

A message to broken women

***He ripped me up
And trod me into the ground
Like a smoked cigarette.***

I am beyond help

All she did was went to a meeting, but now his rage seemed to know no limit. She tried everything she knew to calm him down, but whatever she said just made things worse. She turned away, but he caught her by her hair, lifted his arm and crashed his fist into her mouth. The pain hit her before she even knew what had happened. Blood and teeth began to fall on to her dress. Again and again the fist smashed into her, and as she sank to the floor, he kicked her in the ribs. Finally it was over. He was gone, and she picked up her broken body, and began to feel that intense inner pain which comes only with great offence. She was a woman, and he had broken her - and not just physically. What would happen next?



She had been bleeding for so many years, that she felt all her life had drained out of her. All her money gone on doctors, who promised so much, raised her hopes, only for her to find that she was bleeding again. She felt unloved and unlovable - a fruit squeezed dry of all its juice, drained of all that made her truly a woman.

One day she heard of a man who had the power to heal the sick. But no man would want her near him, to be polluted by her blood. And no crowd would ever accept her presence. What to do? The only thing to do was to creep up to him and touch his cloak. It seemed crazy, but she was beyond all hope, so why not?

Dressing in a way that would make her unnoticed, she went out to where she had heard he was speaking. The crowd was huge, but that might be to her advantage. Slowly, unnoticed, she drew nearer and nearer to him. She couldn't see him – she dare not look up unless she was recognised. She wanted to run away and hide, but desperation drove her on. Finally, she was within touching distance, and with one lunge, she got hold of the hem of his garment. Immediately, she felt warmth deep inside her. That usually was the forerunner of another gush of blood, but this time there was no blood. The warmth grew, and she felt, for the first time for years, that she had control of her body. No longer was she in the grip of a helpless flow. She knew she was healed.

Now to slip away, but then she heard his voice for the first time. “Who touched me?” Those around him began to laugh because the crowds were pressing into him, but suddenly fear gripped her. He knew what had happened. What could she do? She stepped forward, and despair gripped her. The illness would return. The men in the crowd would hurt her, ridicule her, and drive her away. She couldn't take any more pain. But he looked at her, and said the most amazing thing: “Daughter.” How could he say that? How could he treat a wretched bleeding woman like that. Daughter?

But as he spoke, she became aware that she was not bleeding, and the warmth was still there. Daughter. How could he give a woman such value? How could a stranger, a woman, mean so much to him? She had never felt so precious in all her life, and she began to stand up straight. “Daughter, go your way in peace. Your faith has saved you.” Never, never, never had she felt so loved, so valued, so secure. Her life would never be the same again. She walked away, but she made a vow that day - she would be back!



The first story is a fiction from inside my head. But countless women worldwide will recognise it, or something like it, as a reality, because this kind of thing happens again and again in many cultures. Women are abused, beaten, raped and destroyed by men, often their husbands or family members.

The second story is true. It shows all women that whatever the world says or does, God values them for themselves, for what he has put into them, and for what they can give to his creation. He would never hurt them. On the contrary, his only desire is to make them, each one, to feel like queens in his presence.

And when they are hurt, what does he have to say about it? I have written here about different kinds of abuse. I do understand them, and so does the Lord:-

***On the hill,
they tore me to pieces.
My beauty was exposed,
humiliated, violated,
my spirit seared, scarred, savaged.
And they laughed
and left me.***

I understand

Rape

Some time later, this happened: Absalom, David's son, had a sister who was very attractive. Her name was Tamar. Amnon, also David's son, was in love with her. Amnon was obsessed with his sister Tamar to the point of making himself sick over her. She was a virgin, so he couldn't see how he could get his hands on her. Amnon had a good friend, Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab was exceptionally streetwise. He said to Amnon, "Why are you moping around like this, day after day—you, the son of the king! Tell me what's eating at you." "In a word, Tamar," said Amnon. "My brother Absalom's sister. I'm in love with her."

"Here's what you do," said Jonadab. "Go to bed and pretend you're sick. When your father comes to visit you, say, 'Have my sister Tamar come and prepare some supper for me here where I can watch her and she can feed me.'"

So Amnon took to his bed and acted sick. When the king came to visit, Amnon said, "Would you do me a favor? Have my sister Tamar come and make some nourishing dumplings here where I can watch her and be fed by her." David sent word to Tamar who was home at the time: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare a meal for him."

So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house. She took dough, kneaded it, formed it into dumplings, and cooked them while he watched from his bed. But when she took the cooking pot and served him, he wouldn't eat.

Amnon said, "Clear everyone out of the house," and they all cleared out. Then he said to Tamar, "Bring the food into my bedroom, where we can eat in privacy." She took the nourishing dumplings she had prepared and brought them to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she got ready to feed him, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, sister!"

"No, brother!" she said, "Don't hurt me! This kind of thing isn't done in Israel! Don't do this terrible thing! Where could I ever show my face? And you—you'll be out on the street in disgrace. Oh, please! Speak to the king—he'll let you marry me."

But he wouldn't listen. Being much stronger than she, he raped her. No sooner had Amnon raped her than he hated her—an immense hatred. The hatred that he felt for her was greater than the love he'd had for her. "Get up," he said, "and get out!"

