

Overcoming Your Abusive Past

"Our secrets remain locked away and tucked inside our souls. We keep the doors to our hearts bolted shut. We refuse to expose our pain, abuse, addictions, despair and our past that makes us vulnerable. Because we fear disappointment, we don't find the strength to trust.

We erect walls and refuse to restore relationships or build new ones to keep our hearts protected. We live in fear and pain from past failures, keeping us from taking a step forward in faith. I know this because of my own experiences.

I was shut down, pushed down, beaten up, abandoned and shoved down a long road of pain and dysfunction. I am tired of hiding my pain. Finished with people looking at me and believing I have the perfect life, or I have it all together. There are no secrets here.

At 5 years old, I was kidnapped, abandoned, given away and then raised by strangers. My childhood was saturated with physical and emotional pain as I endured dysfunction and mistreatment. It was only by grace, the invisible hands of God and hope that I stayed alive.

Living abused and broken kept me full of shame and a prisoner to negative mindsets. I believed I wasn't good enough to be loved, successful, liked or approved of. My self-confidence was depleted, creating a deep insecurity inside me, holding me back from pursuing my dreams.

In desperation to overcome insecurity, I came to the end of myself. I prayed, crying out to God and telling Him I couldn't live in constant emotional turmoil any longer. I was filled with shame, pain and guilt. In order to break free from lies I believed and unbearable feelings; I sought God with my whole heart, asking Him to reveal truth and breathe life into my spirit. More than anything, I wanted healing, peace and the

ability to walk in truth and freedom.

Through years of prayer, therapy and growing in my relationship with God, I gained courage, strength and healing. I've been able to love and accept myself, living with "childlike" faith, allowing God to embrace me in His arms and be my strength. I learned that when we surrender ourselves to God, He renews our minds, creates in us a pure heart, teaches us to guard our hearts and heals us in His time.

He provides wisdom, courage, peace and strength beyond our understanding. He directs our every step, holds our hand and carries us through every circumstance. God has amazing plans and a fulfilling life for us. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Our relationship with God is a lifelong journey of seeking Him and allowing Him to teach us to become more "Christlike" and Spirit-led in all our ways. When we know how much God loves, adores and cares about us, we can better understand our value and worth; allowing us to love ourselves. When we know who we are in Christ, we can think and act in a confident, assertive and positive manner because we know God is on our side.

We can dream big, pray audaciously, set goals and expect God to move in our lives. When we know who we are in Christ, we can live in freedom, trusting that God is in control and He has us in His best interest. Surrendering our lives to Jesus changes everything. We are adopted into an eternal family and become an heir of the King.

We have many blessings to celebrate, promises to watch unfold and a loving God with supernatural power working in our lives and hearts. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

No matter what lies you've believe about yourself, I want to encourage you with this truth: "You are beautiful. You are loved. God made you perfect just the way you are. You are good enough. You are worth it, and your value is not estimated by your outward appearance. Whoever made you believe less or feel inadequate—shame on them. But it's time to move forward, knowing and believing the truth about yourself.

It's time to stand strong, believe in yourself, get healthy and be healthy because you love your life. No more living for societal approval. Hold your head up and know what God's Word says about you. "You brought my inner parts into being; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will praise you, for You made me with fear and wonder; marvelous are Your works, and You know me completely" (Ps. 139:13-14).

Jesus snatched me from the enemy's hand. He delivered me from hopelessness and despair. I was sinking in an ocean full of despondency.

My heart was desperate and broken. I wanted love so desperately. I was a daughter never approved, loved or accepted until I discovered my true Father, the one seated in heaven, my Creator.

My heavenly Father gave me all the strength I needed and filled me with an unexplainable hope. This feeling inside of me motivated me to keep on keeping on, no matter what my circumstances looked like and no matter how I felt. There was an invisible hand that carried me, an invisible love that held me, and an invisible joy that filled me. While I had no one to live for and nothing to look forward to, I kept pressing on and moving forward in life. I can't explain it, but I know, "hope kept me alive."

And His name is Jesus!

The very same hope, promises, healing and grace God has given to me are also available to you. He came "to preserve those

who mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified" (Is. 61:3).

Brooke Lynn is the author of *Raised by Strangers*. Brooke is a writer and a speaker who passionately lives—reaching others with God's Word and love. She is a survivor of abuse, sharing her past pain and recovery to encourage others with hope. Brooke resides in the Washington, D.C., area, has been married for 19 years, has two children and loves dogs. Join Brooke on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.