

Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”

Hosts: Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Episode 37 — Guest: Megan Lively

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Eric Schumacher 00:00

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Worthy. We do want to mention that this episode includes discussion of sexual assault. And this may be difficult for some listeners to hear. Listener discretion is advised. Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men, on the value of women in the church, home and society. We will not always agree on everything but we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, women are valuable, and respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

00:47

Intro song 'Worthy'

Eric Schumacher 01:19

Welcome back to the worthy podcasts, this is Eric Shoemaker along with my good friend, Elyse Fitzpatrick. We're the co-authors of the book Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women. And we are here today with a woman who is a hero to us, someone that we admire, and are just happy to be with. And we hope that you've listened to Part 1 last time of our interview with Megan Lively. She's the creator and owner of Relevant Reach, an online membership community that assists Christian organizations with social media. She also has her Bachelor's degree in Religion and a Master's degree from a seminary in Christian Studies. She is married to Vincent and they have two children. She lives in North Carolina. And last time on the podcast, we heard a little bit about her upbringing, her conversion, her call to ministry, in high school and how her pastor encouraged her in that. She had a great experience at college studying Religion and Christian Ministry. And she moved to seminary where she came face to face with the experience, her experience was feeling like that she wasn't quite welcome there, in some ways that she was less than the male students there. And felt like she had to posture herself as a woman in certain ways, so as not to maybe threaten or overshadow some of the men there. And so that's where we're picking up in this story is in Megan's time there, that seminary.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 02:58

So thanks, again for being with us, Megan. And so what we want to do now is talk to you a little bit about your experience at seminary. We know that you had a traumatic experience at seminary. And what we want to do with this, I want to tell you what we don't want to do. We don't want this to be a, and Megan's already made this clear to us. And so we're going to make it clear to our listeners, that we're not doing this because we love to gossip about stuff that goes on in places that maybe we think they're wrong in what they're doing. We want you to share your experience so that the listeners and particularly pastors, leaders will understand how people experience and respond to trauma, and then how other people should and should not respond to their report. So Megan, in whatever way you feel comfortable, walk us through what happened at seminary.

Megan Lively 04:10

Okay, um, during my second semester, I began dating a student at the seminary, that I went to church with. And one night we were studying in my apartment. And I'll spare the details. I was raped. I reported it the next day to the institution, to the student discipline office, sharing what happened with the leadership of my school. It was awful, replaying it in my mind made me feel as if it was happening again and again and again. All of a sudden I felt this darkness consume the room when the conversation moved in a different direction. As school administrators reversed truth, I got asked a lot of questions that were not questions. The statements they made were dressed up as questions to make me feel as if what happened was my fault, to imply that I wasn't really raped. And I should keep what happened a secret from everyone, including my church, my pastor, and others because it would tarnish the reputation of the school. I didn't feel safe. Retelling the story made it worse. And I began to wonder what if the police responded in the same way leadership did. I was encouraged not to file a police report anyway. After all the meetings and after the student was questioned and confessed of what I accused him of, in the offices with others present, he apologized to me. He also told me he was kicked out of school effective immediately and would never be allowed to attend another Southern Baptist seminary again. Looking back now I didn't realize at the time, the care I never received. I didn't go to a doctor, but I should have. I wasn't offered counseling, or referred to someone that could help me. I didn't file a police report. I didn't tell my pastor. There was no care of any kind. Unless you include the times I was required to meet with a female employee of the seminary for what was called discipleship or counseling. I can't remember the term. It was a part of my disciplinary plan. We never discussed what happened. She read Bible verses to me and it wasn't verses like Romans 8:1. The verses were used to shame me. She used God's word as a weapon, in such a manipulative way I was unable to speak. I sat through those three required meetings in silence, and took the beatings, but never let her see any emotion. There was a weakness I knew I would never let other people see again, because I didn't want to get hurt again. But I met with her and I did my time. And I did that because if I didn't, I couldn't stay in school because I was on probation and that was one of the requirements of my probation. The day that I reported what happened to me, I went back to my apartment, still in physical pain. I didn't tell my roommate. I didn't call my twin sister. I didn't call my parents. I longed for the community of the safe church home I had at 16 years old. I vividly remember standing in my bedroom window later on that day. And I remember thinking life would never be the same. I took a deep breath and I swallowed a massive lump in my throat. And it remained there for 15 years.

