



HEALING BEYOND THE PEW

Elizabeth Bennett McKinney



www.churchhurt.net

“Healing Beyond the Pew: Reclaim Your Faith After Church Hurt”

By Elizabeth Bennett McKinney | Founder of Church Hurt in America

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: Why This Book Exists
2. What Is Church Hurt?
3. Step 1: Acknowledge the Wound
4. Step 2: Separate God from People
5. Step 3: Confront the Lies You Believed
6. Step 4: Reclaim Your Voice and Story
7. Step 5: Reconnect with Safe Community
8. Bonus: How to Start the Conversation
9. About the Author
10. Next Steps: Invite Elizabeth to Speak or Coach

Introduction: Why This Book Exists

You're not alone.

Too many people suffer in silence after being hurt by people, leaders, or systems within the church. What was meant to be a place of healing and transformation became a source of pain.

This short guide is here to help you take the first steps back toward wholeness with God, at your pace. In His timing. You deserve healing. You deserve hope. And you deserve to know you're not the only one.

Nope! You are not alone! Many walk alongside you but you can overcome!

I did overcome and have been there. I get it. Let me walk alongside you as you process your pain and work towards healing. Let's be friends.

What Is Church Hurt?

“Church hurt” isn't just a trendy phrase. It's real emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical pain caused by individuals or institutions that misuse spiritual authority. It occurs where two or more believers come together within Christ's body.

It may look like:

- Leadership betrayal
- Manipulation through scripture
- Exclusion, judgment, or abuse
- Gaslighting in the name of God

This kind of hurt cuts deep. It can make you question your identity, your worth, and even your relationship with God.

I know firsthand the pain of church hurt. At the age of 12 I was hit with it by a woman of 43 who should have known better and a daughter who she was setting a bad example for. She and her daughter spread lies about me that went through two churches and three schools. I cried daily.

The pain was sometimes unbearable. I was stressed beyond measure. So were my parents. We lived on a tightrope as a result. Wondering what untruth would be circulating next.

All orchestrated by a woman who threw up her hands “Praising the Lord!” at all turns.

I lost my reputation before I was old enough to have one.

My parents told me to turn to God in this. Call out to Him. Pray. Lament like David did in the book of Psalms. He was with me they said. He would never leave or forsake me they said. So I did. I prayed. I called out. Begged God to make the peer abuse go away. To bring me peace.

Crickets.

Please Jesus!

PLEASE!! MAKE IT STOP!!!!

CRICKETS!

At 13 I was kicked out of the body of Christ by adults and children yet not by God. I was forced to live in the world because I was thrown away by my siblings in Christ. A little like Joseph was by his brothers in the book of Genesis.

It was hard. The world hates Christians yet I felt I had nowhere else to go. One thing I did learn was I was treated better out there than by other Christians.

Shortly after this I turned against God. I threw Him away. And his kids along with Him. If this was Christianity, I wanted nothing to do with it.

EVER!

The pain of betrayal from all of this was too much some days. It wore not only me but my parents down as well.

To watch their only child, go through this and knowing there was not a thing they could do about it.

They tried but got no cooperation from anyone in the community. Their hands were tied. The deep-rooted embedded pain of rejection that cuts like a knife emotionally. Daily. Some days it was too much.

I felt it hard. Sometimes too hard. So did my parents.

The tears that hung closely behind my eyes. Sometimes they spilled and other times they stayed safely tucked away in the depths of my eyes where others had no clue they were even there. The Christians who taunted and enjoyed seeing them flow from my eyes knowing they had hit me where it hurt most.

This was a game for them. Entertainment and enjoyment.

Yet it was my life.

The fear of even going to church. The knots in the stomach when walking through the church doors. The anticipation of the ridicule to come. The knowledge that I was not welcome. But my parents made me go.

At 16 when I had my driver's license, I stopped going altogether. I was relieved. I found solace in the world.

At 15, I developed mononucleosis as these problems also hit me physically. I carried the Epstein Barr virus for many years until I was restored and healed in 2017.

Thank you Jesus!

The trauma, PTSD, depression and social anxiety that formed because of being betrayed by my siblings in Christ. Those years in the world because of turning against God. The problems that developed because of this betrayal and abuse.

Most importantly not hearing from God or Him not saving me from this.

In my early 30s the Lord started calling me back to Him. I hated Him so much and fought Him for about a year. I reminded Him that He created hell and needed to go and get cozy there. Yet He left the 99 and came after me and was not about to leave me alone. Eventually I gave in. He won. I told Him never to do that to me again.

EVER!

God and I started out very slow in getting reacquainted. I still had a foot in the world because it was my safe haven from Christians. His kids were just too dangerous, and I let Him know I wanted nothing to do with them. He and I were complicated for a few years there. Yet I slowly grew in Him while I was pioneering the field of Bullying. In this work He started healing me of the skewed thinking and trauma. He used this work to heal me of the peer abuse I lived for so long.

At the age of 24, I was diagnosed with clinical depression. I was told I would be on medication for the rest of my life. In 2017 I was taken off of anti-depressants because I was healed. I was restored and have not been depressed since.

Thank you, Jesus!

As time went on, I got to know Him more and more. And wanted more and more of Him. I slowly started realizing that He never left or forsook me. He needed the bullying problem combated and my story was one of the first used in this country towards stopping it. Good was coming from this pain.

