

Dealing With ABUSE

Understanding • Healing • Breaking the Cycle

Understanding Abuse

■ The United Church of God prepared these articles to inform, educate and provide understanding of abuse issues.

by John W. Cafourek

Abuse, in its myriad forms, is a problem of astronomical proportions in our world today. Community educator Ellie Kimaro of Seattle Rape Relief confirms that in the United States one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted by age 16. In addition, other types of abuse such as verbal, emotional and physical battering wreak havoc in the lives of millions.

Broadly defined, abuse is any pattern of behavior that threatens the physical, mental or emotional well-being of another. Abuse is detrimental to the human spirit. The nature of abuse, as in all sin, is progressive if allowed to continue (James 1:13-15). The following behaviors illustrate how abuse progresses.

Attitudes Behind Abuse

To enhance our understanding of abuse, we must begin with its origin. Abuse began with the corrupting of God's truth and the breaking of His laws by Satan, the originator of all abuse. Genesis 1:2 describes the end result of abuse perpetrated by Satan against God's creation. In his rage and quest for power and control, coupled with his inability to direct it at God Himself, Satan lashed out at God's creation, His entire plan and the future home of mankind. The Bible begins with the end result of all abuse—confusion, ruin, destruction, loss and emptiness.

Improper Treatment

Our present world groans and travails under the weight of its continued abuse. Satan has replaced

truth with his principles of power, force, greed, lust, self-centeredness, selfish ambition, deceit and pleasure-seeking, to the point of hedonism. He has successfully convinced the world to pursue these principles. Although we live in the world, we are not to accept its principles and practice its abusive methods.

Paul warns the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:31 that while they must live in the world, they are not to abuse, overuse or be controlled by the things in the world. Abusing the earth results in disease-causing and life-threatening environmental pollution.

Mankind has long fought personal battles against alcohol and other substance abuse. God encourages temperance and control in Proverbs 16:32. It states: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city."

A Deceitful Act

Deceit and manipulation are chief ingredients used by an abuser, resulting in the emotional abuse of the victim. Emotional abuse is the cruellest and longest lasting of any abuse. It scars the heart and crushes the human spirit, leaving the victim traumatically affected for life. Where trust and hope once flourished, there remains only a sense of dread, uncertainty, confusion, hopelessness and helplessness. Misplaced guilt and deep sadness shatter the victim's bond with the abuser.

The pain created from childhood experiences doesn't stop in adulthood. For some it worsens, turning into anger and imploding on itself. Abuse becomes repetitive and cumulative. It is very easily learned and imitated, perpetuating the cycle from one generation to the next (Exodus 34:7). It is only through education that the truth about abuse can be understood and the healing process begin.

If deceit in the abuse cycle fails to accomplish

what the abuser intends, the means of persuasion intensifies and gives rise to the next behavior.

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is vehemently expressed language that unjustly blames the other person. Verbal abusers squelch, put down, correct, criticize, belittle, trivialize, snub, sneer at and, when all else fails, put on displays of rage in order to dominate and control others. Verbal abuse always lowers self-esteem. Victims believe, at least on some level, what they are told, robbing them of self-worth. The abuser is often so good at control that he or she can turn his or her intimidating displays on and off so he or she continues to "look good" to the outside world.

Verbal abusers often use the following techniques.

- Cruel joking and teasing, insisting such comments are humorous.
- Accusing and blaming the victim for pain the abuser has inflicted upon him or her.
- Judging and criticizing, which sends the message, "I will tell you what is wrong with your thoughts and actions, and I will thereby maintain control."
- Trivializing, to make the victim feel insignificant.
- Purposefully undermining to erode confidence and determination.
- Threatening and name-calling to imply the imminence of physical harm.
- Convenient forgetting to maintain control over the victim and waste the victim's time and energy.
- Denial of the inappropriateness of the abusive behavior.
- Angry outbursts used in a scary and threatening manner to help the abuser get his or her own way.

After all the verbal abuser's techniques have been exhausted, he or she intensifies the

quest for control and proceeds to the final phase.

Physical Abuse

This aspect of abuse often includes sexual abuse, battering and the deliberate deprivation of human needs such as food and emergency medical care. If the abuser doesn't get his or her way, the result can be the death of the victim.

In God's Word, we find an example of sexual abuse occurring centuries ago, yet containing all the ramifications experienced by today's victims. Like today, the abuse begins in the family. Second Samuel 13:1-32 describes the incident and the consequences that follow. In verse 2 we see Amnon so consumed with his lust for Tamar, it results in his physical illness. Please notice Tamar is a virgin—completely inexperienced.

A plan is devised (deceit) for Amnon to be alone with Tamar (verses 3-10). Amnon then asks for her cooperation (verses 11, 14). When Tamar refuses and resists, she is raped. Notice the long-term effects she suffers as a result of the sexual abuse. Victims today suffer the same traumas. She is in shock and disbelief at Amnon's actions (verses 15-17, 19). This, in turn, leads to feelings of undeserved humiliation, embarrassment and self-blame.

As Tamar's emotional depression intensifies, she becomes regressively fearful, clinging and needy—desperately looking for help, support and understanding. Instead of encouraging her to talk about it, her brother, Absalom, insists she tell no one. Tamar's fear and despair seize control of her life and render her desolate, lonely and emotionally damaged. Without a concerted effort to overcome the effects of incest, Tamar is to be robbed in her youth of ever experiencing a healthy male-female relationship.

Her brother, Absalom, as with family members of rape victims today, finds himself dealing not only with his own reactions to the assault on a loved one, but also forced to witness the psychological and behavioral changes he sees in the victim. For over two years Absalom witnesses the emotional decline of his sister and plots his retaliation (verses 23 and 32). As in many occurrences of sexual and physical abuse, death is the result.

Physical battering is the last desperate attempt by the abuser to gain control of the victim. The progressive nature and pattern of abuse requires an abuser and a victim. You may not be able to change the abuser, but you can quit being the victim. Here are 14 suggestions to end the cycle of abuse.

1. Don't accept abuse. The longer the pattern continues, the harder it will be to stop.

2. Report any sexual or physical abuse to the police or to other authorities.

3. Take abuse seriously. It is life-threatening. One reason abuse is accepted is because the victim's life has been devalued by self and others. Fear is another reason abuse is accepted.

4. Take emotional abuse as seriously as physical abuse. Physical abuse can cause death, and emotional abuse can result in suicide.

5. Don't believe it is your fault. No one deserves abuse. Abuse is a statement about the abuser, not the victim.

6. Don't accept excuses. This gives the abuser permission to abuse you under those circumstances.

7. Don't confuse love with abuse. If you are loved, you will not be abused. If you are being abused, you are not being loved.

8. Don't deal with conflicts when they are hot. When one or both of you is emotionally

inflamed, judgment and reason are impaired. This is no time to attempt to solve problems. Calm down first.

9. Don't use abuse to stop abuse. Countering abuse with abuse will guarantee a dysfunctional relationship. It will mess up your life and the lives of your children.

10. Insist on professional help. The very first time abuse occurs tell your partner in no uncertain manner the abuse must stop. Talk out your problems, learn conflict-resolution techniques and get communication training from a professional who specializes in abuse issues.

11. Consider the damage to your children. Many abused women who will not take action to protect themselves will at least take action to protect their children. If your children are not already being abused, the odds are they soon will be. An abuser invariably turns his abuse on his children. The damage is psychological and spiritual as well as physical.

12. Consider the damage to the abuser. Abuse also harms the abuser. If you don't stop the abuse, neither of you will have a healthy relationship.

13. Be prepared to leave. If you are an emotional or financial hostage, you and the others who depend on you for protection are vulnerable to continued abuse.

14. Seek God's help and guidance through the power of prayer.

God's Word offers a clear perspective on godly friendships and marriages in which each partner submits to the other in love (Ephesians 5:21). It shows it is His will that all people do their part to live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15; Romans 12:18). First Peter 2:17 and Philippians 2:3 emphasize treating one another with respect. Galatians 6:2 reminds us to bear one another's burdens.

The Answer to Child Abuse: Emotional Health

by **John W. Cafourek**

Melanie Edwards was trying to do everything right at a time when her world was collapsing. She had left her husband—a controlling, abusive man who beat her, choked her and repeatedly threatened to kill her. She petitioned the court system for protection for herself and her 2-year-old daughter. She hired a lawyer versed in domestic violence, found and used a victim's advocate and

concealed her new address. In spite of all these efforts, however, her estranged husband found and fatally shot Melanie and her daughter. He later shot and killed himself.

Conclusive research by legendary FBI behavioral scientist Robert Ressler has shown that violence in one's childhood is often a strong predictor of violent criminality. His research "confirmed an astonishingly consistent statistic about serial killers: 100 percent had been abused as children,

either with violence, neglect or humiliation."

Proliferation of Child Abuse

Child abuse has become rife throughout the world. As indicated in a Cable News Network report, over 1 million children are abused in the United States each year. A variety of social problems have contributed to this growing plague. The normalizing and even glorifying of violence through the media have added to the problem.

Drug and alcohol abuse, poverty and increased family alienation are also contributing factors. Violence within families has threatened the survival of the basic building block of human society and has spawned cycles of abuse from one generation to the next.

All forms of abuse—verbal, emotional, physical, sexual or just plain neglect—produce symptoms in children. Below are some of the signs that may indicate abuse. (There are, however, certain problems and disorders in children that may include some of the following symptoms, but do not indicate abuse. These may include attention deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and other difficulties.)

