



How to Live
Soul
healthy
in a Toxic World



Christy Johnson



Are relationships hard for you?

The problem may be your soul health.

Learn how to ditch the drama

and find the contentment you've always wanted.

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What drives more women to the point of despair than anything else? What can rip out a woman's heart faster than a speeding bullet? It's not financial issues, a failed diet or a bad hair day. The number one source of grief for women is romantic relationships.

Why are romantic relationships so full of heartache? Because for many women, they depend on a relationship for their emotional well-being. They've fallen for the lie that they've seen plastered on every movie screen. They've believed the spread on every glossy magazine cover portraying that if they're sexy enough they'll find true love. They've been captivated by every perfume ad assuring them that new passion is just a squirt away, that romance equates to the fulfillment of a heart's desire and that a relationship will satisfy every longing and cover every hurt. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Have you fallen for any of these vain promises?

I did.

As a young teenager longing for romance, I grew up watching *The Love Boat*. Every Friday night at 7:00 pm, my

eyeballs were glued to the television set. Everything I learned about love and romance I learned from the countless women I saw on the show. These hopeful hearts concealed their loneliness, put on their cutest bikini, sat on a barstool and stirred a cute little cocktail with a pink umbrella, and presto....as easy as 1-2-3. Bam! There he was—Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome.

Oh, and he was rich, too. And compassionate, generous and devoted to her every need.

At least on the surface. The truth was that really...

He was a heartache in disguise.

I can hear the lyrics now.

Love...exciting and new.

Come aboard, we're expecting you.

How I fell for the lie...hook, line and sinker!

That's because years ago, my soul health was a mess. I was a love junkie. I used men like a drug, searching desperately for a relationship to satisfy the desire of my heart to be cherished and loved. Even though I had a relationship with Christ, I had no concept of how to allow him to heal the loneliness, hurt and

rejection I felt.

Instead of the romantic bliss I dreamed of, however, I kept gravitating toward men who were either irresponsible, immature, manipulative, addicted to something, or all of the above. I know now that it was because my own soul was unhealthy, but at the time I was clueless.

Here's what I didn't know: **Baggage attracts baggage.**

Experts say that we gravitate towards friends and relationships within a ten point spread of our own IQ. Likewise, in the realm of soul-health, we also attract those with whom we are most emotionally compatible. That can be a good thing...or a bad thing. It depends on how much baggage we carry around!

Here's the deal. The best way to improve the health of your relationship is to improve your own soul health.

It's important to become who you want, not only for your own well being, but because **the health of your relationship will never exceed the health of the least soul-healthy partner.**

Want a better relationship? Marriage? Want a better you?
Commit to improving your soul health.

Why Your Soul Health Is So Important

- The healthier your soul is the healthier your relationships can be.
- Improving your soul health will improve the health of all your relationships.
- You will attract who you are.
- Issues related to an unhealthy soul can cause a variety of physical illnesses.
- Your spiritual life is greatly affected by how healthy your soul is.
- Your capacity to enjoy the fruit of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control) is directly related to how healthy your soul is.

No matter how many issues you have, you can become all God created you to be. Whether you're single, married or want to be married, it's essential to get rid of toxic behaviors that

destroy your joy and threaten your relationships. Ditch the drama and find the contentment you've always wanted.

Is Improving Your Soul Health Selfish?

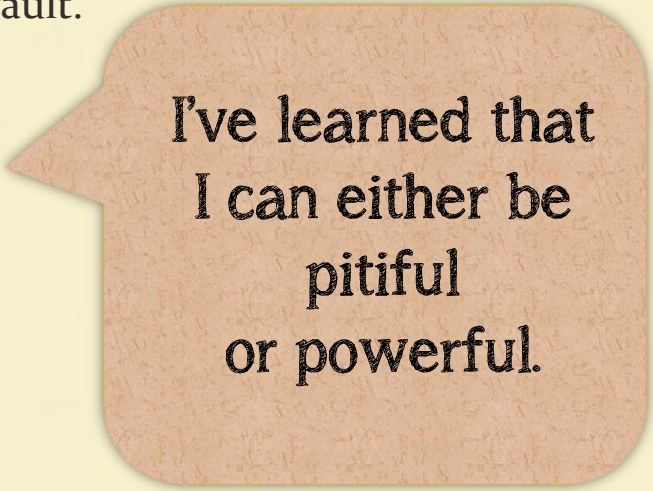
As Christians, sometimes we put more weight on the spiritual aspects of our life, but would it surprise you to know that even though the word *spirit* is used 456 times in the Bible, the word *soul* is used in 432 verses? Clearly, God is interested in our soul-health. We are not just spiritual beings, we are soul beings as well. And yet, as Christians sometimes we place so much importance on our spiritual maturity that we neglect our soul. We know God's word. We attend Bible studies. We can quote a multitude of scriptures, but it hasn't permeated our soul. We have acquired a wealth of head knowledge, but it hasn't affected our soul health.

