



Episode 36: Healing Beyond Relational Betrayal, Conversation with Geoff Steurer, MS, LMFT

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:33):

Hello, everyone! Welcome to today's podcast episode. I am thrilled to be having a conversation today with Geoff Steurer, who is a fellow LMFT, an online course creator for relationships, and the host of the From Crisis to Connection podcast. Hey, Geoff, thanks for joining me today!

Geoff Steurer (00:55):

And thank you for having me! It's good to be here.

Liz Higgins (00:58):

It's awesome to have you here. And it's, um, our, our, our connection is exciting, because we met through Instagram. So very millennial, very with the times with our world today. But it's, it's been so cool to follow your page. You know... There's, like, a handful of Instagram pages that I like to really tune into, and yours' is one of them because you are just putting some really authentic content out there around relationships. But even more specifically, like moving... Moving and healing beyond betrayal, which is so huge for our world today. And just what many, many people go through in their relationships.

Geoff Steurer (01:39):

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Thank you so much. It's the world I live in. And I'm constantly working on repairing any sort of little damages or things that I do in my OWN relationships. That's near and dear to my heart. I just, I just believe healthy relationships are based on constant repair.

Liz Higgins (01:56):

Absolutely! They are. And we know that, and that's why I'm so excited to do my part with this podcast to hopefully just put more, um, more incredible conversations out - like the one we're going

to have today. And just a note, like... I was so excited to be a guest on your podcast (which I don't know when that one is coming out, maybe soon). But I definitely encourage people to go take a listen to that. We'll post a link to my episode that I got to do with you on your podcast about relational mindfulness. That was a lot of fun!

Geoff Steurer (02:26):

Yeah. That one surprised me. I didn't really know exactly where we were going to end up with it. And I was so happy with where our conversation took us and I learned a lot as well from you on that. So yeah, I'm excited to share it with my audience. It'll be out in a few weeks!

Liz Higgins (02:41):

YAY! Well, today we're talking about betrayal. And you know, this is kind of your arena and what you do with clients, and like I said, what you kind of put out into the world on your social media platforms. So I'd love to hear a little bit about maybe what got you into this particular interest and, just some of those common experiences that you see people navigating through. When we talk about betrayal, like what, what does that even mean? What kind of experiences are people having?

Geoff Steurer (03:14):

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. Um, I mean, I've been working... I've been working with couples, primarily, for the past 15 years of my 22 year career. The first 7 years I worked with children mostly, and I found myself always wanting to get ahold of their parents, because there just had been so much, um... There had been so much chaos and problems in the family. And I could just tell at the top, things were not right from the relationship. The adults in the house. And when I started working with parents (which basically were marriages, relationships, partnerships), it's really all about betrayal. It's all about people feeling like somebody hurt them or isn't showing up for them. Doesn't care about them. Um, sometimes (in most cases, at least in my caseload now) there's been some serious breach of trust. There's been some broken commitment, some lines crossed.

Geoff Steurer (04:07):

Um, whether it's an explicit contract that's been broken, like, "Hey, we agreed this wouldn't happen." or something that they learn kind of more implicitly like, "Hey, this really matters to me." but then the person may not care about it. So then that's when the betrayal really deepens. So we're constantly living in a world of relationships where we're having expectations and hoping other people hold them. And then when they don't, we feel hurt. How do we navigate that? How do we bring it up? How do we deal with it? How do we re-bond and reconnect and get back on track? I mean, this is, this is the work of relationships.

Liz Higgins (04:44):

Hmm... Absolutely. 100%. And I think we are doing this work as therapists and as humans, as anybody listening to this. We're in such an interesting time. Because, like, you're talking about explicit rules, but there could be some things that people don't even realize are important. Boundaries, limits, values for them - until the breach kind of happens. I mean, we do a lot of premarital work here with couples and we try to encourage those, uh, quote unquote preventative conversations. Right. But, you know, life doesn't always stay how we would hope that it would be, and we can't possibly cover every single potential breach of trust. And I don't mean that to kind of

say like, 'so just expect something bad to happen.' No. But I think that, with technology and with how connected we are to these platforms of connecting to the outside world, there's just more and more and more of these places where, you know, broken trust can precipitate. And, you know, it's just important to note, I think, as we dive into this conversation.

