

Unfavorable Odds

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Season 1, Episode 1: The Benefit of the Debt

Guest: Meg Miller
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Kim: From the FamilyLife Podcast Network, this is *Unfavorable Odds*. I'm Kim Anthony.

Unfavorable Odds is all about finding hope and help in those seasons of life where things get pretty hard. Jesus has promised us that, whenever we walk through those dark valleys, He is with us, and we never have to be alone. And on each episode of this podcast, we'll be talking to people who have navigated those dark places, and they've drawn strength from Jesus.

Today, we are going to be talking about a tough topic that more and more people are experiencing—pornography.

Meg: I had come home from work one day, and I was searching for something. Our previous keystrokes appeared in the search bar, and I realized, "That's not something I should be searching for or anybody in our family should be searching for."

Kim: I had a chance to sit down with author and speaker, Meg Miller. Her book is called *Benefit of the Debt: How My Husband's Porn Problem Saved Our Marriage*. I have to tell you—it was jarring for me to enter into this conversation with one expectation, and then Meg got me to go in a whole different direction. She also got me to start thinking about my own struggles / my own sin.

Meg: Society has told me as a woman that I can achieve anything a man can; but society is forgetting to tell me that I can achieve the same destruction without realizing it because a lot of my sins are socially acceptable. I've seen thousands of men's groups who want accountability to not look at things that they shouldn't be looking at. I have never found a support group for women who want accountability for their words. We simply are not taking it seriously enough.

Kim: When I saw the title *How My Husband's Porn Problem Saved Our Marriage*, I was taken aback. I want to make sure I understand what you're saying correctly. Are you saying that if your husband slips back into pornography, you're okay with that?

Stick around and listen to what Meg has to say. She and her husband Joe are organic farmers just outside of Washington, D.C.; and she's passionate about farming, but she's also passionate about helping women.

Meg: I thought it was a good marriage. We were happy-ish—happy enough. I look around now, and I see that a lot of people are feeling the same way. They are happy enough, and there are some things that should be dealt with; but boy, life gets in the way, and there is soccer practice, and we've got to get everybody to church on time. There is just not enough time or space to deal with some of the things that tend to get swept under the rug.

So, we were happy, but our definition of happiness might have been off.

Kim: Well, there was something that you said in the book. You mentioned how, before you got married, you expected there to be problems. Why were you so sure about that?

Meg: The church has done a good job of helping women prepare for differences in marriage. We are not the same: "Don't expect to change your future husband."—stuff like that. So, I knew there would be conflict, and I almost even looked forward to it because I'm creative, and I could—yes, exactly—I could figure out how to handle it. I could take the lead.

Kim: Take the lead?

Meg: Yes.

Kim: Tell me more.

Meg: You can see a storm brewing in the beginning right there, where I could figure this out: "I have some craft and ingenuity under my belt. So, I am ready to take on any differences that my husband might bring into the marriage with us." You can already tell just the attitude—just the way I explain—how optimistic I was in my own strength / in my own wisdom. I thought I was really brilliant.

There are enough books out there for young women to read to make us feel just smart enough to have the optimism to go into this thinking, "I can handle little differences."

For example, if it's true that all men—or 95-percent of men struggle with lust—I almost anticipated how we would handle that. We will put some boundaries in place. I had a plan. Unfortunately, I took it the extra step and considered myself ready and self-sufficient in my own knowledge to handle these things.

Kim: Wow. So, you walked into the marriage confident in spite of your expectation that problems would occur.

Meg: Yes, I knew problems would occur. I had no idea how much it would hurt when problems actually did occur. He wouldn't bend to my brilliance, and he wouldn't take my advice and do things the way I said he should. That frustrated me. In fact, it was hurtful that he wouldn't do everything my way. [Laughter]

So, we settled into a little bit of a pattern where I was frustrated with him, often, and he would escape in his own way, often.

Kim: So, take us to the point where you discovered his use of pornography.

Meg: It's such a common story. He almost seemed to want to get caught—almost. He did not cover his trail. He did not clear his browsing history. He almost seemed to be crying out for help—almost. Now, that part is not common; but the part where he does escape using some kind of self-medicating or self-care instead of tackling the problem head on—that's very common.

When I found his browsing history, I was crushed. I thought I was ready for this because it's so common, and I had heard that it is so common that I felt ready; and I wasn't. I thought that would be able to overcome it and not believe the lies that arrive as soon as that browsing history is exposed. For example, "You're not good enough," and "He's dirty," or "He's worth less because of this." Those kinds of lies creep in right away.

I thought I was ready for them because I had heard that it is such a common issue, and my heart, as soon as I found it, betrayed that I was not ready for it.

Kim: Would you take me back to the moments leading up to your discovery of the pornography? What led you to look at his computer / his browsing history? How did that take place?

