

A BOOK BY
ROXANNE MELISSA JOHNSON



HEALING FROM TRAUMA
GOD'S WAY



Healing from Trauma God's Way

By Roxanne Melissa Johnson

Dedication:

For my sons Benjamin and Salem Johnson. God has given you as blessings in my life and I strive every day to be the mother you need and deserve.

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Preface:

Roxanne Melissa Johnson is a mother of two sons, a refugee from Jamaica who was granted asylum in Canada due to Jamaica's abusive psychiatric system and being a victim of spousal abuse, and is herself a survivor of child sexual abuse. In the year 2005 Roxanne was diagnosed with bipolar disorder but it was after this life changing event she realized how much trauma had impacted her life leading to chronic mental health issues later in adulthood.

The author has recognized the failure of the psychiatric system to use a trauma-informed, psychosocial and human rights based approach to mental health. But thanks to a personal relationship with Yashuah Hamashiach also known as Jesus Christ, Roxanne has been on the road to recovery and through this book would like to share the insights the Holy Spirit has given her through her own mental health recovery and in the raising of her two sons Benjamin and Salem.

While pursuing her masters in journalism at Toronto Metropolitan University, the author has used research techniques to show studies that back up and validate the insights she's had of the effects of trauma on the psyche and our childhood development. Studies include the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study started by researchers Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda; A study on Trauma by the American Psychological Association; A study by the None in Three Research Centre at the University of Technology "Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse in Jamaica" and several Jamaican news article delving into the mental health crisis and the abuse of children in Jamaica.

The book looks at the fact that the healing of the brokenhearted that should be done by the body of Christ has been shunted into the secular psychiatric industry which studies have shown the overuse of psychiatric medication has caused much harm.

This book looks at spiritual tools we can use to heal from the traumas of our past no matter how deep and how to forgive those who have abused and harmed us to cause these deep trauma scars.

Christ's approach is always the best approach, and modern scientific studies and technology has only revealed the original plan of healing made by the creator which is best suited for humanity. The author considers herself simply a willing vessel to be used by the Spirit of the Lord "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1)

Introduction:

First, I would like to congratulate you on taking this step to healing by reading this book. Many people won't even acknowledge their traumas and how they have affected them, because sometimes it's just easier to bury the memories deep down inside and hope for the best. But you've taken a very courageous step in recognizing your past hurts, your need for healing and then beginning the journey!

Although anyone can benefit from this book, this is a book written by a Jamaican for Jamaicans. What inspired me to write this book was seeing what was happening in my home country. Jamaica has struggled a lot with crime and violence. But what the Holy Spirit revealed to me was that, unlike other war-torn countries which may be dealing with oppressive political regimes at war with each other, the root cause at the heart of the matter for the country is how people deal with personal conflict. An underhanded insult can quickly escalate into a physical altercation and then murder. Ex-lovers seek revenge for infidelity or because their former partners had moved on. Any action perceived as an insult or slight could result in the loss of life and a grieving community. Tensions are always high, and it seems the entire country is gripped under a stronghold of anger, rage and lack of self-control.

Another revelation I received from the Holy Spirit was the role of child abuse and childhood trauma. Jamaican culture unfortunately normalizes the physical, psychological and even sexual abuse of children. Broken and dysfunctional homes are churning out broken and dysfunctional adults who have deep-seated anger issues and psychological instability. There is no doubt about it: the nation is not just in need of financial and economic progress. There is a deep need for the psychological healing of the damage caused by our past traumas. Hurting people hurt people and the unchecked traumas of our past have very real consequences for our present relationships and how we regard and treat our fellow man.

