

Healing the Soul *of a* Woman

How to Overcome Your Emotional Wounds

JOYCE MEYER



NEW YORK NASHVILLE

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INTRODUCTION

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

—Psalm 147:3 ESV

Can a woman who has been hurt deeply either by circumstances in her life or by a person she loved and trusted be healed? Can her heart and soul be healed? Can she love and trust once again? As a woman who was sexually abused by my father, abandoned by my mother, and cheated on by my first husband, I can say without hesitation, “Yes!” If you are living with a wounded soul and feeling alone, unloved, and misunderstood, I can promise you that you do not have to stay that way.

Beauty for Ashes, which was published in 1994, was the first book I wrote on emotional healing. Since that time I have had a great deal more experience in this area and am more knowledgeable in God’s Word, and I want to share those things with you. I have written other books that include some portions of what I will share in this book, but with God’s help, this will be an all-inclusive manual from a biblical perspective on the subject of emotional healing.

Countless numbers of people are walking around wounded in their souls from past hurts, and they either don’t know they can be healed or simply don’t know what to do or how to begin. I will share what I have learned on my journey, and although yours won’t be exactly like mine, I hope my story can be an inspiration

and a guiding light as you step out onto your path of progress toward wholeness.

Just as our bodies can be sick, our souls can be sick, but God wants to heal us everywhere we hurt, including our soul. The soul is the mind, will, and emotions. It is the inner part of us and a very important part. No matter what we have materially or how good our circumstances are in life, if we have wounded, bruised, and bleeding souls, we will not enjoy life. Whether our hurt is from shame, anger, bitterness, depression, doubt, insecurity, guilt, or fear, it needs to be confronted and dealt with.

I limped through life for years thinking I had the best life I could expect considering my past. I can actually remember thinking as a young adolescent that I would always have a second-rate life because of what my father had done to me. I didn't even attempt to deal with any of the problems that were created from my past simply because I didn't think anything could be done about them. But I was wrong.

It is amazing how wrong our thinking can be, but if we don't know it is wrong then we never rise above it. In this book, I hope to show you that a wonderful, amazing, fulfilling life is available for you. With God's help you can learn to think and behave in ways that will actually set you free to be the amazing woman God created you to be.

Once you know what is available to you, I pray that you will make a decision to go for it! The world offers a variety of remedies for the wounds of the soul, and some of them may be helpful, but Jesus offers us complete healing. He is the healer and restorer of our souls. The psalmist David said God had restored his soul (Psalm 23:3). When something is restored it is made like new once again.

What kind of life did God intend for you as a woman who is

created in His image? It certainly is not one of being minimized, devalued, mistreated, abused, used, and battered. He offers us unconditional love, infinite worth and value, wholeness, righteousness, peace, and joy—and that is just the beginning of His blessings for those who will believe and walk with Him through life!

As you begin the journey of healing for your soul, I ask you to remember that healing takes time. It is also sometimes painful because we have to let old wounds be opened up in order to get the infection that is festering and poisoning our souls out of them. Women who have need of healing for their soul only have two choices. The first is to continue limping along in life, just trying to get through each day, and the second is to say, “I’ve had enough misery, unhappiness, pretense, guilt, and shame, and I’m ready to do whatever it takes to be made whole!”

CHAPTER 1

The History of Women

Make the most of yourself, by fanning the tiny sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.

—Golda Meir

First let me say that women are God's idea. Although He created Adam first, He quickly realized that he needed a helper, so He took a rib from Adam's side and created Eve out of it. I like to make the point that Eve was taken from Adam's side, thus indicating she was to walk beside him in life as someone he needed. She was not taken from the bottom of his feet, indicating that he had permission to walk all over her.

If you are familiar with the story of creation (Genesis 1–3), you may know that after God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a beautiful garden called Eden, and His plan was for them to enjoy life abundantly and fellowship with Him. They had a great deal of freedom to make their own choices and had been endowed with authority to have dominion over the animals and the entire realm they dwelt in. There was, however, one thing God told them not to do, and that was not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of blessing and calamity (Genesis 2:9, 16–17). They could eat from every other tree, including the tree of life. It is clear from this account that God wanted His creation to be filled with life as only He could give it, and in His

original intention, He wanted them to know only good and not evil.

