



FOCUS Newsletter

a newsletter for women in difficult relationships, feeling emotionally and spiritually alone

Does God Really Care About Me?

Issue 5 2007

Her name was Hagar, and she was employed by one of the richest men in the country. Her position as head maid with the Abraham family gave her certain privileges and security that made Hagar feel confident and self-sufficient.

She was an excellent worker, and labored very hard to meet the needs of her employer. **It was at the height of her career when she was “simply doing her duty and living life responsibly” that Hagar’s life fell apart.**

The custom in this ancient culture of Hagar’s day allowed the family patriarch to impregnate a servant if his wife was unable to conceive. As the head maid to Mrs. Abraham, Hagar was chosen to be the one who would provide an heir for her distinguished, wealthy employer.

After the heir was born, Hagar must have felt even

more secure in her position than ever before. But she was totally caught off guard by circumstances that ripped her life apart and left her struggling for the survival of herself and her young son.

Hagar lost everything—her position, her possessions, her provisions, her purpose for living—everything but her son. After being kicked out of their home, Hagar and her son wandered around aimlessly; no shelter, no job, and only enough food and water to last for a few days.

It was at this time—when Hagar came to the end of herself—that she discovered how much God loved her, that He would work on her behalf (sometimes miraculously), and that He would provide all her needs. *(Read the story of Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21)*

Perhaps you can identify with Hagar. You were

When the water was gone, she left the boy in the shade of a bush.

Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away.

“I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said as she burst into tears.

Genesis 21:15-16 NLT

doing your best as a faithful wife and good mother when circumstances shattered your world and ripped away everything you used to depend on.

All of a sudden you are catapulted into an unending nightmare of anxiety over what will happen to you.

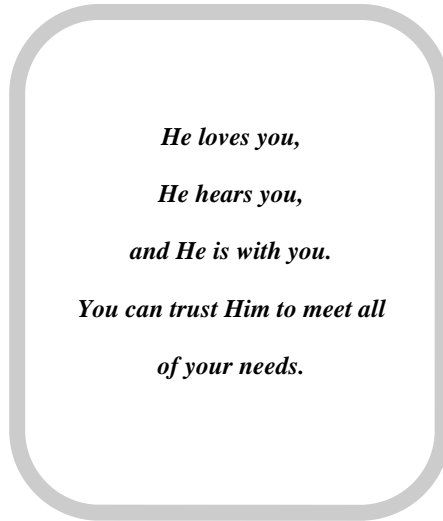
- ♦ Where will I live?
- ♦ How can I pay for rent when I’m just barely making minimum wage?

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- ♦ If I get kicked out of my apartment, will I have to live in my car or on the street?
- ♦ If I get sick and can’t work, or if I have to stay home with my sick children, how will I pay the bills?
- ♦ If I have to get a full-time job, who will take care of my children?

- ♦ If I have to work more than one job to make ends meet, how will I have time to spend with the children?
- ♦ If my car breaks down and I can't afford to get it fixed, how will I get to work?
- ♦ If something needs to be fixed in my house, who can I call to help?
- ♦ When my children get into high school, how will I be able to afford the books and fees?
- ♦ If I need to go back to school for more training, who will pay the bills while I'm not working?
- ♦ If I lose my job, what will happen to the children and me?
- ♦ If my children or I get sick and need medical care, how will I pay for it?
- ♦ Where do I get the money for eyecare and orthodontics?
- ♦ If I need professional counseling to help me handle the stress and uncertainty, how will I pay for it?
- ♦ If I need a good attorney so I won't lose custody of my children, how will I pay for it?

As these questions are left unanswered and life seems so uncertain, we can't help but wonder, "**Does God really love me?** Is He even there? Does He know what is happening to me? If He knows, does He care? Will He do something to help me, or will He just let me stay in this crisis? Will He ever render justice to those who have done



wrong to me, or will they get off scot free while I continue to suffer?"

It only takes one look back at three days in history to dispel all the questions and doubts about God's love and sufficiency. "The three-day pattern—tragedy, darkness, triumph—became a template . . . that can be applied to all our times of testing. **We can look back on Jesus, the proof of God's love**, even though we may never get an answer to our "why" questions. Good Friday demonstrates that **God has not abandoned us to our pain**. The evils and sufferings that afflict our lives are so real and so significant to God that He willed to share them and endure them himself."

