

I Keep Praying for My Abuser to Change Sarah McDugal

"How do I get God to love me more so that he will answer my prayers?"

I've received so many variations on this heartbreaking question from survivors who are still desperately praying for their abuser to be transformed into someone who is safe, reliable, and kind. The answer is rarely the one they wanted to hear, but it absolutely changes the way they view their role in the destructive relationship.

Here are a few key things we need to know about how God works:

God doesn't answer our prayers in any specific way based on loving us less or more.

God never asks us to do things in order to make Him love us more.

God honors and respects our free will -- full stop. Even when it hurts Him.

Here's how that breaks down for us in real, daily life...

God does not capriciously withhold answers to prayer based on some invisible scale of love defined by whether we have done enough good things lately. We cannot earn His love nor reduce it by our deeds.

Quite often though, we tend to treat God as a heavenly vending machine where if we simply punch in the right code combination on the keypad, out will tumble the exact answer that we picked for ourselves. This is a complete misunderstanding of divine character, painting God as a selfish, egotistical ruler,

where we have to do unlock His favor to gain merit by praying "just right". It leaves people feeling that if things aren't going amazing in their life, it must be because they didn't pray correctly, or pray enough.

God tells us that He loved us first, and He loved us so intensely that He came to die for us, even when we didn't realize that we needed it.

A lot of times we forget that God honors our free will. And also, we forget that God honors the free will of people who want to hurt others. **God honors the free will of the person abusing you.** God honors the free will of the person who commits a crime. God honors the free will of those who do not have good intentions and do not have a relationship with Him and even those who have completely rejected Him. God honors their free will, too. (Now that doesn't mean civil and criminal justice systems shouldn't take action to stop those who have been proven to cause harm. We're talking about religious obligations on an individual level, right now.)

You've prayed and prayed, and they just won't change. So... when you're suffering chronic neglect or harm, how on earth are you supposed to get God to act on your behalf and change your abuser's heart?

You're not.

**The problem is not that God isn't listening to you.
The problem isn't that God doesn't care about your suffering.**

The problem lies with your abuser.

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SELF AWARENESS & REFLECTION - Caledonia

Childcare Provided **WITH 24 HOUR NOTICE**

to selah.empowers@gmail.com

This class is intended to expand your skills when dealing with difficult relationships.

In-person and online: 5 - 6:30 pm, Fridays.

Info: Contact selah.empowers@gmail.com or bridget@openchaircounseling.com

May 3: Emotional Disengagement

May 10: Codependency/Trauma Bonding - 1

May 17: Codependency/Trauma Bonding - 2

May 24: **No Class**

May 31: Children's Development/Trauma

June 7: Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

June 14: Grief and the Toxic Relationship

See page 2 for more class options!

FACILITATORS



Vicki Williams



Shari Murdock



Bridget Nash, MA LPC

SELF AWARENESS & REFLECTION - Byron Center
Childcare Provided

This class is intended to expand your skills when dealing with difficult relationships.

Online and In-person: 7-8:30 pm, Wednesdays.

Info: Contact selah.empowers@gmail.com for location or link to join online.

May 1: Forgiveness vs.

Reconciliation

May 8: Grief & Toxic Relationships

May 15: Power and Control

May 22: Legal Advisor-Cynthia Rathburn

May 29: **NO CLASS**

June 5: Emotional/Psych/Verbal Abuse

June 12: Characteristics - I

June 19: Characteristics - II

JOURNEY TO UNDERSTANDING - Online Only

These classes will help bring clarity and validation to what you are experiencing.

Online Only: 10 am, Wednesdays.

Info: Contact selah.empowers@gmail.com for link to join online.

May 1: Trauma and Children

May 8: Faith Issues

May 15: Self Esteem

May 22: Karpman Drama Triangle

May 29: **NO CLASS**

June 5: Stink'n Thinking

June 12: Boundaries

June 19: Emotional Disengagement

GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER - Byron Center

Childcare Provided

This class focuses on growth and healing.

Online and In-person: 7-8:30 pm, Wednesdays.

Info: Contact selah.empowers@gmail.com for location or link to join online.

This week we will be discussing **Chapter Seven** of *I Don't Know Who I Am Anymore, Restoring Your Identity Shattered by Grief and Loss* by Carole Holiday. **This week we explore the healing aspect of learning to ask for help and how to seek a safe harbor in doing so.** If you need a copy please reach out to Shirley Ritsema at shirleyr@selah-empowers.org or receive it when you join class.