Meg: I had come home from work one day, I was alone, and I was searching for something. Our previous key strokes appeared in the search bar, and I realized, "That's not something I should be searching for, or anybody in our family should be searching for." So, I thought, "Hmm, what else is there?" So, I started looking. When I found evidence of his pornography use, I stopped looking.

Now, this is uncommon because a lot of women want to find out everything and see how bad it is; but I knew that if I did that, it would somehow take the privilege away from him of coming forward because that is a—it is an experience he could use to heal. On the other hand, if I confronted him with every single thing that I had found, he would be tempted to hold back the stuff that I did not find; and I knew there would be something that I did not find.

No one was counseling me on this. I just felt a still, small voice that said, "Hang on. Don't go crazy. Let's give him the benefit of confessing so I don't have to accuse him of everything."

Kim: Was there any evidence / any inkling of unfaithfulness through pornography throughout your marriage? Was there every a time where you wondered, "Hey, you know what? There is something different going on here?"

Meg: Yes, there were a few times where in conversation over dinner with some friends someone mentioned a name of a photographer; and he said, “Ha, ha, ha, that’s like a porn star’s name.” Everybody got a little quiet. We were all in Christian company; you know? But my husband was a leader in the church at the time. So, we didn’t bring it up and say, “That’s not something a church leader should be saying or even thinking about.” We pretty much just let him say every once in a while somethings would raise eyebrows but not enough to launch an inquiry.

Kim: So, even though you heard him make that comment and possibly other things similar to that, you didn’t allow it to plant a seed and begin the cautious journey towards—“Okay, what is this?”

Meg: It didn’t. It’s like a wife wants to believe nothing is happening, and that was me. I really wanted to believe this wasn’t happening. If I got curious / if I allowed myself to be curious, then I would—I knew I would find something. One day, though, I was curious enough. You know the keystroke history popped up in our search bar; and that was enough for me to say, “Something is going on. Let’s admit it and bring it to him and allow him to confess if he wants.”

Kim: What did that do to you as a wife to discover that your husband has been using pornography? What did that do to your emotions, your feelings about yourself, your feelings about him?

Meg: It is terrible. It is terrible. It’s one of the worst feelings in the world. I would rather have a physical illness or something—a tragedy from a tree falling on the dog. I would rather have some kind of unexplainable thing that does not pit us against one another—something that we could bind together and face together. This does the opposite. Pornography does the opposite and puts us on opposite sides of the problem where he seems weak now, and he seems like an escapist.

It’s confusing to me, first of all, because we had always been very open with each other. So, suddenly, there are these secrets. It’s also confusing to me because—“Why isn’t our life good enough? Why do you need something else to get by?” It’s also confusing to me because—“Why that? Why would that comfort a guy?” That’s just a difference between many men and women.

To me, other things comfort me. If I need to escape, that’s not where I’m going because we are all wired so differently. I don’t think like that—where if I need comfort, I go to sexual images of things that I shouldn’t be looking at. I do other things for comfort that may not be any healthier but are definitely different. So, it was so confusing—so confusing.

I have an enemy—I believe I have an enemy who was instantly there with me in the room and whispering pseudo-truths that sound very much like the truth, like—“He was always like this,” “You almost expected it; right,” “You knew this was coming,” “He has

hidden his true self for long enough. This is really him,” “This is what the world is made up of. This is what men and women do,” “Women are finding it, right now, all around the world. They are dealing with similar feelings, and they are going to get over it better than you can, Meg.”

That enemy almost tipped me off—almost. I knew better than to believe all the thoughts that came into my mind, or my own were not worth examining; but at the time, there were so many weird feelings. I didn’t even know what to have for lunch the next day because I thought baloney was my favorite; and nothing I thought before was true. So, how could that be true? I was so confused.

Kim: It changed everything.

Meg: Yes, it did.

Kim: So, what did you do—you and your husband do to seek help? How did you strategize towards healing?

Meg: He was repentant immediately. He was thankful that it was out in the light, and he was probably healthier than I was at that point because—“Yay! Healing is on the way.” He was optimistic, encouraged. He felt connected. Secrets are out. So, he felt relief, and he’s a Christian. So, he also felt forgiveness from the Lord. He and the Lord were tighter now than ever before. He was so excited to help other guys. He was ready to become the man of God that God had always wanted him to be; and he was so excited, almost, to have this behind him.

I, on the other hand, was just devastated. I was repulsed. I was disgusted. I was confused. I was disenchanted. I was depressed. I was gone. I was out of there. I had left. I was on a train as far away as I could get before he even realized I was gone. I wanted to let him bring all of his confessions out, but I certainly didn’t want to stick around and be with a guy who was doing this.

Kim: So, once he was discovered, he immediately confessed / he owned up to what he had done; but he also started to help other men—is what you’re saying?

Meg: Yes, in his—you asked about the treatment that we sought.

Kim: Yes.

Meg: We did go to couple’s counseling. The couple’s counselor told us: “You, mister—you need to go to his group; and you, missus—you should go to hers group.” It really struck me the difference, when we came out of our groups, how sad I was after my group and how excited he was after his group. It was like we were going further and further away from each other in our own respective cocoons.