- The child may look undernourished, with unkempt or inadequate clothing.
- The child may show a loss of natural affection with the abuser.
- The child may act out the abuse, either when alone or when with other children.
- The child may act out anger on smaller children or on small animals.
- The child may fear going somewhere with the abuser.
- The child may resist the abuser's touch.
- The child may show signs of provocativeness in dress, talk or actions.
- The child may become promiscuous.
- The child may have symptoms of anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disorders, sleeping problems or eating disorders.
- The child may have school problems: under-achieving, oppositional and defiant behavior, fighting, drug and alcohol abuse.
- The child may have difficulty managing his or her anger.

Child abuse is the unleashing of physical, verbal, mental, emotional or spiritual damage upon a child. In effect, child abuse is any action or intent that damages a child's development. It involves much more than the obvious things that emblazon the headlines—from the abandonment of newborns to the unconscionable beating, molestation, rape, torture or killing of children. The worst part about child abuse, in any of its various forms, is that it not only robs a child of his or her present potential, but also robs his or her future potential as well.

Awesome Potential of Children

The formative years of early childhood should be a marvelous time of growth and development. Child development specialists strongly emphasize the importance of these early years. Research continues to decipher how experiences and environment profoundly mold the supple neural structure of a child's

young, growing brain. In the article "Your Child's Brain," pediatric neurobiologist Harry Chugani of Wayne State University says, "Early experiences are so powerful...they can completely change the way a person turns out. By adulthood the brain is crisscrossed with more than 100 billion neurons, each reaching out to thousands of others so that, all told, the brain has more than 100 trillion connections. It is those connections—more than the number of galaxies in the known universe—that give the brain its unrivaled powers."

So how should we care for such a bundle of potentiality? Scripture exhorts us, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). We are also warned, "Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Children are a wonderful blessing from the Creator God to the human family. The Bible presents an extremely positive portrayal of their value and worth. "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

Tragically, the world has been deceived into believing and espousing a very negative message about even newborn children. Freudian psychology has influenced many to feel our task is to somehow psychosocialize children as they grow up. Even much of religion tenaciously clings to the notion of children being born evil. The act of procreation is believed to transmit so-called "original sin."

But, what do the Scriptures say? "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me'" (Matthew 18:1-5). What a revolutionary, positive perspective on children!

The alarming increase in the number of children affected by abuse in our society today can seem overwhelming in its powerfully negative impact. Are there any solutions available to us? How can we provide our children with an emotionally healthy foundation? What is the connection between spiritual health and emotional health? Let's examine the platforms upon which emotional and spiritual health are built.

Building Emotional Health

Parental love. "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is essential to our spiritual and emotional development. Parental love is a starting point. Its presence is crucial to emotional health. Parents who are good role models, who are emotionally secure themselves and who provide physical and verbal demonstrations of their love for their children are instilling a solid emotional foundation. Parental love includes warm expressions of appreciation for the child at all times, not just when the child achieves unqualified success. A close personal relationship with God as our Parent will increase parental love. Even so, parental love does not stand alone. It must be balanced with two additional building blocks of emotional health—trust and security.

Trust to a child can be compared to the indispensable quality of faith in a Christian's life. "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25). What facilitates the development of trust? Parent-child bonding is an important beginning. This is accomplished through successfully meeting the child's emotional and physical needs. Providing a calm environment is also essential to this process as well as the basics of food, clothing and sanitary living conditions. Supplying appropriate physical contact, such as hugging and kissing, further develops a child's trust. Verbal expressions of love continue to reinforce the bond of trust in a child's life.

Security. "For You are my rock and my fortress" (Psalm 31:3). Total confidence in God is our greatest source of spiritual security. Similarly, emotional security comes from a child seeing his or her parents' love as unconditional. This does not mean that all behavior is acceptable, since a child cannot feel secure without reasonable parental boundaries. Such boundary setting must be intertwined with love, which is "the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). Nonetheless, a child should know that his or her value to the parent is not based merely on good behavior, but on the child's intrinsic worth.

The setting of reasonable limits on a child needs to be done in a clear way, so the child knows exactly what is expected of him or her. It must be accompanied with parental consistency, predictability and the willingness to enforce limits in a firm but loving manner. Implementation of a schedule also helps build a positive sense of security.

Once a child has developed the ability to trust, feel secure and loved, this must be maintained. For example, physical abuse or neglect can erase or destroy that ability. There are two vital aspects:

(1) helping the child learn to trust and (2) avoiding traumas or tragedies that destroy trust.

Risk taking. Appropriate risk taking is another building block of emotional health. Some people may initially question its inclusion. However, appropriate risk taking must be one of our goals for our children, if we truly want them to succeed in life. There is no such thing as a risk-free life, but there are both appropriate and inappropriate risks. Trying out for the team or working diligently to make the academic honor roll are examples of appropriate risks. Smoking or taking drugs are examples of inappropriate risks. Parental instruction and encouragement should help children see the difference between the good and the bad. The emotional platforms of security and trust provide the launching pad for appropriate risk taking. Spiritually, this is walking “by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

A sense of accomplishment is the next emotional platform. This is the ability to succeed. Encouragement is a crucial part that is often overlooked or neglected. To be effective, encouragement must first be deserved. It must also be genuinely encouraging and uplifting, not a form of manipulation or introduction to criticism. We all need encouragement, but it is especially important in child development. Acceptance and

a positive outlook also send powerful messages that translate into an “I can” attitude in a child’s life. Spiritually, this translates into the attitude expressed by the apostle Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Sympathy is another part of emotional health. Scripture describes this as “having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). This aspect is often neglected or overlooked in our society today, with sad results. Sympathy is identification with another person’s feelings, often because we have had the same or similar experience or feeling. Learning and nurturing the ability to feel sympathy for the suffering of others is a vital part of developing healthy relationships with other people.

Empathy is a somewhat rare emotional ability to feel and express genuine concern for another person’s suffering. This requires a high degree of emotional maturity, beyond what should be expected for children. In fact, many adults lack empathy. Spiritually, we can liken empathy to *agape*, the outgoing love of God. This is manifested in our lives through the Holy Spirit. None of us is complete emotionally or spiritually without God’s Spirit. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but

of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Seek Counsel

Prevention of child abuse is an important obligation of each person, particularly parents. Parents who have been abused and have concerns about the possibility of abusing their own children should seek counseling through a qualified minister or abuse counselor. It is often necessary for adults who have been abused as children to get help in order to break the cycle of abuse. With God’s help and that of qualified professionals, healing and the development of healthy parent-child relationships can occur.

It is our goal as Christians to become emotionally and spiritually healthy in every way. However, reality reminds us that many lives have been scarred by the ravages of verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse. All these abuses are the result of sin. When we quit sinning, we will also quit abusing. God’s world of the future will expunge this great negator and destroyer of human potential. In the meantime, we need to take the necessary steps now to prevent or overcome childhood abuse and trauma. The next article explains the arduous but marvelous process of emotional healing.

Emotional Healing: A Biblical Perspective

■ What does God say about how the pain and suffering experienced in today’s world can be healed?

by **John W. Cafourek**

From the extremes of war and genocide, to the passive neglect of the elderly and children, this sinful world has foisted upon all of us a vital need for emotional healing. Indeed, emotional pain and suffering abound in a world described by the Bible as “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4).

Understanding Our Nature

Human nature is self-centered rather than God-centered. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). Such self-centeredness can blind us to the causes and effects of our own words and

actions. It can also block our sensitivities to the pain we inflict upon others.

In addition, the wrong choices of others—parents, spouses, children and friends—can bring us pain as well. God addresses this phenomenon as He gives the Ten Commandments. “For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6). We need to earnestly seek God’s merciful emotional healing.

Scripture expresses the enormous scope of abusive thoughts and actions. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell

you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

Painful consequences of these abuses may be physical, mental, spiritual and/or emotional. Whether we have abused others, sometimes even repeating what has been done to us, or have been a victim of abuse, our thought processes may hold us in bondage to repetitive behavior and unresolved emotional suffering.

Thoughts and Emotions Produce Our Actions

Thoughts and feelings play an important role in our lives. As our feelings connect with our thoughts, emotions are formed. “God created us with emotions so that our lives might be enriched. God could have created us without emotions; we could be intelligent, calculating, insensitive machines. But life would be exceedingly dull” (*Managing Your Emotions*, Erwin

Lutzer, p. 18). Instead, God has given us an astonishing capacity for emotion in seemingly infinite combinations of types and intensities. Unfortunately, emotions and feelings are often viewed in negative terms. As a result, we may attempt to ignore some of our emotions and their effects in our lives.

Science is only beginning to understand the emotional component of our mind. “Only in recent years has there emerged a scientific model of the emotional mind that explains how so much of what we do can be emotionally driven—how we can be so reasonable at one moment and so irrational the next—and the sense in which the emotions have their own reasons and their own logic” (*Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman, p. 291).

The insightful wisdom of Solomon reminds us that “as he [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Seeking godly wisdom is paramount. “He who gets wisdom loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding will find good” (Proverbs 19:8). The process of emotional healing requires following God’s instructions about how to manage our emotions, not deny them. God actually gives us permission to feel anger. He also enjoins us to express it properly. “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

The first step is the acknowledgement of our true thoughts and feelings—and their validation in the Bible. Self-condemnation can damage our faith and confidence in God. “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God” (1 John 3:20-21). The next step is the expunging of negative, destructive thoughts and attitudes such as futility, depression, unresolved anger and bitterness. This necessitates a new attitude and a new mind, motivated by forgiveness and love.