Of course, God also knew from the beginning—because He is all-knowing—that Satan, who appeared to Eve as a serpent, would deceive her and that she and Adam would eat of the one tree He had forbidden. That one wrong action opened the door for all the pain and dysfunction that exists on our planet today. You might ask, *Well, if God knew His perfect plan would fail, then why not make it impossible to ruin it?* The answer is very simple: God created man with free will because He wanted to have people to fellowship with who would choose Him, not merely those who had no choice. He wanted people to partner with in life, not puppets that had no choice but to do His bidding.

It is easy to get angry with Adam and Eve and think, *How dumb can you be?* But not one of us would have done any better. Although God created them with free choice, meaning they had the ability to disobey Him, He also from the beginning had a plan for the complete restoration and wholeness of men and women. That plan, simply stated, is *Jesus*.

God loves us so much that He planned from the beginning of time to let His only Son pay for our sins and bring us full salvation. Salvation means life, but the life that God offers us is not merely an ability to breathe and walk around—He offers us “life” as only God knows it. We can be filled with the life of God. That life is so powerful that no matter what has happened to us in the past that has damaged our souls, we can be healed and totally restored. All death is swallowed up in life, and darkness is swallowed up in light. Jesus is both Life and Light. That’s why John 1:4 says, “In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.”

I can assure you that God is never without a plan. And no

matter what has happened to you, God has a plan for you, and it is a good plan.

After Satan successfully deceived Eve, tempting her to be disobedient, God made a statement to him that leads us to understand why women, by and large throughout history, have been so marginalized, disrespected, and devalued. Genesis 3:14–15 says:

And the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, you are cursed above all [domestic] animals and above everything [wild] living thing of the field; upon your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust [and what it contains] all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He will bruise *and* tread your head underfoot, and you will lie in wait *and* bruise His heel.

Please notice that the “Offspring” of Eve is capitalized in this verse, but the offspring of the serpent is not. That is because the offspring of Eve is Jesus Christ. She is the mother of all living beings and is directly in the ancestral line of Jesus. God was letting Satan know that Eve’s Offspring would bruise his head, or take his authority away from him and defeat him. Satan would, for a time, bruise the heel of God’s children, referring to how he attacks us in our daily walk.

This same type of attack was perpetrated against Jesus during His time on earth, but the end of the story is that Jesus died in our place, took our pain and sorrow, suffered beyond anything we can imagine, and paid for our sins. But thankfully that isn’t the end of the story. If it were, it would have given Satan the victory he always hoped to have. He had indeed bruised the heel of our

Savior. But Jesus was in the grave three days, during which time He took possession of “the keys of death and Hades (the realm of the dead)” (Revelation 1:18), and then He rose from the dead, and He is alive forevermore! Through the Offspring of Eve (Jesus), God bruised Satan’s head (authority).

Satan has been stripped of the authority that Adam and Eve gave to him through their disobedience, but if we don’t know that he is defeated, we will continue to let his wicked and evil plan rule in our lives. Satan is defeated, and a life filled with healing and abundance is available to you! All you need to do in order to receive it is to receive Jesus as your Savior by faith and believe that the promises in God’s Word are for you. As you do, you will step out into a lifetime journey with Jesus, who will guide you along your path.

No matter how deep a pit you may feel you are in, God’s arm is not too short to reach in and lift you out. He will set you on high places and give you peace that passes all understanding and joy that you cannot describe. God will meet you where you are and help you get to where you need to be.

Satanic Attack on Women

The cruel and unjust treatment of women down through the ages can only be attributed to a demonic attack. I will give you a few statistics that I am aware of just to make my point. (See appendix I for more statistics.)

