

Unchained at Last

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Join us for our conversation with activist and founder of Unchained at Last, Fraily Reiss. Unchained At Last is the only nonprofit in the US dedicated to helping women and girls leave or avoid arranged/forced marriages and rebuild their lives. Unchained also is the only nonprofit in the US dedicated to creating social, policy and legal change to end forced marriage in America. Fraily has a powerful message about this unseen epidemic in America. We've also got [What's Good // What's Bad](#) chronicling the interweb's best and worst of the week and a rant about Christians and boycotting.

Buckle up for a wild ride as we skewer through life, culture, and spirituality in the face of a changing world.

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Title: Unchained

Episode: # 142

Program: Snarky Faith Radio

Host: Stuart Delony

Well, good afternoon, and welcome to another round of *Snarky Faith Radio*. I am your host, Stuart Delony. As you're out there listening this week, you may say, "Who is this guy? He sounds different." Well, it's because I got a haircut. I just wanted you guys to know I got a haircut, so I may sound a little different on the radio. Just a heads up, so no one gets confused. This week on the show, we have an interview with Fraidy Reiss who is the founder of Unchained At Last. It's an organization that helps women get out of forced marriages. It's a great talk, and we will get to that in a little bit. Before that, you know what it's time for? It's time for "What's good // What's bad". Just a reminder, if you want to see all the videos and all the links that we're talking about here, you can find it on our website www.snarkyfaith.com.

Over this past week, since we've talked, since we've hung out, since we've been around one another, did you catch the Oscar flub that was heard around the world? I'm pretty sure everybody knows about it where Pricewaterhouse gave Warren Beatty the wrong card. He read out the wrong Best Picture winner, which was super awkward, super embarrassing, but the thing I loved most about this was I love that confused look on Warren Beatty's face when he looked at the card. He stared at it. He looked at it. He wasn't sure what to do with it, and he was just like, "Uh." It was one of those things that reminds me of what it looks like when my mom is trying to figure out how to take a picture with her iPhone. She's just like, "Uh. Why is it on my face? Why can't I—?" Yeah. It was one of those classic moments, which is almost as laughable as the fact, if you heard in the news that, uh oh, Mike Pence used to use a private email account, not a private email server, but a private email account that, in the past, got hacked. What I love about that story is that, as governor, he was still using his own private account, which was an AOL account. I didn't even realize AOL accounts were still a thing. *[Laughter]* I remember it back from in my teens when you would get AOL. You could dial in and hop on to the internet. Oh my gosh. How far we've come, but it's just funny that people still use AOL accounts. I didn't know that was a thing.

Onward and upward into "What's good // What's bad". Here's the first thing we've got. First off, sticking to politics, did anyone read—this comes from the Washington Post—information was recently taken down from the Iowa Senate Republican websites. This guy's name is Mark Chelgren, and apparently, on his website, he had some incorrect information because it said that he formally held a business degree. As folks went to dig into, really, what degree this was, where it from, actually, he had taken a management course at Sizzler years before. No, but this is real. This is a real thing. The dude was touting that he had a bachelor's degree in business and it was simply just, I think, a one-time management course for Sizzler, the restaurant, like when people would say, "I went to McDonald's University." Same idea. Yeah.

Many of you know we are in that period of time called Lent, which marks the days that march us towards Easter. As part of a Lent tradition, you've seen this in the stores. You don't even have to be religious go follow this Lent tradition because we've seen them everywhere. The Peeps. They start happening. You see them in your grocery stores. You see them at the Walmarts and Targets of the world. Yes. Those little, squishy, marshmallow things that kind of represent chicks that are simply just a sugar bomb in your mouth. Well, if those weren't good enough or sweet enough for you, this year, they're running a limited time edition Oreo Peep. You've got the Oreo cookie on the outside and squishy, little Peeps on the inside. The only problem, as people have noted across social media is (a) your tongue turns completely pink when you eat them. The scarier part is on the other side, like after your body has digested and processed it, when it's ready to make its triumphant exit, yeah, it's turning everybody's poop pink. It's freaking people out. Thanks, Peeps. Thanks, Peeps and Oreo for turning our poop pink as that's a great meditation reminding us of the coming of the resurrection of Christ for Easter. *[Sarcasm]* Right. Whoever thought about that? You could, actually, literally give up normal colored poop for Lent and say, "I'm good. I'm doing this. I'm going to commit to 40 days of eating Peep Oreos." Delicious. *[Sarcasm]*

Moving away from poop and getting back to Easter, we've got a video. I don't know if you've caught it. I love it. It's really funny. There was a guy dressed up (I believe this was in Europe) as Jesus walking around as an art piece, a guy dressed as Jesus, walking around, carrying his cross with him. I don't know if this is an airport or a subway station, he's coming out the other end of an escalator. Well, apparently, there wasn't enough clearance in the ceiling, and his cross gets jammed up and jacks up the ceiling. All we can say was, "One of those Jesus party fouls." Really, if you're Jesus and carrying a cross around everywhere, you're bound to come into some mishaps, sometime.

