

Holy Spirit's Truth That Breaks Your Hidden Shame of Sexual Abuse

The media is ablaze with a new story every day regarding a new #MeToo testimony. It took one courageous voice to light the match, and now the conversation is headed in the direction of awareness, healing and change. Last month the #MeToo movement merged with the #NoMore movement and the conversation continues with what will no longer be tolerated. April is National Sexual Assault Awareness month as well as National Child Abuse Prevention month. As an abuse survivor, I believe we desperately need to continue the discussion and offer a voice of hope for survivors.

Having been through sexual abuse as a child by a family member, and then later sexually assaulted by a friend in high school, and yet again by an acquaintance in college, I know all too well the displaced shame and guilt that keeps survivors from speaking out. Rather than take on the embarrassment and feared judgment and ridicule, I remained in excruciating silence for over a decade before the bottled-up rage, anger, fear, self-degradation and depression got the best of me. In the silence, my spirit was strangled by the lies of the enemy—"You're not good enough." "You're used up." "You have no right to an opinion." "You'll never be loved."

Even in this muck of lies, I managed to marry and have children; however, the lies grew stronger. I was constantly afraid of losing my husband, and at the same time, pushing away his sincere love. When we had children, what was left inside of me had festered and overflowed into degrading my capabilities as a mother. Then one day, it all bubbled up over the edge and could no longer be contained. The Lord had been working on my spirit, filling me with His truth, and it

brought the lies to the surface. We are never meant to retain the lies of the enemy. My #NoMore moment came to be and I cried out for God to change my life, help reignite my faith and to be the woman He had always created me to be.

What has been done to us does not define who we are, however, it will remain as a part of our story. Like the dark threads that run through our beautifully woven tapestry of life, they add to it, but do not make up the entire masterpiece.

Through Hopeful Hearts Ministry I have watched countless women and men, of all ages, come to this moment of understanding and acceptance of who they have always been—God's beloved. When we say #NoMore we are finally recognizing who we are, what we stand for and what we will and will not tolerate. Many of us who have been through abuse, whether it be sexual, physical, mental or emotional, have lost a sense of our boundaries so when we can finally answer, 'Who am I?' "How do I deserve to be treated?" "What do I want in life?" and "What will I no longer allow in my life?" We reset the lost boundaries that keep us in freedom.

Getting to this moment for a survivor can be overwhelming in the beginning, but we can start with simple declarations to set our boundaries such as:

- I will not remain silent or taken for granted, I will stick to what I feel comfortable offering with my time, talent and treasure that is best for my family and me.
- I will not tolerate gossiping about others, as I know the hurt judgment brings.
- I will not allow others to talk down to or belittle me. If someone offers constructive criticism, I will receive it with an open heart.

To be honest, I learned how to set these boundaries from my husband, Neal. As I began to embrace who I was and what I

wanted, he too came forward and gave me this boundary:

- I deserve to be spoken to and not yelled at. I will ask them to lower their voice or I will walk away from the conversation.

I come from an intense home life where my father raised his voice to establish his dominance. We were taught to yell to be heard, though rarely was anyone being heard or validated. Early in our marriage, Neal would ask me not to yell, but it only infuriated me because I felt he just didn't want to listen. It wasn't until he said he deserved to be spoken to in a calm voice (and walked away a few times) that I realized the damage I was doing in consistently trying to cross that boundary.

Only by creating healthy boundaries for what we will and will not tolerate in our lives are we able to better define who we are and discover more productive, positive experiences in achieving what we want. Unfortunately, it isn't just survivors of abuse who need to learn to set healthy boundaries. Too often, we see the masses going along with the masses because no one has been taught to set these boundaries clearly. When we define our boundaries and put them into action, we offer a learning experience for others. {eoa}

Shannon M. Deitz is the award-winning author of *Exposed: Inexcusable Me, Irreplaceable Him*. She was listed as one of the best authors in Houston by CBS Houston Radio. Shannon also created the "I Have a Voice" project where survivors share their stories of abuse (domestic, sexual, incest, rape, neglect, emotional and verbal) through intensely personal and honest videos.

For more information about Shannon Deitz and Hopeful Hearts Ministry, please visit