Geoff Steurer (06:00):

Yeah, absolutely. And a lot of... I think it was John Van Epp that said that, um, when you're thinking about who you're going to be with long-term - in a partnership, a marriage - you want to find somebody who's open to changing, open to learning. And if you can put that in place, someone who's willing to say, 'Oh, I didn't realize I had this blind spot' or, 'Oh, that's important to you. Okay.' Someone who's willing to adapt, pivot, change, flex... Those kinds of things will allow you to navigate through the smaller betrayals, hopefully prevent larger betrayals... But it just makes things so much easier when you're partnered with somebody who recognizes that mistakes are opportunities to learn.

Liz Higgins (06:42):

Oh yeah. Absolutely. And I guess a lot of times these betrayals, and, you know, impasses that couples face can really be moments where you choose to consciously create a new narrative - together, separately, like however it kind of pans out. But I think, relationally speaking, they are really opportunities for growth and development. Growing up, you know? So, I mean, I'd love to just hear a little bit from you around that experience where, okay. You're in a relationship, the trust has been breached. Something has occurred, a betrayal. Maybe just even starting by, like, describing what are the normal things for people to be experiencing in that point of it all?

Geoff Steurer (07:30):

Yeah, for sure. The bulk of... Maybe before I jump into that, the bulk of the cases that I really started working with about 15 years ago, when I really got into working with rebuilding trust and helping couples navigate this was really around sexual betrayal. And, for most couples that commit publicly, like in a marriage, there's, there's an expectation of monogamy in most of these cases. Well, in virtually all of them. Um, and, and what happens there is when that... When there's a discovery, when there's a confession, when there's some sort of recognition that, the explicit contract of, 'Hey, we both agreed on this, you changed.' The first thing for most people is, is shock. In order to, to live in a relationship and sort of have the benefits of that secure commitment, we let our guard down.

Geoff Steurer (08:24):

We might have our guard up at work. We might have it up, uh, everywhere else in our lives. But in our, in our marriage or in our committed relationship, in order for it to really be connecting, safe, secure for us to really open ourselves up and be vulnerable, we have to live unguarded. We have to let our, let our partner have full access to all of us. Our thoughts, our feelings, our hopes, our dreams, our bodies. I mean, we just work to blend and connect. And obviously we're still individuals, but we're sharing our lives in a way we don't with other people. And when that betrayal happens, it's like everything just retracts. Everything is... There's shock. Almost like, 'I feel like I'm standing here humiliated, naked, exposed, stupid. Um, I hate myself. I hate you. I can't believe...' It's like this existential crisis of, 'I don't even know how to organize the world anymore because I built my life

around this idea that I understood who you were, who I was, what we were doing.' When that changes, it's so hard to think clearly. So there's a real shock, a trauma. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (09:28):

Yeah. I'm glad that you used that term because it, it really is that way. And I think with the more we know about our brains and our, our protective systems, our nervous systems, and all that fun stuff, the more that we really can say with some certainty that betrayals of this kind of level, for a lot of people, can even lead to things like PTSD-type symptoms and experiences. Because like you're saying, you put all of you into establishing this bond, nurturing this commitment and this relational security that, for it to be broken, I mean, absolutely shock and just confusion... A lot of pain. And a lot of different, I think, I don't know. Physical, emotional, spiritual, whatever. Like, you can just be feeling a lot of different things. And so there's not going to be one way that this goes.

Geoff Steurer (10:28):

Yeah, absolutely. Some and, you know... Just like with Fight or Flight. (I think there's a few more that they've added over the years, you know, you get Fight, Flight, Freeze. And I think FAWN. Have you heard that one? Where you just go along to get along. To survive. So, so there's, there's all these different ways that people respond when they're in that betrayal trauma, when they're in that shock. And so, yeah. Some people become aggressive, some just withdraw and shut down. Some become, you know, almost more people-pleasing. And some just freeze and kind of go through life in a numbed out state. And regardless of whatever your particular response is, if you're betrayed, the fact is that there's reactivity going on. And you're not bonding. You're not connecting, you're not building a secure connection. You're now responding to a breach and there's gotta be stabilization.

