

THE CRISIS AND TRAUMA SERIES

ABUSE RECOVERY

From Surviving to Thriving



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INTRODUCTION

Powerless. Fearful. Broken. Hopeless. Each of these words convey how an abuse victim feels . . . and rightfully so. But do you know that those feelings can continue long after the abuse has stopped? They can creep into every relationship for the sake of “people pleasing.” They can shackle you like chains—when in fact, you are free. You are a *former* victim. You have either overcome . . . or you can overcome.

Candidly, I’ve been a victim of abuse, and I’ve also been held hostage emotionally by a victim mentality. It took a long time for me to accept that I was still living like a victim. But once I did, I was able to find true freedom—a *freedom that lasts forever*.

I remember the day when as a grown adult, I realized I was still living like a helpless child. A friend called me and said, “June, I’ve been reading a new book, and I want you to listen to this list of characteristics. Think about yourself as I read.” As she went down the list, one characteristic at a time, I could see an almost perfect portrait of me—my relationships, my work style, even my innermost feelings!

Then my friend told me her purpose in sharing the list. “I didn’t want to tell you this at the beginning, but the list has to do with adult children of alcoholics.” Even though I’m not from an alcoholic home, I was amazed by how many of the characteristics described me and the feelings of powerlessness I felt.

Though my father was not an alcoholic, I did grow up feeling powerless around him. He ran our family like a dictator. He was abusive and my family rallied together to survive. Harsh and brutal, my father crushed my self-worth. Even his “minor offenses” seared my heart.

I recall a time when my sister Helen and I were playing chess on the living room floor. My father entered the room and roared, “Quit playing chess! It’s not as scientific as checkers!” To see him towering over us, making ridiculous demands, made me boil inside. My first thought was: *What do you mean checkers is more scientific than chess? Who cares?* I was extremely angry, but knew better than to say anything. Naturally, whatever he said was “right” and I felt powerless to speak.

By the time I was a teenager, my father's verbal and emotional abuse had warped my entire life perspective. My friends were all boy crazy . . . but I wasn't. When we heard an announcement on the radio that Ricky Nelson was performing in Dallas, they squealed in unison, "Let's go! Let's go!" But I struggled just to put a smile on my face.

Although we ended up not going, I'll never forget how I felt driving down the road that afternoon thinking: *Don't you realize how heavy things are in the world? How serious? How can you even think about a concert?* I didn't understand how they could be so happy over something I thought was so silly. Happiness was not a frame of reference for me.

For years, I never told anyone about what went on in my home. I found ways to cope with the abuse, including avoiding my father. If he came through a door, I hid in the closet or behind the door. I became a peace-at-any-price person, even lying to keep my father from getting upset. I worked hard at things I knew would please him, hoping, just once, to hear, "I love you." But I never heard those words from him.

I grew up fearful—and that fear permeated my adult life . . . even my friendships. Although I had precious friends who were nothing like my father, I still felt and thought like a victim. I lied about things without reason. I kept my loved ones at arm's length. My victim mentality plagued me, even when it came to my relationship with God—my heavenly Father, who had shown His love for me in so many ways.

But that day on the phone with my friend, something changed in me. I'd been trapped—not by my father, but by my own victim mentality. At that moment I decided to let God give me a new perspective—to take away my victim mentality and ultimately change my heart and life.

God heals the broken heart when you give Him all the pieces. He washes the wounds, tallies the tears, and mends the mind. And He empowers you to rise above abuse and become who He created you to be.

I pray you will allow God to make that kind of change in you. He has a good and perfect plan for your life that no amount of abuse can destroy. As you look at His Word, may you find in Him the power to stop living as a victim of abuse and start living as the person God made you to be: His precious child—forgiven, redeemed, and set free.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope for the Heart

ABUSE RECOVERY

From Surviving to Thriving

Here they come again . . . those painful memories that permeate your heart and pummel your emotions. You feel caught like a frightened bird in a cage with no way to escape to freedom. And it happened long ago. . . . You had hoped to move on, yet your heart feels like it's under attack, like arrows are whizzing through the iron bars of your cage—piercing arrows that penetrate your heart with deep, debilitating pain.

Do you live your life coping with a crippling crisis from the past, hoping to somehow get beyond it, to forget it? The good news is: God wants so much more for you than to just cope. He wants to help you overcome your painful past and conquer the destructive patterns that have developed in your life as a result of your past abuse. He wants you to grow in maturity through His grace and then to reach out and help others recover from past abuse.

Feeling powerless doesn't have to be permanent. God wants to set you free from the cage that has held you captive and robbed you of peace for far too long! He offers you His power for healing and change. And when you experience true healing and personal transformation, you also receive true freedom. Like a bird released from a cage, you can experience freedom today and have bright hope for tomorrow because . . .

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*

(GALATIANS 5:1)

DEFINITIONS



*“To those who have
been mistreated,
the Lord is
a refuge.”*



The statistics are staggering.¹ In the U.S. alone, a report of child abuse is made every 10 seconds. Approximately 20 people are physically abused by their partner each minute. Roughly 20,000 calls are made to domestic violence hotlines each day. And sadly, much more abuse goes unreported.

Consider this: One out of three girls and one out of six boys are sexually assaulted before the age of 18, and more than 90 percent know their abuser. Think about that—let it sink in as you silently count the casualties just in the group of people around you. One, two . . . she was abused. Four, five . . . he was abused. And maybe *you* have an abuse story of your own. But no matter what type of abuse has occurred, no matter when it happened, or how severe it was, God offers freedom and hope as you recover from abuse.

*“There is surely a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off.”*
(PROVERBS 23:18)

What Is Abuse?

Stormie’s story² begins as a little girl who spent much of her early life locked in a little closet under a stairway—a closet where the family laundry was stored. In that small space Stormie had to sit cramped and cross-legged on a large pile of soiled clothes overflowing from a laundry basket. Musty smells, darkness, and the sounds of mice scampering around were all a regular part of Stormie’s daytime world, which was spent largely in that closet.

Stormie never knew what trigger would prompt her mother to banish her to the bleak prison of fearful isolation. On this particular day she had simply asked for a glass of water. “Get in the closet until I can stand to see your face!” her mother yelled with disdain.³ At least Stormie knew she would be released in the evening when her father returned from work, for her mother kept Stormie’s closet captivity a complete secret from him.

Stormie always envisioned her father one day “coming to her rescue”—sweeping her up and forever freeing her from her mother’s verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. But he never came. Always “dead tired”—as he described it—from another hard day’s work, he was blind to the disturbing behavior in his own home that resulted in horrific abuse of his little girl.⁴

The faces of abuse are many—from harsh words, to neglect, to physical violence. Yet despite its many forms and its prevalence in marriages, families, and relationships across the world . . . abuse can be hard to spot. So often it happens behind closed doors and doesn’t get noticed, discussed, or reported. Abuse can leave victims feeling invisible, silenced, and trapped. But even in the darkness of abuse, God sees . . . God knows . . . and God cares.

*“You have seen my troubles,
and you care about the anguish of my soul.”*
(PSALM 31:7 NLT)

Abuse is mistreatment: using something or someone in an inappropriate manner.⁵

Abuse in Old Testament Hebrew is *alal*, which means “to treat severely, harshly, or cruelly, to defile.”⁶

Abuse often results in emotional, mental, spiritual, or physical harm.

Abuse is intentional, not accidental.

The Bible does not shy away from acknowledging the reality of abuse:

*“They raped her and abused her throughout the night,
and at dawn they let her go.”*
(JUDGES 19:25)

What Is Recovery?

Compounding Stormie's desperate situation was the family's secluded living environment—a Wyoming farm 20 miles from the closest town. There were no neighbors nearby and no playmates available to help Stormie build her social skills. Long-term isolation and limited social interaction led to speech impediments and relationship difficulties that, later in life, required major help for Stormie to overcome.⁷

The need to attend school eventually freed Stormie from her small, dark prison, but it didn't stop her mother's verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. One day after returning home from school, Stormie's mother grabbed her by the hair, slammed her against a door, and slapped her wildly as she screamed: "You murderer! You murderer! You've killed an innocent child! I hope you're happy with yourself, you [expletive]!"

What could possibly have triggered such an outburst? A friend's mother had miscarried a baby, and for some reason Stormie's mother blamed it on her. A week earlier, Stormie had stayed overnight at her friend's house and the next day, the friend's mom drove Stormie home. Realize that the drive home happened a week before the miscarriage. What bizarre reasoning for such brutality!⁸

That terrifying incident occurred during Stormie's last year of junior high. She was preparing to accept full responsibility for what had happened when her friend assured her that the miscarriage was in no way her fault. From that day forward, Stormie was engulfed with hatred toward her mother.

Love may have been lost that day, but Jesus has a heart for the lost. In fact, Jesus told back-to-back-to-back stories about finding something that was lost.

A man has 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, so he goes out, finds the lost sheep, and joyfully brings it back home (Luke 15:4–7). A woman has 10 silver coins and loses one of them. She searches her house thoroughly for it. Upon finding it, she rejoices with her friends and neighbors (Luke 15:8–10). Finally, Jesus tells the story of the

prodigal son who loses his way. The son demands his inheritance, then squanders it on wild living. Humiliated and more humble, the prodigal returns home where his father rejoices over the son who “*was lost, but now he is found!*” (Luke 15:32).

In each story, someone rejoices over finding what was lost. In other words, *recovering* what was lost brings rejoicing.

Here’s the point: Abuse *takes away* from you. It can take away your sense of value, dignity, safety, significance, and purpose. It can take away relationships, finances, and it can even take away your emotional and physical health. Abuse takes away and leads to a sense of loss.

Abuse recovery is all about God helping you regain what was lost—redeeming what was taken and restoring you to a place of peace and joy.

*“He has redeemed my soul in peace
from the battle that was against me.”
(PSALM 55:18 NKJV)*

Recovery is the process of getting something back.⁹ The *re-* in *recover* is a clue that the word has “again” as part of its meaning. We can only recover things that we had before.

Recovery is “a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength.”¹⁰

Recovery is “the action or process of regaining possession or control of something stolen or lost.”¹¹

Jesus spoke of Himself as helping people recover when He quoted Isaiah’s prophecy from hundreds of years prior:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind
to set the oppressed free.”
(LUKE 4:17–18)*

What Is a Victim?

Stormie's mother continually told Stormie she was crazy. The painful environment at home prompted so much anxiety, fear, and self-loathing that one day, at age 14, Stormie decided to swallow pills from a bathroom medicine cabinet in an attempt to permanently end her agony. To this day, Stormie remembers what was going through her mind. "My intention was to die . . . not to attract attention."¹²

Ironically, Stormie's mother rescued her from the overdose—forcing her to throw up—but never sought help for her emotionally distraught daughter. Stormie's suicide attempt was never again discussed.

In the years that followed, alcohol, drugs, the occult, and promiscuous relationships provided temporary diversions from her emotional pain, but despair and depression were ever-present. Two unplanned pregnancies ending with abortions only compounded Stormie's guilt and heartache.¹³ Desperation for affection and a deathly fear of being alone set Stormie up for an inability to say no to wrong relationships.

Although Stormie achieved considerable success as an actress, model, and singer, the emotional fallout from the abuse she suffered as a child hung like a storm cloud over her life.

If we compiled a list of every example and every victim of exploitation and abuse—injustices and atrocities—our pages would fill to overflowing. Consider the abused: A neglected child puts herself to sleep, wondering if her parents even care about her. A bullied teen hides his scars in his sleeves. A woman's mirror reflects the aftermath of abuse that no amount of makeup can hide. An elderly man sits confined day after day, longing for connection and conversation, but receives only harsh words that make him feel like he's nothing more than a burden to his caregivers.

Sadly, abuse knows no bounds. Every age, every culture, every race, rich or poor—no one is beyond the reach of abuse. Gladly, we can rejoice in the fact that God extends His healing grace and compassion to all.

*“The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.”*

(PSALM 145:8–9)

A victim is a person who experiences adversity and is powerless to change the situation.¹⁴

Examples: A victim of neglect, an unwanted divorce, infidelity, stalking, sexual harassment, childhood sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, elder abuse, or loss due to suicide

A victim is a person who is tricked or duped.

Example: A victim of robbery, identity theft, fraud, kidnapping, entrapment, and other dishonest schemes

A victim is a person who is injured, destroyed, or sacrificed.

Example: A victim of incest, domestic violence, rape, satanic ritual abuse, a drunk driver, homicide, a natural disaster

A victim is a person who is subjected to oppression, hardship, or mistreatment.

Example: A victim of any verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, psychological, racial, or economic abuse

Victims of abuse feel as though they are living under an umbrella of oppression as Job describes . . .

*“People cry out under a load of oppression;
they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful.”*

(JOB 35:9)

What Abuse Victims Are Mentioned in the Bible?

When Stormie was 28 years old, she accepted Christ as her Savior. Two years later, she married Christian singer and songwriter Michael Omartian at their Los Angeles-area church. Though sincere and steadily growing in her faith, Stormie knew something was still terribly wrong. Depression, panic attacks, and even thoughts of suicide continued to torment her.

Counselors at Stormie's church suggested they attack the problem through prayer and fasting. She made a list of her every known sin. Then on an appointed day, Stormie specifically renounced each one from her long list. Her prayer partners then addressed spirits of futility, despair, fear, and rejection, suicide, and torment. "I was not demon-possessed," she said, "but these spirits had oppressed me at points where I had given them place through my sins of unforgiveness and disobedience to God."¹⁵

"The next morning I awoke without any feelings of depression whatever—no thoughts of suicide, no heaviness in my chest, no fearful anticipation of the future . . . Day after day it was the same. I never again experienced those feelings, nor the paralysis that accompanied them. I had gone into that counseling office knowing Jesus as Savior, but I came out knowing Him also as my Deliverer."¹⁶

God's Word does not shy away from the realities of abuse. As you turn its pages, you find a range of words used to describe the abused. Indeed, many of God's people experienced abuse in a myriad of ways. Though the examples are numerous, a common thread runs throughout: God is a refuge for those who've been mistreated. He is with them, helping them, and giving them strength.

*"God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble."*

(PSALM 46:1)

Victims in The Bible

One Hebrew word in the Old Testament that is used to speak of a victim is *chelekah*, which means “hapless, unfortunate, the unlucky.”¹⁷ In Psalm 10, this word is used of victims of a wicked person who hunts down, attacks, and crushes them . . . and yet, these victims entrust themselves to God who sees their pain and helps them. (See Psalm 10:8, 10, 14.)

Other Old Testament translations of the word *victim* are . . .

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| — The slain | — The killed |
| — The casualties | — The slaughtered |
| — The dead | — The defiled |
| — The wounded | — The helpless |

Old Testament Examples of Abuse

Isaac was manipulated by Jacob, who tricked Isaac into blessing him (believing it was Esau) with the birthright blessing (see Genesis 27). **Jacob** was manipulated by his uncle Laban, who tricked Jacob into marrying his daughter Leah instead of Rachel (see Genesis 29). **Dinah**, the daughter of Jacob, was raped (Genesis 34:2). **Joseph** was thrown into a pit by his brothers and sold into slavery (see Genesis 37). He was also falsely accused of seducing Potiphar’s wife and thrown into prison (see Genesis 39).

Moses “chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). **The nation of Israel** endured harsh treatment and abuse from Pharaoh and the Egyptians—and from many other nations as time went on.

David, before becoming king, endured constant abuse and threats from King Saul. Many of the psalms are written about David experiencing this kind of abuse. **Tamar**, the daughter of David, was raped by her half brother Amnon (see 2 Samuel 13).

Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet,” endured constant attacks, ridicule, and abuse for preaching God’s truth to a people that refused to listen. **Daniel**, another prophet, endured mistreatment by King Darius and other governing officials, and was thrown into a lion’s den for praying to God who miraculously protected him. **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** refused to bow down to idols and were thrown into a fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar, yet were miraculously protected by God (see Daniel 3).

New Testament Examples of Abuse

John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, was thrown into prison for telling King Herod that it was unlawful to marry his own brother’s wife. Herod eventually killed John (see Matthew 14:1–12).

The Apostles (and all followers of Jesus by extension) were warned by Jesus to expect mistreatment. Jesus said, “*If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also*” (John 15:20). **Paul** was a persecutor of the early church who later became a Christian and was repeatedly persecuted and beaten for his faith (see 2 Corinthians 11:23–33). **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr, was persecuted and stoned to death for preaching Christ (see Acts 6–7).

The believers listed in the Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith” endured various kinds of abuse: “*Others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated*” (Hebrews 11:35–37 NLT).

Jesus, the Lord Himself, endured constant abuse, ridicule, and threats of death throughout His ministry. As the time of His death neared, Jesus experienced false accusations, severe beatings, mocking, and crucifixion. Truly, He was “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isaiah 53:3 ESV).

Of all those mentioned in the Bible who experienced abuse, no one more than Jesus understands the pain of abuse. He endured people mocking Him, spitting on Him, shouting at Him, striking Him, and ultimately crucifying Him. The Bible says of Jesus,

*“He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide
their faces he was despised,
and we held him in low esteem.*

*⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*

*⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.”*

(ISAIAH 53:3–5)

What Is a Victim Mentality?¹⁸

In 1976, Stormie and Michael joyfully welcomed their first child into the world—Christopher Scott. “I will never be like my mother,” she assured herself confidently upon his arrival. “My child will have the best care I can give him.”¹⁹

Christopher’s relentless crying, however, soon triggered powerful emotions Stormie could hardly comprehend. “The frustration built until I finally snapped,” she recalls. “I slapped my baby on the back, the shoulder and the head. . . . I was out of control.”²⁰

To her horror, God begins to reveal her own latent abusive tendencies. “It was shocking to discover that I had all the potential in me to be an abuser. It was built in me from childhood. I had seen that violent, out-of-control behavior before—in my mother. I knew it wasn’t my child I hated. It was me. And now I also saw that it wasn’t me that my mother hated; it was herself.”²¹

Unlike her earlier deliverance, which was immediate, Stormie's deliverance from child-abusing tendencies was "long and slow"—a gradual process of recovery as God gently and lovingly peeled back layer after layer of pain and wrong thinking.