Next, on a slight tangent from talking about Jesus, let's talk about zombies because, in certain circles, and depending upon your definition of *The Walking Dead*, it could be argued that Jesus, in fact, was a zombie. He was dead, and then became reanimated again. Let's talk about fake zombie breakouts. The Randolph County, which is Randolph County is in Indiana, their sheriff's department ended up having to list this service announcement this week on Facebook. *[Laughter]* It said this. It said:

"Local alerts from WZZY 98.3 FM regarding the zombie attack and disease outbreak from deceased bodies is a result of the radio station's alert system being hacked. There's no local emergency. We have contacted the radio station and notified the Indiana Department of Homeland Security. Again, there's no emergency or disease outbreak in Randolph County."

What had happened was someone had actually hacked in to the radio station's alert system and began to broadcast out an alert that there was a disease that was spreading, that people were dying, but then becoming reanimated like zombies, and people needed to hide and take cover. This is what happens when we have to wait an entire week until the next *Walking Dead* episode. *[Sarcasm]* Come on AMC. When Netflix drops a new show, they drop them all at once. They don't tease us. They don't make us excruciatingly walk out to figure out what's happening to Rick and everybody else. Come on. All seriousness, I can't imagine that this caused a panic, but apparently, it did cause a bit of a panic because you never know what could happen in Indiana. Wasn't that where *Stranger Things* was filmed? Hmm.

Next. This next thing started off as a "What's good // What's bad". What I'll do is I scour stuff out on the interwebs for you guys and find interesting stuff that's been going on. The Washington Post had posted a piece entitled "Why Can 12-Year-Old Girls Still Get Married in the United States." It was one of those things that would've been in the "What's good // What's bad" category as bad. It just blew my mind. It blew my mind that we still have forced marriage issues in our country, that we still have child brides in our country, that this is still happening. This is the kind of thing that you always read about when we think about human trafficking and stuff that goes on in third world countries. We get appalled about it like, "How can this happen?" This stuff is happening under our noses in this country all the time. I read through this article. I did some more research on this article. It, actually, led me to Fraidy Reiss, the founder of Unchained At Last. This whole idea that this continues on in this country is blowing my mind right now. I wonder if she would take time out of her busy schedule to talk to us, to inform us, to educate us about the problem that we have going on in this country. After a few emails, Fraidy decided that this may be a good platform for her to be able to share her story. I felt like it was a good platform to educate you guys, my beloved audience, about this problem that's going on. That led into the interview with Fraidy Reiss from Unchained At Last. Here it is.

[Begin Audio Clip of Interview with Fraidy Reiss]

Stuart: Today, I'm sitting here with Fraidy Reiss, the founder of Unchained At Last. Unchained is the only nonprofit in the United States dedicated to helping women and girls leave or avoid arranged or forced marriages and rebuild their lives. Unchained, also, is the only nonprofit in the U.S. dedicated in creating social, policy, and legal change to end forced marriage in America. Fraidy, thank you so much for being on this today.

Fraidy Reiss: Thank you for shining a spotlight on this really important issue.

Stuart: When I was doing the pre-interview research and questionnaire, there's terms that get thrown around when talking about this a lot. You'll hear arranged marriages. You'll hear child marriages. You'll hear forced marriages.

Can you give us some definitions, so we have a working definition in this conversation?

Fraidy: Yeah. That's a really good place to start. First, people have, like you said, some confusion about what is an arranged marriage. What's forced marriage? How are they different, and how are they the same? My answer to that is that a forced marriage is one in which one or both parties does not give full, free, informed consent. In many situations, a family or community will call it an arranged marriage, but calling it that, doesn't make it that. If both parties are not giving full, free, informed consent, then that's still a forced marriage. The question of child marriage is—by the way, we can go back and talk about the problem with differentiating between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage is that there's such a fine line between consent and coercion. If somebody says yes but only after experiencing extreme duress, threats, whether they're implicit or explicit, or fraud, coercion, bribery, then it becomes a question of was that yes actual consent or was that coercion. It's very difficult, many times, to differentiate between an arranged marriage and a forced marriage. We let survivors tell us. Did you feel that you had the chance to say yes? Did you feel that you were able to consent to the marriage? The question of child marriage, not all child marriages are forced. A child marriage is one in which one or both parties is under the age of 18. Not every child marriage is a forced marriage because some children enter into a marriage willingly. Not every forced marriage is a child marriage because somebody can be forced into a marriage or pressured, or coerced, or bribed, or threatened, whatever it is, at any age.