Geoff Steurer (11:19):

There's gotta be structure. There's gotta be some sort of a plan (if you will) for how to rebuild, reconnect and get the couple back together. A lot of couples suffer going through life, you know, if they sweep this under the rug or just ignore it, hoping it'll go away with time. These things have to be corrected. There have to be corrective experiences and repairs of the breach for you to be able to function again at the same level of safety and comfort. And unguardedness (if you will) that proceeded the breach. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (11:51):

Well, and I'm sure you have seen this play out all sorts of different ways because you know, each couple is a different story. But am I hearing you say that pretty quickly, you want to look at this. You want to look at what happened. You want to try and get help. Does that sometimes play out with people coming in to see you by themselves? Or do you really encourage people, like, even though this happened, try to get in together as a couple? Where can people start?

Geoff Steurer (12:23):

I mean, definitely. I think that there's different levels of motivation. In my experience, most couples come in together. Most people come in together because there's, there's been a recognition that the relationship is on the line. And so it's, I would say the majority show up together. And, you know, I've never kept track of any numbers of this, but, I would definitely say in second place would be the betrayed. They come in. Because they're the ones that are, you know... It's like the person who

broke the trust, in a lot of ways has the ability to just move forward and rewrite their story and just carry on. 'Cause they, they know what they did. They can go forward and, um... The person who's been betrayed, they're the ones whose story has completely just changed.

Geoff Steurer (13:14):

They're the one who is experiencing physiological symptoms that are very distressing. Their life is not the same. And they've got a lot of shattered pieces on the ground that they need to clean up. And they often need help with that. And so if you're on the betrayal side, if you've been betrayed, it's absolutely important for you to get support - whether it's through therapy, through a group, somebody to help you. Think of it like any trauma, like a car accident or, um, a natural disaster. These aren't things that we want to heal from in isolation. We need support, we need care, we need someone to help us get our emotional balance back.

Liz Higgins (13:53):

Absolutely. Yes. And, I do want to focus in on the experience of the partner who has been betrayed. Because I think that (kind of similar to what you're saying) when people have come in to meet with me, it's usually that person or the couple. And it's such a hard place to be in because, you know, they didn't ask for this thing to happen. I'm sure that that experience of like, 'If this just didn't happen, we wouldn't be here.' And that tendency to really want to blame the partner that did the betrayal (or whatever it is) is just so common to be sitting in that space. And I think, in that position of being the one that this has happened to, there's some really common questions that I wanted to throw your way. I'm just thinking about that painful experience and have heard people ask things like, or say things like 'Once a cheater, always a cheater.' And just even asking, can trust actually be rebuilt? So what do you say to those questions? Can it?

Geoff Steurer (15:00):

Yeah, that's a famous saying. I think in the 12 Steps community, it's like "Once an addict, always an addict." "Once a cheater, always a cheater." I think we say that because of how scary and how terrifying it is to have somebody betray you. And so, I think sometimes people do that to protect themselves from getting hurt again. So they'll just write somebody off. But that's not true. People, people can change. I've done this for a long time and I, I'll tell you. People that have broken major trust, had affairs, had addictions... Even some people that have been abusive, have the capacity to change. We all have the capacity to change. I don't know about you Liz, but I couldn't get up in the morning and do this work if I didn't believe people could change.

Geoff Steurer (15:44):

I'd be a pretty cynical, bitter person. And I'm not, I'm not. I'm very hopeful and optimistic. I know what's possible. And when people apply themselves, and do the work, and show up consistently, trust can be rebuilt. And the thing is, is that, (I don't know if you've seen this in your work or not) but... Some of the people that have really dug in and done this work, to me, become some of the healthiest people I've ever worked with. They have self-awareness, they have increased compassion. They have great emotional regulation. They have impulse control. They are kind to other people. They, uh, they're committed. I mean, there's just so many of these traits that you want in a partner that they earn. And this crisis, this betrayal, this major face plant, was the doorway that opened them up to this new way of living. But they did the work, put in the time. And I feel like, if

you've got somebody like that, who's consistently showing up and working hard and they're making those changes, they're a much safer bet than somebody who you know nothing about.

Liz Higgins (16:53):

Absolutely. I, yes! I have seen that. And I think the research is there to back up exactly what you're saying - that relationships can come out of these experiences, or face plants. I like that you said it that way, because that is what it is! Even stronger, even healthier. And it's, I'm sure, crazy to think of that when you're at that breaking point and everything's just hit the fan and you're just trying to survive, uh, in a range of ways. But the fact is, is that if you stay in it and try, and both people are open to growing forward, that it can be, it can be even better.