Spiritual Healing

Our healing process begins with our calling from God. This calling imparts to our minds spiritual understanding previously unavailable to us. God removes our spiritual blinders, enabling us to see ourselves more as we really are. He also imparts to us an understanding of His laws and the recognition of our need to repent and to receive His Spirit. This is a vital part of the process of spiritual healing. Jesus said, “Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

Another scripture identifies mental and

emotional healing as a crucial part of Jesus Christ’s ministry. “He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

The Bible also explains the complete healing process in terms of the transformation from “the old man” to “the new man.” We are exhorted, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Paul explains how this process of transformation works. We must “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

God’s Love

God is love. This is what He is, how He thinks, what motivates Him and what He will always be. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). It is God’s desire for us to also be motivated by His love.

He wants us to love Him, to love His truth and to love one another even as we love ourselves. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9). This passage is also reminding us how a proper love for ourselves is important. We must yield ourselves to God—to His Spirit, allowing His love, not a negative self-centered spirit, to motivate us. Thus *agape* or a God-plane level of love becomes our code of conduct throughout the process of emotional healing.

A Biblical Anger Management Program

Anger is often a major impediment to emotional healing. “If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.” While the exact statistics of this ancient Chinese proverb may be debatable, modern researchers agree with its basic sentiment—that anger can affect our lives in powerful ways. Some specialists call anger potentially lethal. One medical doctor expresses it very bluntly when he writes, “Anger kills” (*Anger Kills*, Redford Williams, M.D., and Virginia Williams, Ph.D., p. 3).

“Hostile people—those with high levels of cynicism, anger, and aggression—are at higher risk of developing life-threatening illness than

are their less hostile counterparts. Hostile people are also more prone to engage in a number of risky behaviors—eating more, drinking more alcohol, smoking—that could damage their health” (ibid., p. 60).

Anger is an often-misunderstood emotion. Many misconceptions and myths masquerade as truth. Perhaps many of us would benefit from an intensive, in-depth study of the subject. It is a mistake to deny that we do get angry or to believe that getting angry is always wrong. “Angry feelings can go underground. They often don’t display themselves in active forms such as hitting, pinching, throwing things, or slamming doors. They take more subtle forms like silence, irritation, resentment, bitterness, and hatred” (*Anger Is a Choice*, Tim LaHaye, p.13).

Learning how to recognize and effectively deal with anger is an essential part of emotional healing. Failure to properly manage or control our anger can result in disastrous consequences. “Damage to personal relationships is one of the most common costs of anger, and probably the worst. The relationships that are damaged are often your best... The most frequent targets of anger include spouses, children, coworkers, and friends” (*How to Control Your Anger Before It Controls You*, Albert Ellis, Ph.D., p. 3).

“Another reason to curb anger is that it can easily lead to aggression... It is estimated that in the United States about a million and a half women are battered by their partners each year. Approximately 40 percent of all the women who are murdered in this country every year die at the hands of their husbands” (ibid., p. 9).

Clearly, uncontrolled anger is a powerful force, capable of wreaking great destruction—and even death. “Deciding to live your life with less anger may be one of the most important decisions you will ever make” (ibid., p. 17).

As we noted earlier, the Bible provides excellent advice on how to deal with anger. “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Notice the example of how Jesus Christ, as He cleansed the temple of wrongdoing, expressed righteous anger—yet without sinning. “And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’

Then His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up’” (John 2:14-17).

In contrast to Christ’s example, mankind’s history is replete with cases of uncontrolled anger resulting in sin. Explosive anger shattered the first human family. Cain’s unbridled anger erupted into the murder of his brother, Abel.

“And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:4-8).

Uncontrolled and unresolved anger prevents us from healing emotionally. When we have been hurt or offended by others, God wants us to forgive, and pray for the offender. Harboring our anger makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to forgive others.

Forgiveness

God’s forgiveness of our sins is not unconditional. It is predicated upon our repentance. “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

When we repent, God our Father applies the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Through this process, the penalty incurred by our sin is paid for us. Our sins are forgiven, and the slate is wiped clean. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

Forgiving others in our human relationships may often seem more difficult. Relationships that have been strained or broken are not easily repaired or reestablished. Indeed, sometimes it may be unwise to reestablish the relationship. Anger, hurt, resentment and desire for revenge are very potent forces.

Jesus Christ has given us specific instruction that helps us understand that forgiving others is not merely a recommended course of action. Rather, it is absolutely essential, if we ourselves are to continue being forgiven by our heavenly Father. “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive

your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26).

Our willingness and our efforts to forgive others are a pivotal part of the process of emotional healing. If we refuse to forgive others, our own emotional healing becomes short-circuited. It is only through forgiving others that we ourselves begin to heal from the effects of our anger, turmoil, grief and pain. We must be willing to deal constructively with our past—and then move forward with confidence in God.

As Paul eloquently expressed it, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...” (Philippians 3:13).

As we move forward, the next step entails doing something else that is contrary to our human nature. This step is the godly action of praying for our enemies.

Praying for Our Enemies

Enemies are the people who have been the most hurtful, caused the most suffering and produced the most devastating effects in our lives. They are often those who have been close to us. They may be people who have had considerable influence over us in some way. Their words and actions have created deep scars or left gaping wounds in our heart and mind.

Even as we strive to forgive them, we can be overwhelmed by the havoc and anguish that still remains. God’s solution may seem untenable or irrational to us. “Therefore ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head’” (Romans 12:20).

The instruction becomes clearer when we consider the exhortation of Jesus Christ. “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... Therefore you shall be perfect [Greek *teleios*, complete, mature], just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:44, 48).

When we begin to pray for our enemies, we begin to diminish their effect upon our lives and end an adversarial relationship. Through the process of asking God to bless and forgive them, our revenge and hurtful feelings begin to leave. The more we pray for them, the more the negative feelings toward them diminish. As we request blessings and healing for our enemies, our own healing will begin to take place.

In certain cases of personal injury, anger or rage, we may feel the need to ask God to remove the pain from our life and grant us His peace. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Reconciliation

Becoming reconciled to God is a good starting point in our quest for reconciliation in all of our relationships. As Paul exhorted, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are “reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).

Reconciliation in our human relationships can be a difficult process. It must begin with each person accepting accountability for his own behavior. Next, there must be an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. This must be accompanied by the replacement of deceitfulness with openness and honesty in the relationship. Finally, a firm verbal commitment must be made to take the specific steps necessary to discontinue all inappropriate behavior.

Obviously, not everyone is willing to do his or her part toward reconciliation of the relationship. Indeed, attempting to reconcile with one who continues to be an abuser is not wise, nor is it God’s will. On the other hand, even when the relationship cannot be reconciled, we can still know that it certainly is God’s will for us to experience His emotional healing. Jesus Christ gives us great encouragement. “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Recommended Books

Albert Ellis, Ph.D., *How to Control Your Anger Before It Controls You*, Carol Publishing, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1999.

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam, New York, 1995.

Tim LaHaye and Bob Phillips, *Anger Is a Choice*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982.

Erwin Lutzer, *Managing Your Emotions*, SP Publications, Wheaton, Illinois, 1983.

Redford Williams, M.D., and Virginia Williams, Ph.D., *Anger Kills*, HarperCollins, New York, 1993.

What Christians Need to Know About Sexual Abuse

■ What is sexual abuse? Why is it so devastating? What are its effects? How long do the effects last? How can victims recover or even heal from the trauma?

by **Helen Richards and John Cafourek**

Television, radio, newspapers and newsmagazines are full of stories about sexual abuse. Priests or ministers abusing congregants, rape by strangers or by dates, even parents abusing their own children are some of the horrifying items grabbing today's headlines.

What is sexual abuse? Why is it so devastating? What are the effects of it? How long do the effects last? Can victims recover or even heal from the trauma? In this article we will examine this deplorable scourge. In addition, we will look at what is involved in the arduous process of recovery from sexual abuse.

Definition of Sexual Abuse

The term *sexual abuse* covers a wide variety of inappropriate sexual behaviors and actions. It includes a vast realm or spectrum from so-called "victimless" crimes as voyeurism (peeping) and indecent exposure to child molestation, incest and rape.

Voyeurism and indecent exposure may not seem, at face value, to be sex abuse, but they are often the "gateway" acts that start an offender on a path that leads to the more serious ones. To include the whole gamut of offenses, our definition of sexual abuse must be broad. Sexual abuse occurs when one person invades the physical or psychological space of another

without consent or performs sexual acts on the victim. As a result of this invasion, the victims suffer physical or psychological harm or both.

One prevalent myth that surrounds the crimes of sexual abuse is that the offender is acting out of sexual needs and desires, and that the goal of these actions is sexual gratification. Research indicates that for most offenders, however, the primary motive is power. The offender has a compulsion to overpower and control another person. For some offenders, the motivation is intense anger toward women and a desire to wreak vengeance for real or imagined wrongs. The offender does not view a victim as a real person, but as an object to satisfy the need for power and control.

Scope of the Problem

How pervasive is the problem of sexual abuse? How many people are affected by it? According to statistics compiled by the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), there were 261,000 victims, aged 12 or older, of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault in 2001. One out of every six American women, or a total of 17.7 million women, have been a victim of either a completed or attempted rape in their lifetime. Ninety percent of American rape victims in 1999 were women, while 10 percent were men. Three percent of all American men (about 2.8 million) have been victims of sexual assault.