"Jesus himself experienced the silence of God [on the cross] . . . and Easter Sunday shows that, in the end, suffering will not triumph. Those disciples, who gazed at the cross from the shadows, soon learned what they had failed to learn in their three years with their leader: **When God seems absent, He may be closest of all. When God seems dead, He may be coming back to life.**"²

Perhaps you, like Hagar, trusted in

your own self-sufficiency, but now you are flat on your face with no way to help yourself. Wherever you are, whatever you are feeling, God is there **with you** and He feels your pain. You can know with confidence that He cares and He will act on your behalf.

How He chooses to act, *or when*, is based on His sovereignty and wisdom. He loves you, He hears you, and He is with you. You can trust Him to meet all of your needs.

¹ *The Upside of Down*, Joseph Stowell, Moody Press

² *Disappointment With God*, Philip Yancey, Zondervan

Letters/E-Mail

Dear FOCUS,

I refused to get any medical help for depression because I thought it was just me. I had no self-esteem.

I talked to an old friend from high school who was studying to be a counselor and told him what was going on. He told me I was worth fighting for, that I had to fight for myself.

I am in a new relationship and I am trying to get better. There are so many days I feel unworthy. I pray a lot for my kids and my ex-husband. He moved several states away, but still finds ways to try and hurt us with his words. But I can see what he is doing now and that helps.

I wanted to die and leave this world so many times. But God and my kids kept me here.

Thank you for doing the job you do to help women who need it!

—Email

In The News . . .

National Domestic Violence Volunteer Attorney Network Act

This groundbreaking bill would create the first national system to recruit and train volunteer lawyers and match them with domestic violence victims in need. It would be managed by the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence which would create and maintain an electronic network of volunteers and then enlist the National Domestic Violence Hotline to provide legal referrals.

“This innovative bill builds on the best of American ideals – volunteerism, technology know-how, collaboration between the private and public sectors and our unwavering commitment to justice for all,” Senator Biden said. “I know that across the country there are lawyers who want to serve their community and this bill will pave the way.

Reprinted and adapted from “News Flash” (<http://www.fvpf.org/newsflash>), an online newsletter of the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

FOCUS Support Groups

- Eustis, **FL**—Saturdays 10 a.m. to Noon. Call Sherry at 352-434-9310
- Savannah, **GA**—Saturdays. Call Patty Jean at 912-629-4720
- Aurora, **IL**—Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. Call Brenda at 630-370-0138.
- Wheaton, **IL**—1st and 3rd Saturday at 9:30 a.m. Call Joan at 630-690-0976.
- Wood Dale, **IL**—2nd Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Call Paula at 630-595-7023.
- Lexington, **KY**—Saturdays at 9 a.m. Call Leslie at 859-224-1619 (x 143).
- Madisonville, **KY**—Thursdays at 6 p.m. Call Brenda at 270-825-2423.
- St. Louis, **MO**—Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. Call Sylva at 314-918-7647
- Akron, **OH**—2nd and 4th Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. Call Patty at 330-631-1319
- Olmstead Falls, **OH**—Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Call Sally at 440-234-8430
- Knoxville, **TN**—Tuesday at 7 p.m. Call Roberta at 865-470-2820 (x226).

If you are interested in starting a support group in your area, contact Paula Silva at 630-595-7023.

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A Smile Worth Remembering

Some people are remembered best for their beauty, athletic ability, sense of humor, academic skills, or even their weirdness that sets them apart.

People remember me for my smile.

Because I was so shy, it was easier for me to smile at someone than speak to them. So all through high school I smiled my way down the hallways as I came into contact with fellow classmates.

My smile also came from a joyful heart. I had a great family and a few good friends, and enjoyed life as much as any healthy, happy, country girl could.

But even more important, I had a growing relationship with the Lord that provided the real source of joy and happiness. Because of this ever-present joy, I could even smile when things didn't go right or with tears in my eyes at the death of a loved one.

Now this wasn't a teeth-baring, ear-to-ear, Andy Griffith grin—it was a simple upturn of the corners of my mouth that became as much of a reflex action as sneezing or blinking.

The upturned mouth action must have been directly connected to the sparkling eyes reaction because as soon as I smiled, my eyes would light up too!

By the time I became an adult, my smile had become as much a part of me as the sound of my voice or the nose on my face. It was my way of being friendly, offering encouragement, and expressing joy.

Unfortunately, something dreadful happened that disconnected the upturned mouth and sparkling eyes, and even eventually stifled the smile altogether—I got married!

