



# INSIGHTS & INSPIRATIONS

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## A Sister Experience: Lydia's Road to Freedom

“ I entered my marriage filled with hope and excitement, desiring to build a strong, happy union with my former husband, just as I had seen with my parents. We both shared a strong commitment to God, one that I thought would bring us closer to each other. However, it didn't take long for me to realize that his strict and controlling misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures was fading that hope for a strong, happy marriage and gradually sucking the life out of me.

Within the first year of marriage, he worked gradually to isolate us from family and friends, which was not easily noticed or obvious without careful observation. He forbid us from having any part in Christmas or Easter celebrations, dismissing them as pagan and rooted in evil. To justify these beliefs, he had us watch many documentaries and listen to hundreds of tapes trying to convince me of the belief system he so strongly adhered to. I pleaded with him to see things differently. What was meant to be a joyous time of year became a horrible period of dread, stretching from the day after Thanksgiving up until New Year's Day.

As a Christian, I was very familiar with the scriptures in Ephesians 5 which talks about wives submitting to their own husbands in the Lord, and husbands loving their wives, as Christ loves the church. I wanted to live this out but his strict rules and demanding ways twisted those scriptures, making it impossible to live up to his unbiblical interpretation of the bible. I was not going to agree with no voting, not seeing a doctor, and not celebrating Jesus at Christmas and Easter.

He constantly criticized me for not meeting his rigid standards, and in his own words, said I was a failure and not a real Christian wife. Yet, deep down inside, I knew this was not true, and living like this was wearing on me, and I knew this was not what God wanted for me, or for anyone. I knew early on that this was not right and not the way God intended marriage to be, but because of the vows I made before God, I was determined to make it work.

The beautiful home we lived in began to feel more like a prison. I felt numb inside. I wanted to leave but didn't want to break the commitment I made before God. I felt trapped. I sought guidance and support from numerous pastors and counselors, hoping to understand this perspective of the scriptures, or at least confirm his interpretation of God's Word was not right. Although many of them sympathized with me, each time they questioned him on his understanding of the bible, he would put an end to the meetings. He didn't want to continue with anyone who did not agree with his position on scripture. I went back home each time thinking if I prayed more, fasted more, loved more, or did something more, God would touch his heart.

I was in such conflict with honoring God in my marriage, respecting my husband, my reverence of the Lord, and the wedding vows we made. My spirit wrestled with what to do, even though I knew his perspective and construct of what Christianity should be was wrong. I was really confused and didn't know what to do...

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If I really believed God could do the impossible and that nothing is too difficult for Him, he could certainly change my husband's heart. And so I stayed. I didn't understand, nor was I aware, of the opiate of religion and how toxic it can be.

His unrelenting unwillingness to acknowledge and depart from this cultish mentality began to weigh on me spiritually, mentally, and physically. I realized I was not willing to pour any more of myself into this toxic situation.

Then a Christian counselor recommended I contact Hagar's Sisters. It took almost two years before I found the courage to reach out to them for help. Joining Hagar's Sisters was transformative! The support group courses, deeply rooted in scripture, encouraged personal reflection and spiritual growth at my own pace and with no pressure on their part. I was growing and becoming stronger. They provided the support I had been searching for but could not find. I learned my experience of abuse was very toxic and not in alignment with God's desire for me or anyone.

For three years, I attended various support group courses, unraveling the scriptures my former husband had twisted, and drawing strength with the other Sisters. My healing really began. I originally planned to remain in the marriage and rely on the support of Hagar's Sisters to deal with the hell I was living in, but as I came to understand God's deep love for me and His intention for my life, I realized I didn't want to waste my life dealing with this craziness. I grew wiser and stronger with each meeting seeing myself through God's eyes.

When the COVID-19 lockdown happened, my former husband and I were home 24/7 and these issues were front and center constantly. After 15 years of dealing with this, I realized there was no willingness or desire on his part to see things differently than what he and others had constructed in his mind. This permeated through how we lived, how we spoke, and how we interacted with one another and others.

This long train of continuous strife causing separation and anguish was the furnace that was burning away the belief I had constructed in my own mind, that I was not able to get out of this marriage, that divorce was not an option for my situation. Through different pastors, counseling, and Hagar's Sisters, I began to understand my error on this matter and having my mind been rectified as to properly understanding God's provision for divorce, I was free of this mindtrap. Being fully aware of his destructive behavior, I was not willing to be indoctrinated by this belief system any longer. Talking through all of this with Hagar's Sisters and others, they provided me with insight and understanding, giving me traction to move forward. I was ready to break out of this prison of destructive mind control and move forward. I knew it was time to get out of this place! I was mad as a hornet and I was not going to stay. I was done!

I saw Jesus standing in the doorway and crossed the threshold together with Him and entered into His freedom, being free to freely give Him all my praise, worship, and thanksgiving. Empowered by His Holy Spirit, I am now living a life of celebration, giving glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, filled with their peace, joy, and everlasting love.

To anyone struggling in a similar situation, I could not stay, but I have seen other families who experienced the change and healing necessary for healthy reconciliation. Like me, they have been able to find long-term happiness. I'm happy to share that I recently remarried a kind, patient man who loves God and loves me unconditionally. 🌿

Lydia

