Be Known, the Podcast

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Episode 76: How to Know When to Walk Away (Original Script)

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This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_76\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known and where your people do, too.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of.

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Recently, there’s been a lot of talk around me about relationships that are ending or feel like they might end. People sitting across me in the counseling room, in Voxer conversations, across the work lunch table, and over a cup of coffee. Fears of what to do, uncertainty about the future. Frustrations about what’s going on in the relationship. Hopelessness about moving forward. We’ve talked about the ending of friendships a couple of times on this podcast in Episode 14: When to Say Goodbye and helpful practices when your friends leave that my friend Mary B. Safrit wrote in episode 67. I think it’d be helpful to go back and listen to those, too, in this conversation.

But what I’ve been hearing lately is such distress and confusion on how to know when it’s time to walk away from a relationship. Or from a group of relationships. This has also been the cause of much of my own distress over the years— when to stay and when to go.

Relationships are so hard. We talk about and will continue talking about those layers and difficulties on this podcast. Relationships are so so hard. Anytime we invest our heart and soul and time and energy into another person, there’s risk involved. Risk that we’ll get our hearts broken or be hurt or disappointed. Risk others will abandon us. Risk it won’t work out. There’s always risk because we’re always human. We’ll never be perfect on this side of heaven. Never. Relationships are risky, but sometimes, they’re worth the risk.

Because without them, we can’t be whole. Remember, we were made for relationship. It’s not good for us to be alone all the time.

We can’t avoid relationships with people because the risks feel too great. I know there are many things I don’t know about you and your story. I don’t know who’s hurt you and how. I don’t know the betrayals. The lies. The manipulation. The emotional neglect. The abuse you’ve gone through. And you don’t know what I’ve walked through, either.

I can’t possibly know how hard it is for you to do relationships in your life unless I know you, but regardless of the lack of personal context, I can still say that relationships are worth the risk. Not all of them, but some are. And I’m not 100% sure, if ‘m honest, I know which ones are fully worth it. Maybe the ones that are safe.

But there is always this risk the relationship will end at some point. And gosh, that is crazy scary. It doesn’t bother us as much when shallow relationships end— acquaintances, maybe some work relationships, maybe some old school relationships. Maybe some weird extended family relationships.

But what can be crushing is when the closer relationships end.

It’s a form of grief that’s hard to describe.

A grief that doesn’t say goodbye because of death and it’s inevitability, though sometimes that grief is completely unexpected and it’s own kind of hard. But this grief over the ending of a relationship is one that’s a forced goodbye because of someone’s choices. You or the other person chose to walk away. To pull away. To hurt. To leave. And that kind of grief can be paralyzing if you’re the one who’s been left.

But what if you’re the one trying to decide whether to leave to to stay?

These are some of the most difficult choices we’ll ever have to make.

How? How do we know when to walk away?

I think it’s important here to also note that there are some relationships that are easier to walk away from that others. For example, if you’re married and struggling with this, especially if you have children, it may be a lot more complicated for you. No, I know it will be a lot more complicated for you.

And we don’t need to have the same expectations for all our relationships, either. So what I’m about to share about how to know when to walk away may not completely apply because each situation is so unique. Please please take the time to process this with a close friend, mentor, or counselor. My disclaimer here is that I’m not telling you specifically you should walk away. I’m telling you when it may be time to consider it.

And this could be walking away from a group of relationships (like a workplace or church or group of friends). It could be walking away from just one. It could be leaving a friendship, a romantic relationship, a marriage even. There will be some things that don’t crossover because all those relationships again are different and the expectations, therefore, should be different.

With that in mind, how do we know when it’s time to walk away?

1. Be mindful and prayerful.

 I can’t give you all these answers and neither can anyone else. We can help provide wisdom and counsel, but in the end, you’ll have to make the decision. You’ll need to spend a lot of time in reflection and prayer to get an answer you seek. So be mindful. Be mindful of your feelings and thoughts with and about this relationship. Be mindful of your history with the person, the highs and lows. The patterns. The changes made or not made. Be prayerful and reflective. Ask God what to do. I can’t promise he’ll always give you a clear answer in neon lights, but he will guide the way. But I’m not the kind of person who thinks he always tells you to stay, even in marriage. He might show it’s time to leave. Are you ready fo that kind of answer?