Over time, those who have been abused can begin to believe lies about themselves, their abuser, and God. Maybe at one point you thought, *Will this ever change?* Now, you think, *This will never change.* Or perhaps you thought, *I should leave* or *I should speak up.* Now you tell yourself, *I can't do anything about it* or *What's the point?* In the past you may have thought, *I deserve better,* but today you've surrendered to the false notion, *No, I deserve this.*

The lies of abuse are many and lead to further anguish and captivity. But God wants you to know His truth, which leads to healing and freedom.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(JOHN 8:32)

The victim mentality is a mindset in which a person who was once a victim continues to hold on to old thought patterns that foster feelings of powerlessness, even after the victimization has ended.

The victim mentality causes individuals to see others as powerful but themselves as weak and powerless.

The victim mentality leads those who were genuinely powerless to stop abuse in the past to assume the same powerlessness in the present. Before they can fully embrace the future God has planned for them, they must replace this faulty assumption with God's truth.

The victim mentality can cause a person to consciously or subconsciously deny responsibility for his or her actions while blaming others for the undesirable results. Victory requires a new mindset.

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

(2 CORINTHIANS 10:5)

What Questions Do Abuse Victims Ask about God?

Through the years since her conversion, God continued to faithfully heal the many wounds in Stormie's life. But one wound remained painfully raw—her strained relationship with her mother. Stormie begged God for a redeemed mother-daughter bond, and He assured her He would provide—through the birth of a daughter! Contemplating a second pregnancy at nearly 40 years of age frightened Stormie, but she did, indeed, conceive.

“From the moment of Amanda's birth, the healing began. Just like an open wound heals slowly day by day, I felt a wound in my emotions, in my heart somewhere, begin to heal. Every day with Amanda brought more wholeness and more fulfillment.”²²

You might be surprised by some of the questions God's people posed as recorded in God's Word.

The prophet Habakkuk, begins his book crying out with a series of questions to God: *“How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”* (Habakkuk 1:2–3).

David repeatedly asked God equally difficult questions throughout the psalms: *“How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?”* (Psalm 13:1–2).

Even Jesus, in His final moments on the cross, quoted Psalm 22:1, crying out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:26).

Whenever we experience abuse, or any kind of suffering, it's normal to question God. His people have done this for thousands of years. The important thing is to bring your questions and your pain to God. Don't run away from Him. He can handle your questions. He will listen. And in His time and in His way, He will answer.

*"I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears."
(PSALM 34:4 NLT)*

Three of the most frequently and fervently asked questions by victims of abuse are:

1. "Where was God when my abuse was happening?"

Two attributes of God are *omniscience* (He is all-knowing) and *omnipresence* (He is present everywhere). Though God never wills evil, He is with us when we suffer. Just as He was present when His only Son Jesus was being crucified, so He is with us when we are being abused and mistreated.

God sustains and comforts us even if we have no awareness of His presence. And though He does not promise to remove suffering in this present life, He does promise to remove it from the life to come.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (REVELATION 21:4).

Conclusion: God is with us when we suffer.

2. "How could a loving God allow this?"

God hates violence. But because God gave us free will, He allows us to choose to do even that which He hates. Our heavenly Father has meaning and purpose in the suffering He allows to touch our lives, just as with His own Son, Jesus. When we do not understand the ways of God, we can always trust the heart of God and His plan for us. His love is steadfast and sure.

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (LAMENTATIONS 3:21–23 ESV).

Conclusion: God is love and He is trustworthy.

3. “Will God punish my abuser?”

He will punish the wicked and lift up the innocent in the time and way of His choosing.

“For the strength of the wicked will be shattered, but the LORD takes care of the godly. Day by day the LORD takes care of the innocent, and they will receive an inheritance that lasts forever” (PSALM 37:17–18 NLT).

Conclusion: God is just and He will punish abusers.

What Is God’s Heart on Abuse?

Through it all, Stormie says, “I learned about the power of prayer . . . and the transformation that takes place when it becomes our priority. I learned that the more I obeyed God, the more I changed.

“In fact, God changed me and my life so much over the years that today I hardly recognize myself from the person I used to be. And the best part is . . . I know that what He did in me, He can do in anyone.”²³

Stormie Omartian, one of America’s most beloved authors with well over 13 million books sold,²⁴ was transformed from a cowering victim to a confident voice now heard around the world—a compassionate, compelling voice that communicates the help and healing of Jesus to all who need hope. And who doesn’t need hope!

God is a God of love, and He created us for loving relationships. Abusive relationships run contrary to His design and His plan for healthy, flourishing relationships. To those who treat others abusively, God sees their actions, calls them to change, and will hold them accountable. The Bible says, “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*” (Hebrews 4:13).

To those who have been mistreated, the Lord is a refuge. He extends His healing hand and even uses the pain of abuse to accomplish His good purposes.

*"You intended to harm me,
but God intended it for good
to accomplish what is now being done,
the saving of many lives."*

(GENESIS 50:20)

God hears the cry of the battered and abused.

"You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry" (PSALM 10:17).

God understands the pain of abuse.

"He [Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain" (ISAIAH 53:3).

God strengthens and upholds the victim of abuse.

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (ISAIAH 41:10).

God confirms the abuse victim's value and worth.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (LUKE 12:6–7).

God gives hope to victims of abuse.

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (JEREMIAH 29:11).

God offers healing from the pain of abuse.

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (PSALM 147:3).

God wants to be a refuge to the abused and help them process their emotions and experiences with Him.

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge" (PSALM 62:8).

God wants to transform victims' hearts and minds with His Word.

"Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect" (ROMANS 12:2 NLT).

God wants those who've been abused to establish boundaries in their life and relationships.

"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life" (PROVERBS 4:23 NLT).

God wants abuse victims to help others who have experienced abusive treatment.

"The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

God calls for abusive people to change.

"Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right" (EZEKIEL 45:9).

God will one day end all abuse and pain.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever" (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).

Self-Worth

Question: “What does the Bible say about my worth?”

Answer: In biblical times, gold and other precious metals were placed on a balancing scale where their worth was determined by their weight, leading to the expression, “*worth their weight in gold*” (Lamentations 4:2). Think about how much worth that would literally be! If gold were selling at \$1,500 per ounce, 1 pound (16 ounces) of gold would be worth \$24,000. A person weighing 150 pounds would be worth \$3,600,000—more than three-and-a-half million dollars!

In truth, the Bible presents a person’s worth as too great to be measured in mere monetary terms. Peter says your faith alone is “*of greater worth than gold*” (1 Peter 1:7). Are you beginning to see how much you, combined with your faith, are worth in the eyes of God? You are indeed precious to Him. In fact, you have infinite God-given worth.

*“This is how God showed his love among us:
He sent his one and only Son into the world
that we might live through him.”*

(1 JOHN 4:9)



CHARACTERISTICS



*“God promises
to heal and treat
the grievous
wounds of abuse.”*



I hate what happened to me . . . I didn't want it—I didn't like it . . . and I still don't know what to do about it!

At the heart of an abuse victim's wounded emotions is the feeling of powerlessness, of inadequacy . . . a feeling of being unable to make healthy choices in circumstances and relationships. Left with a damaged sense of self-worth, unhealed victims of abuse develop unhealthy beliefs and behaviors.

Due to a lack of control in the past, some victims have a hidden fear of being controlled in the present. Therefore, they themselves seek control and may become overly controlling. Other victims resign themselves to not being in control and have a hidden fear of people who are controlling. These victims of abuse often become codependent, living for the approval of someone else. Both types of unhealthy responses can produce negative side effects.

The cry of an abuse victim's heart is often . . .

*"Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony."*

(PSALM 6:2)

What Is the Profile of an Abused Person?

Arthur Millard is barely 10 years old when he becomes the man of the house. His dad has packed his bags, leaving the family he had for a new one. Being forced to grow up quickly sows bitter seeds in Arthur's young heart as he cares for his mom and little brother.²⁵

As an adult, Arthur feels strapped again with a wife and two sons. Monotony infuriates him, and he vents his pent-up anger with relentless regularity.

His own young sons, Stephen and Bart, catch the brunt of his cruelty—especially three-year-old Bart. In fits of fury, Arthur chokes the life out of every dream his sons dare to dream.

Knowing Arthur's upbringing helps explain—but does not excuse—his abuse. Bart longs for his father's love and acceptance, but Arthur always seems to find fault.

Abusers leave their innocent victims with lingering feelings of rejection and personal defectiveness. The constant fear that their “stains of shame” will be exposed causes victims to develop destructive ways of relating to others. These self-protective patterns of behavior are pitfalls to healthy relationships and impede their ability to know God intimately as explained by Job in the Bible:

*“If I am guilty—woe to me!
Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head,
for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction.”*
(JOB 10:15)

Abused **(an acrostic for the word ABUSED)**

An abuse victim typically feels . . .

A—Ambivalent—Experiences conflicted feelings about pain and pleasure and emotionally gives mixed emotional signals to others.

B—Betrayed—Expects rejection and is unable to trust others or have faith in God.

U—Unexcitable—Lacks passion for both good and bad, merely seeks to be free of conflict with others, and is emotionally flat (doesn't experience emotional highs or lows).

S—Self-absorbed—Is consumed with self-protection to the point of being a peace-at-any-price person.

E—Emotionally controlled—Disengages from true feelings and becomes blind to the feelings of others.

D—Dependent on self—Seeks to be in control because of a reluctance to depend on God or others.

The constant cry of many abuse victims is . . .

“My soul is in deep anguish.”

(PSALM 6:3)

What Do Abuse Victims Believe about Themselves?

Bart feels a sense of shame when his dad knocks him across the room. And Bart will never forget missing two days of school after his dad beats him with a belt. The pain is so severe, Bart must sleep on his stomach without any covering touching his skin.²⁶

The memory with the most reruns in Bart’s mind occurs during his senior year in high school. In an argument about a girl Bart is dating, his dad smashes a dinner plate over Bart’s head. With blood dripping down his face, Bart realizes more than the china is shattered that day.

The one who *should* feel shame—the abuser—continues to be oblivious to the pain being inflicted, while the one abused struggles with feeling fear, feeling defective, and feeling worthless. When these distorted feelings are allowed to rule, they enslave and wreak havoc, causing more pain. Yet, when God’s truth prevails, the attitudes and actions of the abused become grounded and stable.

*“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;
may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”*

(PSALM 143:10)

The words we say to others don’t necessarily reflect the words we say to ourselves. Both our “other-talk” and our “self-talk” reveal what is in our hearts, but what we say to ourselves has the greater power over our lives. If we rehearse negative statements in our thoughts, we will build prison walls in our minds that keep us in bondage to low self-worth.

Common Beliefs of Abuse Victims

Some of the most frequent and fervent statements thought by victims of abuse are listed below. Place a check mark (✓) beside the ones you've said to yourself.

- ☐ I am worthless and unlovable.
- ☐ I need the approval of others to feel good about myself.
- ☐ I must do everything I can to bring about change when I see it is needed.
- ☐ I am responsible for the behavior and feelings of those around me.
- ☐ I am better off with bad love than with no love at all.
- ☐ I am bad if I feel angry.
- ☐ I am terrible because I hate my abuser.
- ☐ I am weak for having needs.
- ☐ I must give in to others because they are wiser and stronger than I am.
- ☐ I must be unlovable if the people I care about reject me.
- ☐ I must keep peace at any price.
- ☐ I must take care of myself because no one else is trustworthy.
- ☐ I will be loved if I am good.
- ☐ I will never again let anyone get close enough to hurt me.
- ☐ My feelings are less important than the feelings of others.
- ☐ My mistakes only confirm my worthlessness.

Whatever factors contribute to your sense of low self-worth, they are held in place by negative thinking you've embraced over the years. But the low opinion you have of yourself can be overcome by replacing your negative self-talk with the truth of God's Word concerning your worth.

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?
Yet not one of them will fall to the ground
outside your Father's care.
³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head
are all numbered.
³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more
than many sparrows."
(MATTHEW 10:29–31)*

What Are Emotional Side Effects of Abuse?

Arthur's indiscriminate abuse extends to his wife who sustains injuries that are not physical. He constantly hurls poisonous darts of verbal abuse. His words strip her of self-respect, exposing her to emotional pain and exhausting any hope of a happily ever after. One day Adele Millard decides that struggling as a single parent has to be easier than living with a tyrant. In desperation, she divorces Arthur and takes the boys with her.²⁷

Life as a single parent is not easy. More often than not, Adele is paralyzed by despair. The boys often fend for themselves. Stephen and Bart reach out to their grandmother, affectionately known as Mammaw, when they need a warm hug or a hot meal.

When Bart is eight years old, his mom remarries and plans to move several hundred miles away. Believing her sons will benefit from the stability of their hometown, she leaves them with their dad.

Abuse is not limited to one area of attack. Its wide range of verbal, emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse covers the landscape. One particular fallout of all types of abuse is emotional abuse, which takes the longest time to heal. (A broken arm takes time to heal—a broken heart takes much longer.) But God is the ultimate Healer. When we yield our will to His will and let Him take control, then we experience this promise of God:

*“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*
(PSALM 34:18)

Emotional Side Effects of Abuse

Those who have been extensively abused generally struggle with severe emotional side effects such as . . .

1. Low self-worth²⁸

Those who have a low sense of self-worth usually find themselves . . .

- Accepting abuse
- Accepting blame
- Accepting condemnation
- Accepting injustice
- Accepting unfair criticism
- Being critical of self and others
- Being desperate for approval
- Being a people-pleaser
- Being unable to accept compliments
- Being unable to set boundaries

Those who have a distorted view of themselves and others often have a distorted view of God. When we feel unworthy of love, respect, and approval from others, we often feel even more unworthy of God’s love, respect, and approval.

Our faulty beliefs lead us to draw faulty conclusions about God, and our wrong beliefs about God sabotage our relationship with Him and smother any hope we have of being valued by Him.

If you struggle with feeling devalued and insignificant, remember Jesus' words:

*"Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap,
they have no storeroom or barn
yet God feeds them.
And how much more valuable
you are than birds!"*
(LUKE 12:24)

2. Dependency²⁹

Victims of abuse often form various addictions or dependencies, such as dependency on . . .

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| — Drugs or alcohol | — Personal abilities |
| — Financial security | — Physical appearance |
| — Food | — Professional success |
| — Material possessions | — Religion |
| — People | — Social status |

Addictions are mood-altering whether through dependence on a chemical (such as alcohol or another substance), a behavior (e.g., bulimia, gambling, overeating), or a person (codependency). When we are hurt, we naturally want relief from our pain.

In an effort to ease our discomfort, we can quickly become dependent on the things we think will provide us with what only God can provide. Shopping, food, relationships, and other activities may provide temporary relief, but they can never fully satisfy the longings of our hearts. Nor can they provide lasting healing.

God alone can satisfy the desires of our hearts, so call on Him to meet your needs.

*“You open your hand and satisfy
the desires of every living thing.*

*¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.*

*¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

*¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.”*

(PSALM 145:16–19)

3. Fearfulness³⁰

Fear is a common side effect experienced by those who have been abused. They may exhibit fear of . . .

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| – Abandonment | – Intimacy |
| – Affection | – Rejection |
| – Authority figures | – Unexpected changes |
| – Failure | – Unfamiliar places |
| – God | – Unpredictable situations |

Fear can be real or imagined, rational or irrational, normal or abnormal. It serves as a protective response placed in us by our Creator to activate our physical defense systems when we are faced with real danger. Fear triggers the release of adrenaline in the body which propels us to action—often called “fight, flight, or freeze.”

Realize, fear is a natural emotion designed by God. However, prolonged fear or fearfulness is not what God intends for us. Fearfulness means living in a *state of fear* or having a *spirit of fear*.

The Bible reminds us that . . .

*“God has not given us a spirit of fear,
but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”*

(2 TIMOTHY 1:7 NKJV)

4. Excessiveness

Yet another emotional side effect of abuse is excessiveness, exhibiting an extreme in . . .

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| — Appearance | — Rules |
| — Control | — Safety |
| — Details | — Seriousness |
| — Organization | — Thoughts |
| — Relationships | — Work |

The human mind is in many ways like a machine with built-in safety mechanisms. When a victim feels overloaded and stressed, the mind can consciously or subconsciously be trained to focus excessively on an object or action as a means of providing temporary emotional or mental relief.

The danger is that the excessive attention or action often becomes so intense that the person feels powerless to control it. But the One who created the mind can certainly reprogram it through the power of His Spirit and His Word. That is why God instructs us to . . .

*“Offer your bodies as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

(ROMANS 12:1-2)

5. Compulsiveness

Those who have been victimized will often display a compulsiveness about . . .

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| — Cleanliness | — Orderliness |
| — Daily routines | — Perfectionism |
| — Dieting | — Personal rituals |
| — Exercise | — Preventing repeat abuse |
| — Locking doors | — Responsibility |

Compulsive people who may appear confident, conscientious, disciplined, and highly productive, are often full of self-doubt and fear, believing that the slightest mistake will cause other people to withdraw, be disappointed, or to reject them. This can lead to living in an overly cautious way, being reluctant to try new things, take risks, or tackle big projects for fear of failing or appearing inadequate in the eyes of others.

