

Endorsements:

In over 27 years of counseling women in abusive relationships, I have not encountered a book that so thoroughly and compassionately addresses the full spectrum of abuse—especially the covert, insidious forms that often lead to confusion, self-doubt, and emotional paralysis.

This work courageously breaks free from the conventional narratives of endurance and obligation. It is a soul-stirring call to clarity, an honest, unflinching invitation to examine one's reality. It brings structure and language to the mental chaos that abuse creates, powerfully illuminating the path to freedom from deception and control. Most importantly, it firmly guides the reader toward reclaiming their identity and security in Christ alone.

To those experiencing abuse: You will feel seen, heard, and deeply understood. Finally. You will say, "Yes! Yes, that is it! That's what I couldn't put my finger on!"

To those walking alongside them: Prepare for a perspective-shifting experience that will deepen your compassion and transform your approach to support.

- Leis Steve, Uncommon Life Ministries

Cherri Raws Freeman's insightful and informative book, *He's Clean and Sober...So Where's My Happily Ever After?*, revealed to me that addiction is often just a surface-level symptom of something far more insidious and destructive underneath. It helped me to realize that my deep sense of unworthiness and constant anxiety actually had a source. Cherri gave me the language to unravel an entire hidden subsystem of coercive control and abuse that had been flowing powerfully beneath the surface, unchecked by family members, licensed therapists, members and leaders of the church, and even by myself. With consistent truth, gentleness, impactful personal stories, scriptural clarity, and profound statements, Cherri created a space where I felt truly known and offered a clear path toward hope and healing.

- Katie - A thankful reader

It may be unusual for a man to be endorsing a book written primarily for an audience of women! I have journeyed with Cherri for 45 years through good, bad, and ugly chapters of life. I read and scrutinized her manuscript as a male, pastor, and professor whose life bears the pain and scars of having friends and family living in the aftermath of addiction recovery and sobriety. This book shines a light on the complexity of life for a frequently forgotten or hidden audience who are bewildered and suffer in silence. It is not only insightful but also deeply convicting because it exposes the reality that, "Sobriety is step one. Healing is the real journey." Even though some of the author's truth is hard to hear, it is a masterclass in why

Christians and churches must be proactive in creating space to understand, support, and walk beside those healing from many aspects of post-addiction abuse.

- Dr James Ayers, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Lancaster Bible College, Capitol Seminary and Graduate School
Department of Church and Ministry Leadership

My relationship with Cherri Raws Freeman spans nearly six decades. Though we had little contact for many years, we reconnected about ten years ago and quickly rediscovered a shared passion: helping women embrace their freedom in Christ. Cherri was ministering to women affected by addiction in their families, and I was working with women in the church and those facing life-controlling issues. We took an abuse advocacy course together through *Give Her Wings* and have since had many deep conversations about how the Christian community has often failed to support women in destructive and abusive relationships.

This book brings together two of Cherri's greatest passions: offering hope to women who feel forgotten after their partner's recovery, and providing practical, Christ-centered tools to help them move forward. She writes with honesty, humility, and deep compassion—for herself and for others.

Even if you're not in this situation yourself, you will gain insight, empathy, and a better understanding of how to walk alongside women who are.

- Donna

Have you ever felt like you're walking on eggshells in your marriage, waiting for the next blow-up? So many of us— strong in our faith— are silently breaking inside. Reading Cherri's book felt like someone finally saw me. With wisdom, grace, and hard-won insight, she speaks directly to women of faith who feel stuck in painful, confusing relationships. Her words bring clarity, compassion, and hope. You'll begin to see your situation for what it truly is—and discover that, even in the middle of the mess, God offers you a path toward healing and the abundant life He promises.

- Anne

This book touches on something no one talks about, especially not in the church. And yet so many of us go through it: the confusion, the loneliness, the invalidation. We don't have the words for what's happening to us, and everyone around us doesn't seem to see it. Because they've 'met Christ' or "worked on themselves,' we're supposed to believe they're healed. So then what is making me still feel this deep pain? I blamed myself through it, looked to my own shame and brokenness to explain the pain, not realizing I was in an abusive relationship.