2. The negative patterns aren’t changing.

 And maybe they’re getting worse even after you’ve confronted the person, shared how you feel, expressed what you need to be changed in order to continue in the relationship. This is key. Have you done all you can do? Have you been honest? Have you given your fair share to the relationship? Have you tried? Have you changed what you needed to change? Relationships take two. But is the other person changing? Is the group changing? If the negative patterns of abuse, neglect, control, manipulation, contempt, pride, betrayal, selfishness, emotional and physical distance, lack of intentionality, and etc. continue, gosh, maybe that’s the sign you need. It’s your choice to remain or not in something like this. You can’t expect perfection, but you *can* expect change. Let me also note, negative behavior doesn’t always have to be a pattern to give you reason to leave. A major betrayal, for example, needs to only happen once. Or any sort of serious abuse. Yeh, that only needs to happen once to give you reason to leave the relationship.

3. There is little to no connection.

 Maybe there’s no conversations happening anymore, any hanging out. Maybe the person has stopped answering your texts or calls. Maybe they’re creating distance (maybe even on purpose). Maybe you’ve stopped knowing one another and trying to. Maybe there’s no more intentionality. Connections don’t always last forever, even though some feel like they might. But there needs to be some connection, some knowing and loving, some seeing and caring for a person. Some listening and understanding. Some laughter and shared interests. Some time spent together. There *has* to be some of that, or maybe a lot of that (like in a best friendship or marriage) in order for a relationship to survive. And if that stuff is minimal or not happening at all? Gosh, maybe the relationship is ending. Or maybe it’s time to try to reconnect. And if the attempts to reconnect aren’t working over a period of time, then maybe it’s time to walk away.

4. Your time with the person becomes much more life-draining than life-giving.

 When you’re around them, it feels extremely uncomfortable or you feel on edge the whole time. You stop enjoying their company and being around them drains you. That could be sign, though we do need to remember that people go through hard seasons and that season may be more draining for you to be around them because they’re going through a lot. If that season of feeling drained around them lasts, like, a crazy long time, that could be communicating to you that you no longer want to be in the relationship.

5. And finally, you can no longer be your full, authentic self in their presence.

 Either because they’re judgmental, they don’t seem to care, they have stopped wanting to know the real you. There could be a million reasons right here— It could be helpful to go back and listen to Ep. 59: When Safe People No Longer Feel Safe for more on this. But there’s something about the relationship that has made you pull away or pull inward, maybe as a form of protection, because you no longer feel you are free to be your full self. That’s a problem that can’t be ignored.

Y’all, I can’t tell you today what you’re walking away will look like because I don’t know your situation or if these things really are reason enough. Your walking away may be cutting off communication. It may be separating or filing for divorce. It may be telling the person or group you’re leaving. And maybe your window of tolerance is greater than others. Maybe you can take this stuff I just mentioned like a champ. Or maybe that just means you’re avoiding problems. But if these things are present, gosh, it may be time to walk away.

I hear you. I hear how distressing this is. How heart-breaking it is. I hear how hard it is. How some relationships have all this going on and you may feel stuck because of a thousand reasons. Gosh, do I hear you.

And I believe forgiveness is absolutely possible, but reconciliation may not be. Just because you decide to leave doesn’t mean you haven’t forgiven the person, or maybe yourself.

But here’s what I’m thankful for in this conversation— I’m thankful we have a God who sees. Who never leaves. Who does gently point us in the directions we need to. He’s not a God that always tells us to stay in unhealthy relationships. Sometimes, he gives us the permission to go. Because he wants us to experience whole relationships, and he knows not all relationships will mend. He knows because he’s seen it over and over. Does it break his heart? I think so, because it wasn’t supposed to be this way. But I think it breaks his heart more to see us remain in toxic, abusive, lonely, broken situations that don’t change. That only break us more if we stay.

Today, may you remember that he is for you. He is with you. And he wants the best for you.

May you be brave to face the brokenness in your own relationships and know when it’s time to walk away.

Amen.

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that knowing when it may be time to walk away form a relationship will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, [kerrahfabacher.com](http://kerrahfabacher.com), as well as other resources.

Just a heads up! I’ll be taking a super short two week break from the podcast because I’m speaking at a couple of local women’s conferences and need to spend my extra time prepping for those, and I know my margin is small in this season. But I’ll see you again soon!

Follow along on Instagram @kerrahfabacher to know when the podcast will return!

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.