Eric Schumacher 08:37

So Megan, I want to ask a few questions just about the story you told. And I want you to feel free to answer or not answer however you'd like. But just to understand what happened and what was wrong about what happened so that our listeners can understand how this was mishandled and can learn how to handle a report better. And rightly so. First of all, I just want to say I'm so sorry, that that happened to you. A seminary should have been a safe place. A seminary student and a seminary administration should be safe people. And it's wrong, both that you were raped and that your report of that rape was mishandled in my opinion. You know, you mentioned being put on probation and having a disciplinary plan. That just saddens me to no end that you were sexually assaulted and you end up being put on disciplinary plan, and on probation when the rapist admits to his crime and his sin. So you go and you report to the school administration. You have a meeting. Who, who is at this meeting? I'm not asking for names, but what types of positions? How many people are there? That's

Megan Lively 10:30

it was, um, leadership. And it was, it was more than one or two people. It was, and it was all males.

10:38

It was all males. Were you asked if you would like a woman to be there?

Megan Lively 10:44

No

Eric Schumacher 10:44

That wasn't offered? And would you have felt comfortable asking?

Megan Lively 10:49

No, no.

Eric Schumacher 10:54

How many questions did they ask you? And what was the nature of those questions?

Megan Lively 11:00

Too many. It was it was questions that a pastor should never, ever ask a woman. It consisted of questions that if my husband ever asked a woman, I would let him have it. I felt backed into a corner and I felt like a four year old girl.

11:30

So you're, you're in a room, an office, I assume, at the seminary. And you've got three men or more, who have authority over you in some way.

Megan Lively 11:44

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 11:45

And they they all have authority over you. And I assume, correct me if I'm wrong, they're asking you sexually intimate details about what took place? Yeah.

Megan Lively 11:59

To try and determine if it was actually rape.

Eric Schumacher 12:01

To try and determine whether it was actually rape. Rape is a crime. Did any of these leaders of the institution, call the police and report it?

Megan Lively 12:15

No.

Eric Schumacher 12:17

Did they encourage you to file a report?

Megan Lively 12:21

No.

Eric Schumacher 12:22

Did they discourage you from filing a report?

Megan Lively 12:25

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 12:26

Why did they discourage you?

Megan Lively 12:28

It would tarnish the reputation of the school.

Eric Schumacher 12:31

Is that the reason

Megan Lively 12:32

and the Christian witness.

Eric Schumacher 12:34

Is that the reason they gave you?

Megan Lively 12:36

Yes, sir.

Eric Schumacher 12:37

Wow. So they told you not to report a crime that was committed against you that has manifold ways that harms you from physically to emotionally. They told you not to report that crime, not to report that criminal who could have very well done this to other people, because it would tarnish the reputation of their institution.

Megan Lively 13:06

Yes.

13:07

Wow. I'll be honest, and frank here. That's evil. That that is that is not Christian.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:19

It's devilish.

Eric Schumacher 13:21

It is, because Jesus is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Which means he doesn't need our help to protect his reputation. Jesus, on the cross, addressed every sin ever committed. He didn't, He didn't sweep our sin under the rug. He addressed it head on and he saw that justice was done. And for leaders of a Christian institution who claim to care about the gospel, to sweep sin under the rug, in the name of Jesus is to deny the name of Jesus. Because that's not what Jesus does. He exposes and ends sin, and he vindicates his people and to not report these crimes against you fails to vindicate you, which is what a Christian leader should do. They should pursue justice. And it fails to protect not only you, but other women because they aren't trained, as far as I know, they are not trained in criminal investigations and they are not authorized. That's not their role to determine whether a rape actually occurred. They're there, not to mention the fact that he confessed to it to them. So

Megan Lively 15:17

He told me, he confessed to it. So I want to make sure that that's clear. When he apologized he told me he confessed.

Eric Schumacher 15:23

Yes, yes. So he, so he confessed to it. He's confessed he's committed this crime. Criminal investigators will be trained and knowledgeable in how to determine whether there's reason to believe this may have occurred elsewhere. So that, you know, a public conviction could have done all sorts of things to protect other women who may have been harmed in the process. So I just see this as a, not just a failure in leadership, but as a grievous sin, on the part of the leadership. And those are my words, not Megan's, if you're out there listening to this, and you're upset about it come after me, not her.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:07

Well, I want to say something as well.

