

Repentance and Forgiveness

by Peggy Harris W.A.S.H. Board Chair

Names have been changed. There are many people who never reach a conclusion to an ongoing story in their personal life. Here is one story that did reach an end that was an answer to prayer.

Her brother Roger, between the ages of 7 and 12, repeatedly raped Lucy. When she went to a family doctor and it was found she was not a virgin she was asked who did this to her. Because her brother had told her not to tell and if she ever did he would kill her, she picked the name of a youth in the neighborhood and said that he had done it. After an investigation it was determined that the accused youth was innocent, but the authorities never discovered who had done it. Lucy grew to adulthood and confided in a sister (one of several siblings) as well as a nephew who was a psychiatrist. The nephew in later years had contact with Roger and tried to lead him to confess his youthful wrongdoing but never told Roger he knew what he had done. Years later, at the funeral of a sister, Lucy saw the young man she had falsely accused years earlier. She approached him and said they needed to talk. They found a quiet corner and she asked his forgiveness for falsely accusing him of raping her. Remarkably, he accepted her apology. During a conversation with Roger when he was an elderly man, Lucy tried being an example and asked him to forgive her if she had ever wronged or done harm to him in their childhood or grown up years. Roger finally admitted what he had done but excused it as just childish playing around (“we were just kids”), without parents around and exploring newly found sex information. Lucy let him know that the experience had hurt her terribly and all these years she had felt wounded in her soul, spirit and physical being. Then shortly before Roger's death he had another conversation with Lucy. By this time, he had fully accepted the Lord into his life and sought her forgiveness for the terrible wrong he had done to her as a child. There are several aspects to this fascinating story. Even though few people may experience the repentance and forgiveness Roger finally asked Lucy for, it is important for a victim of abuse to forgive the perpetrator's actions. This helps to bring closure and healing to the wounded soul. This does not mean that the perpetrator should not be held accountable for the crime of abuse. Lucy accused an innocent person of this crime. She was very fortunate that someone was able to prove him innocent. She had to carry the guilt of that false accusation for years. We need to remember that a child searches frantically sometimes to provide an answer even when it's the wrong one. An important question she should have been asked is: Were you threatened with harm if you tell who did this?

Testimonials

“Karen”

I went to the healing center because my husband was becoming violent. I managed to stash a dollar or two away at a time until I had saved enough for a bus ticket. I slipped away while he was at work. I arrived at the center tired, frightened and penniless. After two weeks of counseling, I called my husband to let him know where I was staying. He begged me to come home. I told him that I would not return to an abusive situation. I told him that I would think about coming home if he would do some counseling with my counselor. He agreed. He traveled to a nearby city where I was staying and set up temporary residence in a local motel and saw my counselor every day for two weeks. He also paid for the counseling. During that time, he began to recognize that his abusive behaviors originated in his childhood and had nourished his feelings of unworthiness, guilt, loneliness and shame.

At the end of two weeks, there was a dramatic change in my husband, so I decided to go home with him. We are still struggling with issues of the past, but we get help. My husband has encouraged me to return to the healing center whenever I feel unsafe with him. We have made a commitment to each other to work on our relationship by attending weekly counseling sessions. Every day I thank God for Women’s Healing and Empowerment Network.

“Sarah”

I was raised in a Christian home. I was knowledgeable of the foundational principles of the church. I was getting really sick of being told all the time that I should be good and do things perfectly. I was tired of being told that the church was always right and the world always wrong when I know that the church has serious problems that they pretend do not exist. As a child my family moved around a lot because of my father’s work. During one of our moves my mother got very sick. So, at age 10 I took charge of the house. Then my mother got better, and we moved again.

At age 14 I was shipped off to boarding school against my wishes. I rebelled against the school rules and the church. When I finished high school at age 18 I was finally allowed to date. I married someone who was very abusive. After having two children with him, I decided to leave him. I sent my two children to live with my parents, which turned out to be a bad idea. Then at age 30 I found myself in another abusive relationship. I got pregnant for him and decided that I needed to get out of that relationship before it was too late. My parents still had my other two children. I heard about the healing center and decided to go there and start a new life. While there, I realized how traumatized I was from the abusive relationship. I had lost faith in God, and in people. But I know that He is out there somewhere. I hope that He is there for me. I am trying to change my thinking. I want to find me. I don’t trust the church anymore. There were times that I reached out to members, but they were not there for me. I hope that in time I will have the information I need to form healthy relationships. I am starting to see a little of God’s love and the way I need to go.

“Jenny”

I was sexually molested as a child and did not have good role models in my parents. When I got married I thought that I should obey my husband in everything. When my six-year-old daughter began exhibiting “acting out” behaviors, a church member told me that I should contact a program that helped Christian women address the issues of domestic violence and sexual abuse. I did not want to go to a secular counselor, so I contacted Dr. Dunbar. After talking with me for a few minutes about my daughter, she asked me if it was possible that my daughter had been molested. My husband and I said absolutely not! Dr. Dunbar told us to get our daughter examined by a doctor as soon as possible. Imagine my horror when I found out that she had been molested! I was angry, in shock. How could this have ever happened? Was the abuser my husband, his father, my brother? I was so distraught that Dr. Dunbar suggested I take a few days off of work and come to the healing center.

