



Given a Voice to Speak

Breaking the silence of childhood sexual abuse.

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Given a Voice to Speak

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*Your voice is precious to God,
Your voice speaks the beauty of who God created you to be into creation,
The time for darkness silencing your voice is over,
This is a time to speak,
A time to tell your story,
A time to find your healing,
A time to share your love,
A time to bring healing to others through your courage in speaking out,
You have been given a voice by God,
This is your time to speak.*

Chapter one - Why this topic?

In a nation where 1:3 girls and 1:7 boys¹ may be abused before turning 16 it is something that we are most likely encountering in people we minister alongside every day, and we have no idea. It is a topic that is still very hidden and something the church also remains strangely silent around.

Working with childhood sexual abuse survivors is something I have navigated not only in ministry settings, but also as a midwife. In the course of my non-working life, I have walked for many years with several people who are sexual abuse survivors, both male and female, and know the lifelong impact this abuse can have. I know first-hand God's heart of redeeming love for those who suffer in silence. This was a clear call from God to pick this topic up in my study leave. This is a clear call from God to the church to hear again that Jesus calls us to care for "the least of these." To be God's agents of fulfilling God's promise to those who sit in the land of deep darkness. To see the healing light of Jesus Christ pierce that

¹ <https://www.helpauckland.org.nz/sexual-abuse-statistics.html> cited Dec 2020

deep darkness to bring peace and restoration. To help them fight the injustice of oppression. To help them find the power of their God given voice to affect change for the future.

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness a light will shine.”

Isaiah 9: 2 (NLT)

This topic is huge, and I want to acknowledge here that I am only scratching the surface, but it is my hope and prayer that it will give people in ministry a deeper awareness of those who may be suffering in silence among them. A deeper awareness that takes us beyond external behaviours to ask, “what is going on for this person that they are behaving this way?” A deeper awareness of our need as a church to break the silence that still sits around sexual abuse. A deeper awareness that enables us, to the best of our ability, to protect our young ones from being sexually abused.

To do this I have sat with and listened to the stories of five sexual abuse survivors. Three females and two males. There were some general overarching questions such as how sexual abuse has impacted their lives? What behaviours were a result of being abused? How did their relationship with God come about? Did their abuse affect their image of God? How has following Jesus brought healing into their lives? What, if anything, has the church offered that has helped healing? Are there any practices in the church that they see as unhelpful for a sexual abuse survivor?

I owe a debt of great gratitude to these courageous and resilient people. If I had done nothing else in this time but listen to their stories and bring them into the light it would have been life changing. In this place of everyday ordinary listening to each story was like standing on holy ground. The burning bush of God’s presence aflame amid their giving voice to what had been silenced, in some, for many, many years. I truly thank you for the privilege of being able to listen as you found your voice to speak, a very humbling process.

These stories are frank and honest because this is the reality these childhood sexual abuse survivors have lived, and research highlights the fact that sexual abuse survivors tend to minimize their experiences. I did not want to do that, so they are written as they were spoken. This honesty has taken great courage on their part and this honesty is a part of their healing. These people can be found in churches around New Zealand every Sunday and unless they opened up to you, you would never know. All either have been or are now active

in leadership in their respective churches in different ways. Their names have been changed as it is their choice as to who, when and where they want to reveal their identity.

If anyone reading this has their own story of sexual abuse and have not yet shared it with anyone then please know there are safe people with who you can share. Please know that God is with you and wants to redeem all that has been broken and stolen from you. If you don't know where to start, there are resources at the end of this study.

These stories are interspersed with gaining understanding from both a psychological and faith perspective. This finishes with a resource of referral places, some contemplative practices and a psychological exercise drawn from an expert in the field. The hope is these resources can help the survivor to find their voice in the loving presence of our healing God who continues to make all things new. Culturally this looks mainly from a white western perspective, but many of the responses are human and cross cultural boundaries. I am very aware, however, that our Tangata Whenua, Pacific Island and Asian cultures may deal with this topic in a different cultural manner. As that is their story to tell I have not researched that here.

To begin with we need to ask the question, what is childhood sexual abuse?

Childhood sexual abuse takes in a diverse range of experiences. The World Health Organization states “Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.”² “*The Long Journey Home*,” gives the following definition. “Child sexual abuse is the exploitation of a minor³ for the sexual gratification of another person through sexual contact or sexual interaction. This definition encompasses a much broader range of behaviors than many people realize, including contact and non-contact abuse”⁴ New Zealand Psychologist Dr. Kim McGregor supports this. She states in her book “*Surviving and Moving On*,” Much

² https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/resources/publications/en/guidelines_chap7.pdf. Cited Jan. 2021.

³ Under New Zealand law anyone under the age of 16 is not considered old enough to give consent to sexual activity even if the child or young person agrees to the activity. For more detailed information see <http://www.wellstop.org.nz/information-about-sexual-abuse.html> under sexual abuse against children.

⁴ Schmutzer, Andrew, J. (Ed.) Et. Al. *The Long Journey Home*, 5, quoting Tracy, *Mending the Soul*, 27.

child sexual abuse doesn't include penetration or use more obvious violence such as physical force... The term child sexual abuse seems to better describe a wide range of possible behaviours' from non-contact sexual abuse, such as 'perving' at a child, accessing and using child pornography, grooming via the internet, through to touching a child's genitals in a sexual way and child rape."⁵

As childhood sexual abuse takes in such a wide range of behaviours' the recovery will be different for all. Those who have been repeatedly abused by a close family member may, for example, take longer to find healing than someone who was abused once by a stranger.⁶ Having said that *all* childhood sexual abuse is ethically and morally wrong and *all* abuse has the capacity to create deep and lasting harm.⁷

Anna's Story

How has sexual abuse affected my life?

Big time and still doing so, I'm now in my mid 70's.

My sexual abuse/ unhealthy touching began in my childhood and continued for many years until my mid-teens. Then it reoccurred in my first relationship.

Dad made it fun in the bath, yet I did not like it, it became normal for dad to "wash" me. Its difficult to remember when bath times started and stopped. He would walk in anytime. He also "washed" my younger sister, but she made such a fuss he stopped.

It's difficult to remember how often and when. My sister and I shared a bedroom. My bed was nearest the door with the head behind the door. The hall light shone into our room, so it wasn't completely dark. That light was switched off when we were all in bed, dad was usually the last to bed. A recent fear memory of an occurrence that happened often was of dad silently standing beside my bed silhouetted in the hall light. I huddled in bed, waiting, what will he do, will he touch me... longing for him to go to bed. I was half asleep (deep sleeper) therefore only half conscious of his touching. I may still have submerged memories.

⁵ McGregor, Kim. *Surviving and Moving On*, 17-18.

⁶ Ibid. 100

⁷ Schmutzer, Andrew, J. (Editor). *The Long Journey Home*, 5.

I remember being a lonely child, partly I lost a dear brother at 7 yrs. of age. At that time, I felt my mum abandoned me (not her fault as she was grieving). I sensed I was different, but I had no understanding at all of why that might be.

I was always seeking dad's attention as he was aloof. He was much older than my mother and weary after working. One evening when I was in my high school uniform Mum was busy in the kitchen, Dad was in the sitting room, and he invited me to sit on his knee. I thought great, but then he touched me wrongly, but at the same time gently and lovingly saying "this is what your mother likes." I liked it too.

The next incident was very different which also had powerful long-term effects on me. I had LOTS of counselling around this incident. My brother, four years older, had bullied me before this incident. Some of this due to my middle brother's death and his anger coming out at me. He had a strong influence on me. When I was about ten, he invited me into mum and dad's big bedroom to try on swim wear. He then proceeded to touch me wrongly, all done silently. While he was silently looking at me naked, I noticed on the light high up on the wall, I studied the lovely evening sunbeam coming through the window. I now know that was dissociating. Also, later suggested in counselling, that God was with me through this, and much more could have happened... in time this has been a comfort. This incident has affected our relationship. I tried to make a time to talk to him, part of working with counsellor, but very much NO. I forgave him long ago and years later we are much better together. Praise God.

Sometime later he was babysitting, he suddenly came and lay on top of me and did his thing, stopped, heavy then left. I guess there were no boundaries in our house.

What behaviours did this background produce in me?

For me, the main long-term effect, was in the beginning being awakened far too early to sexual desires. I was looking for boys from 15 years of age, even earlier. In my late teens I felt different to my friends. They had steady boyfriends, settled down, had children and amazingly have all stayed married. I was different. Due to the sexual abuse my ability to have clear boundaries had been taken from me. This meant I allowed men to touch me in a way that wasn't healthy.

My first love happened in my early teenage years over many years. It was strong and deep for me, becoming sexual. I harboured a deep one-sided love. I was devastated when he got engaged. I started training for my career and during this time would go weekly to the dance hall. I loved dancing but left with virtually any guy who offered me a lift home. Over the next few years, I had several romances but none lasting. At twenty I met a much older man with a chequered history. I should have been able to see the danger signs, but I didn't. I was so ready to have a man. It was disastrous. Seven years of an off and on-again relationship in which I was sexually abused. I tried moving to a different town to get away from him, but he persisted. What a wasted seven years, my childbearing years.

The next 27 years I continued to be needy for a man to validate me, but I am now finding healing in this place. It is no longer a driving need. After short recovery of this traumatic relationship of 7 years my brother invited me to come and see New Zealand. I moved to a different place and the deep desire for "a man," for attention, for closeness moved with me. Eventually I met Jo, we had an instant liking and quickly got into a serious relationship. I soon found Jo didn't want to marry again or have children as he had been married before with 2 children, one with special needs. I knew I had to leave him as I wanted to have children. At the time I thought, the only way I was strong enough to do that was to return to my home country. A year later I returned to New Zealand and Jo as we needed each other. Even though Jo was emotionally unable to marry at that point. Nine plus years later, on a wonderful day, I was married at 39 to Jo. We had a good relationship. Sadly, six months after we were married, he was diagnosed with cancer and died seventeen months later. He became a strong Christian in his fight with cancer.

I missed him so much, but what did I do? I sought another man. I jumped in with such vigour. My friends were too polite to burst my bubble. Although some hinted strongly, they didn't feel this person was right for me. We married a year later and had eight years married. I spent seven and a half of those years crying inside, until through counselling I became strong enough to ask Paul to leave. Eventually we divorced. He was verbally and emotionally abusive. I continued in counselling on and off including with someone trained in sexual abuse counselling. I did not pick up with a man for the next 20 years. I became really scared to get too close to a man. I did well, becoming very independent, working hard and growing in my self-esteem.

Alcohol played a large part in my life. Dad was a silent alcoholic; we kids didn't know. He would drink in the army mess to drown his sorrows. My first relationship (typical of a daughter of an alcoholic) I had married an alcoholic, again silent, I didn't pick up on this until near the end of our relationship. I was amazed how blind/ innocent I was – crazy. Something to do with living with secrets, not admitting problems. I lived as if I had two parts to my life. Part of me lived as a good person, knowing I had done well in my career, then there was my secret personal side that I am now ashamed of. It took a long time to live life fully and honestly. I lived with secrets all my life so did not know how completely freeing it was to be completely honest about everything. It has taken years to write this out as secrecy was such a habit, such a way of life.

The sexual abuse has also affected my physical health having lived with chronic fatigue for many years which doctors were unaware of back then, so it was partly treated with anti-depressants for 20 years. My healing came gradually through alternative health practices. My digestive system still remains dodgy. As a child I had unrecognised dyspraxia which left me thinking I was unintelligent and yet I had high expectations of myself. This came from dad being in the war, everything had to be right and correct. Despite my learning difficulty I qualified in a good profession and later went on to do post grad studies in my field. My life has been very complex. Much energy went into stuffing down unconscious memories. Counselling helped me to navigate these in a healthy way. The sexual abuse was not acknowledged in my life until I faced and worked through what had happened in my childhood. I started counselling around 48 years.

