

From Victim to Survivor to Thriver

Spring 2014

If someone were to ask you which category of the title do you fit into now, what would your answer be? Many people live in “survivor” mode and do very well there. I have moved in and out of survivor mode most of my life. As a survivor you learn to adapt to situations, become a chameleon to survive especially in difficult situations.

When I started the sexual abuse support group at my church I resolved never to refer to the participants in the ministry as “victims”. They survived the crimes perpetrated on their bodies and the emotional abuse that went along with it. They were there at the group so they were at least “survivors” and I always referred to them as such. One of the bravest things they ever did was walk through the door into the support group. I discovered some of the women were still living with a victim mentality, just letting life happen to them, they still had no voice. It was my desire to help them find their strength through a thriving relationship with Jesus Christ, to let Him define them and give them purpose and a voice. I have written in previous FOCUS newsletters that I am a survivor of sexual abuse. I was abused by a neighborhood teenage boy when I was in 6th grade over about a 6 month period of time.

My family moved 13 times the 19 years I lived at home, we lived in 5 different states and I attended 8 different schools. I lived my childhood as the “new kid” in school. We moved from Midwest to the East and from the East to the South and back to the Midwest. Everywhere we moved I was told I talked funny, didn’t wear the right fashion of the time, had the wrong hair, and anything else the kids could think of to criticize. In grammar school many times I was the tallest in the class, so there were names for that too. In addition to the sexual abuse I was also bullied by other boys in the neighborhood. So to survive I became a chameleon and I changed with the whims of those around me to fit in.

I was beginning my junior year of High School when we made our final move back to Illinois. I went to a very large school; my senior graduating class was over 600 so it was easy for me to get lost in the crowd. I decided I would just “do my own thing” and not care so much what others thought. I discovered my liking for writing after taking a journalism class and I joined the school newspaper. We had quite a mixed bunch of personalities on the paper and I finally felt I fit in somewhere.

Did I stay in that “do my own thing” mode? No, I did not. I knew we were settled and not going to be moving again because my father had bought my grandfather’s business and wouldn’t be changing jobs. I knew it was safe to establish long-lasting friendships that I wouldn’t be torn away from. I really didn’t know who I was because I had been a chameleon for so long. Even though I was at the point where I didn’t care what the opinion was of me by the general population at school, I was not at that point in one-on-one relationships.

Have you seen the movie “Runaway Bride”? In that movie the main character had been engaged many times, even made it to the altar a few times, only to run away each time. When a reporter asked her how she liked her eggs, she didn’t know. She changed her “egg-like” for every man she had been with. Toward the end of the movie she prepared eggs the many different ways she had “liked” in the past and finally came to a decision (I don’t remember what it was. I would have to watch the movie again). Of course indecisiveness in egg choices wasn’t her only act of co-dependency. She changed her likes and dislikes with every man she was with. In

many ways I was the same way. For me it was the fear of being abandoned that kept me co-dependent.

I was not raised going to church on a regular basis, but if you asked my parents if we were Christians they would have said yes, just because we weren't Jewish or Buddhist or Muslim. My parents had both been raised going to church but had bad, legalistic experiences and didn't make it a priority after they married. There were some time periods growing up where I went to Vacation Bible School or was taken to Sunday school, but that was very rare. Needless to say I had no idea what a relationship with Christ or growing as a believer was.

It took until I was married at 19, divorced at 35 a couple of years of dating badly, a PTSD episode that drove me to counseling for my sexual abuse, the sudden death of a very good friend that finally sent me to search for God at the age of 38. I read the entire Bible through in 2 months and began watching sermons on TV. I discovered Charles Stanley and sermons from a Christian College in Florida that helped me grow rapidly in the faith. From reading the Bible, I was able to rapidly discern false teachers like the health, wealth and prosperity people on TV. Now one of my top spiritual gifts is discernment. I prayed with a TV pastor to receive Christ as the forgiver of my sins and the leader of my life. Then I knew I needed to find a church so I could continue to grow spiritually.

After about 6 months of discovery and then accepting Christ I began attending church and going to

classes offered by the church. The first class was to discover my spiritual gifts. In that class we wrote about accomplishments in our lives in 5-year blocks of time. As I did that and when I discovered my gifts, I could see God's hand over me over a life time, even when I didn't believe in Him. There is a book by Don Matzat called "Christ Esteem" and I was beginning to see myself as God saw me; made in His image, to do His works as He called me to do. That was when I began to really "thrive" in my life.

