

MY DAMAGED FAITH

SPIRITUAL ABUSE, MANIPULATION
& YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Hurt by
the Church,
Healed by
Christ



| Hope for the Heart

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

Something just doesn't seem right about this. Perhaps you've thought that before about a church or spiritual leader. Sadly, spiritual abuse occurs far too often. Some "leaders" seek to gain control by manipulating Scripture and twisting truth. When the Word of God is misused or the character of God is misrepresented, people inevitably suffer.

Spiritual abuse can cause a lot of pain and confusion, and the tragedy of spiritual abuse is that it can damage a person's faith in God. Yet whatever damage has been done ... the Lord can heal, restore, and redeem.

Jesus reserved some of His harshest language for spiritually abusive leaders and yet extended the greatest compassion to those who were hurt by them. If you've been hurt by the church or by abusive spiritual leaders, know this: *"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18).

We designed this resource to help you identify spiritual abuse and take positive steps to break free from it. Our hope is that you will find freedom from the guilt, shame, and control of spiritual abuse and discover the joy of a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ and the life-changing identity you have in Him.

This resource is a sample from our *Keys for Living* books on Spiritual Abuse, Manipulation, and Identity & Self-Image. The *Keys for Living* are short, helpful books with clear answers from God's Word and concise, practical guidance on life's challenges.

We pray the Lord will use this resource to help you find healing and equip you to help others.

Thank you and God bless,

The Hope for the Heart Team

*"You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free."
(JOHN 8:32)*

You can find more helpful resources on Spiritual Abuse, Manipulation, Identity & Self-Image, and many other topics at

hopefortheheart.org

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Religion at Its Worst

What Is Spiritual Abuse?

The practice of spiritual abuse has persisted ever since the serpent in the Garden of Eden distorted and lied about God's words to Adam and Eve. In doing so, he managed to instill doubt in their minds regarding the character of God and His relationship with those He created. The result was that they found the thought of becoming like God more appealing than remaining dependent on God. That thought led them to trust Satan's words rather than God's words, and their descendants have struggled with this same problem ever since. The serpent said to Eve . . .

*“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ . . .
‘You will not certainly die’ . . .
‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”
(GENESIS 3:1, 4–5)*

Spiritual Abuse

Though the practice is age-old, the term “spiritual abuse” is relatively new. The following definitions explain how spiritual leaders can misuse their position of authority:

Spiritual abuse occurs when someone in a position of spiritual authority misuses that authority to control, coerce, or manipulate others for what seems to be good and godly purposes, but are instead using it for their own self-interest.

Spiritual abuse is the use of religious words or acts to manipulate someone for personal gain or to achieve a personal agenda, thereby harming that person's walk with God.

Spiritual abuse is often broadly defined as any misuse of Scripture whereby truth is twisted and which may or may not result in harming a person's relationship with God. The victim in this case may not be an individual, but truth itself. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul said . . .

“We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God” (2 CORINTHIANS 4:2).

Spiritual abuse is putting confidence in your position of authority and your perceived right to use those under your influence to accomplish your own personal agenda. However, God alone has the right, the wisdom, and the power to accomplish His plans and purposes for those He has created.

*“To the elders among you,
I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings
who also will share in the glory to be revealed:
² Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care,
watching over them—not because you must,
but because you are willing,
as God wants you to be; not pursuing
dishonest gain, but eager to serve;
³ not lording it over those entrusted to you,
but being examples to the flock.”
(1 PETER 5:1–3)*

Heart of Spiritual Abuse

Question: “What is at the heart of spiritual abuse?”

Answer: At the core of spiritual abuse is excessive control of others. Spiritual abuse is acting “spiritual” to benefit oneself by using self-centered efforts to control others.

Examples:

- A pastor who uses guilt or greed to compel attendance, financial giving, or service
- A spiritual leader who takes emotional or sexual advantage of a counselee in the name of “comfort or compassion”
- Religious people who accuse those who disagree with *them* of being rebellious against *God*
- A ministry head who demands absolute, unquestioned obedience no matter what . . . whether reasonable or not . . . whether biblical or not

*“Jesus said to them,
‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;
and those who exercise authority over them
call themselves Benefactors.’”
(LUKE 22:25)*

Spiritual Abuse Is Not . . .

Administering church discipline

- God commanded the church to administer church discipline for the purpose of correcting and restoring sinning Christians to fellowship with the Lord and with the church. Because the focus of church discipline is not on punishment, it must be administered prayerfully and in love. Church discipline is also intended to maintain the church’s purity in belief and practice.

Example: The apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian church to discipline a sexually immoral man by removing him from their midst. . . .

“Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”
(1 CORINTHIANS 5:6–7)

Rejecting incorrect theological beliefs

— The church must evaluate those who teach the Bible to other church members. The church, as the “pillar and foundation of the truth,” must reject incorrect interpretations and false teaching, just as Christ rejected the self-made righteousness and erroneous teachings of the Pharisees.

Example: The apostle Paul identified false teachers in his own day that needed to be rejected—just as there were false teachers in the days of Moses.

“Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.”
(2 TIMOTHY 3:8)

10 Rules of a Toxic-Faith System

- 1.** A toxic faith leader must always be in control.
- 2.** If a problem occurs, someone else must be found to blame.
- 3.** Mistakes are not acceptable.
- 4.** Toxic faith systems don’t adhere to reality. They thrive on the illusion that everything is as it *should be*.
- 5.** Feelings or opinions are not to be expressed unless they are positive and reinforce the toxic system.
- 6.** Questions—especially difficult ones—are not to be asked.
- 7.** Whatever your role in the toxic faith system, you are expected to play your part.
- 8.** No one outside of the system is trustworthy.
- 9.** Giving to the organization is vitally important.
- 10.** No matter what, maintain the organization’s image.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”
(MATTHEW 7:15–16)

What Is God's Heart on Spiritual Abuse?