VOTING RIGHTS:

- Ratified on August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution granted American women the right to vote—a right known as women’s suffrage. At the time the

US was founded, its female citizens did not share all of the same rights as men, including the right to vote.¹

EQUAL PAY AND PROPERTY RIGHTS:

- On average, women employed full-time in the United States lose a combined total of more than \$840 billion every year due to the wage gap.²

EDUCATION:

- Globally, 65 million girls are not in school.³
- Two-thirds of the 774 million illiterate people in the world are female.⁴
- If all women had a primary education, there would be 15 percent fewer child deaths. If all women had a secondary education, child deaths would be cut in half, saving 3 million lives. Mothers' education improves child nutrition. If all women had a primary education, 1.7 million children would be saved from stunted growth due to malnutrition.⁵

GENDERCIDE:

- Demographers estimate that 126 million women are missing due to gendercide (the murder of someone based on their sex, also called femicide). That is as many deaths as those caused by World Wars I and II and AIDS combined. Every year, we lose 2 million baby girls to sex-selective abortion and infanticide. That's four girls per minute. In China alone, 62 million women are missing. That amounts to 9.5 percent of its female population.⁶

- Gendercide affects women of all ages but bears down especially hard on the youngest. In the last twenty years, sex-selective abortion has displaced infanticide as the primary method for eliminating baby girls.⁷

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN:

- It is estimated that 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a nonpartner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁸
- Adult women account for almost half of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for about 70 percent, with girls representing two out of every three child-trafficking victims.⁹

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

- Women and girls make up 98 percent of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.¹⁰
- The average age a teen enters the sex trade in the US is twelve to fourteen years old. Many victims are runaway girls who were sexually abused as children.¹¹
- According to the US State Department, human trafficking is one of the greatest human rights challenges of this century, both in the US and around the world.¹²

Thankfully, women have made some progress, especially in the Western world, but women are still abused even there. And

in many other parts of the world a lot of the things I described on the previous pages are still taking place daily. The battle for the freedom and restoration of women is ongoing, but I am glad I know that healing can occur through faith in God, and I am glad that our ministry is part of helping to bring this freedom to women worldwide.

Because of a long history of being devalued and dishonored, many women today, even in places where a lot of progress has been made, still don't see their true worth and value. They doubt their abilities, and in many instances won't even try to do great things with their life simply because of a wrong mind-set that is ingrained in them. "I'm just a woman" is a statement that I dislike hearing. That very statement is telling in itself.

I remember that when God called me to the ministry, I began experiencing a lot of rejection, for no reason other than I was a woman, and women didn't teach God's Word. I heard things like, "Women can teach Sunday school, but they are not permitted to teach in the main church service." This made no sense, because if it was improper for them to teach, then it would be just as improper to teach Sunday school as it would be to teach in the main church service, or to be a pastor or an evangelist, or to hold any other type of office in the church world.

I was judged, criticized, asked to leave my church, and ostracized by family and friends to the point where I went to God in prayer and reminded Him that I was a woman, and therefore I could not do the things I felt in my heart I was to do. I distinctly remember hearing God whisper to my heart, "Joyce, I know you are a woman!" He wanted me to continue doing what He was leading me to do no matter how much opposition I got. Thankfully, over the years many people's minds have changed, but not all of them. Hopefully, we will still see the day when women

are permitted to take their rightful place in all of society and be respected, valued, and appreciated.

Some women who have decided to fight for their rights have become rebellious and have attitudes that are not healthy for them or the world we live in. It is understandable why the women's liberation movement was started. Women were so tired of being oppressed that they finally decided to blast their way out of bondage. However, in the process many women are now in danger of having an attitude that is excessive and not in agreement with God's will.

God did clearly give Adam (men) authority over Eve (women), but not to rule her. It was for her protection. Women have an innate desire to be taken care of, to be treasured, and to feel safe, and men should provide that. Since that did not occur, at least not in many cases, women have begun to take over and do what in many instances men should be doing. Had things worked properly from the beginning of time, this imbalance would not exist, but they didn't work properly, and, sadly, the beautiful relationship between men and women that God intended has been lost. We dare not look to the world to teach us in these areas, but we can look to God's Word; by obeying godly principles in Scripture, we can experience a healthy balance that will be a blessing to everyone.

