

## Childhood Sexual Abuse

*Anne Richardson*

### Introduction:

With the impact of a fiery head-on collision, innocence meets evil long before its time. Like Eve in the garden as she sunk her teeth into the forbidden fruit, purity is lost, and in its place comes the knowledge of something dark and insidious. And like Eve who once fellowshiped openly with the Lord, the little one who at one time ran with eagerness into the arms of others, now hides in the shadows.-feeling the terrible weight of shame. The sweet face of childhood, and the course of a life is altered. Trust is smothered by fear; the candle of joy is snuffed out by a sorrow too profound to be captured by mere words.

The biblical record of the rape of Tamar shows God's intention to expose the devastating results of sexual abuse. (2 Sam. 13:1-20). When King David's son raped his half-sister, the act and its resulting turmoil became a part of Israel's public and religious record. There is much to be seen in this one regretful incident; a lustful brother, a vulnerable sister, a passive parent, and the seduction of innocence. There is the consuming shame of the victim, the contempt of the offender, and the resulting violence of a family divided against itself. The scene is familiar. It is reenacted in the lives of countless others every day. In fact, sexual abuse is a national plague. Research suggests that by the age of 18, 1 out of every 3 women will be victims of sexually abusive contact.

By definition, the scope of sexual abuse is wide. It involves *any* contact or interaction whereby a vulnerable person (usually a child or adolescent) is used for the sexual stimulation of an older, stronger, or more influential person. It can be expressed through inappropriate touching, lewd looks, sexual innuendo in conversations, or outright rape. It may be an isolated or an ongoing event. The face of the perpetrator could be familiar or strange: a parent, a relative, a friend, a teacher or a neighbor-the possibilities are as numerous as the people in our lives.

Sexual abuse (irrespective of the number of times it occurred, the identity of the perpetrator, or the severity and nature of the abuse) inevitably causes the victim to feel helpless, confused, and rejected by God. Sexual interaction was intended by our Creator to draw from our body and our soul both arousal and pleasure. This can be experienced even in a context that is exploitative and perverse. Subsequently, as time goes on, the person who has experienced such a gross perversion of God's design for sexual intimacy can be swallowed up by a violent confusion of feelings. The hatred of being used is at odds with the feelings of pleasure, and the hunger to be loved. This incredible torrent of conflicting emotions is more than any child or adolescent can bear. Naturally, they cannot understand such emotions in the same way an adult can. It is probably safe to say that a significant percentage of sexually abused children do not acknowledge and deal with their abuse until they have reached their adult years. Exposing the wound, facing the shame, and actually trusting someone enough to confess can take time-perhaps a very long time.

Pain becomes the foreboding backdrop of the adult victim's life. **Happy marriages**, healthy children, or successful careers have no power to erase the raw memories of the past. Even in the most intimate moments, the victim is guarded, always wrestling with ugly memories of dreadful things she wished had never happened. Regardless of how much she talks about it or how many self-help books she reads; and no matter how much friends and family try to help- an unyielding mountain of hurt persists in her soul. This monolith of pain will simply not budge through any amount of human effort.

What a gloomy scenario, a seemingly hopeless prognosis, but against this backdrop of misery and confusion a miraculous testimony is waiting to be written. There is indeed a balm in Gilead! Only the power of God can bring healing to the victim of sexual abuse. His Word is filled with countless promises and principles which when applied to the wound of abuse will bring glorious victory, and abundant life. In the beginning, God spoke, and the universe and everything in it was created. His Word is still creative. It reshapes our thinking about what has happened and brings light to the hidden corners of our heart thrown into darkness by abuse.

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## The Path of Healing

If you have not yet exposed your wound to the Great Physician-this is your first step. Jesus bids you to come to Him, to the One whose purpose was, and still is, *“to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Isaiah 61:1) You must be willing to bring your pain to Him; to acknowledge to yourself and to Jesus what has happened; that getting through this is not something you can do on your own. Cry out for His help, *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak, O Lord heal me for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled.”* (Psalm 6:2-3) *“In my distress I will call upon the Lord, and cry out to my God.”* (Psalm 18:6) Be honest with Him. Express your hurt. And should words fail you, then let the Spirit help you in your weakness, for *“we do not know what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”*. (Romans 8:26) That unyielding mountain of pain will begin to crack and crumble under the power of anointed prayer.

It is **all right** to speak the truth about your feelings, to express to God your anger and confusion, your disappointment and doubts; to bring Him your questions, and share with Him your fears. Pour out your heart to Him and hold nothing back. But when you are finished telling Him about you, begin to speak the truth about Him. Lord, you are, *“near to those who have a broken heart; and save such as have a contrite spirit”*. (Psalm 34:18). Jesus, I believe that *“you will light my lamp: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop; by my God I can leap over a wall”* (Psalm 18:28-29). Indeed, by His Spirit you can conquer the enemies of depression and defeat; you can transcend the walls you’ve built around your heart.