What we don't realize is that our lack of self-respect becomes a magnetic force drawing us to men that take advantage of us, break promises, manipulate us and break our hearts. It's a vicious cycle that doesn't stop until we take responsibility for our soul health.

It wasn't until I got sick and tired of being sick and tired that I finally accepted the fact that if I wanted my relationship to change, I had to change. I had to take responsibility for the way I was treated. In many ways, I had trained others how to treat me. I had trained men that they could walk all over me, that they could lie, cheat and manipulate me and I would just tolerate it. It was a bitter-sweet day when I finally came to the realization that it wasn't all their fault.

I had allowed it.

I encouraged their disrespect by not imposing healthy boundaries because my soul was unhealthy. But no more!



**I've learned that
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I've learned that I can either be pitiful or powerful. I've learned that I am responsible for my own soul health. It pleases God for me to be a good steward over my soul—my mind, will and emotions. I am an effective witness when my soul is healthy. Besides that, when I prosper in my soul, I gravitate towards others who are healthy in their soul. Then I'm

empowered to become all that God wants me to become because the drama in my life has diminished.

Still, you may wonder, “Isn’t it selfish to focus on myself? Aren’t I supposed to put others first?” That mindset may sound more spiritual, but here’s what Jesus said in Mark 12:30-31.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

There you have it—in red letters: Jesus telling us to love ourselves! Seriously, have you ever thought about why? How much can we love others if we have little regard for ourselves? If we don't nurture our own soul, our capacity to nurture anyone else's will be greatly hindered. It's the same principle that airline attendants instruct passengers. "In the event of the loss of cabin pressure, FIRST place the mask over you own face." Flight attendants know the importance of first aid. If you don't take care of yourself, you'll never be in a position to care for others. Likewise, when we love God and take care of our own temple, eventually, a beautiful thing happens. Our capacity to

love increases. We are capable of giving and receiving love in a much greater measure. Not only do we love ourselves more, but others recognize that and it puts into motion a cause and effect of mutual love and respect.

What Does an Unhealthy Soul Look Like?

In a culture where speed dating is the new rage, society encourages the mindset that relationships are responsible for happiness. The standards of the world encourage women to believe lies like:

- I have to have a man to be happy.
- It's normal to feel pain in love.
- I can change him.
- I can help him.
- He's really not that bad.
- He doesn't mean to do the things he does.
- Nobody's perfect.

When problems arise in their relationship, women with an unhealthy soul believe their accusers accusations:

- It's all my fault.
- There's something wrong with me.
- If only I could be more loving.
- I'm inadequate.
- I deserve this.

A woman with an unhealthy soul may:

- Long for approval and security but ignore the red flags in relationships that others clearly see.
- Believe what men tell them and ignore their actions.
- Minimize and make excuses for their partner's inappropriate behavior.
- Think she somehow deserves less than what she desires.
- Want a man who is a spiritual leader, but because of her propensity to settle for less than what she wants, she is most often the one who encourages church attendance and Bible study.

A woman with an unhealthy soul may leave one bad relationship only to find another as equally destructive. Her disappointments and unmet expectations in relationships have caused her to settle. The men she gets involved with often have many issues and are likely irresponsible or emotionally unavailable. If she is married and her marriage ends in divorce, she often gravitates to another relationship that is just as unhealthy.

Women with an unhealthy soul often get involved with men who manipulate them to get what they want, depend on them financially or cheat on them. Many will abuse them in some way. They may not suffer physical or sexual abuse, but often suffer emotional, verbal or even spiritual abuse. The more emotionally drained a relationship leaves them, the harder they may try to make it work. They know something is desperately wrong, but have no idea how to fix it.