Jesus tells a group of Pharisees, *"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires"* (John 8:44). At another point, Jesus confronts the Pharisees, *"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"* (Matthew 23:33). To the false teachers and abusive spiritual leaders, the Lord reserves some of His harshest language and most severe judgments.

Yet notice how Jesus responds to those under the "care" of these "shepherds": *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36). To those who have been harassed and abused by spiritual leaders—to those who feel confused and helpless about what to do—Jesus has compassion on you. And He invites you to find rest in Him.

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary
and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

(MATTHEW 11:28 NLT)

God wants you to use His Word as the standard for truth.

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (ACTS 17:11).

God wants you to hear His Word taught clearly, not in a distorted manner.

"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 CORINTHIANS 4:2).

God wants you to watch out for false teaching and false teachers.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (MATTHEW 7:15).

God wants you to know that those who teach His Word will be judged more strictly.

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (JAMES 3:1).

God wants you to stay away from those who cause divisions and lead others astray.

"Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them" (ROMANS 16:17 NLT).

God wants you to rely on His grace, not legalistic rules, to help you grow in your faith.

"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so" (HEBREWS 13:9).

God offers healing from spiritual abuse.

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (PSALM 147:3).

God wants you to be in a church that is devoted to faithfully teaching His Word.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (ACTS 2:42).

God wants His church to be led by spiritual leaders who humbly serve and lead by example.

“Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example” (1 PETER 5:2–3 NLT).

God wants you to reach out to others who have experienced spiritually abusive treatment.

“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

“To those who have been harassed and abused by spiritual leaders—to those who feel confused and helpless about what to do—Jesus has compassion on you.”

Key Verse to Memorize

Open your heart to God, and He will guide you to right living—not through rigid commands or use of power, but through the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As a Christian, you are completely accepted as His child. Live in the liberty of His love and trust Him to work in you and to change you into the person He created you to be.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
(GALATIANS 5:1)

A Personalized Plan to Identify Spiritual Abuse

The following questions can help you identify spiritual abuse in your own life and in your church or religious setting. These are intended for self-examination and to help you stay rooted in God’s Word as you seek to break free from any spiritually abusive influence in your life.

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”
(LAMENTATIONS 3:40)

I will EXAMINE my own life.

- Do my actions and attitudes communicate an air of spiritual superiority?
“They say to each other, ‘Don’t come too close or you will defile me! I am holier than you!’” (ISAIAH 65:5 NLT).
- Do I tend to challenge the choices others make based on my own opinions?
“Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions” (PROVERBS 18:2 NLT).
- Do my actions and attitudes toward spiritual leaders reveal a driving ambition to please them or God?
“They loved human praise more than praise from God” (JOHN 12:43).
- Do I support my church financially because I feel pressured by my pastor or ministry leaders?
“You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully” (2 CORINTHIANS 9:7 NLT).
- Do I feel restricted from visiting other churches or socializing with other denominations?
“The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:17).
- Do I blindly trust the direction of my ministry leader or pastor without question because it is expected of me?
“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (MATTHEW 15:13–14).
- Do I shun people whose sins are different than mine? Am I guilty of looking down on others in the church based on their lifestyle, income bracket, or heritage?
“God does not show favoritism” (ROMANS 2:11).
- Am I controlled, confined, or criticized by my mate? Do I detect spiritual abuse in my marriage, in my dating life, in my friendships?
“Love does no harm to a neighbor” (ROMANS 13:10).

I will EXPLORE the actions of my pastor, my church, and other religious leaders in my life.

- Has my pastor’s teaching or doctrinal stand ever troubled my soul? Does my pastor or religious leader ever veer from God’s Word or twist Scripture, taking it out of context?
“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (ACTS 20:30).
- Does my pastor or ministry leader present himself as the sole source of truth and wisdom? Has he warned that going against his counsel is equivalent to going against God, or claimed to have received personal messages from God about His will for others?
“‘I am against the false prophets,’ says the Lord. ‘They use their own words and pretend it is a message from me.’” (JEREMIAH 23:31 NCV).
- Does my pastor or religious leader rebuke those who challenge his authority? Are my questions discouraged?
“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 PETER 5:2–3).
- Does my church require that I meet specific or excessive criteria before being considered a member in good standing?
“They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden” (MATTHEW 23:4 NLT).

- Do I feel manipulated, monitored, or scrutinized by ministry leaders? Do the actions and admonitions of my pastor encourage me in Christ or cause me to feel spiritually defeated?
“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).
- Is my church transparent about important matters, such as financial accountability and debt?
“Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (EPHESIANS 4:25).
- Does my church take seriously all allegations of domestic violence and sexual abuse, or does the response of its leadership simply advise silence and forgiveness?
“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice” (PROVERBS 31:8–9 NLT).
- Does my pastor or ministry leader cast doubt regarding the authenticity of my salvation?
“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (EPHESIANS 1:13–14).

I will EDUCATE myself with biblical truths about my freedom in Christ.