Eric Schumacher 16:09

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 16:11

The reason that you protect an institution is because of ambition. You are ambitious for to protect your place, and you are ambitious, to protect your reputation in an institution. And you know, Eric and I have tried to have respectful conversation about this topic. And we've talked a lot about James three, I'm going to read this. If you have bitter and the selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and deny the truth. Such wisdom, which is selfish ambition, does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice. And treating you, Megan, and who knows what other women as you were treated, in my opinion, because of selfish ambition is demonic, unspiritual and earthly and brings disorder and every evil practice. And I want to call it out. I mean, I want to call it out. That's what this is. We're not just talking about people who, you know, they're not really too sure what happened. and so you know, we're trying to protect this wonderful institution. It's demonic.

Megan Lively 18:06

I love John, I read it. I just continually read it over and over because it is, I found my identity in Christ, through the gospel of John, that I read just yesterday, John 3:19. This is a judgment that the light has come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth and comes to the light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:48

It's It's the difference between darkness and light.

Megan Lively 18:53

Yes

Elyse Fitzpatrick 18:53

It's the difference between goodness and evil. It is. It's demonic. The love of an institution over the love of a human being, a soul is demonic.

Eric Schumacher 19:20

Yeah. Satan is the father of lies, and he has come to kill, steal and destroy. And that's what happened in this situation. They covered up sexual assault by not reporting it. They assumed the role of the government when it wasn't their role to take and they prevented justice. There is there is an abuse of a person on the level here that is fits with killing. There is a stealing of much that I think we're going to hear about what was stolen of you. Years of your life and much destruction that comes from this. And so yeah. You said something there at the end. Wow, there's just so much to that I'm so I'm so sorry for what happened how this was responded to. You said that you looked out the window, you took a deep breath, and you swallowed a lump that would stay swallowed for 15 years. What do you mean by that? I did You didn't talk about this for 15 years?

Megan Lively 20:55

I told no one, I wouldn't allow myself to go back and think about it. And I literally stayed in denial for 15 years.

Eric Schumacher 21:07

So explain the stages that you went through, from swallowing that lump in your throat, to being able to be here and to speak.

Megan Lively 21:18

Okay. Looking back now, I didn't realize at the time, but back in 2003, after this happened, within a year, I began struggling with anxiety, which I had never struggled with before. I lost 45 pounds and developed an eating disorder within 12 months. And so I began struggling with secondary, I don't know if you would call it a secondary issue. But I begin struggling with things that I had never struggled with before. And I think it came down to control. I was fearful. I didn't I didn't date, um, my third year of school. But there this happened my first year, my third year in seminary, I finally began dating a young

man who was kind. He was nice. He was there was nothing, there was nothing wrong with him. I wouldn't let him touch me. Wouldn't let him hold my hand. Nothing. And he was very confused. And at the time, I didn't even have the words to explain to him why I could not hold his hand why I could not but but have a close, we had a friendship. But it didn't go any further than that. And so that's part of the denial that lasted 15 years. And then the next phase was realization. And that happened in early 2018 when I began reading news headlines. I intentionally avoided Southern Baptist politics for years, obviously, for the many reasons, but I am on Twitter. And so I started seeing some things and reading some headlines that were really disturbing. And I kept, I remember literally squeezing my eyes shut and closing out browser windows because I didn't want to see it. I didn't want to hear about it. I want to read about it. I didn't want to think about it. But the more I read, the worse I got. And very vivid memories began flashing back. I felt pain in my back that I hadn't experienced since that day in 2003. I started seeing things that I don't I don't know how the mind and body work. But I literally had not had these memories in 15 years. And one night, my husband he asked me, he's like, are you okay? And I blurted out what happened. And I said it as fast as I possibly could. Because again, retelling the story, it makes it real. And it's so hard to retell that story and that and I want your listeners to hear that. That is just one of the many reasons women stay silent. And I say women because I minister to women, I don't have a lot of I don't have any men messaging me on Twitter, sending me emails asking me things. And I don't feel equipped to help men. And so when I say women, I'm not saying there are no male survivors out there, but retelling that story in 2003, and retelling that story in 2018 is just as painful and just as difficult as it was back then. When I told him the story, he said Megan, you were raped and I said no I wasn't. I was a grown Woman, almost 40 years old. I had two kids, successful career. And I was still under the wicked spell of those men that convinced me otherwise. The silenced, shamed, lesser than individual that was never ever viewed or treated as an image bearer of God.