As a love junkie or a woman with an unhealthy soul we often live with frequent anxiety and have tried all kinds of ways to escape the pain. We probably have health issues such as tension headaches, anxiety attacks or abdominal pain. We may

deal with depression and may take anti-depressants or may abuse alcohol, medication or drugs to cope. We may also resort to other addictive or obsessive behaviors like excessive spending, promiscuity or an obsession with weight management in order to camouflage our pain. Some of us will flee to another relationship to heal our wounds.

For years, I used the approval of men to bring validation to my injured soul. But I usually settled for relationships that were less than what I really wanted because deep down I didn't really believe I deserved a man who would cherish and honor me. My relationship with my father was emotionally distant and my failure to receive approval and affection from him caused me to seek it from other men.

Within the relationship, a love junkie is the reliable one, bearing an inequitable amount of the responsibilities. She typically handles everything because she believes if she doesn't do it, it won't get done. She has poor boundaries and allows others to take advantage of her.

“When we were married,” says Jacqueline, “I seriously did everything. I worked two steady jobs while he hopped from

employer to employer. I paid the bills and took the kids to their soccer practices and orthodontist appointments. I even mowed the yard. We were miserably married for 17 years, but I never had time to notice how horrible our marriage was until he was gone.”

Beth, a single mother of four, has been divorced for over 13 years. Constantly on the hunt for men, she wants to be pursued, but her desperation makes her the initiator. Slender, outgoing and beautiful, she has no trouble attracting men and while she only dates guys who attend church, she rushes into relationships. Normally “I-love-you’s” are exchanged after only a few of weeks of dating. Beth has been engaged four times in the last several years. Typically, Beth breaks the engagement after the third or fourth month when some major character flaw surfaces that she didn’t notice early in the relationship because she was in such a hurry. She’s broken hearted and desperate once again. Within a few weeks, however, she can be found in the coffee shop with her next love interest.

Beth has the mistaken idea that so many women have: If a guy goes to church he is trustworthy. My pastor says, “Being in

church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a Mercedes." Good advice! The truth is that when some guys are ready to find a woman, they know where to shop. What better place to look than church? That's where the "nice" girls go.

Shannon, a stay-at-home mother, has been married to Rick, a successful salesman, for eight years. She spends a lot of time on her personal appearance—shopping for the latest fashions, getting her hair and nails done and maintaining a year-round tan at the tanning salon. Like her outer appearance, she wants to portray the image that everything is fine with her marriage.

"To me, Rick's business practices are borderline unethical," says Shannon. "I think he takes advantage of his clients, recommending products that aren't always necessary." Rick's aggressive sales techniques have caused Shannon to distrust Rick and lose respect for him as a husband. "It really makes me mad. I've tried to talk to him about it, but he tells me I'm overreacting, so I've just learned to deal with it. Besides,

Rick is an elder at our church and I don't want a divorce. What would everyone think?"

Like Shannon, many women who are disappointed with their marriages learn to cover up their disappointment. For Shannon, maintaining external appearances is easier than dealing with what's below the surface. She's bitter, but wants to portray the image that everything is fine. Attempts to conceal problems in her marriage will prevail for as long as she is capable of distracting herself from the issue. Women in situations similar to Shannon's may focus on their children, personal hobbies, volunteer activities at church, Bible studies, their career or their friends. They may minimize their husband's failures to others but inside, a storm is brewing.

When their relationship leaves them disappointed, some women completely give up hope. Instead, they focus on other relationships or pursue other interests to mask the pain. Married women may even resort to emotional affairs or daydreaming about how someone more suitable could make her happy. To some, an emotional affair is not the same as physically engaging in adultery. It placates their pain.

Jessica reads romance novels and lets her imagination get carried away.

Rachel flirts online. “My virtual romance is my secret revenge,” she says. “No fights or issues to deal with—just all harmless fun.”

Becka fantasizes. “Whenever I get mad at my husband, I just imagine what it would be like to be married to my favorite pick of the week. It takes the edge off my anger.”

What Causes Misery in Relationships?

Unmet expectations are the leading cause of misery in relationships. Expectations are a set up for resentment because when our expectations aren't met, we are forced to deal with the resulting disappointment and possible bitterness. “After several failed relationships, I finally realized I was responsible for my own happiness,” says Sherry. “For me, expectations were a down payment for resentment.”