Cherri was the first person who helped me see that just because someone recovers from addiction doesn't mean they've healed their relational patterns. Abuse can still happen. This book made me feel seen and helped me see myself. *For the first time, I felt validated, and I was able to validate myself, years after being left confused, gaslit, and convinced I was to*

blame. I had so many moments reading through this book where things clicked, and words gave shape to my experience through the insight of Cherri and the experiences of others. I found myself highlighting page zafter page. I know this will speak to other women that are unheard, unseen both by themselves and others in the midst of a confusing cloud of abuse. I pray it lands in the hands of everyone who needs it. God is using Cherri to bring truth and healing to those stuck in places that most people can't even identify. I'm excited to witness God work through Cherri's book, touching and bringing healing to many.

- Jaylin

I thank God for using your pain and suffering through all the chaos of living with an abuser, so you can be a major help to other women suffering in silence. I too have listened to men's stories holding the mic while the wife just cringed. My husband and I have had a hard time listening to some of the men's testimony's because we saw "sobriety, but no transformation." It is so true that the man with the mic gets the praise. Thanks, Cherri, for writing this most needed book. You are a true inspiration.

- Pat

I feel as if Cherri was living in my house during my very destructive marriage to a man who claimed to be set free from addiction and also claimed to be a pastor but was anything

but. Many victims hesitate to share what is going on with their family, friends, co-workers. However, you need to listen to your gut/heart and shout from the rooftops for help as these pages come alive within you.

Cherri has reached out to us with this gift as a professional, trained through her own life's experiences, as well as her extensive education and compassion for others needing victim abuse counseling. You will recognize that it's time for additional support on your own journey within these pages. and Cherri helps you take that well-deserved first leap to an abundant life.

- Jacqui

Instead of sweeping it under the carpet or stuffing it into the closet, Cherri helps the abused deal with it and bring it into the light. Through Christ they can learn to live victoriously and be free. There is victory in Jesus. Many will learn their true identity because of this book.

- Dr. Bill Welte, Executive Director of Advancement,
America's Keswick Conference Center and Addiction
Recovery Ministry

In *He's Clean and Sober...So Where's My Happily Ever After?* Cherri Freeman addresses a topic I've not seen in print before but one that needs to be. When asked if she could send me a questionnaire for research, it struck me how many women I personally know who have been through similar situations. The church needs a

greater understanding that sobriety is only one step in the journey to spiritual growth. I hope that Cherri's book will provide help and healing for women in post-addiction abusive relationships and encouragement to the church to provide the needed help.

- Ruth

This book is an eye opener! The trauma that women go through is written with clarity and excellence. It expounds on the truth, repentance, and healing! The book is a helpful tool for all with pliable hearts, for the church, pastors, abuser, and most importantly the person who is being abused. This book will help in guiding all to be like Christ.

- Sandra

"Cherri Raws Freeman's new book, *He's Clean and Sober...So Where's My Happily Ever After?*" is a must read for churches and biblical counselors. Emotional abuse is little understood especially within most churches, and their ignorance of its true emotional and spiritual destructiveness is devastating to the woman who is living this nightmare. For women caught in this nightmare, this book gives them understanding, voice and hope. This book is born from her many years of her own journey of emotional and spiritual abuse. Now, God is using those years to reach out and help others caught in the nightmare and bring them safely to the other side to hope and freedom. *He's Clean and Sober...*" needs to be in every pastor's and counselors' library."

- MaryAnn Kiernan, MA Counseling, Former Intake Coordinator America's Keswick Colony of Mercy

Cherri Raws Freeman writes another book with depth and excellence, this one about the unexpected continuation of spousal abuse after addiction recovery. It is a wealth of information, a must-read for those in abuse or who know someone who is. Cherri touches on every aspect and tackles hard truths fearlessly. She does this beautifully, with the gentleness of a compassionate counselor.

- Beth Endicott

He's Clean and Sober... is a much-needed and deeply heartfelt work, uniquely shaped by Cherri's personal journey—not only growing up at America's Keswick, but also leading a support ministry for families of those in addiction, and walking her own path through these challenges.

With both truth and compassion, Cherri sheds light on the pain, sorrow, and frustration of living with an outwardly sober spouse who continues destructive, sinful behaviors in a so-called “Christian” home. She addresses the gaslighting and misplaced shame often heaped on wives—by the ex-addict, by churches, and by well-meaning Christians—when the deep healing still needed is ignored.

- Jeanette

*He's Clean and Sober...
So Where's My
Happily Ever After?*

A GUIDE TO SEEING, NAMING, AND
HEALING FROM POST-ADDICTION ABUSE

CHERRI RAWES
FREEMAN

He's Clean and Sober...So Where's My Happily Ever After

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Dedication

For Barbara and Dorothy — two of the most beautiful souls I have ever known — who suffered torment for many years at the hands of those who had promised to love, honor, and cherish them.