In my mid-seventies having had no real thoughts about my abuse for years, my GP referred me for several investigative tests which involved examination of my vagina and rectum. This brought back real memories with feelings too, especially fear. These memories went to a deeper level, leaving me with questions. Why was I so fearful that I froze waiting? If dad only put his hands under the bed clothes to touch me wrongly and I was half asleep, why so fearful? Why was my sister so fearful too? This experience was strong and lasted for several days. The difference here was that I had a voice. I was able to speak about the experience to my close kind partner and female minister. The feelings passed and I have had no further repercussions.

Chapter two - The Silence of Abuse.

“If no one remembers a misdeed or names it publicly, it remains invisible. To the observer, its victim is not a victim and its perpetrator is not a perpetrator; both are misperceived because the suffering of the one and the violence of the other go unseen. A double injustice occurs—the first when the original deed is done and the second when it disappears.”

Miroslav Volf.

Silence would have to be one of the big issues around childhood sexual abuse. This silence is not just a problem for the survivor, we will look at this more closely further on, silence is a big issue for society and as we are discovering, regrettably, a big issue for the church. As we can see from Anna’s story and in the many historical cases of abuse before the courts at present childhood sexual abuse is no new phenomenon.

There is a vast amount of literature is available on this topic both secular and from a faith perspective and yet we still hear so little about it in our day-to-day living, let alone being preached or discussed openly in the church. Why is that? In reality, the answers are complex and there is no way it can all be covered here. One issue that bears relevance was brought to light in discussing childhood sexual abuse with a trained Psychotherapist who has worked with survivors over many years. She believes that two of humanities most used coping mechanisms are denial and avoidance. It feels much safer to circumnavigate difficult circumstances in life by denying and avoiding them rather than confronting and facing truth to do the challenging work of healing. This is very evident as a coping mechanism for childhood sexual abuse survivors but is also evident in the way society (and I would add the church) has tried to cope.

Dr. Kim McGregor would support this, she says “Denial is a coping strategy that can deflect us from feeling the pain associated with the content of distressing information.”⁸ This is a needed strategy, at times, to protect us from being overwhelmed by the constant barrage of

⁸ McGregor, Kim. *Surviving and Moving On*,54.

bad news that goes on in our world daily basis.⁹ Has it been easier for society to ignore the signs of abuse and to remain silent because the truth is too terrible and disturbing to cope with? Another common way of coping is to react defensively and blame others. It can be easier to blame the child or the parents for not protecting their children. We can blame social workers and those who work with the survivors for over reporting rather than look at what is really going on in society. Or we can harass the messenger.¹⁰

Historically children have had little in the way of rights. During the Middle Ages they were viewed as small adults so sexual abuse was rife. Up until around the 16th century children were viewed as property with parents having total power over them.¹¹ During the industrial revolution children were seen in economic terms. All of this made it highly unlikely a child would ever have been believed over an adult. The old adage “children should be seen and not heard” reflects the attitudes of society that have contributed to the silence around childhood sexual abuse. Thankfully, things are changing but as Dr. McGregor says

“For us as a community accepting that children are sexually abused daily by people we know and trust requires us to alter almost everything we have been taught to believe. If non abusing adults are to work together for the protection of children, a shift in our serotyped thinking about how we view everyone around us, including boys, girls, men, women, trusted people and all those in families is needed.”¹²

For the survivor, silence can be motivated by several factors. Young children tend to believe if anything bad happens to them it is their fault. Until they are around seven, they think adults are infallible, knowing everything about them and the world and are never wrong. If they are abused, they are inclined to believe it is their fault and not the adults. The shame and fear generated around this can keep them silent for years. The secrecy that surrounds the act, even for very young children sends the message that what is happening is wrong or bad and/ or shameful and must not be talked about.¹³ They can remain silent out confusion, not

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. 55. McGregor gives the example of Miriam Saphira. An Aotearoa/ New Zealand Psychologist who suffered harassment from the New Zealand press for over a decade simply because she re-reported, in the 80's, the Kinsey study out of America that stated 1:4 was likely to be sexually abused before the age of 14. To read more about the historical reasons see pages 56-59.

¹¹ *The Long Journey Home*, 29.

¹² *Surviving and Moving On*, 60.

¹³ Ibid. 68-69.

understanding what has gone on and out of fear about what will happen to them or members of the family if they do tell. If they do tell, will they be believed? They may not have the words to describe what has happened. They may have tried to tell and were not believed or even worse were punished.¹⁴ They can remain silent out of fear, having been threatened with punishment or even death. They can remain silent because, in order to cope, they have denied what has gone on. Barbara Hansen, in her book *“Listen to the Cry of the Child, the deafening Silence of Sexual Abuse”* shares her own journey. Raised in a loving Christian family, the daughter of a minister she was sexually abused at 11 by a youth pastor and then by an extended family member. She says *“An abuse victim suffers in silence. By remaining silent and with the fear of anyone discovering “my secret,” the effects of abuse on my adult life were sometimes more devastating than the actual abuse. I had been trying for years to get free from my addiction to denial.”*¹⁵

For many children, a response of fright and freeze or flight and fight are normal reactions to child sexual abuse. These reactions are normal in adults and children when confronted with danger or high stress situations. If the options of fight or flight are not available to us we may freeze. In a sexual abuse scenario for children the fight or flight option is not valid, so they tend to freeze. What does that look like? It can include pretending to be asleep or going limp. *“The shock of being sexually abused is, on its own, often enough to silence a child...threats of any kind can ensure the silence continues.”*¹⁶

Peter’s Story.

When I was four years old, I was in town with mum (mum had a deep faith and attended the catholic church regularly and I was raised in that faith and to pray often) she needed to change my baby brother, so she went to the Plunket rest rooms. Before we went in, she asked if I wanted to go to the toilet and I said yeh. For reasons known only to mum she took me to the men’s toilets in a building away from the rest rooms. There was an older man with swarthy skin and dark hair outside with his bike.

¹⁴ MacDonald, Kathy. Lambie, Ian. Simmons, Les. *Counselling for Sexual Abuse*, 10.

¹⁵ Hansen, Barbara J. *Listen to the Cry of the Child, the deafening Silence of Sexual Abuse.*” 24.

¹⁶ *Surviving and Moving On*, 65-66.

Mum asked a total stranger if he would take me to the toilet while she went and changed the baby. He said yes. Once inside he helped me to unzip my pants then he did the same but his was more than just going to the toilet he exposed himself to me in a sexual manner. Once outside mum still was not back so he lifted me up on the handlebars of his bike and he got on the seat. He wrapped his trench coat around us both and again exposed himself and inappropriately touched me and made me touch him... at four years old I had no idea of what was happening, and he was making strange noises.

He had placed himself in a way that he could see when mum was leaving the Plunket rooms. When he saw her coming, he made everything look right and told me if I ever spoke about what had happened something terrible would happen to me in the dark. Mum came back and thanked the man very much for looking after me... I still struggle to believe mum would leave me with a stranger, what was she thinking...

I never said a word, this is the first time apart from sharing with my wife prior to this that I have spoken of it in 70 years!! And I lived in fear every night. As I grew the anger, shame and rage grew inside.

When I was sixteen, I was asked by a teacher to come for an interview. When I arrived, I thought the conversation seemed odd. Then this male teacher tried to fondle me and kiss me... the anger inside of me snapped and I knew how to box so I lashed out and hit him sending him flying. I left the school never to return. I tried to tell mum and dad about this, but they refused to believe me, but my friends had an idea and I found out later that I was not the only one. So, the anger and the deep bitterness continued to rage under the surface.

What effect did it have on me?

I became self-centred, angry, cold hearted. Sex was always about meeting my needs; I didn't care about the needs of the other. Alcohol and pornography became ways of dulling the deep pain and shame that I carried. Depression and getting so low I was suicidal have all been a part of my life.

Chapter three - The Impacts of Abuse

*My Refuge, I get so scared.
So scared of...
People who hurt others
People who are mean
Memories that overwhelm.
Emptiness, fullness, You.
Scared of failure
Scared of rejection.
Scared of “wrong, wrong, wrong.”
Scared of all these feelings inside of me
That leave me small and shaking.
Scared of pain.
You say, “perfect love casts out all fear.”
My Refuge, I’m afraid to ask you:
Bring Your perfect love to me.¹⁷*

Child sexual abuse is different to adult sexual abuse in its consequences because the child’s brain is still forming. “A child’s brain is much more malleable to experience than an adult brain. Although experiences can alter an adult they can literally shape a child.”¹⁸ Having said that not every person who suffers abuse will have on going affects particularly if they have safe and supportive people around them to aid healing. For others though the impact can continue over a longer period of time. For some the healing can be further delayed as they are drawn into further abusive relationships. So, what are some of the more common impacts of childhood sexual abuse for the survivor?

Depression and Anxiety

Depression is identified as one of the most common complaints and symptoms of child sexual abuse and those who have experienced abuse are much more likely to suffer from depression than those who have not.¹⁹ This is prolonged depression that lasts more than two weeks and

¹⁷ Foote, Catherine J. *Survivor Prayers*, 29.

¹⁸ *Surviving and Moving On*, 85. For a fuller description of the effects on the developing brain see pages 85-88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 89.

is accompanied by physical symptoms such as chronic fatigue, unexplained aches, changes in eating patterns leading to weight loss or gain, inability to concentrate or be decisive, inability to relax and sleeping difficulty. Feeling sad, hopeless, ashamed, worthless, no longer caring, loss of pleasure, suicidal thoughts.²⁰ A point to note “about half of the depressed survivors complain of physical rather than emotional symptoms.”²¹ They will mention physical conditions such as headaches, constipation or chronic fatigue and not say anything about how they are feeling, whether they are sad, overwhelmed or hopeless.²² A response to having to deny their feelings in order to survive.

Anxiety and phobias are birthed out of the fear that is experienced, sometimes daily over long periods of time.²³ Panic attacks, claustrophobia, agoraphobia, fear of going crazy or dying can all be experienced and if their sexual abuse has not been worked through the stress of the attacks can further spiral them even deeper into fear and anxiety.²⁴ Ironically for some they will develop a fearlessness. “Others who feel there are no safe places in the world may put themselves in dangerous situations. Like soldiers suffering from shell shock, they²⁵ have gone beyond the normal boundary of fear that usually restricts people. They appear to be completely fearless because of their over exposure to fear.”

Self-Harm

The need to escape the constant emotional pain of child sexual can result in many different types of self-harm. Survivors can turn to alcohol, drugs, substance abuse, multiple sexual partners, pornography, bulimia, cutting and attempts at suicide to seek relief. Sadly, for the person, these attempts to self soothe often result in addictions. This takes them further into shame, low self-worth and a vicious cycle of destruction.²⁶

Shame

The feeling of deep shame came up in most of the interviews and with conversations I have had with several people who are survivors, whose stories are not shared here. Many tend to take responsibility and partly or fully blame themselves for what happened. Sadly, this can be

²⁰ Graber, Ken, M.A. *Ghosts in the Bedroom, A Guide for Partners of Incest Survivors*, 121.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Surviving and Moving On*, 112-113.

²⁴ *Ghosts in the Bedroom*, 120.

²⁵ Saphira, Miriam. *For Your Child's Sake*, 62.

²⁶ *Surviving and Moving On*, 115.

reinforced by the perpetrator. Some, too young to understand that our bodies are physiologically wired to respond to sexual acts, feel confused, guilty and responsible because they became sexually aroused during the abuse, locking them into a deeper shame. Some feel shame and guilt because they feel they should have been able to stop what was going on.²⁷

“From a very early age, children in most cultures learn there is something very wrong with sexual abuse. This is evident from the secrecy in which it occurs, as well as from their own responses of pain, fear and confusion. For most it is only a small step from knowing abuse is wrong to feeling shame and guilt for being a part of it.”²⁸

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

For some survivor's PTSD develops as a result of exposure to traumatic experience/s of sexual or other abuse where the survivor reexperiences the abuse in several ways. These might include nightmares, flashbacks, sensory or physical reminders that are emotionally distressing. Avoidance of traumatic memories, thoughts and feelings. Negative thoughts and beliefs about themselves and the world. Depressive symptoms. Hypervigilance, irritability, difficulty sleeping, easily startled, difficulty concentrating, risky behaviours. Impaired social or occupational functioning.²⁹ As the emotion associated with trauma is fear this means living with a state of perpetual fear. PTSD must be diagnosed by a specialist.