Now it wasn't the act of getting married that ruined my smile, it was the verbal and emotional abuse that came as a wedding present from the groom that nearly destroyed my life.

At first his complaints were couched in questions like, “*Why do you smile so much?*” No one had ever asked me that before, so it caught me off guard and I didn't know how to respond. It also made me a little uneasy and less confident.

The incidents of verbal attack became more frequent and varied in style and intensity. Most of the time the attack was totally unprovoked, unpredictable, and irrational.

His goal was to gain power by diminishing or criticizing my character, appearance, motives, actions, words, or thoughts, and placing blame on me.

- ◆ “*The trouble with you is . . .*”
- ◆ “*If you were a caring person you would . . .*”
- ◆ “*You brought me down—you did this to me.*”

It didn't take long for the verbal abuse to escalate into physical attacks like slapping, pinching, pushing, grabbing, and hitting. The violence would often be followed by another verbal attack like, “*You made me hit you.*”

Threats and intimidation were also part of his arsenal of words:

- ◆ “*Don't you ever tell anyone—its none of their business.*”
- ◆ “*If anything happens to the baby while I'm at work, you'd better be gone when I get home.*”

One of his most effective methods of gaining power was by undermining my confidence. Sometimes he would be very direct and say, “*Do you know how silly you look when you smile all the time?*” or “*You sound so ignorant when you laugh.*”

Other times he would manipulate my emotions by saying, “*Some of the women at church have talked to me about you.*” When I asked him for specifics he refused, and faked concern that their comments would be too hurtful for me to bear.

After many years of verbal battering, my spirit was crushed and broken.

There was no gleam in my eyes and no smile on my lips. If I ever did smile back then, it was an empty facade meant only to cover up the hurt and pain inside.

It took several years after separating from this abusive man before the sparkle and joy returned . . . **but it did!** The Lord replaced my crushed spirit with a joyful exuberance and delightful laughter.

I knew my wounded spirit had finally healed when I met an acquaintance whom I had not seen for over 20 years. I recognized her immediately, but I thought she would not know me because my hair had turned white and the dimensions of my high school figure were significantly altered.

I started to introduce myself when she interrupted, “*As soon as you smiled, I knew exactly who you were. I'd know your smile anywhere!*”

Her words that day brought as much encouragement and affirmation to my dry spirit that a glass of icy, cold lemonade would bring to a runner on a hot, summer day. Whether she knew it or not, the Lord used her as a vessel of blessing.

Thank you, Lord,
and thank you, Carolyn.

Book Review

by *Brenda Branson*

The Upside of Down (finding hope when it hurts)

by *Joseph Stowell*
Moody Press

In *The Upside of Down*, Joseph Stowell describes how God draws us closer to Himself through our trials and sufferings.

The book encourages us to ask “God, what can I learn from this experience,” instead of “God, why did you do this to me.”

Besides offering scriptural and practical encouragement, this book contains stories of struggles from biblical characters such as Job and Hagar, as well as the experiences of many others in our contemporary society, including the author himself.

“Since God always knows what He is doing, all we have to know is Him. When the whys swarm around us, when our question marks go unanswered, when all the answers seem so shallow—get beyond them to the who. You can trust God. He’ll see you through.”

Recipe of the Month

Cashew Peanut Butter Chip Brownies

1 box brownie mix (1 lb. 5.5 oz)
1/3 cup water
1/4 cup oil
1 egg
1 cup peanut butter chips
(chocolate chips can be substituted)

Topping:

2 (8 oz.) pkg. cream cheese
1 cup powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 1/2 cups cashews

1/2 cup hot fudge topping

Heat oven to 350°. Grease bottom of 9x13” pan.
In large bowl, combine brownie mix, water, oil, and egg. Beat 50-60 strokes or until ingredients are mixed well. Stir in peanut butter chips.

Pour into greased pan and bake for 20-25 minutes. Do not overbake!
In a medium bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Spread over cooled brownies.

Sprinkle cashews over cream cheese topping. Warm hot fudge topping in microwave, and drizzle over cashews.

Words That Heal

Who stood up for me against
the wicked?

If God hadn’t been
there for me,

I never would
have made it.

The minute I said, “I’m
slipping, I’m falling,”

Your love, God, took hold
and held me fast.

When I was upset and
beside myself,

You calmed me down and
cheered me up.