The path of healing is freely offered to you, but you must remember-the cost of giving it was far from cheap. The precious gift of spiritual rebirth required that Jesus, suffer a humiliating death on a Roman cross. In order to partake in this gift, and find freedom from your pain

you, also, must be crucified with Christ. *“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”* (Rom. 6:6) When you make the choice to submit to the cross, **you will experience real deliverance from slavery to yourself.** What does this mean to the one wounded by abuse? In the shadow of the cross the abuse is brought into proper perspective, and the truth that is revealed brings a marvelous liberty found nowhere else. You will no longer have an excuse not to freely love as you have been loved by God. It means you cannot blame the abuse for your bitterness and refusal to forgive; for any tendencies toward self-pity or angry outbursts; for the many ways you may be allowing the past to hinder what God desires to accomplish in and through your life. When you catch this vision of the cross, you will find that you will not have room in your mind or your heart to dwell on the pain of the past. Tell God you are willing to open the door of your heart. Let Him know it is your desire to truly become a *“new creation in Christ, for “old things to pass away and all things to become new.”* (2Corinthians 5:17) Echo the words of David who cried, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* (Psalm 51:10) *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my anxieties. And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* (Psalm 139:23-24) Pray for the promised transformation that comes *“through the renewing of your mind.”* (Romans 12:2) In this verse, Paul is telling us not to be fashioned by the environment we live in, or have lived in. The ways of the world are not the ways of God. The ways of the world may have wounded, disappointed or confused us but the painful events of life do not have to shape and define who we are. In the same way that we are not to develop friendships with, or conform ourselves to worldly systems of belief and behaviour, neither are we to allow our environment (our experiences)-to have dominion power in our lives. Instead we must be *“transformed by the renewing of our mind.”* The word *transformed* used here is the Greek Word *metamorphoo*. The first part of the word, *meta*, implies change. The second part, *morphe*, means form. Paul is saying that we must be changed into another form! The tense of the verb indicates that this is a process; not something that happens instantaneously. The “putting off” of our ways, and “putting on” of Christ’s ways takes time. (Ephesians 4:22-23; Colossians 3:9-10) In order to become a new creation, you will have to forsake some old mind-sets. Your

deliverance from the ugly, restrictive cocoon of abuse will come gradually as your vision and thinking is adjusted to the mind of God. Make this your fervent prayer, O Lord, *“Let this mind be in me which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:5); a humble mind, that *“esteems others better than himself.”*(Philippians 2:3); a mind willing to *“pray for those who spitefully use you.”* (Luke 6:28) As assuredly as the butterfly must struggle to emerge from its cocoon and become the beautiful creature God intended, you must also be prepared to struggle, to push your way through some deep and difficult things.

When you were abused, the temple of your body was defiled; the beauty of God’s intention for it was disfigured. But what a glorious hope you have, because the One who possesses your temple desires to restore it to its former glory. Every room must be redone. Every corner cleansed and renewed by the washing of the water of His Word. (Ephesians 5:26) The truth is powerful! The doors of your heart will be swung open wide by the sheer force of God’s agape love, and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth will begin to search out the lies which are the very nucleus of sexual abuse. It is not the abuse itself that binds you, but what you have told yourself about it, and the way those faulty beliefs have given place to the enemy of your soul, the very father of lies. Many abused women have simply learned to listen to the voice of the accuser. And that is why healing comes only by being renewed in the spirit of your mind. (Ephesians 4:23)

You must learn to cast down, or stop listening to the “imagination” that fight to exalt themselves above the Word of God. (2Corinthians 10:5) Ask God to help you hear His voice above the lies of the past. In Psalm 29 we read, *“The voice of the Lord is over the waters”* (vs. 3) –His voice is over the troubled waters of your soul. *“The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars.”* (vs.4-5) It breaks the strongholds that, like trees, have become so deeply rooted in your mind. *“The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire.”*(vs.7) His voice will guide you through this fiery trial. You will only be burned if you do not heed His words. *“The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness.”* (vs.8) Sometimes you doubt, sometimes you wonder, as the Israelites did, *“Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?”* (Psalm 78:19) But no matter how dry and barren your soul has become, you must choose to hope in God’s Word for it is written, *“He turns a*

*wilderness into pools of water, and dry land into watersprings.”*  
(Psalm 107:35)

Keep in mind that nothing will dry up the waterspring of God’s Spirit like unforgiveness. To those who have been sexually abused, unforgiveness creates an illusion of power over your abuser. It is the way that *“seems right ... but its end is the way of death.”* (Proverbs 14:12) The pain of abuse is so deep and devastating that to not forgive seems justifiable. It may even bring a temporary sense of relief. But those feelings are short-lived. Unforgiveness is the highest form of slavery. It is the chain that keeps you bound to the past and allows your abuser to continue hurting you over and over again. Furthermore, when you allow bitterness to take root, you cut yourself off from that relational forgiveness with God that makes communing with Him so open and easy. David said it this way: *“My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; They are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me.”* (Psalm 40:12) When you allow your mind to be carried away with thoughts of the abuse, iniquity *will* consume your heart. The anger, bitterness and self-pity will contaminate the fertile ground in which God would like to plant and produce the fruit of His Spirit. Instead, you must pray, *“Direct my steps by Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.”* (Psalm 119:133) Call upon God, and let Him know you are willing to *“lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares you”*(Hebrews 12:1); and that instead you will look to *“Jesus the author and finisher of your faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.”* (Hebrews 12:2) The measure of victory you experience depends totally on your willingness to crucify those innate tendencies to handle the abuse your way. You cannot allow sin *“to reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts.”* (Romans 6:12) Fear must give way to faith, sorrow to the joy of the Lord, and hatred must bow in the presence of God’s agape love. Find yourself a quiet place and open your Bible to Psalm 119. As you read and meditate upon the words, it won’t be long before the written word will become a living prayer inside of you; *“My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your Word.”* (Vs. 28) Instead of images of the abuse, *“I remember your name in the night, O Lord.* (Vs. 55) David said it well in verse 92, *“Unless your law had been my delight I would then have perished in my affliction.”* Like this

