

Abused! Broken! Married! Healed!

by Anne Richardson

The road of life can be weighed down with unexpected trials and temptations; ordeals that can send us reeling off our intended course and distort our outlook. In the parable of the Good Samaritan we read of a traveling man who is attacked by thieves on his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Scripture says that this incident leaves the man stripped, wounded and in a half dead state. (Luke 10:30) Sexual abuse can affect its victims in much the same way. It is a cruel invasion into the normal flow of life robbing individuals of their innocence and trust. Hearts can become filled with anger, bitterness and unforgiveness. In the Old Testament, the story of Tamar and Amnon speaks poignantly about this kind of devastating encounter. The Bible describes Tamar as being “lovely” and “a virgin”. Regrettably, her beauty makes her the object of her half-brother’s obsessive lust. When she is asked to bring food to Amnon’s bedside the Bible says he “took hold of her and said unto her, ‘Come, lie with me, my sister.’” Though Tamar pleaded with him, “he would not hearken unto her voice; but being stronger than she, forced her and lay with her.” In just a few terrible moments, her innocence was lost, her life was shattered and the Scripture says that she “remained desolate in her brother Absalom’s house.” (2 Samuel 13-11,14 & 20 KJV)

Today, a multitude of often “silent sufferers” are sitting desolate in the Father’s house. Outwardly, you may appear to live a charmed life; inwardly you are a wasteland. Many of you would identify yourselves as marred vessels-unfit for the Master’s use. Somewhere in your lives the weapon of sexual abuse has been formed against you. Whether it occurred once, as in Tamar’s case, or repeatedly over a long period of time, sexual abuse has delivered a crushing blow to your soul. The wounds of sexual abuse can be deep and devastating but the good news is that “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.” (Isaiah 54:17 KJV) The Hebrew word *tsalach*, translated prosper means that no weapon formed against you will be successful in accomplishing its goal; it will not advance or be profitable!

This cherished promise has become a living reality in my personal life. At the age of fifteen, rape was my introduction to sexual intimacy. I realize now that for many years I lived in a state of shock or a “half dead” state. My young naïve mind could not really grasp what had happened to me. The betrayal was harsh, and penetrated to the core of my being, yet I continued along the road of life as though nothing had happened. There were warning signs along the way, but none I was willing to acknowledge or deal with. It wasn’t until I married that my past crashed headlong into my present life. Something precious had been stolen from me. The gift of sexual purity meant only for my spouse was not there for me to give. Sex is an act of spiritual intensity that is expressly forbidden by God outside the marriage relationship. When his laws are broken either consensually or through some kind of abuse, future relationships between husbands and wives will be affected.

Because memories are called to mind by association, something you hear, see or smell

can bring a memory from your past instantly to mind. With almost the same intensity of the actual assault, memories of the abuse came crashing into the sanctity of my marriage relationship. Initially, those memories threw me into a whirlwind of emotional pain and frustration. Eventually, they drove me to my knees and to a personal search in the Word of God for answers. Ultimately, I experienced God's grace and power in ways I never would have, had I not been afflicted. Looking back, I am convinced of two immutable facts. One is that outside of God any type of sin is possible and the other is that through Him any type of sin can be overcome. Sin is a stain that cannot be removed by anything but the blood of Jesus Christ. This includes the stain of the sins that are committed against us. If sexual abuse has happened to you, it is important to realize that you are not alone, nor is your situation so unique that others could never relate or understand. Believers throughout the ages have felt the sting of this offence. Sexual abuse is one of many trials and temptations referred to in Scripture as "common to man." (1 Corinthians 10:13). In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul offers words of encouragement to future hurting believers that someone, somewhere has walked where you have walked and has overcome through faith in the Lord. "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:1-2 KJV) You may say, but wait a minute! I am the one who has been sinned against, what besetting sins would I have to lay aside? We'll talk about that in a moment, but first you must realize that your most blessed assurance comes from knowing that Jesus fully understands, and empathizes with your suffering. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15 KJV)

