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Victory Over the Power of Abuse

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A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Lindell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

When I was a teenager, life at home was painfully turbulent. Unfortunately, I was part of the problem, rather than being part of the solution. I remember my mother sensitively saying to me, “June, it’s not *what* you say, it’s the *way* you say it.” Oh, how I hated to hear those words, especially since she needed to say them often.

With full sarcasm, I mentally mocked that phrase a half-octave higher: *It’s not what you say, it’s the way you say it*. Then, one day it clicked. That day, I actually heard my disrespectful tone and then I understood.

Slowly I admitted to myself, *That’s true—it’s not what I say, it’s the way I say it*. Actually, I didn’t know it at the time, but I was in bondage to bitterness. My seething anger had turned into hatred, yet I felt absolutely justified in my hatred.

The object of my hatred was my father. My teenage heart could not tolerate his verbal and emotional abuse, especially toward my mother. With every harsh word, as she felt more and more devalued, I felt the devastating impact on her heart. She was my Achilles heel—my soft spot. Consequently, I became consumed with thinking, *How can I protect her? How can I make him stop?*

My mindset was logical: *Somebody has to let him know how wrong he is!* Since no one else seemed willing to step up to the plate, I deduced that it had to be me. Therefore, I used my indirect tactic called, “If looks could kill!” Of course, all I did was make matters worse. And, horror of horrors, I was becoming like the one I hated!

My only direct confrontation (addressing his adultery) resulted in a severe, painful repercussion—I was sent away to boarding school for two months, and then sent away to camp for the summer. He said, “You are a bad influence on the family.”

Numerous times my father told me, “After dinner, you are not to be with your mother. All of you children are bad for her.” (In truth, he was excessively jealous of anyone who would take her away from him for any length of time.) So, following the dinner meal, we were sent upstairs and forbidden to come back downstairs. Yet, at some point

during the course of the evening, my mother would excuse herself with the pretense of going to the restroom. But instead, she would quickly ascend the stairs, making the rounds to all four of us, giving each of us a gentle kiss or a warm embrace, and lightly shower us with soothing words like, “Everything will be all right. I love you.”

In the midst of her tender touches, however, I felt the heaviness of her heart and the pain of her isolation. On occasion, her eyes would fill with tears, “Honey, I’m so, so sorry. He doesn’t mean to be this way. All we can do is trust the Lord.”

Years after my father’s death, as we talked about those earlier years, she confided, “There was nothing I could do. Just nothing I could do.” I didn’t counter her because I knew she genuinely felt that way. But is that accurate?

When someone is being verbally or emotionally abusive to you, is there anything you can do? More accurately, is there something you can do in a healthy way that leads to healing? I say *Yes* because I’ve learned to do it.

You do have *choices*. You can have *boundaries*. You can have *healing*. If only I had known these truths years ago, I would have acted in a much healthier way and been saved much heartache.

Realize, sticks and stones can break your bones but words can break your heart. Therefore, guard your heart against the hurting words of others and open your heart to the healing words of God.

As you allow Christ to be in control of your mind, your will, and emotions, I pray that you will have healthier relationships and be free and whole within your soul.

June Hunt
Founder, Hope For The Heart

VERBAL & EMOTIONAL ABUSE

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You're worthless!" . . . "You'll never amount to anything!" . . . "I wish you had never been born!" Words like these spoken to a child can wound the heart for a lifetime.

Another kind of wounding takes place in adulthood when "control" is the name of the game. Threats like "If you leave me, you'll never see the kids again!" or "I've taken the keys—you're not going anywhere!" are both emotionally and verbally abusive and are weapons for maintaining control in relationships.

Abuse can also be perpetrated without a word—degrading looks, obscene gestures, and threatening behaviors can inflict immense pain and impede emotional growth.

If you can relate to any of these abusive scenarios, please know you don't have to allow an abuser to make you feel worthless. Jesus says that God not only knows each and every sparrow, but He also knows you intimately and considers you to be of far greater worth.

*"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?
Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.
Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."
(LUKE 12:6-7)*

DEFINITIONS



*“The Lord does not
want you to live in
the fear of abuse
but rather in
the freedom of
His powerful love.”*



Christi expects today will be one of the happiest days of her life—it’s her wedding day. The music plays, the vows are spoken, the ceremony ends, and then the newlyweds pose for photos and smile for the camera to commemorate their special occasion. But Christi knows something is wrong. Under his breath, her prince charming snarls, “When is this [expletive] going to be over?”¹

Warning signs abound: his refusing to consider premarital counseling, his pushing for a rush to the altar because he’s offered an out-of-state job, his threat to sever the relationship when she considers her own dream job. She tries reasoning with him . . . then pleads for understanding from him, but to no avail. It’s going to be *his way or no way!*

This scripture is a mirror of their painful, one-sided marriage:

*“People who do not get along with others
are interested only in themselves;
they will disagree with what
everyone else knows is right.”*

(PROVERBS 18:1 GNT)

What Is Emotional Abuse?

Christi finds work as a weekend television anchor at the same station that employs her husband. After settling in, her husband of two months arrives home from an evening of drinking with friends and coworkers. Now Christi sees a different side of her spouse. She’s upset that he’s driven home drunk, endangering himself, but especially innocent people on the road. Quickly he counters by ranting like a madman, accusing her of not loving him, calling her a liar, and threatening divorce.

She's shocked at his vehement anger, his vulgar language, his vile name-calling—each one striking her heart with pain. Suddenly, he grabs a suitcase, wildly tossing clothes inside while hurling more insults. She attempts to reason with him before he punches the wall with two sharp blows. Now she's terrified, afraid of getting too close and being struck herself. Hours later, he finally passes out on the couch.²

Emotional abuse is the unseen fallout from all other forms of abuse: physical, mental, verbal, sexual, and even spiritual. People often minimize the importance of emotions. Yet feelings can be the driving force behind choices made by deeply wounded people, and those choices can be detrimental if not rooted in a true understanding of who we are. Emotional abuse strikes at the very core of who we are—crushing our confidence, whittling away at our sense of worth, suffocating our spirit. The Bible says . . .

*“A cheerful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”*

(PROVERBS 17:22)

Emotional abuse is any ongoing, negative behavior used to control or hurt another person. Emotional abuse ranges from consistent indifference to continual belittling of character.

- All forms of abuse—emotional, verbal, mental, physical, spiritual, and sexual—can damage a person's sense of dignity and God-given worth.
- All forms of abuse wound the spirit and, therefore, are emotionally abusive.

Proverbs, the book of wisdom, poses this probing question:

“A crushed spirit who can bear?”

(PROVERBS 18:14)

Emotional abuse or “psychological mistreatment” scars the spirit of the one abused.

- The damage from emotional abuse can last far longer than damage from any other kind of abuse. A broken arm will soon heal; a broken heart may take a lifetime.

- After extended periods of emotional abuse, many victims lose hope, feeling that life is not worth living.

The book of Proverbs states it this way:

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick.”

(PROVERBS 13:12)

Emotional abuse can be passive-aggressive. Passive-aggressive abuse is a means of indirect, underhanded control.

- Passive-aggressive abusers express their anger through nonassertive, covert behavior. To gain control in a relationship, these abusers often use manipulation as a means of placing themselves in a position of dependence. Then, with underlying anger, they become faultfinders of the people on whom they depend.³
- Victims of passive-aggressive people feel perplexed and dismayed at being the target of punitive and manipulative behaviors. Friends of passive-aggressive abusers often become enmeshed in trying to comfort or console them in response to their claims of unjust treatment and their inability to handle life on their own.

Passive-aggressive abusers need to recognize and resolve their very real anger and take to heart God’s warning:

*“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 7:9)

Emotional abuse can be either *overt* or *covert*.

- *Overt abuse* clearly expresses that a person is useless or unloved (as when one is belittled as a child).⁴
- *Covert abuse* occurs by sending the same message in subtle ways that may or may not be intended to cause harm by the perpetrator (as when one is ignored as a child).⁵ Jesus said that He will not reject those who come to Him.

*“Those the Father has given me will come to me,
and I will never reject them.”*

(JOHN 6:37 NLT)

Biblical Example **Both Overt and Covert Abuse: Tamar** **(Read 2 Samuel chapter 13.)**

Overt Abuse: Tamar, daughter of King David, was raped by her half brother Amnon and then was openly and blatantly despised and shunned by him.

Covert Abuse: Their father, King David, indirectly rejected Tamar by failing to execute justice on her behalf when he refused to hold Amnon accountable for his sin. David, in essence, let his son “off the hook” by totally ignoring the sexual violation of his daughter.

Emotional Abuse in Scripture

Question: “What does the Bible say about emotional abuse?”

Answer: The Bible doesn’t use the term “emotional abuse,” but it does teach us how we are to treat one another. The Bible details numerous attitudes and actions we should have toward each other. If we follow these guidelines, we can avoid being abusive toward anyone.

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
not looking to your own interests
but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4)

What Is Verbal Abuse?

Christi never imagined becoming a verbal punching bag and taking the brunt of his emotional explosions. She knows something is wrong in her marriage, but can't bring herself to leave. Growing up in a Christian home, marriage is sacred to her and she's determined to honor her vows. She dismisses his gloomy moods until after another night out, he comes home from drinking and again spews toxic words like a verbal volcano. He stands toe-to-toe, nose-to-nose before her screaming like a drill sergeant.⁶

She rationalizes his rancid words, almost wishing he had hit her. At least then she would have an excuse—a valid reason—to leave him without feeling guilty for walking out. But instead, she absorbs his wounding words—and wonders how she can make their marriage better.

Verbal abuse is still *abuse*, a form of overt emotional abuse, and it is *wrong*. A skilled woodsman wields his ax carefully, chopping repeatedly on a precise spot until the targeted tree falls. This wood cutter takes pride in controlling himself and his dangerous tool, never striking a careless blow. Likewise, a verbal abuser uses his tongue like a sharp weapon to hack away at another person. This abuser is skilled in his ability to strike a blow—wielding derogatory, deceitful words that cut the heart and sever the soul.

*“You who practice deceit,
your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor.”*

(PSALM 52:2)

Verbal abuse is the systematic, ongoing use of harmful words or sharp tones in an attempt to control or dominate another person.

- **Abuse** is mistreatment: the destructive misuse of something or someone.
- **Verbal abuse** is always harmful.

Those who practice it may, sometimes subconsciously, delight in the tongue's power to destroy:

*“You love every harmful word,
you deceitful tongue!”*

(PSALM 52:4)

Verbal abuse injures the feelings of others with reviling, insulting, or contemptuous words.

- The Bible often uses the image of cutting, piercing, or hurting someone to describe verbally abusive language. Proverbs 12:18 says, *“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*
- The Hebrew word for “revile” is *gadaph*, from a root word that means “cut” or “wound.”⁷

The psalmist said . . .

*“I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame
at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.”*

(PSALM 44:15–16)

Verbal abuse often seeks to injure the reputation of others . . .

- Using tactics such as backbiting, barbs, or belittling talk.
- Using strategies such as slander, slurs, and lies.

The Bible says this about verbal abusers:

*“You love evil rather than good,
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.”*

(PSALM 52:3)

What Is Brainwashing?

Some prisoners of war have succumbed to brainwashing—an effective tactic used in psychological warfare. This term refers to a systematic, forcible indoctrination that puts pressure on prisoners to relinquish their beliefs and accept opposing beliefs.⁸

You don't have to be in a prisoner of war camp to be brainwashed. Your "captor" could be a member of your family or a supervisor at work. In whatever circumstance brainwashing occurs, the damage can be devastating by systematically wearing away your sense of self-worth and confidence and causing you to distrust yourself, doubt your decisions, and even lose touch with reality.

The Bible warns . . .

*"Those people are zealous to win you over,
but for no good. What they want
is to alienate you from us,
so that you may have zeal for them."
(GALATIANS 4:17)*

Verbal and Emotional Tactics Employed in Brainwashing

Verbal Brainwashing

- **Intimidating:** Implying that your failure to comply with all demands or to adopt all of the abuser's attitudes or beliefs will result in severe consequences
- **Indoctrinating:** Implanting repeated messages contrary to your presently held values or beliefs
- **Discrediting:** Belittling your "outside" family and friends who disagree with the abuser
- **Degrading:** Engaging in name-calling, insults, ridicule, and humiliation
- **Accusing:** Claiming that your thoughts are childish, stupid, or crazy

*“They do not speak peaceably,
but devise false accusations
against those who live
quietly in the land.”*

(PSALM 35:20)

Emotional Brainwashing

- **Isolating:** Depriving you of outside sources of emotional and social support
- **Harassing:** Inducing exhaustion by keeping you up late, interrupting your sleep, causing sleep deprivation, or wearing you down physically or emotionally
- **Militarizing:** Enforcing excessive compliance of trivial demands
- **Ignoring:** Withholding essential emotional support and attention within a relationship
- **Deceiving:** Making promises and agreements with no intention of keeping them
- **Exploiting:** Using you or someone close to you for selfish interests or gain

The psalmist accurately presents the plight of a brainwashed victim:

*“The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in the darkness
like those long dead.
So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.”*

(PSALM 143:3–4)

BESIEGED, BROKEN, AND BRAINWASHED: The Patty Hearst Story⁹

Taken from: HOW TO RISE ABOVE ABUSE
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*Three words will forever be associated with the life of Patty Hearst: “Kidnapped Newspaper Heiress.”*¹⁰

*On February 5, 1974 . . . this banner headline flash[ed] across multiple newspapers and news magazines. Worldwide, stories detailed how this 19-year-old college student was gagged and whisked away from her apartment by a small band of domestic terrorists—the Symbionese Liberation Army, or SLA.*¹¹

SLA militants perceived themselves as urban revolutionaries, wanting to be viewed as “defenders of the people”—raucous rebels remembered for taking down the ruling class. One motive for kidnapping Patty was to use her in a prisoner exchange for two arrested SLA militants charged with murder. The other was to coerce Patty’s father, Randolph Hearst, to drain his “fattened bank accounts” to feed the state’s hungry.

The first two months of Patty’s kidnapping could only be described as *terrorizing*: days and nights filled with verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. She was confined to a closet, continually blindfolded, and repeatedly raped. To help keep the SLA in the media spotlight, she was forced to make scripted tape recordings to affirm she was still alive.

When several weeks passed without any communication from Patty, loved ones feared the worst. Then, in April, the silence was broken—by a tape recording featuring a very different Patty. The heiress declared that she had turned rebel and she now wanted the world to identify her as “Tania.”

Patty explained that the SLA had given her two options: (1) be released, or (2) join the SLA to fight for the freedom of the oppressed. Patty chose the latter, with her decision sounding definite: “I have chosen to stay and fight.”¹²

Patty’s aversion-turned-allegiance toward her SLA captors is symptomatic of those experiencing a phenomenon known as the Stockholm Syndrome. The term was coined following a weeklong siege at a Swedish bank in 1973, during which two bank robbers took four hostages and the traumatized captives developed a close bond with their captors. Conditions were intolerable and inhumane, yet when police finally flushed out the robbery suspects, the four hostages encircled the robbers, trying to protect them from harm. One woman even claimed she was in love with one of the criminals and planned to marry him upon his release from prison.¹³

Just weeks after joining the SLA, Tania fought her first battle, but it wasn’t stomping out social injustice. Donning a black beret and wielding a machine gun, Tania was caught on camera robbing a San Francisco bank, threatening to shoot anyone who got in the way. The photos taken by the bank’s security camera sent shockwaves around the world: Was Patty a victim or a victimizer? Was she a forced—or free—accomplice?

Aware of the “brainwashing” buzz in the media, Patty released another recording: “My gun was loaded. At no time did my comrades intentionally point their guns at me. As for being brainwashed, the idea is ridiculous to the point of being beyond belief.”¹⁴

The SLA moved its militants to a “safe house” in Los Angeles, but they weren’t safe for long. FBI and police discovered their hideout and, after a gun battle, the house burned to the ground, leaving behind six charred bodies. The world wondered: Did Patty die for a warped revolution? But an argument had

prevented Patty and two of the SLA comrades from getting to the house, so the traumatized trio watched the entire shootout on television.

About 10 months later, with new recruits, the SLA resumed “combat operations” and raided another bank to fund its “civil war” against the government. In this robbery, a shotgun blast killed a 42-year-old mother of four and Patty, waiting outside, drove the getaway car.¹⁵

Finally, on September 17, 1975, Patty was arrested—19 months after her kidnapping. The SLA disbanded, and Patty’s role as a revolutionary came to an end.