For many women struggling with relationship issues, instead of dealing with the resentment, we stuff it. We store it. We try to forget about it. But can we? How much anger can we

hide before it threatens to erupt? How many issues can we conceal before an explosion occurs?

As human beings we are not created to hoard frustration or sorrow. Unmet expectations lead to disappointment and if not dealt with, the disappointment then turns into a root of bitterness. The Bible says when we are full of bitterness, we are made captive to sin (Acts 8:23). That is why so many of us are drawn like a magnet into behaviors we know are wrong, but can't seem to stop. The turmoil of bitterness also takes its toll on our bodies. When our soul has reached full tolerance, we may develop physical issues like migraine headaches, irritable bowel syndrome or depression. Many times, we don't even make the connection between our emotional problems and our physical issues.

In her book *Who Switched Off My Brain?, Controlling Toxic Thoughts and Emotions*, Dr. Caroline Leaf states, "A massive body of research collectively shows that up to 80% of physical, emotional and mental health issues today could be a direct result of our thought lives. Resentment, bitterness, lack of forgiveness and self-hatred are just a few of the toxic thoughts

and emotions that can also trigger immune system disorders.”

I remember a time when I went to the doctor for tension headaches. When he asked me if I was under stress, I assured him that I wasn't. In truth, I was under a ton of stress, but I had grown so accustomed to the anxiety I didn't even realize it was there. It was familiar. It had been around for so long I had become desensitized to it and didn't even recognize how my body was reacting to the tension.

Maybe you deal with unmet expectations by minimizing them. Concealing them like an unwanted blemish, you play down the severity. Instead of dealing with your emotions, you pretend they're not important. You either convince yourself it's no big deal or it will get better.

Michelle conceals her disappointment by keeping busy. Under the guise of activity she hushes her hurts like a mother putting a pacifier in her baby's mouth. Madeline takes another approach. Instead of hiding her hurt, she dresses her wounds. Just like a bandage begs for concern and attention, her downcast soul begs for sympathy. When others ask what's wrong, she finds comfort in their extended compassion.

Unmet expectations lead to discouragement and this is one of our greatest enemies. When we entertain discouragement, it leads to disappointment, despair, depression and dismay. The Psalmist says, “So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed” (Ps 143:4). The book of Isaiah says this about dismay: “Their people, drained of power, are dismayed and put to shame. They are like plants in the field, like tender green shoots, like grass sprouting on the roof, scorched before it grows up” (Is 37:27). Have you ever felt scorched or burned by love? When we fail to put out the fire of dismay, it will break us. In fact, the word dismay comes from the Hebrew word *chathath* which means to be shattered, to be broken, to be abolished, to be afraid and terrified.

Repurposed Rejects

Thankfully God is the Redeemer of our past. He uses the mess in our life to give us a message. And here's mine: God repurposes rejects. He is the Master at taking what was meant for harm and turning it all into good. He is able to cause all things to work together for our good.

God's favorites are His repurposed rejects. He takes the suffering and hurt in our lives and turns it into hope.

He takes our pain and uses it to produce perseverance. If we don't give up, our perseverance develops character. Finally, our character produces a hope that never fails (Romans 5:3).

Because of God's grace that transformed this love junkie's life, I am passionate about teaching other women how they too can become soul healthy. I am convinced that if God can do it for me, He can do it for you, too. No matter how much you've endured, God is able to turn your sorrow into joy.

