reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

When the Israelites would stray from God, he would send prophets to warn them about their wicked ways. If they did not turn from their sin back to God, he gave consequences like death and captivity.

Our relationship with God is not just one-sided. It is to be a mutual relationship. He expects us to love him back not out of obligation but because of a burning desire within.

- Do we stop to think about how much we are loving God and in what ways?
- Are our thoughts consumed with loving him back?
- Do we understand what encompasses loving God?
- Do we realize that obedience to God’s Word is part of loving him?
- Do we understand how much God desires for us to love him with all of our being?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

John 3:16-17 NIV

This familiar passage of Scripture reveals to each one of us the extent of God’s love on a personal level. To think that God cares so much about our eternal destiny that he would send Jesus directly to us is beyond our full comprehension. Once we begin to grasp the depth of his love, we realize the magnitude of a relationship with God. We become aware of the ways that God shows his love day by day.

As we search further in Scripture, we note in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from his love. His unconditional love becomes more evident as we draw nearer to him. As we lean on him, his hands of compassion and grace are extended offering himself as a personal gift.

We find ourselves giddy at times thinking about his unconditional love. We look forward to each moment to bask in his grace as we absorb God’s love like a sponge. We carry this mental picture of dancing around in a meadow dotted with multicolored flowers as the sun shines warming our hearts. We catch the rays of his love and hold it close to our soul.

With God’s love comes truth and accountability. Each of us is responsible before God for our words and actions. If we do not follow God’s ways, there will be consequences. The consequences are God’s tough love toward us.

In Galatians 6:7-8 we read, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will
How do we love someone who knows our deepest thoughts and secrets?

Loving God is not a quick “I love you, God”, and then running off and doing our own thing. It isn’t leaving him a note on the counter hoping he will read it. It isn’t just going to church every Sunday.

Jesus himself teaches us in Matthew 22:35-40 how we are to love God.

“One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Every part of our being is to be actively engaged in loving God. God first loves us. We receive it. Then his love flows through us to others. Our words and actions toward others will be the evidence.

People we meet no longer are invisible to us. Our sensitivity to others’ needs becomes heightened. We become more aware of what lies below the surface of the mask they wear. Some needs may be more obvious such as food, clothing, and shelter. Others may be emotional pain, lack of self-worth, grief, abuse, and distrust. They may just need a listening ear and a caring relationship.

Filling the needs of others is an act of loving God. For in Matthew 25:40 Jesus said, “The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Let’s go back to the verse in Matthew 22:39, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The second part of the Scripture verse is often overlooked. We have a hard time understanding what that means. Taking care of ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually is critical. Each of us is to be a good steward of the life God has given us. We are not to become self-absorbed but self-caring.

Self-caring is being in touch with what is going on inside our heart, mind, and soul.

Self-caring involves putting boundaries in place in order to not overextend ourselves in situations or relationships.

It is not allowing someone to destroy us physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Self-caring is learning how to recognize people who are “toxic” and developing tools to handle destructive relationships.

Taking time to relax, enjoy the beauty of nature, having fun, and surrounding ourselves with loving relationships become another area we need to incorporate in our lives.

Self-caring and keeping our focus on the one who created us minimizes our anxieties, our fears, and directs our attention to God who is in control no matter the circumstances. His embrace is always available. Fall into the arms of God and put your head on his chest for he cares for you.

He’s waiting!

By Paula Silva
Perfect love casts out all fear. It says so in The Good Book. Guess their love wasn’t perfect then because she was afraid. Very. She told him as much. More than once. He scoffed at her when she said this.

Never once said he didn’t mean to scare her, didn’t want her to be afraid. Or that he was sorry she felt that way. If she just didn’t do dumb things to irritate him, if he just didn’t have to always keep correcting her, for her own good, he reasoned, then he would never have to raise his voice. Or his hands.

If. She. If she. If she only could have been perfect, then he could have been perfect too. He would deny such an accusation now of course, like he denied everything else. But she wouldn’t fall for it like she fell for him years ago. Hard. And hardly sensible.

Her utterance of the words “I do” to him translated from the altar to the threshold into “I do not” for her. I do not have my own voice. I do not have my own emotions. I do not have my own brain. And I do not know how to be a wife or a mother.

Please, please, kind sir, show me the way, he seemed to think he heard her say. Those were not her words however. She would not have called him kind. Not ever.