Patty was charged with bank robbery, and the most brilliant legal mind of the time—in an effort to get her acquitted—built her defense around the argument that she had been brainwashed. The attorney had Patty recant, in court, every word and deed committed by Tania, and Patty testified that after being raped repeatedly for months, her mind was no longer her own. “I couldn’t even think thoughts for myself anymore because I had been so programmed,” Patty stated.¹⁶ “I had been . . . held in a closet for two months and . . . abused in all manner of ways. I was very good at doing what I was told.”¹⁷

Sadly, the jury rejected the brainwashing defense and sentenced Patty to seven years in prison, of which she served nearly two years. The president of the United States commuted her sentence, and later she received a presidential pardon.

Sociologists and criminologists today understand far more about the mechanics of mind control than when Patty Hearst was tried. Experts now acknowledge that Patty was undoubtedly a victim of brainwashing—of verbal and emotional abuse, of manipulative mind control—who had attempted to explain, “I had no free will until I was separated from them.”¹⁸

Realize that you don't have to be a literal captive to succumb to the debilitating effects of brainwashing. Those subjected to incessant barrages of hostile attacks—about a person or an idea—become vulnerable to brainwashing, especially when the attackers are in positions of power. Within families, sometimes the victim is like a helpless bird who is mysteriously selected to be pecked to death by its nest-mates, leaving that member maimed and alienated.

Unlike Patty Hearst, most people are not physically held captive, and therefore need to learn how to recognize and resist coercive persuasion. Likewise we need to take steps to remove ourselves from the source of brainwashing attempts—and *stay away* until those efforts have ceased. Otherwise, when negativism is spewed, we can become poisoned by the toxic fumes.

Only after Patty Hearst became separated from her brainwashers could she see the truth so the truth could set her free. Similarly, if someone is trying to control your mind you must separate yourself from that person and situation so you can *see the truth*. As Jesus said, when you know the truth, “the truth will set you free.”¹⁹

What Is Gaslighting?

Christi begins to internalize her husband's terrible treatment. Never did she imagine herself to be the kind of woman who cries throughout the night, feeling shame for her husband's actions. She starts doubting herself in light of his words: *Is she stupid? Is she worthless?*

Here is the person she loves . . . yet his attacks, unleashed in mere seconds, will take years to heal. Then she remembers the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” What a big, fat, enormous lie! She wonders, *would God truly want her to end her marriage and leave?*²⁰ The cry of Christi’s heart to the Lord is . . .

*“Relieve the troubles of my heart
and free me from my anguish.”*

(PSALM 25:17)

Gaslighting is a psychological tactic that a person or a group uses to make a victim doubt or question their perception of reality.

Gaslighting as a term originated from the plot of a 1938 play titled *Gas Light* and two film adaptations (in 1940 and 1944), both titled *Gaslight*. The storyline centers on a newly married charming-on-the-surface husband who nefariously uses noises in the attic, muffled voices, and flickering gas lights to make his unsuspecting bride doubt her sanity so he can steal her fortune.

Gaslighting is lying blatantly with an intent to manipulate (either the target directly or through others indirectly).

Gaslighting is a technique used by abusers to manipulate and control and includes tactics such as:²¹

- Denying what is said or done to confuse and obscure reality
- Using people or possessions as collateral damage or ammunition to inflict pain (e.g., attacking your spouse, your children, your work, etc. to gain compliance)
- Increasing negative pressure subtly and gradually to ultimately exhaust and disarm defenses (e.g., the frog in the pot metaphor in which a frog placed in a pot of water remains blissfully ignorant of the temperature rising until it is “cooked” and unable to escape)
- Contradicting positive words with negative actions (not “walking the talk”)

- Alternating positive praise and flattery with insults and abuse, causing confusion
- Weakening stability by calling everything into question
- Projecting accusations of negative behavior to distract attention from the abuser’s own actions
- Drawing others in to unintentionally join the gaslighting by spreading a false narrative
- Manipulating a person into believing they are crazy or persuading others to accept that lie

The Bible warns of those who seek to deceive:

*“His mouth is full of lies and threats;
trouble and evil are under his tongue.”*

(PSALM 10:7)

What Is God’s Heart on Verbal and Emotional Abuse?

Christi’s husband gets another job offer in a different city and she hopes a change of scenery will bring about a change in their marriage. They pack up and move, even farther away from family, friends, and all that is familiar. They get a new place and she’s surrounded by beautiful things, but still living an ugly life.²²

Some people live their lives with their minds, wills, and emotions being dominated by a strong, controlling, oppressive personality. Nothing in such a relationship resembles the loving, nurturing relationships God intends for us to have with one another. God created each of us in His image, to be a reflection of who He is.

Realize that God, who is infinite in power, does not use His power to abuse but rather to love. He always acts in our best interests, always seeks to meet our needs, to heal our wounds, and to conform us to the likeness of Jesus. The Lord does not want you to live in the fear of abuse but rather in the freedom of His powerful love.

*“Power belongs to you, God,
and with you, LORD, is unfailing love.”*
(PSALM 62:11–12)

God cares about your pain.

“You have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul”
(PSALM 31:7 NLT).

God understands the pain of abuse.

“He [Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (ISAIAH 53:3).

God offers healing from the pain of abuse.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (PSALM 147:3).

God affirms your worth as His special creation.

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4).

God wants to be your refuge and help you process your emotions with Him.

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8).

God longs for you to understand the power of words.

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (PROVERBS 18:21).

God desires your speech to be encouraging, not abusive.

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them”
(EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).

God calls for abusive people to change.

“Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right”
(EZEKIEL 45:9).

God will judge and call everyone to account for the words they speak.

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (MATTHEW 12:36).

God wants you to establish boundaries in your life and in your relationships.

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life”
(PROVERBS 4:23 NLT).

God provides you with opportunities to help others who have experienced abusive treatment.

“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

God will one day end all abuse and pain.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever”
(REVELATION 21:4 NLT).



CHARACTERISTICS



*“Many people fail
to recognize that
they are in an
abusive relationship
because abuse
has been their
‘normal’ for so long.”*



Words possess immense power. Through His Word, God created the world (Genesis chapter 1). Through the Word made flesh (John 1:14), God saved the world. Words can be life-giving as well as life-threatening . . . life-giving by inspiring us to be all that we are meant to be . . . life-threatening by destroying our hopes and dashing our dreams. Ultimately, words move from being positive to being abusive when they hurt our hearts and harm our relationships. The Bible says . . .

*“They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.”*

(PSALM 64:3)

What Differentiates Grievous Words from Gracious Words?

Christi’s husband agrees to go to counseling. For a time, their relationship improves while they enlist the help of a counselor. This lasts for about a year. But when the emotional roller-coaster they have been on begins to slow to a crawl, continued counseling seems to be an unnecessary use of time and money and eventually, they stop going. The young couple seems to have called a truce, but a battle brews in the background when they cease to seek wisdom for the war they are waging against abuse.²³

*“Plans are established by seeking advice;
so if you wage war, obtain guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 20:18)

Repeatedly God’s Word emphasizes the power of the tongue, the impact of our words. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote: *“The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire . . . no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be”* (James 3:5–6, 8–10).

What a powerful description! Consider the ways James describes the tongue: a fire . . . a world of evil . . . full of deadly poison. Our words have the ability to corrupt and destroy lives, to curse others and yet praise God. That is why, throughout God’s Word, He calls us to speak in a way that builds up others instead of tearing them down.

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk
come out of your mouths,
but only what is helpful for building
others up according to
their needs, that it may benefit
those who listen.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:29)

Grievous Words That Hurt

Attacking a Person

- “You *are* inherently wrong.”
- “You *are* intrinsically bad.”

Yelling

- “Shut up!”
- “You look awful.”

Gracious Words That Heal

Addressing an Action

- “You *did* something wrong.”
- “You *did* something bad.”

Discussing

- “Please listen, we need to talk about (_____).”
- “Let’s talk about what might be more appropriate for you to wear.”

Grievous Words That Hurt

Name-calling

- “You stupid idiot!”
- “You crazy fool!”

Insulting

- “You’re worthless!”
- “You’re disgusting!”

A Negative Picture of the Past

- “I wish you’d never been born.”
- “I should have had an abortion.”

A Negative Picture of the Present

- “You can’t do anything right.”
- “Get lost!”

A Negative Picture of the Future

- “You’ll never amount to anything.”
- “You’re hopeless.”

Gracious Words That Heal

Instilling Hope

- “You are good at (_____).”
- “You have positive qualities.”

Complimenting

- “You have tremendous value.”
- “You have many qualities I admire.”

A Positive Picture of the Past

- “I was glad the day you were born.”
- “I knew God had a special purpose for you before you were ever born.”

A Positive Picture of the Present

- “You do a lot of things right.”
- “You’ll always have a home in my heart.”

A Positive Picture of the Future

- “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”
- “God has a future filled with hope for you.”

*“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

More Likely Abuser

Question: “Who is more likely to be abusive—men or women?”

Answer: Although women are more often victims of abuse than men, abusive acts are committed by both men and women. Many people—but especially men—find it difficult to admit they are in an abusive relationship. Part of the struggle relates to the negative stereotypes of “battered women” and “abusive men.”

Some think of an abused woman as being *weak, poor, uneducated, needy, lacking boundaries, or someone who consistently makes bad choices*. But abused women are like any other woman. Some have careers, some are stay-at-home moms, some live in luxury while others live in poverty. Women who experience abuse represent all economic, racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

Likewise, abusive men aren’t a certain “type” either. We picture abusive men as always angry, violent, and out-of-control. We might see them as uneducated, unable to keep a job, addicted to alcohol or drugs. But even men who are successful, active in their communities, and seen as upstanding citizens can be abusive. They can even be charming and sociable. An abusive man can appear to be a good person to those unaware of the abuse simply by being good at hiding abusive behavior.

Maybe you struggle to understand your experience of abuse because of negative stereotypes. If you don’t fit the stereotype, and neither does the person you’re in a relationship with, then it might be hard to believe that you’re being abused. Instead of dismissing the thought because you don’t fit the stereotypes, use your own experiences to determine if you’ve been abused.²⁴

Scripture urges us to keep careful watch in our relationships so we don't minimize or dismiss the "red flags" God may be using to warn us of abuse.

*"Be careful never to forget what
you yourself have seen.
Do not let these memories escape
from your mind as long as you live!"*
(DEUTERONOMY 4:9 NLT)

What Are Some of the Many Faces of Abuse?

When Christi returns home to visit her family, she and her grandmother take a walk in the summer sun and share stories about work, family, and the activities that occupy their time. When the topic of marriage comes up, Christi confides in her "Gram" some of the struggles she and her husband have been having. Surprisingly, Gram shares that for 24 years she had a beautiful marriage with Christi's grandfather, however, the final eight years were a nightmare because alcohol stole away her loving husband and replaced him with a man who became mean when he drank.

For years, Gram prayed to be free from the abuse. Unable to endure the abuse any longer, one summer she leaves alone for a cottage they normally stayed in together. She took the step of having papers prepared for a legal separation. Then she got the call—her abuser died at home, alcohol finally killed him. After this enlightening talk, Christi knows her Gram will pray for her with a heart tenderized from experiencing abuse firsthand.²⁵

Truly, verbal and emotional abuse wears many faces—faces as varied as the people who give it or receive it. Such abuse can be subtle or blatant, quiet or loud, smooth or abrasive. But with all its differences, any abuse is always wrong and deeply painful. As the psalmist said of an abuser:

*“His talk is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.”*

(PSALM 55:21)

Verbal Abuse

Accusing	“Advising” excessively
Backbiting	Badgering
Bashing	Belittling
Betraying	Blame-shifting
Brainwashing	Breaking promises
Bullying	Complaining chronically
Controlling conversations	Criticizing unjustly
Cursing	Degrading
Demanding compliance	Demanding false confessions
Demanding the impossible	Demeaning
Denying abuse occurred	Denying that abuse is wrong
Destroying credibility	Dictating orders
Disgracing	Gossiping
Humiliating	Insulting
Interrupting constantly	Laughing at abusive behavior
Lying or truth twisting	Making fun of a person’s fear
Negative comparisons	Making racial slurs
Minimizing what is wrong	Mocking
Name-calling	Playing verbal mind games
Ridiculing	Scapegoating
Shaming	Slandering
Speaking profanity	Teasing
Terrorizing	Threatening

Threatening suicide	Twisting Scripture
Undermining other relationships	Using coarse talk
Using put-downs	Wounding with sarcasm
Yelling/screaming	Violating the context of conversations

Nonverbal Abuse

Abandoning the family	Acting overly suspicious
Abusing mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually	Arriving early or late as a form of control
Being chronically irresponsible	Betraying others
Brandishing weapons	Changing rules continually
Committing adultery	Damaging property
Deceiving others	Displaying excessive jealousy
Driving recklessly	Embezzling funds
Excluding others	Favoring others
Forcing an abortion	Forcing sex or sexual perversion
Giving unsolicited “help” to manipulate	Hiding items (keys, money, jewelry, documents)
Glaring condescendingly	Hanging up the phone
Ignoring	Interfering with another’s work
Interrupting sleep	Intimidating physically
Invading personal space	Isolating from family
Killing pet(s)	Making insulting gestures
Making unwanted visits	Manipulating children
Manipulating with excessive gifts	Monitoring phone calls
Neglecting others	Opening others’ mail
Ostracizing	Overindulging to gain control
Playing cruel tricks	Pouting with “pity parties”
Prohibiting decision making	Prohibiting friendships with others
Prohibiting private conversations	Refusing to leave when asked

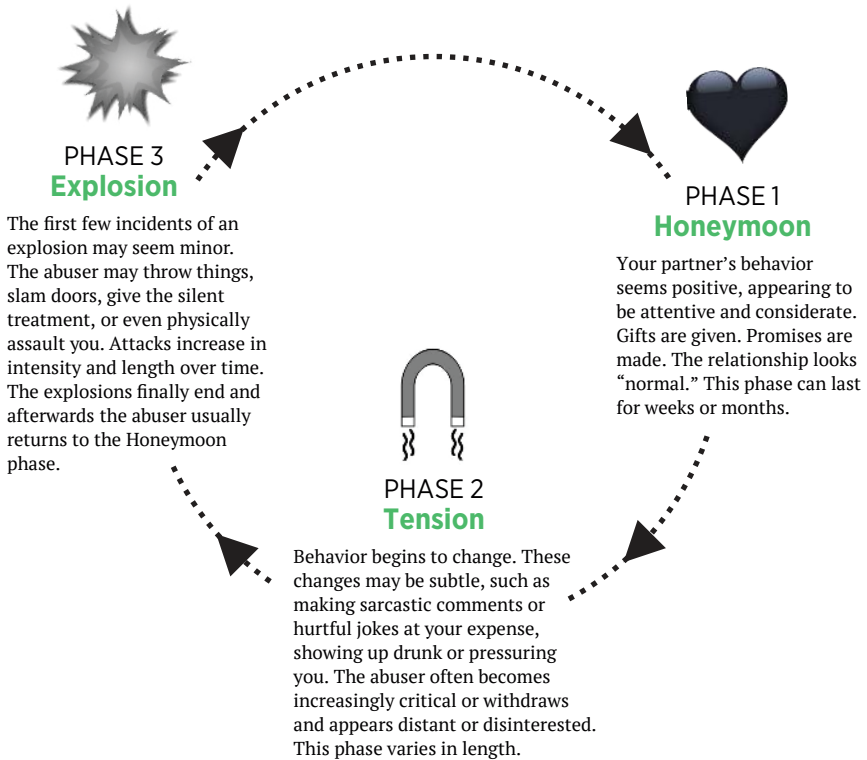
Refusing to listen or validate feelings	Withholding love, compliments, credit, or finances
Rejecting one's own child	Slamming doors and drawers
Sneering	Stalking
Stealing	Threatening with gestures
Walking away as a power play	Withdrawing emotionally

What Is the Cycle of Abuse?