Stuart: Gotcha. All this starts with your story in this. You were raised, what I've read here, is in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community where you were pushed into an arranged marriage.

Fraidy: Yeah, and again, there goes the wording. You're calling it an arranged marriage. In the community that I come from, they don't call it arranged or forced marriage. They just call it marriage. You have to look at what was actually happening as opposed to the label that a family chooses to put on it. Yeah. In my situation, I was raised in a very insular, ultra-Orthodox, Jewish community where I was taught from when I was a toddler that my goal in life was to marry young in an arranged marriage and to be a wife and a mother. Soon after I graduated from high school, my family arranged my marriage. I never really had an option. The question of whether I was going to marry was not asked. That was told to me. The question of when was not asked. It's after you graduate from high school. The question of whom, well, the matchmaker brought me somebody. I had a matter of hours over a period of a few weeks to decide whether I wanted to marry him, never being allowed to be alone in the room with him or have any physical contact and with tremendous pressure on me to say yes.

Stuart: When did it start going wrong for you, or how soon did you start seeing that there was a problem?

Fraidy: Well, I knew him for only a total of three months when we were married because we had a few weeks to, so called, date and then a six-week engagement. He was still a stranger to me when we married. It was only one week after our wedding that he first showed himself to be violent, and soon after that, that he first threatened to kill me.

Stuart: Oh my gosh. When you started seeing that there was problems here, that there was major problems here, where did you go to look for help in your community?

Fraidy: I went to the places that I had been told I was supposed to go for help. I went to my family, his family, and the rabbis in the community. Wherever I went, there were no offers of help. There was, you chose this guy. Even though this marriage was arranged, I had said yes. I was told, you chose this guy. Marriage is forever. Here's another thing that's important to understand is that a forced marriage is, not only at the point of entry that one or both parties doesn't give full, free, and informed consent, if one or both parties is forced to stay in the marriage, then that, then, becomes a forced marriage. As little choices I had entering the marriage, I had even less in terms of leaving it. Under Orthodox Jewish law, I did not have the right to divorce my husband. Only a man is allowed to divorce his wife under religious law. I did not have reproductive rights. I wasn't allowed to use birth control, so I gave birth 11 months after my wedding. Soon, I had two children. I, also, had no financial rights. I wasn't allowed to work, have a bank account, or a credit card in my own name. I was completely, financially dependent on my husband for myself and my kids. With a family that wouldn't help me, there was just no way out.

Stuart: How did you get out?

Fraidy: Finally, at age 32, managed to leave because I became the first person in my family to go to college. It was really frowned upon. The high school that I went to, the all-girls, ultra-Orthodox Jewish school that I went to, we actually had to sign a paper in high school promising that we would not take SATs or driver's ed, by the way. That's how concerned the school was. That's how concerned the community was about people going to college. I became, at age 27, the first person in my family to go to college over the arguments of my husband and my family. I insisted on going, and graduated at 32, and became financially independent even before I was financially independent. As soon as I graduated, I changed the locks and filed for the divorce. My family and community shunned me. They consider me dead, but I rebuilt my life with my two daughters.

Stuart: How was that? How was that process of rebuilding?

Fraidy: Horrifying, terrifying and joyful and liberating at the same time. I was escaping, not only from an abusive marriage but also, leaving a very insular, religious community where I didn't have a television, a radio, newspaper, very little contact with the outside world. I knew nothing about the outside world and had to learn that hamburgers are not made out of ham and that the Beatles are, actually, a group, a band. Just basic things like that, and what size I am in jeans.

Stuart: That is incredible, especially when you're talking about how insolated life was to, then, begin to leave that. It's like you have to relearn everything.

Fraidy: Yes, literally. Not relearn, learn everything.

Stuart: True.

Fraidy: I was 32 years old learning, for the first time in my life, about what the world is like out there. Terrifying and exhilarating at the same time.

Stuart: When we start to talk about these forced marriages, especially in the realm of child marriage, can we talk about stats when we're looking at how prevalent this is in the U.S.? I think, oftentimes, there's this common assumption that this kind of thing only happens elsewhere in the world. How prevalent is this?