Those who struggle with compulsive behavior need to internalize God's grace—live in the truth that God accepts them based on His grace, not based on what they do or don't do. His grace frees us from compulsive “doing” (performance-based acceptance and perfectionism) while also freeing us from the fear of rejection.

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

(EPHESIANS 2:8–9 ESV)

What Are Physical and Mental Effects of Abuse?³¹

When Bart is a high school freshman, his dad becomes ill, is plagued with recurrent pain, and agrees to undergo surgery. Pain is the great convincer, even for Bart's towering dad.³²

With the eight-hour surgery complete, a weary doctor in wrinkled scrubs enters the waiting room. Choosing his words with surgical precision, he delivers a painful punch: liver and pancreatic cancer . . . brutal and aggressive. With a deafening tone of finality, the unexpected news seems to dim the lights and thin the air.

The prognosis is pivotal—a game changer for Arthur Millard. When terminal illness snaps its fingers, he pays attention.

Expecting more of the same, and bracing for a fit of anger like none other, Bart is utterly amazed when he visits his dad after school the next day. His voice, even his countenance, are awash with calming humility. How many times has he wished this man were completely out of his life? Yet now, Bart finds himself praying his dad will live.

Physical abuse impacts the whole person—body, soul, and spirit. Victims of abuse not only suffer during the time of the abuse, but the physical and mental aftereffects of the abuse continue long after the actual abuse ends. Yet God promises to heal and treat the grievous wounds of abuse.

*“He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

Physical and Mental Side Effects of Abuse

Those who are repeatedly abused often suffer from some of the following physical and mental issues:

Disorders

- Anorexia, bulimia, or overeating
- Dissociation or “splitting”
- Self-injury or self-endangerment
- Substance abuse or addictions

Memory disturbances

- Body memories
- Flashbacks
- Memory blocks
- Memory loss

Sexual difficulties

- Defensive reactions to touch
- Frigidity, impotence
- Promiscuity, prostitution
- Sexual identity confusion

Sleeping disruptions

- Awakens frequently to avoid sleeping too soundly
- Fears going to bed or to sleep
- Insomnia, restlessness
- Nightmares

The pressing prayer of many who have experienced physical and mental abuse is . . .

*“Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.
Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.”*
(PSALM 142:6–7)

Dissociative Identity Disorder³³

Question: “At times I appear to have completely different personalities. Although my normal tone of voice, movements, and expressions are different, I’m not aware of it because the changes occur when I seem to lose track of time. Could this relate to the sexual abuse I experienced as a child?”

Answer: Yes. You may be experiencing symptoms associated with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) especially if you experienced severe traumatic abuse at least once before the age of seven.

- DID is the term used in the psychological community since 1994 to describe what had previously been called Multiple Personality Disorder.
- The defining feature of this disorder is that a part of a person's identity becomes detached or "dissociated."
- Dissociation is characterized by the presence of two or more "parts or identities," with vast differences between each part.
- Each identity has distinct behaviors, mannerisms, and possibly even physical attributes, such as right- or left-handedness, allergies, and issues with vision.
- When the walls separating traumatic events from the conscious mind begin to crumble, "flashbacks" of the once cloistered events begin "seeping through" to the conscious mind. Generally this begins occurring when people are in their mid- to late-twenties or thirties.
- The process of "integration" consists of bringing into the mainstream of consciousness the trauma and pain carried by each part. As the pain is effectively processed, healing can occur with the goal of each part being "integrated" back into the whole.

DID is not attributable to substance abuse or a general medical condition. By God's design, the mind is created with the capability to dissociate so one part of a child can privately carry severe pain and trauma without the child having a mental or emotional breakdown. In that respect, DID is a gift from God. As the Bible says . . .

*"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

(PSALM 139:14)

What Are Spiritual Side Effects of Abuse?

In time, light begins to illuminate the darkness in Arthur's mind. Hope dawns with a chance to change. His perspective shifts profoundly. Every day he not only reads his Bible, he studies it too . . . as if finals are tomorrow. And for the first time in Bart's life, he hears his dad praying.³⁴

Even as Arthur becomes more physically frail, his spiritual foundation is becoming rock solid. A death sentence becomes his wake-up call. He will redeem the limited time he has left.

Not only are victims of abuse damaged physically and emotionally, but they also suffer spiritual side effects as a result of abuse. Perhaps the most common spiritual side effect of abuse relates to having a distorted view of God. It can be difficult to see God as loving when so much pain is present. That is why—even in the midst of pain and sorrow—God's Word repeatedly reminds us of His love and compassion.

"I was overcome by distress and sorrow.

Then I called on the name of the LORD:

'LORD, save me!'

The LORD is gracious and righteous;

our God is full of compassion."

(PSALM 116:3–5)

Spiritual Side Effects of Abuse

Those who are repeatedly abused often struggle with obstacles to their spiritual growth. They . . .

Possess a knowledge of God but little personal experience with God

- Know God is real and truly exists
- Know God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present
- Know God is eternal and sovereign

Feel angry with God for not stopping the abuse

- Think God is responsible for the bad things that have happened to them
- Think God is cruel and unloving
- Think God is unfair and unjust

Have difficulty forming an intimate relationship with God

- Struggle with being honest and open with God
- Struggle with believing the promises of God
- Struggle with giving their hearts and lives to God

Distrust God for allowing the abuse

- Consider God to be uncaring for not using His power to stop the abuse
- Consider God to be a liar
- Consider God to be untrustworthy or unreliable

Fear God's anger and displeasure

- See God as impossible to please
- See God as punitive and vindictive
- See God as condemning

Have feelings of rejection and unworthiness

- Feel God has abandoned them
- Feel God has ascribed no value to them
- Feel God has disregarded and discarded them

Project the attributes of their abuser onto God

- Believe God is hurtful and insensitive
- Believe God is selfish and controlling
- Believe God is inconsistent and unpredictable

Seek to gain God's approval

- Hope God will bless them for their sacrificial giving
- Hope God will bless them for their obedience and right living
- Hope God will bless them for their service to others

Harbor warped, negative perceptions of God

- Perceive God as being distant and disinterested
- Perceive God as being indifferent to their pain
- Perceive God as being unavailable

Some spiritual strugglers become so embittered . . .

*"They say to God, 'Leave us alone!
We have no desire to know your ways.'"*
(JOB 21:14)

Others, however, choose to reach out in faith and lay hold of the promises of God.

*"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart
and with the full assurance that faith brings . . .
Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for he who promised is faithful."*
(HEBREWS 10:22–23)

What Survival Strategies Do Abuse Victims Use?

In Bart's teen years, he finds an escape at church. He recalls when his mother took him to church on Sundays, singing a solo at the age of five, as his mother plays the piano. Bart feels at home at church. When he steps inside, it's as if God Himself is dusting off a place for him. At church, Bart feels safe, secure, and accepted.³⁵

A lover of music, Bart always travels with his portable cassette player. In church, Bart finds Christian music helps him forget the pain. Like cold water in a desert, worship songs quench his soul. In a world of bad, God is good.

Bart develops lifelong friendships and church is where he meets the girl he will eventually marry. Later, another church calls Bart to serve as the worship leader. His musical interests lead him to join a worship band. Writing and singing for the Lord brings Bart no greater joy.

Everyone searches for ways to avoid unpleasant situations and responsibilities—some are beneficial, some are harmful. But those operating from a victim mentality become experts at self-protection. Developed through modeling, desperation, or sheer creativity, these skills and ways of relating are learned responses that became necessary for surviving abusive situations.

Often operating subconsciously, these behaviors can undermine non-abusive relationships and sabotage the healing process. Only by walking in the truth of God's Word through the power of His Spirit can we overcome these self-defeating behaviors.

*"In all things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us."
(ROMANS 8:37)*

Survival Personalities

The Dependent gives up personal responsibility in many areas of life and uses helplessness to get support from others. This disguise, adopted for protection, sends the message "I need you," but in adulthood it becomes a powerful means of controlling and manipulating others.

The Pleaser lives by the motto "peace at any price." By constantly complying with the wishes or desires of others, this individual pays a high price for approval and acceptance. As an adult, the pleaser has lost a great deal of personal identity.

The Fixer has low self-worth and attempts to fix it by becoming responsible for and fixing others. Fixers are often seen as very loving, self-sacrificing, and spiritual—though frequently these traits are merely for show and used to avoid addressing their own needs.

The Performer appears highly competent and seems to have it all together. A perfect performance for every act is the performer's unattainable goal. Although there is a certain amount of personal satisfaction in doing so much so well, this person is inwardly paralyzed by the fear of being found to have inadequacies.

The Controller feels secure only when in control. As an adult, the controller comes across as self-assured, always right, and, for the most part, looking good. A fear of vulnerability is what makes this wounded lamb act like a lion.

The Martyr is a great and constant sufferer. Anyone who has been abused needs and deserves the compassion of others. The martyr, however, controls others by continuing to elicit compassion for having experienced devastating abuse.

Rather than using self-defeating survival skills, the Bible presents another option:

*“Since we are surrounded by such
a great cloud of witnesses,
let us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles.
And let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us,
fixing our eyes on Jesus,
the pioneer and perfecter of faith.
For the joy set before him he endured the cross,
scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right hand
of the throne of God.”
(HEBREWS 12:1–2)*

Self-Injury/Self-Harm³⁶

Question: “I’ve discovered that my daughter is a ‘cutter.’ Why would she intentionally hurt herself?”

Answer: Those who deliberately inflict repeated pain on themselves—such as cutting, burning or biting their bodies or reopening barely healed wounds—are seeking relief from overwhelming emotional pain. Self-inflicted harm becomes a temporary coping mechanism to release tension or the shame of abuse.

- Known as “Nonsuicidal Self-Injury” (NSSI), these intentional acts of self-harm are typically shallow, yet painful injuries to the surface of the body. Such injuries are often inflicted with a knife, needle, razor, or other sharp object. Other common methods involve burning the skin with a lit cigarette or repeatedly rubbing the skin with an eraser to cause a burn.
- Abuse victims feel a sense of control when causing self-harm as opposed to feeling out-of-control when harm was caused by a perpetrator.
- Many strugglers engage in self-harm for reasons other than to deflect emotional pain, such as to self-punish, to feel a false sense of control, or to experience euphoria when endorphins are released during self-injury.
- Individual incidents of self-harm can be triggered by different underlying feelings, such as anger, stress, or anxiety . . . depression, revenge, or numbness . . . a “rush,” peer pressure, or loneliness . . . even self-hatred or a desire to escape.
- Both males and females can begin to self-harm even in their younger years and they can continue to self-injure for years if the underlying wounds are left untreated.
- Though not usual, strugglers who harm themselves can

become suicidal if self-injury no longer provides relief from their pain. Since self-harm can be a prelude to suicide, professional help should be sought to help them process their pain.

Any form of self-injury is a cry for help. These strugglers need to know on a very deep level that they don't have to shed their blood to relieve their emotional pain because Jesus has already given His life for them. The Bible says . . .

*"You were redeemed . . . with the precious blood
of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."*

(1 PETER 1:18–19)

I Can Only Imagine Epilogue

The Bart Millard Story³⁷

For Bart Millard, a lifetime of anger stemming from abuse moves aside allowing compassion to enter. He sees a change in his dad he could have never imagined. Reflecting on the radical difference, Bart later asserts, “God transformed the monster I hated into the man I wanted to become.”³⁸

Bart has a front row seat to watch Jesus change his dad. When Arthur draws his last breath, Bart finds comfort knowing he will see his dad again in eternity.

After Arthur’s graveside service, Meemaw Millard envisions her son (whom she calls Bub), entering heaven. The thought travels from the depth of her grief to imagining the reality of heaven. Her curiosity plants a seed in her grandson’s heart that will later flourish for all the world to ponder: “Bart, I can only imagine what Bub must be seeing right now.”³⁹

Eight years later, Bart pens the words of the song, “I Can Only Imagine” in just 10 minutes—words that echo his Meemaw’s imagination. Released by Bart’s worship band, MercyMe, this song compels people in every walk of life to ponder the wonder of heaven and imagine what it must be like to be face-to-face with the Lord.



CAUSES



*“Just because someone
has suffered abuse
at the hands of another
does not mean they
must adopt and accept
a victim mentality.”*



Those who have been abused are typically overwhelmed by trauma. Many often come to have distorted conclusions about themselves and their world. These incorrect beliefs lead some people with wounded hearts to adopt faulty reactions and behaviors that hide their intense pain. Whether they realize it or not, they build walls that block intimacy with God and others.

Yet God's desire is to break down the walls, heal hurting hearts, and set us free to live a life not darkened by shame and fear but radiant with joy.

"Let all who are helpless take heart. . . .

⁴ I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.

He freed me from all my fears.

*⁵ Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;
no shadow of shame will darken their faces.*

*⁶ In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD listened;
he saved me from all my troubles."*

(PSALM 34:2, 4–6 NLT)

What Emotional Walls Lead to a Victim Mentality?

Jenna Quinn lives with her church-going family—a devoted mom, dedicated dad, two sisters, and a menagerie of pets. She and her older sister, Stephanie, make friends with a pair of neighborhood siblings, Jake and Jackie Russell.⁴⁰

The Quinns and the Russells have many common interests and spend time together. Sharing a love of basketball, Jake becomes Jenna's best friend. Both moms share mutual interests and the two dads, Greg Quinn and Mark Russell, become best of friends.

The two families regularly get together for dinners, holidays, and vacations. All seems well . . . until Jenna starts receiving an inordinate amount of attention from Mark Russell.

Jenna's athletic skills ensure the 7th grader a spot on the school's basketball team. Even when his children are not playing a game, Mr. Russell attends Jenna's games and pays close attention to her. He compliments her talent . . . and makes comments on her appearance. Innocent Jenna isn't concerned. But soon, slight physical touches accompany the verbal praise. Again, Jenna senses nothing unusual. She trusts this man who is her best friend's father and her own father's friend.

Sisters Jenna and Stephanie often visit the Russells' home. Both sets of parents take turns taxiing the young teens. One night Mr. Russell takes Jenna home, and the conversation becomes awkward. He talks about how special Jenna is and that he would "do anything" for her. He asks her about boys she likes at school. His words become distressing when he details his own sexual exploits while Jenna sits in stunned silence. They arrive at her house and Jenna expresses her discomfort, "I don't think that's OK to talk about." He brushes her off by saying, "It's just a conversation, relax darling."⁴¹ He then leans over to kiss her cheek before she can scramble out of the seatbelt and escape his reach. The odd encounter feels wrong, but Jenna doesn't make a big deal about it. Although embarrassing, she puts the incident behind her and ignores her unease.

Like physical walls, emotional walls act as protective barriers. They may temporarily hold emotional pain at bay, restricting access to the hurtful memories in your heart and mind. Emotional walls can provide a measure of safety and security, but they can also keep you from allowing the Lord's healing hand to reach your heart. Ultimately, the emotional walls we build are not our refuge—our refuge is the Lord.

*"The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you."
(PSALM 9:9–10)*

Emotional Prison Walls

Often those who develop a victim mentality view themselves as being emotionally healthy, but what they fail to realize is that they have actually built emotional walls and become prisoners of their past.

Faulty Reaction: Bitterness

Distorted Conclusions: “I hate being part of this family.”

“I wish I were someone else.”

Biblical Truth: *“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many”* (HEBREWS 12:15).

Faulty Reaction: False guilt

Distorted Conclusions: “This is my fault.”

“I must not tell; I’ll get in trouble.”

Biblical Truth: *“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them”* (EPHESIANS 5:11).

Faulty Reaction: Shame

Distorted Conclusions: “Something must be wrong with me.”

“I am a bad person.”

Biblical Truth: *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well”* (PSALM 139:14).

Faulty Reaction: Unforgiveness

Distorted Conclusions: “I’ll never forgive them.”

“I wish they were dead.”

Biblical Truth: *“Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others”* (COLOSSIANS 3:13 NLT).

Faulty Reaction: Fear

Distorted Conclusions: “What will happen to me if someone finds out?”

“What if someone hurts me again?”

Biblical Truth: *“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”* (PSALM 34:4).

Faulty Reaction: Hopelessness

Distorted Conclusions: “Things have never been good.”

“Life will never get better.”

Biblical Truth: *“The needy are not permanently ignored, the hopes of the oppressed are not forever dashed” (PSALM 9:18 NET).*

Faulty Reaction: Self-centeredness

Distorted Conclusions: “I never have fun or enjoy life like others do.”

“It’s hard to think of anything but my unhappiness.”

Biblical Truth: *“You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever” (PSALM 16:11 NLT).*

Left unchallenged, these emotional walls prevent the truth of God’s Word from saturating the soul and a victim mentality takes hold. To begin breaking down the emotional walls, ask God to examine your heart.

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!”
(PSALM 139:23–24 ESV)*

What Relational Walls Lead to a Victim Mentality?

Jenna joins Jake to watch a movie at the Russells’ home. When Jake nods off before the ending credits, Jenna starts to call her dad to pick her up. Suddenly, Mr. Russell enters the room and offers her a lift. She insists her dad can pick her up and continues to place the call. Mark moves closer, close enough to hear Greg answer in a sleepy voice. Speaking loudly, Mark announces that he will take Jenna home.