Have you ever been in a relationship with someone whose behavior made you feel crazy? One day, he (or *she*) is kind and affectionate; the next day unpredictable and cruel. Maybe you honestly consider this person to be “good,” yet, their actions (and perhaps even more frequently, their words) cause you to doubt and question your own sanity and your ability to accurately discern character. The only constants in relationships like this are persistent cycles of erratic behavior and “crazy-making” highs and lows. Over time, whatever feelings of safety you might have had within such a relationship ceases to exist.

This *pattern* of behavior was first identified by Lenore E. Walker in her book *The Battered Woman* (1979). In it, the author describes three phases defined as “The Cyle of Abuse”: (1) Honeymoon phase, (2) Tension-building phase, and (3) Explosion phase.²⁶

The Cycle of Abuse



Each phase of this abuse cycle exposes a different expression of power and control. Those being abused try to anticipate what might come next. Being caught in this cycle with the abuser means living in constant fear, knowing that an explosion can occur at any time. Living in daily dread of the abuse intensifying becomes extremely exhausting and frightening.

To break the power of this abusive cycle, take to heart the wisdom found in Proverbs 29:25 . . .

*"Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."*

What Characterizes Classic Passive-Aggressive Behavior?

When Christi returns home, she tells her husband she wants them to return to counseling. He explodes! Then he does something he's never done before—he starts hitting *himself*. She wonders if he is doing this to keep from hitting her.

He rants and raves from one end of the room to the other, gets in her face and then storms off, screaming at her the whole time. He rushes back to the bedroom, throws clothes into a suitcase, and screams at her, “This is it! It’s over. No separation. This is divorce!”²⁷

One minute he’s ending the marriage. The next minute he’s calm and composed, desperately pleading: “What happened? Why are you doing this? I don’t want to separate—let’s try to work this out.”²⁸ In her heart, Christi knows this behavior isn’t acceptable. She’s thankful they don’t have children to witness these battles. Then the thought occurs, *If children shouldn’t be subjected to such chaos, why does she stay?*

Passive-aggressive behavior is a form of *covert control*. *Overt abuse*, such as physical bashing, verbal raging, or name-calling, is easy to identify. But *covert abuse*, like shunning, slighting, or ignoring, can be much more subversive and difficult to detect, though it is just as emotionally abusive.

Passive-aggressive people express anger indirectly and seek to control in evasive, underhanded, or deceitful ways. While some people seem unaware that they engage in such hurtful behavior patterns, others are quite intentional in their actions. The Bible makes it clear that . . .

*“No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house;
no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.”*

(PSALM 101:7)

Passive-Aggressive Behaviors

Tactics used in this type of emotional abuse may include the following:

Invalidating

- “I never said that.”
- “Your recall is wrong.”
- “I don’t know what you mean.”

Minimizing

- “You’re just too sensitive.”
- “You’re exaggerating.”
- “You’re making a big deal out of nothing.”

Countering

- “You couldn’t possibly feel that way.”
- “You’ve got it all wrong.”
- “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Trivializing

- “If you had really worked hard, you would have done better.”
- “Your efforts really fell short.”
- “You’re giving yourself too much credit.”

Methods of Sabotage

To gain covert control and power, the passive-aggressive, emotionally abusive person will use some of the following methods:²⁹

Fostering chaos: Controlling others by intentionally leaving work and projects incomplete

Telling lies or half-truths: Controlling others with unjustified excuses for not fulfilling commitments

Procrastinating: Controlling others by intentionally missing deadlines, thus displaying no regard for the negative impact on others

Being chronically late: Controlling others by keeping people waiting

Being ambiguous: Controlling others by sending mixed messages, leaving others in a wake of confusion about what was said or what was meant

Caustically counseling: Controlling others by offering unsolicited advice on a continual basis

Being passively indifferent: Controlling others by giving the impression that their concerns are heard and important, but then disregarding them

Manipulative protection and help: Controlling others by extending help with the intention of causing a sense of indebtedness

Being a “quick-change artist”: Controlling others by changing the subject and diverting attention from conversations that feel personally threatening

Withholding affirmation: Controlling others by failing to give deserved compliments and credit

Crossing boundaries: Controlling others by taking advantage of those with few or no personal boundaries

In contrast to controlling *others*, God’s Word repeatedly emphasizes the importance of exercising self-control.

*“Like a city whose walls are broken through
is a person who lacks self-control.”
(PROVERBS 25:28)*

What Are Examples of Emotionally Abusive Rejection?

Christi feels the push-pull of the relationship. When life is going well, she finds love and laughter. But those sweet days are few and far between. Times of turmoil occur all too frequently. When she's alone she feels at peace, but when she's with her husband she feels as though she's walking into a minefield. She constantly guesses at gauging his mood. She's so consumed with trying to make him happy, she slowly lets her own dreams disintegrate to dust.³⁰

Rejection is common to all of us. We may have been unjustly rejected by a prospective employer, not chosen by a team captain, abandoned by a date, or ignored by a friend. Yet while we may have had our feelings hurt or our hearts wounded, it didn't last long and left no permanent scars. However, some types of rejection can cut like a knife and pierce like an arrow to the heart.

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

(PSALM 57:4)

Examples of overt, abusive rejection by a parent who:

- Deserts the family.
- Tells a child, "I wish you had never been born."
- Tells a child, "You are a disgrace to this family."
- Tells a child, "You're just like your sorry father."
- Tells a child, "I wish you were more like your brother."
- Tells a child, "You will never amount to anything."
- Tells a child, "You were a mistake. . . . You were an accident. . . . You are not wanted."

*“I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame
and drowned in my affliction.”*

(JOB 10:15)

Examples of covert, abusive rejection by a parent who:

- Constantly “raises the bar” with unreasonable standards.
- Demands more than the child is capable of giving.
- Withholds love.
- Overindulges or overprotects.
- Divorces and begins to withdraw.
- Neglects the child.

*“See, LORD, how distressed I am! I am in torment
within, and in my heart I am disturbed.”*

(LAMENTATIONS 1:20)

What Is the Cost of Being Constantly Abused?

Christi begins to realize she’s not fulfilling her God-given purpose by remaining in an abusive relationship. She has lost herself in the twisted tangle of self-preservation. She’s consumed with fear—afraid of speaking her mind, afraid of fighting for what she needs, afraid of standing up for what’s right. She’s afraid to let people in to her life, and she’s afraid to believe, to hope, to trust.⁵¹

There is always a price to be paid for pain, a loss to be incurred by the recipient of abusive words and hurtful gestures. The cost is often unseen—an extensive, inner deprivation that can continue to damage the soul for a lifetime. The Bible says . . .

*“The soothing tongue is a tree of life,
but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.”*

(PROVERBS 15:4)

Victims of Abuse May Experience . . .

- Loss of clear conscience**increased guilt or shame
- Loss of faith**.....increased fear
- Loss of freedom** increased vigilance
- Loss of friendship**.....increased isolation
- Loss of happiness**..... increased emotional flatness
- Loss of hope** increased despair
- Loss of inner peace** increased “peace-at-any-price” behavior
- Loss of optimism**increased pessimism
- Loss of pride**..... increased self-hatred
- Loss of safety** increased sense of danger
- Loss of security** increased desire to escape
- Loss of self-assurance** increased insecurity
- Loss of self-confidence** increased self-consciousness
- Loss of self-perception**increased self-criticism
- Loss of self-respect**..... increased self-destruction
- Loss of self-worth** increased self-doubt
- Loss of sexual identity**increased sexual confusion
- Loss of trust** increased distrust

Abuse takes an emotional toll on people. It can take away your sense of value, dignity, safety, significance, and purpose. In contrast, God is a giver. He provides peace in the midst of pain, strength to heal our wounds, and graciously satisfies our needs, giving us all we need to move forward.

*“He himself gives life and breath to everything,
and he satisfies every need.”*

(ACTS 17:25 NLT)

What Self-Demeaning Statements Result from Being Abused?

While examining her life, Christi starts to consider what made her susceptible to her husband’s abuse. She writes, “Most of us sense a void inside us that nothing else seems to fill. So when we see what we lack in someone else, we cling to it as if our lives depended on it.”⁵²

People cannot repeatedly experience abuse without internalizing the messages relayed by abuse. These demeaning messages become personalized and incorporated into degrading “self-talk.” Conversely, people who are repeatedly encouraged develop positive, affirming self-talk. And if they believe what the Word of God says about them, their self-talk is empowered by the Holy Spirit living within them. For example, abuse may lead you to believe you are unworthy and unlovable, but God’s Word says you are precious in God’s sight and loved.

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you.”

(ISAIAH 43:4)

What Do You Believe about Yourself?

Following is a list of common, self-demeaning statements. Place a check mark (✓) beside any statements you believe about yourself.

- “I feel defective.”
- “I am bad if I feel angry.”
- “I am bad for having needs.”

- “I will be loved only if I am perfect.”
- “I am a worthless and unlovable person.”
- “My mistakes only confirm my worthlessness.”
- “If people I care about reject me, I must be unlovable.”
- “I need the approval of other people in order to be happy.”
- “I am responsible for the behavior and feelings of those around me.”
- “I am responsible for bringing about change in others when I see that it’s needed.”
- “I must be dependent on others who are wiser and stronger than I am.”
- “I need to be self-sufficient because others are untrustworthy.”
- “I will never let anyone get close enough to hurt me again.”
- “The feelings of others are more important than my own.”
- “I can’t do anything right—everything I do is wrong.”
- “Whatever makes you happy makes me happy.”
- “Nothing matters anymore; life is hopeless.”
- “Bad love is better than no love.”
- “I don’t see any way out.”
- “I’ll never measure up.”

If you’re surprised by how many statements you checked on the list above, search God’s Word to replace the lies you’ve come to believe with God’s truth. The Lord has much to say about your worth and identity. Healing begins when you start to see yourself through God’s eyes.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!”*

(1 JOHN 3:1)

Hope . . . Even When Broken by Abuse

Question: “What hope is there for someone who’s been broken by abuse?”

Answer: God offers great hope for the one who’s been broken by abuse. That hope is found in Him. The Bible says, “*There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off*” (Proverbs 23:18). That means that no matter what has happened in the past, no matter how difficult things are in the present, no matter how much pain you feel . . . *there is hope*. You might feel broken, but God can help restore you to a place of peace and joy. Seek God in His Word and pray for His comfort and healing. Realize . . .

*“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

(PSALM 34:18)

What Characterizes Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships?

Christi starts imagining what God wants from and for her. She thinks He wants her to see herself as He does—wounded, but worthy of His love. She recounts the costs of her decisions: (1) She turned down her dream job, left everything and everyone familiar and rushed into marriage; (2) She couldn’t make her husband less angry, stop drinking, or stop lying; (3) She couldn’t trust him when he was a modern-day Jekyll and Hyde. Edging toward what she knows could lead to a nervous breakdown, instead she breaks down and prays.³³

Are you in an abusive relationship? Have you experienced an unhealthy dynamic between you and someone close to you? Many people fail to recognize that they are in an abusive relationship because abuse has been their “normal” for so long. If you look closely, you can evaluate the health of any relationship by seeing the type of fruit it produces—whether the fruit is good or bad. Jesus said . . .

*“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and
a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.
Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down
and thrown into the fire.
Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”*
(MATTHEW 7:18–20)

The Fruit Test

As a help in realistically evaluating a relationship close to you, take “The Fruit Test.” On the left side of each “fruit,” mark *Yes* or *No* for yourself, and on the right side, mark *Yes* or *No* for the other person in the relationship.

Circle “Y” for Yes and “N” for No.

Fruit of the Abusive Spirit (what sin produces)

*“If you bite and devour each other,
watch out or you will be
destroyed by each other. . . .
The acts of the flesh are obvious:
sexual immorality, impurity
and debauchery;
idolatry and witchcraft; hatred,
discord, jealousy, fits of rage,
selfish ambition,
dissensions, factions . . .”*
(GALATIANS 5:15, 19–20)

Fruit of the Holy Spirit (what the Spirit produces)

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,
peace, forbearance, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self-control.”*
(GALATIANS 5:22–23)

Yourselves	Other Person	Yourselves	Other Person	
Y/N	Biting	Y/N	Love	Y/N
Having a sharp, biting tongue that often hurts the heart		Seeking to do what is in the best interest of another		
Y/N	Devouring	Y/N	Joy	Y/N
Being so overpowering and dominant that the identity of another seems to be destroyed		Living with an inner gladness of heart regardless of challenging circumstances		
Y/N	Hatred	Y/N	Peace	Y/N
Displaying disdain or animosity toward another person		Displaying tranquility in the midst of hardships and trials		
Y/N	Discord	Y/N	Forbearance	Y/N
Starting arguments that result in tension and strife		Enduring difficulties calmly without complaint		
Y/N	Jealousy	Y/N	Kindness	Y/N
Viewing others as rivals and intentionally wanting to exclude them		Expressing genuine care and helping with a benevolent heart		
Y/N	Rage	Y/N	Goodness	Y/N
Displaying out-of-control anger		Displaying moral character and godly virtue with a pure heart		
Y/N	Selfishness	Y/N	Faithfulness	Y/N
Seeking to satisfy personal desires with little or no regard for the desires of another		Being loyal to appropriate significant relationships		

Yourselves	Other Person	Yourselves	Other Person
Y/N	Dissensions	Y/N	Gentleness
Frequently voicing disagreements and disapproval		Treating others with sincere respect, displaying a soothing disposition	
Y/N	Factions	Y/N	Self-Control
Causing splits between others instead of seeking unity		Exercising restraint rather than choosing to be undisciplined	

Ask someone close to you—someone you trust and who will tell you the truth—to help you evaluate your responses. If you are seeking to change, remember the secret to bearing fruit. Jesus said . . .

*“Remain in me, and I will remain in you.
 For a branch cannot produce fruit if it
 is severed from the vine,
 and you cannot be fruitful
 unless you remain in me. . . .
 I am the vine; you are the branches.
 Those who remain in me, and I in them,
 will produce much fruit.
 For apart from me you can do nothing.”*
 (JOHN 15:4–5 NLT)



CAUSES



*“The Lord can take
your pain and
fill your heart with
unimaginable joy.”*



“How can he be so cruel?” “How can she be so insensitive?” “Why would he talk that way?” These are *real questions* that victims of abusers wonder and ask.

Others want to know, “Why don’t the victims simply leave?” “Why endure more abuse?” “Why stay in an abusive relationship?” These questions are often asked by those close to the victims of abuse.

Realize the importance of understanding both why abuse happens (why people become abusive), and why abuse continues to happen (why people stay in abusive relationships). Examine both aspects of abuse and seek wisdom and discernment regarding your relationships.

*“Get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have,
get understanding.”*
(PROVERBS 4:7)

What Breeding Ground Produces Abusers?

Has anyone ever implied or accused you of being abusive? If a kernel of truth exists in such an assertion, do you want to change?

To begin to change, you must examine your life and heal from past pain. First, seek to understand the painful impact those wounds have had on your relationships, both past and present. Then, courageously choose to face the areas in your life that need healing, or refuse to do so and remain a victim of your past, whereby you continue to make others victims of your past as well.

If you choose the path of healing, cling to these words:

*“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.”*
(JEREMIAH 17:14)

Background of Abusers

Evaluate your childhood. What were your relationships like during your preschool years? During your elementary school years? During your adolescence and adulthood? What feelings do you remember? Were you usually sad . . . happy . . . angry . . . afraid? Use the following list of statements to prompt your memory.

- **I experienced** some type of abuse by one or both of my parents.
- **I felt** “different” as a child.
- **I felt** belittled or bullied by my schoolmates.
- **I stuffed** my emotions.
- **I learned** my parents’ ways of maintaining control.
- **I didn’t have** a safe place to express my feelings.
- **I thought** that my “normal” was normal—but it wasn’t.
- **I never dealt** with my underlying feelings of anger.
- **I never developed** sensitivity to the feelings of others.

If many of these statements apply to you, then you will relate to this statement by the psalmist:

“I was overcome by distress and sorrow.”

(PSALM 116:3)

Childhood Feelings of Abusers

Many who become abusers felt singled out as children. They typically felt different in several of these areas:

- Too short or too tall
- Too fat or too thin
- Too dark or too light (skin color)

- Physical features too large (nose, ears, feet)
- Physical features undesirable (freckles, acne, bad teeth, hair color)
- Athletically challenged (awkward or uncoordinated)
- Academically challenged (learning disabilities, ADD, or ADHD)
- Physically challenged (disabilities, poor eyesight, hearing problems, or speech difficulties)
- Financially challenged (few resources, lack of possessions or “nice things”)
- Socially challenged (uncomfortable, either overconfident or insecure)

You are God’s wonderful creation . . . no matter how He made you.