I also changed my mind-set from worrying about people's opinions of me to that of only wanting God's approval. I once saw an article entitled, "What You Think of Me Is None of My Business" that became my motto. I also learned from reading and listening to Dr. Henry Cloud to evaluate my relationships by asking the question, "are they life giving, or sucking the life out of me?"

There have been ups and downs since then. I remarried but my husband passed away after 3 years of marriage due to complications from a life-time of diabetes. Other friends and family members passed away, the loss of a job of 30 years; all of these led me to move back to "survivor" mode at times, not feeling much like a "thrivers."

I do not stay out of "thrivers" mode for very long. The best medicine for me is listening to worship music, talking things through with friends and praying and reading Scripture. When my husband died I had a hard time focusing. My brain was running at 120 mph. Playing worship music and singing along were my prayers at the time. The ways I connect to God are

worship, nature and in community with fellow believers. If you have not discovered how you connect to God search it out, it will help you reconnect during difficult times in your life. There is a book called "Sacred Pathways" by Gary Thomas that can help you discover your paths to connect with God.

So again I ask where are you on the continuum of victim-survivor-thriver? Shown on the following page are some characteristics of each. What steps will you take now to move you through these transitions? Attend a support or recovery group, attend a class on boundaries or other like topics, attend workshops or seminars and listen to Christian radio stations. A real help to me personally and in my ministry has been listening to the Christian counseling program New Life Live. Read the Bible or listen to an audio book form. If it seems too daunting, try the One Year Bible, which breaks the Bible down in small 15-20 minute daily readings. Discover your spiritual gifts and pathways you connect with God. When you discover these it will boost your self-image and you will see His hand over your life.

No matter our circumstances Jesus is the constant in our lives, He is always there. Living life hand-in-hand with Him we can thrive in our lives no matter what the people around us are doing. A "thrivers" lives life with a thriving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Karen Ferguson

VICTIM	SURVIVOR	THRIVER WITH CHRIST
Lets life just happen to them	Takes control of their lives	Asks for God’s guidance in their lives
Blames others for their problems	Blames others but working on it	Takes responsibility for their part of the problem and solutions
Stays in denial about issues in their lives	Working out of their denial	Lives in reality looking for God’s perspective on their life
Stays childlike	Alternates between childlike and adulthood	Remains an adult in all situations reflecting their position in Christ
Is controlled	Is controlling	Gives God control and has self-control
Doesn’t truly accept God’s	Lives under grace and law, still	Repents and accepts God’s grace
Lives in shame and fear	Working on their shame and fear	Knows who they are in Christ and gives Him their shame and fear
Say they forgive, but they are really enabling	Working on forgiveness but retains the right to get even	Truly forgives and offers reconciliation where appropriate
Lacks boundaries	Learning about appropriate boundaries	Develops appropriate godly boundaries and puts them into practice
Stays in the relational dream world	Faces the reality of the relationship	Develops godly responses in relationships showing truth and grace
Let’s others define them	Discovers God’s view of them	Accepts their identity in Christ and moves forward in confidence
State of learned helplessness	Acknowledges the small steps made in taking responsibility for their life and situation	Surrounds themselves with support, safe people, and follows God’s direction

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My True Love



You came to my life in the moment when I was very vulnerable.

You told me you wanted a serious relationship and to be a Father to my kids.

You came and destroyed my self-esteem my confidence my smile my body and my mind.

You came and used me and abused me because of my inability to make a decision and leave.

You showed me how miserable and horrible life can be.

You came in used my house and my money for filthy things.

You came and destroyed my heart.

You came and triggered depression and anxiety in my life.

You came and made fear a big part of my life.

You came and finished with my dignity.

You came and separated me from my family.

You never love me neither that I.

You left and life didn't get better.

You left and the damage started to show up.

You left and I became an alcoholic.

You left and I have no respect for myself or for my body.

You left and I went crazy.

You left and I thought of suicide.

You left and nothing else matter.

You left and I didn't have anybody.

You left and then he came.

He came and gave me a chance.

He came in I started a new beginning.

He came and said it won't be easy but be patient.

He came and my smile started to show up again.

He came and I found help.

He came in my heart started to heal.

He came and sent me an angel to be my husband .

He came and he stayed.

He stayed in my smile got huge again.

He stayed and showed me real love.

He stayed and he gave me a new family.

He stayed and I forgave.

He stayed and I was born again.

He stayed and now I live for him.

Sarai Peterson

WHY DO TEENS ABUSE?



Delving into the question why teens abuse reveals reasons that are thought provoking. Some reasons can be . . .