Almost half (44 percent) of rape victims are under age 18. Seven percent of girls (aged 5 to 8) and 3 percent of boys (aged 5 to 8) reported that they had been sexually abused. This figure increases in the 9- to 12-year-old age group to 12 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys.

These figures, as shocking as they are, do not tell the whole story. Crimes of sexual abuse are highly likely to go unreported. Many victims believe that they are somehow at fault for the abuse and are full of shame and guilt. Also, many fear reprisal if they report the offense. Again according to RAINN, only about 28 percent (less than 1 in 3) of actual rapes and sexual assaults were reported to the police. Among children the statistics of silence are even greater. Of children in grades 5 to 12 who had been sexually abused, 48 percent of the boys and 29 percent of the girls told no one, not even a friend.

Since the likelihood of capture, prosecution and conviction diminishes the longer the time between the assault and the report, keeping silent allows the abuser to continue to abuse without fear. Some researchers estimated that only 5 percent of all rapists ever spend any time in jail for their crimes; 19 out of 20 do not.

Effects on the Victims

The effects of sexual abuse differ depending on the age of the victim, the type of abuse (whether it is rape or childhood sexual assault) and the severity and duration of the abuse. The psychological symptoms resulting from violent assaults fit the diagnostic criteria of acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

These two syndromes are clinically very similar. The former defines symptoms that arise within two days of a traumatic event and last no more than four weeks after the event. The latter diagnosis is used either when the symptoms arise some time after the precipitating event, or when the symptoms of acute stress disorder last longer than four weeks.

Sexual Abuse Trauma Recovery Process*

CRISIS

Shock
Going crazy
Numbness
Denial
Emotional confusion

CRUD

Anger
Depression
Isolation
Mistrust
Shame & guilt
Loneliness
Physical symptoms
Identity problems
Betrayal
Relationship problems

ACCEPTANCE

Sharing with others
Understanding triggers
Realizing the perpetrator is sick
Understanding grooming process
Letting go
Closure

* This process can be a cycle if not brought to full closure.

The root cause of the symptoms is the intense fear generated by the assault. The victim persistently reexperiences the abuse in the form of recurrent and intrusive memories, dreams and flashbacks. The victim cannot stop thinking about the assault, no matter how hard he or she tries. The memories invade sleep in the form of terrifying dreams, which prompt many victims to avoid sleep. In many cases, the victim relives the experience through flashbacks—intensely vivid mental images, which cause the victim to believe that the assault is happening right at that moment. Things, places, situations and feelings that remind the victim of the assault often trigger these symptoms.

For example, a woman who was raped by a man in a blue jacket may start to feel fearful whenever she sees a businessman in a navy blazer. Additionally, victims may experience bodily symptoms (racing heartbeat, rapid breathing, sweating and dizziness) when they encounter mental or physical reminders.

Three months after an attack, a rape survivor expressed these feelings as quoted in the Texas Department of Health Advocate Training Manual, 1994. “Sometimes I think the feelings are more intense now than they were at first. I was on the trolley and two guys came and sat down across from me. They looked like the two that raped me. I could almost feel like I was being grabbed again. I just have to keep thinking intellectually it won’t happen, but my gut reaction is so intense...”

In response to this fear, the victims begin avoiding those things that remind them of the trauma—refusing to talk about the event and attempting to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with it; refusing to participate in activities or going to places that remind them of the assault; and withdrawing from normal activities, people or feelings. Many victims believe they will never have a normal life with a career, marriage and children. In addition, victims often exhibit increased arousal, startlingly easily. They are often more irritable, bursting into rage more quickly. They may have great difficulty sleeping. Concentration suffers, and the sufferer is often in a state of heightened vigilance, constantly on the lookout for danger.

It is important to note that these symptoms are the body and mind’s normal fear responses to extremely threatening situations. War veterans, firefighters, police officers and kidnap victims are only a few examples of people who experience these symptoms as a result of their exposure to life-threatening incidents. The fear responses are natural defense mechanisms designed to protect us from extreme danger.

With time and therapeutic support, the symptoms can fade and the victim can reorganize his or her life along more normal lines. Sometimes these symptoms do not arise for months or even years after the event. Children, especially, repress the troubling memories and only begin experiencing the effects in adulthood.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

If a child is being sexually abused, his or her normal behavior may change. He or she may become depressed; have trouble sleeping or eating; or become angry, withdrawn, anxious and afraid. He or she may be afraid to be separated from you and cling to you.

Experts look for two other factors that often indicate, when they occur together, that sexual abuse is occurring: (1) Sexual preoccupation (or knowledge that is inappropriate for the child’s age) and (2) physical complaints, such as rashes, headaches or stomachaches that have no medical explanation.

If your child tells you that he or she has been abused, say you are glad he or she told you. Do not pressure the child, but draw him or her out with careful questions. Tell your child that you believe him or her—fear of parental disbelief often keeps children from reporting abuse. Case notes have shown that few children lie about sexual abuse. Tell your child that the abuse was not his or her fault. Make it clear that you do not blame the child, as most children will feel guilty about what happened.

You may want to have your child examined by a doctor. Try to find a doctor who has had some experience dealing with abused children and who will be sensitive to your child’s feelings. You may also need to contact the local authorities to report the abuse. In many areas, professionals (such as a doctor who examines your child) are required to report sexual abuse to the authorities.

Differences Between Adult and Child Sexual Assault

The following is a case history of a sexually abused child. Tommy was an outgoing, cheerful, fun-loving 6-year-old boy. He showed interest and ability in sports, so his conscientious, dedicated parents enrolled him in a city-sponsored softball team. Tommy’s coach was well-respected and a successful coach. He took great interest in Tommy, praising him and singling him out for much attention. He scheduled private coaching sessions with the parents’ permission. However, the “coaching” Tommy was receiving was not related to

softball. After two years of special attention, Tommy was devastated to see his beloved coach turn away from him and begin to spend time with a younger boy.

Tommy seemed to recover from his disappointment, but two years later, he began getting into trouble in school. He was expelled for fighting and then charged with assault. He was sentenced to a counseling program for boys in trouble. During the individual sessions, he confided to the therapist what his coach had done. Charges were brought against the coach (a prominent person in the community).

Tommy and his family were outcasts in their small town. Tommy went through several years of acting-out behavior. At the age of 15, he attempted suicide twice. His parents were grief-stricken and guilt-ridden. They blamed themselves. Tommy’s mother became clinically depressed. After many years of therapy and hard work, Tommy graduated from high school and started working.

Sexual assault of adults is a violent, vicious and traumatic attack. The perpetrator, whether known to the victim or not, is acting out of a need to overpower and control. Thus, he or she is willing to use whatever force is necessary to achieve that purpose. The victim, having the advantage of being an adult, knows that the rape is what it is—an attack and an isolated incident. The trauma is overpowering and difficult to heal from, but the adult has the ability to begin to deal with it as soon as he or she chooses to face it. For children, however, healing may not begin for years, sometimes even decades after the abuse. This is because of the mental and emotional immaturity of the child and the method of attack that child abusers often use.

Abuse of children is done most often by someone they know, even someone they trust. The assailant “grooms” the victim, gradually building a friendship with the child. Slowly, by degrees, he (child abusers are mostly male) begins exposing the child first to “innocent” touching and then progressing to more sexualized activities. At each step, he reassures the victim that he won’t hurt the child. By so doing, he overpowers the child’s natural reluctance and fear.

This results in a host of confused and conflicting feelings in the victim. On the one hand, the child feels physical pain, fear and rage. But these feelings are soothed away by the accomplished molester and “explained away.” On the other hand, the attention lavished on the victim makes the child feel special and loved. All children have the need for these feelings to be satisfied. The abuser twists these natural

emotions into a means for him to get his own needs met at the expense of the child's well-being.

To add to the victim's confusion, the acts themselves may be physically pleasurable. They may feel good, but the child feels ashamed or "dirty" because on a deep level he or she knows that the acts are wrong.

Additionally, the child receives a mixed message about trust. The abuser is often someone the child should intrinsically trust—a family member, a teacher, a coach or a neighbor. The child ought to be able to feel safe around such a person, but the acts bring pain. So, what is the message the child receives? "This person says I can trust him not to hurt me, but he is hurting me. So there is something wrong with me. If this person who is supposed to protect me from harm is actually harming me, who can I trust to protect me?"

Considering the complex and contradictory emotional fallout of childhood sexual abuse, it is understandable why a child's mind seeks to protect itself from this pain. The feelings are overwhelming. The mind often represses the memories and feelings until adulthood when the person will cognitively be more able to deal with it.

Even in adulthood, however, the intense pain and feelings can devastate the individual. The adult has an enormous task to heal from the abuse. He or she must deal with the memories and flashbacks, feel the pain and anger and acknowledge their effects on his or her life, and face the feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame that accompany them. Survivors of childhood sexual assault experience a mourning phase in which they grieve for their lost innocence and happy childhood. Other challenges on the way to recovery include learning to trust again and developing healthy interpersonal boundaries.

Secondary Victims

Crimes of sexual abuse involve more than the perpetrator and victim. They spread out their tentacles like an octopus to include the parents, siblings, friends, mate and potential mates of the original victim. Support, or lack of it, can help or hinder the victim's recovery from the trauma.

Family members have strong emotional reactions to the assault. They are distressed that the survivor has been injured and may be fearful that the injuries are permanent or life-threatening. They are also very angry at the perpetrator for injuring their loved one, at the survivor for not "fighting hard enough" or being "careful" enough and at themselves for not preventing the attack or not being "protective" enough.