Judith's Story

I knew something had happened, but I didn't know what. From an early age I was absolutely petrified at night. Sweat would pour off me in the dark. I would wake several times a night and my eyes would always go straight to the door and then scan the room. This pattern carried on into my adult years. I would go to school and later work, zonked.

I always felt as if I was going to be attacked. I always carried shame and thought I was being punished for doing something bad. Over the year men were always sexually provocative towards me rubbing up against me and as I got older would comment on my bust. I always felt like a piece of meat, even with my husband who was always loving and caring. In my early teen years, I had a teacher who threatened to kill me if I didn't perform oral sex on him. In my early 20's I was abducted but this wasn't sexual.

²⁷ *Counselling for Sexual Abuse*, 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 38.

²⁹ Summarized from the DSM manual, for a fuller summary see appendix 4

It wasn't until I started a counselling course and the reading and teaching, particularly around boundaries and addictive behaviours and the reasons for those behaviours that I realised I had been abused at night and I had shut down to forget. I had also developed victim thinking and manipulation became my way of having my needs met. I also had an over realised sense of responsibility. For years, my coping mechanism had been bulimia. The fear and sense of being alone that I carried was overwhelming and I could not control it, but with bulimia believed I had control. Those few moments of eating were seconds of bliss and then I could remove the food from my body.

Some years later I had a nervous breakdown and that is when my healing fully began. The psychiatrist was able to help me see my vulnerability. He empowered me through listening and giving me better ways of coping. I started to let go of guilt and shame that was not mine to own. They were all rooted back to what had happened in my childhood and beyond. I realised I was a good person and I was not to blame for everything that went on. I learned to ask good questions of myself such as, is what this person is saying about me based on truth or their own issues? Counselling certainly brought healing into my cognitive and emotional processing but where was God in all this?

I became a Christian at 15 years when I cried out to God to help me. I am not sure why I cried out to God, but I do remember through religious instruction at school that they used to teach about a God who loved me, and it gave me a hope. At secondary school, a good teacher said to me "God has His hand on you, has a purpose for you. You have a goodness and an understanding about people." These words were in stark contrast to my self-talk... "I'm not good enough, I've got to change!"

Dissociation

Many survivors learn to separate their minds from their bodies in order to cope with what was happening. Unless healing happens, dissociation can continue as a coping mechanism and in times of stress the survivor splits their mind off from their body until they feel it is safe to return to normal.

Relational issues

Feelings of betrayal and mistrust, along with shame and the low self-worth that often entails can make relating to yourself and to others a difficult task for the survivor. Having been betrayed and used for another's self-gratification can cause extremes of behaviour. Survivors can go from trying to lessen their emotional pain by getting into an intimate relationship, but then want to withdraw from the intimacy that creates.³⁰ Sometimes they can become needy and clingy, hoping that the relationship will heal them. "This dependence may also echo the hopeless feeling associated with abuse."³¹ It can also mean, for some, becoming co-dependant, living to satisfy the needs of others and ignoring their own emotional needs. Living for the approval of others means they are often too frightened to say "no" in case the other disapproves.³² Any hint of rejection or betrayal, even something as innocent as partner being late, or a snub from a friend, can cause them to get angry, isolate or spiral into self-harming behaviour.³³

The deep anger, that rightly goes with being betrayed and violated, is either suppressed with the abuse or is expressed against others who were not the perpetrator. Either way the effects of anger, if not dealt with in a healthy way, can be destructive to both the survivor and those they are in relationship with. The survivor, having been badly betrayed and their trust violated can also push the other in a relationship to the limit testing to see if they will break their trust and leave the relationship. Sadly, if the other person has no idea about the abuse, they have suffered this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Some, as children have had to learn to lie, manipulate and hide things to survive. Others in order to survive take on the characteristics of those who are cruel and harmful. For them being controlling and dominant may appear to be the best way to survive and not be hurt.³⁴ If these patterns of behaviours are carried into adult life, they are relationally destructive.

Boundaries

Childhood sexual abuse means survivors boundaries have also been violated.

What is a boundary?

³⁰ *Surviving and Moving On*, 93.

³¹ *Ibid.* 94.

³² *Ghosts in the Bedroom*, 29. For a comparison of co-dependant identity with healthy identity see page 35.

³³ *Surviving and Moving On*, 94.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 120-121.

“Boundaries, in a broad sense, are lines or things that mark a limit, bound or border. In a psychological sense, boundaries are the realization of our own person apart from others... It says what we are and what we are not, what we will choose and what we will not choose, what we will endure and what we will not, what we feel and what we will not feel, what we like and what we do not like, and what we want and what we do not want. Boundaries, in short, define us.”³⁵

In healthy family or community system people communicate well, have visible boundaries, flexible roles, a sense of identity and relationships with others that are helpful, caring and honouring.³⁶ Violation of survivors physical and emotional boundaries by the abuser means trampling their boundaries to “trespass on their personhood.”³⁷ This makes it difficult for survivors later in life to know what healthy boundaries are.

Deborah’s story

When I was 11 years old, we were at home being baby sat by my older brother. We had always been close and up until this night we had a normal sibling relationship. This night, completely out of the blue my brother suddenly, in words I cannot fully remember, started talking in a way I had never heard him talk before. I had no idea how to respond. I knew it was something he should not be asking but I also trusted him to the limit, so would he ask to do something that was wrong? I remember freezing on the spot, wanting to run but found myself doing what he asked. From the moment he started it felt all wrong and I felt a deep sense of shame. He did what he wanted and then proclaimed I did not feel the same as someone else at school, leaving me feeling like I had something wrong with me. Fear flooded in and I knew I could not tell mum or dad because *we* would be in trouble (my perception not necessarily a reality). I carried blame right from the start that somehow this was my fault.

Over the next few years what would often start a tickling game that would end up with him fondling my breasts. I did not like what was happening but did not seem to be able to stop it either. I was totally confused about what was going on. Somewhere along the way thankfully it all stopped. I was

³⁵ Courtright, John and Rogers, Sid (Dr.), *Your Wife Was Sexually Abused*, 55. Quoting Henry Cloud, *Changes that Heal*.

³⁶ *The Long Journey Home*, 18.

³⁷ *Your Wife Was Sexually Abused*, 56.

to find out several years later that my brothers abrupt change in nature was a result of him being sexually abused by a distant relative. This has helped me come to terms with what I went through.

Initially I had no real understanding of what had happened. I remember when I was in my late teens crying out to God and asking, “If I’ve been sexually abused can you please show me.” I knew full well what I had been through, but I did not understand that what my brother had done to me was sexual abuse. I took the blame myself and put that down to normal childhood sexual exploration. What led me to that cry? We had been raised in a loving Christian home and in my early teens I learned that sex was part of God’s plan for intimate loving relationship between a man and a wife and yet for some reason now in my late teens sex seemed anything but.

Due to my boundaries being violated through my abuse I had no idea how to put boundaries around my body, which I also had a deep self-loathing for. I thought the only way a man would be interested in me was if he had my body so I would give it only to find I hated myself even more and felt worse than I had before. I did not know how to say no when something was happening that I did not like. I lost my virginity in an unpleasant way to someone who did not even care for me because I did not know how to say stop, you are hurting me. I turned to alcohol to relieve my pain, but it became a vicious cycle as the alcohol made it even easier for men to get close to me.

During this time, I met Jesus in a very tangible way. I had been moved at a Christian meeting run by ISCF. I met Jesus and God’s pure and gentle love that was beyond anything I had known before. I made a conscious decision to follow Jesus for myself. I was fully involved in church, but my own brokenness had me leading a double life. I was totally sincere about my faith, but it seemed I was totally unable to stop myself going down a wrong path.

Powerlessness

Survivors can be left with a deep sense of powerlessness. This is primarily cause by them having been stripped of their power to choose their inability to stop the abuse and their inability to stop the relentless pain it causes.³⁸ Sexual abuse was never their choice. “If the abuse occurred one time or hundreds, the fact does not change; to the degree that the choice was denied, powerlessness was experienced, and dignity was denied.”³⁹ This deep helplessness leads to hidden wounds which ooze doubt, despair and deadness.⁴⁰ These

³⁸ Alleneder, Dan B. *The Wounded Heart*. 114.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 118.

wounds set the survivor up for relationship problems and revictimization through a loss of self, a loss of sense of pain, a loss of judgement and wisdom.⁴¹

Revictimization

Sadly, survivors are more likely to be revictimized and abused either verbally, emotionally or sexually again.⁴² If survivors continue without help, there can be a tendency to keep living as victims. Tied into powerlessness they see life as something that happens to them which they are unable to change. International studies show survivors are more likely to end up needing refuge from physical/ sexual abuse, end up homeless, in prison or as sex workers.⁴³ One women's prison chaplain I spoke with said every woman in prison that she has worked with has been sexually abused. Very sadly studies also show that "survivors are more likely than those who have not been abused to suffer from verbal, physical or sexual abuse from professionals such as doctors, *clergy (italics mine)*, therapists and psychiatrists."⁴⁴ Survivors are also revictimized if they muster the courage to tell someone and they are not believed. If they are not believed the first time, they tell they are less likely to report any subsequent abuse.⁴⁵

Triggers

Triggers are certain smells, sounds, sights, places or touches that evoke memories or other legacies from the sexual abuse. They can also trigger unwanted feelings of shame or coping mechanisms, such as dissociation.⁴⁶ Simple things like riding in a car or being in a lift, being in a conflict situation, having to speak out loud, being laughed at, certain times of year, night-time, certain aftershave or perfume smells even certain foods can be triggers. As a midwife I found, anecdotally, that the nature of childbirth where the pain happens to the woman and she feels she has no control could also trigger memories of childhood sexual abuse. These triggers can cause some survivors to have what appears to be an overreaction to something that would seem insignificant to others⁴⁷

⁴¹ Ibid, 120.

⁴² *Ghosts in the Bedroom*, 97.

⁴³ McGregor. *Surviving and Moving On*, 96.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *The Long Journey Home*, 57.

⁴⁶ *Ghosts in the Bedroom*, 98.

⁴⁷ *Surviving and Moving On*, 194.

Joseph's Story

When I was 11 and a boy scout, which I had been for several years, one of the leaders tempted me with promises of rewards that sounded appealing, to meet him in a place away from others. I had no reason not to trust this person and so I went. After a time of hanging out he demanded that I perform oral sex on him and if I didn't, I would be in serious trouble. He also demanded that I was to keep silent or I would be in serious trouble and he would tell others this was all my fault. That one moment has had a lifelong impact on me.

I learned how to live life in two parts. One visible to the world and the other hidden and secret stuffed down for no one else to see. As time went by, I could go from someone who was good and caring to a person in rage, lashing out viciously in a matter of seconds. I lost my ability to trust, especially males in places of authority. To survive I had to rely on myself and nobody else, because I was the only one, I could trust. Sex became about conquests not intimacy.

This self-reliance, anger and living in two worlds has gone with me through life. It carried into my marriage. I built walls to protect myself from the harm of others but also built walls that stopped my wife and those I love from fully knowing me. The code of silence meant I never learned how to express my needs in a healthy way, anger being the only emotion that I knew how to express. It took 25 years of marriage before I came to a place where I finally started to break down those walls and let my wife into what had happened to me. Pornography had become a coping mechanism for me, but it was also destroying the love and trust that my wife had for me. That opened the door to my healing journey. My wife listened and held me in safe, loving arms as I let it all out.

Over time, but not straight away the healing would go deeper. Regrettably, it took me falling into pornography again before my wife helped me see that I needed more help than what she could give me and that staying in the place of relying on pornography to survive was not tenable for me or our marriage. So I made the decision to seek further help. I went to my GP who arranged for me to have counselling through an ACC counsellor who specialised in sexual abuse. This counselling continued on and off as the need arose over the next 3-4 years. Through this I was able to come to a place where I have told my children what happened and apologised to them for any unintended effect it has had on their lives. I made

the choice not to pursue the perpetrator as I didn't want to face him again and he would now either be dead or very old, unlikely to be a danger to anyone else.

