

CHRISTI PAUL

HLN AND *In Session* NEWS ANCHOR

A portrait of Christi Paul, a woman with long, light brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a white, ruffled cardigan over a white top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her right hand is partially visible, showing a ring on her finger.

Love Isn't Supposed to Hurt

a memoir

FOREWORD BY
DR. SANJAY GUPTA,
CNN CHIEF MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT

“My dear friend Christi Paul truly shows the world what’s possible! She bravely shares her journey of making big mistakes, taking responsibility, and creating the life she always dreamed of. If you ever wanted to believe it’s possible to move past someone else’s limited vision for your life, then this book is for you!”

—**DARYN KAGAN**

(DarynKagan.com), national radio host of *The Daryn Kagan Show* and syndicated newspaper columnist

“I’m a big believer in living with an open heart. It’s the only way to live authentically, but it can be frightening, too. Christi’s bravery in telling her story isn’t lost on me, but what touched me most was her battle with herself to hold on to hope when she didn’t see any and to recognize the healing power of forgiveness. Her stellar writing and brutal honesty bring you into her pain and invite you to come with her on a journey that proves, whatever your faith, we all have in us what we need to conquer our fears.”

—**JANE SEYMOUR**

Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning actress, author, artist, and designer

“It takes a lot of courage to overcome the pain and anguish of emotional abuse—and even more to write about it. Thank you, Christi, for sharing your own personal heartbreak and triumph. It’s empowering. I have no doubt it will encourage people to find their strength. Every woman should read this book!”

—**CHERYL BURKE**

ABC’s *Dancing with the Stars* and author of *Dancing Lessons: How I Found Passion and Potential on the Dance Floor and in Life*

“Life can be full of hardship and place seemingly insurmountable obstacles in our paths, and it certainly does not go according to ‘our plan.’ This one thing, however, is true: God has a plan, even when we don’t. Christi’s book is a wonderful guide to overcoming those obstacles and living the life we are meant to live.”

—NANCY GRACE

Host of HLN’s *Nancy Grace* and *Dancing with the Stars* final-five contestant
(season 13)

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Some of the names in this book have been changed out of respect for the privacy of the individuals mentioned.

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Foreword

WHEN MY DEAR FRIEND Christi Paul first talked to me about writing a book a couple of years ago, we were sitting next to each other in the makeup chairs at CNN headquarters. It was early morning, and while the rest of us were still waking up, Christi was already a bundle of energy. One of my favorite parts of the day was the impromptu discussions I had with Christi.

On that day I was running off to do my show and Christi had hers, so we didn't have as much time to chat. I asked her what she planned to write about. She paused for a while, and for a brief moment her trademark megawatt smile disappeared from her face. "It will be about hope," she eventually answered. That sparked a discussion we have continued ever since. I told her that when Pandora opened the box, many evils escaped—including pain, anguish, and misery. But as some versions of the mythology go, one evil didn't make it out.

"Forbearance," I told her. "We never know what the future

holds, and that provides the greatest hope of all.” It is a quintessential human ingredient, and without it, we would be a very different species.

I could tell that my comment hit the mark with Christi, but until I just finished reading her wonderful book, I wasn’t entirely sure why. I had heard when this beautiful woman started at CNN that her previous life had been a difficult one, and as a polite colleague, I never wanted to intrude. I was, however, always curious about what had happened to her and shaped her into the person she is now.

Over the years Christi had three daughters and I had three daughters, all around the same age. That cemented our friendship even more. I would laughingly inquire about her husband’s sanity, being outnumbered by gals in the house. More seriously, I would talk to Christi about the hopes, dreams, and aspirations she had for her own girls. It seemed I was always trying to learn the best ways to care for my own daughters. Now, after reading this book, I realize Christi provided me an important gift to pass on to my girls—life lessons we all wish we had learned earlier.

To be honest, at the beginning this was a tough book to read. I was learning some awful details about my friend Christi’s life, things she had never shared with me or many other people. As I read each chapter, I was worried about her safety, and I worried that she would be too broken and too battered to fulfill the life she deserved to have. Even though I knew the outcome and realized that Christi had persevered through some very tough times, I could not stop reading to learn exactly how she did it. I also realize this was exactly why she wanted me to read it. After all, she had once told me, “It will be about hope.” And she really delivered.

The book is about more than that, though. It is about unexpected lessons, taking control of your life, and digging deep to find your courage. At times, the book will challenge your faith—even trash it—as you hear what Christi endured. But in the end she brilliantly always comes back to that galvanizing theme of hope.

Most of us work with colleagues every day and even become friends with them without knowing who they really are or where they came from. That all changed when I read *Love Isn't Supposed to Hurt*. Having written books myself, I know it is scary to put yourself out there for the world to see—and to be vulnerable about some of the most delicate details of your life. Christi was both courageous and brilliant in the telling of her story.

Regardless of your own faith or system of belief, you will learn how the beautiful woman you see on TV every day chose to rely on her own faith and how she turned real tragedy into genuine triumph. After you read the book, hopefully you will get a chance to share it with those you love. At the right time, I will share these stories with my own daughters.

—Sanjay Gupta

Prologue

I'M CONVINCED THAT somewhere in the archives of a photography studio in Ohio there is a picture of me I never want to see.

The sun was beautifully bright that August afternoon in Sandusky as we stood in front of a gorgeous garden splashed with flowers. The photographer said, "Go ahead and dip her." My new husband slid his hand around my back, and as he started to dip me, he hissed at me through his smile, which was really just gritted teeth. "When is this going to f---ing be over?"

At that moment the sun was my enemy. It had to be exposing the white of my face as the blood drained out of it.

Could it be? Could my husband of only two hours want that desperately *not* to be in this moment?