*Psalms 94:16-19 (The
Message)*

Invisible Wounds that Scar the Soul

*Non-physical abuse—
a form of domestic violence*

*“Yelling at living things does tend
to kill the spirit in them.*

*Sticks and stones may break our bones,
but words will break our hearts . . .”
Robert Fulghum*

It is difficult for a man who punches a woman or throws her into a wall to not know that he is an abuser.

It is equally difficult for a woman who sustains a black eye and body bruises not to know she has been abused, although both of them find rationales to avoid reality.

However, the subtle manifestations of nonphysical abuse usually escape acknowledgement—at least for a long period of time.¹

Why? Because the abusers keep their hands clean by landing invisible punches and unseen jabs. “They undermine the wife’s self-esteem and break her spirit, and knock supporting pins out from under her. They know what matters most to her—her dog, her car, her friends, maybe her red suit—and destroy it.

They manipulate her into thinking she’s to blame, and as a result, into trying harder and harder to please.”¹

Friends, family, and co-workers may see the abuser as a really nice person, and that is also the way he sees himself. He attributes his loss of control to his wife’s behavior, and uses her as a scapegoat to take the blame for his words and actions.

The abuser usually does not verbally batter his partner in public, unless it is in the form of a joke or something said where the meaning is only known to her.

Nonphysical abuse is the destruction of a woman’s emotional, psychological, social, and economic well-being, a systematic undermining of her sense of self and her sanity.

Behind all abuse is the need to **control and dominate** someone else. Men who are abusive know exactly what they are doing by weakening their wives in order to strengthen themselves.

It is not always easy for the victim of verbal and emotional abuse to recognize that she is being abused. She may know that her partner is not treating her kindly,

but because she trusts her partner’s perceptions, she may begin to doubt her feelings and the truth of her own perceptions.

If a woman shares her feelings with the abuser, he will either invalidate them or tell her it was a joke. More seriously, if she confronts him with his abusive behavior he may use more aggressive means to gain back control, causing the verbal and emotional abuse to escalate to physical battering.

What does verbal abuse look like? Although there are many categories of verbal abuse, the most frequent are:

- ◆ **Abusive anger**—sudden angry outbursts which are usually unexpected and irrational. After venting his wrath, the abuser usually feels a sense of relief from built-up tensions inside, and enjoys a feeling of power and superiority. His partner will look for rational reasons for his behavior, and will usually wonder what she said or did to make him angry.

No matter how well she manages to change her appearance, attitudes, or actions, she will never be good enough in the mind of her abuser, and he will continue to blame her for his unexpected fits of rage.

- ◆ **Accusing and blaming.** This usually goes along with abusive anger, where the abuser will accuse his partner of something, and then blame her for his anger or insecurity.

Many times the abuser will accuse his partner of infidelity, and blame her for his feelings of insecurity. He may blame her as well for his sexual impotence, while refusing to seek medical help. No matter how the partner tries to help him understand the truth, he will not hear it.

- ◆ **Judging and criticizing.** Here the abuser is going farther than speaking the truth in love. He is expressing his lack of acceptance in an overly critical, judgmental tone.

“The trouble with you is . . .”

“You never get anything right . . .”

- ◆ **Countering**—arguing against her thoughts, perceptions, or experiences.

Nan recognized Ned’s tendency to counter anything she said. So she

decided to agree with any statements he made and repeat them back to him. Here is the interaction:

Ned: *That lamp shade doesn’t go with the lamp.*

Nan: *Oh yeah, the lamp shade doesn’t go with the lamp.*

Ned: *It does too go with the lamp.*

Nan: *Oh, the shade goes with the lamp.*

Ned: *You can’t say it goes with it when the color’s off.*

Nan: *Oh, I see. The color is off.*

Ned: *That’s not what’s wrong with it.*

Nan: *I’m trying to find out what you mean.*

Ned: *No you’re not. You’re twisting my words around!*²

- ◆ **Discounting**—denying and distorting her experiences and feelings as if they were worth nothing. Verbal discounting can be understood by thinking of a very expensive item in a store being “discounted” down to a ridiculously low amount until it is considered worthless.

There are many other categories of verbal abuse (name calling, threatening, ordering, etc.). Most abusers use several or all of these types to keep their partner off balance and wondering what she has done wrong.

“Emotional battering, then, runs the gamut from a steady grinding down of a woman to emotional trauma. While her bones are never broken, her flesh never bruised, her blood never spilled, she is wounded nonetheless.