My relationship with God came about later in life. I was not raised in a Christian family, but my wife was. When we got married, she wasn't going to church but after our first child was born, she started going again. I didn't care if she went, I had time for myself, but I used to get angry with her if she tried to get me involved or got too religious around me. I didn't trust men in authority and the church was no different. Over the years though, my wife had a couple of ministers who were good men and became good friends without pressuring me to get involved.

Chapter four - The Healing Road

I realized that healing begins with our taking our pain out of its diabolical isolation and seeing that whatever we suffer, we suffer in communion with all of humanity, and yes, all of creation. In doing so we become participants in the great battle against the powers of darkness. Our little lives participate in something larger.

Henri Nouwen.

For adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse healing is a complex process and it is one that happens over time, sometimes gradually over many years. Curiously healing is found relationally. Just as the powers of darkness use relationship to rob, kill and destroy, so too God and society use safe, loving relationship to bring healing. “Ironically it seems that healing from being harmed by one human being is best done with another human being – but this time a human who is safe, caring and supportive.”⁴⁸ Due to the confines of time around this study leave, we will look briefly at some main themes of healing before turning to how the church might help or hinder that healing.

It is important to recognise from the outset that psychology offers vital input in the healing journey. As a church we too can bring vital elements of healing, but we are not trained in the expert understanding of the brain and mind that those who work in the psychological disciplines are. It would be akin to me as a midwife operating on a cancer patient. It would be not only irresponsible but also dangerous. Having said that, science informed, and mental health perspectives tend to talk in terms of recovery rather than healing.⁴⁹ Why is that? Janelle Kwee a Doctor of Psychology gives some helpful insight saying “*Healing*, though related to remission and recovery, is not a measurable, practitioner orientated outcome, and is essential beyond psychological science. As a concept, though implied as a goal in medical and psychological treatment, it ultimately belongs in the realm of faith. Healing ultimately belongs to God, our Jehovah - Rapha “the Lord your Healer” (Exod 15:26 ESV).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Surviving and Moving On*, 235 – 236.

⁴⁹ *The Long Journey Home*, 278.

⁵⁰ *The Long Journey Home*, 279.

While each person's experience of sexual abuse and healing will be different there are some patterns of recovery that can be identified. From a counselling perspective it would be

- Acknowledging the abuse has occurred.
- Making the decision to heal.
- Talking to others about the abuse.
- Placing responsibility where it belongs.
- Dealing with loss and sadness.
- Expressing anger.
- Working through difficulties caused by the abuse.
- Building a future.⁵¹

Ellen Bass and Laura Davis in their book *"The Courage to Heal"* outline the healing process in this way, but they do point out that although most of these stages are needed for every survivor, a few of them – the emergency stage, remembering the abuse, confronting your family, and forgiveness are not appropriate for every person.⁵²

- The decision to heal. Deep healing only happens when you choose it and are willing to change yourself.
- The emergency stage. Dealing with memories and suppressed feelings can be tumultuous. Remember this is only a stage it won't last forever.
- Remembering. Remembering is the process of getting back both memory and feeling.
- Believing it happened. Survivor's often doubt their own perceptions.
- Breaking the silence. Telling another human being what happened to you is a powerful healing force that can dispel the shame of being a victim.
- Understanding it wasn't your fault. Adult survivors must place the blame where it belongs – directly on the shoulders of the abuser.
- Making contact with the child within. Many survivors have lost touch with their own vulnerability. Getting in touch with the child within can help you feel compassion for yourself, more anger at your abuser, and greater intimacy with others.
- Trusting yourself. The best guide for healing is your own inner voice. Learning to trust your own perceptions, feelings and intuitions forms a new basis for action in the world.

⁵¹ *Counselling for Sexual Abuse*, 30.

⁵² Bass, Ellen and Davis, Laura. *The Courage to Heal*. Harper Rowe, New York, 1988.

- Grieving and mourning. Most survivors haven't acknowledged or felt their losses. Grieving is a way to honour your pain, let go and move into the present.
- Anger – the backbone of healing. Whether you need to get in touch with it or have plenty to spare, directing your rage squarely at your abuser, and at those who didn't protect you, is pivotal to healing.
- Disclosures and confrontations. Directly confronting your abuser/ and or family is not for every survivor but done at the right time with proper support can be a cleansing tool.
- Forgiveness? Forgiveness of the abuser⁵³ is not an essential part of the healing process. The only essential forgiveness is to yourself.
- Spirituality. Having a sense of power greater than yourself can be a real asset in the healing process.
- Resolution and moving on. As you move through these stages (sometimes again and again), you will reach a point of integration. Your feelings and perspectives will stabilize. You will come to terms with your abuser and other family members. While you won't erase your history, you will make deep and lasting changes in your life.⁵⁴

In looking at the stages of healing Dr Kwee, "*The Long Journey Home*," points out that reducing the complexities of healing into simple stages can run the risk of becoming formulaic but also highlights that there is a sequence of typical healing stages.⁵⁵ These are broadly

- Safety. It's vital to address a survivor's need for safety before healing work can begin.⁵⁶
- Remembrance, the hardest part of the healing.
- Mourning/lament. Greif and mourning give the best understanding of the emotions that are experienced with remembering. Lament cries out to God refusing to settle with the way things are, lament calls on God to act, calling for restoration and justice.
- Reconnection with themselves, others and to life is vital to healing, but reconciliation with the perpetrator is not.
- Hope. Embracing their new identity as a "survivor" and not a victim is filled with the life-giving wonder of hope.

⁵³ Forgiveness will be looked at in more depth under how the church hinders healing.

⁵⁴ *Courage to Heal*, 58-59.

⁵⁵ *The Long Journey Home*, 282 -290.

⁵⁶Ibid. 285. A survivor needs to feel safe in their own body, their environment and their relationship with the person they are disclosing to before they have the emotional capacity to face the task of remembering.

Kwee also gives some helpful comparisons of healing in sexual abuse.⁵⁷

What Healing Is

Safety
Remembrance
Mourning/ Lament
Reconnection
Hope

What Healing Is Not

Silence
Forgetting
Forced Reconciliation
Disconnection/ Isolation
Fear

In healing we need to remember that it's impossible to hit the delete button and wipe out the destruction of the abuse of the past and harm it caused, but the wounds can be healed.

“When afforded the necessary conditions for healing, gradually [the wounds] give way to tender scars. Healing is about care not cure. Healing takes place when the survivors wound is seen, heard, believed and cared for. The scars that remain are memorials to the violation of sexual abuse. They remind the survivor of life’s preciousness and vulnerability. The person with a scar has learned to handle their vulnerabilities with care, to listen to their own voice of discernment, and to selectively trust others.”⁵⁸

Anna’s Story continued.

It's difficult to say how much affect sexual abuse had on my image of God because I would say lots affected that. As a child I attended church and Sunday school regularly. From there I went into youth fellowship and was also a member of Brownies and Guides. During this time, I gained a head knowledge, but I didn’t gain relationship with a loving God, Jesus or understand about the Holy Ghost.

When I was 50 years and the chronic Fatigue symptoms were at their height I started attending counselling. I was reading my devotions sitting in bed one Saturday morning. The devotion was “Every Day with Jesus.” Inside the front cover was the picture of a toddler

⁵⁷ *The Long Journey Home*, 282.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 290.

running towards someone. Their face was sheer delight, joy and excitement. I had a God moment... wow this is how I could be running into Gods arms.

It took me months from this time to raise my head and look at God. Firstly, I had to turn around as I felt I was grovelling on the ground wishing I could go into a rabbit hole, deep into the hill. I was trying hard each day in my own strength to be a good Christian, but God wanted to love me as I was. My relationship with Jesus developed later through Spiritual Direction, Jesus became my perfect brother, praise God. For years I have said heavenly Father to distinguish between my earthly father who had been authoritarian and rather distant. (Many years within military service). While growing up, I tried to do all jobs well so I would get his praise. I was frightened of his voice as he occasionally got really angry. For years whenever I heard a strong, gruff stern voice I would cringe and be unable to think.

Now into my 70's I was getting on really well for 20 years – just fine on my own getting into routines and being ‘strong, busy and independent’. I did not have time for a ‘man’ in my life!! Suddenly yet slowly, without my recognising it a relationship developed with a late friends’ husband. Over the months feelings changed!! Thomas was an older, gentle, loving, kind gentleman. Gradually we became a couple. There was much healing on both sides as we both shared our pasts in a deep way. I could trust him as he seemed to understand. Was he my first ‘soul- mate’? God works in mysterious, delightful ways.

How has the Church hindered and how has the church helped my healing?

For me personally, I have not come across any practices that were unhelpful as a sexual abuse survivor although it did take years to shift some of the old teachings I had grown up with. Most did not know that part of my life. However, God knew, and I guess all the prayer I had for healing helped. I became part of a healthy church family where the pastor spent years helping me into a deeper understanding of the Christian faith. I attended many conferences to learn and grow in my faith and going up for prayer for healing. These experiences in time led me into leading a healing service within our church.

For six years I attended a women's healing ministry during the week with 3 weekend camps annually. During this time, I had a huge amount of prayer for healing and for a lot of other issues in life. This also was a part of me being trained so I could lead our healing services. The scripture 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5 “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.” Often kept me going, helping me to persevere knowing that God could use me to help others. Over the years God has brought many ladies with abuse issues to me and has enabled me to support them as they go through their counselling. I have also spoken twice, through the Sycamore Tree Ministry, to men in prison.

For me healing has come step by step. Writing my story and sharing it has been a big part of that healing. I did a basic counselling course through the polytechnic where I had to write about my experience. I have written a small section for a friend's book on burnout and my chronic fatigue. Sitting here looking back, I can see that persevering is big in my life but look how God has been with me all the way. My 50th, 60th and 70th birthday celebrations were big celebrations. My recent 75th celebration was a quiet family one. I have learned so much about myself since my 50's and this would not have happened without the Chronic Fatigue when I had to seek help. It was a lot to do with supressing my sexual abuse memories. What a journey! I have gained so much and am in wonder at the privilege I have in being able to help others. God has used me in my weakness.

Chapter five - How Does the Church Help in Healing?

“Christ has no body on earth now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” — Teresa of Avila

In looking at how the church helps healing it helps to have a theological underpinning. Again, this area is huge. The nature of evil in sexual abuse and its on-going consequences and oppression are beyond doubt and are a study in their own right. From a pastoral perspective, however, it is crucial for caregivers to understand the role of the body so we will focus briefly on a theology of embodiment as the body is where the incarnation of healing happens. Why is this understanding needed? Sometimes childhood sexual abuse survivors feel very detached from their bodies, for others their body is a thing to be loathed.⁵⁹ Yet biblically we read the first acts of God were the acts of creation and the pinnacle of that creation were human beings. Flesh and blood people created with bodies that were fearfully and wonderfully made. “So, God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them...Then God looked over all He had made, and He saw that it was very good” (Gen 1:27 & 31).

What is a theology of embodiment?

Joy Schroeder quoting Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendall writes: “A theology of embodiment does not seek to outline a new theory, but it does seek to open up a forgotten place which is important today, from which there can be theological thought and action: the human body.”⁶⁰ Embodiment theology proclaims the goodness of the physical body created by a loving God who has graced us with such a miraculous physique to live out our days. “It ponders the meaning of Christ's incarnation. It considers Jesus' ministry of healing, his bodily suffering, death and resurrection, as well as his promise that we ourselves will experience a bodily

⁵⁹ *The Long Journey Home*, 186.

⁶⁰ Schmutzer Et.Al. *The Long Journey Home*, 187 quoting Molmann-Wendall, *I Am my Body*, 103.

resurrection. “⁶¹ A theology of embodiment counters any dualism, any soul and body split that sets the body against the soul, countering the body from being denigrated as inferior or unworthy. It recognises the body as intrinsic to each individual identity. “We are rooted in our bodies. At birth, in our play and work together, in our love making and at our death. It is not simply that we have bodies. It is more that we are bodies.”⁶² Our bodies ground us in creation in this time and place. The two sacraments Jesus called us to, baptism and communion, both involve our bodies in a very real way.