Family members can also feel a desire for revenge against the attacker. They may even act on this desire. Family members often feel guilty that they were not able to protect the survivor. Relatives and friends feel a great sense of loss for the survivor, themselves and the family. A common feeling is that "things will never be the same."

Spouses and potential spouses experience these emotions too. They also may believe some of the myths about rape and sexual abuse. They may not be able to recognize that these crimes are not about sexual relations but about anger, power and control. Therefore, spouses may feel that adultery has been committed and the sanctity of the marital relations has been violated. Many survivors experience sexual difficulties after their attack, which the spouse often interprets as rejection. Because of these factors, the divorce rate among survivors of sexual assault is quite high.

Additionally, adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse have great difficulty in developing and maintaining normal, healthy intimate relations with spouses, especially after they have begun to process their experiences. The stresses on the relationship while the survivor is healing can often be overwhelming to the relationship.

Many times family members may fear to accept the truth of the sexual abuse. This often happens in cases of incest. The nonoffending parent may fear the breakup of the family, and out of that fear will refuse to believe the child's report. This is particularly true in instances where a wife may fear that she will lose her husband if she acts on what her child is telling her. She may accuse her child of lying about the abuse or discount the report in some other way.

Another situation where parents may refuse to act occurs when one sibling abuses another. Whenever a victim is disbelieved, or worse, accused of "making it up," the trauma is magnified. This is called "secondary wounding." As a result of this wounding, the victim suppresses the memories. When the victim finally begins the healing process, he or she must also be healed from the secondary wounding.

The healing process takes time but can, with patience and love, resolve into stronger, happier relationships. For that to happen, all family members must be educated to the effects of sexual abuse and assault and be committed to provide the support and encouragement each needs for the family to heal.

Biblical Examples

Sexual abuse is not new. It has been

perpetrated since the beginning of recorded history. The Old Testament of the Bible contains three specific instances of sexual abuse. The first incident is described in Genesis 19:30-38. This case involved Abraham's nephew Lot and two of his daughters. The daughters initiated incestuous relations with their father, perhaps in the mistaken belief that the entire world had been destroyed (this occurs shortly after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) and they were the only humans left on the earth.

The second incident is described in Genesis 34. It involved the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, by Shechem the Hivite. In this case, the Bible makes it clear that she was raped. "Now Dinah the daughter of Leah... went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her" (Genesis 34:1-2).

Clearly, the emotional reactions of family members toward a rape victim have not changed down through the millennia. When Jacob first heard that his daughter had been defiled, he waited until his sons came back from taking care of the herds in the fields. When Dinah's brothers heard about the rape, they "were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done" (Genesis 34:7).

In the meantime, Shechem had asked his father to arrange a marriage between him and Dinah. He offered to pay as dowry anything Jacob and his sons required. Jacob's sons, however, wanted vengeance. So they lied to Shechem and his father and demanded that the entire city be circumcised. Shechem and his father agreed to this condition. After the city had complied with it, Simeon and Levi, Jacob's sons, attacked the city, killed all the men and took Dinah back with them. The rest of Jacob's sons plundered the city and took all its wealth. Jacob remonstrated with his sons because of their actions, but they defended themselves by saying, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" (Genesis 34:31).

Jacob, apparently, was willing to overlook the rape of his daughter to keep peace with the Hivites. He responded like many family members of sexual abuse victims who turn a blind eye to the reality of the abuse to avoid confronting the abuser. His concern seemed to be more for how his sons' actions would impact his relations with his neighbors than for his daughter.

No doubt the punishment exacted by Jacob's sons was excessive. And, to be

sure, there were other issues involved. However, the emotional reactions of Jacob's sons were the same as many family members of abuse victims today. They were angry, distressed and wanted to avenge their sister's honor.

The next account concerns the rape of Tamar, King David's daughter, by her half-brother, Amnon (2 Samuel 13). Amnon desired Tamar, and he devised a scheme to get her alone with him in his house (2 Samuel 13:1-10). Once there, he asked her to lie with him. She resisted and even told him that if he wanted her, all he had to do was ask their father. She told him that King David would allow them to be married if Amnon requested. She begged him not to rape her (2 Samuel 13:11-13). This passage shows that she did not consent.

The next verse shows that Amnon's goal was not honorable. "However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her" (2 Samuel 13:14). Clearly, he was only interested in forcing his will on her. The law of God states that if a man seduces a virgin, then he is to pay the bride-price and marry her (Exodus 22:16). However, once Amnon had forced Tamar, he rejected her and ordered her out of his house. Tamar begged him not to reject her saying, "This evil of sending me away is worse than the other that you did to me" (2 Samuel 13:16).

Clearly, Tamar attempted to follow God's law, but Amnon was not willing to do so. His aim was to force Tamar to do as he willed. His motivation was to have power and control over Tamar—the same motivation driving sexual abusers.

Tamar's reaction to this attack is also typical of sexual abuse victims, with allowances for cultural differences. She tore her clothes and put ashes on her head (signs of mourning) and cried (2 Samuel 13:19). After telling her full brother, Absalom, what had happened, she stayed secluded and depressed in his house. Many victims of a sexual attack withdraw from their previous activities and from associating with other people. The Bible does not record what happened to Tamar after that. She may have stayed in isolation for the rest of her life, or she may have recovered.

King David was "very angry" (2 Samuel 13:21), but he took no direct action. Absalom was also extremely angry. He hated Amnon (2 Samuel 13:22). Amnon's rape of Tamar set in motion events that led to his

own death at the hand of Absalom (2 Samuel 13:23-39) and ultimately to Absalom's attempt to usurp his father's throne. David's inaction allowed Absalom to have the opportunity to feel angry and embittered toward his brother. Absalom chose to use his desire for revenge as an excuse for committing murder. He also felt anger toward his father for failing to protect and avenge Tamar. He allowed himself to brood on these wrongs and become so embittered that he felt justified in overthrowing his father.

God's Instructions to Prevent Sexual Abuse

God created sex for two main purposes: reproduction and love between a husband and wife. Sex is reserved for the marriage relationship only, and the Bible upholds virginity and abstinence outside of marriage. Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18 forbid adultery. The penalties were very strict. Both parties were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:10). Betrothal was considered as binding as marriage, so if a man had sexual relations with a betrothed woman, the penalty was the same as for adultery.

God also put hedges around relationships within families. In Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20 list in detail those relationships where sexual intimacies are forbidden. They include fathers and daughters, sons and mothers, sisters and brothers, grandparents and grandchildren, aunts and nephews, uncles and nieces, as well as the spouses of these relationships. God indicates in Leviticus 18 that these laws are in response to the practices of the Egyptians. They believed that the pharaoh's line descended through the female line. Therefore, for a father to pass on the office to his son, it was necessary for brothers to marry sisters.

Close intermarriage allows for recessive genetic traits to be more often expressed and passed down. Some of these traits cause disabilities and infirmities with tremendous suffering. By not allowing close family members to marry and have children, these traits do not appear as frequently. Also, having sexual relations between close family members blurs the boundaries between the roles of parent/child and spouse.

Parents are supposed to protect their children from harm, not exploit them to fulfill their own desires. Parents are commanded to raise children who love and obey God (Deuteronomy 6:1-2, 7;

Ephesians 6:4). A parent who violates the laws of Leviticus 18 is clearly not obeying these commands. A family member who violates these laws is also failing to uphold the God-ordained roles of the family. The parent's role is to teach, guide, nurture and protect children until they are able to be fully functioning adults. If a parent steps out of that role into that of a sexual partner, the child's ability to enter into a healthy adult relationship with a mate and into a healthy relationship with God is severely hampered.

Much additional information is available on the subject of sexual abuse. Many Web sites offer both information and help. However, it may be wise to search out Web sites that are sponsored by reputable national organizations. Protection of privacy and assurance of safety and emotional well-being are important considerations. A list of helpful Web sites might include www.rainn.org and www.human-nature.org/ as well as many other sites. The first-mentioned of these, the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, is the nation's largest antisexual assault organization. RAINN operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE and carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help victims and ensure that rapists are brought to justice.

Sexual abuse is not the victim's fault. It is the responsibility of the abuser. If you know someone who has been sexually abused, you can help by offering support to the victim. Victims need to hear repeatedly, "It wasn't your fault." Victims need to hear that they can recover. They need to know that they are not alone and that others have not stopped caring for them. They especially need to understand that God still loves them. And, finally, they need to understand how to break the sexual abuse trauma cycle to further the process of emotional and spiritual healing. The next article addresses breaking the cycle of abuse.

References/Further Reading

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J. Nevid, S. Rathis and B. Greene, *Abnormal Psychology*, 1994.

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The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), www.rainn.org, for statistics about rape and sexual abuse.

Breaking the Cycle of Abuse

■ Abuse statistics are appalling, but many who are being abused never report it. How can we break the vicious cycle and experience God's divine intervention and healing from abuse?

by **John W. Cafourek**

"I feel totally betrayed, and I do not know what to do! At this point I just can't seem to forgive my abuser ... there has been no apology and no admission of wrongdoing ... All of this is affecting my spiritual life, my ability to take the Passover ... I also cannot find any peace, nor am I able to really forgive myself..."

Abuse is an extremely painful reality in our world today. Statistics regarding abuse, as shocking and appalling as they may be, give an incomplete picture. Much abuse is never reported, for a variety of reasons. Meanwhile, the normalizing and even glorifying of violence by the media further exacerbates the problem. Within some families, this growing violence has now resulted in the spawning of multigenerational cycles of abuse.