Kim: Was your husband sensitive to how you were feeling even though he was in this place that was much better than before?

Meg: He was sensitive, and he was supportive and helpful. He would always ask me what I needed to heal. I didn't know. He would try, and I didn't know what I—I was so hurt. It just so—it's not getting better, and I felt that hurt turn into resentment. When that began, I started feeling permanently repulsed by him instead of just temporarily repulsed. I knew—I got desperate. I knew I had to find healing, or we would be done—not because of his problem but because of my unforgiveness.

Kim: Wow.

Meg: I couldn't figure it out, and I knew forgiveness was a command. So, I tried—I tried, tried, tried, tried. I said it over and over: "I forgive you," "I forgive you." But that hurt remained, and the hurt was evidence of unforgiveness. So, I couldn't reconcile that in my mind. I was scared to become a person who physically could not emotionally forgive someone because I know there are ramifications.

If I became a resentful person, there would be generational consequences. There would be ripple effects in my workplace. You could sense it a mile away. You still can—women who are hurting—you still can tell. It is a scary thing to see yourself becoming like that.

Kim: In my own life, I've had to deal with forgiveness—forgiving those people who have hurt me. What I have found—probably which is similar to what you found—is that forgiveness is not necessarily about a feeling. It's about making a choice. I've heard the saying that, "Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

So many times, we think that not forgiving someone is actually hurting them / paying them back. Sometimes, we believe that forgiving someone means that we're letting them off the hook, but that's not the case. When we choose to forgive, we're not forgiving based on this feeling that—"Oh, yes, I feel like forgiving today." It's based on a choice because God—He tells us that we need to forgive others. I think it's more for our own good than, necessarily, for the other person.

Meg: Yes, such a good point. He commands us to do what's best for us even if it doesn't feel good at the moment.

Kim: So, those times you were talking about—when those memories come up of those pictures / of the pain that he had caused you, it forces you when you're walking with God to say, "Okay, I forgive again. I'm choosing to forgive again today"; but there is nothing that your husband could say to you to bring you to that place of forgiveness no matter how much he says, "I love you" / how much he says, "You're the only woman I want." It takes a work of God to bring you to that place of forgiveness.

Tell me about what God did in your life.

Meg: I can't make this stuff up. You're right. It has to be a miracle. It has to be divine. It can't come from someone else's prescription or your husband's work or even that self-discipline of saying, "I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you."

When I begged God for answers—and I did not let Him leave me alone until He did give me answers—what He gave me was almost, at the time—felt like a change of subject. He showed me my husband's heart next to mine, and it was just as damaged. I wondered, "Where did all that damage come from? He couldn't be as damaged as me. This has to be hypothetical."

The Holy Spirit was kind enough to say, "Sure, go ahead. Just explore it. Just consider it. What if—what if your husband is as hurt as you are?" I thought, "Well, okay, let's—I'll go with You there. I'll consider that. But what would be the source of that hurt? Where would he have gotten so hurt from?" I was confused again—"Why would my husband be so hurt?"

Very gently—oh so gently, I ruled out one factor in his life after another until the factor of my own presence in his life came into view. I was like—"Okay, I'll examine myself as the source of Joe's hurt." Everything came into clear focus at that moment. If I am responsible for his broken heart, then it would explain all of the confusion that I had had would be cleared up.

Kim: Tell me how you went from God showing you that his heart is just as broken as yours to actually taking on the responsibility and—please correct me if I'm wrong; you can clarify for me—but you said that you found that you were the source of his pain. Are you saying that you were the source of the pain that led him to using pornography?

Meg: No. I can say that I'm the source of the pain that I saw in this insight / in this revelation. I'm the source of his hurt. What he does with that hurt is up to him, but I am not responsible for his actions. I am responsible for what is the condition of his heart. When I realized I'm responsible for the condition of his heart, that hurt that I was feeling as the result of his pornography habit instantly dissipated and was replaced with concern and regret—not guilt and shame—but regret—"What can I do to make this right?"

I only have so much room in my heart, and that compassion that I suddenly had for this hurting person filled my heart and pushed out all the hurt. I thought it might be temporary—like, maybe, that hurt will come back because many little things had comforted me in the past; but that hurt always came back. But when this feeling of compassion flooded my heart, I was consumed with excitement and desire to make it right and to help him heal because I knew what it felt like to be damaged.

Kim: It's amazing how God knows exactly what we need in order to get to that place of healing. For you, what He knew that you needed was something revealed to you / something about yourself to allow that compassion for your husband to overflow your heart again. You talked about how the Lord revealed to you that you had a critical spirit. Tell me more about that.

Meg: That's right. I didn't realize I was criticizing my husband as much as I was. For example, in the home, when I tell him how to do things, a little wound appears in his heart—"I did not mean to hurt you; but when I tell you how to do everything, that starts to look like a lot of pain."