shepherd boy, turned king you must, “*stand in awe of God’s Word*” (vs. 161) and discover for yourself that there is “*great peace to those who love His law, and nothing causes them to stumble.*” (vs. 165)

In addition to harboring bitterness toward your offender, you may also see yourself as unworthy, even beyond the realm of God’s forgiveness. The accuser has told you, you must have done something to deserve what happened to you, that in some way you were a willing participant, that perhaps you could have done more to stop it. Lies and more lies! But yet these fiery darts of the enemy lodge deep in your thought life, blocking out the light of truth. The knowledge of God *must* be exalted above the lies in order to reckon your self forgiven, and to extend that same forgiveness to others. The Christ of the cross is your Forgiver and your forgiveness. It’s not as though God winked at our sin and said, “it wasn’t really anything”. No. He simply understood our human frailty and our total inability to live above sin without the power of His indwelling Spirit. The Bible says that until we are saved, we are all under the power and influence of the god of this world. You have to see the people who abused you in this way. Jesus did. As He hung there on the cross He cried, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23:34) If the men who spat in Jesus face, who beat Him and drove the nails through His Hands and feet had ever caught a glimpse of who He really was, and what He was about to do *for them*-they would never have committed such a heinous act. It’s not that you are making excuses for the horrible things your abuser has done, but that-especially as one who has experienced the mercy and forgiveness of a loving Saviour-you understand both his weakness and the driving force behind such wicked acts.

Consider for a moment how *you* could make it through one single day without needing God’s forgiveness and mercy. And realize that unless you are willing to forgive those who have hurt you-that much needed forgiveness is also withheld from you. (Mark 11:26) Instead, pray that you will come to the place of being able to genuinely release your abuser into the hands of God. Your sacrifice will be a sweet smelling savor that rises up to the throne of grace and touches the heart of God. It is like Mary washing the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiping them with her hair.(John 11:12) This beautiful expression of love was not the cause of the remission of her sins, but rather an

act born out of her realization that she had been forgiven much. Pray for a revelation of God's forgiveness toward you!! Let this precious truth become so real, that you may be made perfect in His love and in turn, without fear, extend that same love and forgiveness to those who have wounded you.

The late Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who suffered unspeakable cruelty in the German Concentration Camps of World War Two penned these encouraging words, "When Jesus requires that we love our enemies He *gives* us the love He demands from us. We are channels of His love, not reservoirs. A reservoir can spring a leak, and all the love could be drained away. A channel provides the method for a continuous flow from the oceans of God's love." Jesus said in John 15:5, "*I am the vine, you are the branches: He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.*" You must sink your roots deep into Him. It is this abiding relationship that empowers and strengthens you to "*do all things through Christ.*" (Philippians 4:13) All things includes forgiving those who have hurt you. If you will "*abide in Him, and His words abide in you*" the Scripture promises that, "*you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7) Think of it! Your source of supply is sure! His love "*has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Ghost which was given to you.*" (Rom 5:5) Don't allow anger or unforgiveness to block the flow of God's love in your life. Pray, rather for the ability to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving "*even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" (Ephesians 4:32); for the strength to, "*love your enemies*" and to "*pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you.*" (Matthew 5:44) Believe that His grace is sufficient, not only for the Apostle Paul, but for you! Allow His strength to be made perfect in your weakness. (2Corinthians 12:9), and you will experience the power of Christ in a way that is only possible when you have known Him in the fellowship of His suffering. (Philippians 3:10)

No matter how many tears you must shed, or how many times you fail or feel like giving up. No matter how many trips to the altar you need to make, do not "*grow weary while doing good: for in due season you shall reap, if you do not lose heart.*" (Galatians 6:9) When the Scriptures admonish us to "do good" it is almost always to those who do not deserve it. When we sow mercy, we shall in turn reap

mercy in our own lives. Let the continued cry of your heart be, *“As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.”*(Psalm 55:16-17)

Oh the power, the life-changing power of God’s precious Word! And what assurance He gives to those who will hear it and obey, *“beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”* (Isaiah 61:3) Letting go of your past, and to the wrongs that have been committed against you is an act of worship to God. And to that kind of sacrifice, Jesus whispers, *“Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”* (Isaiah 43:18-19)

All Scripture Quotations are from the New King James Bible  
The quote by Corrie Ten Boom is from her book, “Tramp for the Lord”