No matter how shattering the abuse and ensuing pain has been, Jesus has in a very real sense walked a mile in your shoes. His word reassures that healing awaits you through the liberating truth of His Word. "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3 KJV) Simply put, there is no aspect of your life, no problem you have encountered to which God's Word does not speak. Victory is certain through your knowledge of Him and by your continued transformation into His image through the power of His Spirit. Be encouraged today! Let this moment begin a process of change and deliverance which, until now, you may have considered an utter impossibility. You must purpose in your heart to allow nothing to stand in the way of being made whole. My personal turning point began when I was willing to be honest with myself and with God about what had happened. This includes a willingness to bring your pain out of the darkness and into the light by opening your heart to a trustworthy and godly friend. The Bible says, "Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed." (James 5:16 KJV) It is time for you to take off your mask and be real. Pride and fear can prevent you from exposing your secret struggles. The enemy of your soul plays on these works of the flesh in an attempt to keep you isolated and unable to fulfill God's purpose for your life. He feeds mercilessly on the hurts you have kept hidden in the dark recesses of your heart. He wants to convince you that your situation is hopeless; that people will reject you and look upon you with repulsion. He tells you that you will never

get beyond the sting of abuse. But when you honestly and unashamedly bring your pain out of secrecy into the light of Truth, you bring one of Satan's most effective devices to a screeching halt. He can no longer use it against you. As you release your pain to God, and allow a trusted saint or minister to bind together with you in prayer, the anointing begins to destroy the yoke of sexual abuse. Shedding tears at the feet of Jesus brings a release and a healing balm that cannot be found anywhere else. What is accomplished during these special times of anointed prayer cannot be overstated. God's Spirit cleanses the areas of your soul that have been wounded by the weapon of abuse and sets in motion the renewal process that brings change and restoration. When you surrender your desolate heart to Jesus and turn to his Word with single-hearted faith, the Spirit of Truth will begin to reveal any harmful strongholds in your thought life. This is where the weights and besetting sins come in. It is not the abuse itself, but what you have told yourself about the abuse that holds you captive to your past and poisons your present life. The enemy has used the abuse to shoot his fiery darts into your thoughts. He has inundated your mind with imaginations that contradict the truth of God's Word. You, in turn, have listened to his lies and embraced them as your reality. Perhaps you have convinced yourself that if God really loved you, He would never have allowed this to happen. Maybe you have vowed to never let anyone get close enough to hurt you again. You may have convinced yourself that you are a victim and waived your God-given responsibilities in many areas of your life. Perhaps you have unrealistic expectations of your husband, thinking he should be the one to compensate for the horrible thing that has happened to you; consequently you have become cold and unresponsive in your marriage. It could be you have told yourself you cannot forgive your offender and unforgiveness has turned into a crippling root of bitterness. Whatever your particular situation may be, embracing these lies is what hinders your victory over the abuse.

It was only when I had finally come to the end of my self that God breathed into my troubled soul three life-changing Scriptures. At the time, I was still holding fast to my victim status. When that first Scripture dropped into my heart it was, indeed, sharper than a two-edged sword! In fact, I didn't believe it was the Lord because it seemed rather harsh. But as I sat there broken and undone, He continued to speak and I knew He was giving me something that would be life-changing. These piercing yet liberating truths from God's Word have been fundamental to my personal victory. Healing did not come overnight, but progressively as I yielded myself to God and allowed Truth to override the lies embedded in the stain of abuse. The first is found in Romans 6:12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." The wounded heart naturally craves love and understanding. But although God cares deeply about your pain, He understands the dangers of living in a perpetual "victim mentality". This Scripture calls us to be responsible for our own actions, for our response to the abuse. Sexual abuse is an offence. The word offence in its original Greek form skandalon, describes the trigger or snare of a trap. Satan uses offences to lure people into emotional traps or strongholds. The natural or carnal mind easily justifies sinful thoughts and responses when an offence has occurred. But the Scripture tells us "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:4) God's answer for the wounded soul is to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". (Romans 12:2) This simple truth makes perfect sense when you consider the battle for victory is, in fact, being waged in your

mind. When you allow sin to reign through negative responses such as self pity, withholding love from others, or angry outbursts you are effectively hindering God's divine intervention.