How can we break the vicious cycle of abuse? The process of healing from abuse involves a number of vital steps, some of which are primarily spiritual. As a result, God's people have the opportunity to access a marvelous additional blessing—experiencing God's divine intervention and healing from abuse.

Begin With Repentance and Forgiveness

"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Jesus taught repentance as an individual responsibility and requirement before God. But how should we respond to abuse when the perpetrator professes to be repentant? Many victims of abuse have wrestled with this enigma.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to break the cycle of abuse and to really progress through the healing process without understanding how repentance and forgiveness interact. Let's be sure we understand that, unmistakably, Jesus Christ teaches us to forgive others. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not

forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

How should we apply this instruction when abuse has been perpetrated? Notice the common misconception evidenced in the following example. "He broke my arm, and then I had to get right back into bed with him," grieved a woman whose faith community had forced her into a premature reconciliation with her husband. Too often Christians demand that others forgive immediately, before it is appropriate or advisable, before there can be adequate contrition, reflection or amelioration" (*No Place for Abuse*, p. 113).

The Bible certainly does instruct us to forgive. However, it does not insist that we return to the abusive circumstances that occasioned the offense in the first place. Forgiveness does not necessarily imply or require reconciliation. Especially in the case of domestic violence, reconciling may throw open the door to continued abuse. This can unwittingly encourage the continuation, the frequency and even the severity of the abuse.

"In the healing process, we need to be clear-sighted enough to understand the responsibility of the person who wronged us. If we are partially at fault, that must be acknowledged; but ultimately we must also understand what is not our fault and not our responsibility. If we are confused about responsibility, we will probably continue to harbor vengeful feelings" (*No Place for Abuse*, p. 114).

What Forgiveness Is Not

- Forgiveness is not condoning or pardoning harmful behavior, which is sin.
- Forgiveness is not healing the wound lightly, saying "peace, peace" when there is no peace.
- Forgiveness is not an expectation of any degree of future relationship with the person who has perpetrated the abuse.

What Forgiveness Is

Aphiemi, the main New Testament Greek word translated "forgive," means to put something away, set it free, as well as to put one thing aside in order to move on to something else. Forgiveness involves the putting away of anger toward another, putting it aside so that it no longer controls our lives.

Our part in forgiving certainly includes being willing to put the matter in God's hands

and to pray for His will to be done. As Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The mind of Christ in us has the awesome power to grant us true peace of mind. We are assured that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

The Path to Healing

"The healing path is not a jaunt in the park. It is a life-rattling, heart-revealing journey that takes us through danger, harm, heartache—and ultimately to new trust, profound hope, and a love that can't be scorched by assault or destroyed by loss. The healing path is glorious, but the only way we will stay on course and resist the temptation to flee to safer ground is by comprehending more deeply the assaults and losses we will face on our journey. In the desert and valley we will pass through the dangers of betrayal, powerlessness, and ambivalence. These three realities will pull faith, hope, and love right out from under us if we are not ready for them" (*The Healing Path*, p. 23).

The road to recovery from abuse is generally long, difficult and at times treacherous. This path may meander in and out of darkness and light, confusion and clarity, with loss tempered by gain and progress, and residual heartache countered by healing and restoration. Working through the times of grief, anger, rage, sadness, despair and depression is an important part of the process. Don't use the recovery process as an entitlement or excuse for needlessly indulging these negative emotions. Spending years regurgitating these emotions can turn the road to recovery into a never-ending treadmill.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). This familiar Bible verse can strengthen our faith, our hope and our love as we continue to look to God for His healing in our lives. Certainly, we can implore God for His divine healing, requesting anointing and asking God to remove the pain and anger and to give us comfort, understanding and strength through His Spirit.

With this strong spiritual foundation, we can and must move forward. As Paul wrote, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and

reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

God expects us to call upon Him for His intervention and deliverance in our lives. Be sure to read the accompanying article on taking action in your life. And remember, God’s love is powerful enough to see us

through any and all difficulties we face in this life.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him

who loved us” (Romans 8:31, 35, 37).

Resources

Dan B. Allender, Ph.D., *The Healing Path*, Waterbrook Press, 1999.

Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical & Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*, InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Take Action: Your Life May Depend on It

■ Where abuse is concerned, inaction could be deadly.

by Janet Treadway

Awakened in the middle of the night by screams of terror, I ran to my bedroom window and knelt down and began praying in earnest. I was pleading with God to intervene, to stop the terror, the terror that was going on right across the hall. I had done this many times before after awakening to the screams of my mother, begging for my father to stop hitting her. Each time I would get on my knees, asking God to please stop him somehow.

I was only a young teenager when all the terror started. I was able to escape such violence when I was a small child because I was raised in foster care. I had never experienced such violence until I was returned back to my real parents at age 14.

It did not start out that way though. I can still remember the thrill of seeing my father for the very first time after being away so very long. How proud I was that this was my dad, my real dad that I had longed for all my childhood. He would protect me now, and I would never have to leave again. I felt safe in his arms when he reached out to hug

me for the very first time, but the joy of that first meeting was not to last.

After a few short weeks of great joy and security, this man, my dad, changed. Who was this man who replaced my dad? My dad was no longer my protector but turned out to be a raging volcano. This was not the man I dreamed of all my childhood, who would love me, take care of me and keep me safe. We never knew when the rage within him would erupt, and someone in our family would be at the other end of that eruption. I could relate to children who live in a country during wartime—the fear they must feel, waiting for the next bomb to go off around them. That is how I felt, not knowing when the next bomb would explode in our home. The difference between the children of war and me was that the enemy was my father.

I prayed every day and asked God for protection, asking God to help our family and intervene, to somehow change my father, make him loving and kind so that he would not hurt us anymore. But the violence continued on for several more years. Many times I was the victim of his violence, and I thought many times that I would not live through the beatings. I wondered many times why God did not intervene and stop all of this terror. Perhaps it

was my fault that God did not intervene and answer my prayers. Why wouldn’t God answer my plea for help?

I felt trapped, very alone and had even given up at one point in my life. I thought I would die in this situation and even wanted to at times. I just simply gave up and felt that this could not be solved.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt your problems could not be solved, that God was not hearing your prayers?

All of us face trials in our lives that really make us feel that they are not solvable. We may feel God is not hearing us and that we will stay in this trial forever. But does God require more out of us than just prayer? Or do we look at God as a Superman, coming on the scene to intervene and save us? If He doesn’t, we feel forgotten and forsaken. Does God forget you and turn His back? Did God forget me?

My Escape

My prayers did get answered several years later. The answer came when I stepped out and took action.

My father was in one of his rages and this time I knew I was in grave danger, with my very life

Steps That Can Save Your Life

Here are some steps you can take to free yourself and your children from abuse.

- Ask God for help. Psalm 9:9 says, “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed. A refuge in times of trouble.” Refuge means protection or shelter, sanctuary, anything to which one may turn for help. God, our refuge, helped me, and He will help you.

- Seek wise counsel. What you need to do and the action you need to take are some of the most important decisions you will ever make. God’s ministers are available to help you make wise decisions. Proverbs 2:10-12 reminds us, “When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil.”

- Talk to a friend, minister or family member who can help. Do not be ashamed! It is not your fault that your spouse cannot control his anger!

- Leave! There are emergency shelters in all major cities that will take you and your children. Search on the Internet for resources.

- Call the police.

If you are a child or teen, and a parent is abusing you, talk to someone. It is not your fault! The abuse will not stop until you get help. No one has a right to touch you where you are uncomfortable or beat you. Parents who love you and want the best for you will correct you out of love, not out of rage. Correction from a loving parent should not leave you ashamed or in constant fear.

Remember, God will see you through and help you every step of the way. So take action—get help! Your life and your children’s lives may depend on it. Mine did!

Additional Resources:

The hotline for domestic violence in the United States is 1-800-799-7233. They can refer you to women’s shelters and other services in your area.

Use the Internet and search on “violence against women” in the various search engines to find information in the United States and other countries.

being threatened by his explosive anger. If I were to save my life, I realized that I must act—and act quickly.

One morning while my mother and dad were asleep, I packed a few clothes and fled my home. By this time I was legally an adult, but it was like I was in an trap, and I was unprepared to leave. I ended up at a bus station. There was a minister I had once talked to who lived in Chattanooga. I thought if I could get there, then perhaps he could help me.

I went to the ladies' room and poured my heart out to God. I told God that I was trying, that I took the step to leave, but I could not do it on my own. I didn't have the money for the ticket, and the people I had asked for help at the bus station had said no. I had to have His help!

Thankfully God protected me from the predators who often lurk in such places, ready to prey on helpless teens. When I left the restroom, there stood waiting for me a man who handed me the money I needed to get to Chattanooga. Then more people began to give me money. Answered prayer! You bet! God heard my plea and intervened.

I purchased my ticket and got on the bus headed for Chattanooga. I should have been terrified of getting on that bus, but I only felt an overwhelming sense of peace for the first time since I was 14. All the fear that I lived with for so long was gone. I had no idea what lay ahead for me, no home to call my own, and I was going into a strange city, but I knew God was helping me, and it gave me peace. I was on my way to freedom.

I called the pastor when I arrived. He sent a family to pick me up and take me into their home until I could get on my feet. God gave me a fresh start and brought me out of a terrible situation. That day will always be etched into my mind as the day God parted my Red Sea.

