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HEALING

THE TRAGIC SCARS OF ABUSE

*You may be left scarred by abuse,
but those scars need not be permanent.*

I speak from the depths of my heart to each one of you who have been scarred by the ugly sin of abuse.

Unless healed by the Lord, mental, physical, or sexual abuse can cause you serious, enduring consequences. As a victim you have experienced some of them. They include fear, depression, guilt, self-hatred, destruction of self-esteem, and alienation from normal human relationships. When aggravated by continued abuse, powerful emotions of rebellion, anger, and hatred are generated. These feelings often are focused against oneself, others, life itself, and even Heavenly Father. Frustrated efforts to fight back can degenerate into drug abuse, immorality, abandonment of home, and, tragically in extreme cases, suicide. Unless corrected, these feelings lead to despondent lives, discordant marriages, and even the transition from victim to abuser. One awful result is a deepening lack of trust in others, which becomes a barrier to healing.

To be helped, you must understand some things about eternal law. Your abuse results from another's unrighteous attack on your freedom. Since all of Father in Heaven's children enjoy agency, there can be some who choose willfully to violate the commandments and harm you. Such acts temporarily restrict your freedom. In justice, and to

compensate, the Lord has provided a way for you to overcome the destructive results of others' acts against your will. That relief comes by applying eternal truths with priesthood assistance.

Know that the wicked choice of others cannot completely destroy your agency unless you permit it. Their acts may cause pain, anguish, even physical harm, but they cannot destroy your eternal possibilities in this brief but crucial life on earth. You must understand that *you are free to determine to overcome the harmful results of abuse*. Your attitude can control the change for good in your life. It allows you to have the help the Lord intends you to receive. No one can take away your ultimate opportunities when you understand and live eternal law. The laws of your Heavenly Father and the Atonement of the Lord have made it possible that you will not be robbed of the opportunities that come to the children of God.

You may feel threatened by one who is in a position of power or control over you. You may feel trapped and see no escape. Please believe that *your Heavenly Father does not want you to be held captive by unrighteous influence, by threats of reprisal, or by fear of repercussion to the family member who abuses you*. Trust that the Lord will lead you to a solution. Ask in faith, nothing doubting. (See James 1:6; Enos 1:15; Moroni 7:26; D&C 8:10; 18:18.)

I solemnly testify that when another's acts of violence, perversion, or incest hurt you terribly, against your will, you are not responsible and you must not feel guilty. You may be left scarred by abuse, but those scars need not be permanent. In the eternal plan, in the Lord's timetable, those injuries can be made right as you do your part. Here is what you can do now.

Seek Help

If you are now or have in the past been abused, seek help now. Perhaps you distrust others and feel that there is no reliable help anywhere. Begin with your Eternal Father and His beloved Son, your Savior. Strive to comprehend Their commandments and follow them. They will lead you to others who will strengthen and encourage you. There is available to you a priesthood leader, normally a bishop, or at times a member of the stake presidency. They can build a bridge to greater understanding and healing. Joseph Smith taught: "A man can do nothing for himself unless God direct him in the right way; and the priesthood is for that purpose" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 109).

Talk to your bishop or branch president in confidence. His calling allows him to act as an instrument of the Lord in your behalf. He can provide a doctrinal foundation to guide you to recovery. An understanding and application of eternal law will provide

the healing you require. He has the right to be inspired of the Lord in your behalf. He can use the priesthood to bless you.

Your bishop can help you identify trustworthy friends to support you. He will help you regain self-confidence and self-esteem to begin the process of renewal. When abuse is extreme, he can help you identify appropriate protection and professional treatment consistent with the teachings of the Savior.

Principles of Healing

These are some of the principles of healing you will come to understand more fully:

Recognize that you are a beloved child of your Heavenly Father. He loves you perfectly and can help you as no earthly parent, spouse, or devoted friend can. His Son gave His life so that by faith in Him and obedience to His teachings, you can be made whole. He is the consummate healer.

Gain trust in the love and compassion of your elder brother, Jesus Christ, by pondering the scriptures. As with the Nephites, He tells *you*, "I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. . . . I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you" (3 Nephi 17:7–8).

