

PART I: EXPOSING THE ROOTS AND FRUITS OF ABUSE

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EXPOSING THE
ROOTS & FRUITS
OF ABUSE

1

IF YOU'VE EVER tended a garden or flower bed, you know how hard it is to get rid of unwanted weeds. It's not enough to simply yank off their leafy tops or chop them off at ground level: the roots supporting and feeding the pesky plants must also be exposed and destroyed.

Just so, it's not enough to attack the flourishing out-growth of symptoms, pain and problems produced by abuse. The underlying root system must be exposed. The poisonous fruit that abuse has produced in our lives and relationships must be recognized and resolved. Only then can the unproductive, untilled soil in our souls be reclaimed.



HOPE FOR HURTING PEOPLE

“PLEASE, DADDY, let me out! I didn’t steal the knife. I found it in the snow. Honest, I did. Please unlock the door, Daddy! Please!”

Muffled screams erupted from my skinny, terrified seven-year-old frame as I pounded and clawed at the rough door of a dirt-walled, rat-infested canning cellar beneath the house. Pencil-sized welts crisscrossed my back, buttocks, and legs. Pain and panic had caused me to wet my pants, now grimy with dirt. Sticky cobwebs streaked my tousled black hair.

After what seemed like hours, the heavy door burst open, but my father had not come to rescue me. Shouting curses and armed with an extension cord and a coat hanger, he jerked me out of the cellar, beat me for screaming, and then tossed me back into the blackness.

Sobbing, I scrambled to the crack of light at the bottom of the door and drew my shivering, throbbing form into a ball. I hoped somehow to distance myself from the squeaking rats and bone-chilling cold.

I had become accustomed to my father’s violent anger. As a toddler, I had instinctively learned to sleep *under* my bed, not *in* it, to

avoid my drunken father's middle-of-the-night beatings. At four, having never been loved, hugged, nor even once called "Son," I actually ran away from home. I wandered the streets until well-meaning policemen found this dark-eyed Jewish boy and took me back home.

Although my entire family was abused, I always had been singled out as my father's favorite target. And the sadistic arsenal of curse words, angry fists, coat hangers, extension cords, belt buckles and heavy boots always found their mark.

In 1958, I was eleven and still mystified as to why my father despised me. At the same time, I wondered if I could really be garbage, the never-amount-to-anything piece of trash my father said I was.

Upstairs in my room, I cringed as I heard the front door slam. The Friday night ritual began as my drunken dad screamed my mother's name: "Jean! Jean! You get yourself in here!" I crept to the top of the stairs and peered over the railing as my father shoved my mother into a chair. I could see the terror on her face as he began battering her face with his fists.

"How could you do such a thing to me?" my father ranted. "That stupid moron is not my son. It's your fault that bastard is living in my house!" he yelled. Each word was punctuated by bone-jarring blows. "He is a moron. He is a coward. He is NOT my son!"

I longed to dash down the stairs and through the front door into the dark night. Instead, I tried to intervene and he turned his anger on me. By the time he was done using his fists on my scrawny frame, I had been dumped unconscious on the floor of my bedroom. Sometime later I awoke, my body curled into a fetal position with my face and pajamas covered in dried vomit. Every bone and joint ached. I tried to push myself up from the floor of that dark room but fell back, the room spinning. I closed my eyes, clenched my fists in total

agony, and, shaking uncontrollably, cried out to no one in particular, “W-w-why was I born? W-w-why?!”

I saw no purpose for my life. My father hated me, and my mother suffered because of me. All I knew was my father’s warped version of Christianity: Booze on Friday, beatings on Saturday, and church on Sunday. My dad’s favorite Bible verse must have been Proverbs 23:14: “You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.” He paraphrased that as “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” There were no spoiled children in his home—only abused ones. He had never given me one word of affirmation. Not once had I heard “I love you” from his lips that so tenderly and lovingly caressed a glass of amber whiskey. Jack Daniels was his “friend”; I was “moron.”

That night in my room, I had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. As quickly as I had whispered those words, the room was flooded with a light so bright it blinded me. I thought Dad had come back to finish the job—to beat me to death, and this time I could not escape. My first thought was to crawl under the bed to protect myself. I covered my face with my hands and closed my eyes as tightly as I could. After what seemed like an eon, I realized there was no other sound in the room. Now there was only a brilliant light. I slowly spread my fingers and eased my eyes open as imperceptibly as possible.