I felt like someone had poked a hole through my chest, stuck a straw in the opening, and started sucking the air out of my lungs. No breath came out for a few seconds. Just long enough for the shock to register on my face as the camera flashed.

And somewhere in a closet of that photography studio they

probably have it on a negative they were too kind to ever develop.
Thank you, photographer.

But the words were seared into my memory . . . no picture needed. It was at that split second that I thought, for the first but not the last time that day, *Dear God, what have I done?*

CHAPTER I

REMEMBER YOUR ROOTS

DEAR GOD, what have I done?

Of all the things I dreamed of feeling on the day I got married, that was not one of them.

I know. I should have been more honest with myself. By that point in my life I had sat through my share of weddings. If I had lined them up to see how many unions had survived, I'd say I was looking at a 50/50 split—half of the marriages were still going strong, and half had already crumbled. I was a big talker back in the day, too, often proclaiming, “I don't care if I'm standing at the end of the aisle in my dress with everyone seated and ready to go. If it doesn't feel right, I'm not walking down that aisle!”

But that's exactly what I did. Standing at the back of the church, just before the doors opened, with my father by my side, I said,

“Dad . . . you’ll always be the number one man in my life.” I looked at him, and he was fighting back tears. Thinking back on the day now, I wonder if it was simply because he was facing that moment a father dreads most—giving his daughter away—or if there was more to it. If he, too, was scared. If he knew that this was not how things should be.

It should have been a warning sign to me that when I told him he’d always be the number one man in my life, I truly meant it. You’d think that as I was getting ready to say, “I do,” I should have been pledging that spot to my new husband. Or that I wouldn’t feel the need to “number” people at all—that I could love both of them without categorization. But, truth be told, the man I was walking toward was not someone who made me feel safe or cherished or authentically loved. I think I just convinced myself of that for as long as I could because it was what I wanted to believe . . . whether it was real or not. And in that moment, despite all my proclamations of “I’ll never make that mistake,” there I was, walking right into it.

In terms of logistics, everything else was perfect. My most treasured friends were there standing up for me, the church was filled with all the people who were important in my life, and my dear family friend and pastor, Roger Miller, had come back to town to perform the ceremony. I suppose those distractions were enough for me to gloss over the truth that was standing right in front of me.

Roger’s message that day was haunting, though I didn’t realize it for a few more years. He kept repeating, “Remember your roots. Remember the family you came from that loves you. Remember what makes you who you are. . . . Remember your roots.” Maybe

he knew too. Maybe he sensed this was not where God meant for me to be. Maybe the message was Pastor Roger's way of preparing me for the journey ahead . . . and giving me some direction to guide me through it. But I'm sure even he had no idea how torturous the journey was going to be.

Of course I'd heard about women who lose themselves completely, who give everything they have to a man, allowing his life to take over. It never entered my mind that I could be one of them.

But in one walk down the aisle, I did just that. And I had no one to blame but myself. I chose it, even though I didn't realize I was doing it.

Isn't that how it always seems to work? One day you wake up, look around, and wonder, *Where am I? Whose life am I living, and how did I get here?* Little pieces of the real you keep flitting away in someone else's wind until the you that you've always known has disappeared. It happens so gradually you don't even notice it at first. I know I didn't.



A few weeks after the wedding, Justin and I were watching the video of our big day, and I found myself overwhelmed with shame and sadness. I tried to hide it, but I guess my heart was on my sleeve. I can be a darn good actress when I want to be, but the fact is, if I care deeply or if I'm hurt, it shows. My new husband noticed, and he didn't like it.

"What's wrong with you? You're not happy after watching our wedding?" he snapped.

But if you could see the tape, or if you had been at the wedding, you'd know why. It's impossible to ignore Justin's impatience blaring

through each scene in the video—the stomping away from the altar when the photographer wanted to take a few more pictures of me alone, the rolling of his eyes when the DJ asked us to dance together again. At one point I heard someone in the background say something to the effect of, “It looks like Christi’s initiating all the kissing.” I was humiliated. What I had refused to acknowledge before was now right there on tape as evidence, and I couldn’t ignore it.

At the beginning of our relationship I wrote off this impatience as simply Justin’s personality. That’s how he handled a lot of things in his life . . . with eye rolling and a lot of huffing and

*Until you acknowledge your
contribution to a broken situation,
you can't truly start to fix it.*

puffing. But as the years went by, I had to acknowledge that maybe, in his heart of hearts, he didn’t want this marriage after all. Maybe he only wanted me with him because

he didn’t want to be alone. Maybe he had his own insecurities to deal with. Maybe he wasn’t ready to get married. Whatever the reason, I hurt for both of us.

I can’t tell you how many times over the next five years I looked back on that day and asked myself, *Where was I?* I was strong! I was smart! I was independent! What alien took over my head and my heart, telling me, *Yeah, walk down that aisle. Marry that guy! That’s what you should do?*

I knew when all was said and done, it wasn’t only Justin’s fault that we’d gotten married. I had made this choice. I’d said yes; I’d walked down the aisle; I’d spoken the words *I do*. And I’d lied to myself about it the whole time. I suppose I wanted to marry him so much that I allowed that desire to override all the trepidations and doubts I had.

But it took me a long time to own my part in it. What's important is that I finally did. Because until you acknowledge your contribution to a broken situation, you can't truly start to fix it.

There was a landfill full of rubbish I had to wade through before I was honest enough with myself to start making some sound decisions, though. Before I could find my way back to the real me—the person God had created me to be. At one point, it all literally brought me to my knees.

But on the night of my wedding, I laid my head down on a pillow, closed my eyes, and prayed, "God, be with us." Quite frankly, I didn't have any other words.