Eric Schumacher 25:27

So sorry, Megan. That's just hard to hear. Because what I know about the situation is that at least some of those men who tried to convince you otherwise, during those 15 years are, quote, unquote, advancing in leadership, and denominational positions. They're celebrated as leaders. And here's a woman dealing with trauma 15 years later, who wasn't offered counseling or therapy, or a report to the police. And that story is far too common. where, you know, I just think of Bill Clinton as a great example, where he's essentially raping a young, using his power to sexually assault and manipulate a young woman. And he's still celebrated within his political party, and she's still dealing with PTSD. And it goes without saying that's unfair. So your husband points out that this is rape. What happens next? Where do you where do you go from there?

Megan Lively 27:03

He embraced me and he loved me. And over and over and over, he just, he told me I was beautiful and he loved me and God loved me. And he wasn't going anywhere. Because there is this level of guilt. We've been married how many years and I've just told you this for the first time. And my parents divorced when I was a teenager, so of course, I'm, I quickly assume he's gonna leave me. Because when things got bad for my parents, that's what, that's what happened. And, um, he was exactly what I picture Jesus would be. He mirrored Christ to me. And I'll never I'll never forget it, because I know he was angry. I know he was hurting. I know he was going through all kinds of emotions himself. But Vincent grew up in a Christian home, and his, his father loved his mother and his mother respected his

father. They didn't throw around scripture to demand one from the other. He never heard words like complementarianism. He simply knew his parents loved Jesus and loved each other. So Vincent, because he grew up in a home that was so wrapped around Jesus, he was able to display this Christ-likeness to me in that moment, where I felt like everything was out of control. And he called our pastor at midnight. And we went to see him the next day.

Eric Schumacher 28:59

I just want to publicly thank Vincent, for what a great example and model of Christ he is. And I'm struck by the contrast there where there's, there's Vincent Lively, who none of us have ever heard of. He doesn't have any fame. He doesn't have any leadership position as far as I know. He loves Jesus. And and where leaders put you under disciplinary action, and they convinced you that you weren't raped. Like Jesus, Vincent calls the sin what it is,

Megan Lively 29:27

Yeah.

29:45

Yes, he did. Right,

Eric Schumacher 29:47

And where they disciplined you, he grieves with you over the harm and sin that's been done against you. Where they didn't offer or provide any therapy or care, he immediately takes action, to contact your pastor and make sure that you're going to get care right away. Like that is a stark contrast between what you shouldn't do, and what you should do. And a great picture of what Jesus looks like. That's a picture of the gospel. We're going to address the sin. We're going to, we're going to mourn with you. We're going to be present with you. And we're going to immediately see what we can do to get you care. And that is, so Vincent, I'm sure you might be listening. I just want to say thank you to you for loving Megan so well. And, and being showing such such mercy to her in her suffering, and in what others have have done to her. So how did your pastor respond?

Megan Lively 31:10

I couldn't ask for a better pastor, um, bless his heart. I felt so bad for him because we went in and sat down. And I think he thought that we were going to tell him we were getting divorced or something. Because our faces were just and you know, we're both I'm very animated. And I'm, you can see, like, my facial expressions are always doing something and, and he's the same way. He's a super nice guy, very friendly, very, he's got a great personality. But we did not have any of those things that morning. And we go in and we sit down and immediately, like I told you earlier, I start looking at the past my pastors bookshelves, because that's what I do. I love books. I love to read. They're my thing. I'd rather get a book on my anniversary than a piece of jewelry or chocolate. So I'm looking at his books. And he, my pastor says, "Yeah, we went to the same seminary", and I said, "yes, sir". And he said, "Did you ever get to go through and he names a former presidents library?" And my poor husband, his his, uh, he just his heart, and his whole head just went down, like, straight down. And he said, "I'm just gonna have to stop you right there." And I looked at Vincent. And I said, "I can't tell him." I was so embarrassed. It's like, I couldn't I couldn't retell that story again. So Vincent told him for me. And my