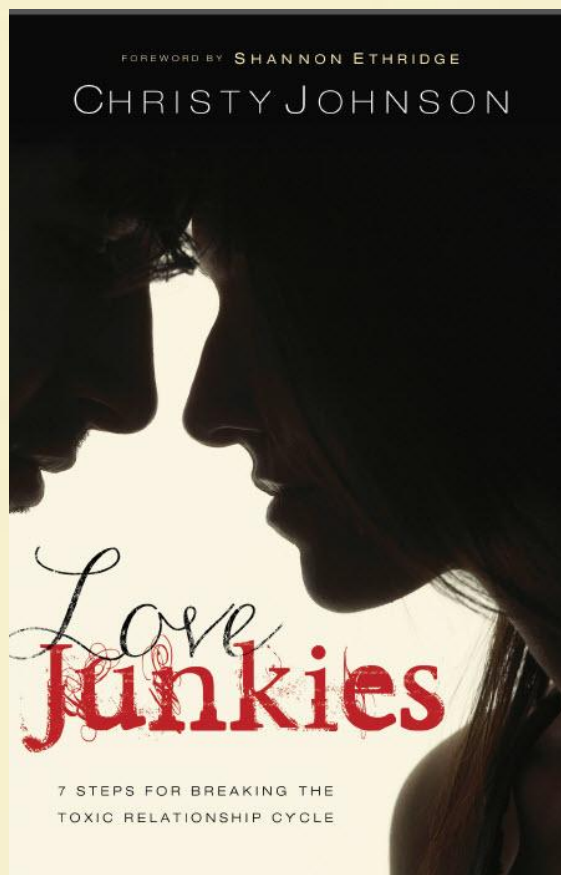
That's why I'm so excited that my book, *Love Junkies, 7 Steps for Breaking the Toxic Relationship Cycle* will be out in March 2014. As a radically renewed former "woman at the well," my heart now pumps with a new purpose—to impart hope to women drawn to unhealthy relationships. My own story about how Christ redeemed my addiction to love and helped me forgive the offender who was responsible for my son's death will be woven throughout the book. I've also interviewed lots of women who have wrestled with issues in their own relationships. Through their stories and lots of scripture, you'll

discover ways to overcome common misconceptions women have about relationships.

In *Love Junkies*, you'll learn the 7 steps for breaking the toxic relationship cycle.

Based on the acronym, "IF-I-PRAY,"
these steps are:

- **I**dentify
- **F**orgiveness
- **I**magination
- **P**rayer
- **R**esolve
- **A**ccountability
- **Y**es



In the **identity step**, you'll learn how to seek your worth through Christ instead of through the opinions of others.

The **forgiveness** step will uncover several lies about forgiveness that hold women in the bondage of bitterness. You'll learn how to rid your soul of toxic waste by releasing judgments against others. In the **imagination step**, I'll show you how to reach your destiny by aligning your vision with God's truth. The **prayer step** will show you how to remove distractions from your life that hinder your ability to hear God's voice. You'll learn how to have a conversation with God to seek His direction and wisdom.

The **resolve step** is my personal favorite. Once I learned the principle of resolve, it revolutionized my ability to restrain my passions. I had tried over and over to do things in my own strength, but I always ended up exasperated because eventually my own will power failed. There were limits to my personal strength, but when I learned how to add divine revelation to my human strength, my resolve was empowered to succeed. I can't wait to teach you these principles.

In the **accountability step** I'll show you how to protect your will by surrendering your choices to wise counsel. Finally, in last step, the **yes step**, I'll teach you how to surrender your own will and allow God to lead your life.

I'll not only explain these principles, but I'll give you several action points for each must have so you will have practical exercises to apply what you've learned. Through these exercises of applying scriptural truths to your life, your soul will be transformed through the power of combined exercise and experience. You'll learn transforming secrets to soul-healthy living and you'll never be the same again.

By embracing these 7 steps for soul healthy living, whether you are in or out of a relationship you can live a confident, secure and content life in Christ. I was a love junkie with an unhealthy soul, but I found recovery and so can you!

How You Can Get my Book

Love Junkies will be out in March 2014. You can find it on Amazon.com or on [my website](#).



Besides my book, however, there are several other ways we can stay connected.

- Follow me on [Facebook](#)
- Read my blog at <http://christyjohnson.org>
- Sign up for life coaching.



Do you need one-on-one confidential mentoring to help you overcome issues that have you tripped up? Check my website for details or to schedule a session.

- Invite me to speak. Is your church or ministry looking for a speaker? Details at <http://christyjohnson.org/speaking>



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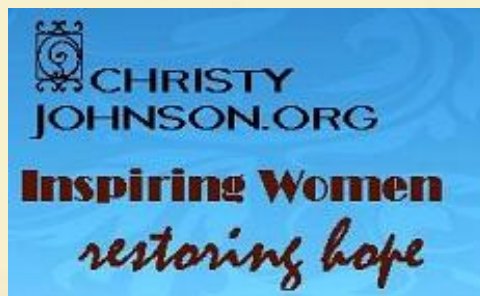
Here are some blog posts you may enjoy.

[Love Bigger](#)

[When the Mountain Won't Move](#)

[Think Your Way to Better Soul Health](#)

**May His blessings consume your life
and overpower your soul!**



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