

5 Steps to Find Healing From the Shame of Abuse

When I was a boy, something shameful happened to me that I never planned to talk about publicly. During a visit to a summer youth camp in Alabama, an older boy whom I considered a friend took me into the woods and abused me sexually. He then brought me inside a boathouse near the camp's lake for more experimentation.

The abuse wasn't penetrative or physically painful, but it inflicted a deep emotional scar. It was as if my 7-year-old soul had been branded with a hot iron. I never talked about the incident with anyone after it happened. I buried the trauma, but the pain didn't go away.

I was glad when my family moved from Alabama so I would never have to see that camp again. Yet the memory followed me like a phantom. It produced self-loathing, fear of exposure and deep inferiority. As a teenager, I spent lots of energy trying to convince my friends I was OK—yet deep down, I still feared I was hopelessly broken.

Thankfully my healing began at age 18, just before college, when I made Jesus the Lord of my life and asked Him to fill me with the Holy Spirit. God stripped layers of shame off me as I heard the Father's voice and experienced His unconditional love. By the time I got married and started a family, the shadow of abuse grew faint.

I found more healing when I told a few mentors and friends about the abuse. I was afraid they would recoil in disgust and reject me (most abuse victims expect that response), but they expressed only love and affirmation. Transparency brought freedom.

Yet a thin layer of shame lingered. Even though I was involved

in full-time ministry by that time, I battled nagging thoughts of disqualification. I seemed confident and successful to others, but I didn't like myself.

It would actually take years of healing to finally feel free. It was not an instant miracle. But I can honestly say today that the pain is gone. The faint scar simply reminds me of what Jesus delivered me from.

A few years ago I was preparing to preach at a men's conference in South Africa. The audience was full of tough, macho guys who seemed very confident, at least on the outside. But the Holy Spirit told me to share my abuse experience and to tell how Jesus had freed me from the shame of that awful trauma.

I wrestled with God about this. How could I stand in front of those men and admit such weakness? What would they think of me? Everything in me wanted to keep my pain hidden—but the Spirit continued urging me to be vulnerable. I finally relented and exposed my dark secret.

At the conclusion of my sermon I gave an opportunity for men to come to the altar for ministry, and a prayer team joined me in front. Many guys responded, and one of the first men I prayed for looked at me with tears in his eyes and said: "What happened to you ... also happened to me." He looked down in shame, and then buried his face in my shoulder and wept. After I prayed for him, other men told me they had endured the same type of abuse. They were tough on the outside, but inside, they were tormented by self-loathing, rejection and depression.

That day I decided I would never hide my scar again. If talking openly about my pain could help one person find healing, I determined I would never care again what anyone thought of me. I want to see people delivered from their pain. If you have experienced any form of sexual, verbal or physical

abuse, take the following steps:

1. Make sure Jesus is Lord of your life. If you want to know God's full healing power, you must give Him full control over your life. Adjust your heart by saying to the Lord, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (see Luke 22:42).

2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit fills us, He begins the amazing process of "sanctification"—a fancy word for inner transformation. He repairs your wounded soul and rebuilds your damaged emotions, so you can know true joy, peace and love.

3. Share your pain with a trusted friend. James 5:16a (NASB 1995) says: "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed." Healing requires vulnerability. Even though the abuse you experienced was someone else's sin, you still need to talk about your pain openly. As long as you hide it, you will be tormented by dark thoughts. You will feel as if tons of spiritual weight has been lifted from your soul when you admit what happened.

4. Receive prayer for healing. Ask a mature Christian to pray that you will be free from all the effects of shame—including rejection, self-loathing, condemnation, unworthiness and inferiority. You must accept the fact that God loves you no matter what happened to you. He does not view you as "damaged" or "stained"; He wants you to experience His unconditional acceptance.

Prayer has the power to restore the soul. But don't feel bad if you need more than one prayer session. Sometimes negative emotions must be peeled away in layers, and the healing process may take time.

5. Tell your story when you are ready. Psalm 107:2a says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Why is it important for us to tell others about a shameful experience? Because they will never know that God can deliver them from the same horrible

memory if someone is not willing to testify.

The devil doesn't want you to share anything about your story. He will plague you with fears, such as, "Now they know who you really are," or "They will never respect you again." Don't listen to the enemy. When you tell of God's goodness, and how He set you free, your testimony will provide the keys to unlock others who have been chained for years. {eoa}

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