Media

Just like adults, teens are significantly influenced by media and social networks which depicts disrespect and the pleasure of having power over someone. Many TV programs, movies, and video games portray violence as a part of life.

If someone displeases another, one retaliates and fights back. Individuals are being desensitized to behaviors that hurt another. Each teen becomes very susceptible to abusive relationships because the media exposure causes them to think it is “normal” in relationships.

Jealousy

Some teens think jealousy is a sign of love. They say, “I love you so much I want you all to myself.” They explode with anger when their boyfriend/girlfriend spends time with someone else. Jealousy is *NOT* a sign of love. Jealous people are insecure and afraid they will be abandoned by the one they “love.”

Power and Control Issues

Some guys are taught by their parents that men have the right to dominate women. Some even misuse scriptures to prove their point. Peer pressure encourages them to be “the boss” and keep their girlfriend “in line.” They feel

it is a “man thing” to control their woman.

Some girls learn by their father’s behavior how a woman is to be treated. She is more likely to be a victim of abusive relationships in the future.

Background of Abuse in the Family

Guys who were abused as children or who observed their father verbally or physically abuse their mother are more likely to abuse their girlfriends. They may have learned from an abusive parent to blame others for causing their problems, and to use violence to gain control over another person.

They do not learn to treat women with respect and believe it is normal to lose their temper and explode when they are frustrated or angry. In some families, it is the mother who is controlling and abusive. If this is the case, the girl may learn that this is how women are to act.

Insecurity

Fear of being abandoned or losing control causes some guys/girls to become violent when they think their girlfriend/boyfriend is losing interest or thinking of leaving. They don’t know how to communicate their feelings, so they act out of fear and anger.

Alcohol and Drugs

Most guys/girls who get violent after using alcohol or drugs were violent before using them. It just

makes them less inhibited and gives them an excuse for acting out of control.

Entitlement

In our society today, teens as well as adults feel that all their wants are to be met now. Delayed gratification in some cases is not part of their vocabulary. Working for a want is replaced by the expectation that it is the role of the parent to provide whatever is asked for immediately. Entitlement is reinforced by commercials. A parent who wants to be a friend instead of a parent tends to give to their teen what is not deserved.

A Lack of Boundaries

Children and teens raised in a home where there are little or no rules or boundaries will push on others who try to set boundaries. They do not want to accept a “no” so they choose not hear a “no.”

Bullying

They have learned that bullying forces control that results in them getting their own way. Striking fear into someone releases a pleasurable rush/high. When people cower under them, they feel superior.

In today’s society, girls can be just as abusive and manipulative as boys. Social media, computers, cell phones become a platform for both genders. Educating teens about relationships is crucial to combat the many influences that bombard them.

Paula Silva

Thoughts to Ponder

Many years ago if a child did something wrong in school you were required to write on the chalkboard a one sentence statement of your wrong.

In abusive relationships the victim often feels she is the blame for the abuse she is receiving from her partner. She tries hard to fix the relationship to the point of exhaustion.

Maybe we need to get back to the writing on the chalkboard, "I am not to blame," so we won't devalue ourselves and think we have failed.



Words that Heal

She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.

Proverbs 31:25 (New International Version)

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 fund-raising, marketing, and the law

Praises:

- **Moving** into our new office space in May
- **Dedicated** support group leaders
- **New support group** in St. Louis, MO
- **Development** of TEEN FOCUS relationship workshops
- **For those that attended**

our Partners in the Journey and Faith Based DV Seminars in April

Prayer Requests:

- **Pray for our TEEN FOCUS team** as they develop our teen program
- **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 churches** to understand the gravity

of domestic violence and will develop appropriate responses.

- **Pray for FOCUS** as we plan for 2014.
- **Pray for those** that come to the ministry for help that do not know Jesus.



Upcoming Events

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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.

FOCUS Ministries (and all individuals affiliated therewith) disclaims any personal liability for information presented within this newsletter or in seminars, workshops, and support group meetings. You should always consult a professional for medical, psychological, legal, financial, or biblical advice.

- **June 6-7, 2014:** Partners in the Journey Training (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **June 7, 2014:** Faith Based DV Training, Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **Oct. 3-4, 2014:** Partners in the Journey Training (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **Oct. 4, 2014:** Faith Based DV Training, Oakbrook Terrace, IL

The FOCUS team is available to come to your church for a women's retreat, seminars, workshops, DV training or other speaking engagements.

contactus@focusministries1.org

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

Ways You Can Help FOCUS Ministries



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