Now, I'm not saying that that pain causes him to sin, but I am saying that that pain is an issue; and I—I'm involved in that, and I can move toward that. That's something I can do. In all the helplessness, I can move toward his pain and say, "I did not know what I was doing." That was very healing for both of us.

Kim: Tell me how that critical spirit played out in your marriage. What did it look like?

Meg: Every day, there are many things that a couple has to talk about to run the household. I call it, "household administration." A lot of the things are lessons learned. For example, "When we get a little flock of backyard chickens, we should probably make sure they don't jump the fence and bother the neighbors. We should also drop off the car to get the brakes fixed. Did you feed the dog?" All these things—they don't sound like criticism; do they?

When you pile them on top—one on top of another—and you start saying, "Hey, you should really wear this," or "You should have gotten the car in a little earlier," or "I wish we could have a cat instead of flock of chickens." If you start criticizing your life in general, a husband often takes that as a direct assault on his character.

Now, what's difficult is that he can't really say that because you really didn't do much wrong. You're just saying—especially if a man tries to bring this up—you have every reason to have said those things because it's true—chickens are difficult, the car does need a brake job, and the dog does need to be fed. So, if you say things in a certain way, often, women—we just think we are collaborating to run the house; but for a man, after a full day's worth of collaborating, that can sound a lot like a drip on his performance.

Kim: As you were describing some of the things that you would say to your husband or suggest that he do, you mentioned the fact that they didn't sound critical; but as I was hearing them, I was hearing control. Is it possible that in the marriage he felt like you were controlling him and his acting out through the use of pornography was, possibly, one of the only places he found that he had control over?

Meg: Yes, and it was a source of comfort for him where I should have been the comfort instead of his control. I could have been more comforting to him instead of more controlling. If I only have a certain number of words allotted to me every day and I use most of them for household administration and control, then I haven't used them to comfort. So, I should be comforting my husband more than controlling him. Again, it doesn't sound like control at the moment. I've just got to get this stuff done.

Kim: Right.

So, you talked about, earlier on in your marriage, before you entered into the marriage, knowing that there would be problems, you figured you could handle this. You are verbally adept at making things happen. You figured you could help him to become the man that you desired him to be, and that communication came out as being critical—possibly, controlling. So, tell me what the Lord has done in your life in the area of having a critical spirit.

Meg: Having a critical spirit is not a habit that I need to work on. It's a big debt I have incurred. What I mean by that is, when I hurt someone, someone has to pay for that. Either my husband's going to live with that hurt every day like I was—like I was living with the hurt of his pornography use—I was paying his debt one little bit at a time. I would never have been able to pay it off by myself.

In the same way, when I criticize him, a debt is incurred, and I cannot pay that. I cannot make it right. I need a third party. I need someone to pay that debt for me, and I don't mean debt cancellation. That's just changing the numbers. I mean someone has to go pay / someone has to hurt on our behalf so we don't have to.

Thankfully, someone already has gone through all that on our behalf. The Lord Jesus died for me so that I don't have to go through this. He was beaten and betrayed. That's how I felt. I was beaten and betrayed by my husband's porn use. I do not have to go through that anymore, not because I have done nothing wrong—which is the lie that I believed before—"I am better than this. I have done nothing wrong. My husband owes me fidelity." Those are not the entire truth.

The entire truth is that somebody has gone through this betrayal and abuse on my behalf so that now I can stand and say, "I don't have to put up with that behavior anymore"—not because I've earned better but because somebody has already gone through the trouble that difficulty and abuse and betrayal on my behalf.

Kim: There is a woman listening. She is a little bit different than you, in terms of her background and how she operates in her household. She, too, has just discovered a stash of pornography that her husband has been using. Yet, she has not been so critical / so controlling; and in actuality, she realizes that this issue had started long before they were married, but she's just discovering it. What do you say to this woman?

Meg: That's very difficult. Thankfully, I don't have to say anything because the Lord Jesus—He addressed this. Simon, in his house, had Jesus over. Simon was a Pharisee, and he had Jesus over for dinner. A woman came into the room and was crying behind Jesus. Her tears wet His feet, and she dried His feet and anointed His feet with perfume—the best perfume now.

She was a woman of ill-repute. She did not have a very good reputation like you're talking about. She did not recycle. She did not get her kids to soccer practice on time. She did not have her act together. She was a woman who had made many, many bad choices; and here she was showering the Lord Jesus with love. The Pharisee thinks, "Hmm, if only Jesus knew who this woman was"; and Jesus answered him, even though the man had not said anything. He read his thoughts and answered him.

He said—let me tell you a story. So, I'm reading this same story—I'm in my Bible, and I'm reading this story. I'm like—"What? What? Tell me because I am that Pharisee saying this guy is disgusting. If you had any idea what my husband has been looking at, I have not done anything wrong. I haven't been critical. I haven't done anything wrong. I deserve so much better. Maybe, my husband does have a chemical imbalance or a problem or trauma in his background that might explain this."