- I will *study* to show myself approved of *God*—rather than *submit* to show myself approved of *man*.
“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 TIMOTHY 2:15).
- I will depend on God to direct my paths and show me the way to go.
“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you” (PSALM 32:8).
- I will worship God and serve only Him—as Christ instructed.
“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only”’” (LUKE 4:8).
- I will make my home a place of safety, free from any hint of spiritual abuse. I will demonstrate the love of Christ to my family and will seek their forgiveness when I am wrong.
“The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (ISAIAH 32:17–18).
- I will practice loving others the way God loves me.
“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–8).
- I will hold Christian leaders in my life accountable to biblical standards because, as leaders, they bear a greater responsibility.
“Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (JAMES 3:1).
- I will remove myself from unresolved spiritual abuse in my church.
“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or stand in the company of mockers” (PSALM 1:1).
- I will remember that the love of Christ never compels me to shame others, nor does it cause me to think of myself as better than someone else.
“Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us” (ROMANS 12:3 NLT).

How to Recover from Legalism and Spiritual Abuse

Their priorities and practices couldn't have been more different, making one thing perfectly clear: Jesus was indeed the Good Shepherd—the Pharisees were the false shepherds.

Jesus healed the sick.	Pharisees hindered the sick.
Jesus taught truth.	Pharisees spread lies.
Jesus embraced sinners.	Pharisees shunned sinners.

In the end, the Pharisees abused the sheep under their care, whereas Jesus died for the sheep. And Jesus lives today to be *your* Shepherd—to guide you through life. As you come under His care, He will be the shepherd of your soul.

*“I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd lays down
his life for the sheep.”*
(JOHN 10:11)

RECOVERY

(an acrostic for the word RECOVERY)

R-Realize that you have been in a legalistic or abusive situation.

- Acknowledge that you have been spiritually deceived and deeply wounded.
- Acknowledge the damage, confusion, and pain it has caused.
- Acknowledge that you need God's help to move forward.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).

E-Exercise your freedom in Christ.

- Renounce being in bondage to spiritual abuse and embrace the truth that you have freedom in Christ.
- Renounce any unhealthy allegiance to a spiritual leader or church.
- Renounce the legalistic laws you have been living under and embrace Jesus, who has set you free from the law.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (JOHN 8:36).

C-Correct your concept of God.

- Study the Bible for yourself to learn the true character of God.
- Study the books of Galatians, Colossians, Hebrews, and Romans chapters 3–8, which proclaim your liberty in Christ.
- Study the Gospel of John and the Epistle of 1 John to see the loving heart of the Father.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 JOHN 3:1).

O-Open yourself up to healthy Christian relationships.

- Realize that any fear and distrust of Christians is based on the abuse you experienced. Refuse to judge others for the sins of some.
- Realize that God created you to be in fellowship with others and that He can use spiritually healthy Christians to love you, encourage you, and help you recover.
- Realize that you can bring comfort into the lives of others who have also experienced spiritual abuse.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

V-Voice your cares and concerns to God.

- Talk to God about your doubts, hurts, and fears resulting from the spiritual abuse.
- Talk to God about the guilt, anger, and other emotions you feel about being deceived.
- Talk to God about what is honestly on your heart and trust Him with your future.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8).

E-Enlist the help of spiritually mature, grace-filled mentors.

- Seek relationships with those who have wisdom and integrity.
- Seek those who love the Lord and who cling to the Word as their guide to knowing God.
- Seek a spiritual mentor who will encourage you to accurately interpret the Bible for yourself.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm” (PROVERBS 13:20).

R-Rest in the finished work of Christ.

- Reject the temptation to use “works” to gain the approval of God. Claim the righteousness of Christ as your own.
- Reject condemning thoughts that assault your mind and emotions. Claim the cleansing forgiveness of Christ.
- Reject the lie that you need to prove yourself worthy of salvation. Claim the truth that God loves you and Jesus died for your sins.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (ROMANS 5:8).

Y-Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit, who lives within you.

- Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth and to protect you from error.
- Trust the Holy Spirit to empower you to love the Lord and to live a life that is pleasing to Him.
- Trust the Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s promise to conform you to the character of Christ.

Remember, the Bible says . . .

“Let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives” (GALATIANS 5:25 NLT).

The Importance of Establishing Boundaries

Do people often take advantage of you? Do you say *Yes* to everyone and *No* to no one? Do you think you're supposed to meet everyone else's needs? If so, you need boundaries.

Just as nations have protective boundaries, your relationships need protective boundaries to guard your personal time, emotional energy, and physical strength. We cannot *be everything* or *do everything* for anyone—much less *everyone*.

You need to know where your responsibility ends and someone else's begins. This means at times, you need to say *No* to people so you can say *Yes* to God. Just as the Lord established physical boundaries when He created the world, He also established boundaries for our lives and relationships.

*“I, the LORD, define the ocean’s sandy shoreline
as an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross.
The waves may toss and roar,
but they can never pass the boundaries I set.”*
(JEREMIAH 5:22 NLT)

A boundary is an established limit—a line that should not be crossed.

- A marked limit of an area, a dividing line
- A limit intended to create necessary space
- A dividing line that separates one entity from another

Physical boundaries are territorial lines that divide one area from another.

- In the Bible, the first boundary was spoken directly from God to Adam. “The Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (Genesis 2:16–17).
- You have both the right of personal control and the responsibility of setting rules for others regarding what is yours. God, the Creator and owner of the Garden of Eden, had the right to set the rules for everything and everyone in the garden.
- “For when you eat from it [the tree] you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:17).

Moral boundaries are ethical lines that divide right from wrong.

- When a boundary is respected, the result is a reward. God set up a moral boundary for Adam and Eve—what was right and what was wrong; what led to life and what led to death. When God's boundary was honored, the couple enjoyed a reward—the abundance of the garden and unbroken fellowship with God.
- When a boundary is rejected, the result is a repercussion. When God's boundary was violated, the couple experienced a repercussion—sin entered the world, which disqualified Adam and Eve from staying within the bounds of the garden.
- When you communicate a clear, rightful boundary—with a reward and a repercussion—and someone violates that boundary, the repercussion is inevitable and, if possible, instantaneous. In choosing to violate a boundary, the violator, not the boundary-setter, is choosing the repercussion.

