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CHILD ABUSE





IN FOCUS

Jane Smith

Please note because of the sensitivity of the subject matter names have been changed to protect the identity for the person being interviewed. Thanks go to 'Jane' for her bravery and courage and all we hope is that her testimony will shine more light on this very dark area. Please note that there are helpline numbers at the end of the feature to help anyone who needs help or counselling if you are affected or have been in the past by child sexual abuse or any other form of abuse...

Introduction

Many millions of children every year are subjected to horrendous forms of sexual or physical abuse or both. In this issue we are looking specifically at child sexual abuse. More will be featured about Ratanak (A Christian Charity) who help children in Cambodia trapped in the horrendous sex trafficking trade, in 3-in-1 The Child's Voice.

Child sexual abuse is considered a 'taboo' subject. It is nevertheless a reality for many millions of human beings who struggle day in and day out trying to come to terms with what has either happened in their childhood in the past, or what is currently an ongoing situation for them...

'Jane' (pseudonym) has very kindly agreed to give her testimony of her experiences and how becoming a Christian brought even more challenges for her. As the body of Christ and believers in Ireland and around the world try to come to terms with the 'fallout' of the recent child sexual abuse revelations within the Roman Catholic priesthood; we have even more so now a responsibility to 'face up' to this the most heinous of crimes, and shed light on this very dark subject, for it is written:

'This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.' 1 John 1:5

Q Thank you so much for taking time to conduct this interview. You are a believer in Christ, how did you come to know the Lord?

A Well, I was in my late twenties and I had lived I guess around two or three lifetimes! It felt like that anyway. I had been around a few corners put it like that. To cut a very long story short, I started to read the bible one night, but it didn't make much sense to me, however, shortly after that while sitting in my room one night I had what I can only describe as a 'visitation', in a split second I knew I was in the presence of the Lord, all the bad decisions and sins I had committed hit me and it was then I realised all the stories I had heard about Jesus as a child were true, I accepted Him as my personal Lord and Saviour right there! It was like I had glimpsed at eternity or something for a moment. That was nearly 20 years ago and I have never 'looked back' – my life had been restored to me and this renewal continues on a daily basis.



Q You experienced child sexual abuse from a very young age can you tell me about this and how it affected you?

A Yes. Child sexual abuse brings about an altered state in a human being, particularly in the whole area of relationships. From the moment you are approached by the abuser your world no longer belongs to you. As a child one is rendered powerless and you lose the power over your body and mind. Spiritually? Well only God truly knows what happens there, we can only guess. My personal experience? Well I was very young when it all started, I was toddler around 3 years old. I had led a very carefree life at the time, the abuse itself started off in a very subtle fashion, it was a gradual onset involving bribes/rewards for a few months before anything physical happened. These people where known to my parents and were 'pillars of society'; heavily involved in church life and free masonry, so trust was gained in a short space of time and I thought I was in a safe environment. However the deception begins from the outset; a child is like a sponge and soaks everything in, from their environment to what's said to them etc etc. Children are very small and vulnerable and they depend totally on adults for all their needs i.e food, clothing, shelter, education, unconditional love and

trust, without these things survival is limited and fear of the unknown can set in. That is what makes the crimes of the paedophile so horrendous actually, the breach of trust, the violation of a minor's body resulting in the distortion of love. As a child you are not equipped to deal with the subject matter, and your mind just can't absorb it all, you become an object of someone else's self gratification. The violation is compounded with physical pain usually accompanied by threats, resulting in fear. Some parts of the memory 'shuts down', like a safety valve almost to try and protect the emotions.

I was abused ritualistically by two paedophiles for a total of over six years, it stopped only because both my abusers died. It was only when I reached my early teens and I came to the age of understanding and increased body awareness that it started to sink in the gravity and depravity of what had happened – I just wanted the ground to open up and swallow me - literally. I felt my life had been destroyed, that is when I 'crashed' when I truly realised what had actually happened. You have got to understand, I was only 9 years old when it stopped, I didn't have any concept of what had actually happened to me, I had been fed a 'diet' of this is normal and natural and 'you're special', but when I was older I realised what had happened, and that was when it hurt. I now know that I started to go through a sort of grieving process, I started to suffer flash backs and visions of my ordeal right up to my early forties. I found it extremely difficult to relate to men and women. As for boys? I dated three times in my teens and I was really stressed out during those times, and I guess so where they! I was in a constant state of dread in case anyone of them would find out my secret. I couldn't cope - I had this compulsion that I had to get married to them! I was suffering in shame so I thought if I married them it would cover my shame! My entire thought processes had been damaged and this would continue to affect my ability to make choices in this area with dire consequences for many years to come...

