

Walking in Holy Spirit Healing From Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

Everyone wants the fairy tale, but fairy tales don't come easily when the marriage is battling to overcome the nightmare of past shame and betrayal. I know this firsthand. Early in my marriage, Neal and I faced struggles, including how to overcome sexual intimacy issues. There were abusive behaviors that carried over into our parenting as well as the imminent threat of an extramarital affair and possibly divorce.

My self-destructive behavior stemmed from both the shame of being abused by a family member and being raped by a friend. My journey to healing and restored faith has been hard. I experienced severe difficulty accepting love, experiencing intimacy and feeling worthy. I also struggled in accepting forgiveness. Yet God is still a good Father. He had incredible gifts waiting for me, but it took faith and courage to trust God when my spirit had been so deeply wounded by so many in the past.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I think we all know someone, a victim of abuse who needs a helping hand along with a word of encouragement. It takes amazing courage but survivors, like me, can step out of the shadows of their hurtful pasts and bring their stories to light. No part of this is easy. But God is faithful and He is always near to the brokenhearted.

Few problems are so pervasive yet shrouded in secrecy as domestic violence and sexual abuse. The statistics are staggering. Shockingly, nearly one in every four women is beaten or raped by a partner during adulthood. One in every four girls and nearly one in every six boys will be sexually

abused before the age of 18. Until recent years, these widespread problems were rarely discussed in public.

I believe that survivors need to be empowered to give a healing voice to their hurtful pasts. For me, that healing began when I came to recognize the abuse I had suffered and was willing to face the hard truth. I had to understand that I was not alone and that my past abuse does not define me. I overcame being a victim, and now I'm in the process of realizing the full potential of God's providential and gracious hand on my life. With this understanding, I can now move forward with healing and hope.

When I created the I Have A Voice project video series, I relived the heartrending memories and feelings related to the abuse I endured by my grandfather. By allowing myself to be vulnerable and honest during the filming, I believe that others may be stirred to open up about their own "secret" and move past feelings of victimization to focus on the things gained through adversity. Abuse changes things forever, but healing is possible if the choice is made to overcome the victim mentality and work hard to become a survivor.

Earlier this year, through Hopeful Hearts Ministry, I conducted an online survey that revealed some alarming information regarding domestic abuse survivors. About 98 percent of survivors polled indicated that they had suffered abuse by a family member during childhood.

I found that women who have suffered through domestic violence in past relationships have lost nearly all sense of identity and the natural boundaries that come with simple dignity and self-respect. They suffered mental and psychological abuse before the abuse ever turned physical. The abuse is subtle, mental, verbal, emotional, slowly chipping away at self-confidence. It causes the victim to feel inferior, and the victim often questions their rights and boundaries. When someone chooses to step forward out of the shameful shadows of

the past and stand up for themselves, it often turns physical for the perpetrator to obtain the upper hand and authority. This is typically when abuse turns physical, and then the victim realizes the true danger they are in.

Many survivors of domestic violence also suffered some form of mental and emotional abuse or neglect during their childhood. Support groups and self-defense courses can help empower survivors on their journey to healing.

One survivor I know recently shared with me: "Although I had finally walked out of the abusive relationship, I still carried the shame that is reinforced by the common misconception that the victim is partly to blame for having stayed in the relationship. By talking about it and also filming the *I Have a Voice* video I walked out of the shame of the abuse."

I am so proud of Jose and her new outlook on life. She has faced the pain of her past, and now she is moving forward. She has enrolled in graduate school to pursue a long time dream and has been an example of hope to everyone around her including her daughter.

The prevalence and the insidious nature of abuse are overwhelming. Most people don't realize that domestic violence rarely begins with actual violence. More often, it starts with emotional and verbal abuse. Ultimately, this dominance turns to violence when the victim begins to show signs of defiance. However, there is hope. You can be a bridge to hope for those facing the scourge of domestic violence by not only being aware of the plight they face, but sharing resources available to help. {eo}

Shannon M. Deitz is the award-winning author of *Exposed: Inexcusable Me, Irreplaceable Him*. Her newest book *Redeemed* releases this fall. For more information about Shannon Deitz and Hopeful Hearts Ministry, please visit .