Fraidy: You're absolutely right about that assumption. I get that a lot. If I meet people, for the first time, who already know my story, they say, "Oh, but you're white. This doesn't happen to white people," or when people hear my story, they'll ask me, "Oh, so you're from Iran, right?" I say, "No, I'm from Brooklyn. I grew up in Brooklyn. I'm very American." The statistics on forced marriage, simply, aren't there because so little research has been done on this. There was one nationwide survey of forced marriage that was done in 2011 by the Tahirih Justice Center that looked at a two-year period leading up to 2011. It found that during that period, there were up to 3,000 known or suspected cases of forced marriage in the United States. Child marriage, also, the statistics just were not there until we, at Unchained At Last, undertook this huge nationwide research project. We went state by state. We went to all 50 states plus Washington D.C., and we asked for marriage license data going back to 2000. We were able to get that data from 38 states. Twelve states and Washington D.C. don't track the data. From the other 38 states, what we found, from analyzing the data that we retrieved, is that more than 167,000 children, as young as 12, were married just between 2000 and 2010, in those 38 states. For the 12 states and D.C., because we didn't have the data, we came up with a formula to estimate how many children were married because there was a strong correlation we identified between state population and the number of children married. Including the actual numbers and the estimate for the states that don't track the data, we determined that nearly a quarter million children were married in America between 2000 and 2010. Again, from the data we do have, we know they were mostly girls married to adult men, and they were as young as 12 years old.

Stuart: That is absolutely frightening to hear that, especially as a father of two girls. For me, that's just mind blowing. I've read that Unchained At Last is fighting to have all 50 states adopt legislation that would change the

marriage age to 18 with no or very few exceptions. What kind of pushback are you seeing in the work that you guys are doing of changing legislation?

Fraidy: So far, there's been no public outcry against the bill. The pushback really, if there is any, more and more states are introducing legislation that eliminate the exceptions to the minimum marriage age of 18, which, currently in all 50 states, allow children to marry. If I could just go back and say that again. Currently, the minimum marriage age in almost all 50 states is 18, but every state allows exceptions under which children can marry. The legislation that we're pushing to introduce would eliminate those exceptions state by state and reserve marriage, which is a serious, legal contract, for those who have reached the age of majority, which, usually, is age 18. In states where the age of majority is higher, then we're pushing for an age of marriage that's higher. More and more states are looking at this now. Legislation that would end all marriage before 18 without exceptions is, now, advancing in New Jersey where it's close to passing. It's, also, pending in Maryland, Massachusetts, Connecticut and about to be introduced in Pennsylvania. Then, legislation that would, at least, cut down on child marriage, although not completely eliminate it, is pending in New York, Missouri, New Hampshire, and more and more states are starting to look at that.

If there's been any pushback, it's been from legislators who are just shocked when they learn about this issue. They have a lot of questions. "Well, is that really your problem here?" I can show them, yes, it is. We have the data showing that this is a significant problem in your state and across the United States. Then, some legislators have questions about, "So, is this violating anybody's religious freedom?" No, it is not because U.S. Supreme Court has upheld legislation that incidentally forbids an act acquired by religion if the legislation does not target religion, which this bill does not. Besides, most major religions tend to view marriage as an important, holy union between two willing partners. I talked about the U.S. Supreme Court having upheld legislation that incidentally forbids an act required by religion if the legislation doesn't target religion. Also, most major religions tend to view marriage as an important, holy union between two willing partners. That's, not at all, where child marriage is. Child marriage, often, is forced, and child marriage almost always ends in failure. Between 70 and 80 percent chance of marriage ending in divorce if there's marriage before age 18. Really, this bill is entirely consistent with modern religious views.

Stuart: Well, I'll ask you this, and this is more of an off-the-cuff question to this. I was reading in the Huffington Post today. It was an article about some legislation that was trying to move forward in Mississippi. They were trying to push forward a bill that would add domestic violence to the list of legal reasons a person can get a divorce in Mississippi. The problem is, that it died in the House Committee on Tuesday after its chairman, Representative Andy Gibson, said that it could open up the floodgates to divorce. I know. *[Laughter]* Legislation like this is still on the periphery of what you guys are dealing with. I don't know if this is simply an issue of too many men running things from a standpoint or what it actually is, but when I read this, I'm just like, "Oh my gosh. What is wrong with you?"

Fraidy: First, excuse me while I vomit on the floor. I can't even believe you just said that. That's just horrifying. So far, we haven't come across anything as terrible as that. There are some legislators who have said along the lines of what you just said. A girl gets pregnant. She needs to get married. There are, unfortunately, legislators who have said that. That's just absolutely horrifying, even getting past the whole sexist notion of that. Actually, studies show that pregnant girls or teenage mothers who stay single have better long-term outcomes than those who marry. Also, in states that have a pregnancy exception to the minimum marriage age, they've, often, been shown to be used to cover up a rape and to force a girl to marry her rapist. States have been moving away from pregnancy exceptions to the minimum marriage age because they're terrible public policy. We are getting, in a limited way, some of that pushback from legislators, but, for the most part, it's a matter of educating them and explaining to them you're not helping a pregnant girl or a teenage girl by marrying her off. You're actually working against her. By showing that this is why, other states have moved away from it. Only nine states still have a pregnancy exception. In fact, there are several states that specify in their law that pregnancy is not enough of a reason for a girl to get married.

