

Trading Your Pain for God's Beauty

Everyone deals with emotional pain to some degree. Whether it's a difficult relationship, an addiction, abuse, depression ... it can cripple us and prevent us from moving forward.

But regardless of what's happened in our past, God still wants us to have a great future.

For years, I thought I had to settle for a second-rate life because I had been sexually abused by my father. I thought my future would never be as good as it *could have* been.

That's what our enemy, Satan, wants us to think. He wants us to believe that our past pain has permanently ruined what God can do with our future.

Maybe that's where you are today. You look at everything you've been through and think, "My situation's just a hopeless mess. Maybe it would be different if God had done something sooner, but now it's beyond repair."

If so, I want you to know that God can fix the unfixable and bring dead things back to life! Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, "...With God all things are possible" (NIV).

If you are brokenhearted—if you've been hurt, abused, disappointed or unfairly treated in any way—it doesn't limit what God can do in your life. In fact, God can give you a future that's *better* than it would have been if you had never gone through the painful times you've experienced.

Double for Your Trouble

Isaiah 61:7-8 has meant so much to me over the years. It says, "Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And

so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. For I, the Lord, love justice..." (NIV).

This Scripture helped me understand that no person could pay me back for what I'd gone through—but God could! And He'd even give me *double* for all the pain I'd been through.

I've witnessed this firsthand in my own life. God has used His Word to transform me from the inside out. Instead of anger and bitterness, I now have peace and joy. Instead of being a victim of past abuse, He is using my experiences to help many find healing and total restoration from emotional pain.

Isaiah 61:1-3 says Jesus came "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the comfort all who bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair..." (NIV).

Jesus has already opened the prison doors! We no longer have to stay in "prisons" of emotional pain, rejection, disappointment, worry, depression, anger, addictions or bad habits.

Let It Go and Move On with Your Life

Pain from the past has a way of lingering and even affecting your future. But you don't have to live stuck in the pain of your past. You can make an exchange—you can trade your pain for God's promise and have *beauty* instead of ashes.

God offers each one of us healing and restoration, but we also have a part to play in the process. We can't expect to keep our "ashes" and still receive God's beauty. We have to choose to move forward and leave things like bitterness, resentment, and self-pity behind.

Self-pity is a major trap that will keep us stuck in our

pain—it's turning inward and pitying *ourselves* when we should have compassion flowing out of us to other people.

It's the same with bitterness and resentment. It took me a long time to get past the point of thinking, "Someone owes me." I was bitter and angry about my past, and I ended up taking it out on the people around me, trying to "collect" from those who had no way of paying me back.

I had to decide to let go of my anger and resentment and trust God to restore what I had lost. He alone could make wrong things right...in His way and in His timing.

✘ Whatever you've gone through or wherever you are today, your pain doesn't have the final say in your life. God can take any situation and turn it around for His good.

If your life is a fragmented mess, let Jesus gather up the pieces. Be determined to maintain a positive, grateful attitude, focusing on God's blessings and the great things He is doing in your life.

As you do, your pain will become someone else's gain, your mess will become your message and what you've walked through will help to bring someone else to their miracle. You'll have a life of beauty, joy, and gratitude for all God has done!

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