In the car, the conversation again takes an uncomfortable turn. Jenna moves to disembark when suddenly he's on her side of the car, hands everywhere on her body. Unable to breathe, she tries to push him away, begs him to stop, and pleads to no avail. He's too strong and determined. Finally he withdraws, but not before threatening, "Don't you dare tell anyone about this."⁴² Intimidated by fear, Jenna remains silent.

The threat leaves Jenna shaken, feeling shame and guilt for not being able to fight him off. She thinks about telling her dad, but she's too concerned about his reaction. She's even too ashamed to go to God.

Walls create boundaries. They determine where you can go and where you can't go—what you will let in and what you will keep out of your life. Like a physical wall, relational walls determine *who* you will let in and *who* you will keep out of your life. While boundaries are important to healthy relationships, those who've been abused may create relational walls that block intimacy and restrict access even to people who the Lord can use to provide healing and comfort.

*"God, who comforts the downcast,
comforted us by the coming of Titus."
(2 CORINTHIANS 7:6)*

Relational Prison Walls

Those who develop a victim mentality often do not understand they are held captive within relational walls of their own making.

Faulty Reaction: Fear

Distorted Conclusions: "People are unsafe."

"I must protect myself."

Biblical Truth: *"In God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?"*
(PSALM 56:11).

Faulty Reaction: Distrust

Distorted Conclusions: “People are unreliable.”

“I must guard myself.”

Biblical Truth: *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love” (ROMANS 12:9–10).*

Faulty Reaction: Anger

Distorted Conclusions: “People are perpetrators.”

“I must avenge myself.”

Biblical Truth: *“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (ROMANS 12:19).*

Faulty Reaction: Insecurity

Distorted Conclusions: “People are selfish.”

“I must fend for myself.”

Biblical Truth: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4 ESV).*

As victims of abuse move on with their lives, many outgrow faulty and immature ways of thinking about life. They put away the past and begin to seek fulfillment by achieving personal goals, such as getting married, raising children, advancing their career, serving the Lord, and other personal accomplishments.

Unfortunately, for some, patterns developed as children to survive abuse remain part of their personalities. These patterns may become iron-clad, protective walls around emotional pain or hurt and keep self-awareness, vulnerability, and true intimacy in relationships at bay.

Although those who have been victimized yearn for mature love, often the journey back into their silenced hearts seems too threatening and the hidden deceptions too deep to understand.⁴³

Healthy, intimate relationships require trust, transparency, and vulnerability. This can be difficult for those who have been abused.

When the heart has been deeply hurt, walls of self-protection are often built to shelter us from future pain. Vulnerability is avoided. Trust is terminated. But to veer from vulnerability is not the way of Christ. As we are vulnerable before the Lord, we are given the security to become vulnerable before others. Then as we grow in intimacy with the Lord, we are given security to safely develop deeper intimacy with others who are safe.

*“Blessed are those who fear the LORD,
who find great delight in his commands. . . .
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.
Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear.”*
(PSALM 112:1, 7–8)

What Spiritual Walls Lead to a Victim Mentality?

Mark Russell continues to infiltrate the Quinn family. When he asks Jenna’s parents about her, they don’t recognize his inappropriate interest as “grooming” (gaining the trust or alleviating apprehensions of a victim, and sometimes extended family). Mr. Russell ingratiates and imposes himself in Jenna’s life wherever possible.

What occurs next happens fast, but to Jenna, it feels like slow-motion terror. Home alone after sleeping in on a lazy Saturday, 14-year-old Jenna gets up to answer the doorbell. Peering through the peephole, she sees Mr. Russell. She doesn’t answer the door but Mark knows she’s home—alone. He tells her, “I’m dropping something off for your dad. Your dad knows I’m here.”⁴⁴

The naive young teen expects her dad home soon, so she opens the door a crack to take the box Mark is carrying. He pushes past her and enters the home. “I talked to your dad. I must have just missed him. He said that he might not be home but to go ahead and drop this off.”⁴⁵

“What are your plans today? I see you’re still in your pajamas,” his eyes lingering on her body. Jenna heads to the front door without a reply, thinking he will take the hint and leave. Instead, he follows closely behind her and grabs her. Fear leaves her weak and helpless. Stepping back, she screams, “No!” Yet, he corners her and starts pulling up her shirt and pulling down her pants. “Stop!” she yells. “I don’t like it.” He forces his face next to hers and whispers, “Yes, you do.”⁴⁶

Fighting tears, she threatens to call her dad. He claims, “Why? I’m just trying to help you. We aren’t doing anything wrong.”⁴⁷ Finally he relents and leaves, insisting he’s only dropping off a package and Jenna better not say anything about what “we” did.

Closing and locking the door, Jenna no longer feels safe in her own home. She restlessly paces, wondering what to do. It will be her word against his. He is her father’s friend, a likable guy, and a churchgoing coach. Who would believe her?

Walls define space. The walls that enclose a room determine its size and structure. A room cannot get bigger unless walls are torn down. In a similar way, spiritual walls built in response to abusive treatment can restrict spiritual growth. If we live with spiritual walls segmenting life, it’s as if we’re telling God, “I will only give You access to this part of my life . . . and no more.”

Like emotional and relational walls, spiritual walls keep us from moving forward and growing in the Lord. Healing occurs when we make room for God’s love and grace to work in our hearts. Then, we won’t be imprisoned by impenetrable walls, but instead will be surrounded by unfailing love.

“Unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD.

So rejoice in the LORD and be glad.”

(PSALM 32:10–11 NLT)

Spiritual Prison Walls

Often those who develop a victim mentality fail to realize they have become prisoners of their past, enclosing themselves within spiritual walls.

Faulty Reaction: Blaming God

Distorted Conclusions: “This is God’s fault.”

“God is not fair!”

Biblical Truth: *“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he”* (DEUTERONOMY 32:4).

Faulty Reaction: Harboring anger toward God

Distorted Conclusions: “How could God let this happen to me?”

“God doesn’t care about me.”

Biblical Truth: *“The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does”* (PSALM 145:17).

Faulty Reaction: Refusing to trust God

Distorted Conclusions: “I can’t depend on God.”

“I don’t believe in God.”

Biblical Truth: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding”* (PROVERBS 3:5).

Faulty Reaction: Hiding from God

Distorted Conclusions: “I’m afraid of God.”

“I want to hide from God.”

Biblical Truth: *“Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most”* (HEBREWS 4:16 NLT).

Faulty Reaction: Doubting God’s love

Distorted Conclusions: “God certainly doesn’t love me.”

“I don’t deserve God’s love.”

Biblical Truth: *“Great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever” (PSALM 117:2).*

Left unchecked, spiritual walls separate abuse victims from the truth of God’s Word and a victim mentality soon emerges. The Lord desires to break through spiritual walls with hope and healing. He cares for you and wants to carry your burden of pain.

*“Give your burdens to the LORD,
and he will take care of you.”
(PSALM 55:22 NLT)*

What Fosters Fear in Abuse Victims?⁴⁸

Jenna’s last place of refuge is ruined when Mr. Russell volunteers to coach her basketball team. Her safety shrinks when her dad announces that Mark has offered to bring Jenna home after practice since it’s on his way. Jenna never knows when the next attack might occur.

Jenna’s performance on the team starts to decline. On a non-practice day, Mr. Russell lures Jenna to his home, ostensibly to try on new team jerseys. After unsuspecting Greg drops Jenna off, she soon discovers no one is home but Mark. Jenna takes the jersey and heads to the bathroom to try it on, locking the door. After putting on the jersey and seeing it fits perfectly, she realizes she has walked right into a trap.

She quickly changes back into her clothes and reluctantly opens the door, intending to leave, but Mark grabs her hand and leads her to the TV room where he says he has a movie he wants her to see. It’s porn. Jenna wants no part of it and reaches for her phone, but he grabs it away and forces her to the couch where he unzips his pants and fully exposes himself to her. She fights desperately. Suddenly, he’s interrupted by her ringing phone. It’s her dad. “You better let him know you’re OK,” he says with sudden fear in his voice.⁴⁹

“Hi, Dad” she responds as Mark scrambles to get his clothes back on. Jenna straightens her clothing all the while glaring at her attacker with hatred as she escapes outside to wait for her dad. Imagine her shock and surprise when she sees Mark coming around to her father’s side of the car and thanking him for dropping her off to check the jerseys! He then calmly asks Greg if he wants to catch a movie. His brazen audacity is terrifying!

Fear does not appear in a vacuum. Something sets us up to be controlled by fear, and something serves to trigger that fear. The setup occurred in the past, while the trigger occurs in the present. Finding the truth about our fear provides insight into the reason we are being controlled by present fear and are held captive to past abuse.

*“Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.”*
(PSALM 55:5)

Past Setups for Fear

Monumental Experiences

- Traumatic events
- Scary situations
- Abusive relationships
- Fearful role models

Pinpoint the reason for your fear and tell yourself the truth about the past and the present.

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. But when I became an adult, I set aside childish ways” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:11 NET).

Emotional Overload

- Pent-up, unacknowledged feelings
- Unrealistic expectations
- Harsh, stressful environment
- Demanding, rejecting authority figures

Pinpoint the reason for your fear and allow the Lord to help you heal from your hurts.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 PETER 5:6–7).

Situational Avoidance

- Refusing to face fears
- Rejecting opportunities to change
- Reinforcing fears
- Repeating negative thought patterns

Pinpoint the reason for your fear and allow the Lord to help you face your fears.

“You came near when I called you, and you said, ‘Do not fear’” (LAMENTATIONS 3:57).

Dismal Outlook

- Anticipating danger and disaster
- Expecting frustration and failure
- Believing lies
- Rejecting truth

Pinpoint the reason for your fear and tell yourself the truth.

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Why Do Abuse Victims Become Codependent?

Greg goes to the movie, returns home, and asks Jenna if she wants to go out for dinner. Even though she's flustered and uncertain, she agrees. But when the father and daughter walk into the restaurant, who is there but Mark Russell? Before being seated, Jenna excuses herself and heads to the bathroom, hoping to calm her clenched stomach. Feeling nauseous despite an empty stomach, Jenna suddenly notices an itchy rash welting up on her skin. She returns to the table and begs her father to take her home because she's sick and covered with this strange rash.

Arriving home, Jenna's mom examines her skin and her parents decide to take Jenna to the emergency room. After three hours, they conclude she has hives due to stress, but can find no cause. She is sent home with medication to manage the symptoms, but the cause remains a mystery. Deep down, Jenna knows the reason she is stressed. Yet, sadly she keeps her torment a secret.

The word "codependent" was first used in the 1970s to describe a family member living with someone dependent on alcohol. Codependency describes the dysfunctional behavior of family members seeking to adapt to the destructive behavior of the alcoholic. Just as the alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, the codependent is dependent on being needed by the alcoholic (or someone who is problematic).

Codependency is a relationship addiction. At its core is the need to be needed. Codependent people often believe they can "fix" others or "save" them. They may think, *if I just do this . . . he will stop being abusive*. A codependent person will often protect the addict or abuser from the natural consequences of their addictive or abusive actions. This leaves the codependent person in a position to be taken advantage of, controlled, or manipulated by the abusive person.

Just as day follows night, codependency predictably follows abuse. Each fosters the other and imprisons victims in a repetitive, painful cycle of abuse. God wants to break this cycle and bring freedom.

*“So if the Son sets you free,
you will be free indeed.”*
(JOHN 8:36)

Setups for Codependency

No one sets out to be emotionally addicted to another person, to constantly crave love from another person. These cravings were created in childhood because their “love buckets” were and still are empty.

These children often become codependent as adults because they . . .

Did not receive enough positive affirmation as children

Grew up feeling unloved, insignificant, and insecure

Experienced a traumatic separation or a lack of bonding

Felt and continue to feel intense sadness and a profound loss from being abandoned

Experienced repeated rejection from their parents

Felt and continue to feel extreme fear, helplessness, and emptiness

Children with empty “love buckets” often believe that some person will come and remove their fear and finally make them feel whole.

As adults, they still behave like emotionally needy children who . . .

Believe that being loved by someone—anyone—is the solution to their emptiness

Enter relationships believing the other person cannot take care of themselves

Assign too much value and power to the other person in a relationship

Have tremendously unrealistic expectations of the other person

Try to “stick like glue” to the other person to feel connected

Live in fear that those who love them will ultimately leave them

Looking to people or to a relationship to meet your deepest needs will ultimately fail. Only the Lord can love you perfectly, completely, and eternally. Allow the Lord to lead you to maturity and dependence on Him.

*“From everlasting to everlasting
the LORD’s love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children’s children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.”
(PSALM 103:17–18)*

What Is the Root Cause of a Victim Mentality?

Drowning in shame through no fault of her own and shackled by the silence of her secret, Jenna needs a new way to deal with the weight of her pain. So one day, she gets a safety pin and sits on the edge of her bed. She thinks of cutting her wrist, but those wounds would be too visible. She takes a deep breath, pulls up her pant leg and cuts herself for the first time. Even as she experiences the physical pain, she feels an emotional release. Jenna’s external pain now matches her inner turmoil.

Jenna longs for her 16th birthday—when she will finally be able to drive herself and no longer be at the mercy of Mr. Russell in his car. Her parents have promised her a car, which means escaping Mark Russell and regaining control of her life.

Shortly after getting her car, an unknown number appears on her phone. She answers only to discover it’s Mr. Russell, talking non-stop. She debates whether to unleash a verbal assault on him or simply hang up. Before she can decide he rambles on, “I think of you all the time. I can’t wait to see you again.”⁵⁰ Her blood boils and she hangs up.

Abuse usually occurs outside the victim's control. The lack of control over a situation can lead the one abused to believe they are also powerless to change an outcome. However, the abused *do* have control over their response. Whether or not someone develops a victim mentality depends in large part on their response to the abuse.

The abused can become embittered and angry, often trapped in broken relationships and patterns, looking to people and things to satisfy their deepest needs. Or, they can choose to find help and healing through counseling, processing their emotions and experiences, and through the power of God's Word. They can turn to the Lord to satisfy their deepest inner needs and to find true, lasting healing.

*"Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and
I will be saved, for you are the one I praise."
(JEREMIAH 17:14)*

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.⁵¹

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*"I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me"
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).*

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

"Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge" (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Abuse victims who remain imprisoned by a victim mentality do so because of a belief system that keeps them locked into feeling they are powerless to change.

Wrong Belief: “I was powerless to change my life growing up, and I am powerless to change it now. What happened to me has defined me, and I do not deserve anything better. God doesn’t care about me. He was powerless to change what happened, and He is powerless to change it now.”

Right Belief: “God cares deeply about what has happened to me. He has the power to heal me, to help me overcome my past, and to make me into the person He created me to be. Because God loves me, I can come to Him with all my pain and fears, and He will help transform my heart and mind so I can become emotionally, relationally, and spiritually healthy. I can trust Him to give me victory over abuse.”

“My victory and honor come from God alone.

He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.

O my people, trust in him at all times.

Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.”

(PSALM 62:7–8 NLT)

What Is God’s Plan for Ultimate Recovery?

Soon Jenna’s parents start to worry. She’s wearing dark clothing, hooded sweatshirts, big black wristbands and dog-chain chokers. She skips showering for days at a time and gains an extra 20 pounds. She’s showing a total disregard for basketball and for the first time, Jenna sits on the bench rather than runs the court.

Fast forward. It’s Christmas break and her sister Stephanie is home again. As the Quinns and the Russells gather to celebrate Christmas Eve as is their usual custom, Jenna prays to God for a miracle.

The day after Christmas, Stephanie invites Jenna to lunch. She has a question for Jenna—one she prefaces with a serious look and a straightened spine. She asks Jenna to be honest with her and promise to tell the truth. Jenna agrees, then sits in stunned silence when Stephanie asks, “Has anyone ever hurt you?”⁵²

The road behind you may not have been the one you wanted to travel. The abuse you endured may have paved the way for broken relationships, troubled emotions, and regretful actions. Yet despite the roadblocks you’ve faced and the painful detours you’ve taken, there is a way forward. The Lord has a path for you to find hope and healing.

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”*

(PSALM 32:8)

4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him"* (John 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31).

4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

Pure in Heart

The Jenna Quinn Story—Part 1⁵³

In the crowded restaurant, uncontrollable tears cascade down Jenna's cheeks. Stephanie remains calm, waiting for her sister to regain her composure. "Yes, but I can't tell you who it is."⁵⁴ Stephanie insists on knowing, determined not to leave until the truth is revealed.