Stuart: Looking at this on more of a global scale, I think, and I believe, from what I was reading, but you would be more of an expert to answer this. What countries are handling this problem of forced marriage better, and how are they doing it?

Fraidy: Are you asking about forced marriage or child marriage? There are a lot of countries that are handling forced marriage better than we are. In terms of child marriage, it's very difficult to determine which countries are handling child marriage better than we are because, like in most U.S. states, they set 18 as the minimum marriage age. If you were just looking at it quickly, it looks like we're doing a great job, but it's those exceptions that are the problem. A lot of countries have the same situation. More than half of all countries allow girls to marry under a parental consent exception, and that's, specifically, girls. Most countries have more protections for boys than for girls, which is really upsetting. In terms of child marriage, it's really hard to say. I've read so many different studies that have shown the topic so differently about different countries. It's hard to know what's, actually, happening in those other countries. In terms of forced marriage, I can say that the U.S. lags behind many other countries in acknowledging and responding to forced marriage. I often use the example of the UK where they've longed acknowledged that forced marriage is a problem, and for that reason, there's a national hotline that people can call to ask for help if they're facing or already in a forced marriage. There is a task force that responds to individuals who are in need, even if somebody was taken overseas. If a UK citizen was taken overseas to be forced into marriage, this task force will respond, and rescue that individual, and bring the person back to safety. There was always a civil protection order that those facing a forced marriage could use to gain safety and protection. Then, a couple of years ago, the UK also criminalized forced marriage, so there's, now, an actual, statute that criminalizes forced marriage in the UK. We don't have any of this in the U.S.

Stuart: From your experience and the experience of those that you've been helping to get out of these situations, how do you see that religion plays into this problem in both child marriages and forced marriages? Also, just in that same regard, how do these religious communities that we're seeing here allow, condone, or turn a blind eye to things that are happening within these marriages?

Fraidy: Before I answer that, by the way, I just want to add to what I said before. There are ten U.S. states or territories where there are laws on the books that can be used to prevent or punish a forced marriage. That's a very small percentage. Also, those laws appear to be written for completely different reasons, not to prevent or punish a forced marriage. An answer your question about religion, so there are four main reasons that we've seen that parents will force their child, whether it's a minor or an adult, into a marriage. The first one is tradition. That could be cultural or religious. It's not always in a religious context that a forced marriage happens or a child marriage happens. Girls, often, will say to us, my parents were never religious, but all of a sudden, when it came to marriage, this was just something that was deeply ingrained in them. The second one is money. Sometimes, there's a bride price or dowry that changes hands. Related to that is immigration. A girl is, sometimes, forced to marry a man overseas so that he can apply for his U.S. visa. Again, in many of those contexts, there's no religion involved at all. Then, another big one is control. Parents will use marriage as a way to control a child's behavior or sexuality. If a child comes out as LGBTQ, a girl gets pregnant, parents find out their child is dating or dating the wrong person, and they don't like that, they'll sometimes use marriage as a way to control that. Again, that could be completely outside of a religious context.

Stuart: Take me through the steps of how Unchained At Last helps someone. Someone reaches out to you, what are the things that you guys do to be able to help them?

Fraidy: If it's an adult, what we do is we help the person. Most of the people we help are girls or women. If it's an adult woman, we help her to leave home. That can be very tricky. We implement an escape plan. Sometimes, she's being held against her will. Sometimes, she's even been taken overseas to be forced into a marriage. We have to work with the state department to bring her back, and then get her into a shelter. Then, help her to rebuild her life. Often, that means getting her free, legal representation, so she can get a restraining order against whoever it is who's threatening her or abusing her, or filing for divorce if the marriage has already happened. Sometimes, there's a nasty custody battle because some of the women we help have been married many years and have multiple children. Then, anything we can do to help this woman become financially and emotionally independent. That's always for free. We don't charge for any of our services, so that's psychotherapy. If she escaped with just what's she's wearing, we'll get her a whole new wardrobe. If she's transitioning from a shelter to her own home, we'll help

her get pots and pans, and dishes, and a couch, and beds for her kids, and for herself. Anything she needs whether it's ESL classes or getting her GED, so that she can move on and get an education. Sometimes, there are other legal needs that she has like immigration. If she was brought from overseas, she needs legal representation to get her legal immigration status. It's whatever we can do on a case by case. No two cases are the same.