Instead of seeing my dad’s anger-deformed face, I saw two hands reaching toward me. In the center of each wrist was an ugly scar. I had seen those scars in Sunday school literature. They were supposed to represent the nail scars of Jesus. Someone was playing a trick on me, but who? Did I dare look beyond the wrists to the face? Was I having a nervous breakdown? Was I going crazy?

Rather than the cold, stark fear that had filled the room earlier, I now actually felt warmth. I felt a Presence that brought both power

and peace. I was being immersed in an invisible liquid love that poured over me and lodged deep within my soul. I slowly raised my head, and as my eyes followed the arms upward, I saw standing there in my bedroom the Lord Jesus Christ. He was either clothed in light or in the most brilliant white imaginable—whiter than fresh snow; whiter than the clouds that float in the sky; whiter than anything I had ever seen. Draped from His shoulder to His waist was a deep purple cloth—more purple than the heavens at sunset.

As I lifted my head to take in His face, I was instantly drawn to His loving eyes. They were happy eyes filled with every color of the rainbow. It was like looking into an illuminated bowl of the world's most highly prized jewels. I felt as if I could see through them and beyond to heaven and the promise of eternal peace. They were like magnets drawing me into their depths. Keeping His arms outstretched, He looked at me with an all-encompassing expression of love. He smiled and then said three things I had never heard before. They were like a healing salve to my wounded soul and spirit.

He said, "Son." It was the first time anyone had ever called me "Son." It was said so gently, with such love and respect for me—for me!—that I felt my heart melt. The word *son* echoed in my spirit again and again.

"I love you." Someone really did love me. What joy! I felt as if I'd just escaped a death sentence and was free. That statement alone was enough to sustain me for the rest of my life. But He continued, "I have a great plan for your life." The power and presence of Jesus were like a holy fire igniting my soul. I had a purpose! God had something for me to do. Then there was silence. I am sure only a few seconds had passed, but it felt like an eternity.

I closed my eyes, and tears slid slowly down my face. I was consumed with an inexplicable happiness. Eventually I realized that

the light had departed but the overwhelming warmth remained. He was gone from my room but not from my spirit, not from my heart. I never wanted to lose that feeling of love and peace and warmth.

I knew better than to share my special secret with anyone, especially my mother. “The Pope, Billy Graham, Adolf Hitler have all claimed to be Christians, and they’re all the same,” I had heard her snort angrily. “Why would you want Christianity? It has killed six million Jewish people. Jesus is the gentile God, and He’s dead. Don’t try to dig Him up!”

Still I managed to get a Bible and began reading it faithfully. In the coming years I was somehow kept from the destructive vices and snares around me.

Yet, I could not throw off the terrible shyness that had plagued my early childhood. The jeers of my gentile classmates and their sarcastic remarks about the welts and bruises I was unable to hide in gym class were becoming more than I could endure. My habit of skipping school accelerated and just before high school, I dropped out altogether.

By 1963, I was an awkward, lanky sixteen-year-old, nervously laughing with my friend as we walked through the front door of my house. This was the first time I had ever had the courage to invite anyone home with me; my heart was beating in my throat. As I attempted to quietly steer my friend past my father and uncle and upstairs to my room, my father sneered loudly, “Well! It’s my moron of a son!”

I was angry and embarrassed beyond words. I cast a glance at my father and kept climbing the stairs, hoping he had achieved his aim of humiliating me and would say no more. That was not to be. With great agility for a man of his stature, he was on his feet and across the room in a flash. Cursing viciously, he took the stairs two at

a time. “I saw that dirty look, you bastard,” he roared. “No moron is gonna look at me like that and get away with it!” Terrified, my friend bolted for the front door.

A blow to my head spun me around. Huge, vise-like hands grabbed me by the throat. I was lifted six inches off the floor as the very life was choked out of me. My struggles were no match for my father’s brute strength. As blackness overtook me, the screams and curses seemed farther away. The room whirled faster and faster and then went completely black as my father tossed my limp body to the floor and stalked away.

In 1964, I realized I would have to leave before my father killed me. I had studied a world map, searching for the farthest place I could find away from home. Consequently, after joining the army, I was stationed at Wong Tong Ne, a compound on a mountaintop in Seoul, Korea. I served as a medic in the 44th surgical hospital. Two years later this exact site would become known as Prayer Mountain. It had been purchased by Dr. David Yonggi Cho, a minister who would ultimately pastor the largest church in the world.