When they were finally set free from their abusers, they walked forward with dignity and humor, refusing to let the past destroy their future. They loved beauty and music. They chose deep relationships and loyalty over anger and bitterness. They loved their children, grandchildren, and friends well.

My life has been richly blessed by your example and your friendship. You are my heroes.

Contents

Chapter 1:

A Call for Truth and Healing 15

Chapter 2:

The Myth of Sobriety as a Cure 9

Chapter 3:

The Intersection of Body, Soul,
and Spirit in Addiction and Abuse 21

Chapter 4:

Coercive Control—The Hidden Abuse 31

Chapter 5:

The Many Faces of Abuse 42

Chapter 6:

The Poison of Entitlement—
“I Deserve It” and the Destruction It Brings 65

Chapter 7:

Does a Diagnosis of Mental Health Issues
or Personality Disorders Excuse Abuse? 76

Chapter 8:

Clean, But Not Free 96

Chapter 9:

Intermittent Reinforcement and Trauma Bonding:

The Invisible Chains of Abuse After Sobriety 120

Chapter 10:

Tactics of a Toxic Person 136

Chapter 11:

Myths That Keep Women Trapped. 151

Chapter 12:

Can He Change? Will He Change? 177

Chapter 13:

The Woman's Journey—Breaking Free from Abuse . . 198

Chapter 14:

Boundaries are the Most Loving

Thing You Can Do. 231

Chapter 15:

When the Church Fails to Protect

and Value Women 246

Chapter 16:

The Church as a Safe Haven 265

Chapter 17:

Rebuilding Life in Christ 281

Chapter 18:

Resources for Women in Toxic Relationships. 292

Chapter 19:

A Final Word: You Are Not Alone,
and This Is Not the End 304

Appendix A

A Note to Ministry Leaders: 315

About the Author 320

Author's Note. 322

Acknowledgements 323

A Note on the Writing Process 325

Endnotes. 326

Chapter 1:

A CALL FOR TRUTH AND HEALING

“The torrent of words came at me as a tsunami, unexpected, unstoppable, inescapable, unbearable. It had started, as tsunamis do, with a pulling back, a few moments of quiet mulling over my supposed infraction, preparing himself for the verbal attack. And then it would hit. Like a constricting snake wrapping itself around my head, the words seemed to have a life of their own, squeezing hope and peace out and replacing them with despair and questions. Had I actually done anything this time to provoke this? How can I make my apology quickly enough to avert the onslaught, all the while knowing that I hadn’t done anything to cause it and was powerless to stop it. I couldn’t escape to another room, as he would follow me. I couldn’t get out of the house fast enough, as he would block the door or take the keys to the car. I felt as if the world were crashing in yet again. Words of condemnation and recrimination, words of shaming and guilt, words of my past failure and criticism of my children all

flowed out without check or concern for the destruction he was causing. For that was the point, after all. Destruction would keep me under control and on edge, hoping to just do enough and be perfect enough to not have to go through this again, except that was not possible. There would always be another time, and it wouldn't be far in the future. It was lurking just around the corner, waiting for him to need to get the next high of explosive anger and to keep me in my place."

For years, this was my normal—an endless cycle of confusion, control, and emotional exhaustion. Moments like this happened so often that I stopped asking when the next one would come and started asking how I could survive them. I didn't realize then how deeply the fear, guilt, and isolation had taken hold. I only knew that I had lost my voice, my peace, and my sense of reality. And yet, like so many women in faith communities, I stayed.

Until one day, my body said what my voice could not.

I woke up bewildered in the hospital emergency department, with no idea why I was there, when I had arrived, or why I was lying on a hospital bed when I didn't feel sick. My friend sat in the chair next to my bed, looking extremely tired and worried. A doctor came on the screen in front of me and asked me questions such as who the president was and what year it was. Usually, I was the one in the chair and X was in the hospital bed, but X was nowhere in sight, which was confusing—but also a big relief.

The day had been extremely stressful, on top of months of fatigue, pressure, and emotional uncertainty. My brain responded by going into a type of short-lived amnesia. I didn't remember the ambulance ride, CT scan, or anything that

had happened for about six hours. It was as if I had been in a deep, dreamless sleep while still being awake. I couldn't create memories during that time and drove my friend crazy asking the same question over and over again every few minutes. Little did I know that it was the beginning of the end of a nightmare that had started ten years earlier.