Geoff Steurer (17:34):

Absolutely. People need to know that. I mean, I agree. It's not a very sensitive thing to say to somebody who's just been violated or betrayed that, 'Hey, your partner someday is going to be really healthy!' We don't know that. We don't know at the beginning. So that person needs emotional - first day, they need support. They need to know that, that they can get to safety and security. And then over time, that other person, the unfaithful person, has to obviously put in the work. And then, the betrayed partner will ultimately be the one who decides whether or not that person is trustworthy. So we're just talking about what's possible. We're not, in any way, saying that any one case, we know exactly how it's going to turn out. I have no idea. Because talk is cheap. We don't know what somebody's going to do until they do it. And do it for a long time.

Liz Higgins (18:25):

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And I think, I think a good therapist is never going to try to make that kind of call for somebody. But, I think it's huge for us to be able to acknowledge (as therapists) that we have seen that happen. And so, yes, that possibility is there. But I am wondering, too Geoff, like... For the betrayed partner, (and I'm just kind of thinking in my head about those like next, first and next steps, post-betrayal, and you know, the fire's kind of simmered a little bit. Enough to like, okay, we need to get some help. Let's address this.) Um... I mean, what would you say to that person? Because, I imagine that it's really hard to want to hold space for their partner who has done the betraying. To hold that space to support them in getting better. I mean, there's so much anger. There's probably resentment. Like how, how do you do that work together when you're in so much pain?

Geoff Steurer (19:27):

Oh, that's the million dollar question, Liz! That's, it's challenging. And a lot of it depends what... In terms of doing the work together, that "together" piece does depend a lot on the betrayer, the unfaithful person, the person who broke the trust. If they're belligerent, if they're unaccountable, if they're blaming, then you're not going to be doing a lot of relational work. You're going to be working on getting yourself to safety. You're going to be working on getting yourself some boundaries and some structure. And probably doing a lot of your work separate from the other person, unfortunately. It's too bad if they're, if they're going to be that kind of a person and be blaming and defensive. And so, you really have to (early on) get very clear, and do a lot of observing and say, 'Is my partner really willing to take responsibility for what they've done?'

Geoff Steurer (20:19):

Are they working to have compassion? Are they honoring the limits and the requests that I'm setting to keep myself safe and secure?' If it's yes to all of those, and you've got a partner who feels remorse, who's honoring boundaries, who's owning up to what they've done, and they're working hard to repair trust, then the relational work is going to look a lot like two people working to talk about the impact that this had on the betrayed partner. And having the unfaithful partner, the betraying partner, really work to deepen empathy and compassion. And obviously stop whatever they were doing. But beyond that, the relationship really goes into a conversation of caring about - and dealing with - the grief, and the loss, and the heartache that the betrayed partner is experiencing. That empathy, that compassion, has to come up so that, from the betrayed, the betrayer or the unfaithful person, so that there can start to be some level of safety. Like, 'Hey, you're safe with me again. I care. I, I really understand the impact this had on you.' And those conversations, if they're not happening, the relationship's not going to heal, ultimately.

Liz Higgins (21:36):

Mhmm. Well. And so I imagine, well... I kind of just want to reflect. Because what you are describing there feels so important to acknowledge. That the work post-betrayal, quote, unquote, I mean, it's gonna look, it's gonna look potentially very different from one partner to the next. And you're not always sitting there together working on vulnerable communication. Like, it's going to take time. And you need to make sure you've established the kind of safety and security that you need to even step back into those type of relational interactions. So, really important to acknowledge, I think... That that work right after could, could look very different and there's no one way it's going to go. Hence why it's probably even more helpful to do any of this with a licensed therapist that can really help you walk through it in a healthy way. 'Cause otherwise, I would imagine it could even... and it would make things worse to try and deal with all of this on your own.

Geoff Steurer (22:36):

Yeah. I mean, what happens a lot of times when people just try and do this on their own is... The most common pattern is the betrayed partner is usually, you know, demanding answers. They're understandably trying to figure out what the truth is. Um, it becomes kind of a cat and mouse-type game. Or, or you get somebody that's just shut down completely, says nothing, sweeps it under the rug, and they carry on with life. And then it blows up years later. I mean, you just... It's energy that has to be managed either by being corralled or by being, like, uncovered. But there's, there's an energy. There's been a breach. There's been some sort of a major wound that we can't ignore. Uh, and you're right, Liz! It's, it really depends on what the couple comes in with. And so having a skilled therapist who understands how betrayal works, and is not going to blame the betrayed partner, but is going to set up a structure, a plan, to help them rebuild that trust.