Unfortunately, when it's child under the age of 18, even one day before age 18, our hands are tied, and we're blindfolded. There's very little that we can do. Those girls, often, end up just giving up. They stop reaching out to us, and we cannot reach out to them without putting them danger. Some of them just decide to go along with the marriage because they realize that anything else is just too difficult. Some of them turn to self-harm or suicide attempts because they're so devastated by what's happening to them. We see clients from so many different backgrounds, and so many different stories, every socioeconomic level, but the one constant in almost all of these cases is the betrayal. This is something that I can relate to from my own story. The perpetrators in these situations is their own parents. It's their own family members. It's really traumatic for these girls and women to realize that the worst trauma of their life is happening, and it's their own family that's doing it.

Stuart: For any of our listeners out there that may be caught in a similar situation like to the ones that you're describing here, how should they go about contacting you? What would you tell them? Can you speak directly to them if they're caught in a situation like this?

Fraidy: If you are in a forced marriage situation whether that means facing an impending forced marriage or you're already in a forced marriage, I urge you to reach out to us at Unchained At Last, so that we can help you. You can call us or email us if you're unable to make a phone call safely. We will do whatever we can to help you. It's just important to get the help and not try to figure out the situation on your own. Unfortunately, what some people do is they'll try to get help from—especially someone young in high school or in college, they'll often go to a teacher for help or go to a friend. In many situations, somebody who doesn't have experience with this is very well meaning and tries to help but reacts in the wrong ways and that can, often, exacerbate a bad situation. We've had situations where a girl approaches a teacher, for example, and said, "Please help me. My parents are trying to force me into a marriage." Then, the teacher, very well meaning, will say, "Oh, don't worry. I'll call your parents." That, of course, often leads to a bad outcome. Many times, parents will pull the girl out of school, and then she disappears. There's no way to help her. We've, also, had situations, unfortunately, where a girl approaches somebody and asks for help and gets turned down because a teacher doesn't understand the situation. Even the police will say, "Well, this is just an argument between you and your parents. You can work this out," and dismisses it. If somebody has dismissed your concerns, please don't think that that means that you deserve to be forced into a marriage. You don't.

Stuart: What about folks that hear this and want to get involved or support Unchained At Last? What are avenues they can get involved?

Fraidy: We're a really small organization, almost all volunteer. We have two staffers, me and one other person, a social worker. Beyond that, we're almost an all-volunteer organization, and we rely on the kindness and generosity of people like you. If you want to get involved, go to our website. You can make a donation. That, of course, is always helpful. Because we're a very small organization with low overhead, your money goes directly to helping women and girls. There are different opportunities on our website for ways to volunteer. Depending on which state you're in, if legislation is pending in your state, you can send an email to your legislators and your governor saying, "I support this legislation because it happens." You can read about upcoming events. We organize periodic chain-ins. It's these political protests where wear bridal gowns, and veils, and chain our arms and tape our mouths to protest forced and child marriage. We provide the bridal gowns and the chains. It's quite an experience, so I urge everyone to join an upcoming chain-in. It's an experience you'll remember forever.

Stuart: On that, topic of chain-ins and upcoming events, what's on the horizon for you guys, right now?

Fraidy: Our last chain-in was just last week in Albany. We don't have any chain-ins currently scheduled, but we're looking to do another one coming up soon in New York City. We hope to do one in Massachusetts in the spring.

Then, looking to do, perhaps, in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Connecticut. Go to our website to learn more about those chain-ins. Other events for those of you who are in New Jersey—do you have any listeners in New Jersey? We have an event coming up next Thursday at the Bloomingdale's in Short Hills. Bloomingdale's are holding a fashion event, where 20 percent of the proceeds goes to Unchained At Last. We have our annual dinner coming up in September. We're doing a dinner cruise for anyone who wants a cruise on the Hudson River with an open bar and a DJ, so it's good times and all to benefit a really good cause. This is your opportunity.

Stuart: We've heard about your work. We've heard about all that you're doing. For you personally, what inspires you the most to keep going, to keep doing this great courageous work?

Fraidy: For me, it's so personal. I couldn't do anything else at this point. I'm so dedicated to this because I know what it's like to be in a forced marriage and unable to leave. Then, the women and girls who call and ask for our help, they are our daily inspiration and a reminder to me about how important this work is. It's only with us survivors telling our stories, and making noise, and attempting these chain-ins that we can make Americans aware this is a problem. Forced marriage is a problem here in America. Child marriage is a problem here in America. That's the only way we're going to see change.

Stuart: Well, Fraily, thank you so much for your time today. Thank you so much for your work and all that you're doing to make a difference in this world. It is such a noble, honorable cause that you're going after. I just wish you the best, but I really just do appreciate the time that you gave here today for the show.