"It's Mr. Russell . . . he's been doing things to me." Finally, the horrible truth is out in the open. Stephanie is silenced by shock, absorbing the awful news. She shakes her head and cannot speak beyond an initial, "I'm so sorry." After what seems like an eternity, Stephanie sits straight up and says, "OK, well, we're going to get you help. He is never going to hurt you again."⁵⁵

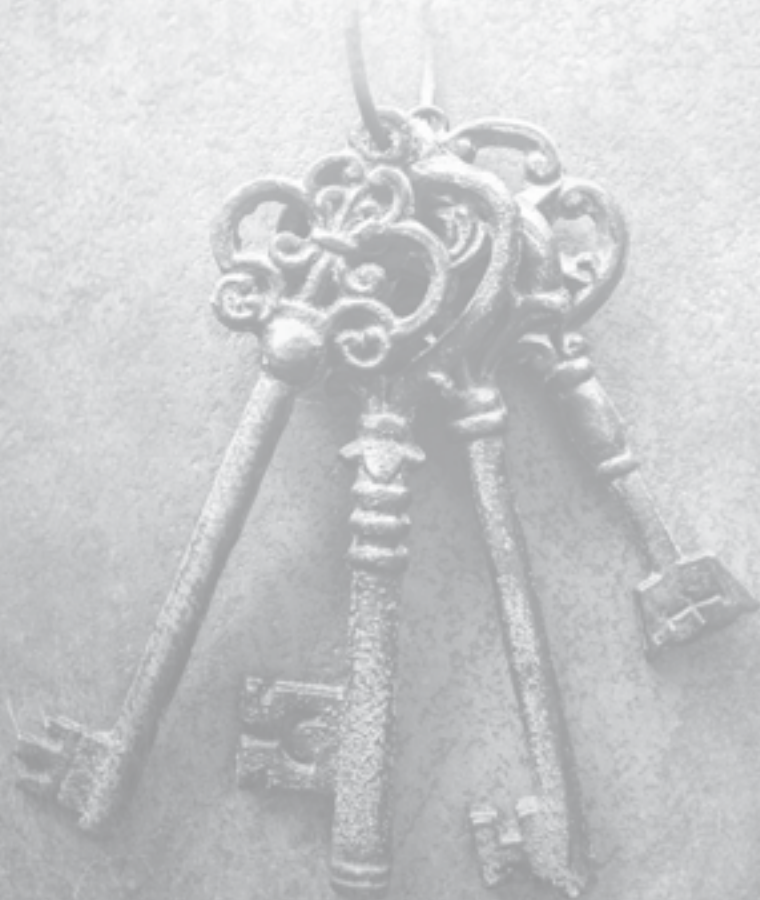
Stephanie insists Jenna tell their parents immediately but Jenna can't help but think of Russell's numerous threats and the very real danger about what her father might do once he learns the truth. She doesn't want to tell them. But Stephanie persists, "He's living a great life at your expense. He thinks he's getting away with it, too. He knows, and he could care less that he's destroying your life, causing pain and suffering to his family and yours. As of now, that's going to stop!"⁵⁶

Before leaving the restaurant, Stephanie stresses that none of what happened is Jenna's fault. Jenna accepts the dose of reality but wonders why she didn't think of that before. So thorough was Mr. Russell's victimization of this young teen, the thought never occurred to her. Driving home, Jenna is reminded of her prayer on Christmas Eve, wondering if this was the miracle she pleaded for so earnestly.

"In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me."

(PSALM 120:1 ESV)

STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“Help and healing
ultimately come
from God.”*



Just as someone recovering from a serious injury needs time to heal, so too do those who have suffered abuse.

Every day across the world, broken bones are set, scrapes and scratches are cleaned and bandaged, torn flesh is sewn back together. Medicine is administered to facilitate healing and wounds are given time to heal. The result of deep wounds may leave signs of scars, but the hope of healing remains.

Healing from abuse is not unlike recovering from an injury. Painful memories and wounds from the past must be addressed and attended to so that healing can begin. After healing takes place, it becomes possible to gain strength and to grow in wisdom and grace.

*“O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.”
(PSALM 30:2 ESV)*

Key Verse to Memorize

Help and healing ultimately come from God. He knows your pain. He sees your grief. He is not indifferent toward you, and He does not ignore you. You can trust Him. You can place your past, present, and future in His hands.

*“You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.”
(PSALM 10:14)*

Key Passage to Read

Stories abound in Scripture about people who were mistreated, maligned, attacked, assaulted . . . *abused*. In the book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah reflects on his suffering and the suffering of Israel after being attacked by an enemy nation. Jeremiah's response to the attack mirrors the response of many to harsh treatment: anger, confusion, despair, and bitterness.

Jeremiah shows us that as God's people bring their emotions to Him and look to Him in the midst of their suffering, they find hope. Your story of abuse may differ in many ways, but the same hope is available to you.

*"Surely there is a future,
and your hope will not be cut off."
(PROVERBS 23:18 ESV)*

Lamentations 3:19–26 (NLT)

¹⁹*The thought of my suffering . . . is bitter beyond words.*
²⁰*I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.*
²¹*Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:*
²²*The faithful love of the LORD never ends!
His mercies never cease.*
²³*Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh each morning.*
²⁴*I say to myself, 'The LORD is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!'*
²⁵*The LORD is good to those who depend on him,
to those who search for him.*
²⁶*So it is good to wait quietly
for salvation from the LORD."*

The Hope of Recovery from Abuse

Acknowledge your pain and suffering.	v. 19
Allow yourself to time to grieve.	v. 20
Dare to hope.	v. 21
Realize that God's love for you never ends.	v. 22
Rejoice in God's daily faithfulness and mercy toward you.	v. 23
Speak God's words of truth and hope to yourself.	v. 24
Keep relying on and looking to God, who is good to you.	v. 25
Know that salvation and healing come from the Lord.	v. 26

Why Does God Allow Abuse?

Question: "Why didn't God stop my abuse from happening?"

Answer: Knowing that God permitted your abuse but in no way caused your abuse or condoned it is critical. God hates evil and violence and will one day totally obliterate all evil and evil practices. He will pronounce eternal judgment on all who persist in their evil ways.

*"I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins.
I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty
and will humble the pride of the ruthless."*

(ISAIAH 13:11)

True. God did not prevent the abuse, but know . . .

- God did not create humans to be puppets. He gives each person free will. Some choose right, others choose wrong.
- Allowing sin is not the same as causing or agreeing with sinful actions.
- God will judge sin and sinful people . . . in His time and in His way.
- While God permits evil, He has the desire and power to redeem both those injured by abuse and those who abuse others. He wants to restore them to wholeness and use them to accomplish His divine purposes.

*“We are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.*

*³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons,*

neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

*³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

(ROMANS 8:37–39)

How to Have a Transformed Life

Stephanie and Jenna arrive home and gather in the living room with their parents. With sweaty palms and a pounding heart, Jenna's thoughts battle her terror. She's not afraid for herself, but for the pain her parents will experience. Stephanie prompts Jenna but she can't say the words. Finally, Stephanie reveals, “Someone has been hurting Jenna.”⁵⁷

Mom Kellie reacts first, “Who? Jenna, what’s going on?” Jenna answers, “You’re not going to believe me, but it’s—it’s Mr. Russell.” Kellie gasps and repeats, “No. No. No. No.”⁵⁸ At first, Greg sits still, but then he breaks down in tears standing in front of Jenna before falling to his knees and saying her name. Without the words to express his heart, he simply weeps.

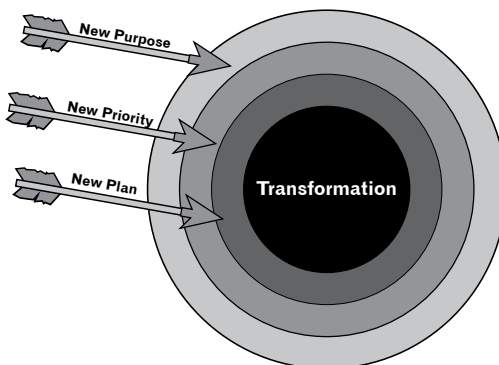
Jenna’s mother asks how many times and Jenna admits she doesn’t know . . . the abuse has been going on for *years*. Kellie asks in disbelief, “Why didn’t you tell us? You know you can tell us anything.”⁵⁹

Moving from *victim* to *victor* requires a transformation—in mind, heart, and attitude. Ultimately, this incredible transformation is possible through the life-changing work of the Lord in your life. Reaching the target of transformation becomes reality as you walk in newness through the new purpose, new priority, and new plan God has for you.

*“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,
in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father, we too might
walk in newness of life.”*

(ROMANS 6:4 ESV)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



THE FREEDOM FORMULA

	A New Purpose
+	A New Priority
+	A New Plan
	A Transformed Life

Target #1—A New Purpose

God's purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

Healing from abuse is a process—a multi-faceted process that takes time. Although I may no longer be in an abusive situation, the effects linger and may still impact my life and relationships. I may or may not be aware of the effects. The road to recovery might seem like an uphill battle, but I can take steps toward healing and find victory with the Lord's help.

*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."*

(PSALM 121:1-2)

As I seek to overcome the abuse I've experienced and become the person God created me to be, **I will:**

Look to the Lord

Change, healing, and freedom all begin with God. He will listen to me, strengthen me, and help me rise above abuse. Being abused can distort my view of God but I will remember—God loves me. He is for me, and He is with me. He desires to heal and restore me and set me free. I can trust Him. To this end . . .

- I will read God's Word and pray regularly.
- I will get involved in a local church to deepen my relationship with God.

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always" (1 CHRONICLES 16:11).

Talk to someone

Sadly, much abuse goes unreported. Fear and shame, as well as manipulation and control, have kept me from discussing abuse. Because I have been abused (or am currently being abused), I need to tell someone. If they don't believe me, I will tell someone else. Talking to someone can be the first step toward healing and recovery for me. I know healing doesn't take place in isolation, and that God can use my friends, family, and counselors to comfort me and to help me heal and grow. Therefore . . .

- I will reach out to a trusted family member, friend, neighbor, coworker, counselor, or someone in my church or in my community (or the police if necessary) and tell them I need help.
- I will contact an abuse recovery hotline to talk with someone about my experience. (See page 139 for a list of free and confidential hotlines.)

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help" (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

Address physical issues

Whether or not the abuse I endured was physical—I may have physical issues that need to be addressed. They may be literal wounds or lingering pain that needs healing. Or the stress of the abuse may be

the cause of my sleeping problems, an addiction, an eating disorder, or other unhealthy behaviors I've been using to cope with the abuse. Consequently . . .

- I will talk with a medical professional about my health concerns.
- I will make it a priority to develop a healthy lifestyle of exercising, eating well, managing stress, and avoiding harmful substances.

"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 TIMOTHY 4:8).

Process my emotions

The pain of abuse can create lingering, damaged emotions that are ever-present and just waiting to surface and spill out. Painful, hidden emotions like anger and hurt still affect my well-being and relationships. I may not know how to express my emotions, or I may not have had permission to express them. But I know that confronting my emotions is an important step toward healing. Therefore, I will give myself time to grieve and process this pain.

- I will be honest about the emotions I've felt as a result of the abuse I experienced.
- I will talk with God and trustworthy individuals to help me process my thoughts and emotions.

"In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help" (PSALM 18:6).

Replace lies with truth

Abuse has led me to believe lies about myself, my value, and my purpose. I have even believed lies about relationships and about God. I understand that healing occurs when I recognize the lies and walk in the truth. God's Word provides truth about me—my identity, my purpose, and my worth. As I read His Word, I will begin to see myself through God's eyes.

- I will identify the lies I've believed: lies about myself, about others, about life, and about God.
- I will look to God's Word to replace those lies with the truth.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (JOHN 8:32).

Set boundaries

Boundaries define what is permissible and what is not, separating what is in bounds and what is out of bounds. In abusive relationships, boundaries that are designed to keep me safe are often crossed. To prevent further abuse, it's important for me to establish and maintain firm boundaries. (For more help on setting boundaries, see "How to Set and Maintain Boundaries" on page 112.)

- I will set healthy boundaries to protect myself and others from further abuse.
- I will enforce repercussions and maintain those boundaries when they are crossed.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"
(PROVERBS 4:23).

Help others

One sign of healing and growth is that I can take the bad things that have happened to me and use them for good. God can use my painful experience to help others. He can turn my misery into ministry.

- I will trust God to use me, even my painful past, to help others who have been impacted by abuse.
- I will look for opportunities to share my story, listen to others, and point people to the Lord.

"The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

How to Face Abuse and Find Freedom

Without a word, Greg stands, goes to a closet for his coat and heads toward the door. Jenna's worst fears are coming true. Despite being a kind man, a loving Christian man, Greg is still a father learning his daughter has been horribly abused.

Stephanie and Kellie rush to stop him, insisting they call the police. He promises to only “have words” with Mark. Knowing more would follow, Jenna stands frozen in tears while Stephanie and Kellie plead with him to calm down. Finally, wisdom prevails and the police are called. Greg assures Jenna he will handle this situation the “right way,” and they allow law enforcement to deal with Mark Russell.

The police arrive and a lengthy interview ensues. Jenna shares the horrible details privately with the officers and as they leave, one tells Greg, “This guy was really sick. He knew what he was doing.”⁶⁰

As you begin the process of healing, you need to face several painful realities and work through them to move beyond your past and embrace your future—a future of freedom. The Bible says there is . . .

“A time to embrace and a time to turn away.”

(ECCLESIASTES 3:5 NLT)

1. Face Your Prison Walls

Recognize what walls you in and what will be required to tear down those walls to experience the freedom God wants for you. Ask yourself . . .

- Do I feel there is no way out of my situation?
- Do I think love is based on my performance?
- Do I feel powerless in my relationships?
- Do I lie in order to avoid conflict?
- Do I think other people are better than me?
- Do I have a lack of trust in people?
- Do I have difficulty saying *No*?
- Do I fear rejection?

Acknowledge your bondage from past abuse and your need to break through the walls that keep you from healthy relationships. Ask yourself . . .

- Have I confessed my bondage to God?
- Have I acknowledged that this bondage hinders my relationships with God and others?

- Have I admitted my need for God’s divine intervention in my life?
- Have I acknowledged my dependence on Him to bring deep and permanent healing to my life?
- Have I accepted my need for a new way of thinking about God, myself, and others?
- Have I acknowledged my need to see myself from God’s viewpoint?
- Have I admitted my need to have a healthy relationship with God and others?
- Have I acknowledged my past bondage by sharing it with one or two trusted confidants who will help me find freedom through Christ?

Remember this promise in God’s Word:

*“For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.”*

(PSALM 72:12)

2. Face Your Past⁶¹

God knows how to make sense of confusion, and He is completely trustworthy. He can bring trustworthy people into your life to help you in your healing process.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”*

(PROVERBS 3:5–6)

Remembering past abuse is sometimes the first step toward healing. To prompt memory, God often uses . . .

- Flashbacks
- Parenthood
- Things we see or hear in the news
- Victory over an addiction (linked to past abuse)

- Dreams and nightmares
- A significant death
- Touch and smell, sights and sounds, pictures and places
- Testimonies of others

Journaling can help you process traumatizing past events. Writing down your thoughts and feelings helps you . . .

- Face the fact of the abuse
- Recall the feelings associated with the abuse
- Uncover hidden anger resulting from the abuse
- Process your feelings about the abuse
- Neutralize the abuse
- Organize the events surrounding the abuse
- Discover the ramifications of the abuse
- Gain insights into any present abuse

Those who have been abused can take comfort in knowing . . .

*“The LORD your God goes with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

Trouble Remembering

Question: “What do I do if I have trouble remembering what happened in the past?”

Answer: Ask the Lord to bring to your mind anything He wants you to remember.

Pray, “Lord, I’m willing to face whatever painful situations occurred in the past. I know that I don’t have to remember everything to be emotionally whole. Please bring to mind only what you want me to remember.”

Realize . . .

*"The advantage of knowledge is this:
Wisdom preserves those who have it."
(ECCLESIASTES 7:12)*

3. Face Your Patterns of Behavior⁶²

Realizing what you are doing to get your inner needs met can provide meaningful insight. Ask yourself . . .

- Am I compromising my values to feel loved?
- Am I violating my conscience to feel secure?
- Am I being a perfectionist, a workaholic, a fixer to feel significant?
- Am I cycling through one codependent relationship after another to fill my love bucket?

Remember . . .

*"No temptation has overtaken you
except what is common to mankind.
And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted
beyond what you can bear.
But when you are tempted, he will also
provide a way out so that you can endure it."
(1 CORINTHIANS 10:13)*

4. Face Your Private Secrets⁶³

Many abuse victims feel responsible for their abuse. This can lead to feelings of shame and a strong desire to keep the abuse secret. Keeping "the secret" keeps you in bondage that must be broken. You are not responsible for the abuse that you experienced!

Understanding the bondage a secret creates is essential to breaking down these prison walls.

- Telling the secret breaks its power over you.
- Talking about the past brings it into reality.
- Telling someone else gives your past credibility.

- Telling brings what was done in the dark into the light for healing.

Scripture says . . .

*“You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.”*

(PSALM 18:28)

5. Face Your Pain⁶⁴

Walking through the emotional pain of abuse is one of the most difficult but most necessary steps in breaking down the walls that keep you in bondage.

- Pain acknowledges your abuse.
- Pain unrevealed is pain unhealed.
- Pain expressed is often pain released.
- Pain is unpleasant but not unbearable.

The psalmist prayed . . .

*“Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD . . . my soul is in deep anguish.”*

(PSALM 6:2–3)

6. Face Your Perpetrator—If It Is Safe to Do So⁶⁵

Facing your abuser may not be safe. When considering this, talk with trusted family members and friends or a counselor or pastor. Pray about it and if you feel led to do so, take someone you trust with you. (For more on confronting your abuser, see the Q&A on “Confronting Your Emotions and Your Abuser” on page 96.)

Before you face your abuser . . .

- Identify realistic goals that you hope to accomplish through the confrontation.
- Let go of secret hopes and expectations.
- Be prepared for the offender to deny having abused you.
- Pray for God’s timing and the preparation of your heart and the heart of the abuser.

“Pray for those who abuse you.”

(LUKE 6:28 ESV)

Words you could say:

- “I want you to know that I remember the abusive things you did to me, and how it profoundly impacted my life.”
- “I hope you seek counseling to fully understand the reasons you committed the abuse.”
- “I pray you are taking preventative actions not to harm anyone else.”
- “I have a new life in Christ, and He has enabled me to forgive you.”

Realize . . .