I am a woman in ministry, the head of an international ministry, and yet I am also a woman who respects her husband's authority. Dave and I love and respect and submit to one another as unto the Lord. I have had a lot to learn because of being abused by a variety of male authority figures on hundreds of occasions, and it didn't come easily, but God has helped me see His original plan for the respectful, peaceful coexistence of men and women,

and I pray I might always model that for those I have the privilege of teaching.

Thankfully, our history does not have to be our destiny. I often say, “I didn’t have a good start in life, but I am determined to have a good finish!” If you have a wounded soul that is in need of healing, I pray that you will make that same decision and declaration.

*I didn't have a good start in life,
but I am determined to have a
good finish!*

Attitude

Many books have been written about the danger of a bad attitude and the power of a good one. This section is not intended to be a deep and thorough study of the subject, but I do want to mention it. Like most people who have wounded souls, I had a very bad attitude. In my head it sounded something like this: *No man is ever going to push me around again! Nobody is going to tell me what to do from now on. I will take care of myself, so I never need to ask anyone for anything. You cannot trust men because they are only interested in using you for their own selfish interests. I will never again be put in a position for anyone to be able to hurt me.*

These thoughts and many others like them played over and over in my mind for years and years. My attitude was hardened and my mind was set. If this describes you in any way at all, I suggest that after inviting Jesus into your heart, you invite Him into your attitude. I won’t tell you that you will never get hurt again if you open your heart and let people into your life, but I can promise you that if you do get hurt, Jesus, your Healer, will be with you to help you once again. If we spend our lives trying to protect ourselves from ever being hurt, we will also spend our lives lonely.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, instructing them to let the same humble attitude be in them that was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5–8). The thought of humbling ourselves to anyone else is frightening because we see it as weakness and assume that if we show any weakness, we will be taken advantage of. But actually, meekness and humility are strength under control, not weakness. When Dave and I have a disagreement about a decision that needs to be made, I don't enjoy it if I don't get my way, and I will admit that I still need a lot of help from God in order to give in with a good attitude. But I also know if I do what God asks just because it is the right thing to do, then He will always take care of me, and He will do the same thing for you.

You always win when God fights on your side.

Part of the restoration that God offers us is to have a healthy attitude, one that knows when to take a stand against things that are wrong and when to give in and do what someone else is asking us to do to. I am so grateful to God that I no longer have to feel like I am fighting the world, trying to get what is rightfully mine, and I am thrilled to have this opportunity to teach you that you don't have to live that way. God wants to fight your battles, and believe me when I say that when God fights on your side, you always win!

CHAPTER 2

Living the Best Life Available

In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.

—John 1:4

“Ah, the good life!” When we hear that phrase we may think of lying on a beach day after day, or being able to buy the new automobile we have admired, or owning a yacht and fishing off the deck. But that kind of life has proven *not* to be the best because many people who do have that kind of life will admit that they are unhappy, lonely, and miserable. I heard that Jay Gould, an American millionaire, had plenty of money, but when he was dying, he said, “I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth.”

There is nothing wrong with having those things, but they are not life; they are things. God offers us true life through Jesus Christ—a real life, the best life that anyone can possibly live. He offers us a life of being made right with God, and one of peace and joy (Romans 14:17). Jesus said that He came so that we might have abundant life, “to the full, till it overflows” (John 10:10).

The best kind of life is only found in God because He is life, and the life that we call ours is a gift from Him. He is the giver of life!

Do You Need an Upgrade?

Many different types of technology are available to us today, two of them being computers and cell phones. The companies who sell these devices are regularly offering upgrades, and most of us rush to get them. We waste no time, we spend money, wait in lines, whatever it takes to get the newest upgrade. We want the best equipment that is available.

If we are that aggressive about technology, why wouldn't we want the best life available and be equally aggressive in making sure we have it? Just as you have to learn how to work the new upgrade you get, we have to learn how to work with God and His plan for our lives.