Healing best begins with your sincere prayer asking your Father in Heaven for help. That use of your agency allows divine intervention.



When you permit it, the love of the Savior will soften your heart and break the cycle of abuse that can transform a victim into an aggressor. Adversity, even when caused willfully by others' unrestrained appetite, can be a source of growth when viewed from the perspective of eternal principle (see D&C 122:7).

As a victim, do not waste effort in revenge or retribution against your aggressor. Focus on your responsibility to do what is in your power to correct. Leave the handling of the offender to civil and Church authorities. Whatever they do, eventually the guilty will face the Perfect Judge. Ultimately, the unrepentant abuser will be punished by a just God. Predators who victimize the innocent and justify their own corrupted life by enticing others to adopt their depraved ways will be held accountable. Of such the Master warned: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Understand that healing can take considerable time. Recovery generally comes in steps. It is accelerated when gratitude is expressed to the Lord for every degree of improvement noted.

Forgiveness

During prolonged recovery from massive surgery, a patient anticipates complete healing in patience, trusting in others' care. He does not always understand the importance of the treatment prescribed, but his obedience speeds recovery. So it is with you struggling to heal the scars of abuse. Forgiveness, for example, can be hard to understand, even more difficult to give. *Begin by withholding judgment.* You don't know what abusers may have suffered as victims when innocent. The way to repentance must be kept open for them. Leave the handling of aggressors to others. As you experience an easing of your own pain, full forgiveness will come more easily.

You cannot erase what has been done, but you can forgive (see D&C 64:10). Forgiveness heals terrible, tragic wounds, for it allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. It cleanses your consciousness of the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord.

The Master counseled, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them *who despitefully use you and persecute you*” (3 Nephi 12:44; emphasis added).

Bitterness and hatred are harmful. They produce much that is destructive. They postpone the relief and healing you yearn for. Through rationalization and self-pity, they can transform a victim into an abuser. Let God be the judge—you cannot do it as well as He can.

To be counseled to just forget abuse is not helpful. You need to understand the principles that will bring healing. Healing may begin with a thoughtful bishop or stake president or a wise professional counselor. If you had a broken leg, you wouldn't decide to fix it yourself. Serious abuse can also benefit from professional help. There are many ways to begin healing, but remember that a full cure comes through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master and Redeemer. Have faith that with effort, His perfect, eternal,

infinite Atonement can heal your suffering.

As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser. When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heart-ache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser. As a result, you will enjoy greater peace. While an important part of healing, if the thought of forgiveness causes you yet more pain, set that step aside until you have more experience with the Savior's healing power in your own life.

Caution

I caution you not to participate in two improper therapeutic practices that may cause you more harm than good. They are: Excessive probing into every tiny detail of your past experiences, particularly when this involves penetrating dialogue in group discussion; and blaming the abuser for every difficulty in your life.

The repair of damage inflicted by abuse should be done privately, confidentially, with a trusted priesthood leader and, where needed, the qualified professional he recommends. There must be sufficient discussion of the general nature of abuse to allow you to be given appropriate counsel and to prevent the aggressor from committing more

violence. Then, with the help of the Lord, bury the past.

I humbly testify that what I have told you is true. It is based upon eternal principles I have seen the Lord use to give a fulness of life to those scarred by wicked abuse.

If you feel there is only a thin thread of hope, believe me, it is not a thread. It can be the unbreakable connecting link to the Lord, which puts a life preserver around you. He will heal you as you cease to fear and place your trust in Him by striving to live His teachings.

Ask now for the Lord to help you (see Mormon 9:27; Moroni 7:26, 33). Decide now to talk to your bishop. Don't view all that you experience in life through lenses darkened by the scars of abuse. There is so much in life that is beautiful. Open the windows of your heart and let the love of the Savior in. And should ugly thoughts of past abuse come back, remember His love and His healing power. Your depression will be converted to peace and assurance. You will close an ugly chapter and open volumes of happiness. ■

To learn more about the healing the Redeemer can provide, see Elder Richard G. Scott, “To Be Healed,” in the April 1994 general conference at conference.lds.org.

From Elder Scott's April 1992 and April 2008 general conference addresses; capitalization and punctuation standardized.