*“A truly wise person uses few words;
a person with understanding is even-tempered.”*

(PROVERBS 17:27 NLT)

7. Face Your Pardon⁶⁶

Have you ever said, “I have been severely wronged. People want me to forgive, but how can I simply let my offender off the hook?” If these words have passed your lips or even crossed your mind, be assured you are not alone. Yet the Bible is clear about why we should forgive:

*“If any of you has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Learning the truth about guilt and forgiveness is a major key to living in freedom.

- Forgive yourself. When you’ve been forgiven by God, He is the highest authority.
- Forgive the offender. (For more on forgiving your abuser, see “How to Forgive Your Abuser” on page 117.)
- Forgive anyone who has overtly or covertly abused you.

- Forgiveness gives you freedom by taking vengeance out of your hands and putting it in God's hands.

*"For we know him who said,
'It is mine to avenge; I will repay.'"*
(HEBREWS 10:30)

How to Handle the Emotion of Anger

While waiting for the police to conduct their investigation and arrest Mr. Russell, the Quinns try to carry on with daily life as best they can. Waiting and wondering what would happen next leaves everyone on edge. Finally Mark is called in for questioning, a warrant is issued for his arrest, and he is charged with five counts of indecency with a child and two counts of sexual assault.⁶⁷

Jenna knows she will have to face her abuser in court. One of the recommendations from the police department is that Jenna seek help from the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). Although she doesn't want to keep repeating her sordid story to strangers, this time she finds help and hope.

A wall stacked with teddy bears welcomes counselees to the clinic. Every child can choose a bear to take home as a physical reminder of the support available at the CAC.

Another wall filled with colorful handprints—most smaller than Jenna's—serves as a symbol of each survivor's strength. When children arrive, they dip their hand in paint and leave their imprint to represent their belonging in a community of survivors. They are not alone.

Anger is a God-given emotion, often occurring when a need or expectation is not met. Anger serves as a warning signal, blaring, "Something's wrong! Something's wrong! Something's wrong!" Some people bottle it up and rarely, if ever, express their anger. Their anger

may look like self-condemnation, negative self-talk, or passive-aggressive behavior. Others give full vent to their anger and will curse, slam things, put others down, or even get physically aggressive.

Experiencing any type of abuse can leave a person angry for years—with anger directed at the abuser, at themselves, at God, at others, or at the world or life in general. Even when you are no longer in an abusive situation, anger can keep affecting daily life. Anger may not surface in obvious ways, but its presence permeates thoughts, emotions, decisions, interactions, and relationships. If left unaddressed, buried and unresolved anger will continue to impact your life in negative ways. On the other hand, with God’s help, you can redirect anger to propel you to positive action—to take steps toward healing, growth, and peace.

*“The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.”*

(PSALM 29:11)

Identify the Source of Your Anger

The first step toward overcoming anger is learning its source. Your anger may be the result of . . .

Hurt: Your heart is wounded.⁶⁸

Everyone has a God-given inner need for *unconditional love*.⁶⁹ When you experience rejection or emotional pain of any kind, anger can become a protective wall keeping people, pain, and *hurt* away.

“I’ll never forgive him for the pain he caused me.”

Injustice: Your right is violated.⁷⁰

Everyone has a sense of right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and *unjust*. When you perceive that an *injustice* has occurred against you or others (especially those you love), you may feel angry. If you hold on to the offense, the unresolved anger can take root in your heart.

“I felt violated, used, and taken advantage of—like I had no control over what happened to me.”

Fear: Your future is threatened.⁷¹

Everyone is created with a God-given inner need for *security*.⁷² When you begin to worry, feel threatened, or get angry because of a change in circumstances, you may be responding to *fear*.

“I constantly walked on eggshells and worried about my safety and my future.”

Frustration: Your performance is not accepted.⁷³

Everyone has a God-given inner need for *significance*.⁷⁴ When your efforts are thwarted or do not meet your own personal expectations, your sense of significance can be threatened. *Frustration* over unmet expectations of yourself or of others is a major source of anger. Do these statements describe you?

“I was always told, directly or indirectly, ‘You’re not good enough. You’ll never be enough. You’ll always be a disappointment and a failure.’”

To help uncover the source of your anger, consider writing down your thoughts. Take four pieces of paper and label one “Hurt,” one “Injustice,” one “Fear,” and one “Frustration.” Then write down every instance of each that you can remember from your life. Invite the Lord into the process and ask for His help in overcoming your anger. Give Him your worries, because He cares about you.

*“Give all your worries and cares to God,
for he cares about you.”
(1 PETER 5:7 NLT)*

Confronting Anger Rooted in Past Abuse

After uncovering the source of your anger, take the following action steps to dig deeper and release your anger.

Ask yourself the following questions the next time anger wells up in your heart:

- What am I feeling: hurt, injustice, fear, or frustration?
- Did I have any of these same feelings when I was a child?

Identify how your present anger is connected to your unresolved past (childhood) anger.

- Ask God to reveal buried hurts, injustices, fears, and frustrations from your childhood.
- Ask God to reveal the relationship between your past and present anger.

Talk with someone to gain clarity about your anger.

- Ask close family members and friends how they know when you are angry and what they think makes you angry.
- Ask them about your history of anger and how they think it has impacted them, you, and others.

Forgive and seek forgiveness.

- Forgive and pray for those toward whom you have harbored anger.
- Ask forgiveness from anyone you have offended by your anger.

Appropriately express your anger.

- Journal your thoughts or pray openly and honestly to God about your experiences and feelings.
- Talk with a trusted friend, family member, counselor, or pastor about your anger. Consider joining an anger management class or group to learn how to process and express your anger appropriately.

Assume personal responsibility for your present feelings of anger.

- Remember that you have a choice in how you respond to your anger and your circumstances.
- Determine to make changes and implement habits that will help you overcome your anger.

Mediate on God's Word to find peace when you're angry.

- Study what God's Word says about anger (see Psalm 145:8–9; James 1:19–20; Ephesians 4:26–32; Colossians 3:8).
- Memorize passages that speak of God's love for you (see Jeremiah 31:3; Lamentations 3:21–23; John 3:16; Romans 8:38–39).

Make it a practice to release your anger every time you feel it.

- Give yourself a time-out to relax and regain composure when you begin feeling angry.
- Turn to the Lord and pray.

Prayer to Release Your Anger

“Lord, thank you for loving me.
Thank you for caring about me.
Since you know everything,
you know the strong sense of
(hurt, injustice, fear, and/or frustration)
I have felt about (name or situation).
Thank you for understanding my anger.
Right now, I release all of my anger to you.
I trust you with my future.
In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.”

Confronting Your Emotions and Your Abuser

Question: “How can I release the painful emotions I feel toward my abuser?”

Answer: Confronting your abuser may not be safe. In some cases, it may not be possible because the abuser has died, is out of reach, or simply unavailable. Even if you cannot confront your abuser in person, you *can* confront indirectly by saying what you would want to say or need to say as though your offender is in front of you. Three ways to do this are:

- **Chair Method:** Imagine the person seated in a chair placed in front of you. Say the things you would say to the person if you were actually seated across a table from one another. Express your feelings about what was done to you and how it has affected your life. Then forgive the person and explain that you have taken the person off of your emotional hook and placed them onto God's hook.
- **Letter Method:** Write a letter to your abuser stating every painful memory you recall. Read it over the person's grave or at a place where you can openly speak to the person as though you were in each other's presence. At the close, choose to forgive by releasing your abuser into the hands of God.
- **List and Release Method:** Make a list of all the painful as well as positive memories you have with your abuser. After completing the list, go back to the top of your list and write the word *past* by each memory. Acknowledge and accept that the past is in the past. Release all the pain as well as the person into the hands of God.

The fact that your abuser has died does not mean you cannot forgive and move forward. You can prevent further anger and bitterness from establishing a foothold in your heart and mind. The Bible says . . .

*"See to it that no one falls short
of the grace of God and that no
bitter root grows up to cause
trouble and defile many."*

(HEBREWS 12:15)

How to Address the Emotion of Fear

Despite being angry about going to counseling, Jenna discovers that opening up in the counseling sessions is empowering. She processes some of her pain, and finds healing and hope, and in turn encourages her parents to also seek counseling.⁷⁵

Struggling with her faith, Jenna doubts God really cares. When her school arranges a showing of the film, *The Passion of the Christ*, Jenna can't summon the strength to join her classmates and sit in a theater. But Jenna's mom insists the movie would be good for her, and she encourages Jenna to go with Kellie's friend, Pam. Jenna won't have to ride the bus and she can sit with Pam, so she agrees to go.

Seeing the suffering of Jesus on the big screen impacts Jenna in a profound way. Throughout the years she endured abuse, she lost sight of God as loving, caring, and compassionate. The truth is He hates what happened to her. Seeing the movie infuses Jenna with a stronger faith to trust God and draw closer to Him.

Those who have been abused often live in fear. You may have been taught to fear because you have been in dangerous situations or have been constantly intimidated, threatened, controlled, or manipulated. As a result, you might fear being known, being vulnerable, being transparent. You might be afraid of rejection, failure, or trusting others. You might fear that you will never find love or form healthy relationships.

If this sounds like you, realize . . . God does not want you to live in fear. The Lord wants to help you overcome your fears and live in the freedom of His love and grace. He wants to help you move from fear to faith.

*"Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."*

(PROVERBS 29:25)

Overcoming your fears involves reflecting on them, identifying the false assumptions behind them, and replacing lies and false assumptions with truth. Jesus said, “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).

Identify a specific fear: “I am truly afraid of _____.”

To identify the lies behind this fear . . .

Ask yourself:

- Y / N** Is my fear tied to recent events, or did it originate from a specific situation in the past?
- Y / N** Is my fear based on a real threat or merely a perceived one?
- Y / N** Is my fear wrongly associated with an event or object that should not be feared?
- Y / N** Is my fear coming from certain places, people, or things that trigger unpleasant memories or consequences?
- Y / N** Is my fear based on personal experience or was it instilled by someone significant from childhood?
- Y / N** Is my fear due to a persistent fear-based mindset, even though the circumstance, relationship, or lifestyle in which it was rooted no longer exists?
- Y / N** Is my fear a result of continuously anticipating fearful outcomes over such a long period of time that the fear has now become real?

*“The wisdom of the prudent is
to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of fools is deception.”*
(PROVERBS 14:8)

When you feel afraid of a person or a situation . . .

Ask yourself if what you fear is going to happen, and then:

- **Analyze:** Is what you fear actually *likely* to happen?
- **Theorize:** What is the worst possible outcome?

- **Neutralize**: How could the worst outcome not be so bad?
- **Generalize**: When have you already faced and survived an equally bad outcome?
- **Strategize**: What possible ways can you respond if your fear comes true?
- **Realize**: Will fixating on your fear guarantee its continued repetition?
- **Finalize**: If your fear really has nothing to do with what's happening now, are you willing to put it out of your mind by focusing your attention elsewhere—on something pleasant and joyful?

*“On him we have set our hope
that he will continue to deliver us.”
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:10)*

In order to determine if the fear you are currently feeling is from the past or the present . . .

Ask yourself these questions:

- What past fear are you bringing into the present?
- What trauma(s) first instilled your fear?
- What is going on when you feel this fear?
- How old do you feel emotionally when you experience this fear?
- Where are you when you feel this fear?
- What has currently triggered this fear?
- How is this fear affecting your life now? What is it costing you?

*“One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind
and straining toward what is ahead I press on. . . .”
(PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14)*

Once you are truly committed to getting out of the grip of fear . . .

Make a commitment to yourself and God to . . .

- Do what it takes to control your fear and to change from being full of fear to being filled with faith.
- Tell yourself, “I will not let this fear run my life. I will not let past fears control me. I will trust God to protect me and meet my needs.”
- Decide to live in the here and now and act in a way not based on fear.
- Repeat this phrase two or three times: “That was then; this is now.”
- Share your fear and your plan for change with a trustworthy person.
- Tell your confidant, “Years ago certain circumstances in my life led me to develop a fear of _____. Over the years, it has robbed me of joy, and I am determined to overcome it by (state my plan).”
- Ask your confidant, “Would you be willing to encourage me in my endeavor by (state my need)?”

As you choose to face fear with faith, claim this scripture as your own:

*“I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.”*

(PSALM 34:4)

To continue developing your faith and remove fear from your life . . .

Meditate on these passages from God’s Word:

- **Deuteronomy 31:8**—“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”
- **Isaiah 41:13**—“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’”
- **Psalms 27:1**—“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”
- **Psalms 46:1-2**—“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.”
- **Psalms 56:3**—“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.”

- **Psalm 112:6–7**—*“Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.”*
- **Psalm 118:6**—*“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”*

Overprotection

Question: “I was sexually molested when I was a child. Now it’s very difficult for me to trust people (including family members) with my children. I am often accused of being overprotective. What should I do?”

Answer: Being protective of your children is a good thing. One way for you to prevent feeling the need to be overprotective is to give your children permission to also protect themselves by learning to say *No*.

Most children are taught “obey your elders.” To a child, this can be someone even just a year or so older! However, children need to be empowered to protect themselves from anyone who would abuse them. Therefore, children need to hear the following statements to instill confidence within them and help young hearts resist any abuse, including sexual advances.

If there are known sexual perpetrators around your children, it is your responsibility to confront them and not allow them to be alone with your children. It is also appropriate to instruct your children to never be alone with strangers or people you know are not safe. This is necessary even with family members. Some family secrets are to be shared with authorities, especially when keeping silent puts innocent children at risk. Scripture instructs . . .

*"In your teaching show integrity,
seriousness ⁸ and soundness of speech
that cannot be condemned . . .
¹² It [the grace of God] teaches us
to say 'No' to ungodliness
and worldly passions,
and to live self-controlled, upright
and godly lives in this present age."
(TITUS 2:7-8, 12)*

Protection Power for Children

First call the child by name and then say . . .

- "God loves you and made your body with a special plan and purpose."
- "If you are asked to do something you think is wrong, say, 'NO!' even to a relative or friend of the family. Then come tell me whether saying 'No' worked or not." (Role-play saying "No" or "Stop" in a firm, assertive voice.)
- "Your body belongs to you and *you* decide who touches it."
- "The parts of your body covered by a swimsuit are private."
- "Never allow anyone to touch your private parts—unless it is for medical reasons and a safe parent is present."
- "If someone touches your private parts and says it's okay, that's not true! You must tell me or someone you trust."
- "If someone doesn't stop touching you, say, 'I'll tell if you don't stop!' Then when you are safe, tell anyway."
- "If someone threatens you, don't be afraid—tell anyway."
- "If you are asked to keep the touching a secret, tell anyway."
- "If the person you tell doesn't believe you, keep telling no matter how embarrassed you feel . . . keep telling until someone believes you."

—“Pray for God to guide you to a safe adult you can trust—not a member of your family—but to someone who can help you.”

Share this vital verse with every child . . .

“My child, when sinners tempt you, don’t give in.”

(PROVERBS 1:10 GNT)

How to Define and Deal with Guilt and Shame

As Jenna works on healing, her abuser obtains one postponement after another, dragging out the ordeal. Finally, the judge puts an end to any additional delays. As others seek to encourage Jenna by telling her it’s almost over, she knows no matter the jury verdict, the trauma will never be over for her. She is forever changed.⁷⁶

Jenna completes her requirements to graduate high school early and begins to focus on preparing for the trial. Terrified to face her abuser, one court counselor tells Jenna to think of Mr. Russell as her opponent. He no longer has any power over her. She will go into court with a fighting spirit, with a battle to be fought and won. She is no longer a victim.

Struggling with feelings of embarrassment, Jenna wishes she didn’t have to share all the ugly details of her abuse. She is reminded over and over again that it’s not her fault. Her mother’s friend, Pam, makes white awareness ribbons with “Pure in Heart” in silver letters to signify Jenna’s innocence and purity as a visual reminder that what had been perpetrated against Jenna does not diminish or taint her purity.

Abusive people are notorious for blaming their actions on their victims. Blame-shifting is a means of controlling others and breaking down any possibility of resistance. No one deserves abuse. And no one makes another person abusive. Abusers alone are responsible for their actions. *You are not to blame for what an abuser chose to do.* Guilt belongs to them alone, not to you.

Yet, most people who have been abused struggle with overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame. Left unresolved, this “punishing pair” wreak havoc and destruction in the lives of those trying to heal from past abuse. These feelings need to be correctly defined and dealt with God’s way, so that healing can happen and you can begin to walk in the freedom of God’s grace.

“God has taken away my shame.”

(GENESIS 30:23 HCSB)

Understand the Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are not the same. Guilt focuses on your behavior, whereas shame focuses on you.

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined guilt.

Shame can be a response to what was done to you, but guilt is a response to something you have done.

Shame focuses on who you are, whereas guilt focuses on what you’ve done.⁷⁷ Shame is experienced when your guilt moves from knowing you have *done something bad* to *feeling that you are bad*.

Shame creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior, while guilt creates a desire to change or justify emotions and behavior.

Shame produces inner loneliness that fosters unhealthy dependencies, whereas guilt produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

Shame steals the joy of your salvation, while guilt confessed restores joy in salvation.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*

(PSALM 51:12)

True Guilt vs. False Guilt

False guilt can deceive and blind victims from seeing the truth about the abuse they suffered. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to the already wounded emotions of the abused. A guilt-ridden victim will often figuratively beat themselves up, believing the abuse was somehow their fault. Although it may seem counterintuitive, false guilt is common among those who are continuously abused. Realize, there's a big difference between true guilt and false guilt.

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the perfect will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues after having committed, confessed, and repented of a sin, and it is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt results in freedom when it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.⁷⁸
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.