Embodiment theology also recognises, that we are more than our physical body alone. As Paul said, also in trying to combat dualism, “don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?” (1 Cor. 6:19). We are created in the image of God mind, body and spirit and we cannot be reduced to being an object to be owned or to our sexual organs. Embodiment theology condemns any actions of violent injustice or oppression that objectifies or commodifies people’s bodies in any way.⁶³

Jesus’ life and death embodied God to us in a way that allows us to see that our bodies matter. Much of his ministry was spent healing the body. If the body did not matter, would he have wasted time and energy bringing healing to dying and broken bodies? In Gethsemane Jesus embodied the sin and suffering of the world to the point of his body sweating drops of blood. “He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.” Luke 22:44 (NLT). This is a rare medical condition known as hematidrosis and usually occurs when a person is facing intense distress.⁶⁴ He was then beaten, whipped, humiliated and stripped before finally being nailed to a cross. He felt every bit of pain, stress and humiliation there was to feel within his body. Isaiah 53: 3-5(NLT) tells us

“He was despised and rejected—

a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.

⁶¹ Ibid, 187.

⁶² Schmutzer Et.Al. *The Long Journey Home*, 186. Quoting Newell, *Echo of the Soul*, ix.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ <https://www.healthline.com/health/hematidrosis>. Sited Jan 2021.

We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.

He was despised, and we did not care.

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;

it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,

a punishment for his own sins!

But he was pierced for our rebellion,

crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.”

And yet, in the mystery that is God, it's in this place of Jesus' bodily violation that our healing is empowered. Several writers also mentioned the sexual humiliation and shame that Jesus would have gone through in being stripped during the crucifixion. Figueroa and Tombs in their paper “Recognising Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse” support this saying

“In the ancient world, Roman crucifixion was meant to do more than just kill the victim. It was also intended to dehumanize him and reduce him in the eyes of society. The victims were crucified naked as a form of sexual humiliation. This humiliation also served as a warning to the public about the terrible consequences of rebelling against those in power... Based on what the Gospels affirm, Jesus was first stripped naked to be flogged. The soldiers then stripped him again and dressed him for his journey through the city. They then stripped him once more and exhibited him naked on the cross until he died before a mocking crowd... For both the Romans and the Jews, nakedness during execution was a sign of humiliation and absolute powerlessness in which shame and dishonour were integral factors in the punishment.”⁶⁵

As Elaine Heath says in her book *“We Were the Least of These”* “Jesus died in the dark night of his abuse.”⁶⁶ It is as a victim of violent abuse that Jesus' suffering and humiliation enables him to connect with all who have suffered abuse at the hands of others in a deep and

⁶⁵ Figueroa Alvear, R., & Tombs, D. (2019). Recognising Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse: Responses from Sodalicio Survivors in Peru ('When Did We See You Naked?' No. 3). (D. Tombs, Ed.). Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/8976> page 4. Cited December 2020. For an in-depth study of adult sexual abuse, its use in state terror and asking how Jesus' crucifixion can speak into this arena see Tombs, Figueroa and Reaves “When did We See You Naked“ Project.“ <https://www.otago.ac.nz/ctpi/projects/2020/otago675463.html>

⁶⁶ Heath, Elaine A. *We Were the Least of These*. 124.

profound way.⁶⁷ Henri Nouwen also saw Jesus' embodied woundedness and suffering as the place of deep connection with our suffering. "Jesus is God's wounded healer: through his wounds we are healed. Jesus' suffering and death brought joy and life. His humiliation brought glory; his rejection brought a community of love. As followers of Jesus we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others."⁶⁸ Nouwen understood we are all wounded people, whether that's physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. For him the challenge was not how we hide our wounds out of shame and humiliation but how we could bring our woundedness to the light, the loving, healing presence of God and loving community and use our woundedness to serve others? "When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers."⁶⁹

Joseph's Story continued

A while after I had shared about my being abused, I became even more difficult to live with, it was like I needed to really push to find out if I was really loved, how could someone really love me? I pushed to the limit throwing angry comments at my wife like, "you don't need me you need a Christian husband!" One night after a long backwards and forwards of trying to break her she quietly turned to me and said... "I can't give you what you're looking for only Jesus can do that." Those words hit their mark and I found myself saying "I know, I just don't know how to do that!" Right there we prayed and I opened my life to Jesus. I wish I could say I was instantly healed but I was not. My healing has come over the years as I have been able to open up and let God and others into my places of hurt, mistrust and pain.

The church has been crucial in my healing as I have come to know God more in and through others. As I have learned to live in a community that cares about me, cares about others, that loves and accepts me for who I am. Small groups have been helpful as its easier to build trust with a small group and to learn from others life experiences. One area that I find unhelpful is the large men's gatherings such as promise keepers. Again, it comes back to my trust being broken by a man in a place of authority, but for me in my healing it is not a place that I feel drawn to or would feel safe in.

⁶⁷ Schmutzer, Et.Al, *The Long Journey Home*, 192.

⁶⁸ Nouwen, H. <https://henrinouwen.org/meditation/the-wounded-healer/> cited Jan. 2021.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

I cannot say I feel God's love yet, but I know God's love through the love of my wife and family. I know God's love through the church community we are a part of, and I know God's love through faithful friends. I am no longer the angry man that I was, and I am no longer able to be silenced. God's healing has and is giving me back my voice to a point where I am now sharing my story and giving me back my ability to feel emotions in a good way. I hope in finding my voice it will give others courage to find theirs.

The Resurrection.

Embodiment theology does not end with the death of Jesus. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the hope filled future that lies beyond the cross. Luke 24: 38-43(NLT) helps us see that the resurrected Jesus had a body.

“Why are you frightened?” he asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched.”

And Paul says of our bodies “It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.” (1 Cor. 15: 42-44). The remarkable thing about Jesus' resurrected body was it still contained the wounds and scars of his crucifixion. In his post resurrection appearance to Thomas Jesus said “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!” (John 20:27). This can be helpful to a survivor as it was Jesus wounds that authenticated who he was to Thomas, but his body, wounds and all had been redeemed into a glorious new body that could no longer be touched by the evil of abuse and death, but the scars remained. As Kwee poignantly writes

“Scars serve as long term memorials to injuries. Scar tissue can be more sensitive to touch than unaffected skin... Scars, however, are very different to open wounds. They are no longer acutely painful. They no longer serve as openings for foreign bacteria to take hold and cause infections. They don’t smell, and they don’t need bandaging or any sort of special care. People with scars are people who laugh, run and dance. While their scars carry painful reminders of being injured, the person can essentially move free in restored functioning.”⁷⁰

It helps us to see God’s intentions for all humanity is healing and wholeness. Jesus scars give meaning to the scars carried by the sexual abuse survivor but also point to survivor towards the healing of the wounds so that the scars no longer remind them of the horrors of their abuse. Instead, those scars authenticate the resilient, courageous, compassionate person they have become.

Having gained some insight into survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the healing path and a theology of embodiment how can the church help in the survivors healing journey?

How Can the Church help in the healing journey?

The church, or the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit has powerful potential to wrap around the survivor in loving healing community if it has eyes to see and ears to hear what many would prefer to keep unseen or unheard. The first step for that to happen must be for the church to speak on abuse and offer a safe and sacred place for the survivor to tell their story. As ministers we can study and sensitively teach on the difficult biblical texts of sexual abuse and incest. Some examples would be Lot offering his daughters to the men of Sodom who wanted to sexually abuse his visitors (Genesis 19), the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13), or Paul addressing incest in the church at Corinth (1 Cor: 5). We can ask questions such as how do the biblical laws provide protection from sexual abuse? What are the devastating effects of the abuse in the story being studied, not just to the person involved but to the whole family system and society? How does God see sexual abuse and provide justice and mercy in dealing with the abuser and the victim? How can we sensitively name the evil of sexual abuse for those of our listeners who have lived through it? How can we help others to understand sexual violence from a biblical perspective?⁷¹ I was amazed in the simple act of telling people what my study leave topic was how the door opened for several people to share their story. These stories were over and above the stories shared here.

⁷⁰ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 283

⁷¹ Schmutzer et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 153.

What made them share? They were given an opening in a safe setting where they felt they could pour their hearts out.

Closely related to the church speaking is the survivor telling their story. The survivor must be made aware that they are in control of their story. They get to choose how much they share, with who they share and when they share. We need to remember the survivor is in control and they are the ones to set the pace of their healing journey to suit their changing needs.⁷² We need to encourage them to establish safety and balance in helping them to pace themselves in their healing journey. This includes the minister/ pastoral worker understanding their boundaries and where the need for referral or working alongside a trained counsellor is appropriate. Having a leadership that is aware of the complex nature and impact of childhood sexual abuse and where possible, having the appropriate people educated to work in this area of pastoral care.

“Proclamation and practical assistance are the two core components of pastoral care. The language of the Spirit brings peace and healing – a vital supplement to the needs of daily life – breathing hope into dark fearful places. Proclamation, or speaking out against the prevalence and severity of abuse, is a necessary first step in offering a sacred space for a victim to disclose the horror of what has happened to them.”⁷³

Compassionate and intentional listening in this space is essential. Jean Stairs in her book *“Listening for the Soul”* observes “by hearing others into clarity and truth about their lives, others will know they exist and are valued children of God... The act of listening becomes God's own means of melding the divine cry with our own in the holy screams for new life. Listening validates our God given existence and affirms that our frailty need not cripple us, nor our glory be denied.”⁷⁴ To listen in this way, we need to validate what we are hearing and be prepared to let the raging emotions that have been suppressed for so long to surface and be expressed.

⁷² Mc Gregor, *Surviving and Moving On*, 179.

⁷³ Schmutzer et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 212.

⁷⁴ Stairs, Jean. *Listening for the Soul*. Augsburg, Fortress, 2000. 18.

Judith's Story Continued

After my counselling my husband had to go away long term for his work. I was not at all keen on the idea as I still hated being alone at night, but I prayed and sought good advice from others. I had a distinct sense that God would have him go and that God would care for me. God called me to collect all God's promises that he had given or that were applicable to my fear and stand on those. Over that time God did a deeper healing in me. My fear of being alone at night just vanished. The counsellor had given answers on one level but through the Holy Spirit and the renewing of my mind I found a fuller healing. My pastor was also a part of my healing journey through bringing a deeper faith understanding and through prayer.

If I didn't have God in my life, my wonderful loving husband and a few good trusting close friends who have all just kept loving me I would never have survived. As a result of what I've been through I can now often recognise where sexual abuse has been or is present and God can use me to help others. Through the loving guidance of others, I came to realise that the voice of God inside me was louder than what was going on around me, but I didn't know that was what it was or how to tap into it.

Sexual abuse hasn't impacted my image of God as I have only ever known God as love and light, but those who preach a judgmental God would not have been at all helpful for my healing if I hadn't known God as I did. I say that because as a sexual abuse survivor you have already judged yourself and found yourself severely lacking and a God who offers only judgement isn't a lifeline you are going to grab even if you are drowning.

The church can also hinder healing when it places people in leadership who aren't ready for that role. Some are not able to deal with the emotions that come with having been abused so when those emotions come to the fore you are greeted with arms crossed in judgement when you need arms open in welcome and a safe place to be vulnerable and let those emotions flow. Every church needs key people trained to recognise and help those who are sexual abuse survivors.

Healing also came to me through a "Word for Today" on "a time for healing." This led me into a two-year biblical study course taking me to a deeper level of healing and restoration. My past doesn't upset me like it used to. I'm so grateful to Jesus, my husband, friends, counsellors and pastor for my healing. I no longer need to take responsibility for everything, and now I can be safe, welcoming arms for others in need.

Healing Love

The most powerful aid to healing the church can bring would have to be God's unconditional love, but for many survivors their trust of a loving God has been so battered by their experiences and their understanding of love so skewed that they have no understanding of what the unconditional love of God is like. Telling the survivor, they are loved by God often isn't enough. They need to experience the reality of God's gracious healing love through the care and the actions of Jesus' body the church. As the church embodies the unconditional love of God to the survivor they learn to trust and be in relationship in a healthy way.

