

"YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE."
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THE TRUTH THAT SETS YOU FREE

When Rachel was a child, her foster family sexually abused her. They told her that the only thing she was good for was to keep Dad happy.
On a daily

"YOU WILL
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John 8:32

basis they told her that she didn't deserve to be loved and that no one wanted her, not even God. She grew up with these lies embedded in her mind and heart. As an adult, she couldn't receive love because she believed that she was too worthless to be loved by anyone, especially God.

I've already talked about some of the lies abuse survivors believe about themselves in order to help you understand why you might be afraid to break the silence. When we find the courage to tell, we take the first major step on our healing journey. When we embrace the truth that the abuse wasn't our fault, we take the second. But there are other lies that can cause us more problems and pain along the way. Chief among them are the lies we believe about God. Replacing these lies with truth is crucial for healing; for what we believe about God is the source of everything we believe about ourselves, others, and the world.

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

I understand that bringing God into the healing equation may be uncomfortable for some of you. In fact, just thinking about God may stir up a lot of emotions deep inside. You may feel very angry with Him. Or you may have read in the Bible about His love for you, yet really struggle to believe that it applies to you. You may doubt that it's true at all. You may have many questions for which no one can give you a good answer, including me—questions like, *If God loves me, why did this happen?* I want you to know that I understand that. I've been where you are, and I want you to know that your anger, doubts, and questions are normal.

That said, I also believe that you'll never find genuine healing outside of a relationship with God. I would be doing you an injustice to tell you that breaking the silence and

accepting the truth about your abuse is the end of your healing. I've heard many speakers say that you should never expect to overcome the pain of sexual abuse. They say that you'll always feel empty inside because of it. My message is different. I just can't leave you there!

You see, I know from my own experience that knowing God was what quieted my questioning heart and allowed His healing waters to flow in and out of my life. Some of you may be thinking, *This may have worked for Nicole because she has a close relationship with God, but it won't work for me. I don't have that.* The greatest news in the world is that you can have one too! What God has done for me, He is longing to do for you.

If we're truthful, we have to admit that our own efforts to cope with our abuse haven't really worked. In many cases, they have just added more problems and injuries; and in the end we still feel shame, pain, and sadness. We've hurt others and ourselves, and in so doing, we've hurt God. But the good news is that all of this can be forgiven and the slate wiped clean. This happens through a personal relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us so that our sins could be forgiven and we could become children of God.

All you have to do to join God's family is to admit that you've failed Him, realize that you need Him, and ask Him to forgive you and to come into your heart to be your Lord and Savior. This is the simple path to an up-close-and-personal, day-in-and-day-out relationship with the God of the universe.

Once you're in God's family, you can start to get to know Him. Ask Him to show you His true character and reveal to you any lies you've believed about Him. If you long to have Him reveal Himself to you, He will. He wants to show you! No matter what you're struggling with, take it to the Lord. If it's a lack of faith or a lack of desire to know Him more, tell Him. He can handle it. He wants to hear from you. He wants to answer you. He wants to help you.

God will personalize His relationship with you according to who you are and what you need. He sent His Son not only to make forgiveness possible, but also to dry your tears, heal your pain, and give you life in abundance. I know this may be difficult for some of you to believe, but you don't have to take my word for it. God Himself will prove it to you once you have a personal relationship with Him.

If you're ready for a personal relationship with God, you can begin by praying something like this:

Lord, what Nicole has said makes sense to me. I understand that only You can forgive me and free me to heal and truly live. I don't want to go through this healing journey alone; I want to go through it with You. Right now, I accept You as the Lord of my life. Be real to me today. Reveal the lies that have kept me in bondage, and show me how to root them out with the truth in Your Word. Help me live out that truth in my daily life. In Jesus Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Amen means "Yes, it's so," but it also means "Now let's go!" Let's pinpoint the source of the common lies survivors believe about God and then replace them with the truth that will free us to move forward on our healing journey.

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Although most lies took root when you were abused as a child, your abuser isn't the only enemy you have. Satan will try to get you with his tricks as well. He doesn't want you to get very far on your healing journey; in fact, he will do everything he can to trip you up by keeping you from knowing the truth. The apostle John says this about him: "He

has always hated the truth, because

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there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Listening to Satan plants the seed of a false belief system deep within us.

Dwelling on his lies allows a poisonous vine to grow in the soil of our minds and then spread until it infects every area of our lives. The longer we allow it to live on the inside, the more it will manifest itself on the outside in behavior that keeps us in darkness and bondage.

The only way to break free of this oppression is to root out each lie and replace it with truth. When we demolish lies about God, all the lies that stem from a false view of Him will die as well.

Survivors of abuse often find it hard to resist Satan's lies because their own experiences make them seem credible. When you find yourself harboring the Devil's lies in your mind, do what Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness: Counter each lie with a truth from God's

Word. This is the way to resist Satan, and God promises that when you do this, “he will flee from you” (James 4:7).