Instead false guilt is resolved by rejecting lies and believing truth. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the “*accuser of our brothers and sisters*.” He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins committed against you for which you feel responsible (or the sins for which you have repented), realize that this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- “What am I hearing?” (Accusation)
- “What am I feeling?” (False guilt)
- “What are the facts?” (I am not guilty. I am fully forgiven.)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: “Thank you, Father, that you don’t condemn me and don’t want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ.”

*“There is now no condemnation for
those who are in Christ Jesus.”
(ROMANS 8:1)*

Overcoming Guilt and Shame

If you are experiencing true guilt, feeling bad about *what you’ve done*, confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

“I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone” (PSALM 32:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing false guilt, feeling bad *although you’ve done no wrong*, reject the false guilt and replace the lies you’ve been led to believe with the truth of God’s Word.

“Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you” (PSALM 25:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing shame, feeling bad about *who you are*, embrace God's love for you and reflect on your identity in Christ as a beloved child of God. (For more on your identity in Christ, see "How to Claim Your Identity in Christ" on page 126.)

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 JOHN 3:1).

Guilt and shame are powerful emotions that can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God's Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

"In abundance of counselors there is victory."

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

How to Break the Cycle of Codependency

Days before the dreaded trial date, the Quinns receive word that Russell has pled guilty with "ulterior" motives, a move to his advantage as some of the damaging evidence against him would not be presented. All that remains is the punishment phase before a jury. Even this small victory becomes difficult to celebrate as Jenna will still be required to testify. What if the jury doesn't believe her and decides not to punish him?⁷⁹

The night before the trial, Jenna's restlessness compels her to pray—not only for herself and her family, but also for Mr. Russell. She knows in her heart that holding on to bitterness only keeps her captive in a prison created by her abuser. But she has the key to set herself free.

She prays God will help her say what she needs to say. She asks Him to be with her family and the Russell family. She asks the Lord to enable her to pray for the man who abused her and that God would help him in all the ways he needs help. She ends with asking that God's will be done, whatever that is. She will trust in Him.

A codependent person looks to someone or something to meet their deepest needs that only God can meet. In an abusive relationship, the codependent person might look to the abuser or a rescuer to meet their needs for love, significance, or security.⁸⁰ No person will ever be able to fully meet these deepest needs—only the Lord can do that.

Additionally, a codependent person might stay in an abusive relationship because they need to be needed. They believe the abuser needs their help, or they believe they can change the abuser's behavior. However . . . the abused, codependent person cannot change or “fix” another person—only the Lord can do that.

True hope for the abuser *and* for the abused, codependent person is found in the Lord's meeting their deepest needs. His love can break the cycle of codependency. Only His love can ultimately satisfy and save.

*“Help me, LORD my God;
save me according to your unfailing love.”
(PSALM 109:26)*

You can move from codependency to a mutual give-and-take in healthy relationships. To break the cycle of codependency in your life, you must . . .

Acknowledge the truth.

Be honest with yourself about codependent patterns and behaviors in your life. Acknowledge that codependency is an emotional addiction to another person.

“I have chosen the way of truth” (PSALM 119:30 NKJV).

Change your focus.

Codependent people often try to meet others' needs to the neglect of their own. Focus your attention on what you need to do to become emotionally healthy.

“Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil” (PROVERBS 4:25–27 NLT).

Confront the consequences of your codependency.

Accept responsibility for how your codependent patterns of behavior and reactions have hurt your relationships.

“We are each responsible for our own conduct” (GALATIANS 6:5 NLT).

Address your painful emotions.

Understand that you will have pain no matter what you choose to do. If you leave your codependent relationships, you will hurt. If you stay in codependent relationships, you will also hurt. The only hope for healing is leaving a codependent lifestyle and resolving the emotional wounds that draw you into codependent relationships.

“You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry” (PSALM 10:17 NLT).

Break any secondary addictions.

To numb emotional pain in your relationships, codependency can lead to other addictions, such as chemical dependency, sexual addiction, compulsive eating, or excessive spending. These must be broken, as the Lord does not want you to be enslaved or controlled.

“You are a slave to whatever controls you” (2 PETER 2:19 NLT).

Establish boundaries in your relationships.

Healthy relationships have healthy boundaries, and codependent relationships often have few or no boundaries. Establishing boundaries is critical to breaking free from codependency. (For more on establishing boundaries, see “How to Set and Maintain Boundaries” on page 112.)

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (PROVERBS 4:23).

Find support.

Seek the help of a counselor or another wise, trustworthy person to help break deeply ingrained codependent patterns.

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help” (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

Beware of conflicts.

Do not allow yourself to become trapped in heated arguments or to become emotionally ensnared by the bad behavior of another person.

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared” (PROVERBS 22:24–25).

Identify what you need to release in order to grow.

You may need to let go of a relationship, a habit, or faulty thinking such as: *I can’t live without this person.*

“I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead” (PHILIPPIANS 3:13 NLT).

Seek to build joyful, mature, loving, non-codependent relationships.

Establish several interdependent relationships—not just one exclusive relationship.

“Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 CORINTHIANS 13:11 NLT).

Biblical Dependency

Question: “What is biblical dependency?”

Answer: Rather than depending on another person to fill our “love buckets,” God wants us to depend on Him to meet our deepest needs. To develop a healthy, biblical dependency on God, you must . . .

— Rely on Him, not on people or things or self-effort.

“My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge” (PSALM 62:7).

- Believe that He will meet all of your needs. You can safely reveal your hurts, your fears, your worries, and your needs to God.

“God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 CORINTHIANS 9:8).

- Trust in Him to take care of your loved ones.

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8).

- Look to Christ, whose life within you enables you to overcome any destructive dependency.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GALATIANS 2:20).

How to Set and Maintain Boundaries

On the day of her testimony, several family members come to the courthouse to support Jenna. When Jenna is finally called to the stand, she sees family and friends wearing the white ribbons. While her attacker is only a few feet away and Jenna is aware of every gesture and sound he makes, she focuses on answering the prosecutor’s questions.⁸¹

When the hard questions come, Jenna needs a break to regain her composure. When court reconvenes, she must detail all the sexual assaults—every horrible event and all the vile things said and done to her over the years of abuse. She talks about her pain, how she lost her passion for basketball, how she tried to cope with self-harm, how her grades and her health suffered. Then she is asked to point out her abuser in the court. She identifies Mark Russell, and for the first time, Jenna feels empowered.

How can you avoid future abuse? You cannot change another person, but you can change yourself so that abusive tactics previously used on you are no longer effective and cease to ensnare you. As you determine appropriate boundaries, realize that these boundaries are designed to guard your heart, life, and relationships.

*“Guard your heart above all else,
for it determines the course of your life.”*
(PROVERBS 4:23 NLT)

After determining a plan of action to set boundaries . . .

1. State clearly, in a conversation or a letter, what you are willing to accept and not accept from the abuser.

- Communicate your position in a positive way. Practice or rehearse what you will say in advance.
- Present your boundaries when your situation is as calm and conflict-free as possible.
- Do not justify yourself. Do not be apologetic, just state the boundary:

“If this relationship is going to continue . . .

- ♦ “I’m not willing to listen to your name-calling.”
- ♦ “I’m not willing to hear your accusations concerning (name) any longer.”
- ♦ “Talking negatively about the past, about you or me, or anyone else is counterproductive.”
- ♦ “I’m not willing to be controlled by your silent treatment (or anger) any longer.”

- Keep what you say short and succinct.

Remember . . .

*“The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint,
and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.”*
(PROVERBS 17:27)

2. Announce the consequence you will enforce if the abuser violates your requests.

- Your response should be a matter of separating yourself from the abuser.
- You cannot change the abuser's behavior, but you can remove yourself from frequent exposure to unacceptable behavior.
- State the consequence clearly:
 - “I want you to know that when we are together . . .
 - ♦ “If you call me a derogatory name, I will leave for a period of time.”
 - ♦ “If you persist in making that accusation, I will immediately end our conversation.”
 - ♦ “If you give me the silent treatment, I will leave or occupy my time. If you choose not to talk with me, someone else will.”
- Consequences are part of God's plan.

Remember . . .

“A man reaps what he sows.”

(GALATIANS 6:7)

3. Enforce the consequence every single time abuse occurs.

- Do not bluff! The abuser needs to know that you are going to act consistently on your words.
- Plan on being tested multiple times.
- In your mind and heart . . .
 - ♦ Say *No* to manipulation.
 - ♦ Say *No* to pressure.
 - ♦ Say *No* to control.
- Eventually, your abuser will stop an abusive tactic, but only after that tactic proves to be ineffective.

Remember . . .

“Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no.”

(JAMES 5:12 ESV)

4. Hold your ground and absolutely do not negotiate.

- Since abusers do not use words fairly, negotiation will not work.
- Instead of “talking out” the problem, your abuser will seek to wear you down.
- Simply state that when the behavior stops, you look forward to a renewed relationship . . .
 - ♦ “I am not willing to discuss this topic any longer.”
 - ♦ “I have stated clearly what I will not accept.”
 - ♦ “When you are ready to respect my requests, let me know. I look forward to enjoying our time together then.”
- Keep your words brief and to the point.

Remember . . .

*“Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.”*

(PROVERBS 10:19)

5. Respond when your boundary is violated—never react out of instinct or out of anger.

- Expect your boundary to be violated . . . but don’t react.
- Expect your boundary to be violated again . . . and again. But don’t react.
- If you react, you will find yourself back under the control of the abuser.
- Respond by detaching yourself from the abuser and enforcing your repercussions.
 - ♦ Do not *cry* because of feeling hurt.
 - ♦ Do not *beg* because of feeling fearful.
 - ♦ Do not *explode* because of feeling frustrated.

Remember . . .

*“The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.*

*Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 7:8–9)

6. Solicit the support of one or two wise, objective people to help you through this process.

- Include supporters—friend, mentor, or counselor—as you analyze and identify the problem.
- Include supporters as you determine how to articulate your plan.
- Include supporters as you enforce the repercussions.
- Include supporters to help you through this critical period.
 - ♦ Discuss the situation with your supporters.
 - ♦ Discuss the tactics used on you.
 - ♦ Discuss the plan of action.

Remember . . .

*“Listen to advice and accept discipline,
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.”*
(PROVERBS 19:20)

7. Expect manipulative maneuvers and emotional ups and downs.

- Assume that your actions will make the abuser angry.
- Allow your abuser to react without reacting yourself.
- Do not seek to placate and appease this person—it won’t work.
- Think of this time as comparable to having surgery. It is a painful experience, but it provides the only hope for healing and having a new, healthy relationship.

Remember . . .

*“No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful!
But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living
for those who are trained in this way.”*
(HEBREWS 12:11 NLT)

How to Forgive Your Abuser

The hardest part of the trial comes when Mark Russell's defense attorney tries to put Jenna's actions on trial. *Why didn't you tell?* Jenna replies that the families were close and Jake was her best friend. If his son found out about his dad, it would break his heart. Overcome by sadness, Jenna starts to cry and, sitting behind his father, Jake gets emotional too. Jenna's testimony concludes, and her mother testifies the next day.⁸²

The thought of forgiving an abuser can seem unthinkable, unfair, and unequivocally wrong because of the lasting wounds and lingering consequences of abuse. However, forgiveness is at the heart of God's character. It's why Jesus came. And it's at the heart of healing, growth, and freedom.

Choosing to forgive is not about letting your abuser "off the hook" or ignoring the pain and damage that's been done. It's about walking in God's grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope.

Forgiveness is a difficult process, but you don't go through it alone. God is with you every step as Psalm 147:3 reminds us:

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

(PSALM 147:3)

What Forgiveness Is Not⁸³

When approaching forgiveness in any situation, it's important to understand what forgiveness is and, perhaps more importantly, what it is *not*. Misconceptions of forgiveness abound. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of excusing sin—saying that what was wrong is now right. Others think forgiveness means you *must* reconcile with the offender or trust them again. Neither of these assumptions is true.

Before you consider forgiving your abuser, it is crucial you understand what forgiveness is *not*:

Forgiveness is *not ignoring* God's justice or letting the guilty "off the hook."

- It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.

Forgiveness is *not dismissing* appropriate boundaries or earthly consequences.

- It is maintaining boundaries and allowing appropriate consequences to occur, especially in cases where the law was violated.

Forgiveness is *not enabling* or excusing wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that sin is sin—that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

Forgiveness is *not the same* as reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it only takes one to forgive.

Forgiveness is *not dependent* on an apology.

- It is God's will that we extend forgiveness, whether or not the offender ever apologizes.

Forgiveness is *not explaining away* or *denying* the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt, feeling it and releasing it to God.

Forgiveness is *not stuffing* your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

Forgiveness is *not forgetting*.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is *not a feeling*.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

Forgiveness is *not simply a one-time event*.

- It can be—but oftentimes, forgiveness is a process that needs to be worked through repeatedly.

Forgiveness & Reconciliation⁸⁴

Question: “What’s the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?”

Answer: Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense; reconciliation focuses on the relationship. You can forgive your abuser without reconciling. In many cases, especially when abuse is involved, it is not safe or wise to reconcile with an abuser. Realize, there are many differences between forgiveness and reconciliation. . . .

Forgiveness can be given by one person.

- Reconciliation requires at least two people.

Forgiveness is extended in one direction.

- Reconciliation is reciprocal, involving a two-way direction.

Forgiveness is a decision to release the offender.

- Reconciliation is the effort to rejoin the offender.

Forgiveness involves a change in thinking about the offender.

- Reconciliation involves a change in behavior by the offender.

Forgiveness is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

- Reconciliation is a restored relationship based on rebuilt trust.

Forgiveness is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

- Reconciliation is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

Forgiveness is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

- Reconciliation is conditional and is based on repentance.

If you're considering reconciling with an abuser, talk with a trusted pastor or counselor to help you determine whether reconciliation is advisable in your situation. Realize, you can forgive your offender, but you should not reconcile with someone who refuses to change. The Bible says, *"You must change the way you have been living and do what is right. You must treat one another fairly"* (Jeremiah 7:5 NET).

What Forgiveness Is

So what exactly is forgiveness? A good way to think about forgiveness is to imagine letting go of the offense by releasing your offender. When you don't forgive, it's like holding on to bitterness, holding on to the pain, and holding on to the offender. When you forgive, you release your resentment, your pain, and your offender into the hands of God. As you do this with God's help, you reflect the gracious and merciful character of Christ.

*"Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful."
(PSALM 116:5 ESV)*

To forgive means to release your resentment toward your offender.

- Release your right to hear "I'm sorry."
- Release your right to be bitter.
- Release your right to get even.

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (ROMANS 12:17).

To forgive is to release your rights regarding the offense.

- Release your right to dwell on the offense.
- Release your right to hold on to the offense.
- Release your right to keep bringing up the offense.

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior . . . forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (EPHESIANS 4:31–32 NLT).

To forgive is to reflect the character of Christ.

- To forgive is to extend mercy.
- To forgive is to give a gift of grace.
- To forgive is to pray for your offender and entrust them to God.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (LUKE 23:34).

What Are the Stages of Forgiveness?

Forgiveness takes time. In order to release the offender and the offense, you must first address your experience and your feelings. This can be difficult, but it’s an important step toward your freedom and healing. Remember, God is with you each step of the way.

*“For I am the LORD your God
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”
(ISAIAH 41:13)*

1. Face the Offense.

When you experience deep, personal pain, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you. First, face the truth of what has actually been done and do not hinder healing by justifying what happened, rationalizing it, or focusing on false thinking.

Don’t minimize the offense by thinking: *No matter how badly I’m treated, it’s okay.*

- **Truth:** Bad treatment is not okay. There is no excuse for bad treatment of any kind—any time.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (EPHESIANS 5:11).

Don't excuse the offender's behavior by thinking: *He doesn't mean to hurt me. I shouldn't feel upset with him.*

- **Truth:** No matter what happened or how long the relationship has lasted, you need to call sin what it is—sin. Face the truth instead of trying to change it. There must first be a guilty party to have someone to forgive.

"Whoever says to the guilty, 'You are innocent,' will be cursed by peoples" (PROVERBS 24:24).

Don't assume that quick forgiveness is full forgiveness by erroneously thinking:⁸⁵ *As soon as it was over, I quickly and fully forgave him. That's what I've been taught to do.*

- **Truth:** Many well-intentioned people feel guilty if they don't extend immediate forgiveness, so they "forgive" quickly. And yet they have neither faced the full impact of the offense nor grieved over what actually happened.

Realize, the full impact of sin is rarely felt at the moment it occurs. Rather, its impact is felt at different levels over a period of time. Quick forgiveness over deep hurts may seem sufficient, but it may not be full forgiveness—not until it has been extended to each level of impact. Before complete forgiveness can be given, you must face the truth about the gravity of the offense and its impact on you.

"I have chosen the way of truth" (PSALM 119:30 NKJV).

2. Feel the Offense.⁸⁶

Anger or even hatred may be your true feeling in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward an offender needs to be brought up out of the basement of your soul and addressed. However, not all hatred is wrong. For example, God hates evil, and we should too. The Bible says, *"Hate what is evil; cling to what is good"* (Romans 12:9).

Failing to feel the offense results in . . .

Denying your pain: "I don't blame him for always criticizing me. He's under a lot of pressure. And besides, it doesn't hurt me."

- **Truth:** Being mistreated by someone you love is painful. You must feel the pain before healing can occur.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (PSALM 34:18).

Carrying false guilt: “I’m never supposed to have hatred. I feel guilty if I hate what was done to me.”

— **Truth:** God hates sin, and so can you. Hate the sin, but not the sinner.