"I'm still—I still don't think it's right. She can't be in this house washing this man's feet. This is the Lord Jesus. He can't be here. I'm the one entertaining Jesus. I'm the one taking care of Jesus."

The Lord Jesus tells the story of two people who came to a man, and they both owed the man money. One owed a certain amount; the other owed less. He forgave both the debts which one loved him more. The Pharisee said, "Well, I suppose"—begrudgingly—"I suppose it was the one who had the bigger debt." "That's right. You have guessed correctly," the Lord Jesus said. "Now, look, do you see this woman. Her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. Her love shows the size of debt that she's been forgiven."

So, when you say, "There's a woman listening who really hasn't done anything terrible"—

Kim: Now, I will correct—not that she lives this perfect life, but she's just in a bit of a different situation than you are; but yet, she still feels that pain / that anguish that you experienced upon finding your husband's use of pornography. Yet, she's wrestling with—"Okay, I am not clearly seeing this, and this happened or started before the marriage." How would you comfort her?

Meg: I can't. I can only say, "You still believe you had a smaller debt." The person who thinks they had a bigger debt forgiven is showing more love and joy. If you are believing you have a smaller debt, I don't know what else to tell you because the Lord Jesus addressed it.

Here is another story. In 2 Samuel, Nathan came to King David and said, “King David, I have to tell you. Something terrible is going on. A guy is taking advantage of another guy in this city. He took his favorite lamb, and he slaughtered it for a dinner. This was the guy’s favorite lamb. He loved it like a child. What should we do about it?” King David—ever just—he says, “That man must pay. The man who did this has to be put to death. Well, wait. First, he has to pay the lamb back quadruple what it’s worth and then kill him.” Nathan said, “You are the man.”

In the same way, we are being told we are the woman who had the big debt. Now, the Lord Jesus has suggested this to me through my story. I know I remember King David said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Does that sound like fear? Like—“Oh no, oh no, oh no?” I know better because I’ve been in the same position. It’s relief.

To be taught that you had owed a big debt, and now you are going to go free. It’s a big relief. It’s such a relief. It’s a benefit of the debt. I’m better off having incurred a big debt and hurting someone and been forgiven of that debt where someone else pays for it on my behalf than every have done nothing wrong and only seeing a person over here who—“He’s really the messed up one.”

Kim: Okay, so, you’re saying that we, as women, finding our husband is using pornography—if that is the situation we find ourselves in—that we need to first look at ourselves and look at our own sin.

Meg: No, we don’t look at ourselves. That’s what the people who are on the right track—they say that. They say, “Look at yourself”; but the Lord Jesus says, “Look at me. Look at me. I have forgiven both debts.” Are you celebrating her many sins are forgiven as her great love has shown? That love replaces the hurt. The forgiveness is a by-product. It’s not an effort anymore for me. I don’t know how it works; but I was blind, and now I see.

This was seven years ago, and we haven’t had a relapse. The pressure in our house—it’s a different tone. We still get the car fixed. We still feed the dog. We still get stuff done, but the pressure is off for both of us to perform.

Kim: So, Meg, forgiveness is key. So, to that woman whose heart is broken who was blindsided by what she just saw on her husband’s computer, you’re saying that forgiveness is possible.

Meg: Mm-hmm, if you look to the Lord Jesus and what He has done. Don’t look inside yourself. There’s nothing true in there. The heart is deceitful above everything you are going to experience. Many support groups—you know, you go around the circle, tell what you’re feeling. It’s not productive if you’re not already in the Word and talking to the one Counselor who can answer all your questions. He might do it with a story, but He’ll still answer the questions.

Kim: Meg, how is your marriage today? What is it like for you?

Meg: It's good. I've—I get asked this often. Having told my story, many women ask me how my husband is doing in his sobriety. I say, "Good"; but I really don't know because I would have said, "Good," the first time; right? So, I say it's good, but I really don't know.

You know what is good?—is that I know no matter what happens God has something really, really special for me, the forgiveness of a big debt. That overpowers all the feelings that I need to figure out what my husband is doing right now and whether he is doing the right thing with his time, energy, money, with his sobriety, and with his relationships. It doesn't matter like it used to.

So, how are we doing? It depends on if the problem was pornography or the problem was my perception of how much debt I had been forgiven—ever. So, I still incur debts, and the Lord Jesus still paid them for me. My husband lives with those, too. He also pays my debts for me. My husband also says the wrong thing many times, and he does things that I wish he wouldn't, all the time. I don't know what other women go through at home; but boy, it can be so frustrating living with someone who doesn't think like you do, who doesn't reason like you do, or run the house like you do.

But thank goodness—he is not afraid of my barbed words anymore because he knows that I am aware of it. We can now talk about it. We have a couple jokes that we use when he feels like I've been—I've slipped back into my critical spirit. He says something like—"I've done it ten times already"—even if he hasn't done it—where I say, "Can you please wipe the kids' hands?" He'll say, "I've done it ten times already." Even if the answer he has not done it at all, he'll say that.