*“For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”*

(PSALM 139:13–14)

Predisposing Influences in the Childhood of Abusers

Not all children who experience abuse become abusers; however, *most abusers have been abused* in one way or another. This raises the question: “Why do some children become abusers while others do not?” Certain factors predispose children to make particular choices about how they respond to their experiences. One thing they all have in common: Each young spirit was crushed by heartache. The Bible says . . .

“Heartache crushes the spirit.”

(PROVERBS 15:13)

Temperament

- The child may be strong-willed and impulsive.
- The child may be over-confident and forceful.
- The child may lack compassion and empathy for others.
- The child may exert power and control over peers.

Environment

- The child experiences some form of abuse within the home.
- The child spends excessive, unsupervised hours playing violent video games and/or watching violent TV programs laced with sarcasm and harsh language.
- The child forms the belief that being mean to others is the best form of self-protection.
- The child is unable to express anger and frustration safely at home.

Why Do Some Inflict Abuse and Others Receive or Reject It?

Children are impacted by abusive treatment. Some take the path of succumbing to abuse and defining themselves by the negativity of that abuse. Others take the path of rising above abuse and defining themselves by positive character-building values.

*“I have followed your commands,
which keep me from following cruel and evil people.
My steps have stayed on your path;
I have not wavered from following you.”*

(PSALM 17:4–5 NLT)

Three Paths to Travel

Many people wonder, *Why did I have to travel down this path of abuse?* You may not know the exact answer for some time, or you may never fully know the answer. However, you can know that as long as you continue to entrust your life to the Lord, He will direct your path each step of the way. Through Him, you can overcome the abuse that has defeated you in the past. You can be more than a conqueror.

*“In all these things we are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.”*

(ROMANS 8:37)

1. The Path of Victims

- Children *internalize* abusive experiences.
- Children *blame* themselves for the abuse.
- Children *feel* deserving of abuse.
- Children *seek* out abusers who *look strong*.
- Children *remain* victims of abusers.

2. The Path of Abusers

- Children *internalize* abusive experiences.
- Children *blame* others for the abuse.
- Children *feel* that others are deserving of abuse.
- Children *seek* out the weak in order to *look strong*.
- Children *become* abusers.

3. The Path of Overcomers/Conquerors

- Children initially internalize their abusive experiences, but later *find healing* and make sense of their experiences.
- Children initially blame themselves or others for the abuse, but later *forgive* those involved in the abuse.
- Children initially feel deserving of abuse, but later *feel* deserving of loving, trusting relationships.

- Children initially seek out abusers or victims, but later *seek out* well-adjusted people.
- Children initially remain victims or become abusers, but later reject both roles and *become* emotionally healthy.

Truly, the path to overcoming is through Christ.

*“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 15:57)

Overcoming Damage from the Past

Question: “How can I overcome the damage I suffered in the past? Why do I keep repeating the same unhealthy relational patterns and how can I change them?”

Answer: God often allows the difficulties we experience in life to wake us up to our need to understand our personal attitudes and actions. Then, with that understanding we can take responsibility for them. You will be drawn to the same relational dynamics over and over until you overcome the past by allowing God to heal and restore you. Reclaiming your life through discipline will produce a harvest of peace and righteousness in you. Truly . . .

*“God disciplines us for our good,
in order that we may share in his holiness.
No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.
Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness
and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

(HEBREWS 12:10–11)

Why Do the Abused Feel Guilty?

Christi confesses to her counselor that she feels tremendous guilt when she thinks of leaving her husband. She knows if she leaves, it will hurt—both her and him. She sees her husband as basically a good man trapped by his own pain, wrestling demons he can't control. Her attempts to save their marriage will never be successful if he won't take responsibility for his part and make different choices. She has no power to make him change. What she can change is her own reaction to his abuse. She knows she needs to leave, but doesn't know if she has the strength.³⁴

One emotion associated with abuse transcends all geographical boundaries, blinding victims from seeing the truth about the abuse they suffer. That emotion is *false guilt*. It deceives people who believe that the abuse they experience is somehow their fault.

False guilt adds yet another unhealthy dynamic to the already wounded emotions of the abused. A guilt-ridden victim will often figuratively beat themselves up, suffering needlessly because they feel they “let down” their abuser or didn't do something “right” in the eyes of the abuser. Although it may seem counter intuitive, false guilt is common among those who are continuously abused. Those who experience it might say . . .

“My life is consumed by anguish.”
(Psalm 31:10)

True Guilt vs. False Guilt

There's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt.

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the perfect will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues after having committed a sin even though the sin is confessed, repented of, and no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt leads to freedom when it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.⁵⁵
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess. Instead, false guilt is resolved by rejecting lies and believing truth. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the “*accuser of our brothers.*” He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

Reject the false guilt and lies you've been led to believe, and find freedom by believing the truth of God's Word.

*“Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.”*

(PSALM 25:5 NLT)

Why Don't the Abused Leave?

“Once you ask God for help, make no mistake—He gives it.”³⁶After Christi prays, she feels a stirring of peace, joy, and even hope. Although her husband agrees to resume counseling, she wants some distance between them. When she's with him, she becomes a tense, suspicious version of herself.

She decides she wants to visit her parents, to put physical distance between her and her husband. No surprise—he doesn't want her to go. He fears her parents will convince her to divorce him. She thinks, *If only he knew how many times her parents counseled her to stay in her marriage.* Their counselor confirms her need to be with family and convinces her husband she would only resent him if he refuses to let her go.³⁷ For Christi, even a brief separation is warranted. Indeed, the Bible warns,

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,
do not associate with one easily angered.”*

(PROVERBS 22:24)

Those who live in healthy, non-abusive homes often have no frame of reference for why the abused don't leave their abusive relationship. But those who live in abusive homes know all too well the reasons why the abused often stay with their abusers. They understand the mentality because it is their mentality. They may have lived it as children, and now they live it as adults. They are caught in the snare of abuse.

An abused person chooses not to leave their abusive relationship because of certain beliefs, emotions, and fears.³⁸

Beliefs That Keep the Abused Trapped in Abuse

They believe they don't have a biblical right to separate in order to achieve a healthy relationship.

They believe abuse is normal and must be accepted.

They believe they must protect the family (or relationship) image at all costs.

They believe family or relationship “problems” are private and should not be shared.

They believe they have to stay because of what they’ve been told by spiritual leaders.

They believe the promises of the abuser who says they will “never do it again.”

They believe being a peace-at-any-price person is being loyal and godly.

They believe their spouse and children are all they have.

They believe biblical submission in marriage permits abuse.

They believe no one is there to help or are uninformed of organizations or services available to help.

Emotions That Keep the Abused Enslaved in Abuse

They feel helpless, without the power to leave or make it on their own.

They feel they have no real worth or value.

They feel manipulated by threats of suicide from the abuser.

They feel they must deserve to be abused and blame themselves.

They feel isolated from supportive people.

They feel too much shame to tell others about the abuse.

They feel they are not heard or understood when they do share about the abuse.

They feel others don’t want to hear about the abuse.

They feel that explaining the details of the abuse costs too much emotionally and physically.

They feel that having two parents in an unhealthy relationship is better for the children than having only one healthy parent.

Fears That Keep the Abused Frozen in Fear by Abuse

They fear if they tell and then the abuser changes, people won't understand or forgive the abuser.

They fear what the abuser will do if they leave.

They fear losing their children.

They fear being divorced and/or being a single parent.

They fear the financial consequences of separation or divorce.

They fear living alone.

They fear "starting all over again."

They fear being dependent on others for help.

They fear the stigma of people learning about the abuse.

They fear they are "crazy" because they are continually told they are crazy.

The cry of the abused might be . . .

*"Ensure your servant's well-being;
do not let the arrogant oppress me."*

(PSALM 119:122)

Why Do the Abused Finally Leave?

Christi leaves to visit her parents and search her soul. When her husband drops her off at the airport, there's no good-bye kiss, just a small wave from her. He's not happy she's taking this trip and makes this abundantly clear. She turns to look back, feeling a sense of finality. She sees only his back as he gets in the car. No lingering glance at her. No wave good-bye. Nothing.

She sighs and moves on. When you've been trapped in a relationship that stifles and smothers you, being alone is freeing. Throughout the plane ride to Cleveland, she turns her situation over and over in her mind. Getting farther and farther away from him, she feels no anger, no animosity. Just sadness. No longer in love with him, she still loves and cares about him.

She talks with her parents and her grandmother. Her mother shares the advice of a friend who endured a similar situation, "Tell her not to wait 25 years like I did."³⁹ Gram cries, sad and resigned. Looking back at their wedding reception, Gram noticed even then that Christi's husband displayed no affection, nor had she seen him show Christi any tenderness since.

Sometimes abusive relationships change. The abuser may recognize the gravity of their harsh treatment and make changes. Sometimes God intervenes and changes the life of the abuser. Sometimes boundaries are established in the relationship and real change occurs. Sometimes a temporary separation leads to lasting change.

But in many cases, the verbal and emotional abuse increases in regularity and severity. Sometimes the verbal and emotional abuse escalates to physical abuse.

One of the most difficult things a victim of abuse will ever do is leave the abusive relationship. Whether leaving is temporary or permanent, it is an important step toward freedom and healing. Leaving an abusive relationship benefits everyone involved and ushers in the opportunity for a fresh, new beginning. The abused no longer lives in constant fear or faces continual abuse. The abuser can better grasp the gravity of the abusive situation and seek counseling and recovery.

But walking away from an abusive relationship is not easy. Enlisting a supportive circle of friends can help you maintain your resolve and help meet your needs during such a vulnerable time. Above all, seek the guiding, protective hand of God and lean on Him to give you the grace and strength you need to take that first step toward healing.

*"I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you."
(ISAIAH 46:4)*

The Abused Leave Because . . .

They finally realize their abuser won't change if circumstances remain the same.

They understand that leaving may be the only way to motivate change.

They can now see their abuser acting on threats of severe physical, mental, or emotional abuse.

They see the abuse occurs more frequently.

They see their abuser has begun to abuse the children.

They want to prevent their children from adopting abusive mindsets and behaviors.

They have found help through friends, family, church, or professional organizations.

They realize it is not God's will for anyone to be abused.

They are afraid for their lives or for the lives of their children if they stay.

They realize there is a thin line between threats and physical abuse.

The abused need to continually pray:

*"O Most High. Bring to an end the violence of the wicked
and make the righteous secure."
(PSALM 7:8-9)*

What Is the Root Cause of Abusive Relationships?

Eventually, Christi comes to the conclusion she must leave. She also discovers she isn't mad and doesn't want to hurt him, but she cannot continue to allow him to keep wearing her down and tearing her apart.

She wrestles with what to do next. If she returns home to tell him in person, what might he do to her, or even himself? She decides that possibility is too dangerous. She's been close to his family—they've been her family, too. They know the relationship has been bad. If she asks his parents to be there, to support him and even protect her, would that be right? No, she decides. That would humiliate him. She considers calling from her parents' home and breaking the news to him over the phone. She knows that's not ideal, but she would be physically safe.

She learns from his mom that his brother has come to visit him while Christi is at her parents. Calling him and telling him over the phone seems to be the least explosive and safest solution. She views this as an answer to prayer. Christi hopes his brother being there will be a source of care and comfort for him.⁴⁰ As for herself, she will turn to the Lord for comfort and strength.

*"The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him."*

(NAHUM 1:7)

Healthy relationships are those in which the people involved have a clearly defined sense of their own identities. Without a clear understanding of who we are and of the worth God has given us, it is hard to maintain functional relationships that enrich everyone involved. A relationship will not always be smooth, but it can provide a safe, trusting environment in which there is no fear of intimacy and where each person feels free to communicate personal needs and desires to the other.

Unhealthy relationships generally reflect an inability to understand and work within appropriate boundaries. Living with unhealthy boundaries is often the result of being raised in a dysfunctional family. Children raised in such families will not likely develop healthy boundaries apart from direct intervention

Pain from not having one's need for love, significance, and security met carries into subsequent relationships, often in illegitimate or abusive ways.⁴¹ This pain will not be healed by human relationships but only by the Lord.

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

(PSALM 147:3)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.⁴²

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”

(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

WRONG BELIEF OF VICTIMS:

“I am responsible for the way others treat me. I don’t have a choice about being mistreated. I must be doing something wrong or I wouldn’t be treated this way. If I just try harder to do what is expected, I can make things better. If I can’t, then I deserve to be unhappy.”

RIGHT BELIEF OF VICTIMS:

“I realize that I have been living a lie, believing that I am to blame for being mistreated and believing that my happiness will come from a human relationship. I have a choice about being around anyone who mistreats me. I don’t want to have a false loyalty to anyone who abuses me, nor do I want to have the false expectation that if I just change, the abuse will stop. I will no longer live for the approval of others but will rely on the Lord to meet my inner needs—because my value and worth come from Him and He loves me unconditionally. Only the Lord can meet all my needs.”

*“Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*
(GALATIANS 1:10)

WRONG BELIEF OF ABUSERS:

“I am not responsible for the way I treat others; they are to blame. If people wouldn’t make me mad, I wouldn’t treat them badly. They are the ones who should change, not me. There’s nothing wrong with me. People just need to accept me the way I am.”

RIGHT BELIEF OF ABUSERS:

“I realize that I am responsible for the way I respond to others. No one deserves to be mistreated. No matter how people act toward me, how I act toward them is my choice. God has given me the power through His Holy Spirit to treat everyone with love and respect. I don’t need to try to control people because God is in control, and He is the only one who can meet my deepest needs.”

*“Be compassionate and humble.
Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.
On the contrary, repay evil with blessing,
because to this you were called
so that you may inherit a blessing.”*
(1 PETER 3:8–9)

What Is the First Action You Can Take toward Healing?

When Christi makes the phone call, dread hovers over her. The conversation begins with small talk. Then he asks if she’s been thinking about where they stand. She answers *Yes*—that she’s coming back to Phoenix, but not coming back to *him*. She simply can’t keep living this way. She can’t keep pretending everything is all right when it’s not.

He remains calm at first, but the inevitable explosion ensues. “I can’t believe you’re doing this! . . . There’s no separation here, Christi! It’s divorce!”⁴³

He throws out more threats and insults before the conversation ends. She waits for her tears and trembling to start, but her expected anguish never arrives—instead, only relief. She knows there’s no going back, but she doesn’t want to go back anyway. No, she wants to move forward toward hope and healing.

No matter how heavy a burden you bear, the Lord can carry it. No matter how broken you feel, the Lord can restore you. No matter how deep the wounds, the Lord can heal them. He can take your pain and fill your heart with unimaginable joy.

*“LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.
You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit. . . .
You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”*
(PSALM 30:2–3, 11)

4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God’s Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you've humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I've chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



STEPS TO SOLUTION



“Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God’s eyes.”



Living with a verbal and emotional abuser is like living with a rabid dog, asleep in your own living room! Threatening, unpredictable, attacking—its presence should never be ignored. But think of what harm could be done if *no one* is willing to confront this “boundary-less” beast—for fear of inciting its wrath.

Yet all who enter tiptoe carefully—trying to keep the peace—hoping to avoid a frightening confrontation. But it’s important to remember, no matter how long you let “sleeping dogs lie,” they eventually are bound to wake up.

Rather than spending the rest of your life permitting inexcusable attacks in “the living room of your life,” decide today to respond God’s way to all verbal and emotional abuse. Although your resolve will be tested, as you maintain a right spirit with firm boundaries, your life will begin to change—whether your abuser changes or not. What’s more, your consistent, Christlike character could be the impetus to transform your emotional predator into “man’s best friend”—one who can become an encourager and bring glory to God.

As impossible as transformation may seem, Jesus offers this comforting hope:

*“With man this is impossible,
but with God all things are possible.”*
(MATTHEW 19:26)

Key Verse to Memorize

At the heart of God’s character is love. In fact, the Bible says, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16).

Whereas love seeks the highest good of another, abuse harms another. Abuse runs contrary to who God is and how He calls us to live. God desires our relationships to reflect His character, to be marked by love.