Fraidy: Well, thank you. I really appreciate your taking the time to, again, shine a spotlight on us because we need more people talking about this and being aware of this.

Stuart: Thank you so much.

[End Audio Clip]

Again, my thanks to Fraily Reiss. You can go to www.unchainedatlast.org for more information. The thing I love about the work that she's doing is that it is an absolutely, worthy cause. You know what's not a worthy cause, Christian's boycotting *Beauty and the Beast*. Yes. The new *Beauty and the Beast* movie that I know little kids out there are all excited about happening. Of course, as this movie rolls forward and is about to come out, leave it to the religious right to start trying to find something to boycott, something to get angry about, something to stand against. Who's at the epicenter of all of this? It's none other than my anti-man crush, Franklin Graham. Yes, thank you, Franklin. Thank you so much for highlighting this huge problem that we have here in America and especially, the America church. *[Sarcasm]* It's one that I would probably put under #whitepeopleproblems, #firstworldissues. Yeah, if the biggest thing that you as a mouthpiece or a supposed mouthpiece that Christianity can get up and rally the troops around is the fact that there's a side character in *Beauty and the Beast* that happens to be gay. Really? Don't you run a humanitarian organization, Franklin? Don't you run an organization that's trying to help the problems in this world with hunger, with people that have a lack of clean water, a lack of access to healthcare? Those are big problems. Those are problems that I wish Christians were known for being about, for known for trying to fix in this world, not this kind of crap that you're pulling, not this kind of crap again where we have nothing better to do than boycott issues of entertainment. I mean, really. Let's talk about having your eyes on the prize or completely missing the point, which is what's happening right now.

For the sake of context, I will read to you this post that Franklin Graham sent out over Facebook last week. He said:

“Disney has aired a cartoon with same-sex couples kissing. It has also been announced that their new movie “Beauty and the Beast” will feature a gay character in an attempt to normalize this lifestyle. They're trying to push the LGBT agenda into the hearts and minds of your children—watch out! Disney has the right to make their cartoons. It's a free country. But as Christians, we also have the right not to support their company. I hope Christians everywhere will say no to Disney. I met Walt Disney when I was a young boy. He was very gracious to me, my father, [Billy](#)

Graham, and my younger brother when we visited. He would be shocked at what has happened to the company that he started.”

Then, he goes on to say, “If you agree, comment below and share this with others. Let Disney know how you feel.” I swear, this stuff has been going on forever in the Christian community. It’s one of these huge, white, American, privilege problems that we like to do this. We like to say, “I don’t like the content that you’re making. We will boycott this.” At the same time, I just want to highlight the absolute hypocrisy behind this. If you want to ask me, as the guy with a radio show called *Snarky Faith*, I mean, seriously, that you’re worried about a side character being gay in this. Come on. The whole core of this movie is, essentially, bestiality. It’s, apparently, normalizing bestiality for our young children. [Sarcasm] Come on. You totally missed the point here, Franklin. If you want to boycott something that you can say is pretty definitive in the Bible, let’s go after bestiality. This movie’s about bestiality. [Sarcasm] No, I digress from that. I’m just kidding, but this is the problem. This is the problem that we have with Christianity in America today. It’s the fact that we do not know what it means to be a Christian. If we think being a Christian is going out and policing culture, taking the “moral” high ground in all of these issues, setting up straw man arguments, doing all this in our own echo chamber of followers, when we do that, we, actually, accomplish nothing besides just puffing ourselves up. We use these issues as platforms to, hopefully, stoke popularity amongst our legions of followers that we have in the midst of this. None of this has anything to do with making the world a better place. None of this has to do with feeding those who are in need, helping those who are hurting.

If you read the core teachings of Jesus, if you read that, it’s simply about loving those around us, providing help for those who are in need, and being a good friend and not being an ass at every turn, which is, somehow, the American, Christian complex. For those mouthpieces out there, they have defaulted to, somehow, just being an ass because they feel like they have the moral high ground to do it. Is this what Jesus was here for? Did Jesus die on a cross so that we can police movies, that we can boycott things, and scream about our preferences not being made? The only one thing that I will say was true about his statement is that this is a free country, and people can make whatever kind of movies they want to make. The idea that you are wasting efforts, that you are wasting time, that you are wasting people’s attention on trivial matters like this, things that don’t matter, things that show that you are so out of touch and have no idea, really, what God is calling us to do in this country.