The principle of rewards and repercussions was clearly demonstrated when God set a boundary with Adam and Eve. By choosing to violate that boundary, they chose the repercussion that God stated.

*“To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife
and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you,
“You must not eat from it,” Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.’”*
(GENESIS 3:17)

The Purpose and Benefit of Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries are like fences, protecting you from wrong people, wrong places, and wrong priorities. Personal boundaries also guard you from giving more time, talent, and tolerance than you should, protecting you from people taking more than they should.

Personal boundaries are the healthy by-product of realizing we are uniquely separate from one another and personally responsible for our own actions and responses. Boundaries are necessary to protect you from those who might attempt to take advantage of you. The Bible reveals the treasure within you that is to be guarded above everything else.

*“Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.”*
(PROVERBS 4:23)

Personal boundaries convey:

- What you are—and what you aren’t
- What you value—and what you don’t
- What you believe—and what you don’t
- What you’ll endure—and what you won’t
- What you’ll accept—and what you won’t

Personal boundaries allow you to:

- Determine what belongs to you and what belongs to another
- Decide who and what you will prioritize in your life
- Demonstrate how you will maintain control over your body, soul, and spirit
- Declare limits in your relationships—and your right to enforce them
- Determine how you will maintain your moral convictions, not violating your conscience

Relational boundaries enable you to:

- Stand up for yourself and share your relationship restrictions appropriately
- Feel comfortable in giving honest feedback without fear
- Be firm with others, thoughtfully and unapologetically
- Respect the rules of others and act in their best interest
- Establish and maintain healthy give-and-take relationships

Emotional and mental boundaries equip you to:

- Evaluate the appropriateness of your thoughts and emotions in light of God's Word
- Guard against letting your own emotions (or someone else's) control you
- Feel the freedom to agree or disagree with others without fear or guilt
- Communicate your own thoughts and emotions in a Christlike way
- Disengage from those who try to manipulate, hurt, or lie to you

"For we are each responsible for our own conduct."

(GALATIANS 6:5 NLT)

MANIPULATION

Cutting the Strings That Control You

What Is Manipulation?

If you searched in the Bible for the word “manipulation” ... you probably won’t find anything. However, God’s Word speaks to this issue, as manipulation is all about controlling and deceiving others for one’s own advantage. It’s as old as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and it’s a common tactic among spiritually abusive leaders. The Lord, however, wants you to be grounded in His Word – so you can be guided by the truth.

“Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me.”

(PSALM 43:3 NLT)

Manipulation is the art of controlling people or circumstances by indirect, unfair, or deceptive means—especially to one’s own advantage.

Manipulation happens when we allow others to have excessive control over us—control that God alone should have.

To manipulate is to unduly restrain, restrict, or rule in a relationship by use of deception.

To manipulate is to suppress or oppress a person by overtly or covertly subversive tactics.

To manipulate is to have excessive, cunning control.

To be manipulated is to allow:

- Another person to dictate your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Decisions to be made for you
- Others to have control over you, rather than allowing God to govern your life.

Spiritual manipulation involves the use of religious words or acts to manipulate someone for personal gain or to achieve a personal agenda, thereby harming that person’s walk with God.

At the core of spiritual manipulation is the control of others. Spiritual manipulation is acting “spiritual” to benefit oneself by using self-centered efforts to control others.

A—Acting “spiritual” to

B—Benefit oneself by

U—Using

S—Self-centered

E—Efforts to control others

Examples of Spiritual Manipulation

The religious leader who twists Scripture or uses legalistic, unbiblical rules to control the behavior of the church members

The religious people who shame others or use guilt in order to get what they want or to “win” an argument

The religious husband who demands submission from his wife so that he can manipulate her to violate her own conscience in order to satisfy his selfish desires

The religious parent who commands total, unquestioned compliance from children by using harsh discipline without compassion or understanding

The religious employer who micromanages employees, expecting them to work longer hours without equitable monetary compensation

Spiritual manipulators put confidence in their position of authority and their perceived right to use those under their influence to accomplish their own personal agenda. However, God alone has the wisdom, the power, and the right to accomplish His plans and purposes for those whom He has created.

*“In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.”*
(PROVERBS 16:9)

Motivating God’s People

Question: “If spiritual manipulation is not used, what will motivate people to follow God’s will?”

Answer: No manipulation is needed to motivate people. God Himself empowers and motivates you to do His will.

– **He puts** His Spirit in you to do His will.

*“I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow
my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*
(EZEKIEL 36:27)

– **He puts** His laws on your heart and mind.

*“This is the covenant I will make with them . . .
says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”*
(HEBREWS 10:16)

– **He puts** His Word in your mind and reminds you to do His will.

*“The word is very near you; it is in your mouth
and in your heart so you may obey it.”*
(DEUTERONOMY 30:14)

Spiritual Manipulation or Biblical Obedience

Question: “What is the difference between spiritual manipulation and biblical obedience?”

Answer: Obedience is the act of conforming outwardly to God’s righteous standard and inwardly to the character of Christ through the enabling grace of God. The difference between biblical obedience and spiritual manipulation lies in the resource, motive, result, and how you approach God.

- **In manipulation**, the resource is self-effort, the motive is self-promotion. Manipulation results in pride. God is approached on the basis of self-performance.
- **In obedience**, the resource is the Spirit of God, the motive is to glorify God. Obedience results in humility. God is approached on the basis of Christ’s performance.