*“Love does no harm to a neighbor.
Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*
(ROMANS 13:10)

Key Passage to Read

Have you ever spilled a glass of milk and watched helplessly as it poured across the tabletop and over the edges onto the carpeted floor below? You wish you could somehow catch it and put it back into the glass, but it flows between your fingers and you are left with a mess to clean up.

It only takes a few minutes to wash the table and clean up the spilled milk splashed across the floor, but it takes much longer to “clean up after” hurtful words. Once they’ve been spilled onto a person, damaging the soul and inflicting emotional pain, it will take time and the healing counsel of God’s Word to restore wholeness and possibly repair an abusive relationship. If there is no repentance from the abuser and no help sought by the abused, the effects of verbal and emotional abuse can last a lifetime, causing permanent scars of sorrow on the heart of the abused.

God hears and will judge every word that spills out from the overflow of our hearts.

Matthew 12:34–37

³⁴*“How can you who are evil say anything good?
For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*

³⁵*A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him,
and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.*

³⁶*But I tell you that everyone will have to give account
on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.*

³⁷*For by your words you will be acquitted,
and by your words you will be condemned.”*

WORDS

(an acrostic for WORDS)

- W— Words** that are good do not come from
the mouths of those who are evil..... v. 34
- O— Out** of the overflow of your heart come
the words you say. v. 34
- R— Righteousness** flows from the good stored
in your heart.v. 35
- D— Deeds** of evil are stored in the heart of one
who is evil.v. 35
- S— Spoken** words will be judged on the day of
judgment.vv. 36–37

How to Have a Transformed Life

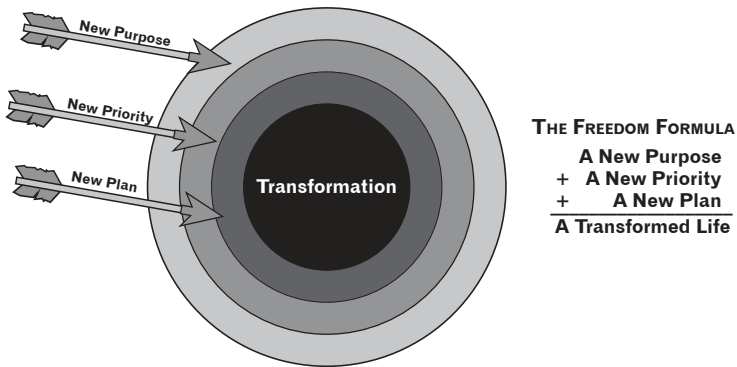
For years, Christi prays for God to heal their marriage. Before visiting her parents, she sits in her car alone in the church parking lot. Pondering her past, one verse comes to mind—Proverbs 3:5, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”*

This verse talks about understanding and Christi realizes she has none—but maybe trusting God is what she’s been missing. She sees the Lord as being able to solve her problems—except the ones she is responsible for creating. She’s the one who made wrong decisions and took impulsive actions. Isn’t that on her? She’s mad at herself . . . so shouldn’t God be mad at her too? Ultimately, she comes to the conclusion she hasn’t been living the truth of this verse—she hasn’t trusted God.

Thinking back to her earlier epiphany—that if her marriage relationship wasn’t safe for a child, then it wasn’t safe for her—she suddenly sees herself as the child in the relationship with God as her Father. Just as she feels protective of children she doesn’t even have, she recognizes God is just as fiercely protective of her. Finally she sees herself as His beloved daughter!⁴⁴

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!”*
(1 JOHN 3:1)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



Target #1—A New Purpose

God’s purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).

—“I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

My Personalized Plan

What's been *said* to you and what's been *done* to you may have left you with a broken heart, broken dreams, and broken relationships. You might feel trapped in an abusive relationship or ensnared by fear, anger, and bitterness.

The idea of finding healing and freedom may be difficult to grasp, but it is all possible with God's help. He has a plan for you to help you overcome the past, find joy in the present, and give you a bright future. Even in the darkness of abuse, He can shine a light into your life that makes it possible for you to move forward with hope.

*"You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light."*

(PSALM 18:28)

To overcome the abuse I've experienced and become the person God created me to be, **I will** . . .

Look to the Lord

The Bible says, *"I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me"* (Psalm 77:1 ESV). Change, healing, and freedom all begin with God. Abuse can distort my view of God but I know God loves me. He is for me, and He is with me. He will help me rise above abuse because He desires to heal me and set me free. I can trust Him. Scripture says, *"The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy"* (Psalm 28:7 NLT).

- I will read God's Word and pray regularly.
- I will get involved in a local church to grow in my relationship with God.

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always" (1 CHRONICLES 16:11).

Process my emotions

The pain of abuse can create heavy emotions. Some emotions like hurt and anger linger, are ever-present and quick to surface. Though hidden, these emotions still affect my well-being and relationships. I often struggle to process my emotions and express them freely. But confronting these painful emotions is an important step toward healing. I will give myself time to grieve and process the pain.

- I will be honest about the pain and emotions I've felt as a result of the abuse I experienced.
- I will talk with God and trustworthy people to process my thoughts and emotions, as well as journal my experience.

"In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help" (PSALM 18:6).

Find support

Healing doesn't happen in isolation. God often uses friends, family, and counselors to comfort us and to help us heal and grow. God created us to be in loving, flourishing relationships. Therefore, it's important for me to find and develop healthy friendships and other relationships where I can be supported and loved.

- I will seek the help of a counselor, if needed, to help me heal, grow, and develop healthy relationships.
- I will develop a support system with my family, friends, and local church, as well as look into online and community resources for further support.

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help” (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

Replace lies with truth

Verbal and emotional abuse often leads to believing lies about ourselves, our value, and our purpose. We might even believe lies about how relationships should work, whether change is possible, or even lies about God. Healing occurs when we recognize the lies and walk in the truth. God’s Word provides truth about me—my identity, my purpose, and my worth. I will begin to see myself through God’s eyes—as a precious child of God.

- I will identify the lies I believe about myself, about others, about life, and about God.
- I will look to God’s Word to replace those lies with truth.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (JOHN 8:32).

Set boundaries

Boundaries define what is permissible and what is not, separating what is in bounds and what is out of bounds. They are designed for my protection. In abusive relationships, boundaries are often crossed. They are either never established, or they are established but never maintained. To prevent further abuse, I must draw the line and establish boundaries.

- I will set healthy boundaries to protect myself and others from further abuse.
- I will enforce repercussions and maintain those boundaries when they are crossed.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (PROVERBS 4:23).

Help others

One sign of healing and growth is that I can take the bad things that have happened to me and use them for good. The pain of abuse might make this difficult to believe, but God can use my painful experiences to help others. As the saying goes, “God can turn my misery into a ministry.”

- I will trust God to use me, even the pain of my past, to help others who have been impacted by abuse.
- I will look for opportunities to share my story, listen to others, and point people to the Lord.

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (ISAIAH 54:10).

How to Identify the Language of Love

Even in the midst of a pending separation or, at the worst, a divorce, Christi wants her husband to be okay. She doesn’t want him to hurt and doesn’t want him to be angry. But she knows she has no control over how he will act or feel. Their past has proven that fact. Examining her own heart, she discovers that she’s not angry at him anymore.

Christi realizes she can forgive him without condoning or excusing his behavior. Once hurtful, harmful words are spoken, the damage has been done. An abuser can apologize, but the pain is not erased. There she chooses to move past the pain and finds the freedom of forgiveness. However, that act of forgiveness is not an open door to let him back into her life.⁴⁵

Abuse occurs when one person repeatedly interacts with another person in an unloving manner. Abuse violates the way God tells us to love one another. The best description of love is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, often called “The Love Chapter.” If you wonder whether you are being verbally abused, write out the exact words spoken to you and ask yourself:

- “How does this make me feel?”
- “Does this sound like a conversation between two people who respect each other?”
- “Does this sound like a conversation between two people who deeply care for each other?”
- “Would Jesus speak to me in this way?”
- “If I said these words, how would the other person respond?”

Compare the words spoken to you with 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, God’s description of love and the standard He has set for us.

⁴*“Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking,
it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes,
always perseveres. Love never fails.”*
(1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–8)

The Language of Love Inventory

Love is . . .

Y / N *Patient*—Are these words spoken in *haste*?

Y / N *Kind*—Are these words *unkind*?

Love is not . . .

Y / N *Proud*—Are these words *prideful*?

Y / N *Dishonoring*—Are these words *disrespectful*?

Y / N *Self-seeking*—Are these words *self-serving*?

Y / N *Easily angered*—Are these words *hostile*?

Love does not . . .

- Y / N *Envy*—Are these words selfishly *possessive*?
- Y / N *Boast*—Are these words *bragging*?
- Y / N *Delight in evil*—Are these words *malicious*?

Love always . . .

- Y / N *Protects*—Do these words *attack*?
- Y / N *Trusts*—Do these words create *doubt*?
- Y / N *Hopes*—Do these words create *despair*?
- Y / N *Perseveres*—Do these words *lessen motivation*?

Love . . .

- Y / N *Keeps no record of wrongs*—Are these words based on *past wrongs*?
- Y / N *Rejoices with the truth*—Do these words reflect *untruthfulness*?
- Y / N *Never fails*—Do these words reflect *loss of love*?

If most of your answers to these questions are *Yes*, seriously consider the truth that you are being verbally abused. The Bible says . . .

*“Love must be sincere.
Hate what is evil;
cling to what is good.”
(ROMANS 12:9)*

How to Have Victory over Verbal Abuse

Christi and her husband encounter many skirmishes following her decision to separate from him. He decides he wants to keep their apartment so she makes arrangements to stay with a friend when she returns to Phoenix. She needs to pick up her car and thankfully they both agree he won't be there when she does.

Is there any hope for those who have been verbally abused? *Yes!* Granted, change doesn't come overnight. But with intentional, consistent work, progress can be made, authentic change can occur, and victory can be achieved.

Those who seek to control or to overpower you with verbal bombardments may not be as strong and self-assured as they appear. If they express inappropriate anger toward you, realize that their assaults are often not about you but more about them. The source of their insensitive attacks is a heart that suffers from emotional pain or dysfunction from the past and from their choice to respond to those pains by abusing others. Be aware that you too may have unresolved anger from abuse in your past that magnifies the abuse you experience now. If that is the case, the Bible has this helpful word of instruction:

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
(EPHESIANS 4:31–32)

Seven Steps to Victory

1. Face the problem.

- Identify any verbal abuse. Does the other person . . .
 - ♦ Say things that are meant to make you feel guilty?
 - ♦ Claim to always be right?
 - ♦ Put you down in humorous or sarcastic ways?
 - ♦ Act as your “judge and jury”?
 - ♦ Bring up the past over and over?
- Decide that you are no longer going to tolerate the abusive behavior.
- Communicate your position to the abuser.
- Determine to resolve your own anger from past or present verbal abuse.

The Bible says . . .

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

(PSALM 139:23–24)

2. Understand the source of the problem.

- Know that many verbal abusers were themselves abused or neglected in some way as children. (Some, however, were not abused and simply learned abusive behavior later in life.)
- Know that verbal abusers often lack empathy and feel justified in their abuse.
- Know that uncontrolled outbursts of anger can be triggered by depression, fear, hurt, stress, anxiety, worry, frustration, or insecurity.
- Know that you are *not* the cause of the abuse (although you might be blamed).

The Bible says . . .

*“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge,
for the ears of the wise seek it out.”*

(PROVERBS 18:15)

3. Confront the problem person.

- Communicate an attitude of caring.
“I want you to know that I care about you.”
- Communicate that you have been deeply hurt by the abusive behavior.
“I feel deeply hurt by your tone of voice when you talk to me that way.”
- Communicate your desire for a positive relationship, but make it clear that you will no longer tolerate verbal attacks.

“I want to support you and I want us to have a good relationship, but I will no longer tolerate abusive behavior from you.”

- Communicate truth without condemnation or judging.

“I want our relationship to continue, but if you choose to continue belittling me, I will know that you don’t value me. We therefore will have no basis for a relationship, and I will leave.”

The Bible says . . .

*“The wise in heart are called discerning,
and gracious words promote instruction.”*

(PROVERBS 16:21)

4. Take responsibility for yourself.

- Resist becoming defensive.
- Resist retreating into a shell.
- Resist playing the familiar “victim-martyr” role.
- Resist seeking retaliation.

The Bible says . . .

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,
live at peace with everyone.”*

(ROMANS 12:17–18)

5. View the abusive person from God’s perspective.

- See the person as having God-given worth.
- See the person as someone for whom Christ died.
- See the person as capable of being changed by Christ.
- See the person as having legitimate God-given needs that God alone can meet and that God is willing to meet.

The Bible says . . .

*“Be completely humble and gentle;
be patient, bearing with one another in love.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:2)

6. Love unconditionally.

- Love is not a feeling but a commitment to do what is right.
- Love looks for legitimate ways to meet the needs of another.
- Love seeks to do what is in the best interests of another.
- Love says, “I care about our relationship, and I will work to make it a positive, healthy one.”

The Bible says . . .

*“Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over all wrongs.”*

(PROVERBS 10:12)

7. Practice a powerful prayer life.

- Remember that God cares about both of you even more than you care about each other.
- Remember that prayer is the surest path toward healing and wholeness.
- Remember that you need to pray for healing for both you and your abuser.
- Remember to thank God for all that He is teaching you in the midst of this trying time.

The Bible says . . .

*“Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

(1 THESSALONIANS 5:17–18)

How to Change the Course of an Abusive Relationship

As soon as the plane lands, Christi feels anxious about what she will face. She takes a cab to the apartment and lets out a sigh of relief that he's not there. She finds a note: "Christi, Here are the keys. Dr. Anderson told me it would be good for me not to be home, so I'll talk to you later."⁴⁶

She's shocked. No insults, no anger, no negativity at all. And he's been talking to their counselor. Was he making an effort at last?

Christi adds a few items to her bag and realizes that he's left her the keys to the car *he* normally drives. Just more evidence of him trying to exert control. Her anger rises momentarily, then she puts that thought aside. *He can have the better car as long as she has freedom from his abuse!*

You can curtail verbal and emotional abuse by developing a plan to prevent yourself from being controlled. You cannot change another person, but you can change yourself so that the abusive tactics previously used on you are no longer effective and cease to ensnare you. As you determine the appropriate boundaries, realize that these boundaries are designed to guard your soul—your mind, will, and emotions.

The Bible says . . .

*"Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked;
whoever guards his soul will keep far from them."*

(PROVERBS 22:5 ESV)

After determining your plan of action . . .

1. **State clearly**, in a conversation or a letter, what you are willing to accept and not accept from the abuser.⁴⁷
 - Communicate your position in a positive way. (Practice what you will say in advance.)
 - Do not justify yourself. Do not be apologetic, just state the boundary:

- “I want our relationship to continue, but . . .
 - ♦ “I’m not willing to listen to your name-calling.”
 - ♦ “I’m not willing to hear your accusations concerning (name) any longer.”
 - ♦ “Talking negatively about the past, about you or me, or anyone else is counterproductive.”
 - ♦ “I’m not willing to be controlled by your silent treatment any longer.”
- Keep what you say short and succinct.

Remember . . .

*“The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint,
and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.”*

(PROVERBS 17:27)

2. Announce the consequence you will enforce if the abuser violates your requests.

- Your response should be a matter of separating yourself from the abuser.
- You cannot change the abuser’s behavior, but you can remove yourself from frequent exposure to unacceptable behavior.
- “I want to visit with you, but . . .
 - ♦ “If you call me a derogatory name again, I will leave for a period of time.”
 - ♦ “If you persist in making accusations, I will immediately end our conversation.”
 - ♦ “If you give me the silent treatment, I will go and find someone else to talk with.”
- Consequences are part of God’s plan.

Remember . . .

“A man reaps what he sows.”

(GALATIANS 6:7)

3. Enforce the consequence every single time abuse occurs.

- Do not bluff! The abuser needs to know that you are going to act consistently on your words.
- Plan on being tested multiple times.
- In your mind and heart . . .
 - ♦ Say *No* to manipulation.
 - ♦ Say *No* to pressure.
 - ♦ Say *No* to control.
- Eventually, your abuser will stop an abusive tactic, but only after that tactic proves to be ineffective.

Remember . . .

“Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no.”
(JAMES 5:12 ESV)

4. Hold your ground and absolutely do not negotiate.

- Since verbal abusers do not use words fairly, negotiation will not work.
- Instead of “talking out” the problem, your abuser will seek to wear you out.
- Simply state that when the behavior stops, you look forward to a renewed relationship.
 - ♦ “I am not willing to discuss this topic any longer.”
 - ♦ “I have stated clearly what I will not accept.”
 - ♦ “When you are ready to respect my requests, let me know. I look forward to enjoying being together at that time.”
- Keep your words brief and to the point.

Remember . . .

*“Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues.”*
(PROVERBS 10:19)

5. Respond when your boundary is violated—never react out of instinct or out of anger.

- Expect your boundary to be violated . . . but don't react.
- Expect your boundary to be violated again . . . and again. But don't react.
- If you react, you will find yourself back under the control of the abuser.
- Respond by detaching yourself from the abuser and enforcing your repercussions.
 - ♦ Do not *cry* because of feeling hurt.
 - ♦ Do not *beg* because of feeling fearful.
 - ♦ Do not *explode* because of feeling frustrated.

Remember . . .

*“The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.
Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.”*
(ECCLESIASTES 7:8–9)

6. Solicit the support of one or two wise, objective people to help you through this process.

- Include supporters as you analyze and identify the problem.
- Include supporters as you determine how to articulate your plan.
- Include supporters as you enforce the repercussions.
- Include supporters—friend, mentor, counselor—to help you through this critical period.
 - ♦ Discuss the situation with your supporters.
 - ♦ Discuss the tactics used on you.
 - ♦ Discuss the plan of action.

Remember . . .

*“Listen to advice and accept discipline,
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.”*

(PROVERBS 19:20)

7. Expect manipulative maneuvers and emotional ups and downs.

- Assume that your actions will make the abuser angry.
- Allow your abuser to react without reacting yourself.
- Do not seek to placate and appease this person—it won’t work.
- Think of this time period as comparable to having surgery. It is a painful experience, but it provides the only hope for healing and having a new, healthy relationship.

Remember . . .

*“No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful!
But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living
for those who are trained in this way.”*

(HEBREWS 12:11 NLT)

How to Confront and Cope with Emotionally Abusive People

Christi hopes her job will offer a reprieve, but her husband hounds her at night—with calls complaining about the separation, villainizing her for leaving, and fighting about money. She sees their counselor alone and announces she’s ready to file for divorce. He cautions her not to be impulsive about making a serious decision while she’s still emotionally raw. He recommends they continue individual and couples counseling.

At their next session together, Christi tells her husband she's frustrated with his hostility. He snaps back at her that any hostility is *her* fault because *she* left. Their counselor intervenes and suggests they continue the separation for another month so each of them can gain clarity about the steps they want to take next. They set a few ground rules to give her some space and agree to limit their conversations to personal business issues such as finances, insurance, work. But they are not to discuss anything about the relationship for 30 days.⁴⁸

Although victims of verbal and emotional abuse generally feel inadequate and powerless to stop an abusive relationship, appropriate confrontation is often necessary to defuse emotional abuse. Ignoring it won't make it go away. Wishful thinking won't make it better. And believing that loyalty means remaining quiet is dangerously erroneous.

When hurtful words and actions are exposed as unacceptable and viewed as intolerable, the foundation is laid for change to occur. That change will come slowly and will likely be met with much resistance by the abuser. When power is the goal and control is at stake, an unrepentant abuser will repeatedly change tactics in an attempt to maneuver around each boundary you set, always looking for some way to put you in a position to be manipulated. To remain silent in such a relationship is not love but fear . . . and is harmful rather than helpful.⁴⁹

According to God's Word . . .

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love."

(PROVERBS 27:5)

How to Confront Emotionally Abusive People

Start educating yourself.

- Emotional abuse can go on for years before victims realize the dynamic in the relationship isn't "normal."
- Abusers are calculating, and their behavior is deliberate and designed to keep them in control.

- Discouragement will begin to dissipate once your eyes are opened to the tactical behavior of the abuser. (Only then will you be able to establish a more level playing field.)

Take to heart God’s Word . . .

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

Set boundaries.⁵⁰

- Communicate that you will no longer be treated with disrespect.
“I feel greatly disrespected because of the way you are treating me. I will not stay here if you continue to treat me in this manner.”
- Be specific about what behavior is unacceptable.
“I won’t continue to talk with you if you constantly interrupt me.”
- Refuse to accept excuses and reasons for repeated inconsiderate behavior.

Suppose the abuser says, “I didn’t mean to be late—some people I needed to see came by.” You say in a firm but calm voice, “That does not make what you did acceptable because you could have called or texted me. From now on, unless you call, I will go on with my plans without you.”

The Bible says . . .

*“Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”*

(PROVERBS 16:24)

Seize the moment.

- Speak up as soon as the abuser begins to change the subject or to twist your words to mean something other than what you intended.
“You just changed the meaning of my words. I didn’t say that. What I said was (____). Now what are you hearing me say?”
- Repeat back to the abuser the words said to you.
“What you are saying is (____). Is that accurate?”

- Remain calm. Your abuser wants a strong reaction from you.

“Do we need to discuss this later? If you want to continue now, I need you to speak with more restraint, or this conversation will have to wait.”

Remember this truth . . .

*“The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded
than the shouts of a ruler of fools.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 9:17)

Seek to surface the abuser’s hostility.

- Acknowledge that you sense anger in your abuser.

“It seems like you are angry.”

- Confirm that being angry is permissible. (Never attempt to humor an abuser out of anger.)

“Sometimes anger is justified.”

- Help your abuser recognize the cause of the anger, but don’t try to psychoanalyze the individual.

Ask, “What triggered your anger?”

Realize . . .

*“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters,
but one who has insight draws them out.”*

(PROVERBS 20:5)

Soften the confrontation process.

- Confront the behavior, not the person.

“I care about you, but I dislike what you are doing. What can I do to help you stop (_____)?”

- Avoid threats, sarcasm, hostility, put-downs, or judgment of the other person’s intentions.

“If you are angry with me, talk with me and help me to understand why. But please stop your present behavior.”

- Ask again if necessary (respectfully) when you don't get a clear, direct, to-the-point answer.

“Let me ask again. Why did you tell me you were coming over, but then not show up?”

Take to heart this admonition from God's Word . . .

*“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
Be completely humble and gentle;
be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit
through the bond of peace.”*
(EPHESIANS 4:1–3)

Stay in the present.

- Focus on the issue at hand.

“I need for us to focus on this issue and to resolve it.”

- Don't bring up past issues.

“We can't change the past, but we can do things differently now.”

- Don't let the other person get you off track.

“I realize this topic may bring up other issues, but we need to keep to the subject at hand for now and find a resolution for it.”

Apply this counsel from God's Word . . .

*“Let your eyes look straight ahead;
fix your gaze directly before you.
Give careful thought to the paths for your feet
and be steadfast in all your ways.
Do not turn to the right or the left;
keep your foot from evil.”*
(PROVERBS 4:25–27)

Squelch unrealistic expectations.

- Don't put all your hope in the expectation that an abuser will change; put your confidence in God and in His sufficiency.
- Be aware that you cannot make the abuser change no matter what you do, how much you try, or how good you are as a person.

- Know that change will occur only after the abuser admits to having a problem and begins to receive the help and support needed to turn from that problem.

Keep in mind the fact that . . .

*“If we claim to be without sin,
we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*
(1 JOHN 1:8–9)

Strengthen your relationship with the Lord.

- Look first to the Lord for discernment about your relationship.
- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom, insight, and direction as you seek to honor Him in all your relationships.
- Read Scripture and believe what His Word says in order to renew your mind so that you will not continue to live as a victim, but as a victor.
- Get involved in a Bible study. Memorize and daily rehearse scriptures that emphasize your worth and the identity you have as a child of God.
- Live dependently on Christ, seeking His grace and strength in all things.
- Don’t try to live out of your own resources. Throughout the day, focus your attention on the Lord and acknowledge your dependence on Him.

Remember these words from the Lord to the apostle Paul:

*“My [Jesus’] grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.’
Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more
gladly about my weaknesses,
so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)

How to Build Personal Boundaries

It doesn't surprise Christi when the parameters their counselor places on their communications aren't honored by her husband. He repeatedly calls to badger her about money and to grill her about taking so long to decide what she wants. She hopes the month of separation will give him time to search his own soul, but that doesn't prove to be the case. A few of the times when he calls, she can tell by his slurred speech and angry voice that he's been drinking.

She notices that not once does he say, "I want you back. I want this to work out. I'll do whatever it takes."⁵¹ These conversations only solidify her decision to remain separated and build personal boundaries.

All countries must define clear geographical boundaries in order to protect their territory and maintain strict control over who enters or leaves. Additionally, laws are established that apply to everyone living or traveling within those boundaries. Likewise, we must take the same type of action—not with roadblocks, soldiers, and guns—to set and maintain personal boundaries in our relationships. In doing so, we preserve our own emotional health and help our relationships grow by strictly guarding who has access to our hearts and minds.

Is there someone in your life who often takes advantage of you? Are you expected to meet every need of someone else? Do certain people expect you to help them, but then fail to help you when you need help? Does someone take advantage of you at work by piling one project on top of another? Do you feel manipulated by someone's lies, half-truths, procrastination, and lateness? These are all examples of a *lack of boundaries*. When these kinds of breaches occur often, they are significant threats to your freedom to serve God and to become all He wants you to be. Learn to *draw the line* with people who would cross your boundaries and put you in bondage. You can do this by remembering this truth:

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*

(GALATIANS 5:1)

Building Boundaries

Step #1: Place boundaries around your heart.

Be careful where and on whom you spend your emotions. Put firm boundaries around the things in which you are emotionally invested. Completely giving your heart away can cause you to stumble and replace appropriate devotion to God with a focus on someone else. . . .

*“Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.”*

(PROVERBS 4:23)

Step #2: Learn that it’s okay to say *No*.

Many people who lack boundaries are not in touch with their true feelings. Or if they are, they don’t think they have the right to say *No*. Do not listen to lies about being selfish or uncaring when you refuse to comply with someone’s wishes. Jesus set many boundaries while He was here on earth, and He said *No* to many people, including His disciples. He knew that the *No* was necessary for Him and for them. Jesus said . . .

“All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

(MATTHEW 5:37)

Step #3: Start being assertive.

People who are nonassertive would benefit from assertiveness training classes. Nonassertive behavior allows others to violate your personal rights. The reason people typically continue to be nonassertive is to avoid any kind of conflict, but the consequences are often hurt feelings and devalued self-worth. Assertively standing up for yourself in a respectful, appropriate manner is acting in accordance with Jesus’ instructions:

*“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault,
just between the two of you.*

If they listen to you, you have won them over.”

(MATTHEW 18:15)

Assertiveness Training 101: Ways to Deliver Your Message without Inciting Anger

“When I . . .”

- Describe a specific behavior of the other person that violates one of your boundaries.
 - ♦ “When I hear your anger escalate, I get concerned.”
 - ♦ “When I hear that several extra people are coming for dinner and I have not been given sufficient notice, I am caught off guard.”

“The result is . . .”

- Describe specifically how the other person’s behavior affects your life and, as a result, how you *feel*. (Avoid, “You make me . . .”)
 - ♦ “The result is I feel hurt and frustrated because I think that instead of yelling, we should be talking about the problem.”
 - ♦ “I feel embarrassed, ill-prepared, and inadequate because there might not be enough food prepared. I also feel taken advantage of.”

“I want . . .”

- Describe what you would like to hear or to have happen.
 - ♦ “I want you to be more aware of when you are getting angry so that you can consciously choose to speak calmly and kindly.”
 - ♦ “I would appreciate you checking with me before asking anyone to join us for dinner.”

Step #4: Draw the line.

Each of us have personal, emotional, and physical boundaries that should not be crossed and certainly not invaded. Do you know your specific boundaries? Do you know how to respond when your boundary limits have been crossed? Do you know where to draw the line?

To help identify your boundaries, pay attention when your emotions are intense, dark, shaming, or guilt-ridden in response to something someone has said or done to you. It means your boundaries are being crossed. The following responses will help you educate those in your life who are verbally and emotionally *crossing the line*. Remember . . .

*“Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favor
rather than one who has a flattering tongue.*

(PROVERBS 28:23)

— **Inform**

“Do you realize how loudly you are speaking?”

“Do you know how your words sound?”

“Do you know that you are saying things that make me feel uncomfortable?”

— **Identify**

“Please lower your voice.”

“Please stop using that kind of language.”

“Please explain your anger.”

— **Implore**

“Stop insulting me with your words.”

“Stop these painful outbursts.”

“Stop hurting me in this way.”

— **Insist**

“You must stop speaking to me in that tone of voice.”

“You must change your way of communicating with me.”

“You may not continue to degrade me in this way.”

— **Instruct**

“I will no longer allow you to hurt me like this.”

“I will no longer allow you to talk to me this way.”

“I will no longer allow that tone of voice in my presence.”

— **Invite**

“I am open to working this out when you choose to be reasonable.”

“I care about you and our relationship, but you must change your ways of communicating with me.”

“I am willing to go to counseling with you if you will agree.”

— **Impact**

“I am now leaving in order to protect myself.”

“Because this behavior is unacceptable to me, I am going to distance myself from you for awhile.”

“If you continue with this behavior, I will consider all my options regarding our relationship.”

Dealing with Hurtful Words

Question: “How can I deal with the hurtful things my husband says to me?”

Answer: When things are peaceful between the two of you, ask, “If we could have a better relationship with each other, would you want it?” When your spouse responds affirmatively, say, “I want that too. But sometimes we get into verbal battles that are not best for us or for the kids. So I’ve decided I will step out of the room when that happens in the future and then come back later.”

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

(PROVERBS 15:1)

How to Let God Heal Your Broken Heart

Before she announces to her husband that she does indeed want a divorce, Christi prays for the Lord to give her the words to say, and that he will accept her decision without becoming contentious. She knows that at times she’s been selfish and angry, but she also knows how hard she has tried to make their marriage work.

Christi remembers a personal assignment from a friend to write a letter to herself *from God*—imagining what He would say to her. She finishes the letter in a few short minutes reminding herself that God is with her—that she’s never been alone in this. He’s been with her husband, too. Christi has done what she can and now she needs to trust in the Lord because He loves her and always will.⁵²

No one escapes the pain of a broken heart. In the Hebrew language, the word translated “brokenhearted” can also mean “shattered.”⁵³ And no one lives very long in this fallen world without experiencing that “shattering” and the all-encompassing pain that accompanies it.

Many never heal from heartbreak because they avoid dealing with their pain by blocking out, denying, or burying the memories. But the path the Lord has prepared will heal your deepest hurts—if you allow Him into the innermost part of your heart where He can apply the healing balm of His Word, His presence, and His peace.

*“May God himself, the God of peace,
sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body
be kept blameless at the coming
of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one
who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”*
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:23–24)

Additional Action Steps toward Healing

Whether you are a new believer or a longtime believer, the path to healing is a process that takes time. As you walk with the Lord, ask Him to help you take these actions toward healing.

Give your heart to the Lord, allowing Him to be your deliverer.

- Acknowledge your inability to heal yourself and accept that God is the source of all growth and healing.
- Realize that the abuse you have suffered may have altered your brain chemistry and created some physical problems.
- Ask the Lord to heal your past pain and soothe your soul as you take refuge in Him and draw on His strength.

*“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.”*
(PSALM 18:2)

Know that you are never alone.

- Realize that everyone experiences loneliness and pain—it’s part of life.
- Continually thank the Lord that He is always with you.
- Build a network of friends who care about you and who will support you both spiritually and emotionally.

*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:8)

Search for the truth.

- Discern the truth about what has caused your past wounds and your present struggles.
- Search out the truths of God’s Word that strengthen and support you both spiritually and emotionally.
- Seek truths from biblical principles and the wise counsel of trustworthy people to aid you in understanding and addressing your situation.

*“Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.”*

(PSALM 25:5)

Address your legitimate emotional needs.⁵⁴

- Understand that you have three inner needs—for love, significance, and security.
- Accept that proper self-worth comes from viewing yourself through God’s eyes.
- Remind yourself that God never withholds His love from you, though you may not have felt you were loved by your parents or your spouse.

*“You are a forgiving God,
gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love.”*

(NEHEMIAH 9:17)

Pay attention to your feelings and perceptions.