So, we can look at each other across the room; and I say, "I see what you're saying. I see what you're saying"—where he says, "Get off my back," very gently in a way that I can laugh about it. How many wives can laugh about that? [Laughter] Very few; right? Very few.

Kim: How can we as wives recognize when we're being critical? How do we recognize that on our own without having our husband get angry with us first or pointed out to us first?

Meg: Or escape into a habit that would destroy the family? How do you—yes—how do you recognize that yourself before?

I have never found a support group for women who want accountability for their words. I've seen thousands of men's groups who want accountability to not look at things they shouldn't be looking at. We—hey, we simply are not taking it seriously enough.
A: That's the first thing you can do today. Take it more seriously.

In a lot of the Christian publishing, there's—"Hey, if you want to improve your marriage, you should probably watch your attitude." No, if you don't, our families will deteriorate, and our society will go with it. It's that important, and it's today. It's not a habit you can develop eventually when you guys settle down or the kids move out and you have time to think. It's now. You have to do it now. You have to take it more seriously. Take it from me. You don't want your family to deteriorate.

So, when I realized what I was doing to my family and to my husband by saying things in a little bit of a controlling way—not even criticizing much—I never said something like—"You can't do anything right." I never went that far. I just said, "Did you do that thing I asked you to"; you know?

When I realized what I was doing to my husband, I felt the same feelings he felt when his addiction was exposed. I felt excited, hopeful. I felt all those things that I was jealous of in the beginning. I was connected. I was ready and excited to move on. He was not as hurt as I was when I started bringing it up / when I started showing my regret. He was excited, too. Now, we're excited together, and we can tackle this together.

So, your question: How do you see this before it gets to that point? Start taking it more seriously. I have an online group—on my—on BenefitOfTheDebt.com where we talk about this thing: "Hey, my husband just left the car door open, and it's raining outside—brand new car. What would you guys say? I've got five minutes. Help me. How do I say this nicely?"

It's a group where we can bring our most important things, where it's like—"This hurts so much. I know I should be forgiving, but it's still hurts. I feel like I might be slipping into resentment. You guys have got to help me." We do. We do. We offer that perspective. That's been the most beneficial thing.

Now, I wish every church listening / every church leader would consider starting a group like this where women finally take it seriously—especially the men leaders in the church who are listening right now who love their fellow men and see their women doing this and give them the benefit of the doubt and know that they are not trying to hurt their husbands, they just don't know. There are books that come out like—"You must—you should respect your husband. It's a suggestion." No, I'm saying if you don't, we're all doomed. Look at society."

Society has told me as a woman that I can achieve anything a man can, and I believe that. I have the capacity to achieve anything a man can; but society is forgetting to tell me that I can achieve the same destruction, and I can achieve the same hurt, and I can achieve the same damage without realizing it because a lot of my sins are socially acceptable. They don't seem to really hurt anybody.

Kim: God's Word tell us, "Wives, respect your husbands"; and a lot of times, as you have mentioned, we dishonor our husbands with our mouths with the words that we use

/ the words that we say. I've been guilty of this. I've had to go before the Lord, myself, and ask, "Please, help me. Help me to control that little thing called a tongue that can set such a big fire and do damage to my relationships / to my marriage."

One of the things I ask the Lord—I say, "Lord, let the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth be pleasing to you this day," because I need it. I need it. I can't do it on my own. I need to abide in the Lord. I need His Spirit to help me tame my tongue.

Meg: You feel it, too.

Kim: I feel it, too.

Meg: You feel it, too.

Kim: I do.

Meg: And if we could hear what every other woman listening right now would say—she would say, "I feel it too, but I suppressed that because I have a lot to do." No, don't suppress that. You've got to examine that. If the Holy Spirit is saying, "Pay attention to your tongue," please do. I'm begging you, for your own family and for your own culture. I really think the next generation is depending on us because we're crying out.

All this sexual assault and all the—every headline you see is telling you that we are addressing men's sin. At some point, we must look to our own and say, "What have I done?" Then, celebrate that it's been paid for and move forward: "How do we stop this?"

Kim: And as you say that, you're not down playing what women have gone through by way of abuse—I know that. At the same time, you're saying, "Hey, let's look into our own hearts and seek the Lord. Are we being the women that God calls us to be? Are we being the wives that God calls us to be?"

Meg: Right. I believe He can turn us into those wives that He has called us to be. A lot of women have given up and said, "That Proverbs 31 woman—she's so unattainable." I don't know. With the Lord, I think—I think with the Lord anything is possible. I haven't ever done all the things in Proverbs 31 at once, but I do believe that He is capable. I've seen Him move mountains. I think He can turn me into that person—the person He wants me to be.

Kim: Absolutely. The person He wants you to be. Then we all have seasons of life. So, we can't do it all at once; but if we walk with the Lord and follow His direction, we can be who He designed us to be.

