

How God Restores a Victim of Abuse

Traditionally, women have had good reason to feel as if they are of less value than men. In society and in the church, women have been treated as lower-class citizens for centuries, in spite of the efforts of religious and political action groups to elevate their status.

Probably the most devastating result of this erroneous view of women is the worldwide crisis of **abuse**. Women and girls are victimized by all forms of **abuse** with alarming frequency.

In the United States alone, one woman in four has been the victim of some form of violence against her body, soul or spirit. Statistics on **domestic abuse**, **verbal abuse**, **sexual abuse**, **incest** and **rape** cross all economic, social, racial, educational and geographical lines.

Abuse has devastating effects on its victims. One of the most detrimental is the shattering of self-esteem. Women who have been **abused** typically suffer from guilt, shame, self-blame and a poor self-image for the rest of their lives unless God intervenes.

In a sense they are victimized twice: first by the actual assault and then by the assumption of much of society and often the legal community that somehow they were responsible for the horrendous crimes perpetrated against them. The implicit blame adds the tremendous weight of guilt to the already overwhelming burden of the assault itself.

An Age-old Story Though **abuse** is a current phenomenon, it is not a new one, as the story of Tamar in the Old Testament shows (see 2 Sam. 13:1-20). Tamar was King David's daughter, the sister of Absalom and the half-sister of Amnon. Her tragic story reveals that the abuse of women has been a part of

history for a long time.

It also shows that **abuse** is not merely a personal tragedy. It impacts the perpetrator, the victim, the parents, the siblings, the extended family members, and even succeeding generations. The text in Second Samuel covers all these participants and gives us a clear picture of the circumstances and the consequences of abuse.

When the story begins, Tamar is a young girl, still under her father's protection. In biblical times, girls were married or betrothed in their early teens. Since Tamar is single, we can conclude that she is perhaps 14 years old or younger.

Amnon, her half-brother, on the other hand, has his own land, his own home, his own flocks, his own independent homestead. He is clearly an adult.

Amnon is obsessed with wrong feelings for Tamar. In fact, he is so consumed with his inappropriate desires that they begin to take a physical toll on him. He becomes irritable and loses weight, and his countenance and demeanor are so altered that his cousin, Jonadab, notices and asks him what the problem is (see vv. 3-4).

When Amnon tells his cousin that he desires Tamar, Jonadab helps him plot a way to get her alone. In fact, Jonadab is the one who comes up with a plan to provide an opportunity for the assault, telling Amnon to pretend to be sick and to ask his father, David, to send Tamar to cook for him and feed him "from her hand" (v. 5).

Unaware of Amnon's evil intentions, David agrees and sends Tamar to fix food for her brother (see v. 7). Her refusal, her pleading, her invoking of her father's name, her efforts to defend herself when Amnon attempts to violate her are to no avail. In the end, Amnon's superior physical strength overpowers her (see vv. 12-14).

As is the case with all women who have been the victim of rape, Tamar's life is forever altered by this act of violation of her body, soul and spirit. Immediately after it occurs, Amnon's attitude toward her changes. Burning desire turns to hatred, and he has her thrown out of his house by a servant (see vv. 15,17).

Ashamed and disgraced, Tamar is left alone to deal with the aftermath of Amnon's crime. She must put the life he shattered back together by herself.

What is her response? The Scriptures tell us, "Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying" (v. 19, KJV, emphasis added).

The pathos of her situation is made dramatically clear in this understated passage. The words "went on crying" illustrate the continuing, ongoing nature of the mourning process those who have been victimized by abuse experience. It's not over even when the incident is "over." For them the crying goes on and on and on.

Tamar didn't cry for a while and then stop. She went on crying. She went on weeping. She went on grieving.

I know that women victims everywhere can relate to the feelings of isolation, helplessness, hopelessness and impotent fury that this passage describing Tamar conveys. She "went on" with her life, but she was crying. She "went on" with a brave face on the outside but a broken heart on the inside.

Women everywhere, like Tamar, have "gone on"—but they have gone on crying. And like Tamar, many of them have experienced the ultimate tragedy related to abuse: the inability or reluctance to reveal what happened to them.

The Scriptures tell us that Tamar's own brother encouraged her

to keep quiet about Amnon's indiscretion. "And Absalom her brother said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart'" (v. 20, NKJV).

This conspiracy of secrecy is the final indignity heaped upon Tamar. It is the same dynamic that operates in many families in which abuse has taken place. The victim does not have even the solace of truth for comfort. Incident after incident occurs, but each one is accompanied by the explicit or understood rule: Don't tell.

Look at the terrible toll this stance took on Tamar: "So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house" (v. 20). Because her brother told her not to tell, she stayed where she was. She couldn't move out or away from that place in her life. She stayed in the same place she was the day the crime was committed against her.

Free From Pain How many women survivors of abuse who are reading these words recognize that they too have remained broken, grieving, isolated, bitter and alone inside their "houses" and have not been able to get out? If you are one of them, don't despair. God has a word of renewal for you!

Tamar's story is included in the Bible in all its sordid detail because God wants you to know that He has seen the needs of wounded women. He has felt your pain.

He has provided His Word to let you know that you are not alone. He has put your story in His Word so you will know that just as surely as He has included the problem, He has included the answer as well.

Great texts in the Bible tell us story after story of leading women who are empowering mentors and role models to us in this modern day. Many of Jesus' great miracles were done for women, women who in biblical times had no place in the religious hierarchy and whom the disciples often tried to send away from

the Master. We can find positive images for ourselves in the Scriptures to seize upon as proof that we are “highly favored of God.”

I encourage you to read and study the life stories of the women recorded in Scripture. You’ll see that God used many of them in spite of their socially unacceptable backgrounds and negative life experiences!

You can celebrate the life of Ruth, the alien and non-citizen who married Boas and became the great-grandmother of David, the greatest king in the history of Israel. Find your life story in the account of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, who became the ancestor of Jesus himself!

Identify with Mary Magdalene, who had a bad reputation and an attitude to match but who was the first to meet Jesus at the tomb and become the herald of the Resurrection. Or think about the woman at the well, with her documented history of six failed relationships—a social outcast who became the greatest evangelist mentioned in the Scripture, bringing the whole town to “come, see a Man” (John 4:29).

All these are life-lifting, esteem-building records of what God can do in the lives of broken and rejected women. But I want to leave you with the formula for victory over the battering of esteem our spirits have been subjected to: the woman with the issue of blood (Matt. 9:20-22).

Ladies, here is our model for reclamation and restoration. Since life is in the blood, truly her issue of blood was symbolic of the fact that she was suffering from issues of life. But when she got close enough to touch Jesus, they weren’t “issues” any more. She was no longer a victim of her circumstances.

God doesn’t want you to be a victim any longer, either. Why not reach out and touch Him today?

Read a companion devotional.

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