- See the abuse for what it is—actual abuse.
- Know that you’re not going crazy—you are not “nuts.”
- If you felt abused, acknowledge that what happened is unacceptable.

*“You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”*

(JOHN 8:32)

Clear your mind of confusion.

- Realize that you have been a victim of confusing, mixed messages.
- Seek help from a safe, trustworthy person to sort through the confusing words and to distinguish the truths from the lies.
- Refuse to be confused if the abuser tries to reverse the blame by putting it on you or counters what you are saying.

“God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”

(1 CORINTHIANS 14:33 ESV)

Acknowledge your negative feelings.

- Make a list of any negative feelings, such as anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, hate, or revenge.
- Be honest with God about these feelings—He knows you have them, and He understands why.
- Ask God to cleanse you from unhealthy, negative feelings and attitudes.

*“Cleanse me with hyssop,
and I will be clean; wash me,
and I will be whiter than snow.”*

(PSALM 51:7)

Forgive your abuser. (See Appendix A for more on forgiveness in cases of abuse.)

- List each offense committed against you by each abuser.
- Release each offense and the pain it caused into the hands of God.
- Choose, as an act of your will, to release each abuser to God, trusting that He will deal with them in His time and in His way.

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another
if any of you has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:13)

Allow yourself to grieve.

- Write down all the losses that have occurred in your life.
- Allow yourself time to grieve (by yourself or with a friend).
- Write the word *finished* beside each painful memory.

*“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens
. . . a time to weep . . . a time to mourn
and a time to dance.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 4)

Realize that healing is a process, not an event.

- Refuse to seek quick fixes and painless solutions.
- Develop an understanding of the activities that promote healing.
- Grow in patience as you embrace the journey of the healing process.

*“As an example of patience in the face of suffering,
take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
As you know, we count as blessed
those who have persevered.”*

(JAMES 5:10–11)

Reach out and minister to others.

- Ask God for a compassionate heart that is sensitive toward those who have experienced abuse.
- Be prepared to share your experience when God brings other victims across your path.
- Ask God to fill you with a passionate desire to comfort others by sharing your healing experience with them.

*“Therefore if you have any encouragement
from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love,
if any common sharing in the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,
then make my joy complete by being like-minded,
having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”*
(PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2)

Releasing Bitterness When the Abuser Has Died

Question: “How can I release the bitterness toward my abuser who is now dead?”

Answer: Although you cannot confront your abuser in person, you can indirectly confront him or her by saying what you would want to say (or need to say) to your abuser by one of these methods:

- **Chair Method:** Imagine the person seated in a chair placed in front of you. Say the things you would say to the person if you were actually seated across from one another. Express your feelings about what was done to you and how it has affected your life. Then forgive the person and explain that you have taken the person off of your emotional hook and placed them onto God’s hook.

- **Letter Method:** Write a letter to your abuser stating every painful memory you recall. Read it over the person’s grave or at a place where you can openly speak to the person as though you were in each other’s presence. At the close, choose to forgive by releasing your abuser into the hands of God.
- **List and Release Method:** Make a list of all the painful as well as positive memories you have with your abuser. After completing the list, go back to the top of your list and write the word *past* by each memory. Acknowledge and accept that the past is in the past. Release all the pain as well as the person into the hands of God.

The fact that your abuser has died does not mean you cannot forgive and move forward. You can prevent further anger and bitterness from establishing a foothold in your heart and mind. The Bible says . . .

*“See to it that no one falls short
of the grace of God and that no
bitter root grows up to cause
trouble and defile many.”*

(HEBREWS 12:15)

How to Recover from Abuse

Christi Paul walks the steep and difficult journey of ending her marriage and begins a new chapter in her life. She digs deep into her heart and presses close to the Lord, grateful to awaken each new day no longer living in fear of being accused, criticized, or ridiculed. She knows harmful words can hurt. She also knows truthful words can heal.

Recovery—healing—is a process that occurs over time and is a result of hard, productive work. Rarely is it accomplished in a moment or in a single experience. But regardless of the time frame, the Lord is with you every step of the way, helping you and watching over you.

*“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth. . . .
The LORD watches over you—
the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.”*
(PSALM 121:1–2, 5, 8)

10 Recovery Step Confessions

All the practical insights and suggested solutions for recovery can be summed up in ten steps that are illustrated in the following confessions:

Step #1:

“I recognize that I am powerless to heal my damaged emotions resulting from abuse, and I look to God for the power to make me whole.”

Step #2:

“I acknowledge that God’s plan for my life includes victory over my experiences of abuse.”

Step #3:

“The person who abused me is responsible for the acts committed against me and for the words spoken to me. I will not accept the guilt and the shame resulting from those acts or words.”

Step #4:

“I am looking to God and His Word to find my identity as a worthwhile and loved human being.”

Step #5:

“I am honestly sharing my feelings with God and with at least one other person as I try to identify those areas needing cleansing and healing.”

Step #6:

“I am accepting responsibility for the ways I have responded to abuse.”

Step #7:

“I am willing to accept God’s grace and ask for His help to forgive those who have hurt me. I will trust Him in the process of doing so.” (See Appendix A for more on forgiveness in cases of abuse.)

Step #8:

“I am willing to mature in my relationship with God and with others.”

Step #9:

“I am willing to let God use me as an instrument of His healing and restoration in the lives of others.”

Step #10:

“If pain from the past resurfaces, I am willing to repeat these steps as many times as necessary to continue healing.”

By faith, I claim the words of the psalmist:

*“You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
LORD my God, I will praise you forever.”*

(PSALM 30:11–12)

How to Replace Lies with Truth

After ending her first marriage and doing the hard soul-searching work of healing recovery, Christi discovers her verbally-abusive husband had been unfaithful.⁵⁵ But she also discovers her own strength in her relationship with the Lord.

Eventually, she marries a man who loves her, respects her, supports her, cherishes her, and encourages her without abusing her. His name is Peter, a name that means “rock” and she knows that the Lord has sent him to be her rock. Together they have three daughters and she shares her story for them and others like Christi who have been in abusive relationship.⁵⁶

Christi recognizes it’s impossible to change the past, but ignoring or denying abuse won’t prevent it from occurring again. The Lord taught her much through the recovery process and corrected so many lies in her life with truth. She wants others to experience that same miracle of hope.

If you’ve heard constant, cruel and condemning messages from your parents, spouse, boss, or anyone close to you, it’s understandable you may have come to believe those messages over time. Perhaps you’ve come to believe that you are unworthy or unlovable, incomplete or insignificant. No matter what harsh words you’ve been told, abuse does not have the final word about you—God does. His Word speaks of His love for you and the life-changing identity you have in Christ.

Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God’s eyes, believing what He says about you. Therefore, it is important to identify the lies you’ve been led to believe and replace them with God’s truth.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth.”*

(PSALM 86:11)

Lies vs. Truth

Lie: “I am worthless.”

Truth: You have God-given worth because God created you, and that worth can never be taken from you.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (LUKE 12:6–7).

Lie: “No one will ever accept me.”

Truth: The Lord has chosen you, accepts you, and will never reject you.

“I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:9–10).

Lie: “I am unlovable.”

Truth: God loves you, and nothing can separate you from His love.

“Nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ROMANS 8:38–39 NLT).

Lie: “I can’t do anything right.”

Truth: You have been created by God with unique skills and abilities to be used for His purposes.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 PETER 4:10).

Lie: “I deserve to be abused.”

Truth: No one deserves to be abused—no one. Each person should be treated with respect as God’s image-bearer.

“Show proper respect to everyone” (1 PETER 2:17).

Lie: “There is no hope for me.”

Truth: No matter how deep the pain, with God, there is always hope.

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (PROVERBS 23:18).

Lie: “Things will never change.”

Truth: God can change anything and even make the impossible possible.

“What is impossible with man is possible with God” (LUKE 18:27).

Lie: “I have no control over what happens to me.”

Truth: God has given you free will, and you do have control over the choices you make and the actions you take.

“Give me a helping hand, for I have chosen to follow your commandments”
(PSALM 119:173 NLT).

Lie: “God doesn’t care about me.”

Truth: God cares deeply about you and wants you to come to Him with your burdens.

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 PETER 5:7 NLT).

Lie: “God is disappointed in me and wants nothing to do with me.”

Truth: God has compassion for you—He is with you and desires a close relationship with you.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. . . . The LORD is near to all who call on him” (PSALM 145:8–9, 18).

You may have been led to believe other lies. As an exercise, write them down and then look in God’s Word to discover a passage or a truth that can speak directly to that lie. God wants you to *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). As you replace the lies with God’s truth, you will be transformed by His Word.

*“Do not conform to the
pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the
renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test
and approve what God’s will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*
(ROMANS 12:2)

How to Help the Abused

Perhaps you know someone who's been hurt by verbal and emotional abuse. You want to help but you don't know where to start. Maybe you've experienced abuse and want to help others rise above the abuse in their life.

Because abuse involves pain and a range of difficult emotions, it's important to know what to do and what not to do. Realize, the person before you may be wounded, emotionally fragile, perhaps even traumatized. The tone and tenor of your words are essential to establishing a nurturing conversation. People who have experienced abuse may ignore the severity of their situation. They may display defense mechanisms such as denying that anything is wrong, minimizing their pain, or rationalizing their abuser's behavior.

If the abused person is open and honest about discussing the situation, realize they are displaying significant courage. Be prepared to respond with love and patience as they begin to share the secrets of their broken heart. As you seek to help others, remember that God is the source of comfort and change and you are an instrument of His comfort and love.

*“God is our merciful Father
and the source of all comfort.
He comforts us in all our troubles
so that we can comfort others.
When they are troubled,
we will be able to give them
the same comfort God has given us.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4 NLT)

Don't treat the problem lightly or minimize the abuse.

Do realize that verbal and emotional abuse can leave lasting wounds and significant emotional damage.

“The tongue has the power of life and death” (PROVERBS 18:21).

Don't be quick to give simple answers, platitudes, or pat answers.

Do listen intently, ask questions, and seek to understand them.

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry"
(JAMES 1:19).

Don't feel like you have to say something or have the right answer.

Do be present with them, and know that just your presence can be a comfort.

"They sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words" (JOB 2:13 NLT).

Don't dismiss their feelings or experience.

Do encourage them, give them compliments, and thank them for their courage to share their thoughts and emotions.

"Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them" (EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).

Don't communicate that the abuse is in some way their fault.

Do express sympathy and compassion.

"Be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble" (1 PETER 3:8).

Don't be critical or express judgment toward them.

Do show that you love and accept them.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (ROMANS 15:7).

Don't assume they are comfortable talking about God and spiritual matters.

Do be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, and ask if you can share God's Word with them.

"Let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (GALATIANS 5:25 NLT).

Don't leave them to their own resources.

Do help them find support, resources, and wise counsel in their community, local church, or online to help them heal and recover.

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed"
(PROVERBS 15:22).

Don't overextend yourself or offer to help in ways you cannot provide.

Do recognize your limits and know when you need to point them to additional help or professional counseling.

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (ROMANS 12:3).

Don't forget to pray *for* them and *with* them, as they are comfortable doing so.

Do lift them up before the Lord on a regular basis.

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people” (EPHESIANS 6:18).

How to Break Free from Being Abusive

While there is never an excuse for abuse, it is imperative to understand that some abusers were once victims of abuse themselves. Typically, abuse develops from an abusive foundation—an abusive environment or an abusive family. Children learn what they live and often reproduce similar patterns as adults. They live out what they have experienced—unless someone or something drastic intervenes.

Maybe you wonder: *Is restoration possible for an abuser?* It may be difficult, but the answer is *Yes!* But for change to occur, the heart of the abuser must be changed by the power of God through Christ.

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

(ROMANS 7:24–25)

In order for change to occur—for the relationship to be healed—the loving work of God in the heart of the abuser is necessary. And the abuser must be willing to meet certain criteria.

Step #1: Honestly assess your words and actions.

Many abusers deny that they are abusive. Is it possible that you may have been abusive? Are you willing to consider that you may not be in touch with your own emotions because they have been buried or ignored for so long?

- Y / N** Have you ever placed blame on another person for your own actions?
- Y / N** Do you believe you are always right?
- Y / N** Could you be in denial about the seriousness of your behavior?
- Y / N** Have you ever been told you are emotionally insensitive or uncaring?
- Y / N** Has anyone ever said your behavior is abusive or unreasonable?
- Y / N** Have loved ones ever said you act nicer with others than when you are with them?
- Y / N** Has a loved one ever said that you overreact?
- Y / N** Do you avoid responding or get angry when asked questions you don't like?
- Y / N** Do you refuse to acknowledge or try to rationalize past negative behaviors?
- Y / N** Do you have a short fuse that ignites anger?
- Y / N** Do you think your personal interactions with others could be considered destructive?
- Y / N** Have you previously been unable to resolve problems in relationships?

If you answered *Yes* to three or more of the above questions, it is likely that you have been abusive.

*"An honest witness tells the truth,
but a false witness tells lies."*

(PROVERBS 12:17)

Step #2: Desire to change.

Change cannot take place unless you are willing to do the work of recovery and to invite God into the process. Psalm 139:23–24 says, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” Give careful thought to how you are responding to the need for change and taking responsibility:

Don’t vent pent-up anger on another person. (Anger that is bottled up needs to be resolved and dissipated, not spewed out.)

Do understand that *feeling angry* is not a sin, but failing to handle anger appropriately results in sin, especially when it becomes abusive.

Don’t say, “You’re the reason I am so angry.”

Do realize that you may be using your anger to get your own way.

Don’t say, “I can never please you!”

Do begin to see things from the other person’s point of view.

Don’t say, “After all I do for you, it’s never enough.”

Do recognize that courageous people willingly admit their weaknesses. Be courageous.

Don’t use harsh, belittling, or sarcastic statements.

Do realize that you can change. It’s never too late.

Don’t withdraw emotionally.

Do be willing to enlist friends and family members to encourage you and hold you accountable.

*“Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end.”*

(PROVERBS 29:11)

Step #3: Reap the benefits of reflection.

Some children grow up in abusive homes where they receive the brunt of excessive control and power. When a parent is severely dominating, a child's feelings are stepped on and personal expression is stifled. This atmosphere of fear infiltrates the family.

These children grow up with a negative view of the offending person, vowing never to be like the father who always broke his promises or like the mother who was strict and unaffectionate.

An adult who was abused as a child may not exactly mirror the behavior of an abuser. But, an immature emotional focus may cause them to develop the same attitudes of resentment and bitterness they so disliked in the one who abused them.

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

(ROMANS 3:14)

Ask yourself . . .

- Was there anyone in my family who was overly controlling of others when I was a child?
- Do I harbor resentment toward anyone in my past?
- Am I still angry over the way someone I love was treated by someone else who was abusive?
- Have I learned to forgive others in spite of their faults?

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior . . . forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

(EPHESIANS 4:31–32 NLT)

Step #4: Manage your anger.

People who have difficulty controlling anger usually express it in one of two ways. If you vent your anger at someone else, your anger is *explosive*. If you keep your anger bottled up, your anger is *implosive*.

- *Explosive* anger is *outwardly* abusive.
- *Implosive* anger is *inwardly* abusive.

Both are damaging to relationships. God does not condemn our feelings of anger, but He does require that both kinds of anger be addressed and expressed appropriately—in God-honoring ways.

“Be angry, and do not sin.”

(PSALM 4:4 ESV)

Step #5: Exercise self-control.

Discover your trigger points.

- Be aware of when you feel irritated or aggravated.
- Take note when you feel a sudden surge of anger.
- Watch and listen to yourself so you recognize when you are behaving badly, performing poorly, or snapping at those close to you.
- Take a few moments to examine the true source of your anger. Is it from hurt, fear, frustration, or injustice?

*“Let us examine our ways and test them,
and let us return to the LORD.”*

(LAMENTATIONS 3:40)

Be aware of your family background.

- Recall and reflect on your early family dynamics.
- Was it safe to express anger?
- Did you learn that explosive anger was a means of control?
- Have you now learned to see your family through the eyes of an adult?

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I put the ways
of childhood behind me.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:11)

Restrain angry thoughts and actions.

- Turn your thoughts toward God and pray, “Lord, please give me your peace.”
- Breathe deeply and count backwards from 10 before you respond.
- Walk away and then return after your emotions are under control.
- Take a “time-out” for 15 or 20 minutes, if necessary.

