

Trophies of Grace

MANY PEOPLE APPEAR to have their lives together outwardly, but inside they are emotional wrecks because they have been traumatized by abuse. A victim of trauma is someone who has been wounded physically or emotionally by some sudden or substantial shock that created severe and lasting damage to the psychological development of that individual.

I believe there are many traumatized people in the world who have been so abused in the past that they are psychologically deficient; they are unable to function normally in everyday life. There are people who have been through such trauma that it severely jarred their emotions, because they endured something that was so awful it was unspeakable.

Surviving the trauma of abuse can throw people into a state of psychological damage that prohibits them from functioning properly in relationships with others. Such victims do not understand what is wrong with them, or how to get out of their destructive behavior patterns so they can live a normal life. That was my situation before I learned how to gain the victory over the trauma in my life.

Through seeking God and reading His Word, I found that the Lord's main concern is our *inner* life, because that is where we enjoy His presence. Jesus said, "For behold, the kingdom of God *is within you* [in your hearts] *and among you* [surrounding you]" (Luke 17:21, emphasis mine).

This book is a summation of how God taught me to triumph through Christ over the tragedy of abuse in my life. After I had spent many years preaching His Word, God led me to 2 Corinthians 2:14: "But thanks be to God, Who in Christ always leads us in triumph [as trophies of Christ's victory] and through us spreads *and* makes evident the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere."

One Thanksgiving morning, a spirit of thankfulness began to rise up within me as I considered all that God had done for me. He spoke to my heart that day and said to me, "Joyce, you are a trophy of My grace, and you are helping Me get other trophies." Then I had a vision of a display case in heaven, filled with trophies. I understood that when someone wins trophies, it is because that person is a champion at what he or she does. If people have baseball, golf, or bowling trophies displayed in their homes, it is obvious that they have spent a lot of time developing their skill in that particular area.

God is the Champion at bringing people from a place of destruction to a place of total victory. As they reach that place of victory they become trophies of His grace, and they are set on display as a fragrant reminder of God's goodness. I share my testimony in this book to help those who are still in the process of becoming a trophy for God.

Through both tragedies and triumphs, I have learned that Jesus is my King, and He wants to be yours, too. The kingdom He desires to reign over is our inner life—our mind, will, emotions, desires, and thoughts. The Word teaches clearly that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of [getting the] food and drink [one likes], but instead it is righteousness (that state which makes a person acceptable to God) and [heart] peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He who serves Christ in this way is acceptable *and* pleasing to God and is approved by men" (Romans 14:17-18).

In other words, if God's kingdom rules within us, we will enjoy righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We will also be acceptable to God and approved by men. Jesus said that we should not worry about external things, such as food and clothes, but that we should "seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given [us] besides" (Matthew 6:33).

Before all else, we are to seek the kingdom of God, *which is within us*, and then all of our external concerns will be taken care of. When we accept Jesus as our Lord, He rules our inner life and brings with Him righteousness, peace, and joy. No matter what difficulties or trials we may experience in our outward life, if we are whole inside, we will not only survive, we will enjoy our lives.

Our inner life with God is much more important than our outer life. Therefore, emotional healing, which I also refer to as inner healing, is a subject that needs to be discussed in a scriptural, balanced way that produces godly results. The apostle Paul said that we can be "assured that He Who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up also with Jesus and bring us . . . into His presence" (2 Corinthians 4:14). In verses 16-18 he continued:

Therefore we do not become discouraged (utterly spiritless, exhausted, and wearied out through fear). Though our outer man is [progressively] decaying *and* wasting away, yet our inner self is being [progressively] renewed day after day.

For our light, momentary affliction (this slight distress of the passing hour) is ever more and more abundantly preparing *and* producing *and* achieving for us an everlasting weight of glory [beyond all measure, excessively surpassing all comparisons and all calculations, a vast and transcendent glory and blessedness never to cease!],

Since we consider and look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are visible are temporal (brief and fleeting), but the things that are invisible are deathless and everlasting.