I've had a relationship of some sort with God since I was nine years old. During that time I've had many upgrades. I've continued to learn things and understand more fully what is available to me through my relationship with Him. So, you may know nothing at all, or perhaps you are educated in Scripture, but I think all of us still fall short of fully living the life God has made available through Christ, and that includes me. That is why we need to continue growing and learning. It is a process that continues throughout our lives, and I might add, it is one that I believe is very exciting. Why not make a commitment right now to spend the rest of your life learning how to enjoy the best life God has available to you through Jesus Christ? Ephesians 2:10 talks about that life when it says:

For we are God's [own] handiwork (His workmanship), recreated in Christ Jesus, [born anew] that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us [taking paths which He prepared ahead

of time], that we should walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live].

Sometimes we have a tendency when reading a book to skim over the Scriptures that an author uses, so I want to ask you to stop reading for a moment and go back and slowly read the Scripture I just quoted and really think about what it is saying to you.

Let me give you my paraphrase: *God created us; we are His workmanship. Because of sin we lived broken lives, but through the salvation offered in Jesus we are born again, or made new once again. We get to start over and learn how to do things right. God has always had a good plan for His people and He always will. It is available to anyone who will choose it and learn how to walk in it.*

I received a major upgrade in 1976. You might even say it was a complete system overhaul, and it came as a result of crying out to God for change because I was sick and tired of being so miserable. He answered my cry by giving me a genuine desire to study His Word and start learning what was available to me. Before this time, I had been a Christian for many years, attending church and trying to be good. Like many people, I had a mistaken idea about what it meant to be a Christian. We often reduce it to church attendance, perhaps putting a little money in the offering basket, saying a prayer when we are desperate, maybe reading a little Scripture occasionally, and trying to be good. But that kind of life is never fulfilling; all it does is leave us frustrated. We become confused because we think we are doing what we should be doing, but our lives are still quite miserable.

But as I studied God's Word and applied what I was learning, amazing changes began to happen in me—in my soul. I will admit that it was not always quick or easy, and it was often painful, especially emotionally. For example, I had to admit my faults

and stop blaming all of my problems on my past and other people, and that was hard! Because when a person has lived in denial for a long time, it is not always easy to face truth. It is similar to getting a new upgrade on your phone. You wanted it, but once you got it, maybe you didn't bother to learn all of the new features because the old way is just easier. At least that is what I do.

I cannot even imagine all I could do with my computer and phone if I took the time to actually learn all of the features and practice them until I was good at using them. Once in a while, my son will need to help me with something that has gotten messed up on my computer, and when he sees some of the antiquated methods I am still using even though I have new equipment, he simply says, "You have no idea how much easier this would be if you learned the new way."

A New Way of Living

Jesus said He is the Way (John 14:6). In the very early days of Christianity, it was often called "the Way." God's plan includes a way to live that will lead us to everything good He offers. This plan begins with receiving Jesus as our Savior. One may faithfully attend church and still not be a Christian. Christianity is not merely belonging to a church and trying to be a good person, but it is about Jesus and what He has done for us. He offers us Himself as the sacrifice and payment for our sins and guilt, and when we receive Him, He actually comes by His Spirit to live, dwell, and make His home in us. Once you are born again (repent of sin

Christianity is not merely belonging to a church and trying to be a good person.

and receive Jesus as Savior), you no longer need to be led by rules and regulations, expecting to get some reward from God if you keep them

all, but you can be led and prompted by the Holy Spirit, who will guide you into the full plan of God for your life. It truly is a whole new way of living.

The New Testament book of Hebrews talks about the new and living way that Jesus had opened up through His death and resurrection (Hebrews 10:20). There are things to be learned about the new way of living that will seem uncomfortable or perhaps a bit unusual, because they are different from anything you have learned previously. One of those things is God's instruction to forgive our enemies, those who abuse and misuse us, and to actually love and bless them. Wow! That was a hard one for me. Forgive my father, who had stolen my childhood through using me as a means to vent his own lust? Forgive my mother? She knew what my father was doing to me, and instead of rescuing me, she pretended she knew nothing and treated me as if I were doing something wrong. Forgiving them seemed totally unreasonable to me, and it took a long time for me to become willing to do it, and even then it was painful.