“The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

(TITUS 2:11–14)

Characteristics of Spiritually Manipulative Leaders

Spiritually manipulative leaders are generally . . .

Authoritarian—implying that God communicates with His people only through a hierarchy of power

Coercive—using any tactic available to persuade followers to disregard their own logic and do what the leaders demand

Condemning—heaping condemnation on outsiders and anyone who leaves the congregation

Discriminatory—telling average members their needs are less important than are the needs of leaders

Image Conscious—seeking to present themselves as an image of perfect righteousness

Intimidating—threatening members routinely with punishment or excommunication in order to gain compliance

Isolating—encouraging members to minimize or discontinue contact with family, friends, and the outside world

Legalistic—expecting members to make extreme sacrifices of money, time, and energy for the sake of the organization

Perfectionistic—condemning failure of any type or magnitude

Prideful—flaunting their distinctiveness to validate their claim of having a “special” relationship with God

Scapegoating—blaming the ministry’s problems on the sins of the members

Suppressive of Criticism—maintaining that those who question anything about the organization are actually challenging God’s authority

Wrong and Right Belief of the Manipulated

Wrong Belief: “I must have the approval of others in order to feel loved, significant, and secure.”

Right Belief: “I do not need the approval of others because God accepts me totally and loves me unconditionally. He alone gives me significance and will meet my inner needs.”

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

Key Verse for the Manipulated

*“Am I now trying to win the approval
of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”*
(GALATIANS 1:10)

How to Stop Being Spiritually Manipulated

Submit yourself to God’s authority. You are accountable to God first and human authorities second.

“We must obey God rather than human beings!” (ACTS 5:29).

Talk about your concerns with spiritual leaders who are not involved in your manipulative situation. God desires peace, unity, and reconciliation between Christians.

“[We are to] be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (EPHESIANS 4:2–3).

Consider how the spiritually manipulative attitude of others is impacting your spiritual life, your relationships with family members and friends, and your sense of personal value.

“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:33).

Separate yourself from manipulative situations and seek out people who are encouraging.

“Encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (HEBREWS 3:13).

Getting Rid of Guilt

Guilt is a primary weapon for spiritually abusive and spiritually manipulative people. They use guilt as a motivator for obedience, compliance, or simply to get their way. That is not how God intends guilt to operate in our lives. Guilt should serve as a signal that we’ve done something truly wrong in God’s eyes, and we need to come back to the Lord to receive His grace and forgiveness. It should not be used as an abusive tool to force or coerce people to action. That’s why you need to know the truth about guilt.

*“Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.”
(Psalm 25:5)*

God is gracious and forgiving, yet He does not overlook or excuse the guilty.

“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty” (EXODUS 34:6–7 NLT).

God declares that all people are guilty of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).

God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:5–6).

“Guilt should not be used as an abusive tool to force or coerce people to action.”

God does not condemn those who are in Christ—who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (ROMANS 8:1).

God will judge those who reject Christ and His free gift of salvation.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (JOHN 3:36).

God doesn’t want you to hide your sin and guilt but to confess it and receive His grace.

“People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (PROVERBS 28:13 NLT).

God wants you to repent with godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

“For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There’s no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT).

God completely forgives and cleanses you of all sin.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).

God calls you by His grace to live holy and leave sin behind you.

“Neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (JOHN 8:11).

God wants you to regularly remind yourself that He is gracious and compassionate.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (PSALM 145:8–9).

God wants you to forgive others who are guilty of wronging you.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

God wants you to tell others about His forgiveness.

“My friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (ACTS 13:38).

Key Verse on Guilt

*“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
(ROMANS 8:1)*

Key Passage on Guilt

*“Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!
² Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!
³ When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.
⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.
⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.”
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”
(PSALM 32:1–5 NLT)*

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

“I’ll never tell anyone.”

“No one will love me if they find out.”

“I feel dirty. Damaged.”

“God will never forgive me.”

Statements like these reveal the lasting sense of guilt and shame. If these emotions go unaddressed, they can impact how you view yourself, how you interact in your relationships, and how you relate to God. In order to break free from these strongholds, the feelings of guilt and shame need to be correctly defined and dealt with God’s way. With God’s help, you can start walking in the freedom of His grace.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD,
and the LORD answered me and set me free.”*
(PSALM 118:5 NLT)

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are not the same. **Guilt** focuses on your behavior; **shame** focuses on you.

Shame can be a response to what was done to you, but **guilt** is a response to something you have done.

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined **guilt**.

Shame focuses on who you are, but **guilt** focuses on what you’ve done.

Shame is experienced when your **guilt** moves from knowing you have done something bad to feeling that you are bad.

Shame creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior; **guilt** can motivate a desire to change—or justify emotions and behavior.

Shame produces feelings of loneliness that foster unhealthy dependencies, but **guilt** produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

Shame steals the joy of your salvation; **guilt** confessed restores joy in salvation.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*
(PSALM 51:12)

The Difference Between True Guilt and False Guilt

False guilt can blind and deceive people from seeing the truth about themselves, their situation, and God. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to already difficult emotions. Realize, there's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt. . . .

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues even after confessing and repenting of a sin that is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt leads to freedom, as it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- **False guilt** is resolved by rejecting the lies of the enemy and believing the truth of God's Word. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the "*accuser of our brothers and sisters.*" He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins which you have confessed and repented of, realize this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- "What am I hearing?" (Accusation.)
- "What am I feeling?" (False Guilt.)
- "What are the facts?" (I am not guilty. I am fully forgiven.)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: "Thank you, Father, that you don't condemn me and don't want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ."