pastor put his face in his hands, and he wept, and he wept. And he sat there. We all sat there in silence, and he wasn't afraid of silence. He wasn't afraid of having all the right answers in that moment. When we all we needed to do was grieve. And I needed to see his grief as the shepherd of as the leader of our church. And he did that. He he didn't try to fix anything. He prayed with us. He He asked me if there were any verses that came to mind. And I was in such a fog in that moment. I know now that I was experiencing psychosis, which I had never heard the term before. But I couldn't I couldn't recall a single verse and Vincent said "that's, that's their idea. That's how you know there's something wrong with her because she can tell you a scripture, anything you asked, she can recall it and she can quote it by memory. That's how you know there's something wrong pastor." And so he read, um, gosh, I think it was Psalm 3 or Psalm 4 because I told him I wasn't sleeping and I didn't feel safe. And as I was struggling so much, but he, in that moment, when I told him that spiritual leaders had hurt me, it didn't stop him from reading the Bible and sharing Scripture with me and praying for us. And that takes a very bold pastor, but he, he read I believe it was Psalm 4 and because I, I hadn't slept all night. And he knew that and he's the end of that chapter. In peace, I will both lie down and sleep for you alone make me dwell in safety and he focused on that word safety. And he reminded me that I was safe. And we discussed a lot of things that day. But one of the biggest things was you need to seek medical help immediately, you need to go see your doctor. And he knew he didn't have the tools in his office to fix or to heal, or to help me. He knew he could spiritually advise me. But he also knew that he was not a medical professional, and I was clearly experiencing a level of trauma that he wasn't able to handle.

Eric Schumacher 35:40

So even here, we have another great contrast where these leaders when you reported, they didn't send you for any medical help. They didn't provide for your physical well being. They didn't provide you with trauma therapy, or counseling. And, and legally they, they bore the burden of being the crime investigators, instead of letting the police do that. They didn't provide you with legal justice. And here's a pastor who says, I know what my capability is, and what my responsibility is, my calling. I know my I know, my office, and that is to walk with you spiritually, and provide you spiritual counsel. I'm not trained and not equipped to give you what you need for your mental health.

Megan Lively 36:43

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 36:44

And so he pointed you to go get that.

Megan Lively 36:48

And after he pointed me to this

Eric Schumacher 36:51

after he pointed to the Bible, yeah, he gave you that spiritual counsel.

Megan Lively 36:55

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 36:55

And what a great Psalm, Psalm 4 that night prayer. I'm just thinking about how it starts. Answer me when I call God who vindicates me. You freed me from my affliction. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. How long exalted ones will my honor be insulted? How long will you love what is worthless and pursue a lie? Know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself, the Lord will hear when I call to him. And I just pray that even through you sharing your story, Megan, that's my prayer for you. That God would vindicate you. And that he would be near to you, gracious to you, and hear your prayer. So your pastor encourages Vincent to go and get you medical help. What, what kind of helped you end up getting and what happens from there,

Megan Lively 38:00

The next stage, I guess you would call it that I went through after denial and realization was anger. When I found out and realized that what I've thought for 15 years wasn't true was and I was very angry. And I stayed angry for a very long time. And even today, I get I had to get on my knees every morning. And you will not hear a lot of survivors say this, but I will say it, I have to get on my knees and confess my anger. Because I know that this will this situation and what happened to me which does not define who I am will make me bitter, or it will make me better. But it will always be present. And when I submit myself to God, He takes that energy and He uses it for good. Because it's always going to be present. I'm always going to have this energy in me. And I don't want the root of bitterness to spring up at all. And so I have to constantly submit myself to Him because anger. I think there's anger is justified in a lot of this. But anger shouldn't stay with us forever. So I went I went through a stage of anger. And then um, during that I sought help from my medical doctor, because I I didn't sleep for months, honestly, and I've never struggled with insomnia or anything like that. I never did. I never heard the word complex trauma. I knew what PTSD was that people that come back from the war. But that was my only experience with that I didn't know any of these things. I didn't know what psychosis was. And so I went through all these new issues. And it's not. And this is one thing my pastor told me, because we met with him a few times after he said, "these things that you're feeling, are in no way, an indication of the healthiness of your relationship with God. And you cannot help how your brain reacts to the trauma going on inside your body. Your brain is trying to help to keep you healthy." And I was staying awake, because my brain was trying to protect my body. Because my brain knew I was in danger, or, or I'd convinced my brain I was in danger, I don't understand it all. And I need to I need to read more on the subject. But, um, I went through a lot of mental terms that, and things that I never even knew existed. And I'm, I'm thankful now because I know what that looks like. Because that when I see it in another woman, I can say, I think I know what you're experiencing, I never assume that I know more than I do but I can share with her. This is what happened to me. And the smiles that I get in return, are very, they're very sweet and sad at the same time. So I went through it and a fate stage of anger. And then I went through regret just I was very, I felt guilty for other women that came forward after me, I felt guilty for the women that hadn't come forward. And I felt as if I should have done more in 2003 than what I'm what I did, and so those were just four of a few phases stages that I went through, involving trauma.