A counsellor who works with sexual abuse survivors tells the story of working with a woman who had been chronically abused and the counsellor longed for her to grasp God's love for her, but nothing was penetrating. Desperate she got on her knees and begged God to help the woman see how much she was loved. God's response? "You want her to know my love, then you love her in a way that demonstrates that. You want her to know that I am trustworthy and safe? Then you go and be trustworthy and safe with her."⁷⁵ Just as Jesus incarnation showed God's love to us so we as the body of Christ incarnate God's love to the world.

One survivor, whose story is not written here shared with me a powerful healing moment that she experienced through receiving communion at the right time in her healing journey. This need to experience God's love and truth through good people is intensified in the survivor as they have experienced the "antithesis of the truth of God. They have learned about fathers, trust, love and refuge from the one who emulated the 'father of lies' (John 8:44)."⁷⁶

In this place we need to gently help the survivor to speak truth. As we have seen the survivors need to cling to life at any cost has often meant lying to themselves and others about the reality of what is going on. A loving faith community around them can gently and sensitively help the light of Jesus' truth penetrate the lies and let them discover who God truly created them to be. This may also include helping people to recognize any addictive behaviours they may have used to cope. This can be a long and tedious process requiring a lot of patience, but the rewards are amazing as over time you begin to see God's healing light dawning over a darkened and bewildered life. For them to get to this place we ourselves need to pray for

⁷⁵ Schmutzer et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 230.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 231.

strength and courage to love as Jesus loves. Then we must speak God's love, live God's love and be God's love for as long as it takes.⁷⁷

For the body of Christ to bring the healing that God desires it first has to know God, God's word, the work of the cross and be fully dependent on the Holy Spirit throughout. The cross of Christ shows the power of evil, and the depth of violation and destruction evil can bring to individuals and communities alike. The cross of Christ shows the gracious love of God and the extent that God went to, suffering for us, to bring healing redemption to humanity and reconciling us in relationship with God and with each other. "Any inadequacy of the cross means that none of us are safe. The cross of Christ is "God with us" in our sin, our suffering, our grief and our sorrows"⁷⁸ and I would add in our resurrection to new life. Or put another way "Redemption is by Christ's defeat of evil through God's love: Christ faces the injustice of the world, the brokenness of our relationships, the brutality of the human race and dies for sin. To human minds it is unfathomable, it really comes home in our own experiences of forgiveness and resurrection."⁷⁹ Can we help bring God's healing reconciliation to others if we have not let God bring healing and reconciliation in our own lives first?

To know God and to know God's word is to know God's heart for the broken and the crushed. As the Psalmist tells us "The LORD is close to the broken hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed." (Psalm 34:18). It's to have God's word so intertwined in our lives that we hear Jesus' call to follow and live as Jesus lived laying our lives down to love God and others. If we fail to care for "the least of these" can we say we truly know God?⁸⁰ For us to know where God is at work in the world and to work with God in that we need to be utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit. For us to know where to begin and where to end we need the Spirit of God within us. "Where else will we know wisdom? How will we know when to speak and when to be silent? How will we discern lies from truth? How else will we love when we are tired, or be patient when we are weary? How can we know the mind of God apart from the Spirit of God? How can we possibly expect to live as a person who demonstrates the character of God apart from the Spirit of God?"⁸¹

⁷⁷ Schmutzer et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 231.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 231-232.

⁷⁹ Storkey, Elaine. *Scars Across Humanity*. Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2018. 224.

⁸⁰ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 232.

⁸¹ *Ibid*. 233.

Deborah's Story Continued

Through my late teens, early twenties I never stopped praying or reading my Bible but as I moved away from home to start training for a profession I did stop going to church. Despite that I grew to love the Psalms, especially the lament psalms as they touched something deep within me.

In my first year of training, I met a man who truly loved me for who I was. For the first time I felt a deep connection that was about more than my body. We would marry two years later and are still together today. His love enabled me to start my journey of healing. I no longer needed the alcohol to numb the pain, but rather than dealing with it I pushed it down into the past.

A few years after our marriage I started going back to church and God started to show me that what my brother had done to me was abuse and needed to be named as such. It was among a group of close female friends in a bible study group that this revelation became known. As they shared about sexual abuse they had been through, suddenly what I had not wanted to acknowledge was as clear as day and healing began.

I started studying and reading anything I could get my hands on that related. As a group we shared and prayed for each other. It was not until several years later that I would share with a counsellor. I never shared with a minister as putting myself in that place with a man did not feel particularly safe. It took years for me to be able to put my needs above others and even longer to be able to communicate my needs as they had been silenced and lost somewhere in the mess of abuse. For this reason, I was often in danger of burning out, but over the years God has brought healing in this place to the point where I can now say no effectively and communicate my needs in a healthy way.

During this time my brother met Jesus for himself. He was able to tell our parents what had happened and get the help he needed. I am among the few who have had their abuser come and ask for forgiveness, taking full responsibility for what he had done as wrong. He was genuinely remorseful for the impact it had on my life. The moment he asked for forgiveness, I had a love and compassion far greater than my own sweep through my body and was able to accept his apology and be totally genuine in saying "I forgive you." I know it was God's love and compassion at work to bring healing and reconciliation.

God has taken what was meant for evil and used it for good. Over the years I have been able to come alongside others who have been hurt so deeply and be a safe place for them to share. If there is one thing the church does well that helps healing it is acceptance and grace. If there is one thing the church does poorly that hinders healing it is lack of acceptance and lack of grace. Genuine love and grace enfolding me were powerful tools of healing. In my healing Jesus has never shown anything but grace and forgiveness, but that doesn't mean I have been left in a place of living an unhealthy lifestyle. As Jesus has healed, as His love has covered a multitude of sins, the desire to live the way Jesus calls me to live has continued to grow. The desire to face and acknowledge ways of living that are destructive has continued to grow. Having a circle of Christians who I trust to speak truth into my life has been vital to that growth. Like the nameless women who anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7 I know the loving, forgiving grace of Jesus. As Jesus said, "the one who is forgiven much, loves much." A broken love that has now been healed and able to flow out of God's love to bring healing to others.



Prayer

Sits in the valley between helping and hindering. When prayer is understood and practiced in a healthy way it can be the most life transforming practice. When it is used in an unhealthy way it can be totally destructive. In praying we need to be highly tuned to the leading of the Spirit and to the person we are praying with as some survivors desperately cried out to God to stop the abuse and yet the abuse continued.

So, what might healthy prayer look like?

Firstly, intercessory prayer is vital. Praying for the survivor whether or not you are able to pray with them is an audacious act of faith. In crying out on behalf of the other we are calling on our God of compassion and justice to respond to this beloved child made in God's image. Crying out for God to bring God's healing light of love and goodness into places of great darkness and brokenness. Crying out for God to bring a depth of healing and goodness that only God can bring. As Walter Bruggeman says in his book "*Great Prayers of the Old Testament*," "In both ancient and contemporary practice, prayer is a daring act. It is an act that intends to connect present *urgent context* with *sovereign compassion and holiness*."⁸²

⁸² Bruggemann, Walter. *Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky. Kindle Ed. 2008. 7.

James 3:16b –18 (NLT) says “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.” Jesus exhorted his disciples about prayer “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” (Luke 11:9 NLT).

When we intercede for another, we are bringing a need greater than we have the answers to, but we are bringing it in hope because we are crying out to our God who hears and our God who acts out of who God is. Bruggemann quoting Barth says “God is not deaf, but listens; more than that he acts. God does not act in the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence upon God's action, even upon his existence.”⁸³

Secondly in praying for a survivor we are bringing them to Jesus for Jesus to act in the way that Jesus knows is best. The story in Luke 5:17-25 where Jesus heals the paralytic man when the man's friends, who had gone to desperate measures to lower him from the roof on a mat, set him at Jesus feet gives a poignant picture of how we can pray.

The place of “being with” in prayer rather than “praying over is helpful. Ask what they would like Jesus to know? What would they like Jesus to do? Don’t assume we know what their greatest need is and pray accordingly, ask them what their needs are. Remembering that powerlessness is an issue for survivors its important in this place of prayer to let them be in the place of power when deciding what they want brought to God. If the prayer senses God might be speaking something present it as a question rather than a statement. Phrases like “I have a sense of God saying, or I wonder if God might be speaking.... what are your thoughts about that?”

Thirdly, prayer can be a vital part of healing in helping a survivor to find their voice. Encouraging them to sit with the lament psalms and using the practice of lament can open a way for God’s healing presence to release the years of emotions that have been buried. As Bruggemann astutely remarks “In the end, prayer as utterance is a refusal of silence, for every settled authority wants to silence dissenting inconvenience. The out loud tradition of Israel is

⁸³ Ibid. 12. Quoting Karl Barth, *Prayer: With Essays by I. John Hesselink, Daniel L. Migliore, and Donald K. McKim*. Westminster John Knox Press 2002. 13.

important in the contemporary world, and the rediscovery of speech among the silenced is urgent.”⁸⁴

Finally, in the stories of survivors who now have a faith many find the contemplative prayer practices life transforming. However, they also speak of needing someone to be there with them in the initial stages as being on their own in silence can be a terrifying place. Spiritual Direction or spiritual mentoring one on one with a suitable person is a valuable practice for survivors as they deepen their journey with God and learn to hear the still small voice for themselves.

In praying with survivors, we need to constantly be asking where are you in this God? Constantly asking God to help us stay with the work of the Spirit. It's all too easy, even with the best of intentions to find we have slipped into the seat of power and pray from that place rather than praying with the Spirit and with the survivor.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 13.

Chapter six - How Does the Church Hinder Healing?

Finally, we will turn and look briefly at three ways in which the church can hinder the healing God intends for a sexual abuse survivor. These are lack of awareness, judgmentalism, and pushing to forgive. The first, lack of awareness on the part of the church about sexual abuse and the trauma it causes, is largely unintentional but hinders healing and it needs to change. The church needs to understand how trauma affects people⁸⁵ if it doesn't want to make wrong evaluations as to why a person behaves in a certain way and then bring a wrong response out of ignorance. Or to expect healing to quickly because we have not listened well to either the survivor or others who can inform this healing. It's being aware of deep emotions, particularly anger that may surface. If they do surface it means letting them be expressed and not shutting them down, normalizing them as a right response to what they have experienced. The church is not good at allowing people to acknowledge and express their emotions and yet God created us with emotions and being able to express them in a safe, healthy space it vital to healing.

It calls church leadership to examine its modelling of gender roles, are men and women regarded as equal, if so, is that reflected in the number of women in leadership roles? Where might the church be upholding patriarchy and as a result be disempowering women and children and making them vulnerable to abuse? Where might it be using biblical texts to uphold unquestioned male dominance in a relationship?⁸⁶

Being aware also calls those in the pulpit to be sensitive when preaching. How might the survivor abused by their father respond to hearing that our earthly father's love represents God's love? How might the survivor who has gone from one sexual relationship to another as a result of the abuse that was inflicted upon them respond to the call to remain a virgin until they are married? How might the survivor who pleaded with God for the abuse to stop again and again respond to a sermon on "ask and you will receive?" The church needs to be aware and do what it is called to do to respond in empathy and to advocate for the survivor in healing and calling for God's justice to be enacted in both the church and society.

⁸⁵ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 232.

⁸⁶ The role of patriarchy within the church and its impact on not only sexual abuse survivors but also domestic abuse survivors warrants an essay of its own. For those wanting to read more in this area Lucy Peppiatt's "*Rediscovering Scriptures Vision for Women*" and Elaine Storkey's "*Scars Across Humanity*" bring light into the dark. For a local perspective Daphne Marsden's "*Dishonoured and Unheard, Christian Women and Domestic Violence*" brings this too close to home to ignore.

The second area where the church can hinder healing is the area of judgement. One of the things that stuck with me out of the survivor's stories was the statement “as a sexual abuse survivor you have already judged yourself and found yourself severely lacking and a God who offers only judgement isn't a lifeline you are going to grab even if you are drowning.” Failing to accept a survivor where they are at and casting judgement over behaviours that have resulted from their abuse puts the survivor in the precarious position of being re-traumatised. It raises the question; how does the church remain true to its prophetic voice without alienating the very people it is trying to reach with the healing love of God?