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

(ROMANS 8:1)

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

If you are experiencing true guilt (feeling bad about what you've done), confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

"I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (PSALM 32:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing false guilt (feeling bad although you've done no wrong), reject the false guilt and replace the lies you've been led to believe with the truth of God's Word.

"Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (PSALM 25:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing shame (feeling bad about who you are), embrace God's love for you and meditate regularly on your identity in Christ as a chosen, beloved child of God.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 JOHN 3:1).

The powerful emotions of guilt and shame can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God's Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

"In abundance of counselors there is victory."

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

IDENTITY & SELF-IMAGE

Knowing What's True about You

What Is God's Heart on Your Identity?

If you have experienced spiritual abuse, you may have an inaccurate view of God . . . and yourself. Because of the spiritual abuse, it's possible that your identity might be wrapped up in your performance, false self-image, or "good works." It might also be true that your identity is so damaged by the guilt, shame, and pain you've experienced that it's hard to believe that God loves you and accepts you. That's why it's important to know what God's Word says about you.

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."*

(JEREMIAH 31:3)

You are loved.

"God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people" (1 THESSALONIANS 1:4 NLT).

You are chosen.

"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes" (EPHESIANS 1:4 NLT).

You are accepted.

"Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory" (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).

You are redeemed.

"But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine'" (ISAIAH 43:1).

You are precious.

"You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you" (ISAIAH 43:4 NLT).

You are forgiven.

"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins" (COLOSSIANS 2:13 NLT).

You are cleansed.

"But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 NLT).

You are renewed.

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 NLT).

You are empowered.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 PETER 1:3).

*"God loves you
and accepts you."*

You are gifted.

"In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well" (ROMANS 12:6 NLT).

You are useful.

"We are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (EPHESIANS 2:10).

You are blessed.

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ" (EPHESIANS 1:3 NLT).

Key Verse to Memorize

Heart transplant stories inspire and amaze. With the wonders of modern surgery and the generosity of organ donors, a dying individual can receive new life from another. There's a sense in which the donor's life continues, living in and through the recipient. The new life of the recipient is due to the generosity of the donor.

However, astounding stories of successful heart transplants are but a dim reflection of an incredible biblical reality. When you become a follower of Christ, God gives you a new heart, a new identity, a new family, and a new purpose. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ's life becomes yours as He lives in you and through you. This new life and identity is due entirely to the generous grace of God in Christ.

*"I have been crucified with Christ
and I no longer live,
but Christ lives in me.
The life I now live in the body,
I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me."
(GALATIANS 2:20)*

Key Passage to Read

God's Word describes each person in two different ways. There's the "you" before receiving Christ, and there the "you" after receiving Christ. Similar to the "in Adam" and "in Christ" distinction, the Bible describes this difference as your "old self" and your "new self."

The old self, like Adam, disobeyed God, lived independently of God, and generally lived to please self. But in and through Christ, we are given a new nature. The new self seeks to obey God, lives dependently on Him, and desires to please God. Everything about the old self was centered on self; everything about the new self is centered on Christ.

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

(EPHESIANS 4:22–24)

Colossians 3:1–17 Putting on the New Self

You are with Christ and in Christ—so focus on Him.v. 1

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

You have died to your old self—so look to Christ to find life.vv. 2–3

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

You have a new, glorious future—so live with joyful expectation.v. 4

"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

You are not defined by the sins of your past—so you can conquer them.vv. 5–9

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices . . ."

You are made new—so grow to be more and more like Christ.v. 10

"and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

You belong to Christ—so find your primary identity in Him.v. 11

"Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

You are chosen, holy and loved—so love and forgive as Christ does. vv. 12–14

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

You have the peace of Christ—so live a life of peace and gratitude. v. 15

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

You have a new purpose in Christ—so share Him with others. v. 16

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

You have a new motivation in Christ—so do everything to the glory of God. v. 17

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Seeing Yourself through God’s Eyes

If you’ve heard constant, cruel and condemning messages from your parents, spouse, partner, boss, spiritual leader, or anyone close to you . . . you might have come to believe those messages over time. Perhaps you’ve come to believe that you are unworthy, unlovable, or not “good enough.”

Underneath much of our struggles are lies we believe about ourselves, others, our situation, and about God. These lies are often connected with a sense of guilt and shame, and they can negatively impact our behavior, decisions, and relationships.

But know this: No matter what harsh words you’ve been told, abuse does not have the final word about you – God does. His Word speaks of His boundless love for you and the life-changing identity you have in Christ.

Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God’s eyes, believing what He says about you. Therefore, it is important to identify the lies you’ve been led to believe and replace them with God’s truth.

*“You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”*

(JOHN 8:32)

Do you think . . . you are unacceptable?

God says . . . you are accepted by Him.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (ROMANS 15:7).

Do you think . . . you are alone?

God says . . . He will never leave you nor forsake you.

“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Do you think . . . you are incompetent, a failure?

God says . . . He has made you competent.

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are bad, not good enough?

God says . . . He sees you through the lens of His mercy.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (TITUS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are a mistake?

God says . . . you are wonderfully made.

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (PSALM 139:14).

Do you think . . . you are defeated?

God says . . . you are more than a conqueror.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (ROMANS 8:37).

Do you think . . . you are unloved?

God says . . . He has great love for you.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (EPHESIANS 2:4-5).

Do you think . . . you can't be forgiven?

God says . . . your sins are forgiven and are gone.

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (PSALM 103:12).

Do you think . . . you don't have enough strength?

God says . . . He will strengthen you Himself.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).

Do you think . . . you can't have victory over a sinful habit?