But she tried. She tried to believe as he believed. That he always knew what was best. That he was incapable of making a mistake. That it was his God-given right to be in control. But all of her trying only led to crying, proving what he said all along about her being a basket case. Proving to him, maybe. But she still wasn’t buying; renting his ideologies perhaps, but she simply could not take ownership of them. He sensed this of course. And it rocked his world. It pushed his buttons. It gave him reason to set things straight. Put her in her place. And he did. Right at the bottom of the porch steps.

Lying on her back, her head throbbing, she looked up at his dark form centered in the door frame. The kitchen light behind him silhouetted his tense body, his clenched fists. No more, every muscle screamed within her. Get up and run. And somehow she did, urging the children to run a little faster alongside her.

Through the late evening snow, wearing thin socks and no shoes, they made it safely to a neighbor’s house. Her rapid knocks gave way to an open door, a knowing look. Catching her breath, she cried out three numbers: 9…no more will he push her around…I…she is taking her life back…I…”I’d like to report a crime.”

Time. It ticks away. The bruises dissolve. She weeps and no one calls her a basket case. Her children thank her, obey her; they even ask her opinion sometimes. There are no eggshells on the floor of their new home. No bars are set out of their reach.

There is peace here. There is love. And it is perfect.

By L.M.
Writers often think that they are in control of every word they write. But, sometimes, what actually comes out is totally unexpected. As I wrote the poem, "Life Wracked with Pain," I had to face so many of my darkest moments, but surprisingly, found solace through my own words.

I am an adult woman, married, with two adult children of my own. But I carry inside me memories of a traumatic childhood, which included sexual abuse by an uncle, horrendous beatings by my mother, and later, as a young adult, date rape, pregnancy and an abortion. And for many years, I kept silent, telling no one what I had survived.

As an author of fantasy fiction, I had written about some events from my past, disguised as events in one of my character's life. But it wasn't until I began writing my memoir Living with Rage that I truly began to face what I had experienced. So many memories began to surface that it became almost overwhelming. I remember one day, I just couldn't keep writing and I had to take a walk. One phrase kept going through my head: blood on my hands, blood on my hands. I knew what that blood was: it was my blood, and that of my unborn baby.

At that point, I felt so low, wondering if everything I had gone through was really for nothing. I realized my life had indeed been wracked with pain, and I thought to myself that I was truly unworthy of God.

"God," I would say to Him, "Why are you torturing me?" The memories, the guilt, the nightmares came unceasingly.

I finally went to my priest, a man I had known for many years, and confessed to him that I didn't know if I could write this memoir. It was bringing me nightmares, but at the same time, it was unleashing the pain and silence that I had maintained for so many years.

When I told my priest about the phrase that kept circling through my head, "blood on my hands," my priest gently took my hand in his and said, "Honey, God is washing you with His blood."

That blood I kept imagining was not blood of guilt, he said, but blood of cleansing. "God is healing you with your own words," the priest said.

But, I asked him, how could God forgive me for what I had done? The priest looked at me. "Are you so arrogant to think that God wouldn't forgive you?" he asked. "Don't you see," he said, "God knows your child, your circumstances. It is you who can't forgive that child, or yourself."

I realized my priest was right, and together, he and I named and spiritually baptized my child. I chose the name Michael, for a boy, and Michaela, for a girl, after St. Michael the Archangel. My child now has a place in heaven and in my heart.
Solace Through Pain

When I came home that day, I let all the pain inside and all the doubt and hopelessness I felt, express themselves in the words of the poem.

Life Wracked With Pain
My body, my soul aches
Does anyone hear my plea?
Does He, the one above hear my voice?

As I wrote, I realized I was not the only one in pain. Women, like me, who have been raped, are so often in their own jail of pain, silence and embarrassment.

My soul jailed in violence
Blood on my hands
I am not worthy in His sight

But as I continued writing, I came to these words, straight from Jesus through me:

I am Jesus your brother,
your friend
Rise and come with me
I am the breath of your life
I am the light in your soul
I AM
You are free

And I felt that freedom, even though I had never really allowed myself to feel it before.

I finished my poem, and I finished my book, realizing that this was something God wanted me to share, to connect with others and to help others who may be going through something similar. Through my writing, I found a peace I had never experienced, and knew without a doubt that this was something I was meant to do.