Early one morning as I strolled mountain trails not even thinking about God, the Holy Spirit fell upon me. I wept as I was gently reminded of the words Jesus had spoken to me those many years ago when I was eleven. Every morning thereafter, I returned to that hallowed spot to commune with God.

When in 1966 I had to leave my beloved mountain in Korea, I returned to Philadelphia to work as a recruiter. In my sparsely furnished room at the Philadelphia YMCA, I shut myself in with God for a week, praying and reading straight through the New Testament. Hoping Jesus might visit me again, I pointed to a battered rocking chair in the corner and said, “Lord, this is your chair. If you want to sit there and be comfortable while talking to me, that is fine.”

A few days later I was baptized in the Holy Spirit. Filled with boldness, I spent every available minute in the streets, passing out gospel tracts and sharing Jesus.

About two weeks later, while eating breakfast in a run-down restaurant, once again I was enveloped by the presence of God and began to weep. “Lord,” I cried, “I don’t even know what an evangelist does, but I know You’re calling me to be one. I’m just garbage, but if you can use garbage, I’ll give my life to You.”

After being discharged from the Army, I felt compelled to attend a Bible college in the South to prepare for ministry. During the next two years, I spent many nights in the dormitory prayer room. Fasting and interceding before the Lord, I sought divine direction and pled for healing from the never-ending pain of rejection that had, all my life, gnawed at my insides like a starving rat.

It was in Bible College that I met and married Carolyn, but fearing her rejection, I never told her of my past abuse or of not attending high school.

In 1978, after so many years of repressing my feelings, I found myself in a cardiology ward. There, I underwent a heart catheterization at the tender age of thirty-one. I had undergone a complete breakdown—emotionally and physically. I was still afraid to tell anyone of my fears lest I be rejected. I had yet to realize that I was in search of a father figure.

For the previous twelve years, I had worked as hard as humanly possible in the ministry. Although I told myself it was because of my passion for souls, deep in my heart I knew it was also the driven little boy inside crying out for acceptance. Feeling inferior to other preachers who had bigger ministries, wore better clothes and were better educated, I shrank from close relationships, always avoiding opening up and being real. Longing for the approval I had never had

and believing that worth and significance had to be earned by performance, production and perfection, I strove for achievement.

Every time a pastor said, “We can’t schedule a meeting with you right now,” it was as if my father had rejected me yet again. Finally, the time came that I was holding back-to-back revivals and crusades. My ministry was housed in its own 66,000-square-foot headquarters complex in New York. As a young evangelist, I spoke at Giants Stadium to 60,000 people, at Arrowhead Stadium to 45,000, and was written up in *Time* magazine. Driving myself eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, I felt sinful if I rested, and even apologized for being tired.

But now, as scalding tears trickled down my cheeks and machines monitored every heartbeat, I knew I must confide in someone. I reached for the phone and called one of the few men I had been able to trust, the beloved Christian author and journalist, Jamie Buckingham.

“Jamie,” I sobbed, “this is Mike Evans. I’m hospitalized in a cardiology ward and I’m afraid.”

“Mike,” Jamie answered, “it’s okay to be afraid.”

I desperately needed to hear those words because I believed that if people found out I was afraid, they would think me weak and I would face more rejection.

When I ended the call, I lifted my hands to God and pled for the grace I would need to be honest with my wife and others. Warm tears dripped down my face, and an indescribable peace descended.

It took most of the night, but sob by sob, hurt by hurt, I told Carolyn everything. Then I confessed my failures and fears to God, asking His forgiveness.

“Will you let Me set you free from the destructive soul ties

between you and your father,” I sensed the Lord asking. “Will you go to him and ask his forgiveness?”

“Yes, Lord; yes, I will.”

“Now, you are ready to minister,” Jesus answered.

Early the next morning, I disconnected myself from the machines, dressed, and explaining to the astonished nurses that I was well, walked out of the hospital.

I found my father in a bar trying to pick up a young woman. He and I drove to a quiet place so we could talk. Obeying the Lord’s leading, I did not speak of my father’s wrongs against me. Neither did I speak of my own successes, as I had in the past, vainly struggling to gain my father’s approval. Instead, I wept and confessed my failures.

The presence of God settled upon us, and my father’s hard exterior crumbled.