God says . . . You have victory through Jesus.

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:57).

How to Claim Your Identity in Christ

In order for Christians to walk in victory, we need to identify the lies we believe about ourselves and exchange them for the truth about who we really are in Christ. At the moment of our salvation, we become a new creation. But we must believe and accept that truth to live it.

Consider the following seven lies we commonly tell ourselves, followed by seven truths from God's Word. For lasting change to occur, we must cast aside the lies and constantly rely on the truth of Scripture. . . . *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Review one of these lies each day. Ask yourself, *Am I believing this lie?* Then refer to the scripture verses for that day and write them down. Read them aloud and thank God that His Word confirms the truth about you—*whether you feel like it or not*. Repeating this practice regularly will help you begin to see yourself through God's eyes.

*"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent
or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:8)

Day One . . . My New Family

Lie: "I can't feel valuable unless I'm loved and accepted by my family and the significant people in my life."

Truth: In Christ, I have a new family where I am unconditionally loved and accepted by God.

"You are members of God's family" (EPHESIANS 2:19 NLT).

— **I am chosen by God.**

"He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (EPHESIANS 1:4).

— **I am given a new birth.**

"In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"
(1 PETER 1:3).

— **I am adopted by God.**

"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure" (EPHESIANS 1:5 NLT).

— **I am a child of God.**

"To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"
(JOHN 1:12).

— **I am made an heir of God.**

"So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir"
(GALATIANS 4:7).

— **I am given access to God.**

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (EPHESIANS 3:12).

— **I am given fellowship with Jesus.**

"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 CORINTHIANS 1:9).

Day Two . . . My New Characteristics

Lie: “I’ll never feel valuable because this is just the way I am. I cannot change.”

Truth: In Christ, I am made new.

“Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (EPHESIANS 4:24).

– **I am a new creation.**

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

– **I have a new heart.**

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (EZEKIEL 36:26).

– **I have a new Spirit.**

“I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (EZEKIEL 36:27).

– **I have a new attitude.**

“Be made new in the attitude of your minds” (EPHESIANS 4:23).

– **I have a new way.**

“We serve in the new way of the Spirit” (ROMANS 7:6).

– **I have a new mind.**

“Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:16).

– **I have been given a new covenant.**

“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:6).

Day Three . . . My New Life

Lie: “My life has no value because I’ve done so many things wrong. My life is ruined.”

Truth: In Christ, I have new life.

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (ROMANS 6:4).

– **I am saved.**

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (EPHESIANS 2:8).

– **I am cleansed.**

“But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 JOHN 1:7 NLT).

– **I am washed.**

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (TITUS 3:5).

– **I am sanctified.**

“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11).

– **I am justified.**

“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (ROMANS 5:1).

– **I am redeemed.**

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (EPHESIANS 1:7).

– **I am reconciled.**

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18).

Day Four . . . My New Clothing

Lie: “I don’t feel valuable unless I live in the right neighborhood, drive the right car, and wear the right clothes.”

Truth: In Christ, I am given new clothing.

“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness” (ISAIAH 61:10).

– **I am clothed with Christ.**

“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (GALATIANS 3:27).

– **I am clothed with compassion.**

“As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion” (COLOSSIANS 3:12).

– **I am clothed with kindness.**

“. . . clothe yourselves with . . . kindness” (COLOSSIANS 3:12).

– **I am clothed with humility.**

“. . . clothe yourselves with . . . humility” (COLOSSIANS 3:12).

– **I am clothed with gentleness.**

“. . . clothe yourselves with . . . gentleness” (COLOSSIANS 3:12).

– **I am clothed with patience.**

“. . . clothe yourselves with . . . patience” (COLOSSIANS 3:12).

– **I will be clothed with the imperishable.**

“The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:52–53).

Day Five . . . My New Image

Lie: “My life has value as long as I have a good image and look good to others.”

Truth: In Christ, I have a new image.

“Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man [Christ]” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:53).

– **I am totally accepted by Christ.**

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (ROMANS 15:7).

– **I am totally righteous in Christ.**

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:21).

– **I am totally holy in Christ.**

“He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (COLOSSIANS 1:22).

– **I am totally complete in Christ.**

“You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (COLOSSIANS 2:10 NKJV).

– **I am totally forgiven in Christ.**

“He forgave us all our sins” (COLOSSIANS 2:13).

– **I am totally perfect in Christ.**

“For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (HEBREWS 10:14).

– **I am being totally transformed into Christ’s image.**

“We all . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:18).

Day Six . . . My New Freedom

Lie: “My life has no value because I have failed and deserve to be punished.”

Truth: In Christ, I am freed from the penalty and power of sin.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (JOHN 8:36).

– **I am free from God’s wrath.**

*“God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:9).*

– **I am free from being an enemy of God.**

“For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (ROMANS 5:10).

– **I am free from the power of sin.**

“We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin” (ROMANS 6:6 NLT).

– **I am free from the law and legalism.**

“You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God” (ROMANS 7:4 NLT).

– **I am free from condemnation.**

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (ROMANS 8:1).

– **I am free from the veil of ignorance.**

“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:16–17).

– **I am free from blemish and accusation.**

“He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (COLOSSIANS 1:22).

Day Seven . . . My New Inheritance

Lie: “My life has no value if I do not succeed financially and leave a comfortable inheritance.”

Truth: In Christ, I have a new inheritance.

“We have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 PETER 1:4 NLT).

– **I am given every spiritual blessing.**

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (EPHESIANS 1:3).

– **I am given everything needed for a godly life.**

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 PETER 1:3).