Solace Through Pain—in Poetry by Angelica Harris

Bio: Angelica Harris, author of Living with Rage: A Quest for Solace, is a victim, survivor, and now a conqueror of sexual and domestic abuse. By lending a voice to those who have been abused, Angelica increases awareness and support for those affected.

Partnering with Amnesty International and the Institute on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma (IVAT), Center for the Women of New York (CWNY) Angelica is speaks and writes about these issues. Married for 31 years with two adult children, Angelica is also the author of three fantasy novels.

You can learn more about her at www.angelicaharris.com.

I Am

I was regretting the past and fearing the future.
Suddenly my Lord was speaking:
“My Name is I Am.” He paused.
I waited. He continued,

“When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I Was.

When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there.
My name is not I Will Be.

When you live in this moment it is not hard. I am here.
My Name is I Am.”

Helen Mallicoat

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Book Review

LIVING WITH RAGE
By Angelica Harris

“As a teenager in Queens, New York in the 1970s, Harris bore two secrets: the beatings of a mother swiftly descending into mental illness, and her uncle's yearlong sexual abuse. Always on the brink of exploding, Harris sought relief through literature and theater, but couldn't eradicate the rage that simmered inside her. In candid, revealing prose, Harris tells the story of a life haunted by violence but that also shimmers with all the complexities of love. “

Words that Heal

You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted;
You encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
Defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
In order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.
Psalm 10:17-18

Domestic Violence Training for Churches/Groups/Organizations

Topics:
- What is Domestic Violence?—A Closer Look at Verbal, Emotional, Sexual, Physical, and Spiritual Abuse
- Characteristics of an Abuser/Why Does He Do That?
- Recognizing a Victim of Domestic Violence
- Why Women Stay or Leave/Developing a Safety Plan
- How Does Domestic Violence Affect the Family Especially Children
- Teen Dating Violence
- What Can the Church Do?
- Do’s and Don’ts of Counseling
- Signs that the Abuser Has Changed
- Church Safety Plan/Risks
- Becoming an Anchor in the Storm/How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship

Development of Domestic Violence Program in Churches
- Do’s and Don’ts of Counseling Victims and Abusers
- Development of Domestic Violence Policies and Procedures for Churches
- Step By Step Approach for Churches to Address the Issue of Domestic Violence
- Training for support group leaders
Prayer Requests & Urgent Needs

Urgent Needs:

- New board members with expertise in fundraising, marketing, and the law
- Trainers to assist in our training seminars
- TEEN FOCUS team to develop the teen program
- An office space to accommodate the increasing need for the ministry

Praises:

- FOCUS Ministries was featured on This is the Day (Moody Radio)
- CEU Sponsor for Counselors & Social Workers

Prayer Requests:

- Pray for our TEEN FOCUS team as they develop our teen program
- Pray for a facility for our FOCUS Women's Center. It would enable us to expand our services and provide more trainings, seminars, and conferences.
- Pray for funds to hire much needed staff
- Pray for board members as they make critical decisions regarding the direction of the ministry
- Pray for women and families who contact our FOCUS Women's Center.
- Pray for pastors' wives that are being abused.
- Pray for individuals, churches, and businesses to commit to monthly giving.
- Pray for all the FOCUS support group leaders
- Pray for houses in IL, to be donated for use as transitional homes.
- Pray for more invitations from churches to train pastors, staff, and congregations about domestic violence.
- Pray for churches to understand the gravity of domestic violence and will develop appropriate responses.

Upcoming Events

- February 25, 2012—Restoring the Hope Conference, Speaker: Rosalie de Rosset, Villa Park, IL
- March 30-31, 2012—Partners in the Journey: Train the Trainer FOCUS (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- June 29-30, 2012—Partners in the Journey: Train the Trainer FOCUS (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- September 10, 2012—DV Training, ECFA, Wheaton, IL
- September 28-29, 2012—Partners in the Journey: Train the Trainer FOCUS (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL

The mission of FOCUS Ministries is to provide a safe place for teens, women, and families who experience domestic violence and abusive relationships to find hope and healing in Jesus Christ.

Funding: FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit 501 c3 organization funded by contributions and grants. If you would like to help us minister to hurting people through our educational materials, support groups, counseling, and financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, please send your gift to FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126 or online at www.focusministries1.org. A tax-deductible receipt will be provided for all contributions.

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