Why did God wait so long to answer my prayer? Four years was a long time to endure such violence! Why did He allow me to go through so much before helping me? I asked myself this over and over again.

Then years later I understood it. He did not

intervene until I took action! Sometimes we have to take action, then God will help us. It takes faith and courage on our part to take that first step in solving our problems. Once we take it, God is there to help us through the problem.

Abuse Can Lead to Death!

It is sad to know that one quarter of all murders in the United States take place within the family. Surveys of American couples show that 20 to 50 percent have suffered violence regularly in their marriages. The records indicate that between 2 and 4 million incidents of domestic violence occur every single year. Wife abuse is one kind of family violence that probably occurs far more often than most people imagine. The tragedy is that many women suffer this abuse for years without getting help.

Most injuries occur to the head and neck, in addition to bruises, strangle marks, black eyes and split lips. The results include eye damage, fractured jaws, broken noses and permanent hearing loss. Assaults to the trunk of the body are almost as common and produce broken collarbones, bruised and broken ribs, fractured tailbones, internal hemorrhaging and lacerated livers.

Once wife beating occurs, it is likely to happen again and again, with the violence getting worse over time. Children are abused as well. My mother and I would receive beatings at least once a week. I lived in fear every day. I feared for my mother; I feared for my own life.

If you are in this situation, you do not have to stay trapped like I did. Why did we stay? Why do countless women continue to suffer abuse at the hands of a man?

Why Do Women Stay in an Abusive Situation?

• Change—I thought I could change him. I thought if I tried harder, my father would not go into his rage, and he would not hurt my mother or me. I tried very hard to please him by good behavior. I thought that he might love me. It did not work.

misconduct, but is not limited to this.

• Not pleased to dwell. Paul explains in the book of 1 Corinthians that if an unbeliever is not pleased to dwell and departs that a Christian is not 'under bondage.' An individual may express his/her displeasure in a number of ways—*habitual* misconduct such as immorality (refers back to implications of *porneia*), criminality, addictive behaviors, abuse, desertion or willful failure to provide physical support (1 Timothy 5:8). In such cases it may be appropriate for the 'believer' to initiate the proceedings."

• Isolation—I felt alone and trapped and that there was no one to help me. I was too fearful to talk to anyone. I felt if my father found out, he would kill me. He even took me out of school in ninth grade, which only isolated me more. Most abusers will isolate their victims.

• Guilt—I felt that perhaps I deserved it, that it was my fault. Abusers will lay the guilt on others to keep from facing their own guilt.

• Fear—I was fearful for my life. If I ran away, he would find me and kill me.

• Support—I had no money or means of caring for myself. I was only a teenager. Many women in that same situation feel trapped for lack of funds or marketable skills.

• Shame—I was ashamed that this was happening to me.

• Love—I still loved my father and needed his love.

I learned many years later that women in abusive situations generally experience similar feelings. Their self-esteem is totally shattered as mine was. It would take years to restore a proper respect for myself through the power of God's healing.

My mother reasoned that she should never divorce, and my father convinced her that she was to submit. My mother also reasoned that as long as my father was "pleased to dwell" with her, she should not leave.

"Pleased to dwell"—what does it mean? Does God require a woman to submit to continuous beatings? Not the loving God I have come to know. (See the sidebar, "Pleased to Dwell.")

Christ Took Abuse for You So You Can Live for Eternity!

Christ humbled Himself, came to this earth to give His life for you and me. He took blows and beatings that we might live! He shed His blood for you and me that we might have eternal life. My mother and I did not understand that God did not wish us to be punching bags. We did not know what it meant to be cherished and loved, loved in the way that God loves us. So then, why would God expect any woman to stay in a situation like that when He so willingly gave His life for us so we might live? Christ can relate to our suffering. He took the abuse for us!

There are countless women living with an abusive man today who do not understand what true love is. Did my father love me like God does? Did my father love my mother? Did my father protect her, cherish her and, if necessary, would he have given his life for her and me as God did? Would your abuser be willing to take the blows the way that Christ did for you? Does God understand what you are going through? You bet He does because He has been there!

"Pleased to Dwell"

The following explanation is from the United Church of God's Statement of Belief on "Divorce and Remarriage" (see www.ucg.org/papers):

"Only the following two reasons can (but do not necessarily have to) dissolve a marriage in which a believer is involved.

• *porneia*, or sexual immorality. This would include in the broader sense all cases of sexual deviancy, adultery being an example. The implication is habitual sexual

Satan Works Through Inaction!

Satan works through inaction, whether it is through neglect of prayer and Bible study or avoiding solving our problems. We give Satan greater power to destroy us through inaction. Satan gets a stronghold on our lives and takes us captive when we are inactive. We fall into a state of despair, feeling hopeless and abandoned by God. This is how Satan wants us to feel—to give up and lose hope! I lost hope through inaction.

One of my greatest heroes in the Bible is King David. He also had to take action. He prayed and with courage fought lions, bears and the giant, Goliath. Everyone else was too afraid to take action and fight this giant. David may have felt that same fear, but to end the trial, he had to do more than pray about it. He had to take action! I, like David, had to take action. My situation was not solved as long as I was inactive.

When I took that first step to solve my problem, then God held out His hand, took mine in His, and helped me along the way. Everything began to fall into place. Now, years later, my father has since died, but I am still very thankful that I escaped when I did.

Take Action!

Too many women give up and suffer needlessly. This brings trauma upon the children as well. Women need the courage to take the first step and the faith to know that God will help them.

If you are in an abusive situation, you have to pray about it, and then you have to take action! The abuse generally doesn't get better. It only gets worse with time. You must realize that your children are in danger emotionally as well as physically. They will have scars they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Do not

convince yourself that you are staying for the children's sake.

Violence against women, children and even men presents a real danger in many homes. All writers and authorities advise those in abusive relationships to take whatever steps are necessary to protect their own safety along with that of their children. Trust your instincts and avoid dangerous situations.

For advice on where to obtain legal or other professional services in your area, contact your minister or local women's shelters, law enforcement agencies or other suitable agencies or professionals. Women's shelters and other professionals can also give advice for specific cases and information regarding local laws to people helping those who are abused.

For more specific actions to take, see the sidebar "Steps That Can Save Your Life!"

Breaking Free From Sexual Addictions

■ Sexual addiction occurs in many forms and can be very destructive spiritually. How can it be overcome?

by John W. Cafourek

"When Dan's therapist told him that he was sexually addicted, he was outraged! He thought his therapist was exaggerating. Dan was certain his real problem was depression. He was simply down all the time, and he wanted to be happier. True, his life had left a trail of broken relationships and he had some sexual problems, but that was because he was so down all the time" (*Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, p. 177).

Denial is an all-too-common human defense mechanism. Patrick Carnes, an acknowledged expert on sexual addictions and author of about a dozen books on this topic, lists denial as symptomatic of the initial stage of progressive sexual addiction. The addicted person refuses to admit, even to himself, that he needs help. He thinks he can handle his own problems.

What Is Sexual Addiction?

Obviously, not every person who has some difficulty or problem involving sex and sexual relationships is sexually addicted. However, since sexual addiction is progressive, it is possible for difficulties or problems to become exacerbated and to ultimately develop into addictions.

In his book *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, Dr. Carnes provides some important insight into identifying some of the common symptoms indicative of sexual addiction. "A way to understand sexual addicts ... is to compare them with other types of addicts. A common definition of alcoholism or drug dependency is that a person has a pathological relationship with a mood-alter-

ing chemical. The alcoholic's relationship with alcohol becomes more important than family, friends, and work. The relationship progresses to the point where alcohol is necessary to feel normal. To feel 'normal' for the alcoholic is also to feel isolated and lonely, since the primary relationship he depends upon to feel adequate is with a chemical, not other people.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous Adapted for Sexual Addicts

1. We admitted we were powerless over our sexual addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

From *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, page 170.

“Sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict’s relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his life...

“Addicts progressively go through stages in which they retreat further from the reality of friends, family, and work. Their secret lives become more real than their public lives. What other people know is a false identity. Only the individual addict knows the shame of living a double life—the real world and the addict’s world” (pp. 14-15).

The Anatomy of Addiction

How does addiction actually begin? Perhaps not surprisingly, it starts with the acceptance of delusional thought processes about oneself, allowing them to become rooted in one’s personal belief system. As a consequence, addiction stems from faulty core beliefs about oneself that affect how we perceive reality.

Each person develops a belief system that is the sum of the assumptions, judgments and ideas that he or she holds to be true. This belief system contains potent family messages about such things as one’s value or worth, relation-

ships, needs and sexuality. When these core beliefs become inaccurate or faulty, they have the potential to provide fundamental momentum necessary for the development of sexual addictions.

What are some of these irrational beliefs? Perhaps the most common is the perception of not being a worthwhile person. Addicts believe that other people would not value them as a person if everything about themselves was known, including their addiction. They also believe that sex is their most important need. Sex is viewed as the only thing that makes their isolation bearable. Consequently, faulty personal core beliefs become the anchor points for sexual addiction.

Impaired Thinking

Interacting faulty beliefs produce distorted views of reality. Denial leads the list. Ignoring the problem, blaming others and minimizing the behaviors become part of a defensive repertoire. Arguments, excuses, justifications and circular reasoning abound amidst impaired thinking patterns. Amazingly, even consequences such as venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, lost jobs, arrests and broken rela-

tionships are either overlooked or attributed to factors other than the addiction.

Slicing through this mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and the overcoming of this juggernaut. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (James 1:14-16).