GOD'S TRUTH:
“God has said, ‘I will never fail you. I will never abandon you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

In my experience, this is the number one lie about God that survivors struggle with. I, too, battled it. I spent many nights reading His Word, journaling, and crying out to Him. At last I heard from Him in such a way that I knew without a doubt that He hadn't abandoned me and never would abandon me.

As I grew in my faith and spent time alone with the Lord, I found that He was with me through it all. It may not seem logical (it may even sound crazy), but I've seen the Lord heartbroken for me and for you. I've seen Him crying with us and for us. He cried when I cried. He was angry when I was angry. Sometimes as I closed my eyes and talked to the Lord, I saw Him holding me in His arms and weeping over what had been done to me. God *showed* me that He hadn't abandoned me.

The truth is that the Lord is close to those who are brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18), He will never forget us (Isaiah 49:15), and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:39).



GOD'S TRUTH:
“When you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else” (James 1:13).

Although most victims of childhood sexual abuse blame themselves for what happened to them, it's also common for them to blame others. Even though the perpetrator is the one who deserves all the blame, it's often too hard for victims to blame an offender who is a parent, caregiver, or someone they love. So others receive the brunt of their anger. This can be the nonoffending parent, a sibling, or even other children at school. Oftentimes, however, it's God.

Adult survivors often blame God as well. Trauma forces us to ask “why” questions: “Why me?” “Why them?” “Why, God?” Left with unanswered questions, we find ourselves either searching for God in a black cloud of doubt, fear, and mistrust, or else running from Him into dark corners, doing our best to deny that He exists.

“Why” questions like these show that sexual abuse is an assault on the very soul of its victims. It causes us to turn against the very One who loves us more than anyone else ever could, our heavenly

Father, Abba God. While I, too, asked all these questions, I eventually came to understand that God wasn't the one responsible for my abuse; my step-father was responsible. The truth is that your abuser chose to hurt you. The abuse wasn't God's doing.

SATAN'S LIE

God is bad, just like my earthly father.

GOD'S TRUTH:

"The Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation" (Psalm 100:5).

The word father can be frightening if your earthly father has abused you. Both teens and adults tell me things like: "I can't accept God as my Father. My real father was a horrible man. I can't trust any father figure." It isn't uncommon for those who have been wounded by an older male, often a father or trusted authority, to feel this way at one time or another.

Don't let Satan deceive you. The truth is that God the Father is, was, and always will be *nothing* like your earthly father. The Bible is quite clear on who God is. Even though I worried about trusting a man again, I knew that God was a whole different ball game. He is nothing like an earthly man. He is more loving, compassionate, merciful, available, trustworthy, and honest than any man you have ever met or ever will meet. He is perfect. He is everything you ever hoped for in a father . . . and then some. Your Abba Father is holier, wiser, and kinder than even your most picture-perfect daddy.

SATAN'S LIE

God doesn't care about child abuse.

GOD'S TRUTH:

"If you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea'" (Matthew 18:6).

God has a special place in His heart for children. He loves them and wants them to be treated with love, gentleness, and kindness. He tells us in His Word that it is a very serious offense to lead someone else to sin, especially a child. Any person who harms a child brings God's wrath down upon himself.

God will not stand for child abuse and won't allow it to go unpunished. Child abusers will have to answer to Him. He will see that justice is done. You may not see it happen, and it may not happen the way you want it to, but the Lord will make sure that this sin is paid for.

SATAN'S LIE

God can't heal me.

GOD'S TRUTH:

"By his wounds you are healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

You can be free of the pain of the past—the nightmares, the shame, the fears, the lies. You can nail all of it to the cross. On the cross, Jesus was "beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed" (Isaiah 53:5). If you're a child of God, you don't have to punish your body; Jesus has already taken the beatings for you.

God wants you to know Him personally, and
He wants to heal you personally. I feel it burning
in my soul that, because we are His children,
YOU He aches deeply when we hurt. He wants to
DON'T take the hurt for us. He doesn't want us
HAVE TO to continue to feel the pain. He wants
PUNISH YOUR us to give it to Him. And you
BODY; JESUS HAS can. I did. God is now making
ALREADY TAKEN the effects of sexual abuse
THE BEATINGS disappear from my life.
FOR YOU. And He will continue to do
that as I continue to believe the
truth about Him.

What lies are you listening to
today? Do you believe that God couldn't
love you? That He doesn't care about your
problems? That He has rejected or forgotten you?
Seek the Lord and His Word for the truth.

MAKING THE TRUTH REAL

In the battle for truth, we need to rely on spiritual
weapons to defeat our adversary. God has given us all
the weapons we need to resist Satan when he attacks. In
Ephesians 6:13–18, Paul encourages us to use them:

Put on every piece of God's armor so you will
be able to resist the enemy in the time of
evil. Then after the battle you will still be
standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on
the belt of truth and the body armor of God's
righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that
comes from the Good News so that you will be
fully prepared. In addition to all of these,

hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery
arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your
helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which
is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all
times and on every occasion.

I printed out this passage and taped it on the wall
directly in front of my desk, right at eye level. I pray it every
morning to prepare myself for whatever fiery darts Satan
plans to throw my way that day. This is important for me,
and it's important for you too. If we fail to clothe ourselves
daily with our spiritual armor, we leave ourselves open to
Satan's deception.