"Oh no, brother," she said. "Please! This is an even worse evil than what you just did to me!" But he wouldn't listen to her. He called for his valet. "Get rid of this woman. Get her out of my sight! And lock the door after her." The valet threw her out and locked the door behind her.

Sexual abuse of women, from eyes to penetration, is very much against God's will. From the rape of Tamar to the abuse heaped on the adulterous woman in John's gospel, it is clear that this violation isn't God's will, delight or purpose. He made women to serve him, to bear children, to add their distinctive approach to his creation, to live without the fear of sexual abuse, and to fulfill their potential as human beings.

Look how radical is his view of rape and abuse:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Jesus pushes his hatred of sexual violence, to the limit: – "Men, sex in the head is just as bad as sex in the bed!" He stands against any kind of abuse, even in the head, and this goes to the very heart of the issue. There is the potential for evil in the minds and hearts of men. With Jesus, the issue is crystal clear - sexual abuse and violence is not permissible under any circumstances and in any place, physical or spiritual.

So why is it necessary to write this?

- * Because women often blame themselves for being sexually abused.
- * Because women are too forgiving, believing that the man will learn from what he has done. He seldom does, and having got away with it once, will do it again and again.
- * Because women allow themselves to be devalued by this revolting criminal act.
- * Because women believe that this is how it is, and there is no hope of change.

Rebuilding the shattered lives of those who have been abused takes years. The negativity and the pain have to be replaced with a sense of value and purity. The filth is so ingrained, that it is very hard to remove. It takes time, and it is not easy. But it is God's desire that women be healed, and this is reflected in the changed attitude in many western cultures, where abuse has been made a criminal act. The Governments are saying: "Our citizens feel this abuse is wrong. So we, with their support, are passing laws to punish and outlaw it." This is a good beginning, but only the Lord can heal the pain.

Smashed against the wall again,

No more than I deserve.

Beaten with the poker,

No more than I deserve.

Suffocated with a pillow,

No more than I deserve.

Made to feel so filthy

No more than I deserve.

Stripped and thrust and battered

No more than I deserve.

Bleeding on the carpet,

No more than I deserve.

You see,

You must understand,

it's my fault.

Violence

“Using Tirzah as his base, Menahem opened his reign by smashing Tiphseh, devastating both the town and its suburbs because they didn't welcome him with open arms. He savagely ripped open all the pregnant women.”

Rape is just part of the whole experience of violence against women. Beating, assaulting, harming, imprisonment, and emotional destruction are the wider experience. Jesus makes it clear where all this violence comes from:

“The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no one can figure out.”

But this is no excuse. As with rape, the Lord pushes attitudes to violence to the limit:-

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.”

The human heart is deceitful, and easily enflamed. It starts with bitter words, and ends up ripping open pregnant women. It starts with anger, and finishes up with humiliation, beatings, stabbings, maiming and even murder.

Again, many societies are stating quite clearly, by their laws, that this is unacceptable behaviour. The United Nations states:-

“We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government.”

The time to change is now. Only by standing together and speaking out can we make a difference.”

All these thoughts and hopes flow from the heart of Jesus. He did not create women to endure this pain. Does writing this really make any difference? If a man lifts his hand to smash a woman, does this kind of writing make any difference?

I believe it does, because we have to give courage to women everywhere to begin to reject this abuse, even as they endure it. To throw it away and to believe that billions of people on the planet know that it is wrong.

Feeling supported in this belief opens the path, in the long run, to healing.

***Through the pain,
I reach for the light.
It is so fragile,
Can it really bring light to my darkness?***

Yes.

Abuse in marriage

“Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting.”

Abuse within the marriage covenant is perhaps the hardest to bear, expose and expunge. In a place where a woman should be at her safest, abuse is very damaging. Some men think they can get away with anything – physical assault, rape, emotional harm, threats, and imprisonments. In some countries a woman may think of escape. In other cultures, there is nowhere to go.

The United Nations statistics make dreadful reading. Over a third of women questioned, and up to a half of them, admitted to having been physically abused by an intimate partner.

Again, Jesus is quite clear on this issue. A husband is to love his wife, as he, Jesus, loved the church, and that love led him to the cross. Sacrificial and caring love is what God expects towards women in marriage. Abuse is not an option.

Rejection

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them. The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, “Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?” They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"

"No one, Master." "Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

In this story, the religious people were full of accusation towards a woman. They did not see her as a person, but as an object, and wanted to abuse her more, reject her, punish her or even kill her.

Jesus does not see an adulterous woman, but a person being hurt. He deals with the accusers, and then deals with her inner hurt. Physical abuse often involves rejection, but not by Jesus. Her accepts, loves and heals. Does that mean he condones the sin? Not at all, but his nature is to forgive, to uplift, to see the person not the sin.



The broken women

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?"

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

The heart of Jesus is to mend broken women.

This woman, whose illness had a demonic background, had been robbed of everything of value. She could never be beautiful, never have any confidence, only be the victim of pity, rejection, and ridicule. Everything which the Lord made for women to be had been robbed from her.

Jesus easily restored her dignity, and her femininity. She knew it, and her response was to praise God. This is what God wants for every abused woman – that her femininity and dignity should be restored, she should be healed and free to praise him. God wants it. We should want it too.

Jim and Mary Smith, along with their team, are building Ruth House on their base in Ghana. This will be a hostel for broken women

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