Everyone is subject to what Paul called, "momentary afflictions," and some of us have suffered what seemed at the time to be unbearable, emotional pain. But Jesus came "to announce release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send forth as delivered

those who are oppressed [who are downtrodden, bruised, crushed, and broken down by calamity]" (Luke 4:18-19).

The King James Version of verse 18 says that Jesus said He came "to heal the brokenhearted." According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, the word translated *brokenhearted* in this verse is a combination of two Greek words, *kardia*, meaning simply "heart,"¹ and *suntribo* (*soon-tree'-bo*), which means "to *crush completely*, i.e. to *shatter . . . break (in pieces), broken to shivers . . . , bruise.*"² I believe Jesus came to heal those who are broken inside—those who are crushed and wounded *inwardly*.

If you have been traumatized by abuse, it is my hope that this book will serve as a road map to get from the ashes of devastation to the beauty of health and wholeness in your inner self. I pray that you will find this message to be simple, clear, and powerful, and that the Holy Spirit will enable you to follow Him to your destination of peace and joy.

My prayer for you is paraphrased from Ephesians 3:16:

I pray that you will be strengthened in the inner man through the power of the Holy Spirit and that He will indwell your innermost being and personality.

I also encourage you to always remember God's promise, found in Hebrews 13:5-6:

For He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you *nor* give you up *nor* leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless *nor* forsake *nor* let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]

So we take comfort *and* are encouraged *and* confidently *and* boldly say, The Lord is my Helper; I will not be seized with alarm [I will not fear or dread or be terrified]. What can man do to me?

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The Ashes of Abuse

I BELIEVE THAT most people are abused in one way or another during their lifetime. Almost every person can remember a time when he felt mistreated. I also believe there are

multitudes of people who have been severely traumatized by the abuse that has been inflicted upon them.

Some of the definitions of the verb *abuse* are: "to put to a wrong or improper use"; "DECEIVE"; "to use so as to injure or damage: MALTREAT"; "to attack in words: REVILE." Definitions for the noun *abuse* include: "a corrupt practice or custom"; "improper or excessive use or treatment: MISUSE"; "a deceitful act: DECEPTION"; "language that condemns or vilifies . . . unjustly, intemperately, and angrily"; "physical maltreatment."³

Some common forms of abuse are: physical, verbal, mental, emotional, and sexual. Any form of ongoing abuse can produce a root of rejection in the individual who has been mistreated, and this defensive sense of unworthiness can then cause major problems in the interpersonal relationships of that individual. Today we live in a society filled with people who do not know how to get along with other people; even though the abuse in their lives has stopped, the residue of trauma continues to affect their ability to relate to others.

God created us for love and acceptance, but the devil works hard to keep us feeling rejected because he knows that a lack of self-worth and root feelings of rejection injure individuals, families, and friendships.

The above-mentioned types of abuse—whether they take the form of broken relationships, abandonment, divorce, false accusations, exclusion from groups, dislike by teachers and other authority figures, ridicule by peers—or any one of hundreds of other such hurtful actions—can and do cause emotional wounds that can hinder people in their efforts to maintain healthy, lasting relationships.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABUSED?

If you have been treated wrongly or improperly, it can deeply affect your emotional state. But to be healed of the pain of abuse, you must *want* to get well.

One of my favorite passages of scriptures (but a startling one) is John, chapter 5. In verse 5, Jesus is described as seeing a man lying by the pool of Bethesda who had been sick with a deep-seated and lingering disease for thirty-eight years. Knowing how long this poor man had been in that terrible condition, Jesus asked him, "Do you want to become well? [Are you really in earnest about getting well?]" (v. 6).

What kind of a question is that to ask someone who has been hurting for that long? It is a proper question because not everyone wants to get well badly enough to do what is required. Wounded emotions can become a prison that locks self in and others out. But Jesus came to open prison doors and to set the captives free (see Luke 4:18-19).