You may already be familiar with this passage of
Scripture. You might even be able to quote it. But knowing
what your spiritual weapons are and actually using them to
defeat Satan are two different things. God's truths become
real to us only when we put them into practice in our life.

Kim has truly been through hell. She has suffered
abandonment, neglect, beatings, rapes, and emotional and
verbal abuse. The sins against Kim made her mind an easy
target for Satan, who planted his lies there in an effort to
destroy her.

"I always felt that I wasn't worth anything to any-
one," Kim told me. "Every day I searched Scripture to find
out who I was in God's eyes. Then I would go to bed and cry
out to the Lord to help me understand what I had read. I
knew it in my head, but I wanted to *feel* it in my life.

"One night as I was reading and praying, I realized
that although I had dealt with a lot of stuff from the past,
there were still lies that I believed. So I put on the whole
armor of God. I went on a marathon of reading the
Scriptures and praying in the Spirit. I asked God to reveal

all the lies and replace them with the truth. I wrote out truths on three-by-five index cards and taped them where I would see them every day—on my bathroom mirror, on the door of my refrigerator, on the dashboard of my car.

“I also had a couple of friends who prayed with me over and over again every time I hit bottom. Every time I would cry out to God, He would remind me that He didn’t make junk, and that it was a lie of the Enemy for me to believe that I was. He helped me realize that I am a child of the King, a joint heir with Him, and that Satan’s lies can never take that away from me. I kept looking to the Lord and relying on His strength to get through the pain. I won the battle of the mind; Satan can’t make me believe those lies anymore.”

The Lord has given us everything we need to overcome the Devil and his lies. Because He Himself had to do battle with Satan, He knows who and what we’re dealing with. I’ve come to realize that there’s no emotion I’ll experience in my entire life that Jesus didn’t feel while He was on the cross. He has been there . . . and done that! He hurts when we hurt, and He wants to help us, if we will only let Him. “So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:16).

You may already know some of God’s truths in your head. But *feeling* them in your heart and *experiencing* them in your life come when you ask the Lord to show you what they mean and then act on them. He is a personal God. He wants to teach you His truth on a personal level. He wants you to seek Him with your questions so you can find real answers.

LIVING WITH UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Even as God’s truths and weapons become real in your life, you may still have many unanswered questions about God. To be honest, I still have questions like that—questions such as:

“If God is all-powerful and can beat up the Devil any day He wants, why didn’t He stop the abuse when it was happening?”

“Why do bad things happen to good people?”

“Why do we have to go through pain?”

Like King David and Job and many other believers through the centuries, I’ve wrestled with these questions. I’ve tossed and turned at night because of them. Even though I still don’t have the answers, I’m okay with that now. Why? Because when I invited the God of this universe to come into my world, He came into my life in such a personal and loving way that the questions I still had didn’t matter anymore. All that mattered was that I wanted more of Him. I wanted more of His love, His comfort, His peace, and His acceptance. I wanted to be His child, His daughter.

The closer you get to God, the less important your questions will seem. Someday we’ll know the answers. Until then, it’s okay. For now, God has told us everything we need to know.

People often ask me, “How do I know I’m truly healed in certain areas? I sometimes think it’s still there.” Remember that when God heals, it’s permanent. The big battle is probably won, but you will still have little skirmishes along the way. Satan

likes to come into these little scuffles and trick you into thinking they mean more than they do. He wants you to think that God's healing isn't really happening. Don't listen to him! You have to take authority in this situation. At times you just have to say out loud, "Hey! I'm healing. And I'm moving forward in that truth." (Sometimes I throw a "you stupid devil!" in there at the end.)

There are times when your negative thoughts may *not* be from the Enemy. If it's too much of a struggle to stand firm in the Word day after day, you may need more healing. The fight to remain confident in your healing shouldn't consume you. If it does, even though you're doing all you need to stay healthy, it might be a sign that you're now ready to heal an area that hasn't yet been uncovered. Acknowledge the need to receive more healing in that particular area and work through it.

As you replace lies about God with the truth about Him, I encourage you not to go it alone. Lies prevent many survivors from seeing themselves as God sees them, and that keeps them in bondage to fear and self-condemnation. Just as we need someone who can help us break the silence in the beginning, we need someone who can help us see God as He is and ourselves as He sees us.

Do you have someone you trust completely? Someone who knows all about you? If not, you need to find someone like that right away. Seek out a godly mentor or adviser who can help you by guiding and praying for you along your healing journey. When Rachel sought healing from the abuse by her foster parents, her Christian counselor was able to help her break free from the bondage of Satan's lies as he guided her into God's truth.

Moving from silence to healing always means moving *toward* God, the source of light, freedom, and life. It always

means moving *away* from Satan, the source of darkness, bondage, and death. One of the greatest gifts God has given you is the power to choose. **What you choose to believe about God will eventually determine the choices you make about your healing.** If you truly want to be healed, choose to truly believe God. His truth is the truth that sets you free.