As I lay in that hospital bed, the fog in my mind slowly began to lift—not just from the present confusion, but from the storm of the past decade that had led me there. To understand how I ended up in such a broken place, I have to go back to the beginning—back to when I first met X.

X was finishing up an internship at a rehab when I first talked with him. He had come into the program after many years of addiction to drugs, alcohol, and sex, stayed for their second-phase program, and then was offered an internship counseling and supervising the men in the first phase of rehab. He was charming, gregarious, funny, and exuded a love for Jesus. He had a powerful testimony of transformation that was engaging and encouraging. I was at a very low point in my life, having gone through a second divorce just a year prior to meeting him, and I felt as if God were very disappointed in me, at best, and done with me, at worst.

From the moment we first talked, it felt like an unstoppable force had entered my life. At the time, I believed that God had brought X to me to assist my healing and to help me know His love in a new way. After he finished his internship, he began spending nearly all day, every day at my house—probing into my past and taking up so much of my time that it became hard

to think clearly. There were some red flags occasionally, but I chalked them up to his being in a process of growth after many years of destructive living. There were times that I wanted to break up with him, but then he would become incredibly loving, affirming, and overwhelming to me emotionally, and I couldn't go through with it.

Within six months, we were married—much to the dismay of my family and friends, though I didn't know about some of their concerns at the time. It felt as if I were being carried along in a rushing river, unable to get to the shore and climb out or even catch my breath.

He thought that we should go into addiction ministry—first with an organization where we trained, and later with our own non-profit. The plan was for him to work with people in addiction, and I would work with the families. On the surface, it sounded ideal. But the underlying patterns of dysfunction that had never been addressed became more and more destructive. He became seriously ill six months into our marriage and dealt with varying levels of illness throughout the years. His medical condition, combined with our shared ministry work, became the seemingly unbreakable chains that kept me tied to him.

It felt as if I were living on a rollercoaster built in a minefield. I never knew what would set him off. Once triggered, he might go on for hours—or even days—ranting at me over something I had supposedly done to hurt him. Over time, I felt increasingly isolated from my children and family. I was told that I shouldn't talk about the problems in our marriage with anyone but him. I felt as if I were walking on eggshells every moment of the day.

It seemed as if he needed my constant attention from the moment I woke up in the morning until we went to bed. Noise abuse may sound like a strange concept, but it was very real to me—it felt as if he never stopped talking, even during movies or while I was working. If I was in the shower, he would come into the bathroom and continue talking. If I asked him to stop, there would be a stretch of cold silence, followed by an outpouring of criticism—about me, my children, my past relationships—anything that could intimidate me into submission.

There were times he would quote Psalm 51 or other Scripture verses in ways that made me feel disloyal, unsubmitive, or unspiritual. These conversations left me confused and unsure of what had even started the “argument” in the first place.

After a few years, I finally opened up to several close friends and eventually to my sisters. They were incredibly supportive and helped me process the things he said so I didn’t lose my grip on reality. But it was hard to find the privacy to talk. I had to be careful to erase emails and texts, as he began going through my phone and email, looking for evidence of whatever he was trying to find. My loved ones wanted me to leave long before I did, but I felt bound by the ministry, his illness, and the overwhelming guilt. How could I justify leaving someone who claimed to be dying—especially when our work and lives were so deeply intertwined?

I prayed daily that God would take one of us home in order that this would be over. I didn’t want to face another divorce.

I reached out to a pastor at my church on two separate occasions to share what I was going through. He responded with

concern and began meeting with X after the second conversation. I also insisted that X pursue counseling, and I began seeing a counselor myself. A ministry mentor had previously tried to help us through marriage counseling—something I now understand is not appropriate in abusive relationships. While I believe the intentions were sincere, the reality was that these efforts didn't address the core issue of abuse, and nothing truly changed.

My body began to reflect the toll of the constant stress—multiple episodes of diverticulitis eventually led to bowel resection surgery. The emotional and physical strain wore me down in every way. The deep wounds X carried from his past, combined with longstanding toxic patterns and the ongoing medical issues, created a perfect storm in our marriage that I could not weather alone.

When I ended up in the hospital—bewildered and broken—God began the work of healing that I so desperately needed. He plucked me out of a destructive situation and used the people who loved me—my children, sisters, and friends—to tell X that I would no longer be in the relationship.

