
Recovering from Abuse

Finding Hope in the Gospel

Adapted from a Blog by Ed Welch

<https://www.ccef.org/recovering-child-abuse-help-and-healing-victims-part-1/>



You have were an innocent kid, but he made you feel shameful and dirty. You were just a kid, trusting, obedient and vulnerable. Instead of being protected, helped, and comforted you were abused. Most likely by someone who should have been trustworthy—a family member, a teacher, a neighbour, a coach, a pastor, a friend. Instead of being protected you were violated. Your feelings were not considered. Someone used, misused, and took advantage of you.

Two Truths:

You may be wondering if life will ever be normal again? The road has been a long one and you know there is no simple way to get over this kind of trauma. But we can assure you of two things: The first is that you are not alone and the second that there is hope.

Your recovery will be a process of learning and remembering those two truths, not just once, but over and over. Think about how bread gets made. It gets kneaded so that the yeast goes through the whole loaf. These two truths must be kneaded into who you are until they work through every part of you, and that takes time. The damage you suffered may have been done in one or more terrible moments; the healing and the restoration unfolds at a human pace. It unfolds at your pace and it unfolds as part of your story.



Your Identity:

Abuse feels like an experience that has stamped you and has the final word on your identity. But the truth is that God gives you a different identity. No matter what terrible things have happened to you, they are not your identity. Your identity as God's child is far deeper than the abuse you suffered.

When you come to God through trusting in Jesus, he gives you a new identity. You become part of His family. You are his dearly loved child. Listen to what the John says about you: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 Jn. 3:1). You have a perfect Father in heaven who loves you and wants to fill your life with the good gift of himself (Luke 11:13).

Because you are God's child, you are not alone in a nightmare of pointless suffering. It's true that "the heart knows its own bitterness" (Prov. 14:10), and even your dearest friend can't fully understand the terror, the aloneness, the pain, and the horror you experienced. But Jesus does understand, and he is with you.

Your Identity:

Knowing Jesus is with you and loves you will give you the courage to see that the story of your life is bigger than your suffering. What happened to you is not the last word on who you are and where your life is going. It's a big part of your story, but it doesn't have to define who you are. It's just one chapter of the new story that Jesus is writing.

Think about Joseph's story. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers! Then he was falsely accused of rape by his master's wife and thrown into prison. At the end of the story, Joseph meets his brothers again but instead of taking revenge he says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). God used all the evil that was done to Joseph to put him into a position where he could save his family from starving to death.

Joseph never 'forgot' what happened to him. He says that his brothers did "evil" to him. But he saw the bigger story. And that story was bigger than the evil he suffered. God was at work bringing good out of extreme betrayal. God is also at work in your life. Abuse is not the last word on your life story. God has a purpose for you.

Living out and Redeeming Your Story:

Like Joseph, you can choose to get on with making good choices as the bigger picture is gradually revealed. That doesn't mean that you will forget the evil done to you. But it will mean learning to respond to it in new ways.

You can grow in gratitude, joy, purpose, and the ability to help others and live your life with courage and conscious intent. A few years ago I [Ed Welch] counselled a young woman named Joanne. She had suffered terrible sexual abuse at the hands of family members from the age of 3 to 14. She was finally rescued by a social worker and placed into care. When I met her she was married, with two kids, and had become a social worker herself who counselled abused and traumatised kids.

Jo hadn't forgotten her suffering and was still working through its effects, but her life story was about more than her abuse. She was creating a loving home for her husband and children and reaching out to others who were suffering as she had. Her suffering wasn't forgotten, it was redeemed.

Jesus has redeemed us, through his death on the cross, what that means for our stories is that we, now equipped with the Spirit can see the bigger story and get involved in it.

Practical Strategies for Change

When we are kids, we behave like kids. Because we have little or no power, and no voice we learn strategies to cope with things that life throws at us. These are often helpful whilst we remain kids, but when we become adults (with power and with a voice), we need to change those childish strategies because now, rather than protecting us, they can become damaging.

Are there things you want to change?

Trust:

Do you struggle to trust others?

Sex:

Is your sex life a healthy one?

Bitterness:

Do you struggle with resentment?

Kids:

What's your relationship with your own kids like?

Conflict:

How do you handle conflict?

God is in the business of moulding character. Once we are redeemed he starts the business of making us to be more like Jesus every day. He knows that change is hard, and so he lovingly and gently takes His time to chip off those rough edges. You will enter into a life-time of change that will be as rewarding as it will be surprising.

God has amazing gifts for his children - not material things, but spiritual things. That's because material things will cheer you up for an hour or so, but spiritual things will give you a life time of deep seated joy. A joy comes from knowing how precious and loved you are by the perfect father.

Psalm 56

O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me.

My foes attack me all day long.

I am constantly hounded by those who slander me,
and many are boldly attacking me.

But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.

I praise God for what he has promised.

I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?

What can mere mortals do to me?

They are always twisting what I say;
they spend their days plotting to harm me.

They come together to spy on me—
watching my every step, eager to kill me.

Don't let them get away with their wickedness;
in your anger, O God, bring them down.

You keep track of all my sorrows.

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book.

My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help.

This I know: God is on my side!

I praise God for what he has promised;

yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised.

I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?

What can mere mortals do to me?

I will fulfil my vows to you, O God,

and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help.

For you have rescued me from death;

you have kept my feet from slipping.

So now I can walk in your presence, O God,
in your life-giving light.



Psalm 57

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection.

I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.
I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfil his purpose for me.

He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me.

My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness.

I am surrounded by fierce lions, who greedily devour human prey—
whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords.

Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens!

May your glory shine over all the earth.

My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress.

They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it.

My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident.

No wonder I can sing your praises!

Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp!

I will wake the dawn with my song.

I will thank you, Lord, among all the people.

I will sing your praises among the nations.

For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens.

Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens.

May your glory shine over all the earth.



Psalm 55

Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help!

Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles.

My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats.

They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down.

My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me.

Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can't stop shaking.

Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!

I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness.

How quickly I would escape - far from this wild storm of hatred.

Confuse them, Lord, and frustrate their plans, for I see violence and conflict in the city.

Its walls are patrolled day and night against invaders,

but the real danger is wickedness within the city.

Everything is falling apart; threats and cheating are rampant in the streets.

It is not an enemy who taunts me - I could bear that.

It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me - I could have hidden from them.

Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend.

What good fellowship we once enjoyed

as we walked together to the house of God.

Let death stalk my enemies; let the grave swallow them alive,

for evil makes its home within them.

But I will call on God, and the Lord will rescue me.

Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.

He ransoms me and keeps me safe from the battle waged against me,
though many still oppose me.

God, who has ruled forever, will hear me and humble them.

For my enemies refuse to change their ways; they do not fear God.

As for my companion, he betrayed his friends; he broke his promises.

His words are as smooth as butter, but in his heart is war.

His words are as soothing as lotion, but underneath are daggers!

Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you.

He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.

But you, O God, will send the wicked down to the pit of destruction.

Murderers and liars will die young, but I am trusting you to save me.