Eric Schumacher 42:26

You know, it's, I'm interested in so much of what you just said, because I'm noticing from that Psalm 4 where I stopped reading, the next verses, be angry, and do not sin. On your bed, reflect in your heart and be still, offer sacrifices and righteousness and trust the Lord. And I'm just struck by the way that,

that your response is exactly what the psalmist tells us to do. You were angry, but you strove not to sin. And you got down on your knees, you know, beside your bed, and, and, and put your hope in Christ, your sacrifice, and and what you said, I just think is so important, because here you are as a Christian, striving to honor your Lord. And that's something you've emphasized with us. It was I want to glorify God in what I say, and and here you are trusting the Lord, and striving not to sin. And at the same time, all the problems didn't go away. Like this, this is not a matter where having more faith heals you, you know, You're trusting the Lord and all those big psychological terms you were using, are still there, and that harm is still something that you have to live with. Because of these, in a lot of ways, fearfully and wonderfully ways that God has made us He has made our body to protect itself.

Megan Lively 44:21

Yes.

Eric Schumacher 44:22

And when we are harmed in ways that ought not happen in ways I don't understand, our mind is seeking to protect us. And things happens to our minds so that when we're in similar circumstances, or things come up, we see things, we hear things. Our mind goes into action, our body goes into action to protect us, and we're also fallen and broken in our bodies, you know, we're decaying and these things don't always work the way they're supposed to and Sin harms us. And I'm so thankful for your pastor. And I hope he's listening, I want to say thankful to him to realize, like, on the one hand, yeah, Megan needs to hear from the Word of God.

Megan Lively 45:13

Yeah.

Eric Schumacher 45:14

And on the other hand, this is not a matter of Megan just needs more faith and to forgive someone, and then she'll be okay. Because it's, it's like a broken arm. You know, the kid falls off the trampoline, and breaks his arm, and we are going to pray with him. But it's not a matter of, if he just has enough faith right now his arm's healed. He needs to go to the hospital. And this healing takes it takes time. And it the wound is real, and the harm is real. And churches need to talk about that and understand that what happens in our mind isn't merely a spiritual matter.

Megan Lively 46:06

And there are reasons for why women respond in ways that some other people may not necessarily understand.

Eric Schumacher 46:17

Hmm.

Megan Lively 46:18

And I think that needs to be talked about. And people need to educate just like I had to educate myself on what psychosis and complex trauma was. Leaders and pastors need to as well as they will more than likely deal with what my poor pastor dealt with, and had no idea like what was about to hit him,

bless his heart, but he was so good to us. But again, he didn't, he didn't try to fix it. And he didn't try to manage everything right there in his office. And you know what? He didn't tell me not to tell anybody. He didn't say don't tell anybody in church. Don't tell any of the other pastors.

Eric Schumacher 47:05

Yeah

Megan Lively 47:05

He knew that God. We, it's not. God does not need us to protect his reputation.

Eric Schumacher 47:16

Yeah, yeah. And he gave you the benefit of the right to control how you told your own story. You know, if you wanted to tell someone else you were free to tell someone else.

Megan Lively 47:35

Yeah. And the biggest thing, I think, in my story that I love, and it's heartbreaking at the same time is God never let go of me. In those 15 years

Eric Schumacher 47:50

Yeah. Yeah

Megan Lively 47:50

I never lost my faith. I still believed that I had a heavenly Father that loved me, and cared for me. And there is a part of me that wishes like, I think it's, I don't know what movie it is where the girl takes her crown off after winning homecoming queen and starts breaking off pieces and throwing it to women in the crowd. I wish I could take some of mine and give it to women who have been abused in a spiritual setting, and now struggle in their relationship with the Lord. Because that's not how it should be. But I'm, I'm grateful, because I know that is of the Lord and not me. And He, He never let go. Never let go.