During group counseling I realized that my relationship with my husband was not healthy because he was rewarding me with money or clothing each time I had sex with him. My husband is not a bad person, but he did not realize that this kind of behavior was inappropriate; neither did I. We decided to get marital counseling. We are still dealing with many issues, but our relationship is improving. I discovered that my daughter’s abuser is one of her classmates. I tried to talk with the principal and the pastor so that together we could talk to the boy, but they told me that I should be careful not to bring trouble to the school. The pastor said that I did not need to go back to the healing center and that I should just pray and ask God for help. I am very angry with him. I am disappointed at how unprepared most pastors are to help people dealing with abuse. I am glad that Women’s Healing and Empowerment Network exists. We really need this place. It has been a blessing to my whole family.

“Janie”

When I enrolled to attend the healing seminar in September, I didn’t know what to expect. I actually went to this seminar to get some information to use in my ministry. I thought I was healed and was ready to help other women who went through what I suffered in my marriage, or are still experiencing in their marriages, especially when separation and divorce seemed imminent. When the seminar started and I listened to people’s hurting experience, I was so touched I wanted to cry for them. That is when I realized that I had not fully healed. At the end of the three-day healing process, I felt as if something heavy was lifted from my shoulders. My life has never been the same since.

I now know my rights which God gave me. I did not know that I have a right to be me. I did not even know that I had rights as a human being. My life has always revolved around other people and I made a lot of sacrifices for them which made me a miserable person. I read the book “The Truth About Us” over and over and use it in my ministry. Every day during prayers both at home and in my prayer groups, I do affirmations.

“Faith”

Attending the residential training was an answer to many prayers I had made to the Lord. I was asking for guidance as to how I could move my life forward after I had been hurt by church members and people I considered my friends. The training empowered me and imparted to me strategies on how I could begin my journey of healing and restoration. It educated me on strategies I could implement to manage specific aspects in my interpersonal relationships that I had been struggling with and perhaps people had been exploiting me because I had allowed them to.

Since this training, I have reclaimed my right to be. I am on a journey to self-discovery, identifying areas in my life that have hindered my growth and potential because of the negative messages and experiences and turning them around into positive paths by applying the principles outlined in the book “The Truth About Us”. The positive affirmations have been a great source of encouragement in this process.

This residential training, as well as the continuation of the same training on a weekly basis, plus individual counseling has boosted my confidence, transformed my approach to dealing with issues, handling people and living my life. This is a journey I will continue to explore, and my life will never be the same again. It is my prayer that the Lord helps me realize my full potential. Lord willing, next year I hope to embark on a counseling course on a part time basis. This, I hope, is the beginning of my journey to an enriching career.

“Jim”

I am a pastor. My wife left me because I was physically and verbally abusive to her. She went to a place I later found out was a healing center for Christian women. I was embarrassed and hurt. How could she do that to MY ministry? After two months she returned home. She was a different person. At first I was angry with her and the people at the center. But my wife no longer kept quiet when I criticized her. No longer was she willing to listen to my shaming and blaming her for my inadequacies. Yet, I could tell that she still loved me. I began to admire her for her determination to stand up for herself. I was curious about the center and called the counselor and asked her if she could talk with me. I was surprised that she said yes and was kind and patient. She told me that my wife was taught to value herself and recognize her limitless potential in God. She encouraged me to recognize my own potential and value to God. That really impressed me. I decided that I would get help for myself. I am presently attending a class for abusive men. One day I hope that I can meet the staff at the healing center. They helped to save my marriage and OUR ministry.

“Paula”

Every Saturday I had to attend the same Bible class as my rapist. I went to the healing center after my pastor found out about the rape incident and encouraged me to get some help. I was only going to stay for two weeks, but decided that I should stay for a month after I realized that I had issues from my childhood that made me vulnerable and accepting of abuse. I learned new skills regarding how to be more assertive. One week after leaving I decided that I would go to church and face my perpetrator. My counselor from the healing center had told me to dress nicely, walk with my head high and if I saw him, look him straight in his face. I did just that. When he saw me he felt so ashamed, he walked out of the church. It was obvious that he could not face me. After exploring my issues and telling my daughter about my experience at the healing center she informed me that she had been molested but was afraid to tell me. We both plan on going back to learn how we can help and support each other. I thank God that your healing center was in existence when I needed it. I wish that the entire church would support this program. There are many women out there who need it.

“Carol”

I am a pastor's wife who suffered through physical and emotional abuse by my husband for 11 years. I went to the healing center because I did not want to expose my husband. I was afraid that he would lose his job if the conference found out about his abuse. Then what would happen to me and our two children if he lost his job? After attending groups and receiving individual counseling, I realized that I had certain rights, that I do not need to protect my husband, and that he needs to take responsibility for himself. I am determined not to let him abuse me anymore. For the first time in my life I had the strength to say no to his unreasonable demands.