Judgement can also come in the way a survivor's disclosure is heard. If they finally muster the courage to tell someone and the response is “that person would never do such a thing.” Or “you must have done something to encourage it,” you have already judged and found the survivor guilty. Once again, they are left in a place of powerlessness, fear and shame and are silenced. Denial is a powerful motivator of judgementalism. Church leaders and members would prefer to maintain the illusion that sexual abuse would never happen in the church, especially not our church!⁸⁷

“Often the response [to the disclosure of abuse] is one of shame or denial or embarrassment, that there would be such problems among God's people. Such shame and embarrassment show a lack of understanding of who we are. We must remember that Jesus invited hurting people to come and find rest for their souls...Instead of portraying the church as a place for perfect people, we can define the church as a place for those who are hurting and broken.”⁸⁸

Peter's Story Continued.

I was an innocent four-year-old boy whose life has been affected for all these years. My thoughts over many years were focused on getting violent revenge on the perpetrator for what they had done to me.

In my faith I have struggled to reconcile Jesus words in Matthew 18:6 “But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

⁸⁷ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*. 219.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

(Douay-Rheims Bible) with Jesus' command to forgive. Jesus gives very strong warning to those who would harm any of the little children and I struggle to line that up with forgiving. I struggle and am reluctant to forgive such evil. For me, it has impacted my attitude to homosexuality because, in my case, homosexuality has equated to paedophilia.

But my faith has brought me comfort, my mother was a good praying woman and I know God is present with me. My church family has also brought me healing. The loving acceptance of me for who I am, its good.



Forgiveness

The final area that we will look at in how the church can hinder healing is in the arena of forgiveness. As we can see from Peter's story it is an issue that is complex. Often the church, in responding to Jesus' teaching that we must forgive others as we are forgiven, can try to move people to the place of forgiving a perpetrator before they are emotionally, spiritually or physically able to do so and again put them in danger of being retraumatised. Daphne Marsden in her book on Christian women and domestic Violence, "Dishonoured and Unheard" remarks "forgiveness is not a black and white issue. Sadly, it has been their [the abused women's] experience that well-meaning pastors or others in the Christian community encourage the victim to start on the path of forgiveness (with reconciliation an almost non-negotiable requirement) without enough thought as to whether that is honestly the first action Jesus would have taken in the situation."⁸⁹

So how do we find clarity in these murky waters of forgiveness? From a psychological perspective forgiveness of the perpetrator is not necessary for healing to occur, neither is confrontation or reconciliation.⁹⁰ The thinking around forgiveness ranges from forgiveness being a pointless shortcut to the healing process, to being imperative in the healing journey.⁹¹ Those in the church working with survivors need to understand what it might mean to ask the survivor to forgive someone who has violated them, particularly if they were meant protect and love them. We need to recognise that healing is a process and forgiveness in the right space can bring freedom but applied too soon can make things worse. Prayer for wisdom and

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Marsden, Daphne. *Dishonoured and Unheard, Christian Women and Domestic Violence*. 20.

⁹⁰ MacDonald et.al. *Counselling for Sexual Abuse*, 43.

⁹¹ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*. 169.

discernment is vital in this process, as is a deep understanding of what forgiveness is. Steven Trac, quoted in the *Long Journey Home*, gives an insightful framework that is helpful. He suggests that forgiveness operates in three contexts - judicial, psychological and relational.⁹²

Judicial forgiveness touches on the divine pardon and cancelation of sin:

It involves a complete removal of the guilt of one's sin (Ps 51:1-9). God alone has the judicial authority to forgive all sin including the victim and the perpetrator. "Judicial forgiveness is an act of God to be accepted as fact – based on the character of God and His declared commitment to creation through the work of Christ on the cross."⁹³ This forgiveness is dependent on confession and repentance (Ps32:5, 1 John 1:9). It needs to be made very clear here that biblically forgiveness of sin does not pardon the offender from the consequences of their wrong actions as part of Gods judicious actions.⁹⁴ Moses never entered the promise land as a result of his anger, but he was forgiven. David was forgiven for his adultery and the murder of Uriah but had to live through family and political turmoil that resulted from his actions. "Jesus draws parallels to both forgiveness (Matt 18:15-18) and divine judgement to those who bring harm to children (Matt 18:1-6) The idea of God's judgement is that he alone has the right to retribution for sin. Vengeance for evil is a divine activity (rom 12:19)."⁹⁵ When we forgive in this sense, we are not pardoning the evil that has been done, but we are releasing the perpetrator and the evil into God's hands for God to bring about justice and relinquishing our desire for retribution. In doing so we participate in breaking the cycle of violence.

Psychological forgiveness is a cognitive process involving letting go of negative emotions like anger, bitterness, hatred and fostering positive emotions such as peace, joy, patience and hope. Again, the survivor lets go of the right to retaliate for the hurt they have suffered. Letting go does not silence, pardon, minimize or justify the trauma, but releases the self-destructive emotion of corrosion that holds the survivor in a place of shame and guilt.⁹⁶ "Psychological forgiveness can be accomplished through the actions of faith in God's promise of love, care, presence amidst suffering, and God's own character as loving and purposeful."⁹⁷

⁹² Schmutzer. Et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 174-175.

⁹³ Schmutzer. Et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 174.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 175.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Relational forgiveness happens in the space between people rather than the inward cognitive arena of a person. It refers to the potential for restoration of relationship if confession and repentance have taken place. Relational forgiveness is the bridge to reconciliation although it is *not* always possible or wise. Reconciliation between God and humanity (2 Cor 5:18-21) and between people (Eph 2:11-14) is biblical but relational forgiveness requires repentance of the perpetrator.⁹⁸ Jesus, speaking to relational forgiveness says, “If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then *if*⁹⁹ there is repentance, forgive.” (Luke 17:3) Repentance by the perpetrator must include a change of direction that includes stopping any further harm and taking full responsibility for the harm caused. Abusers are all too good at apologising only to fall back into destructive patterns, their repentance needs to be evidenced by their changed lifestyle over the long term. “Relationship forgiveness demands time so that responsibility for one's actions can be demonstrated and so that trustworthiness can be evidenced”¹⁰⁰

Christian tradition has theologically supported the idea of forgiveness as essential to our human wellbeing. If relational forgiveness cannot be reached it does not mean that judicial and psychological forgiveness are not possible. Lewis Smedes suggest forgiveness is key for a victim, even for serious offences. The victim can take control and responsibility in forgiving and although complete closure, reconciliation or healing may not happen freedom and healing can still be found through the biblical principles of forgiveness and doing what is within reach.¹⁰¹ “While the climax of forgiveness takes two, the reality of forgiveness can still be reached without such a climax. You do not always need a thing whole to enjoy it all.”

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For forgiveness to be a path to healing rather than further traumatization the church needs to understand that it must walk alongside the survivor at the survivor's pace with gentle footsteps and be sensitive to the Spirit's leading always.

Conclusion

There is no doubt about the depth of evil that would seek to rob, kill and destroy the fragile innocence and beauty of a child in such a destructive way, through sexual abuse. There is no doubt about the harm it causes not only to the child but also to the family and to society.

⁹⁸ Schmutzer, et.al. *The Long Journey Home*, 175.

⁹⁹ Italics mine.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Marsden, *Dishonoured and Unheard*, 56.

¹⁰² Ibid, 57.

There is no doubt about the love of God who took that evil into his own flesh and blood body for us in Gethsemane and on the cross. There is no doubt about the hope of new beginnings and resurrection life that Jesus invites all people who are created in the image of God into. There is no doubt about the power of loving community to bring healing. There is no doubt that the church moving in a healthy manner focused on Jesus Christ can be the compassionate healing vessel of God's love into the broken and hurting, "the least of these in our world." But is the church aware enough of the hidden evil that childhood sexual abuse is? Is the church honest about its own hurts and sufferings and what might need to happen to bring healing? Does the church understand the vital role the healing love of Jesus Christ and the redemptive power of God in bringing beauty out of brokenness can play in the life of a survivor? Does the church understand it's in our brokenness that we can rise with healing in our wings?

To have had the time to fully engage with the agony and heartbreak that this evil has inflicted on so many people has been life changing privilege. In engaging there have been tears and heartache, my own deep lament and crying out to God. Crying out for our God of compassion and justice to act as only God can. Crying out for God in hearing the cry of the least of these to move and bring justice and healing for all who have been abused. It is timely as our nation faces a national enquiry into abuse to see that, finally for some, justice is being found and better laws have been put in place to protect our children for the future. In many ways this will just be the beginning. As the insidious, pervasive, hidden nature of this evil and the rising destructive force of evil that pornography and the dark web are in feeding into this horrific abuse continue to function, the church must also find its voice in condemning such actions and rising to bring down the powers and principalities of evil that sit behind these activities. The church also needs to find its voice because it has very real healing to offer to the survivors in the form of loving relationship that is healing and healthy. Most importantly the church can bring God into the injustices of the world and the brokenness of the survivor with the hope of healing and new life that resurrection in Jesus Christ brings. For the church too we have been given a voice, it is our time to speak.

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Appendix 1

Helpful Websites

<https://www.findsupport.co.nz/>

<https://rpe.co.nz/find-your-local-support-service/>

<https://www.helppauckland.org.nz/sexual-abuse-statistics.html>

<https://malesurvivor.nz/>

<https://mherc.org.nz/directory/sexual-abuse-services>

<https://starthealing.org/>

<https://www.stop.org.nz/about/stop-overview/>

<http://www.wellstop.org.nz/information-about-sexual-abuse.html>

https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/resources/publications/en/guidelines_chap7.pdf.

Canterbury Resources

<https://www.avivafamilies.org.nz>

<https://canmen.org.nz/survivors/>

<https://projectesther.co.nz>

<https://mherc.org.nz/directory/sexual-abuse-services>

Helpful phone numbers

Need to Talk? Free call or text 1737 to talk to a trained counsellor anytime.

Lifeline 0800543354 for counselling and support

Depression Helpline 0800111757 to talk to a trained counsellor

Youthline 0800376633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz for youth, whanau and friends.

Appendix 2 - Healing Prayers

These prayers are for you to use as a guided meditation to connect with God.

If you find it difficult to be alone in the silence, then it might be helpful to light a candle to remind you that you are not alone. The light of the world is with you. You might prefer to sit with a friend and work through this alongside another. Or you might prefer to have some music that brings you comfort and strength playing in the background. It is also helpful to have a journal that you can write in to express any thoughts or feelings that arise, or any words you feel God might be speaking to you.

Remember you are in control of your healing journey, take a break from it whenever you need to. If you are feeling a lot of distress in your body, take some time out to deal with the distress and do some positive things for yourself.¹⁰³

The Rose

If possible, find a weather beaten rose to hold as you work through this prayer. As you start take five deep breaths in, hold and exhale slowly. As you breath in ask God for peace, as you breath out exhale any anxiety you may feel.

Imagine a beautiful rose that has been torn from its bush by a violent storm. That rose fell to the ground and soon got covered in mud. It was then trampled underfoot, crushed by others oblivious and not caring about the pain they had caused. The rose knew that all hope and life were ebbing away. Covered in mud and shame the rose knew it had never shone in the way it was meant to, but it had been so trampled and broken there was nothing the rose could do to change things...

Scripture: “The LORD is close to the broken hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.” (Psalm 34:18 NLT)

Read this through three times. Take notice of any words that jump out at you.

Ponder that word for a while.

What might God be wanting to speak to you through that word?

What thoughts or feelings arise for you?

¹⁰³ Surviving and Moving On. 284

What do you want to say or ask God about in response?

Think about where Jesus might have been close to you in your brokenness. If that is too hard to imagine ask Jesus to show you where he was when your spirit was being crushed?

As you reflect on that is there anything you want to say to God?

What do you need God to do in your life today?

Back to the rose.