Eric Schumacher 48:38

Yeah. So if you're comfortable talking about this. At some point, you did speak publicly about what happened to you, and the response. What led to that?

Megan Lively 48:57

I knew there were other women. And I found out after I reported what happened that the student had been seeing other women at the same time. So I couldn't find them on Facebook or reach out to them. And I could not. I felt like I had to speak for women that were out there that I didn't even know, for strangers. If he did this to me, and I'm hearing these and I'm talking about the leaders. If this leader covered up this story of mine, and I've been seeing these headlines about other things that he's done recently there has to be more stories. And I didn't want other women walking around for 15 years thinking they were crazy.

Eric Schumacher 50:12

Yeah.

Megan Lively 50:13

And it was just this overwhelming sense of love for people. And I can't even I don't, I can't describe it, but I couldn't, I couldn't stay silent. And that did not come from a place of anger, or creating justice on my own, it came from a place of love for my neighbor.

Eric Schumacher 50:44

And I know from talking with you, and from other women who have shared their stories of sexual assault and rape, publicly, because they wanted to protect other women, that this is not something that women do for attention. And the price that you pay for going public with a story like this is a high and painful price. Is that accurate?

Megan Lively 51:19

Hundred percent.

Eric Schumacher 51:20

Yeah. What was the experience, like after you went public? If you want to talk about that,

Megan Lively 51:31

it was not, it was not pretty, it was not. Um, it was it was ugly, it was there was a lot of pain in my family, my extended family. There are relationships that have will never be the same. There are relationships that were destroyed completely. I was a lot of people associate what happened to me with the #metoo movement, which a lot of people believe is a liberal, Democratic issue. And so all of a sudden, instead of being a person who was sinned against, I became a political topic. And when you live in a small town, you don't want to be called a Democrat. That's like being called a cuss word. So that the small town part was difficult. And I had family members that were ashamed of me.

Eric Schumacher 52:45

And I've been able to even witness some of the just following your story, some of the shameful and inappropriate ways that people have treated you online, on Twitter, social media, name calling, reputation smearing. It's, it's really wicked, how far people and their networks will grow, to protect a person and their reputation at the cost of another. Instead of just saying, we sinned, and we totally mishandled this, please forgive us, what can we do to make this right? There is a whole network of people who will come to a man's defense and attack a woman again, and traumatize her again, for the sake of protecting a reputation just like they protected an institution. And that's evil. And you still have to live with that. And that is wrong, and it should not happen. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that it did. And I just want to say to our listeners, if you're a person who has been involved in you have sexually assaulted someone else, or you're in leadership and a report has come to you, and you covered it up, or you mishandled it because you didn't know how to handle it. They didn't teach me that in seminary. We had nothing on how to handle this and that was 2002 and I graduated. And you you don't want to speak out on these issues because you know what you did in the past. I just want to encourage you to come clean. Go confess what you need to confess and do what you need to do to make it right. Because what good is it to guard your reputation in your institution when Jesus is going to lay this all bear on the last day anyway,

Elyse Fitzpatrick 55:21

Yes, He will

Eric Schumacher 55:23

And he's going to. What's been done in secret He's going to proclaim from the rooftops. You might lose your job, and you might lose your reputation. Who cares? What, what does it gain you to gain the world and lose your soul? You're worried about what might happen to you if you admit what you've done or failed to do. And you're more concerned about yourself than what happened to this other person has already happened to this other person, their harm has already been done. And your repentance will not only help this person, it will actually help turn the tide of how religious institutions and churches handle these things. And if that was your legacy, that's worth it. We need more of those legacies of repentant, repentant leaders. Even if it means you have to resign. It's worth it. The men and the women that you will help will be, both in the past and the present and in the future, will be it'll be worth it. So, Megan, I kind of want to wind it down now. And I think maybe this will be our last question, unless Elyse you want to throw something else in there.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 57:00

You go.

Eric Schumacher 57:02

You have been you became a political topic. And there were big old newspapers reporting this. The story. How, how have people treated you, in terms of wanting to interview you? I imagine there's people who this is trivia, and like voyeurs, they just want to get in and get some juicy gossip and see what actually happened and went on places. What do you want people to know, about survivors like yourself, and how people should take an interest in them and their story?