This is only one of many things that God has shown me about this new way of living, and that is why I say it is a lifetime journey. I am still learning. But I want to be very clear that each path the Holy Spirit has led me down on this new way has always ended up bringing me to a better place than where I was previously. God will never ask us to do anything difficult unless it will lead us to a better life. If you can begin your journey believing that, it may well make your journey shorter than mine was.

Like our computer programs, learning the new way can be challenging, and it may be tempting to revert to old ways, but if we persist in the new way, it will lead us to greater fruitfulness and ease. Throughout this book I will share many of the new

ways that God is offering you, and I sincerely pray that you take advantage of each one of them.

Loving God's Word

I love my Bible. It is so much more than a mere book; it is filled with life. It teaches us the new way of living, and in the process we begin to experience healing for our wounded souls and hope for the future. Solomon wrote about the healing found in following God's instruction when he said:

My son, attend to my words; consent *and* submit to my sayings. Let them not depart from your sight; keep them in the center of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, healing *and* health to all their flesh (Proverbs 4:20–22).

God's words are life to us and bring healing to every area of our life, including our inner life (soul). Our entire being is healed through the life-giving power of God's Word. His Word will do amazing things in our life if we will believe it. God's Word renews our mind and teaches us an entirely new way to think about God, life, ourselves, and other people.

Like many people, I once thought I knew a lot, but most of what I had learned prior to studying God's Word was wrong. I knew what the world had taught me, and I knew what I felt like, but I knew nothing about the new way of living that God wanted to teach me. God's Word is a light for your path (Psalm 119:105). Study it and do what it says to do, and you will be healed and made whole.

God's Word is medicine for our wounded souls. You might ask,

“How can studying a book become medicine for the emotional wounds from my past?” Let me explain it by using an example. If you go to the pharmacy and get a prescription filled, you go home with pills and begin taking them. Inside the pills there is medicine that promises to heal your infection, stop your pain, or heal whatever is hurting you. You take the medicine diligently, and if you are still having problems, you get it refilled and do it again. God’s Word is also full of life-giving, healing power. It may look like a book with words on pages, but when it is taken into your heart diligently and you believe it, it truly does have amazing healing power.

God’s Word is filled with promises for those who act on what He says to do, and these promises are for everyone who believes and puts their trust in Him.

God’s Word is medicine for your wounded soul.

If Bible study sounds daunting to you, or if perhaps you think that you could never understand the Bible, then I suggest that you join a group of godly people who are on the same path as you are and study together. Find one that has a good reputation, with a leader who is experienced in the areas you need help in.

Another way you might receive help is through group therapy, which has helped many people, and it gives you an opportunity to be with people who can truly have empathy for what you have gone through. If you are unable to locate such a group, I can assure you that the Holy Spirit will lead you Himself, as an individual, just as He did me. I was made whole through reading various Bible-based books on the areas I needed help in, as well as Bible study, sitting under good biblical teaching in my church, and prayer and fellowship with God.

If you need healing for your soul and you don’t know where to

go to get help, I suggest that you ask God to lead you down the healing path He has planned for you. He will lead you just as He did me, and millions of others. As you follow His guidance, you will experience the same healing and wholeness that we have.

The goal of every hurting person is to be healed, and a variety of paths can be taken. It is very important that you choose a path that is based on God's Word and His promises; otherwise, you could end up becoming more and more frustrated as you put time, effort, and perhaps a lot of money into something that never produces any good results. I know people who paid hundreds of thousands of dollars on treatment programs that promised healing and deliverance, and yet they never got any better until they let Jesus into their life and began depending on Him and following His ways.

The important thing is that you make a decision to get the help you need if you are someone who is living with wounds and bruises in your soul from past or current situations that need to be healed. An amazing life is waiting for you, one of peace and joy, filled with hope and enthusiasm. It is a life you don't want to miss!