I tried, it seemed the results never changed. Or did they? Only you can be the judge of how much is enough. Stan has remained sober now for 6 months and that is nothing short of a miracle. Did he become Prince Charming? No, but I can't tell myself nothing changed. It's a curious phenomenon that when we get fed up we tend to only listen to our side of the story and lose perspective. This is one of the reasons that going to a marriage counselor can be beneficial.

### Our new heart desires the truth

As Jesus was preparing his disciples for the crisis of the cross and his leaving them he said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life."* John 14:6 He was assuring them then, as he does us today, that we can know the truth. Our new heart has a way of letting us know when we're veering off course. I have learned these past few months that there's a difference between healthy submission and fooling yourself. When submitting to a greater good, the Lord will show you, nudge you, even keep you up at night when you fail to obey. But when you submit because you are being spineless, it continues to weigh on you and hurt you. This kind of submission won't stay submitted. When crisis happens, it will turn to fight or flight.

I'm not saying that you should stand up for yourself in a loud, abrasive way. On the contrary, we are to be gentle and humble – always. But submission and sacrifice have to come from an honest place – just as love and forgiveness have to – from a clean heart.

### We can't trade one lie for another

Running away from my husband's authority doesn't set me free to live life on my own terms. In our modern culture, we see and hear that independence is the same as freedom. But that simply is not true. Walking away from the rules doesn't make them any less real. It may make you feel in charge, but you can't get away from government and parents and laws and responsibilities. And it's the same spiritually. You can walk away from your commitment, but it doesn't make God see it in any different light. God is all about authority. Listen to this story about how Jesus heals sickness:

*"The Centurion soldier sent friends to say to Jesus, '...say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes... when Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him and turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not*

*found such great faith even in Israel.' Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well." Luke 7: 9*

We need to understand that obedience to authority and to God's will not only helps us, it holds the power to heal. If you feel, at this point, that you must walk away from a destructive marriage, I absolutely get that. Walk. Just don't run into the 'solution' without understanding how seriously God takes this principle. After explaining the hard heart 'clause' for divorce, Jesus goes with the disciples into a house and says, *"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."* Mark 10:10.

None of this matters when you're hurting, I know. I just beg you not to make decisions out of pain and fear. I challenge you to allow the one with all authority to have room to work in your situation so that you don't lose your faith in the process of losing your marriage covenant.

#### Making things right through communication

If you want to move toward a healthier marriage, you are going to have to look at your dynamics honestly and be willing to do the hard work of communication. Our Lord takes this so seriously he says if your brother has something against you, leave your gifts at the altar and go make it right (*before your heart is right to worship*). *Italics - added*

When my crisis hit, I was given the courage to address every grievance. Even the ones I hadn't admitted to myself. As I poured out my heartache, I thought I would deepen the gap between Stan and me, but in fact, it had the opposite effect!

For us, deciding to 'leave' together was only the beginning. Now, we have to figure out how to be honest rather than let things build up then zing each other for things we see wrong. We are trying hard to communicate in a way that is healthy and positive – to both give and take the other's observations without one being right and the other wrong.

Sometimes we fool ourselves with sarcasm and jokes that we're not being ugly, when we are. I realized on a recent afternoon with my mom and sisters how deeply we've adopted her passive-aggressive style of communication. I've always known it about mom, but I saw how it plays out in each of us. She was saying stuff to my sister in that roundabout way and my sister was zinging her right back. They were talking about butter and pickles, but the substance was so much deeper. It was so sad to me. I've been doing the same thing for so long!

***Lord, help me and my family as we climb our way out of this destructive tunnel up into the light of Christ. That's what God said – FIRST – "Let there be light." Without God, darkness lurks over the surface of every person's heart. And we know from our hearts, we speak.***

*Luke 6:45 - "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."*

Isn't it funny that we can fool our minds, but we can't fool our mouths?

### Making things right by following Jesus

Finally, as I contemplated what to do about the hopeless way I was feeling, I kept coming back to the same question: Am I going to be a disciple of Christ?

When I was hurt, I didn't stop being a disciple but my heart couldn't hear anything over the agony. My brother's death helped me wake up to the fact that this life is so much more than a test of pain management with me playing doctor. It is a gift; a precious, short, abundant, messy gift. When I diagnose what everyone else should be doing, I rob myself of contentment. When I choose to count it joy – these trials, this pain – when I really, really count it joy and not run to my go-to (which is my "fix") then I disarm the darkness. In me.

Thankfully, I don't do this on my own. As a believer in Jesus Christ, I have been given God's Spirit within me (we each have ~ 1 Corinthians 6:19). In some verses God's Holy Spirit is referred to as our comforter. This Greek word is 'paraklete' – which means helper, comforter, guide. And like the big, fluffy comforter on our bed; it doesn't change the temperature of the room, but it does change the experience of the one it is wrapped around.

For me, the Escape Hatch was the portal I needed to get off the crazy train of doing the same thing and hoping for different results. I could tell myself I had faith and submission because I mixed in lots of prayer, but no one was getting better – least of all, me. If this is the alarm inside your heart, it may mean you need to remove yourself from a destructive cycle and find a quiet place to pour out your heart and listen to God's Spirit. Spiritually or physically, it's better to unclog some arteries than suffer *sklerokardia*.

The *Confessions* Bible Study explains much more about recognizing where you let your heart take you and how to put your life fully under God's authority so that you can experience love and healing in your marriage. I developed it from candid journal entries and while I can't be on the journey with you, I know the Comforter can!