Through the power of the Holy Ghost you have the God-given ability to respond biblically to whatever God or man does or says. In other words, the Holy Ghost gives us "respond-ability". Romans 6:12 makes us aware of the part we play in overcoming the offence of abuse. It also impacts us with the understanding that rather than merely dealing with the symptoms of a problem, God's way targets the source. The root of sexual abuse can easily be identified as sin. Similarly, the root of our actions and responses to the abuse are often sinful. As much as Jesus identifies with your anguish, His greatest concern is how you respond to it. If you allow your carnal nature to reign, your life will be ruled by negative emotions. Consequently, your spiritual growth and your ministry cannot develop. Healing and transformation come as you choose to put off your carnal responses and allow yourself to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Only He can heal a wounded heart because only Jesus can cleanse and empower you to live victoriously over sin.

The second Scripture is found in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

No matter how overwhelming your experience has been, you cannot use it as an excuse to think or act in a way that does not glorify God. His Word clearly conveys how we are to respond in the face of evil. Though it goes totally against the grain of our human nature to forbear and forgive one another, God has called us to overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21) The choice not to forgive has kept many victims of sexual abuse yoked to their past. The Scriptures speak of "imagination", or thinking that "exalts itself against the knowledge of God". (2 Corinthians 10:5) The knowledge of God says, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15). Carnal reasoning that withholds forgiveness must be "cast down" and "every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5) Your heart may rebel against such words, but I assure you that spending time at the foot of the cross will change how you think about your offender and the offence. When you look at the cross, you see the forgiving face of God; you see human possibilities beyond your own experience. It will expose the veil of flesh that has prevented the glory of God from being revealed in your life, and usher into your heart a deep humility. It may seem like a daunting task, but take heart, "the weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds"! (2 Corinthians 10:4) Your victory will come as you pray, fast and humbly submit to God's Word. When you choose to forgive, you are casting the heavy weight of sexual abuse upon the Lord and releasing the offender into His capable and just hands. By doing this you are saying, "Jesus I love you, and I am willing to die to my 'self' to prove it. I give you my pain, and ask you to cleanse and renew the ravaged areas of my heart. Let all of my thoughts, my responses and my words be an act of worship to you"! The third scripture is found in Philippians 4:11-12, "For I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I

know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” This final verse really expresses the result of obedience to the first two Scriptures. The Greek word for content literally expresses a sufficiency in oneself. But here it denotes sufficiency, not in self, but in God. It describes a place of contentment where one becomes independent of external circumstances. This will happen as you begin to turn your eyes fully upon the Lord and believe with all your heart the truth of His loving provision. The place of contentment is the place of trust. David wrote in Psalm 131, “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even of a weaned child.” The image is that of a child who is no longer unsettled and discontent, but one who is at peace and trusting in his mother. I encourage you to adopt this attitude; to cast aside your own understanding of what has happened in your life and to trust in the Lord with all of your heart. When you are truly convinced that all things do, indeed, work together for good to those who love the Lord, the offence of abuse will lose its sting. The same word used to describe Tamar’s desolation in 2 Samuel, is used in Isaiah to describe the desolation of Zion. God’s promise to Zion breathes hope into the heart of the victim of sexual abuse. “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires....In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression: for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.” (Isaiah 54: 11 & 14 KJV) In other words He will turn your desolation into something beautiful. He will restore you! What He has done for the desolate land, He can do for the desolate soul!

As the Holy Ghost uproots the binding strongholds in your life, room is made for the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Bitterness and resentment fade under the awesome power of love; joy lifts the heaviness of depression and self-pity; peace transcends anxiety; impatience gives way to long-suffering; goodness obliterates the desire for revenge; fear and unbelief are cast down by faith; stubbornness and pride are exchanged for meekness; and self-control begins to prevail in the weak areas of your life. The wounds that have nearly destroyed your soul will be turned into a weapon of healing and deliverance in the lives of other hurting souls. May your heart, echo with mine the words of David in Psalm 30:11-12: Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee forever