FACILITATORS



Shari Murdock



Misty LaFree, LLPC



Erica Terry, Intern



Vicki Williams



Carol Bosch, LMSW

Selah Childcare
Byron Center
Location



Elisabeth Richards



Shirley Ritsema

Don't miss the next pages with more info from Selah!

Group Agreement: We ask that everyone read the Group Agreement attached to the email. Attending the classes means you have read and agreed to the group agreement.

Childcare: Please let us know ahead of time if you will need childcare, however, we know schedules change, so if you don't get a chance to let us know before class that will be fine, too.

Safe Environment: We want to provide a confidential and safe environment for everyone to share and receive support. We also recognize that some material covered in this group is sensitive and can be triggering. Please practice healthy self-care and let us know if you are feeling overwhelmed or need to speak privately.

How Can We be in Prayer For You?

In Selah online and in person classes, facilitators often extend the opportunity for participants to share a prayer request. These are anonymously passed along to a team of individuals who are committed to praying over Selah, it's leaders and most especially for Selah participants. If you have a prayer request you would like to submit, please feel free to do so by dropping an email to shirleyr@selah-empowers.org. Your email will be handled with confidentiality, care, and covered in prayer!



Selah is grateful to be partnering with these local counseling centers:



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Your abuser has chosen to reject the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and then invest in the messy work that is a pre-requisite to becoming a humble, loving, serving, safe person. Their actions show that they have no interest in repentance and genuine change. As long as they choose to act abusively, as long as they want to stay angry, as long as they cling to entitlement, as long as they refuse to get sober... whatever it is... they are exercising their free will to avoid accountability and continue perpetrating harm.

It's not because God doesn't love you enough.

It's not because you haven't prayed hard enough.

It's because God allows your abuser to exercise free will choice too.

God will not violate your abuser's free will just to answer your prayers.

God will draw the abuser with His invitation to humility and change.

God will offer opportunities for the abuser to recognize what they're doing.

God will offer chances for conviction that lead to change. But God will not force the abuser to become a good person against their will when it isn't something they want for themselves.

God is just as committed to their free will as He is to your free will.

So what are you supposed to do?

Many churches give patently damaging advice by telling abused spouses to go home and silently submit to more abuse in the name of suffering for the name of Christ, or based on a warped concept of the value of human life. When they say "Go home and just show more love/give more sex/be more patient..." ultimately, they're saying "Go home and let the other person continue sinning against you with impunity without any pushback."

The message to just be quiet, let it happen, be more submissive, pray more does not align with God's heart for the oppressed as we read throughout Isaiah and Jeremiah. If we love the abuser, then we want the best outcome for them. Wanting the best outcome for them includes wishing for them to be transformed, even while respecting that we can neither love nor control them into healthy behavior.

Wishing healthy change for them, does not include making it as easy as possible to continue to perpetrate harm by silently suffering as they sin against you without accountability.

Does that mean victims of abuse should be told they must stand up against their abuser, or set more rigid boundaries, or leave immediately? Definitely not. Every situation is unique and must be addressed uniquely, based on the factors present in that particular set of dynamics.

What it does mean is that you have every right to remove yourself and find safety from any pervasive ongoing form of abuse, whether that's physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial, spiritual, verbal... you have the right before God to live without abuse.

If someone chooses to continue harming you without being willing to change and do the work to show genuine repentance, you have every right before God to seek safety.

Your abuser may not change, but you have the right to seek safety elsewhere and remove yourself from the abuse. It isn't that God is ignoring your prayers. It's that God does not coerce anyone, not even into goodness. So God won't transform your abuser against their will, but He will support you in choosing safety.

Coerced change is not genuine change. A harmful person will only become safe if they've chosen for themselves to do so, because they realize the harm they've caused and they want to change. Nothing you do to beg, plead, inspire, hold accountable, or persuade will accomplish the goal.

They must choose healing for themselves.

If you are praying for someone who is continuing to cause you harm, and your prayer is not being answered, it is not because God doesn't love you. It is not because God doesn't love them. It is not because God has abandoned you. It is because God respects your abuser's choice to be abusive and to choose that path for themselves just as much as he respects your choice to flee.

You have every right to seek safety.