Geoff Steurer (23:37):

I mean, at a very basic level, (if I were to sort of break it into steps) there's usually going to be some sort of discovery, or disclosure of some kind, initially when the couple comes in. It's rare that I have somebody who comes in and says, "I have this thing that I've never told my partner." I mean, that does happen, but it's very rare. Most of the time there's been something that's been discovered, there's a crisis. And so early on, the work early on, is really just about crisis management. If people need to be separated, if there needs to be limits or boundaries set up, if there needs to be some sort of emergency disclosure... Like if there's been an affair, go get STD testing. We're just trying to

contain the crisis here and figure out safety. So people can sleep at night. People can eat, people can take care of their bodies, and their children, and their families. Like... We're just trying to contain the situation. That's the first thing.

Liz Higgins (24:29):

Right? In RLT, we call it, uh, 'stopping the bleeding'. That's basically what you are doing.

Geoff Steurer (24:36):

Exactly. It's, it's very energetic. It's, it's swift it, you're assertive. You're just working to contain the situation. And then, I like to move into this next phase of really understanding what just happened. And that, if you've got a partner that is accountable, a betraying partner, the unfaithful one, who's really wanting to rebuild trust, then we start working on... Um, and I'll usually split the couple and really go over the story of what happened. And kind of start to set up what we call a formal therapeutic disclosure. There's been secrets, we're working on this... And this can take six to eight weeks to get a formal disclosure out. And that's another podcast for another day. But basically that, that process is a very formal process of one person getting very honest about their story. What they've done, where they've been, who they were with, all the details that matter to the healing. And taking those, and eventually sharing them with the betrayed partner in a formal meeting.

Geoff Steurer (25:38):

And it's a very difficult experience, but it is extremely healing. The research on it is clear that couples can only build on a foundation of truth. And so, a lot of the early effort is really on getting that piece done. And then that really settles the couple down to do the long-term work of understanding the why. The what happened, the individual and couple growth elements. And that long-term process of the emerging, the new marriage or the new relationship moving forward can only be done if there's been good containment and crisis management. And, and the truth is out and both people are actively working to turn toward each other. And, and also have healthy self-regulation. I mean, that's a mouthful there, Liz, but that's essentially the over overlay of, of what happens here when I see healthy couples moving toward reconciliation.

Liz Higgins (26:37):

Yeah... Wow. I'm so glad that you just walked us through that. Because again, I imagine for anyone listening who has gone through this, or is going through this now, to have some semblance of what does it look like for us to get past this? That's kind of what it is. And I don't know, I don't know about you, but I always get a little 'Ugh' when people ask me the question of like, 'How long is this gonna take? How long will it take to feel normal, again, to be better again?' And, you know, that's people just pining in their pain. To be, to be better, to be, you know, quote unquote healed. Let's just get this done and move past it. But you have to, you have to walk through it. And I am wondering, like... Just even hearing that that disclosure piece could be six to eight weeks, like, is there sort of a general timeframe that you see for couples going through those steps that you just described? Like how long might that go on for?

Geoff Steurer (27:40):

I think it was Barbara Stephens. Um, no... Who was it? Anyway, there was an author that did... She wrote a book called Sex, Lies, and Forgiveness. And it's not Barbara Stephens, it's another author.

Anyway, she, she wrote this book about, um... she did a study with some couples. It was a smaller sample size. And what she found - and these couples had gone through affair recovery, sexual addiction recovery, really heavy duty stuff. And she found in her research that, after six months, they still, most of the, most of the betrayed partners, like did not, they just somewhat trusted. It was low. And after about a year, and then into 18 months, you got, you got into mostly trusted, completely trusted. So within, within a couple of years, you can have a restoration of trust. You can, you can really rebuild a, the security and the bond through constant active working. And recognize that trust is not all or nothing.

Geoff Steurer (28:43):

It's, you know, your, your partner may cheat on you, but you still may trust them to drive the kids to soccer practice. Right? So like, there's, there's still trust in certain areas. This is about, in most cases, about trusting you with my body, trusting you with my feelings, trusting you with my future. And it's, it's an individual, personal trust of giving me to you. And giving yourself back to someone else is the most trusting step we take in our lives. It's it's, I mean, it's, it's all we've got. It's us. And so of course that should take a long time. We would be silly to just throw ourselves back into something like that, where somebody could do that and hurt us again like that. So it needs to take time and... Uh, real quick, Liz - it's interesting that the people that I find that press the question of how long will this take are generally not the betrayed people.