Q Did this affect you whenever you became a believer or was this area completely healed?

No, unfortunately this continued whenever I became a Christian, in fact I would say it was even worse for a time. I struggled to find scriptures that would alleviate my hurt and betrayal, that would speak specifically about child sexual abuse – I found none. I felt unclean and used before Christ. Whenever other believers spoke about being 'intimate' with Christ instead of feeling peace and joy, I felt worry and anxiousness, I didn't want to be intimate with anyone, what did that mean? It only meant one thing to me. I spoke to my Pastor about it and asked him, he said there were no scriptures specifically about it, but he did say something that freed me from the burden,

'God says it is wrong!' At last I felt there was a fragment of hope, he gave me a scripture that I have clung to ever since **"It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble"** (Luke 17:2).

Q Was it easy for you to adjust to being a Christian?

It has taken me years to 'climb' out of the mindset that I am unworthy to be a Christian and that I am unworthy to be loved by any man because of what happened to me. But you know what? That is exactly what the enemy wants to do, render you powerless again and again and again – you have been in a struggle, a spiritual one. The flesh is temporal and will heal but the spirit is eternal and that takes Christ to deal with that. I truly believe in my heart that people who are abused or suffer in this way have been 'attacked' like this so that they cannot have a pure relationship with Christ, because the enemy can see the potential in them. But listen, only Christ and the Word of God can set you free from the shackles and chains of bondage and help you to live a fulfilling fruitful life – something happened to you whenever you were young but only Christ can realign you spiritually and offer true healing, I believe I am concrete evidence of this and there are others too – go to the cross and read about Christ's sacrifice for us – by His stripes we are healed...

For years I thought there was something wrong with me – somehow I had enticed them, encouraged them in some way? For me that was another shock and another issue I had to deal with when I came to Christ believe it or not – you know all the scriptures about 'keeping yourself' for your husband, well I went around for years thinking I was unworthy to be a believer because of this, that I was 'tainted goods'. Maybe that is what is preventing you from becoming a Christian? I used to 'worship' at the altar of 'self depreciation' - a lot. The whole area of sexual abuse is both physical and spiritual a very powerful weapon that the enemy uses, but you can break these shackles and chains you are not alone. 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' Rom 8:1

Q When you became a believer did you seek help in this area?

A I believe that everyone is uniquely created and therefore has a different reaction to abuse and to varying degrees, some kids get into prostitution, some are promiscuous, some addicted to drugs, some like me become frightened of men and relationships in general, some have eating disorders and can't hold down a stable relationship, whatever the reaction the end result is the same – the person is completely at the mercy of the altered state and their ability to take control over their bodies, make their own rational decisions can take them through some very rough territory, and sometimes it ends in death. As believers



I truly believe that men and women in the body of Christ have a responsibility at the very least pray for these children and campaign to have the perpetrators of these heinous crimes taken off our streets for good. There is no justice in this world at present, but we have a responsibility to protect our children and that just isn't happening.

*The first thing I yearned for when I became a Christian was to have this entire area swept clean. It had hung over me like a shroud for many years and I knew it was affecting my life, but I had no control over it. I had hidden it from my parents for years; in fact my mother couldn't deal with it. My earthly father, went to his grave never knowing about it. But I knew whenever I became a Christian and started to read the Word of God that my heavenly Father knew. In Jeremiah 16:17 it is written: **'My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.'***

So I asked God to help me, a few intercessors prayed with me, but I still felt that there was something 'clinging' to me, like a mark that meant people knew I had been abused. I know it sounds silly but that is how I had felt all my life. Then one morning I awoke suddenly with all these flashbacks, I started to be physically sick, not only had I been abused by a male paedophile but by a female paedophile as well. For some reason I had 'blocked' this out of my mind all those years, I don't know the psychological terminology but I knew it was wasn't good. By this stage I knew a lady in my local church who organised 'emergency Christian counselling' for me there and then. I really don't know what I would have done without that, but after a few weeks of this, it still hadn't got to the root problem, was there always going to be residue? I would ask myself. I felt the counselling only helped me to understand where I had been and where I was now – it was woefully inadequate for the principalities and powers at work in my life, it didn't heal me – but the power of the blood of Christ has...