*“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.”*

(PSALM 37:8)

Choose the right time and the right way to express your feelings.

- Train yourself to keep a lid on your anger until your agitation is calmed.
- Try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view.
- If you are angry at another person, ask, “Is there a time when we could talk about something important to me?”
- If your anger has turned inward, talk with a friend and seek an objective view of the situation.

*“An angry person stirs up conflict,
and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.”*

(PROVERBS 29:22)

Absorb truth.

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you how He sees you—the person He created you to be before abuse marred and changed you. Trust Him to do this with love.
- Pray for the Lord to reveal to you how much He loves you.
- Acknowledge that you have God-given worth. Don’t let others define who you are.
- Read through the book of Proverbs beginning at chapter 8. Write out all the verses that pertain to anger and are relevant to you. Memorize other verses about how to handle anger. Begin with Psalm 37:8, Ephesians 4:26, Colossians 3:8, and James 1:19–20.

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

(PROVERBS 15:1)

Step #6: Come to Christ, seeking His help with a sincere heart.

Confession: “My behavior has been wrong and has hurt others.”

*“Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way
and so is unfaithful to the LORD is guilty
and must confess the sin they have committed.”*

(NUMBERS 5:6–7)

Repentance: “I will rely on God’s strength to change my behavior because I want to please Him.”

*“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
but the one who confesses
and renounces them finds mercy.”*

(PROVERBS 28:13)

Forgiveness: “God, thank you for your willingness to forgive me in spite of my failure to honor you.”

*“I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

(PSALM 32:5)

Acceptance: “Jesus, I receive you as my Lord and Savior and give you control of my life. Thank you for being willing to adopt me into your family.”

*“To all who did receive him,
to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become
children of God.”*

(JOHN 1:12)

Substitution: “I give up control of my life in exchange for a new heart and a new life in Christ.”

*“Rid yourselves of all the offenses
you have committed,
and get a new heart and a new spirit.”*
(EZEKIEL 18:31)

Restitution: “Lord, reveal to me those to whom I owe a sincere apology. If it is appropriate and will not cause them further harm, I will go to them and ask forgiveness for my wrong and hurtful behavior. Help me know when and how to do this.”

*“If you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother
or sister has something against you,
leave your gift there in front of the altar.
First go and be reconciled to them;
then come and offer your gift.”*
(MATTHEW 5:23–24)

Cleansing: “God, thank you for cleansing me from my sins and unrighteousness.”

*“Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.”*
(PSALM 51:2)

If you’ve hurt others with your words and actions and you want to change, know that you can do that with God’s help. Nothing is impossible with God. You can change because of His transforming power and His unwavering faithfulness.

*“Power, O God, belongs to you;
unfailing love, O Lord, is yours.”*
(PSALM 62:11–12 NLT)

(For more help on how to break free from being abusive, see Appendix B, “Hope for the Abuser.”)

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

Forgiveness in Cases of Abuse

The thought of forgiving an abuser can seem unthinkable, unfair, and unequivocally *wrong* because of the lasting wounds and lingering consequences of abuse. However, forgiveness is at the heart of God’s character. It’s why Jesus came. And it’s at the heart of healing, growth, and freedom.

Choosing to forgive is not about letting your abuser “off the hook” or ignoring the pain and damage that’s been done. It’s about walking in God’s grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope.

Forgiveness is a difficult process, but you don’t go through it alone. God is with you every step as Psalm 147:3 reminds us: “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*”

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT⁵⁷

Misconceptions about forgiveness abound. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of excusing sin—of saying that what was wrong is now right. Others think forgiveness means you *must* reconcile with the offender or trust them again. Neither of these assumptions is true.

Before you consider forgiving your abuser, it is crucial you understand what forgiveness is *not*:

Forgiveness is *not ignoring* God’s justice or letting the guilty “off the hook.”

- It is allowing God to execute justice in His time and His way.

Forgiveness is *not dismissing* appropriate boundaries or earthly consequences.

- It is maintaining boundaries and allowing appropriate consequences to occur, especially in cases where the law was violated.

Forgiveness is *not enabling* or *excusing* wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that sin is sin—that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

Forgiveness is *not the same as* reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it takes only one to forgive.

Forgiveness is *not dependent* on an apology.

- It is God’s will that we extend forgiveness, whether or not the offender ever apologizes.

Forgiveness is *not explaining away or denying* the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt, feeling it, and releasing it to God.

Forgiveness is *not stuffing* your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

Forgiveness is *not being weak*.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

Forgiveness is *not forgetting*.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is *not a feeling*.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

Forgiveness is *not simply a one-time event*.

- It can be—but oftentimes, forgiveness is a process that needs to be worked through repeatedly.

Forgiveness is *not a natural response*.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS

A good way to think about forgiveness is to imagine letting go of the offense by releasing your offender. When you don't forgive, it's like holding on to bitterness, holding on to the pain, and holding on to the offender. When you forgive, you release your resentment, your pain, and your offender into the hands of God. As you do this with God's help, you reflect the gracious and merciful character of Christ: *"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful"* (Psalm 116:5 ESV).

To forgive means to release your resentment toward your offender.

- Release your right to hear "I'm sorry"
- Release your right to be bitter
- Release your right to get even

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (ROMANS 12:17).

To forgive is to release your rights regarding the offense.

- Release your right to hold on to the offense
- Release your right to dwell on the offense
- Release your right to keep bringing up the offense

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior . . . forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (EPHESIANS 4:31–32 NLT).

To forgive is to reflect the character of Christ.

- To forgive is to extend mercy.
- To forgive is to give a gift of grace.
- To forgive is to pray for your offender and entrust them to God.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (LUKE 23:34).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION⁵⁸

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the *offense*; reconciliation focuses on the *relationship*. Forgiveness involves a change in *thinking* about the offender; reconciliation involves a change in *behavior* by the offender. Forgiveness is extended *even if it is never earned*; reconciliation is offered to the offender *because it has been earned*. You can forgive your abuser without reconciling.

In many cases, especially when abuse is involved, it is not safe or wise to reconcile with an abuser. If you are considering reconciling with someone who has abused you or others, first talk with a trusted pastor or counselor to determine whether reconciliation is advisable in your situation. Remember: You can forgive your offender, but you should never reconcile with someone who refuses to change. The Bible says, “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (Proverbs 22:24).

THREE STAGES OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness takes time. In order to release the offender and the offense, you must first address your experience and your feelings. This can be difficult, but it’s an important step toward your freedom and healing. Remember, God is with you each step of the way: “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).

1. Face the Offense.

When you experience deep, personal pain, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you. First, face the truth of what has actually been done and do not hinder healing by justifying what happened, rationalizing it, or focusing on false thinking.

Don’t minimize the offense by thinking: *No matter how badly I’m treated, it’s okay.*

- Truth: Bad treatment is not okay. There is no excuse for bad treatment of any kind—any time.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (EPHESIANS 5:11).

Don’t excuse the offender’s behavior by thinking: *He doesn’t mean to hurt me. I shouldn’t feel upset with him.*

- Truth: No matter what happened or how long the relationship has lasted, you need to call sin what it is—sin. Face the truth instead of trying to change it. There must first be a guilty party to have someone to forgive.

“Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent,’ will be cursed by peoples” (PROVERBS 24:24).

Don’t assume that quick forgiveness is full forgiveness by erroneously thinking:⁵⁹ *As soon as it was over, I quickly and fully forgave him. That’s what I’ve been taught to do.*

- Truth: Many well-intentioned people feel guilty if they don’t extend immediate forgiveness, so they “forgive” quickly. And yet they have neither faced the full impact of the offense nor grieved over what actually happened.

Realize, the full impact of sin is rarely felt at the moment it occurs. Rather, its impact is felt at different levels over a period of time. Quick forgiveness over deep hurts may seem sufficient, but it may not be full forgiveness—not until it has been extended to each level of impact. Before complete forgiveness can be given, you must face the truth about the gravity of the offense and its impact on you.

“I have chosen the way of truth” (PSALM 119:30 NKJV).

2. Feel the Offense.⁶⁰

Anger or even hatred may be your true feeling in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward an offender needs to be brought up out of the basement of your soul and addressed. However, not all hatred is wrong. For example, God hates evil, and we should too. The Bible says, *“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9).*

Failing to feel the offense results in . . .

Denying your pain: “I don’t blame him for always criticizing me. He’s under a lot of pressure. And besides, it doesn’t hurt me.”

– Truth: Being mistreated by someone you love is painful. You must feel the pain before healing can occur.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (PSALM 34:18).

Carrying false guilt: “I’m never supposed to have hatred. I feel guilty if I hate what was done to me.”

– Truth: God hates sin, and so can you. Hate the sin, but not the sinner.

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (PROVERBS 8:13).

3. Forgive the Offender.

God calls us to forgive. If you’ve ever thought, *I know God wants me to forgive, but how can I ignore my anger and let this person off the hook?* Be assured, you’re not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

How to Handle “The Hook”

Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

Imagine a meat hook curved around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then picture the pain of those offenses represented as rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Some are small, some are large, but all are heavy. Now you have a bag full of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

Ask yourself: “Do I really want to carry the weight of all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

Visualize taking the one who hurt you off of your emotional “hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

Remember, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay*” (Romans 12:19).

Release your offender to God in prayer:

A Final Note on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is possible by God’s grace. His grace helps you heal from past wounds and empowers you to forgive. So when you find yourself struggling to forgive, reflect on God’s grace and He will help you walk in the freedom of forgiveness.

*“The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.”*
(PSALM 145:8–9)

For a more comprehensive look
at forgiveness, consider purchasing
Forgiveness: Releasing You is Freeing Me,
one of the topics in the *Keys for Living Library*.
Call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or
visit www.HopeForTheHeart.org.

APPENDIX B

Hope for the Abuser

Although it may be difficult, abusers *can* change. Consider the apostle Paul who sought to destroy the church, dragging men and women out of their homes to prison (Acts 8:3). While the church grew, he was “*breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples*” (Acts 9:1). Indeed, recounting his life, Paul admits he was “*a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man*” (1 Timothy 1:13).

But when the Lord confounded Paul with the truth and permeated his life, Paul abandoned his violent and abusive ways and became a man of peace. No matter how far someone has strayed, no matter how drastic the sin, this truth remains—the Lord changes hearts, minds, and lives. And the Lord can change *you* . . . just as He did Paul.

*“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance:
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—
of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason
I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners,
Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example
for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”*
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15-16)

The Pathway to Recovery for an Abuser

You’re on your way to recovery when your abusive ways begin to change.

You must:

Admit you have a problem and get right with God.

- Confess your sin of abuse to God, acknowledging the harm you have caused others.
- Give Christ control of your life from this point forward.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).

Take personal responsibility.

- Don't blame others for your bad behavior; take responsibility for your own actions.
- Seek to repay or make restitution for the damages and harm you have caused others.

"For we are each responsible for our own conduct" (GALATIANS 6:5 NLT).

Be accountable.

- Seek accountability with a group of people who can encourage, correct, and guide you.
- Share your thoughts and emotions with your accountability partner(s) on a regular basis.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (PROVERB 27:17).

Exercise rigorous honesty.

- Don't become defensive when others who genuinely know you push against your self-deception and denial.
- Open up your heart to God and invite Him to reveal to you the unfiltered truth about yourself and your life.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (PSALM 139:23–24 ESV).

Get professional help.

- Seek help from a counselor to understand your aggressive behavior and learn new ways of handling it.
- Look into anger management programs (online or in person) to help control your anger.

"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (PROVERBS 1:5 NASB).

Examine past abuse in your life.

- Deal with the painful abuse in your past so you do not repeat unhealthy patterns.

- Commit to no longer viewing people as possessions and learn how to love unconditionally without using force, fear, or anger to motivate or manipulate others.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4).

Stop the cycle of abuse.

- Break the cycle of abuse in your life by not allowing feelings of agitation to progress to dissatisfaction, blame, anger, passive aggressiveness, bitterness, resentment, manipulation, control, or abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, or psychological).
- Remove yourself physically from situations that trigger your anger to regain a state of peace and calm, or contact your counselor or accountability partner for help.

“Give up violence and oppression and do what is just and right” (EZEKIEL 45:9).

Change your habits and confront your addictions.

- Find new, healthy ways of controlling your negative thoughts, difficult emotions, and aggressive behaviors.
- Eliminate habits and addictions that increase the likelihood of you acting aggressively or abusively (i.e., drinking alcohol, viewing violent content, spending time with angry individuals).

“Don’t befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul” (PROVERBS 22:24–25 NLT).

Let go of your need to control.

- Learn how to handle stress so that you don’t use violence or domination to exert power or control over others.
- Admit when you feel the need to control, then identify what’s influencing the desire, refocus your attention using the truth of God’s Word, and give control to Christ.

“Christ’s love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:14–15 NLT).

Seek forgiveness.

- Make amends to those you have harmed.
- Acknowledge that those you have harmed may not want to forgive you or be reconciled to you—and that you will respect their desires.

“If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you” (PSALM 130:3–4).

Respect boundaries.

- Respect the boundaries of those you have harmed, knowing that they may choose not to interact with you anymore.
- Do not force your way on anyone but instead be considerate of other’s boundaries, opinions, preferences, and values.

“Show proper respect to everyone” (1 PETER 2:7).

Grow in your walk with the Lord.

- Cultivate your spiritual life by praying, reading and meditating on God’s Word, and obeying His commands.
- Seek to find your identity in Christ—in what God says about you in His Word.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 PETER 3:18).

As impossible as transformation may seem, Jesus offers this comforting hope:

*“With man this is impossible,
but with God all things are possible.”*

(MATTHEW 19:26)

APPENDIX C

Abuse Recovery Resources

Below is a list of national resources to call or visit online if you are experiencing abuse of any kind. They exist to help and support you. You are *not* alone. These free and confidential services are available 24/7 to provide emotional support and helpful resources for those in difficult situations.

*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:8)

Note: If you are ever in immediate danger, call 911.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

- 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.thehotline.org (Live chat available)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- 1-800-799-4889 (For Deaf + Hard of Hearing)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org (Live chat available)

Shelter & Housing Directories

- www.domesticshelters.org
- www.womenshelters.org

Verbal & Emotional Abuse Help Online

- Crisis Text Line: www.crisistextline.org | Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor
- Day One: www.dayoneservices.org OR call their 24/7 crisis hotline at 1-866-223-1111
- SafeHorizons: www.safehorizons.org OR call their 24-hour hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

Does God understand my **pain** and **suffering** and what it's like to be abused and **rejected**?

*"He [Jesus] was despised and **rejected** by mankind, a man of **suffering**, and familiar with **pain**."*

(ISAIAH 53:3)

Has God **seen my troubles** and does He **care about the anguish** I've experienced?

*"You have **seen my troubles**, and you care about **the anguish** of my soul."*

(PSALM 31:7 NLT)

How much **power** does the **tongue** have?

*"The **tongue** has the **power** of life and death."*

(PROVERBS 18:21)

Why should I **give thanks** in the midst of **all circumstances**?

*"Pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

(1 THESSALONIANS 5:17–18)

Is there any **hope** for me? Does God have **plans** for my **future**?

*“I know the plans I have for you,
declares the LORD, ‘**plans** to prosper you
and not to harm you,
plans to give you **hope** and a **future**.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

What do **reckless words** do? What **brings healing**?

*“The **words** of the **reckless** pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise **brings healing**.”*
(PROVERBS 12:18)

Can God **heal** my **broken heart** and
the painful **wounds** of abuse?

*“He **heals** the **brokenhearted**
and binds up their **wounds**.”*
(PSALM 147:3)

Instead of using **abusive language**,
how can the **words I say**
be an encouragement to others?

*“Don’t use foul or **abusive language**.
Let everything you **say** be good and helpful,
so that your **words will be**
an encouragement to those who hear them.”*
(EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT)

What will happen if I **fear man** more than I **trust in the Lord**?

*“**Fear of man** will prove to be a snare,
but whoever **trusts in the Lord** is kept safe.”*

(PROVERBS 29:25)

Can **God comfort** me in all my **troubles**?

*“Praise be to the **God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of compassion and the **God** of all **comfort**,
who **comforts us in all** our **troubles**,
so that we can **comfort** those in any **trouble**
with the **comfort** we ourselves receive from **God**.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)



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