Geoff Steurer (29:37):

'Cause they instinctively know it's going to be a while. It's, it's the people that have broken the trust that are asking that. Because they, in most cases, were using whatever they, you know, their addiction, the betrayal, all these things as a way to mismanage their emotions. And so now, they're sitting with a lot of uncertainty. They're sitting with a lot of tension, a lot of shame and guilt. These really heavy duty emotions. And they're looking for those to end by this just not being a thing anymore. But we really will only serve them best if they can learn distress tolerance. And be able to sit with that and have that, have that sort of integration of all these heavy emotions. And be able to be a healthy person that can manage their emotions, instead of using other things to distract them or escape them. So we want people to learn to sit in, and just relax, and do the long-term work. It's so worth it.

Liz Higgins (30:34):

I'm wondering because, you know, a lot of my, my listener following here is the millennial generation, millennial demographic. And so, you know, people that are floating in the thirties age range right now, and many of which are still kind of early on in their relationships. Um, of course, you know, there's a spectrum and all of that, but... I'm wondering like, what would you say to couples earlier on in their relationship (committed relationship, nonetheless), but whether they're committed or married, maybe like one to five years in, who may have gone through like a major betrayal... Like, how can somebody know... I've heard this, which is why I'm asking this, you know? It's like, because the relationship is so young in nature, there's all those fears floating around of like, 'Is this how you're always going to be? Should I just jump ship now and not deal with this anymore?' How can a person navigate when their relationship is on that younger side to really push forward and lean in or call it quits post-betrayal?

Geoff Steurer (31:41):

Yeah. It's so vulnerable. It's so vulnerable when there's been a betrayal. And I, and I've worked with couples where, you know, something happened on the honeymoon. I mean, it was like, it was like right out the gate. And there was some, some major injury and, and then they, you know... But the biggest, the biggest thing is, is the betrayer, is the unfaithful person, willing to take complete responsibility and then do something different to really learn and understand how that happened? If you're with somebody who is just full of blame, and excuses, and denial, and unwillingness to do their own personal work, to understand how they got there and how they could do this, and, and is not making room for your feelings or your pain, then that relationship's gonna really struggle long-term. You're not really probably ever going to feel safe with that person.

Geoff Steurer (32:37):

Um, that's just a general principal. Obviously every relationship has to have the, you know, has to go through its own process. But there are some principles about rebuilding trust, which are based on accountability, on compassion, on allowing for time, and doing that work long-term. And if those things are not in place, it's really hard to feel secure with somebody ever again. If they're trying to hurry you up and move on and just sort of get over it, you're not going to get over it. It's just not how it works. And, so those are red flags you want to look for. But again, on the flip side, if you've got somebody who is doing their work, going to therapy, reading books, being deeply accountable, being transparent, changing behaviors, lifestyle changes. And they're devastated. And they're, they're, they're, they're broken just for hurting you. And they feel awful about it.

Geoff Steurer (33:36):

And they're putting lots of supports in place. That person's more likely to be a safe bet. Even if they struggle, even if they're overcoming something... Like some people come into marriage, or come into committed relationships with an addiction, for example. Um, and a lot of people are like, 'Oh, the addict', whatever. And it's like, you know... An addict is really just somebody who has basically, uh, who's misused their ability to cope with difficult emotions, or attachments and things. And so, if they can learn how to do that, then that will, there'll be a lifetime of, you know, growth and security for you. They can really work on that. And so it's, it's totally worth kind of observing and giving somebody a little space and time to see what they'll choose. Obviously, if they're abusive and you're, you're feeling diminished as a person, you're feeling controlled, and they're not giving you any room to grow or have any pain at all, those are terrible conditions. And there needs to be some, some boundaries set there. Yeah.

Liz Higgins (34:36):

Yeah, yeah. And I know that, when you're in the thick of difficult relationships or unhealthy relationship dynamics, it can be hard sometimes to really see that those things are not healthy. And that they are impacting you in negative ways, and stuff like that. But so, but just hearing what you kind of talked through with some of those, um, markers of what it actually looks like to see your partner trying to be better - not perfect, maybe still working through stuff - but trying. We can kind of define like, this is, this is what you should see. This is what you should be experiencing. And, you just have to be brutally honest with yourself, I guess. On, on both sides of this experience! But certainly with, like, letting yourself see what is unfolding in front of you, you know, words are not

actions. Like, really look at what is happening. And the intentional efforts that your partner is making (or not making), because that stuff is important to check in on.