Meg: Amen.

Kim: On page 6 of your book, you write: “To this day, I do not believe that he would rather be intimate with me than with the women in his fantasy world. Let’s get real. Even now you can’t convince me that if he had a choice and no consequences, he wouldn’t choose Miss Airbrush. I can’t compete with her.” Tell me more about that.

Meg: The way I realized that is because, to this day, I would still like him to be on time. I would still like him to make wise financial decisions. I would still would choose a version of him that is sober or kind or thoughtful—one that volunteers more. I would choose a version of him that didn’t play video games or watch sports so much or yell at the dog. To this day, I still would prefer him to be awesome.

Instead of dwelling on that, I look straight to my own debt—the debt that I’ve been forgiven—and when I look back at him, he’s perfect. He’s good enough for me because I have a new perspective. I can’t—if you’ve ever had a debt forgiven, you know what it feels like. There’s no better feeling. So, when I look to him, he looks different.

Now, I have to trust that he’ll do the same for me because the world and the enemy are going to continue pushing images at him that are way better than I—I’m going to age. So, visually or relationally, I’m not the perfect version of myself either. I need to trust him to look to his own debt and then look back at me.

Kim: I’ll take you back to that quote. When I read it, I’ll be honest with you, my heart broke that that is the way you feel. So, I wonder, “How are you able to remain in a marriage where you feel like your husband will always choose the other over yourself?”

Meg: Because often, the tendency is to say, “I will cope. I will go shopping. I will eat cake again. I will control the children instead.” The tendency is to cope; and I’m telling you. A glimpse at your true debt will do all of that for you. You don’t have to cope. You don’t have to walk with that limp or do small self-destructive things and say, “Well, it’s a yoga pants day because I ate too much again.” You don’t have to comfort yourself like that.

So, how I stay in the marriage and enjoy it is by looking again and again to Christ and what He did for me—the debt—the mountain of debt, not the little pile, or the chump change that I’m holding over my husband’s head. The mountain of debt I’ve been forgiven does it all for me.

Now, if I wonder and start thinking about other parts of Christian living that I should be focusing on, I forget my debt. Then I project all those lessons that I’m learning about Christian living on to my husband and on to my kids, and I forget my debt—the debt that is gone now. I forget what it’s like to be chains to it and have to repay and have to work and be sold into slavery—everything I own—and the next few generations as well. I forget what it’s like to be forgiven of that. So, that’s all I do—is I return to that debt. It’s enough for me.

Kim: So, are you saying that this belief you have that your husband would choose someone over you is just a way you remind yourself of his sin and your debt? I'm having a hard time grasping that.

Meg: Sure. Sure. No, I just think it's the only way I think I can be real and never slip into believing a façade ever again.

Kim: So, it's protective.

Meg: Yes, but it's based on the cross. Yes, it's protective, but it's based on looking at Christ. I can't explain it; but when I look at how much I've been forgiven, I can know that my husband is going to be given images and comforts better than me, and I can be okay with that. I'm secure.

Kim: I want to make sure I understand what you're saying correctly. Are you saying that if your husband slips back into pornography, you're okay with that?

Meg: No, I'm not okay with that behavior.

Kim: Okay.

Meg: I'm okay with my identity. I won't be confused again.

Kim: 1 Corinthians 13:7 talks about love, and it says that love always hopes. When I read the statement, I'm not hearing the hope; but I want you to explain to me how, even though you believe this about your husband, you still have hope.

Meg: I do. Same thing as I know that diseases, injuries, tragedies, are in my future. Jesus, Himself, said we're going to have trouble. Everywhere around me, families are falling to one thing or another; but I have a hope that if we go through anything, including betrayal, Jesus will not leave me. He'll have a nugget of information for me that changes everything for me. If He's done it once, He'll do it again. I know He will.

When I'm not strong enough to look at that pile of debt, myself, I can beg Him again and again; and since He didn't ignore me last time—He ignored me for a while, but I think that was my inability to receive the revelation. Anyway, this time I'm ready.

Kim: When you think about perfection in terms of pornography and what many men are struggling with and wives as a result of their finds are struggling with, I think about how there's a tendency for a wife to measure herself up against this airbrushed perfection. All of the sudden, okay, you're looking in the mirror; and you're thinking, "Hey, I'm not quite measuring up." How were you able to overcome that comparison, or are you still in process?

Meg: I'm tempted to listen to what the world says, which is—"You are perfect. You are awesome the way you are. You need nothing else." That's, again, half of the truth. I am unworthy of God's love, and I am unworthy of His presence and His redeeming love. Yet, because of Him, I'm perfect. He decided He would sacrifice everything to be with me. When I think about that, that's enough for me.

I do still hear the world saying that you can have the beauty that your husband is looking for if you try this procedure or buy this top or take that pillow or clean up your house, then you can that perfection that he's looking for. I know that he's looking to fill a hole that only God can fill, and so am I. So, my worth comes from what God says about me.