“Mike,” he admitted tearfully, “my father abused me like I abused you. He had me working in the fields when I was five or six, and I couldn’t go to school to learn to read and write.” He had to choke back sobs before he could continue. “Son, I should have been put in prison for the way I treated you.”

Suddenly, I found my heart overflowing with love and compassion for the man I thought I could never forgive.

The healing process continued as God steadily worked in my life to demolish the big lie. The constant, stabbing pain of rejection has diminished to a mere twinge now and then. My old, negative self-talk has been replaced with what God’s Word says about me as His child. I increasingly comprehended that it is Mike Evans—not what my pride and compulsive workaholic nature can produce—that God values.

Today, my life is filled with joy unspeakable. Carolyn and I have celebrated over four decades of ministry and marriage, as we have worked side-by-side to fulfill what God has called us to do. We now have four children and ten grandchildren.

Wonderful doors of opportunity continue to open wide so I can minister to heads of nations. The Lord has allowed me to preach face-to-face to hundreds of thousands of people. I have been asked to appear on television and radio shows such as Good Morning America, Nightline, Crossfire, CNN World News, and numerous Fox Network shows in defense of the Jewish people. To date, I have published nearly fifty books and produced eighteen television specials based on the books.

Best of all, as I dare to share the story of the atrocities I once endured, the story of a frightened, rejected little boy's terrible suffering is being used to bring healing and hope to hurting people—people struggling for perfection, performance and praise; people with plastic smiles on their faces and gaping holes in their souls; people of all ages and from all strata of society who so desperately need to hear that a smiling Savior with nail-scarred hands loves, accepts and values them and has a wonderful plan for their lives.

TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Are you the victim of a painful past? Have you come to grips with that pain and resolved it, or are you still a prisoner of the past? This checklist may help answer those questions for you.

- ___ 1. Are you a workaholic?
- ___ 2. Are you a perfectionist? Do you believe any error on your part detracts from your worth as a person?
- ___ 3. Do you feel you must perform in order to prove your worth?

- ___ 4. Do you seek approval and acceptance by striving to produce and achieve?
- ___ 5. Are you afraid of taking leadership?
- ___ 6. Are you torn between fear of failure and fear of success?
- ___ 7. Do you avoid being placed in a position requiring you to be evaluated or criticized?
- ___ 8. Is your self-concept so fragile that even this most harmless negative statement made by someone you love or admire damages you emotionally?
- ___ 9. Are you so afraid of rejection you won't allow people to get close to you?
- ___ 10. Do you reject or belittle any compliment you receive?
- ___ 11. Do you always seem to feel inferior to everyone?
- ___ 12. Are you so filled with self-hatred that you despise who you are, what you are and everything you do?
- ___ 13. Has your chronically low self-esteem resulted in an exaggerated sense of self-importance—a false grandiosity where you pretend to be something you're not?
- ___ 14. Do you have a strange tendency to sabotage your own successes?
- ___ 15. Are you constantly assuming the blame and/or apologizing for things that aren't your fault?
- ___ 16. Do you always place yourself in positions or relationships that are painful?
- ___ 17. Are you afraid of losing control?
- ___ 18. Are you afraid of the dark or of going to bed?
- ___ 19. Do you have difficulty trusting people?

- ___ 20. Do people sometimes assume you are cold or uncaring because of your lack of emotions or difficulty expressing them?
- ___ 21. Do you always expect the worst?
- ___ 22. Are there gaps in your childhood memories?
- ___ 23. Do you sometimes sense that there is a painful, frightening experience in your past, yet you cannot remember it?
- ___ 24. Are you plagued by abnormal sleep habits or patterns?
- ___ 25. Do you consistently deny yourself pleasure or rewards?

The questions you have just answered describe some of the traits springing from long-buried seeds of abuse. Each case is individual, of course, since the long-term effects of abuse vary, based on the severity and frequency of the abuse, the amount of trauma each victim may have experienced, and the internal strength of the victim.

If you found yourself answering yes time after time—either because you were seeing a reflection of your own self or someone you know—you will find hidden keys and practical explanations for those feelings in this book. At times its probing may make you cry or become angry. You may find long-buried fears or memories surfacing.

Remembering can be unpleasant; it can hurt. When that happens, remember this: Recognizing, rebuilding and redirecting damaged emotions, attitudes, thought processes and behavior patterns can be painful, but in the end, it will lead to wholeness.