The Addiction Cycle

Addictive experiences tend to progress through a four-step cycle, intensifying with each repetition:

1. *Preoccupation* is the mood or trance in which the mind becomes completely engrossed with thoughts of sex. This mental state creates an obsessive search for sexual stimulation.

2. *Ritualization* is the formation of special routines leading up to sexual behavior. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement.

3. *Compulsive sexual behavior* is doing the

Tools of Recovery

A. Michael Johnson, Ph.D., listed the following tools and more on his Web site www.sexual-addict.com/learn-tools_of_recovery.htm:

• **Accountability Partners and Agreements:** Being accountable to someone is an important anchor for sobriety. Make an agreement with someone to check in daily if at all possible. That person should have a list of questions—very specific questions—to ask you and that you have agreed to answer honestly. Your partner may be a member of your group, a friend in recovery, your therapist or a good friend. An accountability partner must be someone you trust and with whom you feel safe. It is not recommended that you ask your life partner to be your accountability partner. Related tools include sponsors and a support network.

• **Avoid Triggering Situations:** You don’t have to go to business meetings at nude bars. You can tell the others that going to such places interferes with your spiritual growth. If you can’t avoid some triggers such as working on a computer, make it safe for yourself. Install blocking software (so that you don’t know the password), keep your door open, turn the screen toward the door, put the computer at home in a public area and never go online when you are alone.

• **Balance Your Life and Service.**

• **Carry Recovery With You at All Times:** That may be reminders, cues, instructions or anything else that will help. Those things might include:

Phone numbers of recovery friends.

Photographs of loved ones.

Cost Card (add up the costs of your addiction).

• **Combat Physical Inactivity:** Spend time doing fun activities and getting involved in sports, exercise and other physical activities. This is useful

for all addicts and particularly important for those who became sedentary with their addictions such as cybersex addicts.

• **Combat Isolation:** Spend time with people. Isolation is a part of your disease. Find ways to be in contact with people.

• **Interrupt Your Acting Out:** Develop and memorize a set of strategies to help you avoid acting out. Use these daily.

• **Meetings:** In these meetings you learn valuable information about your disease and how the 12-step program works. Members give and receive support, work the steps and share experience, strength and hope in a safe environment. At first, attend as many meetings as you can. If possible, attend meetings daily for the first 90 days and practice abstinence to the best of your ability.

• **One Day at a Time.**

• **Prayer and Meditation.**

• **Professional Help:** Your addiction may have been a subconscious way of self-medicating yourself for wounds you carry from your earlier life. It is important to work with a professional who understands sexual addiction or is willing to learn. This is another way to keep yourself on the path of recovery. Remember that recovery is much more than abstinence from sexually addictive behaviors. You may want to seek out group therapy, individual therapy or both. If possible, including your spouse in therapy, both individually and as a couple, can be a great benefit to the recovery of both and to your relationship.

• **Set Boundaries.**

• **Telephone:** The telephone is your lifeline between meetings. Get phone numbers from other members in your program. Get used to calling someone daily. It is an important way to break out of the isolation that is so strongly a part of the disease. You may be shy and hesitant at first, but by training yourself to call someone, it will be easy to place that call when that moment of crisis arises. And it will!

actual sexual act, the end goal of the preoccupation and ritualization.

4. *Despair* is the feeling of utter hopelessness and sense of powerlessness that results from once again having engaged in sexually addictive behavior.

A Self-Perpetuating Cycle

Since the end result is very disappointing and very painful, why would anyone repeat this addiction cycle? The reason is that the cycle becomes self-perpetuating. Ironically, much of the pain felt at the end of the cycle can be numbed or obscured through sexual preoccupation. This reengages the addiction cycle all over again. Hence, sexual addicts become hostages and slaves to their own pre-occupations. Jesus Christ gave this concise warning about the enslaving potential of all sin: “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34).

God’s Revealed Purpose for Sex

We live in a society that presents “the joy of sex” as the rightful pursuit of everyone. It seems, in fact, suspicion may likely be attached to anyone who refrains from engaging in sexual activity. The so-called sexual revolution insists that we discard any “inhibitions” and “sexual hang-ups.” This preoccupation with sex pervades many facets of life.

The great Creator God has designed human sexuality to be a wonderful blessing. God revealed His intent and purpose for sex when human civilization began. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This is a reference to the union of the sexual organs of husband and wife and implies that marriage is intended to be an intimate relationship.

This understanding is confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians, where he calls sexual intercourse becoming “one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:16). In the same context, Paul wrote, “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18), explaining that sex outside of marriage is sin and that it brings penalties on the sinner. In contrast, in Hebrews 13:4, Paul affirms that the sexual union between a husband and wife is the lawful function of human sexuality. The marriage bed is undefiled, he explained. Paul then immediately warned that other sexual acts outside of marriage do defile a person spiritually.

Christ’s statements in Matthew 5:27-30 explain how it is possible to commit sexual sin in our mind alone—apart from any action

whatsoever. We are commanded to guard and control our thoughts as well as our actions. Jesus Christ later also inspired Paul to write about our thoughts as the battlefield on which we win or lose the struggle: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Levels of Addiction

Sexual addiction is generally categorized into three levels. The presence of one or more of these sexual behaviors does not always involve addiction. Various sexual crimes, for example, may or may not be addictive behaviors. The behaviors designated as level one have in common general cultural acceptance. Some are regarded as illegal, but the reality is that widespread practice conveys a public tolerance. Though often considered by society to be less destructive, each of these can be devastating when done compulsively. Level one addictions generally include masturbation, compulsive relationships, pornography, prostitution and anonymous sex.

Level two addictions include exhibitionism, voyeurism, indecent phone calls and indecent liberties. These behaviors are deemed sufficiently intrusive to warrant stiff legal sanctions. They are all punished when actively prosecuted. Both prosecutors and the general public, however, often view these acts as nuisance offenses. The commonality of all of these addictive behaviors is the fact that someone is victimized.

Level three sexual addictions share in common the violation of some of our most significant boundaries. Rape, incest and child molestation entail basic transgressions of laws designed to protect the vulnerable. A number of additional detestable behaviors and addictions are intentionally not being mentioned in this listing.

Breaking Free

Breaking the hold of sexual addiction is very difficult to do. All forms of addiction are vicious because they further the inability to trust others. However, without help from others, the addict often fails to regain control because the addiction feeds itself. Also, few forms of fixation or excitement are as super-charged with social judgment, ridicule or fear. This makes seeking help especially difficult for the sexual addict.

One of the best-proven paths to recovery is the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, but adapted to a particular sexual addiction. The 12-step program helps members restore their network of human relationships, especially in their family. Members are taught how to live the program, leaving behind their double life and its delusion and pain.

Battling a Pornography Addiction

Sex sells! Pornography, one of the greatest sexual scourges afflicting human society today, is a \$57 billion industry. Porn revenue is larger than the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises! It also exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC television networks.

Overcoming an addiction to Internet pornography may necessitate the use of some special computer safeguards. For example, various software programs filter Internet content but still allow normal Web surfing. They can be used to block out offensive Web sites.

If you install this type of program yourself, you will easily know how to get around it. Therefore, it would be better to have your spouse or some other trustworthy adult set up the software on your computer.

Three good ones are CyberPatrol, CyberSitter and NetNanny. They cost less than \$40. All have free trials, so you can take each for a test drive before you buy. You’ll find them at, respectively:

- www.cyberpatrol.com/
- www.cybersitter.com/
- www.netnanny.com/

Both America Online and MSN offer ways to limit access to the Internet’s darker side. Like the filtering software, you might want to have your spouse or other trustworthy adult set up the account. This way, you do not have any of the passwords. While these controls are meant primarily for children, they can help adults avoid problem Web sites.

You could also use an Internet Service Provider that does filtering. Below are links to three such companies:

- www.characterlink.net
- www.bsafefhome.com
- www.mayberryamerica.net

If you need something more adult, check out accountability software. One such program is X3watch, which is offered by XXX-church.com, a ministry that battles online pornography. With this program, you designate an accountability partner. X3watch makes

a record of any questionable sites you visit, and e-mails the list to your accountability partner. It also makes a note if you close the program. X3watch is free. You can get it at www.x3watch.com/.

Here are some additional Web sites that may prove to be helpful in recovery from an addiction to pornography:

- Sex Addicts Anonymous: www.sexaa.org/.
- Dr. Patrick Carnes, author and expert on this topic: www.sexhelp.com.

Overcoming Sexual Addictions

The process of overcoming sexual addictions is neither simple nor easy. Spiritual freedom, however, is made available to us through Jesus Christ. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

The first step in the process of attaining this freedom is to recognize and acknowledge our sins. Remember King David's example of repentance. "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3).

The next step involves changing direction in our life, turning away from sin and toward obedience to God. Deep, heartfelt repentance before God can provide a marvelous cleansing process, a spiritual catharsis that releases the guilt and shame induced by sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The struggle against sin is a long and difficult process. It is not only essential that we continue to "put to death" (Colossians 3:5) the old sinful carnal nature within us, but that we

also allow Christ to transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit, the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). Sinful habits must be rooted out and replaced with habits of obedience to God. As Paul expressed it, "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18).

It is possible to break the bonds of sexual addiction. If you need help in this area, ask God to give you the courage to honestly face the problem. Be willing to seek counsel from the ministry and, if recommended, to obtain specialized professional help as well.

Most importantly, beseech Almighty God to accomplish His will in your life.

"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

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