I also found growing up in Kingston to be traumatic, not only because I was a childhood victim of sexual abuse and harassment and there were dysfunctional behaviors within the home, but it was also stressful living in a city where you always faced a high chance of becoming a victim of a crime yourself or being on the receiving end of someone's unbridled anger. If you didn't hear of some horrible violence from a second-hand account or word of mouth, you would certainly be exposed to it from just watching the local news. But thanks to Yahweh, he has allowed me healing from the past, which is always ongoing. For me personally it meant having to leave the country. But for many I know this is simply not an option. But through the Lord taking me out of the country, I've been able to see where certain behaviors that lend themselves to violence have been normalized within Jamaican culture. It has allowed me to look back and identify toxic and damaging behaviors, thought processes and emotions that lead to trauma and the traumatization of others.

Though it's written within a Jamaican cultural context, this book is for anyone who is trying to heal from the trauma in their past. Whether childhood trauma, or recent; whether psychological, emotional, physical or sexual, the trauma of our past affects our present. It can affect our relationships, our mental health, our physical health, and manifest in toxic, self-medicating behaviors such as substance use and other addictive patterns which can in-turn traumatize others.

But whatever the traumas you've been through, the bible promises that we can be free of the chains and strongholds they have created in our lives! This book offers a Christian perspective to emotional healing and reveals biblical principles and promises that can and will lead us on the road to full recovery. We don't have to struggle with depression, mood disorders or psychological instability! We don't have to struggle with addiction or other high-risk self-defeating behaviors. We don't have to be a slave to negative emotions and thought patterns.

Clinical models for mental health, may give you a diagnosis and say you'll struggle with irreparable psychological disorders for the rest of your life where you'll have to be on several psychopharmaceuticals which can have harmful consequences. But God, Yahweh, the Great Physician has a better way! And you can take Him at His word when Yashuah says the Father "hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (Luke 4:18)

The Lord understands humanity's need for deep psychological healing. And why wouldn't He? He created the us! He is the designer of the human brain. He understands the intricacies of the mind, and the effect of our thoughts on our emotional and physical health. You *can* be healed and you *can* be free!

This book will look at several spiritual, bible-based concepts and principles that we can practice and employ for our healing and recovery. We'll look at the love of the Father and our need for His plan of salvation; Our need of forgiveness, for ourselves and for those who have hurt us in our past; Spiritual warfare and unlearning the lies of emotional abuse; Identifying toxic and emotionally abusive relationships and learning how to love from a distance by erecting healthy boundaries; Emotional Intelligence and how we can be free from being a slave to negative emotions such as anger, depression and hopelessness; Overcoming addictive and self-medicating behaviors; Learning that when God makes a promise He always follows through; and learning that the Christian's spiritual battle is never over!

I truly hope you find the contents of this book enlightening, empowering and healing. Feel free to read it from start to finish or to skip to certain chapters. I hope you come away with new psychological and spiritual skillsets that you can use every day, not only for healing from past traumas but also for navigating the emotional and spiritual challenges of everyday life.

The Love of the Father

Did you know that your heavenly Father rejoices over you? Zephaniah 3:17 says "...He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." If you've ever had children and watched them while they've slept, what a joy they bring! Just to watch them sleeping and their little chests rising and falling as they breathe. If we have so much love for our little ones, how much more love does the Eternal Father have for us, whom he delicately created in the womb. Psalm 139:13-14 says "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." Revelation 4:11 says "for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We were created for Yahweh's pleasure! Our very existence brings Him happiness.

Of all of the earth's creation, mankind was Yahweh's crowning achievement: we were the only creation that was made in the image of God. Genesis 1:26 says "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." We were made to have dignity and dominion over creation.

It is a very unfortunate thing that sin came into the picture. Humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve instead of trusting in the Father's love and instruction, decided to listen to the lies of Satan instead. They were told not to eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but Satan disguised as a serpent deceived Eve.

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 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 3:2-3)

In other words, God is holding out on us! He just doesn't want us to be as wise as He is! Though Psalm 84:11 says "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" Satan got Eve to doubt that. This distrust for God and a desire to do things our way for a seemingly better payoff is what got us into the current state of a cruel, harsh and sinful world. Since then, not only has the environment of the earth been cursed with thorns and thistles making it hard to get our daily bread, but man has also been ruled by his sinful and carnal nature. Instead of being like God who is benevolent and loving, we are now selfish and naturally given to indulging unruly and carnal emotions like anger and jealousy.