Kim: That's great.

I think about my own wrestling with having a critical spirit at times. For me, it was more so in the area of perfectionism. What I found is that my critical spirit or my speaking on those things or people who were not living up to my expectations or someone else's expectations—I found that the more critical I was of others, that I was ten times as critical about myself.

It wasn't until I began to slow my roll in my criticism of others and lower my expectation—or even remove expectation—and just allow people to be themselves that I was able to allow myself to live in a way where I was not being critical of my own imperfections.

What has God done in your life as you have worked through having a critical spirit and you're starting to recognize or you've been recognizing it—how has that changed the way you see yourself as a woman?

Meg: I enjoy everything the way it should be enjoyed. I feel like everything was a little gray before because I couldn't get passed the imperfections. Now, the imperfections are what make everything almost—the days when the house is a wreck, I enjoy it. I've heard of this before. You see a lot of quotes on Pinterest about enjoying the imperfections and stuff, but it's a lot harder to live out. To me, it's natural now.

I still, sometimes, if I can see perfection within grasp, I start going toward it. It doesn't work out well. [Laughter] Let me tell you. It has never worked out well; but when I realize, "Oh, this isn't going to work," I remember I have the alternative of the real deal which is authenticity and true messy relationship with every member of my family / every member of my community / every member of my church. It's going to be messy.

If I am looking for perfection or reaching for perfection—even people just being on time to stuff—if I project that on people, I find the world grays just a little bit; but when I forget about that and I remember—"Wow, what a beautiful moment this is"—it's all full-color

again. I really enjoy everything a lot better. Lunch tastes better. I'm telling you. The birds sing sweeter. It's a great feeling.

Kim: It is a great feeling. It is. Psalm 139, verses 23-24—it is something that you are probably well familiar with because what it sounds like, as we have had this conversation, is that you have asked the Lord—"Search me and know my heart. Try me and know my hurtful, anxious thoughts. See if there be any wicked way / any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Meg: He did that. He answered that prayer for me: "See if there is any offensive way. Well, what if there is? What if this is it? What if your daily demeanor is it? Are you going to accept that from Me if I say that's the answer?" "Yes. Yes, I will. Let's tackle that. What do we need to do to make this right?" "Well then, the answer is awesome. I've done it all. I've done it all. You don't have to do anything; but let's try not to incur any more debts. Let's work on this so we're not hurting your brother in Christ."

Kim: That's good.

Well, thank you, Meg.

Meg: Thank you for having me, Kim.

Kim: I appreciate your candidness, your honesty, your rawness, and being able to share with us what the Lord has allowed you to experience sharing the vulnerability of the pain that incurred when you discovered your husband's pornography use. And thank you for being willing to listen to the Lord / to ask Him to search your heart to see if there is any offensive way and to actually listen to Him and be willing not to stop asking for Him to reveal to you those things that you need.

Yes, as women across this country and across the world will discover, unfortunately, their husband's pornography use, the Lord will reach them / will heal them in different ways; but for you, He knew that He needed to point toward your own heart, and He wanted to allow you to experience the forgiveness that He was giving your husband in an area that you wrestled with. That's a powerful story.

Meg: It's so good. It's so good. I have the best story in the world.

Kim: Thanks for being here.

Meg: Thanks for having me.

Kim: You know I really enjoyed my conversation with Meg Miller. What I took away from my time with her—and what I hope you are able to take away as well—is not that women who discover their husband's use of pornography should minimize his sin or that we should take responsibility for our husband's pornography addictions, Meg's

discovery of her husband's use of pornography just happened to be the vehicle God used to help her to see her own sin.

As you can see, she is passionate about helping other women to recognize the power of their words and the power those words have in the lives of their husbands. Now, I personally wrestle with having a critical spirit; and I have to check myself every, single day to stay on top of it because if I don't, I will find myself going down a path that is, not only hurtful to others, but damaging to my own soul.

Today's conversation was challenging, but what a beautiful story of how God can use the most difficult of circumstances to make us more like Christ.

Thanks for listening to the podcast. If you'd like more information about Meg Miller or her book, *Benefit of the Debt*, you'll find it in our show-notes. Check out the *Unfavorable Odds* page at FamilyLife.com/podcasts.

If you enjoyed today's conversation with Meg Miller, I'd really love it if you would subscribe to the podcast. You can search for *Unfavorable Odds* on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you go for podcasts.

Next time on *Unfavorable Odds*, I'm going to introduce you to a young woman who, at the age of 18, found out that she was permanently infertile.

Chelsea: Just a few days after the diagnosis, it was baby dedication at church. I walked to the bathroom and just sat there and cried and cried and cried my eyes out.

Kim: We'll talk to Chelsea Sobolik next time.

I'm Kim Anthony. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Unfavorable Odds*. *Unfavorable Odds* is produced by FamilyLife and is a part of the FamilyLife podcast network.

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