My niece, thinking she'd be helping me for a few weeks, graciously took me in for nine months until the divorce was finalized and I could return to my home. Since then, God has provided every step of the way. I've entered into a new life of service through coaching and counseling women who are or have walked through difficult relationships. He continues to care for me, financially and spiritually, and often blesses me with beautiful surprises. My family and friends are an incredible gift.

I am reminded of Psalm 40:2:

“He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along.” (NLT)

I believe in transformation. I truly do. My family legacy has been wrapped up in that concept since the 1890s when my great-grandfather found freedom from addiction and started the Colony of Mercy at America’s Keswick, the oldest rehab in the country. Thousands of people have found a new life free from addiction and family dysfunction through the ministry of the Colony for men and now Barbara’s Place for women.

As I watched the men of The Colony sing their theme song Victory in Jesus last night, however, I couldn’t help wondering how many of them would truly find healing and how many would just get clean and sober. Through the years I have watched the metamorphosis from a life of destruction to full restoration of life in Christ in many. But there is a subset of men (and women) who retain their old relationship patterns. Yes, they are not drugging and drinking or doing any other kind of life-dominating addiction that can be seen to the outside observer, but they hold on to ways of relating that are toxic to those around them. Abusers have learned the language of transformation but refuse the process of becoming like Jesus and letting Him live His life in and through them. They wear the mask of godliness, but the fruit of the Spirit is not present in their lives. Their testimony may bring many to tears of joy, but who sees the tears of pain their wife sheds behind closed doors? Where is her miracle? The patterns of coercive control

and abuse continue unabated, and yet she may feel locked in by the “testimony.” Who leaves a marriage after the partner is supposedly free from addiction when she has supported him all through the process?

The purpose of this book is to bring a spotlight of truth to understand toxic patterns of relating even after someone has become sober, to show God’s heart for the abused, to bring hope for life after abuse, and to encourage churches to step up to the plate to support her journey. I have walked this path myself and want you to know that there is hope. You are not alone.

While this book was written for women who are experiencing abuse and coercive control after their partner became sober, I have seen and recognize that there are abusive women who practice the same kinds of behaviors. For any man who reads this book, please know that I hear you and have great compassion for what you are experiencing. The principles are the same, no matter who is being abused, but the experience is not completely the same for men and women, so I will address the problems from a woman’s perspective and pray that you will find the help you need specific to what you are going through.

The stories that are included in the book have been courageously shared by those who have been where you are. Names and identifiers have been changed to protect their privacy and safety. Some of the stories are composites of multiple women’s experiences.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is that of Hagar, the Egyptian slave of Sarai, wife of Abram. When Sarai was unable to conceive and bear an heir, she took matters into her own

hands and told Abram to take her slave Hagar and use her to produce offspring (Genesis 16). This was never God's plan for Abram and Sarai, which has led to much conflict in our world. When Hagar got pregnant, Sarai abused her so much that she ran away into the wilderness. It was there that God met her and assured her of His care for her and her baby. Hagar was the first person in the Bible to give God a name: El Roi, meaning The God Who Sees. God cared for an abused, enslaved, pregnant woman. He cares for you and all that you are going through also. He sees, even when others don't or don't want to believe you.

Psalm 34:17-19: "When his people pray for help, he listens and rescues them from their troubles. The Lord is there to rescue all who are discouraged and have given up hope. The Lord's people may suffer a lot, but he will always bring them safely through (CEV)."

A Word to Men and Pastors Reading This Book

Some readers may wonder if this book is harsh toward men or critical of the Church and its leaders. Please know that this is not the intent. I deeply believe there are good and godly men—men who stand courageously against injustice, live with integrity, and show compassion in the face of real-life struggles. I also know there are churches and pastors who faithfully walk

with the wounded, supporting and serving those caught in painful and complex situations, often at great personal cost.

This book is not a blanket condemnation of men or pastors, nor an indictment of the Church as a whole. Rather, it is a focused examination of a particular kind of harm that is often misunderstood or mishandled—especially within Christian communities. Most pastors have had little or no training in recognizing coercive control or supporting victims of abuse, and many feel overwhelmed by the breadth of needs presented to them.

My hope is that you will read this with courage and curiosity—not as a critique of your heart or your calling, but as an invitation to grow in wisdom, compassion, and practical understanding. There are resources listed later in this book for training pastors and churches to be safe havens. I personally am ready to assist, encourage, empower, and teach—not to point a finger but to lend a hand.