Geoff Steurer (35:42):

Yeah, exactly. And I mean, one thing that I'll say to betrayed partners, if you're listening - we obviously expect the unfaithful person to be accountable and, and their betrayal and what they did is not your fault. Um, that was a choice they made. And so you'll never, you'll never need to accept blame for whatever they chose to do to betray the relationship. However, personal growth is two-sided. Don't expect the unfaithful person just to do all the work growing and healing from this situation. If you believe that somehow you just get to sit and tap your toe and just passively wait for things to improve, then they're going to essentially outgrow you. You gotta be aware of that. If they're working hard to become a healthier person and you're stuck back in there and you refuse to do any, any self improvement, if you're unwilling to look at how you handle emotions, if you're unwilling to deepen and grow from this experience, (what the research calls post-traumatic growth) then it will be really hard to align your directions together. So, use this opportunity (as awful as it is), use it as an opportunity to rebuild a secure connection to yourself. And learn and understand who you are and who you want to be. There's so much growth available to you after this crisis. And if you're expecting your unfaithful partner to grow, and to learn, and understand themselves, you can do that same journey without, you know, having to take responsibility for what happened to you. But take your responsibility for your growth.

Liz Higgins (37:26):

Oh, I love that. I feel like that's such a beautiful statement to kind of wrap this conversation up with. Because it just really rings true. You know, you don't... You never hope that this type of experience will happen, but I mean, the stats are there. This stuff is not uncommon. We're humans, we're imperfect beings. And it's not to excuse those breaches of trust, but there are so many ways to move forward and to heal together. Which I think is just so, um... You know, I'm in my therapist mode right now, right? But it's just, it's such a hopeful thing to know that that is a truth for so many people out there. That you can grow beyond these face palms (or whatever we called it earlier) and have an even better relationship. Stick in it, get support, and take care of yourself, first and foremost.

Geoff Steurer (38:24):

Absolutely. Yeah. People need to know that this is, this is hopeful. Because it's just the arc. It's, it's, it's, it's our human journey. It's, it's about learning and developing and growing, and we don't grow without mistakes. Obviously you hope that the mistakes that are made - that you commit, that someone commits against you - aren't so devastating that you lose what's most important to you. But most, most, even serious betrayals in relationships, can be worked through. The research on affair recovery is very promising. Um, it's not, it's not easy. And I'm not going to minimize it at all, but it just is possible. So if the conditions are right, and you've got somebody who's willing to work with you, and you're both wanting to commit to it, there's resources and help and support. So I'm very optimistic about it.

Liz Higgins (39:19):

Well, thank you so much for sharing your wealth of knowledge on the subject! And I do want people to know where they can find you. And just... If you have any kind of, um, you know, programs, or freebies out there that people can access, where can listeners find you?

Geoff Steurer (39:35):

Yeah, thanks Liz! Uh, the easiest place is my website. You can go to fromcrisistoconnection.com. And on there, I've got a podcast. And I do have a free guide to help you end your marriage arguments. And I do have online courses, as well. As you mentioned earlier, I do have a trust-building bootcamp, which is a video course - a 12 week intensive course on helping people rebuild broken trust. So there's lots of great resources on there to help people navigate the messy parts of these relationships. That's just what I love to talk about and work on. And my podcast has a lot of incredible experts and guests that have come on and shared their process and support. So, lots of help out there.

Liz Higgins (40:22):

Yes! And I mean, I'm, I'm telling you, like your podcast is amazing. I have loved the episodes that I have been listening to. And you're just, you're so versed. But there's clearly a compassion that you can hear in your voice when you talk about these really difficult experiences that people often walk through and work through. And so, um, I'm really excited to have found you and just share more about your stuff with my audience. Because we need more people like you! So, thank you!

Geoff Steurer (40:51):

Yeah, thanks Liz. So happy to make the connection!

Thanks again for listening to the podcast. If you like the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you're interested in learning more, sign up for my free e-book "The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face" at millenniallifecounseling.com.

Want access to Geoff's Trust Building Bootcamp online course? Just [click this link](#) and use the code **GET10** to receive 10% off.

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