This man at Bethesda, like so many people today, had a deep-seated and lingering disorder for a long, long time. I am sure that after thirty-eight years he had learned how to function with his disorder. People who are in prison function, but they are not free. However, sometimes prisoners, whether physical or emotional, become so accustomed to being in bondage that they settle in with their condition and learn to live with it.

Are you an "emotional prisoner"? If so, how long have you been in that condition? Is it a deep-seated and lingering disorder? Do you want to be free of it? Do you really want to be well? Jesus wants to heal you. He is willing, are you?

DO YOU WANT TO BE FREE AND WELL?

Gaining freedom from emotional bondage is not easy. I will be honest from the beginning and say, point blank, that for many, many people, getting free from the pain of the past will not be easy. This discussion may provoke feelings and emotions they have been trying to hide rather than facing them. You may be one of those people.

Perhaps you have experienced feelings and emotions in the past that have been too painful to deal with, so each time they have surfaced to your memory, you have said to God, "I am not ready yet, Lord! I will face that problem later!" This book will deal with the emotional pain caused by what others may have done to you, and also with your responsibility to God for overcoming those traumas in order to get well.

Some people (actually a great number of people) have a hard time accepting responsibility for their own emotional health. In these pages, we will deal in a practical way with forgiveness, repressed anger, self-pity, the chip-on-the-shoulder syndrome, the you-owe-me attitude, and many, many other poisonous attitudes that need cleansing if you are ever to be fully well.

You may think, *But who will deal with the person who hurt me?* We will get around to that issue too. You may also be wondering, *What makes this woman think that she is such an authority on the subject of emotions—especially mine?* You may have questions you would like to ask me, such as: "Do you have a degree in psychology? Where did you do your study? Have you been through any of the things I am going through? How do you know what it is like to be caught in an emotional prison?"

I have answers to all those questions, and if you are brave enough to face your situation and have determined that you really want to get well, then read on.

I WAS ABUSED

My schooling, degrees, experience, and qualifications to teach on this subject come from personal experience. I always say, "I graduated from the school of life." I claim the words of the prophet Isaiah as my diploma:

THE SPIRIT of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed *and* qualified me to preach the Gospel of good tidings to the meek, the poor, *and* afflicted; He has sent me to bind up *and* heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the [physical and spiritual] captives and the opening of the prison *and* of the eyes to those who are bound,

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord [the year of His favor] and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

To grant [consolation and joy] to those who mourn in Zion—to *give them an ornament (a garland or diadem) of beauty instead of ashes*, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment [expressive] of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, *and* failing spirit—that they may be called oaks of righteousness [lofty, strong, and magnificent, distinguished for uprightness, justice, and right standing with God], the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3 emphasis mine)

God has exchanged my ashes for beauty and has called me to help others to learn to allow Him to do the same for them.

I was sexually, physically, verbally, mentally, and emotionally abused from the time I can remember until I finally left home at the age of eighteen. Actually, several men abused me in my childhood. I have been rejected, abandoned, betrayed, and divorced. I know what it is to be an "emotional prisoner."

My purpose in writing this book is not to give my full testimony in detail, but to give you enough of my own experience so that you will believe that I know what it means to hurt. I can show you how to recover from the pain and trauma of abuse. I want to help you, and I can do that better if you truly believe that I understand what you are going through.⁴

Before I begin discussing the details of my childhood and sharing some of the things I experienced, I wish to say that in no way do I mean any of these things to be degrading to my parents. Since the first release of this book, God has been faithful to restore my relationship with them.

But I have learned that hurting people hurt people; that most people who hurt others have been hurt themselves by someone else. God has enabled me by His grace to say, "Father, forgive them, for they really did not know what they were doing."

I tell this story only for the purpose of helping others who, like me, were abused.