

Joyce Meyer Leads Her Father to Faith

The popular Bible teacher recently baptized the man who she says abused her when she was a child

Most people don't realize when they watch the petite, sassy-talking evangelist Joyce Meyer walking across the stage in her high heels and fashionable clothes that they are looking at a former victim of long-term sexual abuse. Yet when the charismatic preacher talks about miracles these days, it's with a renewed passion because she has seen God's power change the life of the one who caused her pain.

From the time she was very young until she was a teen-ager, Meyer was sexually molested by her natural father. When she speaks about him, and about what he did, her voice carries great emotion, but a tone of compassion as well.

"He was born in the hills—way back in the hills. In his family, incest was just part of the culture," she says.

Meyer, who grew up in Missouri, was 9 years old when she first told her mother what was happening. Frightened by it, her mother did nothing.

"I guess on some levels, I can understand that. It is easier to believe your 9-year-old daughter is a liar than it is to believe that the man you married could be capable of something so awful," Meyer says.

But something that ultimately made the difference in her situation also occurred that same year. She made a decision

that she wanted to be saved.

“I was going to get saved,” she said, recalling her youthful boldness and determination, which now are hallmarks of her personality and message. Yet even at church in those days she needed both qualities to get what she needed from God.

“Wouldn’t you know it, the pastor didn’t give an altar call that night. I sat there in my pew as long as I could, then I grabbed my two cousins’ hands and dragged them up with me—‘Come on, we’re going to get saved!’” she said.

Through tears, the young Meyer stammered to the surprised pastor, “Can you save me?” As she prayed, she felt the cleansing forgiveness of Jesus.

“I always felt dirty. I was always washing, bathing, trying to get clean. And in this one moment, Jesus washed me, and He never left me,” she told Charisma.

A verse she had heard—Isaiah 61:7—came to mind: “Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs” (NKJV).

But afterward she still had to return home—back to the abuse. When Meyer was 14, her mother actually walked in while it was occurring.

“I thought: Thank God. Now she’ll put an end to it,” Meyer said. “But she didn’t. She picked up her purse and walked out

the door—away from the nightmare.”

Meyer says her mother simply did not know what to do, so she did nothing, but Meyer doesn't blame her mother. A few hours later, when her mother returned, Meyer held her breath, waiting for the fallout.

“But she walked in and never said one word,” she said.

Only adulthood removed Meyer from her father's assaults. But the abuse was a cloud over the family that never went away.

“We never talked about it. I never confronted the issue,” Meyer said.

That was 40 years ago. Meyer has since married, raised children and founded a ministry that today spans the globe, preaching the gospel through television, radio, tapes, books and conferences. She learned early in her ministry that she had to forgive her father, totally and unconditionally, which she says she did.

But two years ago, while he lay on a hospital bed weak and frail, he told her: “Joyce, I am sorry you feel I hurt you. But I still don't understand what was so bad about what I did.”

Meyer says that with incredible sadness she left the hospital room not knowing if her father would live through the night and certain that if he died he'd go straight to hell. God told her that she was to move him close to her house and take care of him.

It was a very difficult act of obedience. Meyer's husband, Dave, strongly disagreed with the plan, but it soon was confirmed that God had spoken to Joyce, and Dave agreed to follow His leading.

Every chance she got, Meyer showed her father she loved him. Every need he had, she met. She bought clothes and food and made sure all his basic needs were met.

One day, Meyer's mother found him crying. He called Joyce, asking her and Dave to come over right away. When they arrived, he broke down in tears again.

"I am sorry for what I did to you. I have wanted to say this to you for a long time, but I didn't have the guts," he said. Then he looked at Dave and began to weep again. "Dave, I am sorry for what I did to you, too. I am sorry I hurt your wife. Please forgive me."

Meyer knew in that moment that the miracle of salvation was there for her father. She knelt beside him, and together they prayed the sinner's prayer.

A few days after, Meyer came back to the house after her mother reported that he was doubting his salvation. She used God's Word to encourage him. He then asked Joyce to baptize him.

Meyer baptized her father on December 2, 2001, in front of hundreds of onlookers at the Dream Center that Joyce Meyer Ministries started in the inner city of St. Louis. Though her father's health remained frail at press time, Meyer reported

that his soul is “healthier than it’s ever been.”

Meyer has never mentioned her father’s name in public. In order to protect him, she also has chosen not to release her maiden name.

Mary Hutchinson