In my early 40s a friend invited me to a Bible study that changed my life forever. *Bible Study Fellowship*. I went and learned one very important thing.

Christians were nice! WOW!

I really started growing after that and embraced the Christian walk in full. To say I was growing spiritually is an understatement.

I started being healed of the abuse and trauma I experienced at the hands of His children along with the peer abuse. I was learning what it really meant to be Christian. I learned to love His kids which was something I never thought I would do.

In 2017 I came to the end of myself, and I could no longer do Elizabeth, but I could do God. These two natures are alive and well in me and at war nonstop. Today God is my BFF, rock, provider, protector. I live, eat, sleep and breathe Him. He controls every aspect of my life.

He is my everything.

My walk with God is one of acquaintance, hate, reacquaintance, complication and full surrender.

This story is one of redemption and restoration. One of healing. And one not only used to change the world on a grand scale but to be reconnected with Him and knowing He never left or forsook me. What I went through had purpose and meaning. And He stills writes my story.

There is a way forward. Come and take this trip with me. Allow me to take your trip with you. Let's be friends.

Step 1: Acknowledge the Wound

We can't heal what we won't name.

Silencing your pain doesn't make it go away, it buries it. As we said in the Bullying world it adds to the problem. That's why the first step toward healing is giving yourself permission to say: "Yes, that was wrong. That was not okay."

Something like this is never okay. And as believers we should not be tolerating it.

What happened to you, and how did it make you feel? Write it down. Your pain is valid. Talk to me...

Step 2: Separate God from People

When people in church misrepresent God, it can distort our entire faith.

I know it did mine. Don't let it distort yours.

You're allowed to revisit what's true about God, apart from what others have told you.

When you think about God now, what emotions rise? Anger? Confusion? Distance? Don't judge your answers but observe them with compassion.

Step 3: Confront the Lies You Believed

Pain can leave behind poisonous beliefs:

- “I’m not worthy.”
- “This is my fault.”
- “God must hate me.”

These are lies rooted in trauma. Healing begins when we replace those lies with truth. Truth being scripture which is God’s word. Trauma can result from this but please allow someone to walk beside you as you work through your pain.

God will heal you. Your healing is in Him alone. Don’t run to an “expert” or self-help book, run to Him. He is your answer. Trust Him.

What beliefs about yourself or God came from your experience of church hurt? Which ones do you want to unlearn?

Step 4: Reclaim Your Voice and Story

Silence serves the system that hurts you.

Healing means taking your voice back, telling your story, and refusing to hide. It doesn’t always mean going public, but it does mean speaking truth, even just to yourself.

When I started my bullying work, I was able to take my voice back. I shared my experiences of being abused by my peers. I went out and made a lot of noise through the media, internet, and anywhere I was given a platform. I helped get one of the first Anti-Bullying Laws passed in this nation. I traveled the nation speaking and laying the groundwork for this problem. Through the years I learned my story helped a lot of people.

God takes your mess and makes it a mission.

I took the power back, and it felt good.

You can do it too. Trust Him. He's got this.

If you could speak freely and safely, what would you say about what happened to you?

Step 5: Reconnect with Safe Community

Healing isn't done in isolation.

Many people walk away from the church completely. That's okay for a period because space is needed at times. But over time, finding a healthy, grace-filled, nonjudgmental community can bring powerful healing.

Please do not turn against God. He may seem distant at the time but if that is the case know that what is happening will be used for good someday.

Find a body of believers who are growing spiritually and are spirit minded. Even though they are human, they are living Christ centered lives and seek unity in relationships not division. The scriptures come to life with them. They are aware of who the real bully is in all of this. When I got to BSF I met people like this, so I know they are out there.

What would a "safe" spiritual space look like for you today?

Bonus: How to Start the Conversation

Whether you're a pastor, ministry leader, therapist, or simply someone who cares about others, this guide is a conversation starter. The silence around church hurt ends when we speak up, listen deeply, and create room for honest healing.

Questions to open the conversation:

- Have you ever felt hurt by a church experience?
- What did healing look like or what do you wish it had looked like?
- What would it take to feel spiritually safe again?

About the Author

Elizabeth Bennett McKinney is the founder of Church Hurt in America, a movement dedicated to helping people process spiritual trauma, rebuild their faith, and find healing after religious harm. As a keynote speaker, coach, and survivor of church hurt herself, Elizabeth offers compassion, insight, and practical tools for healing.

Next Steps: Invite Elizabeth to Speak or Coach

Elizabeth works with:

- Churches, Summits & Conferences looking to have bold, healing centered conversations
- Individuals navigating their personal recovery journey
- Leaders who want to make their spaces safer

Visit Church Hurt in America to:

- Book Elizabeth as a speaker
- Inquire about 1-on-1 coaching
- Access free healing resources

Let's talk further and stay in conversation! Please reach out if interested in learning more! You can find me at:

• elizabethbennettmckinney@churchhurt.net

Let's break the silence. Together. Let's start healing.

"Heavenly Father, I call down to you today on behalf of the one who is reading these words.

Lord, you know the pain they are in and how this is probably affecting the relationship they have with you. Lord, touch them, give them hope. Help them to know that whatever it is they are dealing with will not be wasted. Good will come of it as it did me. Touch them, bring them hope and peace. Most importantly heal them! In your precious name, Amen." .