Megan Lively 58:00

The human sinful nature side of Megan, if I had to do all over again, I wouldn't. I wouldn't tell a soul. I would tell my husband. I would tell my husband and that would be it. I would still have relationships out my life would be different. My marriage, even though it stood, we stood strong through that, and we got through it. It was difficult. It's been difficult. But if I had it to do all over again, I would, I wouldn't tell us all except for my husband. And yet, the side that leans in to my Savior is the opposite. I would do it. I would. I wouldn't change a thing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 58:49

Megan, I think that we've run you out.

Eric Schumacher 58:53

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 58:55

And I'm so proud of you and so thankful for you. And I'm not as spiritual as you are. I am enraged. On the one hand, and I'm thankful that you told your story. I'm sorry that telling your story has been so

costly. And I don't I don't think we need to. I don't think we need to say anything else except. Thank you. You know, well, I think in what you have said, if people have listened, they will know who you are and what needs to be said. Is there anything in your heart Megan that you would like to say and if not, we will just close it.

Megan Lively 59:55

Light shines in the darkness and the darkness is not required.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:00:03

Like, yes, and so may the light of the truth, and your so beautiful life in Christ shine, and may the light shine for all the women and men who hear this. And who are. Maybe they don't even feel like they're survivors at this point, maybe they think that they are victims. And they are. We're not telling anybody to do anything except to listen and to love to love your neighbor. And let the light, let the light shine. And so for our Worthy listeners, we pray that you would listen to our courageous sister. And that you would take this to heart and ask God to help us as the church to love the brokenhearted and to love those who have experienced, maybe things that we haven't experienced. And to think again, about what it means to be like Christ. So we thank you, we thank you, Megan, thank you for your time. And listeners, we thank you. Would you please would you please fall on your knees and ask God to give us all heart to love like Jesus loves?

Eric Schumacher 1:02:13

I think I'd like to do something we don't often do in the podcasts. And I, I want to, I want to close this episode with prayer. And ask the listeners to please just pray along with me and and with us. And add your Amen. Heavenly Father, we are thankful that you are a good gracious and merciful God, that you are a tender caregiver, that you are a warrior for justice, that you defend victims, that you punish the guilty, that you lift the sufferer out of the pit. Lord, we are grieved by this story of injustice and wrong in what's been done to Megan at a Christian institution, the way that sinful men covered up crime and abuse for the sake of the reputation of something that Jesus never said that he would build. For he's building a church. And he doesn't need our help in guarding the reputation of the gospel. Father, we know that Megan's story is not isolated at all. But that this story is all too common in other institutions, and places of work, in local churches, and in homes. Lord, we pray that you would uncover and expose every act of sexual violence. every act of cover up by leaders and we pray this particularly in your church in America, Lord, that You would continue to uncover and expose this. We pray Lord for the Southern Baptist Convention that you would bring to light such injustices wherever they may be. Lord, we pray that you would bring those who commit such crimes and sins, to justice, and to repentance. And, Lord, we pray that you would vindicate every one of these victims and survivors. Lord, we know that on the last day you will vindicate your people, you will show them to be in the right, that you will correct every wrong. But Lord, we pray for victims of sexual violence, for victims of sexual violence cover up in the church, and in Christian communities and institutions that you that you would not make them wait for the resurrection and judgment to see that vindication. But that you would do a sweeping work of revival by giving them this vindication now, no matter what it means for the American church and its reputation. Jesus is the Lion of Judah and he can defend himself. And the gospel is your power for salvation. It doesn't need our help. Help us to believe that. And Lord, I pray for Megan and for every other survivor, that you would look down upon them in your compassion, that you would see what they

are experiencing, and feeling and that you would be moved to dwell with them and help them. Give them healing. We pray that like Joel prophesied that you would restore for them all the years that the locusts have eaten and give them wholeness and peace and joy and flourishing in this world, as they wait for the next. Father, we pray especially for Megan. We know that telling her story is exhausting. And we know that as these podcasts are published, having her story be heard, will be exhausting. And we pray that you provide her with abundant grace and mercy. In Jesus name, Amen. Thank you Megan, for joining us.

Megan Lively 1:08:16

Thank you.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:08:17

Thank you, Megan.