With self-confidence and self-respect gone, she lives, empty, with no self left to assert. She cedes control of her life to her abuser. The emotionally battered woman loses herself.”¹

¹ *No Visible Wounds, Mary S. Miller*

² *The Verbally Abusive Relationship, Patricia Evans*



Partners In Ministry

- YES! I would like to receive FOCUS Newsletter each month for 1 year at the rate of \$15 per year.
- I want to partner with FOCUS to educate churches and individuals about domestic violence and help families suffering from the trauma of abuse. Here is my faith promise of \$_____ per month as God provides. Here is my one-time donation of \$_____ to use where most needed.
- I want to support FOCUS Women's Centers and Homes of Refuge and provide salaries for staff. Here is my donation of \$_____ or my monthly pledge of \$_____.
- Enclosed is my gift of \$_____ to provide complimentary copies of FOCUS Newsletter to women and organizations who cannot afford a subscription.
- Count on me to be a prayer warrior for this ministry. Please send me specific requests.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip

Mail to FOCUS, P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413

Upcoming Events

- **Aug. 2007**—Release of our book, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis*
- **Sept. 12-15**— Exhibitors at the **American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference** in Nashville, TN
- **Oct. 3**—Presenting **Domestic Violence Seminar for Evangelical Child and Family Agency** in Wheaton, IL
- **Oct. 20**—Presenting **Domestic Violence Seminar at Rockford Rescue Mission** in Rockford, IL
- **Nov. 11-16**—Trip to California to attend the **Ultimate Leadership with Dr. Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend**

If you would like the FOCUS team to come to your church for a women's retreat ("*A Woman's Journey To God*"), seminar on domestic violence, or other speaking engagement, please contact us as soon as possible as our calendar for 2007 is quickly filling up!

Contact Brenda at 270-825-2423 or Paula at 630-595-7023 or by email at contactus@focusministries1.org.

"A Woman's Journey To God"

A weekend retreat for women in pursuit of God

If your church would like on-site training to help you minister to families dealing with domestic violence, please contact us by email at: contactus@focusministries1.org

NEW: Virtual Office!

Join our free virtual office (forums, Bible search, lots of links and free downloads) by going to our website: Focusministries1.org and signing up. You can communicate with others and us on lots of interesting topics!



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Focusministries1.org

Our mission is to encourage women who are struggling in difficult circumstances to find strength and hope in Jesus Christ. “O Lord, you alone are my hope.” Psalm 71:5 NLT

Endorsement:

“These women are called, prepared, and surrendered to their crucial ministry. The stamp of God is on their lives and work. It’s my prayer that God will use their gifts across the world to draw thousands of women to the hope that Christ provides. This is one ministry I’m sold on.” **Dr. Larry Crabb**, New Way Ministries

Funding:

FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization funded by contributions and grants. If you would like to help us minister to hurting women through the distribution of printed materials, support groups, workshops, transitional housing, and financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, please send your gift to FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413 or donate online at focusministries1.org. A tax-deductible receipt will be provided for all contributions.

Prayer Requests & Urgent Needs

Urgent Needs:

- **Storm doors and entry doors** with deadbolt on both entrances.
- **Replacement windows** at KY Women’s Center
- **Insulation** for attic
- Professional **grant writer**

Praises:

- **Brenda** is almost fully recovered from her surgeries and is working full time in the ministry.
- Donation of a **new furnace and air conditioner**

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for the young woman who has come to live in the FOCUS Women’s Center
- Pray for the editing and publishing of our book, ***Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis.***
- Pray for individuals, churches, and businesses to commit to **monthly giving.**
- Pray for all the **FOCUS support group leaders** in the U.S.

- Pray for God to send **people** alongside us who have expertise in development, fundraising, public relations, and grant writing.
- Pray for **property** near Elmhurst, IL to be donated for IL Women’s Center and transitional housing.
- Pray for **property** to be donated for Women’s Retreat Center.
- Pray for **houses** in IL, KY, and MO to be donated for use as transitional homes.
- Pray for funding to provide **scholarships** for women to attend our weekend retreat, “A Woman’s Journey to God,” and our “Train the Trainer” seminar for support group leaders.
- Pray for more **invitations** from churches to train pastors, staff, and congregations about domestic violence.

O Lord, You Alone Are My Hope! Psalm 71:5 NLT