



Providing People with Spiritual Tools to Move Beyond Abuse

by Sallie Culbreth

Abuse is a very lonely and isolating experience that causes intense struggles. It feels as if there is an internal tug of war as you decide whether to keep people out or let them in. It often feels as if there is so much at risk that your life will be shattered regardless of what you do. The harsh legacy of abuse is that the broken child has a broken heart.

In the mind of a survivor, there are many individuals that he or she holds responsible for the abuse. These may include the actual perpetrator, the passive person who looked the other way, organizations such as a church or club, or even God.

Many people wonder, "If God loves me, then why is life so painful?" This is a powerful question that requires a thoughtful response. As you think about this, perhaps it will be helpful to consider what is supposed to be from what is in order to recognize what went wrong and why life is difficult.

Our origins were perfect. No pain, hunger, poverty, prejudice, violence, or abuse. Our origins also included an unobstructed relationship with God. In fact, it should be a very natural thing for people to experience the love of God. There was never supposed to be a wall between us and the ability to have our Spiritual hunger satisfied.

God created people with the power to choose. We are not puppets. He\* wanted a relationship built around free choice and passion, not rule-bound obligation. With this power, people have strayed from our origins, leaving humanity powerless. It is obvious that we are not naturally or adequately equipped to combat pain, hunger, poverty, prejudice, violence, or abuse. In spite of all our knowledge and technological advances, the human race is still unable to solve our most basic social problems.

As a result, the earth seems to be infected with a terrible disease that brought about death, violence, sickness, rage, poverty, hunger and abuse. Religion calls this disease "sin." It is important to know that people were not created to live this way.

Life is difficult because we live in an unnatural environment. Your body, mind, and spirit were not built to carry the disease of sin. It is like a virus that continues to harm you. It creates hardship and struggles. Even the earth has suffered. A steady decline in the ecological health of the planet is evidence that something is terribly wrong.

This difficult condition is not what God had in mind. It is contrary to the original design and so it routinely malfunctions. It is for this reason that everything feels so wrong.

Think about life this way:

*Suppose you, being an "air breather," were suddenly forced to live the rest of your life floating in a stormy ocean. If that happened, you would spend all of your energy struggling to keep your head above the water. You would work hard to get air into your lungs before the next big wave hit you. To survive, you would need an air tank and face mask until the time came for you to be rescued and returned to dry land, your natural habitat. That is a*

Where was God?

Why did this happen?



*picture of what God did. He\* gave you the means to survive until he returns you to your natural habitat, which is God's original design.*

People do wrong things because they are not puppets or robots. People do right things for the same reason. God is not interested in a relationship with someone who mechanically responds to him\*. God will never force himself\* on you. God wants a relationship with you built around mutual love.

Perhaps you never considered God as a relational or emotional being. He\* is. More than anything, God desires to be in a relationship with people. Because of this, God gave people the power to choose.

Abuse survivors frequently have double standards. They understand that they make choices every day to do right or wrong. They freely exercise their powers and rights to make these choices. However they somehow expect that their abusers should be in a different category altogether. Survivors often believe that the power of choice should be reserved only for them. The fact is, all people have this power and everyone is responsible for his or her own choices.

One abuse survivor shared this story about the power of choice:

*One day I found myself very stressed and overwhelmed. My six year old son was behaving badly and I could feel myself growing angrier and angrier. Toward the end of the day, I was walking up the stairs in my house and my son was right behind me. His behavior continued to deteriorate. As I reached the top of the stairs, I was literally shaking I was so angry at him. Everything inside of me wanted to turn around, pick him up, and throw him down the stairs.*

*I prayed and asked God to help me. I asked for help to bring myself under control before I hurt my child. I actually told God what I felt like doing. The Holy Spirit's response was direct and clear. "And if you do pick him up and throw him down the stairs, who's fault will it be? Yours or mine?" Of course it would have been my fault. I had the power to choose and so made the decision to honor and respect my child. At that moment, I made the choice to break the cycle of abuse.*

*I turned to my child, told him to go to his room and stay there for a while until he and I both calmed down. Then I went and washed my face, prayed for wisdom, thanked God for letting me vent, and suddenly realized something truly amazing.*

*I didn't abuse my child. I had the power to choose. It could have easily gone the other way. God gave me the freedom to make that choice. It was the same choice my abusers had to make. They chose to sin. I chose not to.*

*J.P.*

It was a person's choice that caused your abuse. It was NOT God's choice, it was theirs. Although God did not cause the abuse, the existence of abuse has broken his\* heart. God is sorry that sin even exists.

God hurts because of sin (Genesis 6:6). God grieves when a sinful choice takes the innocence of a child. God is broken-hearted over what happened to you. Although it was not God's choice for your life experiences, he\* deeply empathizes with the wounds of your past.

God is saddened by the wounds of people. It was this sadness that compelled him\* to come to Earth in the first place. God entered our world in an earth suit. He\* looked like us, smelled like us, and lived like us. He experienced pain like us, too.

Jesus was also abused. To recognize that Christ experienced abuse that is similar to yours can help you on your personal journey of recovery. When you connect your brokenness with his, then your spiritual journey can strengthen you. As you walk this road with Christ, you will find there are moments of real peace and real freedom. This is possible because of a restored relationship with a broken hearted creator.

*\*God is not an anatomical male. God is Spirit - a unique being, who is complete and transcends gender, time, or space. God is balance. However, for the sake of language, which at this point does not have a pronoun for God, we use the pronoun "he" or "him" as a matter of simplification and one of familiarity for most faith traditions. Please do not let the limitations of language limit your connection with God.*

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