Jesus came walking by and he noticed His precious rose. Storm battered, crushed underfoot and cut off from its life source. Quietly He kneeled and tenderly picked it up softly breathing life into the rose. Gently wiping the mud of shame away Jesus speaks saying “You were not created to be left broken and trampled in the mud. You were created to bring my beauty, my colour, my vibrant life into this world. I am lifting you again, restoring you to life so others might see my beauty, my life through you. I am calling you out of brokenness to fully be the beautiful you I created you to be.”

Song suggestion: Listen to “Tell your Heart to beat again” by Danny Gokey (Official lyric video can be found on you tube).

And let God breathe new life into you.

Prayer: God of new beginnings help me have the courage to let my heartbeat again. I want to leave my yesterdays of betrayal, pain and shame behind but it's hard to let the walls that I have built around me to protect me down. It's hard for me to trust that you won't hurt me in the same way others have. But I can't keep living the way I am, all life draining from me. Help me trust your closeness, help me trust your gentle life-giving breath is restoring me to life, help me trust you and those you have brought around me to bring healing.

Broken too Beautiful

The Japanese have an art called kintsukuroi. It is the art of taking broken useless pottery and repairing the cracks with gold. It gives the understanding that the piece becomes way more precious, more beautiful after being broken. What was lying useless and bereft of life is recreated into something new and beautiful.

Find or break a small plate into several pieces. Have some strong glue and some gold glitter glue ready to use. Set the broken pieces in front of you on a table. Place a sweet-smelling candle next to it.

Ask how might your life feel like that broken plate?

My Journey¹⁰⁴

My journey is from brokenness to wholeness.

The breaking happened a long time ago when I was just a child.

Body torn from me. Feelings torn, mind torn, choices torn.

People torn from me.

I was left to pick up the pieces, to put myself back together again.

My little child hands were not graceful or gifted,

But I did the patching the best I could, and I continued on.

I grew.

I found on my journey that the brittle shell my childhood hands

Had made could no longer contain all that was me.

It could not bend with my stretching, it could not shift with my

Own fierce healing, so

I broke through.

My journey is from brokenness to wholeness.

With these strong scars my body knitted to my heart to my mind to my soul, and

I became free to stretch my wings at last.

I flew.

¹⁰⁴ Foote. Catherine J. *Survivor Prayers*. John Knox/Westminster, Louisville, Kentucky. 1994. 19

When you are ready light the candle to remind you that Jesus is with you in the midst of your brokenness and sit with the following words.

Scripture: “So now the case is closed. There remains no accusing voice of condemnation against those who are joined in life-union with Jesus, the Anointed One.” (Romans 8:1 The Passion Translation).

Read this through three times. Take notice of any words that jump out at you.

Ponder that word for a while.

What might God be wanting to speak to you through that word?

What thoughts or feelings arise for you?

What do you want to say or ask God about in response?

Imagine yourself as those broken pieces and Jesus as the healing gold that joins you back together in “life Union” with him. Lift your head to see the love in his eyes as He whispers to you, “my child you do not need to listen to those accusing voices of condemnation anymore.”

As you sit in this place is there anything else you want to say to God?

How do you need God to move for you today?

Song Suggestion: Listen to Beautifully Broken, by Plumb (Official lyric video can be found on You Tube).

Prayer: Loving God, help me see how my fragments of brokenness and shame can be transformed by being in life union with you. Remind me of the cross, help me to stand in its shadows. Remind me that every day you are gathering every broken bit and transforming it through your brokenness and shame on the cross into something of wholeness and beauty. Remind me that what this life has torn from me does not form who I am. I am formed, healed and made whole by you, a God who loved the world so much that you suffered with us through your beloved Son. Help the truth of who you are silence the voices of accusation that haunt me from my past. Take my brokenness and make me beautiful.

Empty

Find an empty cup and a small empty clear bottle. Fill the bottle with water to represent your tears.

Hold the empty cup, what does it speak to you about your own emptiness?

I'm Empty

I'm empty, nothing left,
Drained to the very last dreg, nothing left to offer anyone, not even you God.
Empty, of every tear, they've all been cried out long ago,
Empty of the ability to feel or care,
Empty, sitting in the ashes of desolation,
Empty, swallowed up in your sea of forgetfulness...

Now pick up and hold the bottle of tears, what do they speak to you about your tears?

Old Tears¹⁰⁵

These tears I'm crying now are old tears formed decades ago
In my childhood, when tears were forbidden.
I kept them inside waiting for safety.
The wall that held them back was built of threats, of fear, of pain,
The water in these tears has almost dried up.
The salt almost crystalized with age,
Eaten through my soul,
Purified my wounds.
Now the healing has begun, and my tears can fall.
And now my comforter I cry these tears.
Now they fall freely.
Now their falling brings freedom.
And you my comforter, are the one who gathers my tears, who hears my pain,
Who holds me gently as I sob,
Who dries my face.
You are the one who guards me as I grieve.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 75

For Healing for safety for love I give you thanks.

Scripture: You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help. This I know: God is on my side!! Psalm 56: 8-9 (NLT)

Read this through three times. Take notice of any words that jump out at you.

Ponder that word for a while.

What might God be wanting to speak to you through that word or words?

As you hold your bottle of tears, what does it mean for you that God knows and holds every tear you have cried?

What thoughts or feelings arise for you?

Is there anything you want to say to God, or ask of God, in response?

What do you need from God today?

Song Suggestion: Listen to “Tears in a Bottle” by Skylar Kaylyn. (The official lyric video can be found on You Tube)

Prayer: Lord, filler of my emptiness, let me feel the strong currents of your tender love flowing through the dry and barren spaces of my emptiness. Lord if I'm truthful, in this place of emptiness, in this place of loneliness, in this place of abandonment and powerlessness I'm not sure I can even feel your love flowing. But just as couldn't see you collecting my tears it doesn't mean it didn't happen so fill me anyway. Fill me with a deep desire to know you more, fill me with the truth of who you are, fill me with the truth of who I am, fill me with your love that is a good love, a healing love a protecting love, fill me with a growing belief that you can be trusted and that others can be trusted to.

Appendix 3 - An Emotional Exercise in having Compassion for Yourself

Again, remember you are in control of your healing journey, take a break from it whenever you need to. If you are feeling a lot of distress in your body, take some time out to deal with the distress and do some positive things for yourself.

For this exercise it could be helpful to have a photograph of yourself at the age you were when your abuse began.

Step 1

Think of a child you know and care about today who is about the same age you were when your abuse began. Imagine this child shares with you that they were abused in the same way you were and got the same responses you did from their family or community. How do you think the child is feeling. Write this down.

What sort of responses do you think this child needs to try and make sense of what has happened and to begin a healing journey? Write these ideas down.

Write down what you felt when the child you imagined disclosed this to you. Would you want to reach out and give that child love and compassion or would you get angry and send the child away because they were displaying emotions such as fear, shame or anger that you were uncomfortable with? What could you say that would be helpful? Would you say that it is okay to cry, or be afraid or angry and that it may be a while before they feel safe, strong and confident again? Would you say this should not have happened to them and that they deserve protection. Or would you be impatient and say that it wasn't that bad, and that they should pull themselves together?

How do you think your responses would make the child feel? Would you like to be able to respond in a different way, if so how? What might this different response have felt like for the child in your imagination?

Step 2

Take the photo of yourself or imagine yourself at the age you were abused. What does that child look like? How old is that child? What would that child be wearing? Picture in your mind where that child is – in a bedroom, at the beach, in a classroom? What is the child

feeling/ doing and or needing? What does the child want from the adult you? Understanding, compassion and or care?

Write down how you feel about the child when you imagine them. What are your responses? Do you feel annoyed with the child for being weak, sad or angry, or do you feel compassion? Do you feel anger towards the child and want to avoid them? Or do you feel sad and angry for what the child has been through? Do you want to offer them protection?

Write down your responses. What support are you able to give the child? Can you give acceptance, warmth, caring, love, respect? If so this is fantastic. Spend some time giving those compassionate responses to the child/ you (*if it is helpful you might want to speak to your photo*)¹⁰⁶ that was so very hurt a long time ago.

If you can't give the child part within you any compassion move on to step three.

Step 3

Compare the responses you would give to your hurt child part in step 2 with those that you would give to another child (the child in step1) who had endured exactly the same things as you had. Are your responses the same for both or are they different? Were your responses to both children warm, caring and compassionate or cold, hostile and angry. Were you able to be compassionate with the child in step 1 and not with yourself in step 2? If so don't tell yourself off. Many survivors feel this way, having compassion for others but not themselves. This seems to be another by product of abuse. Think about when you stopped having compassion for yourself.

How does the way you treat the child you compare with the way the offender, your family or others responded to you as a child? Have you accidentally taken over as critic from the offender, your family or others who were unsupportive of you? Consider the internal messages you give yourself when you are dealing with some of the effects the abuse has had on you. For example, you may think impatiently "for goodness sake pull yourself together! I should be over it by now." If so, how do these messages make you feel? How do you feel in your body when you think these things? How do these thoughts and feelings lead you to act

¹⁰⁶ Italics mine

towards yourself and others? Do you become impatient and irritable with others or just yourself?

What do you think will happen if you continue to respond to yourself in negative ways? Have you thought about what it is about you that you don't like or want to change? Do you think talking negatively to yourself achieved the sort of changes you want to achieve? Do you need to think about trying different ways to achieve the changes you want for yourself? Do you think you may want to experiment with changing your negative self-responses to being more neutral or even positive? Do you think there would be any changes in your life if you started treating yourself with more compassion and care? How do you think you/ and or your life would change if you were able to make these changes? If you improved the way you internally respond to yourself, do you think people would respond to you differently? If so, what would those differences be?

Children deserve to be protected and cared for. You deserved and still deserve these things. Sadly, as a child you may not have received these things, but as an adult you are in control of your life now, and you can begin to treat yourself the way you should have been treated all along. It is never too late. If you wanted love and nurturing, then you can give love and nurturing to yourself. Unfortunately, if you wait for others to give you what you need, you may wait forever but you can begin to give yourself what you need – and you can start right now.

(Adapted from *Surviving and Moving On*, by Dr. Kim MacDonald. For further exercises see chapters 7 and 8 of this book).

Appendix 4 – Diagnostic Criteria for Post-traumatic stress disorder.

All of the criteria are required for the diagnosis of PTSD. The following text summarizes the diagnostic criteria: from the DSM 5 (a diagnostic and statistical manual). This diagnosis can only be made by a qualified professional.

Criterion A: stressor (one required) The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence, in the following way(s): Direct exposure Witnessing the trauma Learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to a trauma Indirect exposure to aversive details of the trauma, usually in the course of professional duties (e.g., first responders, medics)

Criterion B: intrusion symptoms (one required) The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in the following way(s): Unwanted upsetting memories Nightmares Flashbacks Emotional distress after exposure to traumatic reminders Physical reactivity after exposure to traumatic reminders.

Criterion C: avoidance (one required) Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli after the trauma, in the following way(s): Trauma-related thoughts or feelings Trauma-related external reminders.

Criterion D: negative alterations in cognitions and mood (two required) Negative thoughts or feelings that began or worsened after the trauma, in the following way(s): Inability to recall key features of the trauma Overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world Exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma Negative affect Decreased interest in activities Feeling isolated Difficulty experiencing positive affect

Criterion E: alterations in arousal and reactivity Trauma-related arousal and reactivity that began or worsened after the trauma, in the following way(s): Irritability or aggression Risky or destructive behaviour Hypervigilance Heightened startle reaction Difficulty concentrating Difficulty sleeping.

Criterion F: duration (required) Symptoms last for more than 1 month.

Criterion G: functional significance (required) Symptoms create distress or functional impairment (e.g., social, occupational).

Criterion H: exclusion (required) Symptoms are not due to medication, substance use, or other illness.

Two specifications: Dissociative Specification In addition to meeting criteria for diagnosis, an individual experiences high levels of either of the following in reaction to trauma-related stimuli:

1. Depersonalization. Experience of being an outside observer of or detached from oneself (e.g., feeling as if "this is not happening to me" or one were in a dream).
 2. Derealization. Experience of unreality, distance, or distortion (e.g., "things are not real").
- Delayed Specification.** Full diagnostic criteria are not met until at least six months after the trauma(s), although onset of symptoms may occur immediately.