Q Apart from this lady did you ever tell anyone in the church about this and did it affect your relationships within the church?

A I confided in my spiritual mom who was a very unique individual. She was very wise and understanding. I guess if I am totally honest, a part of me wanted to belong but no I didn't share this with anyone in the Church, except my Pastor, even then for years afterwards I thought he had told everyone, which of course he hadn't, but I found it almost impossible to integrate within the group because of my doubts and fears and spent the rest of my life isolated and with very few friends. I really wanted to participate and get to know others in Christ. I would never be like one of these Christian ladies I used to think. I felt inferior and thought that the church would be better off without me, so I stopped going to church, but my relationship with Christ was intact, however, my fellowship with the body of Christ was not.



'Coming home'

Q So what 'attitude' do you think the Church should adopt, because obviously some people go to church and people do not know what is going on in their lives?

A I don't think that attitude is probably the correct term here. The church just has to adopt a Christ-like mind. I am in a fellowship now and you can feel the love of Christ in the place. Church is not just about having tea parties, barbecues and creating a 'feel good' factor, some people just live for that! I believe that if the church wants to make a real difference it has to start tackling real issues that are preventing people going to church for a start.

*For instance some readers will be shocked to know that children who have been sexually abused are excluded from certain churches in the world. 'Oh that would never happen in our church' I hear you say – but there are different forms of 'exclusion.' I always ask myself whenever someone tells me something about their experience, 'what would Christ do?' Well we only have to read the scriptures to know what He would do, we are actually instructed what to do, **'Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.'** Rom 12:15 Drawing alongside a person can mean more than all the words you would ever say, and I don't mean hugs, I struggled with 'hugs' for a long time from men and women. You don't know what someone has gone through so if someone does have the courage to open up and share something so sensitive and private – don't worry you won't get contaminated – just lift that person up to Father, because I can guarantee you that person will someday be set completely free!*

Q How can healing for the victim take place and for their families?

*A Fortunately nowadays there are some great terminals and help lines for people to contact. I would always advise a child in trouble, if they cannot tell a parent because for instance the other parent is the abuser, to contact the Police, Social Services, NSPCC or Childline, if it is someone in your church tell a senior pastor or if you can't tell a male pastor a female leader or tell a teacher at school – but tell someone! Once it is vocalised physical protection can occur and the abuse whether sexual or physical can stop immediately! It is essential that the practical steps are followed to ensure that the child is out of harm's way is the first thing that occurs. I have been bewildered at some congregations responses in the past where 'elders' who were accused of such crimes were allowed to stay within the congregations and the authorities not brought in! What is going on? No-one is above the law God states in His word that we are to keep the law of the land – **"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." Rom 13:1& 2.***

In some cases a child will have to endure like a 'second death' through the criminal route in order to gain justice for the crimes, therefore they will need protection, back-up and counselling, above all a place of safety that only the authorities can really provide. They are much better than they used to be at this, I know that some people have had bad experiences, but they were rescued out of harm's way. Ultimately Christ will heal the broken hearted and only He can realign the spirit – trust me I know...

Q Finally what 'advice' would you give to someone reading this who has suffered sexual abuse whether believers or not?

Now I would like to take this opportunity to talk directly to people here for a second who have been sexually abused. First thing you got to understand is that it is never the child's fault you are totally blameless before God and before men. I spent a lot of my life associating pain with love – I couldn't separate or differentiate between the two. Your starting point is to stop blaming yourself, then realise that which is off the flesh is flesh and is a temporal state, those things in the past are gone and cannot harm you anymore. Getting to that point and really "believing that" is a big step; but many of us achieve it. Then healing the mind and the spirit well that is the hard bit for us who have been abused, as this requires a new relationship, one with Christ and that's a challenge. What I can say is that Christ never hurt or harmed anyone, He spent His ministry healing the broken hearted, the sick and infirmed, you and I cannot see the scars but He can – and He will heal you. He will not force His will on you, He waits for you to be ready to receive it and when the healing comes it is complete and it is wonderful – you can at last be the person you were always meant to be!

If you have been affected by any of the above please contact:

Police *If you think a child is immediate danger ring 999*

NSPCC 0800 800500 - [link](#)

Child Line 0800 1111 - [link](#)

UCB Prayerline Tel: 0845 456 7729 (UK)

Tel: 1890 940 300 (Rep of Ireland)

If you live overseas please seek out help in your country. Do not suffer in silence...