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (PROVERBS 8:13).

3. Forgive the Offender.

God calls us to forgive. If you’ve ever thought, *I know God wants me to forgive, but how can I ignore my anger and let this person off the hook?* Be assured, you’re not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

How to Handle “The Hook”

Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

Imagine a meat hook curved around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then picture the pain of those offenses represented as rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Some are small, some are large, but all are heavy. Now you have a bag full of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

Ask yourself: “Do I really want to carry the weight of all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

Visualize taking the one who hurt you off of your emotional “hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

Remember, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay”* (Romans 12:19).

Release your offender to God in prayer:

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about
how much my heart has been hurt.
You know the pain I have felt
because of (list every offense).
Right now I release all of that pain into your hands.
Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me
and extending your forgiveness to me.
As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).
Right now, I move (name) off of my
emotional hook to your hook.
I refuse all thoughts of revenge.
I trust that in your time and in your way
you will deal with (name) as you see fit.
And, Lord, thank you for giving me your power
to forgive so that I can be set free.
In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

Genuine Forgiveness

Question: “How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?”

Answer: Over time, you may find old thoughts and feelings resurfacing. You may wonder if you’ve really forgiven your offender, which is completely normal. Ask yourself the following questions:

— “Do I still expect my offender ‘to pay’ for the wrongs done to me?”

- “Do I still have bitter feelings toward my offender?”
- “Do I still have vengeful thoughts toward my offender?”
- “Do I desire that my offender will one day come to have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and experience a changed life?”
- “When is the last time I prayed for my offender?”

Forgiving someone does not in any way mean that you do not want justice. It simply means that you leave the meting out of that justice entirely in God’s hands. You refuse to harbor hateful feelings toward your offender.

Forgiveness is an ongoing process which requires you to choose to forgive whenever the offense comes to mind. Likewise, you choose to pray for the offender whenever the offense crosses your mind.

“Pray for those who hurt you.”

(LUKE 6:28 NLT)

A Final Note on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is possible by God’s grace. His grace helps you heal from past wounds and empowers you to forgive. So when you find yourself struggling to forgive, reflect on God’s grace and He will help you walk in the freedom of forgiveness.

*“The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.”*

(PSALM 145:8–9)

How to Claim Your Identity in Christ

Mark Russell is called to the stand and questioned. He says he's sorry for what he's done and that he would want justice if someone sexually assaulted his daughter. But . . . he would want to know "all of the circumstances involved . . . whether or not she was the one misleading him." The prosecutor asks pointedly, "Are you trying to tell this jury that you were manipulated, sexually manipulated by a 14-year-old girl?" His answer is "Jenna made herself very much available." Incredulous, the attorney asks, "So this is her fault?" To which Russell responds, "No, it's not her fault, it's not her fault."⁸⁷

He knows what he did was wrong, but that didn't stop him. A psychiatrist and six more witnesses for the defense follow Russell's testimony. The last person called to the stand is Jenna's father who testifies about the heart-rending betrayal of his daughter being terribly abused by his supposed friend.

When the court reconvenes for the verdict, the indictments are read and the sentence is passed. On five counts of indecency with a child and two counts of sexual assault, Mark Russell is sentenced to serve two ten-year prison terms or 20 years.

Whether explicit or implied, those who have been abused receive negative messages from their abuser. If you have heard constant, cruel and condemning messages from your parents, spouse, boss, or anyone close to you . . . then you may have come to believe those messages over time.

Perhaps you believe that you are unworthy or unlovable, incomplete or insignificant. Or maybe you believe the lie that you are responsible for the abuse you endured. No matter what harsh words or lies you've been told, abuse does not have the final word about you—God does. His Word speaks of His love for you and the life-changing identity you have in Christ.

Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God's eyes, believing what He says about you and your identity in Christ. To walk in victory over abuse, exchange the lies you've been led to believe with God's truth.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth.”*

(PSALM 86:11)

Lies and Truths about Your Identity

Lie: “I am worthless.”

Truth: “I have God-given worth because . . .”

— I am created by God.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made”
(PSALM 139:13–14).

— I am adopted by God.

“God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ” (EPHESIANS 1:5 NLT).

— I am a child of God.

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children”
(ROMANS 8:16).

Lie: “I am unlovable.”

Truth: “I am loved by God . . .”

— I am loved eternally.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (JEREMIAH 31:3).

— I am loved unconditionally.

“Nothing can ever separate us from God’s love” (ROMANS 8:38 NLT).

— I am loved continually.

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 ESV).

Lie: “I am unacceptable.”

Truth: “I am accepted by God . . .”

— I am chosen by God.

“He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (EPHESIANS 1:4).

- I am not rejected by God.

“I have chosen you and have not rejected you” (ISAIAH 41:9).

- I am totally accepted by Christ.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (ROMANS 15:7).

Lie: “I am insignificant.”

Truth: “I matter to God . . .”

- I am precious to God.

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4).

- I have God-given purpose.

“The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me” (PSALM 138:8 ESV).

- I am cared for by God.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 PETER 5:7).

Lie: “I can’t have a changed life.”

Truth: “My life can change with God’s help because . . .”

- I am redeemed.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (EPHESIANS 1:7).

- I am a new creation.

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

- I have a new nature.

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him” (COLOSSIANS 3:10 NLT).

There may be other lies you’ve been led to believe. Perhaps you believe life is hopeless, but God’s Word says there’s hope for you (Job 11:18). Maybe you think that you’re to blame for the abuse, but the Bible says each person is responsible for their own actions and accountable to God (2 Corinthians 5:10). Or you might believe that God is mad at you, but His Word says He is not angry with you (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

As an exercise, write down the negative messages and lies you've been led to believe. Then, look in God's Word to discover a passage or a truth that can speak directly to that lie. God wants you to *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Over time, as you replace the lies with God's truth, you will be transformed by His Word.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will."
(ROMANS 12:2)*

How to Support Survivors on the Road to Recovery

After the sentencing, the Quinns' home phone rings nonstop as friends and acquaintances call to offer encouragement and kind words. One call is surprising: a local newspaper columnist wants to write a story about the abuse and the outcome of the trial. The family trusts this man and Jenna agrees to be interviewed.⁸⁸

Steve Blow, the newspaper columnist, comes to the Quinns' home to conduct the interview and assures Jenna she doesn't have to respond to any questions she's not comfortable answering. Understandably, few victims are willing to share their stories. Steve asks questions and Jenna answers. He asks for her advice to give to others who may have experienced abuse and Jenna encourages them to tell. As the interview concludes, Steve assures Jenna and the Quinns that her real name will not be used in the article. It's the newspaper's policy not to name victims since most don't want their identities revealed.

Jenna suddenly shouts, *"No!"*⁸⁹ This 17-year-old survivor wants to help other victims. She wants them to be brave and speak up. How can she ask that if she's not willing to do the same herself?

Four days after Russell is sentenced, Jenna's story is published in a Dallas newspaper. Feedback from the article encourages and empowers Jenna. As a result, she is invited to speak at a National Crime Victims event. She decides if her story can help even one victim, then she will do it.

If you know someone who has been impacted by abuse, you may want to help but don't know where to start. Maybe you've experienced abuse and want to help others rise above the abuse in their own lives.

Because abuse involves pain and a range of difficult emotions, it's important to know what to do and what *not* to do. Realize, the person before you may be wounded, emotionally fragile, perhaps even traumatized. The tone and tenor of your words are essential to establishing a nurturing conversation. Many people who have experienced abuse may dismiss the severity of their situation. They may display defense mechanisms such as denying that anything is wrong, minimizing their pain, or rationalizing their abuser's behavior.

If the abused person is open and honest about discussing the situation, realize they are displaying significant courage. Be prepared to respond with love and patience when your wounded friend begins to share the secrets of a broken heart. As you seek to help others, remember that God is the source of comfort and change and you are an instrument of His comfort and love. . . .

*"God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort.
He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.
When they are troubled, we will be able to give them
the same comfort God has given us."
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4 NLT)*

How to Support Survivors of Abuse

Don't feel like you have to be an expert to help.

Do learn what you can about abuse and help them, but remember that their healing is dependent not on you but on God.

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

Don’t treat the problem lightly or minimize the abuse.

Do realize that abuse can leave lasting wounds and significant emotional damage.

*“My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction.”*

(PSALM 31:10)

Don’t be quick to give simple answers or platitudes.

Do listen intently, ask questions, and seek to understand them.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to become angry.”*

(JAMES 1:19)

Don’t rush or push for full disclosure of uncomfortable things.

Do respect boundaries, privacy, and the healing process that takes time.

“Show proper respect to everyone.”

(1 PETER 2:17)

Don’t feel like you have to say something or have the right answer.

Do be present, and know that just your presence can be a comfort.

*“They sat on the ground with him
for seven days and nights.
No one said a word to Job,
for they saw that his suffering
was too great for words.”*

(JOB 2:13 NLT)

Don't dismiss feelings or experiences.

Do encourage, validate, and compliment the courage it takes to share painful thoughts and emotions.

*"Let everything you say be good and helpful,
so that your words will be an encouragement
to those who hear them."*

(EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT)

Don't communicate that abuse is in some way the victim's fault.

Do express sympathy and compassion.

*"Be sympathetic, love one another,
be compassionate and humble."*

(1 PETER 3:8)

Don't be critical or express judgment.

Do show your love and acceptance.

*"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God."*

(ROMANS 15:7)

Don't assume someone who has been abused is comfortable talking about God and spiritual matters.

Do be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, and ask if you can share God's Word.

"Let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

(GALATIANS 5:25 NLT)

Don't leave them to their own resources.

Do help them find support, resources, and wise counsel in their community, local church, or online to help them heal and recover.

*"Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed."*

(PROVERBS 15:22)

Don't overextend yourself or offer to help in ways you cannot provide.

Do recognize your limits and know when you need to point to additional help or professional counseling.

*"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment."*

(ROMANS 12:3)

Don't forget to pray *for* them and *with* them, as much as they are comfortable doing so.

Do lift them up before the Lord on a regular basis.

*"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions
with all kinds of prayers and requests.
With this in mind, be alert and always keep on
praying for all the Lord's people."*

(EPHESIANS 6:18)

As you seek to help others, don't feel like God can't use you. He can use your pain and your past to comfort another. Almost everyone has been touched either directly or indirectly by some form of abuse. That means everyone is in a position now or will be in the future to further a survivor's journey to becoming an overcomer—to travel from merely coping to thriving, from struggling to surviving, from pain to peace, from victim to victory.

*"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

(1 CORINTHIANS 15:57)

Pure in Heart Epilogue

The Jenna Quinn Story—Part 2

Fast forward two years. As a college student, Jenna is asked again to speak . . . and again. Soon her purpose becomes clear: empowering others to move from victim to victor. She decides her focus of study will be on psychology, and she will help other victims of abuse find freedom. Jenna interns at the very place that offered her so much help—the Child Advocacy Center of Denton County.

As she steps into her role as an advocate, Jenna continues her journey of healing and walks through difficult days, leaning on the Lord's strength. Still, she wants to do more to stop abuse. But how?

Suddenly the solution surfaces—what if teachers and students were required to learn about the signs of abuse? What if legislation could be passed that put prevention and early intervention at the forefront? Her idea has merit and she seeks the help of the CACDC director, who puts her in contact with other agencies and state legislators.

In May 2009, “Jenna’s Law,” the first child sexual abuse prevention law in the U.S. named after a survivor, is unanimously passed in the Texas State Senate. Jenna’s Law mandates trainings for K-12 students and school staff. Since being passed, Jenna’s law has expanded to include child and foster care centers, child placement agencies, and universities. It was also amended to include sex trafficking prevention in schools. More than 30 U.S. states have since followed Texas’ example by instituting similar laws.⁹⁰

Jenna is a survivor, author, and sought-after speaker who graciously shares her remarkable story of faith and victory.

*“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.
He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.
³ I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and he saved me from my enemies. . . .
¹⁶ He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
he drew me out of deep waters. . . .
¹⁹ He led me to a place of safety; he rescued me
because he delights in me. . . .
³⁰ All the LORD’s promises prove true.
He is a shield for all who look to him for protection. . . .
³⁵ You have given me your shield of victory.
Your right hand supports me; your help has made me great.”
(PSALM 18:2–3, 16, 19, 30, 35 NLT)*

**“Sticks and stones” do break bones
and words can wound a tender heart.
But God shatters prisons of pain
to set captives free.**

—June Hunt



APPENDIX



APPENDIX A

Abuse Recovery Resources

Below is a list of national resources to call or visit online if you are experiencing abuse of any kind. They exist to help and support you. You are *not* alone. These free and confidential services are available 24/7 to provide emotional support and helpful resources for those in difficult situations.

*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*
(DEUTERONOMY 31:8)

Note: If you are ever in immediate danger, call 911.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

- 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.thehotline.org (Live chat available)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- **988**
- 1-800-799-4889 (For Deaf + Hard of Hearing)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org (Live chat available)

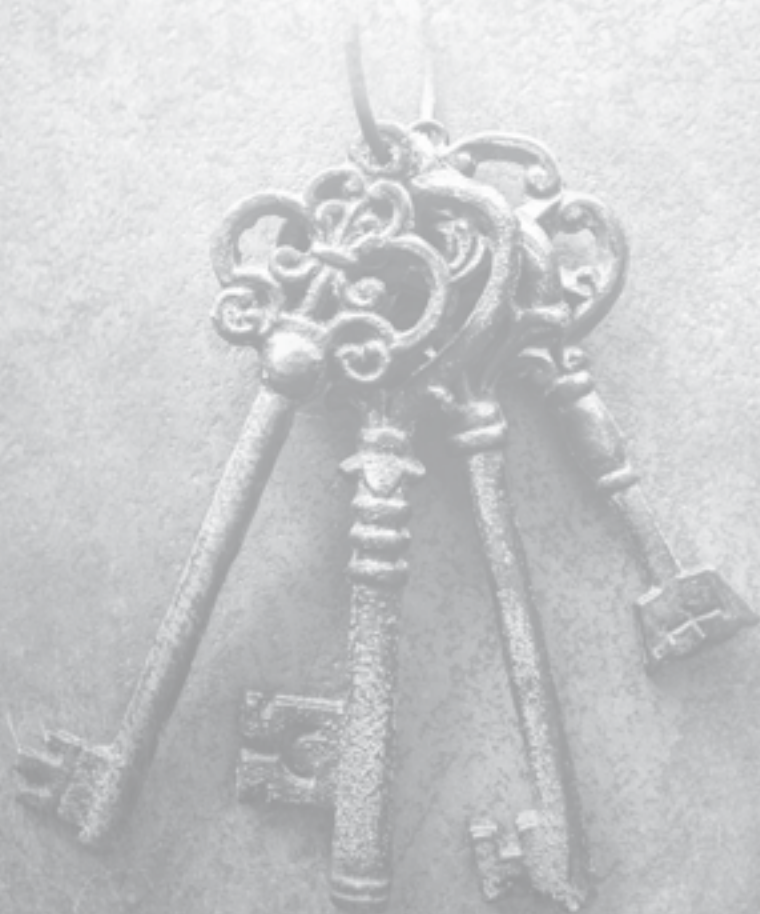
Shelter & Housing Directories

- www.domesticshelters.org
- www.womenshelters.org

Verbal & Emotional Abuse Help Online

- Crisis Text Line: www.crisistextline.org | Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor
- Day One: www.dayoneservices.org OR call their 24/7 crisis hotline at 1-866-223-1111
- SafeHorizon: www.safehorizon.org OR call their 24-hour hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Where was the **Lord** when I was so **brokenhearted** and **crushed**?

*"The **Lord** is close to the **brokenhearted**
and saves those who are **crushed** in spirit."*

(PSALM 34:18)

Why should **victims** of abuse **commit themselves to God**?

*"You, **God**, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The **victims commit themselves to you**;
you are the helper of the fatherless."*

(PSALM 10:14)

Where can I **find rest** and **hope**?

*"Yes, my soul, **find rest** in God;
my **hope** comes from him."*

(PSALM 62:5)

Does God understand my **pain** and **suffering** and what
it's like to be abused and **rejected**?

*"He [Jesus] was despised and **rejected** by mankind,
a man of **suffering**, and familiar with **pain**."*

(ISAIAH 53:3)

Does the **Lord** have any **good news** of **freedom** for me,
an **oppressed prisoner** of a painful past?

*“The Spirit of the **Lord** is on me,
because he has anointed me to proclaim **good news**
to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **freedom**
for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the **oppressed** free.”*

(LUKE 4:18)

Why should I **trust God** and **pour my heart out** to **Him**?

*“**Trust** in **him** at all times, you people;
pour out your **hearts** to **him**,
for **God** is our refuge.”*

(PSALM 62:8)

Can God **heal** my **broken heart** and the
painful **wounds** of abuse?

*“He **heals** the **brokenhearted**
and binds up their **wounds**.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

Who will **strengthen, help, and uphold**
me when **I am** full of **fear**?

*“Do not **fear**, for **I am** with you;
do not be dismayed, for **I am** your God.
I will **strengthen** you and **help** you;
I will **uphold** you with my righteous right hand.”*

(ISAIAH 41:10)

Can **God comfort** me **in all** my **troubles**?

*"Praise be to the **God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the **God** of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us **in all** our **troubles**, so that we can **comfort** those **in** any **trouble** with the **comfort** we ourselves receive from **God**."*
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)

How **will** I ever **be free** from the pain
and damage of my past?

*"If the Son sets you free, you **will be free** indeed."*
(JOHN 8:36)



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