– **I am given a seal with the Spirit of Christ.**

“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance . . .” (EPHESIANS 1:13–14).

– **I am given great promises.**

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 PETER 1:4).

– **I am given hope.**

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” (EPHESIANS 1:18).

– **I am given eternal life.**

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (JOHN 3:16).

– **I am given an eternal home in heaven.**

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ” (PHILIPPIANS 3:20).

A FINAL WORD ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Truth about the Bible

Spiritually abusive people twist Scripture for their own desires. This might lead some to believe that the Bible is therefore wrong or untrustworthy. However, the problem is not with the Bible but with the sinful hearts of the abusers. For the believer and for those who have been spiritually abused, it is important to know God's Word so you can discern truth from error as well as proper use from misuse and abuse.

*“Teach me your ways, O LORD,
that I may live according to your truth!”
(PSALM 86:11 NLT)*

The Bible is the Word of God; it is inspired by God; God is its ultimate author.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17).

The Bible is inerrant; it is completely true; it does not lie.

“All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal” (PSALM 119:160).

The Bible is infallible; it is completely trustworthy; it accomplishes everything it says it will accomplish.

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (ISAIAH 55:10–11).

The Bible is the final authority for the Christian's life, beliefs, faith, and practice.

“Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (MATTHEW 4:4).

The Bible is ultimately about Jesus. It is properly understood with respect to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (JOHN 5:39).

The Holy Spirit gives understanding to the Word of God.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (JOHN 16:13).

The Word of God will endure forever; it will last forever; it cannot be destroyed.

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever” (ISAIAH 40:8).

How to Stay Rooted in God's Word: 5 R's

The Bible is truly a life-changing book. It is a gift to be treasured, studied, and obeyed—not misused and twisted for personal gain. The Christian life cannot be lived without God's Word, for it contains His plans, purposes, and promises to every believer.

As you seek to overcome spiritual abuse, it's important to stay rooted in God's Word. Use the following 5 "personalized" steps to grow in your relationship with God through His Word.

Recognize the Bible is God's Word

- I will remember that the Bible alone is God's Word.
- I will remember that the Bible is inspired, infallible, and inerrant.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17).

Read God's Word regularly

- I will read and study God's Word daily.
- I will find a Bible reading plan and commit to it.

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (REVELATION 1:3).

Remember God's Word

- I will memorize passages of Scripture each week.
- I will meditate on God's Word, thinking through what it means for my life.

"I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways" (PSALM 119:115).

Rejoice in God's Word

- I will thank God regularly for giving me His Word.
- I will delight in God's many great promises to me.

"I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure" (PSALM 119:162).

Respond to God's Word

- I will believe what God says in His Word.
- I will respond to God's commands with obedience.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (JAMES 1:22).

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*
(JOHN 5:24)

The information in this resource is intended as guidelines for healthy living. Please consult qualified medical, legal, pastoral, and psychological professionals regarding individual concerns.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.



P.O. Box 7, Dallas, TX 75221
hopefortheheart.org

© 2022 Hope for the Heart

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to these topics, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin, change, or stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to these topics, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding these issues? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with these topics/issues? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

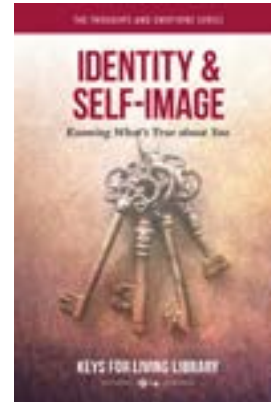
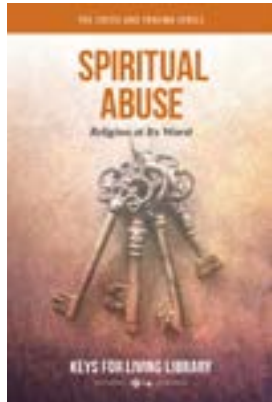
What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

HELPFUL RESOURCES

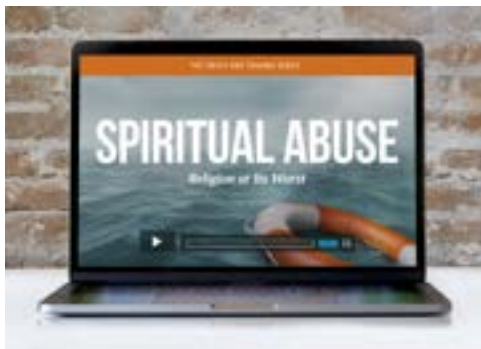
For more information on the topics in this resource, click on the topics below to find helpful books and video courses from Hope for the Heart. The resources of Hope for the Heart provide clear answers from God's Word and concise, practical guidance on life's challenges so you can grow personally and be equipped to help others.

Books with Practical Steps



Video Courses

Save 30% on our video courses with coupon code **TOPICAL30**



DID YOU KNOW ... ?

You can get any of our *Lifeline to Hope* Topical Video Courses for 30% off!



**Use code TOPICAL30 at checkout
and take 30% off today!**

Our topical video courses provide biblical instruction and practical guidance on specific emotional, relational, and spiritual issues such as Abuse, Addiction, Anger, Anxiety, Depression, Fear, Forgiveness, Grief, Marriage, Parenting, Stress, and more. Get the tools to face life's challenges with courage and confidence.

These video courses are great for:

- Personal study and growth—helping you overcome specific personal challenges
- Learning how to help others move toward greater freedom and spiritual maturity
- Anyone who wants to learn more about what God's Word teaches on various subjects

Each video course includes a downloadable workbook with helpful, biblical insights on the topic and discussion questions for further study and growth.

hopefortheheart.org/topical