You see, I believe that we should be about bringing walls down, not building them. I think we need to be about dialogue. I think we need to be about peace. I think we need to be about the good things that we want to follow after instead of trying to tear down culture at every turn. You don’t create culture by tearing down everybody else’s culture. That just makes you a critic. Critics don’t get anything done. Now, we need them because, otherwise, it be completely hypocritical of myself [laughter] who’s in the middle of criticizing this to say that we don’t need critics. We do. We, also, need tangible action. I’m not talking about boycotts. I’m not talking about Facebook posts. I’m talking about, actually, getting your hands dirty while helping others, putting yourself out there in a vulnerable position to be able to love others. You see, we had heard about *Unchained At Last*. These are people that are doing tangible things. They’re trying to help people get out of horrible situations. When we just sit here, and like to kick back, and just criticize culture, and try to rouse up folks against things like that, it simply and only comes from a place of privilege. It costs nothing to do it. You’ll get Facebook likes. You’ll get Facebook shares. You’ll get all of those things that tend to make yourself feel good. Oh, yes, I’m on the right end of this argument because look at this. [Sarcasm] Look at this. All these people that agree with everything that I say, continue to agree with everything I say. I go back to the place that we are at right now in a country where we are very divided, where we can’t even hear the other side anymore. The idea of attacking and tearing down only continues to polarize us and push us further and further apart. Where’s the humility in all this? Where’s the grace?

No, I haven’t seen the *Beauty and the Beast* movie, and I, probably, will rent it at Redbox when it comes out because I have two daughters. Have you watched the movie? Are there themes of redemption and grace in it? I’m guessing there are. When we highlight what is good in the world today instead of only having a lens to look at what we don’t like, or what we disagree with, or what we think is bad because if you claim to have a faith in Jesus and a walk with a Savior that is redemptive, that loves, that wants healing and wholeness for all, you’ve really missed the boat. I

don't think that the pursuit of Christianity is being able to point out sins of others. I don't think it's about being a cultural critic. I think it's about loving others. I think it's about making a real, tangible difference in the world. We get caught up in these stupid and pointless Facebook, and Twitter, and social media political arguments where we are just playing to our side. We are doing nothing at all. Actually, let me correct that. We are doing something. We're, actually, just creating a divide, and we're making it to where our voice will no longer be heard. You see, if you're against everything, it's really hard to ever see about what you're for. If you're against everything, that's all you're going to be known for being. We have to be a people that want to create change, that want to create change that doesn't exclude people. We want to be able to create a change where people have the space and have the place where they can hear messages of hope that things can get better, where we can begin to see what is good in the others around us. Now, I'm not saying we have to agree with everybody, but the moment where we can cease to see the humanity on the other side of the aisle, when we cease to see them as people, as creations in God's own image, when we cease to see their humanity, we've become monsters. We've become monsters that little resemble the Savior that we so loudly like to proclaim.

The problem with Christianity in America today is the fact that it's forgotten why it exists. It's become consumed with the fact that it has lost power. Now, I'm not talking about spiritual power. I'm not talking about anything transcendent. No, it's, mainly, about political power or cultural power. See, any time Christianity falls into the ranks of power grabs, and hierarchy, and being a mouthpiece for all of these kinds of things, it's lost its way. It becomes something that it's not. That is a sad thing. If only we can return to our roots, if only we can learn mercy and we can follow justice, and we can learn empathy, we can practice compassion, we can begin to see folks that aren't like us, we can begin to see them as something beautifully and wonderfully created. If we spend our careers, if we spend our passions, if we spend our lifetimes tearing people down, we're just simply monsters. Again, I read the Bible. I've read the Gospels. Jesus does not call us to be monsters. Jesus calls us to take out monsters, the monsters that prevent others from being able to see the light. If we're so busy building walls, if we're so busy insulating ourselves from everybody else, how can you spread the thing that you claim to be as Good News? When good news becomes a weapon, it is not good news. It may be good news to you that's holding that weapon, but it, certainly, isn't good news to those that you are slashing with it. For faith that proclaims something that we call Good News that Good News needs to be good news for everybody.

That's all I've got this week. I will back again with you next week. Just a reminder as we end this broadcast, you can always catch this episode and all past episodes on podcast at www.snarkyfaith.com. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Just look up *Snarky Faith*. Again, thank you for journeying with us through this last hour. Without you, we wouldn't be here. Without you, I'm just sitting in front of a microphone talking to myself. I do, I appreciate you, our listeners. I appreciate you for being a part of the journey. If you want to give us feedback, ask questions or anything else like that, just remember you can email us at questions@snarkyfaith.com. If you also go to our website www.snarkyfaith.com, you can sign up to be on our mailing list where we are going to start doing, once a month, live episodes online where you can tune in. You can ask questions. You can interact with Ben and I. You can be a part of the entire journey and conversation. Thanks so much. You guys have a great week. I'm outta here.

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