There's no better example than the relationship between Cain and his brother Abel, that happened soon after creation's fall. Cain's jealousy overwhelmed him, because of God's acceptance of Abel's offering and His rejection of his own. Jealousy turned into anger, and anger turned into hatred. Our Father, Yahweh, who sees everything within our hearts, warned Cain of where his emotions were leading him. "...if you do not do

what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:7) Then humanity’s first murder happened, and between two brothers no less! How much do we see how our own negative emotions have hurt others as well as ourselves. Because of man’s sinful nature, now we live in a world filled with tragedy, abuse, war and natural disasters that cause so much physical and psychological suffering.

Yet even in our disobedience, the Father created a plan to save us from ourselves. Sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2 says “...your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” That separation also leads to an eternal death. Romans 6:23 says “For the wages [punishment] of sin is death.” But even in our destructive and selfish nature, the Father wanted desperately to reconcile us back to Himself, and devised a plan to come to earth as a human being and experience our vulnerability and suffering, our emotions and temptations. Yashuah, (Jesus Christ) the Messiah, the son of God, lived in this world as a man and died in our place not only as a perfect sacrifice for sin, taking our punishment onto Himself, but also reconciling us back to God the Father, so that we can have access to His Holy Spirit which empowers us to no longer be controlled and enslaved to our sinful behaviors.

Romans 6:12-14 says “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law but under grace.”

Because of Yashuah’s sacrifice (Yashuah in Hebrew means “God’s Salvation”) we now can have a relationship with God in which His Holy Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience and gentleness, can dwell within us. But in order for His Holy Spirit to live in our hearts and minds, we must first accept Christ as our Lord and savior. It means having the humility to acknowledge that we are sinful and in desperate need of His forgiveness.

No matter who we are or where we’re from, we have all sinned. Romans 3:23 says “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Whether they’ll admit it or not, every single human being on this earth has sinned. We’ve all said and done things we regret. Acts 10:34 says “God is no respecter of persons.” We’ve hurt others as well as ourselves. But no matter what you’ve done, no matter how many bad choices and mistakes we’ve made in our lives, God the Father wants to forgive you, if you’ll only ask Him. And His forgiveness is one of the most liberating things you’ll ever experience!

Psalms 103:12 says “As far as the East is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” Hebrews 8:12 says “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Once we admit our sins to God, He doesn’t hold them over our heads anymore. He doesn’t rub our mistakes in our faces to remind us how evil we were. He wants to completely transform us.

There are no Lengths to the Love of the Father:

One person's testimony that has shown me how deep the Father's love is the story of John Ramirez. From the age of eight years old to the age of 35, John was trained by his father to be a high-ranking priest in a satanic cult in New York City. Living in a broken home where his father often abused his mother, and desperate for self-worth, John loved the sense of power he got from the occult practices his father immersed him in. John would learn to cast spells and place curses on people. He would even practice astral projection, a way of having an out of body experience. John however noticed that persons he had trouble casting spells on were Christians. During one of his astral projection sessions he came upon a group of Christians holding hands in a circle and praying and felt a power there he had never experienced before. It frustrated his plans to curse that neighborhood.

One day John met a girl who invited him to church. He kept his occult practices a secret but went to church with the young lady. While in the service, John felt himself become possessed by demonic forces and grabbed the pastor by the throat. Members of the church rushed towards the scene and immediately began praying for John. John felt as if he was being pulled in two different directions. He felt the Spirit of Yashuah pulling him in one direction and the dark forces of Satan pulling him in another. After the experience John felt like he was losing his mind. Even to the point where he was contemplating suicide. Remembering the traumatic past of his childhood, John began to ask God "Where were you when my mom was getting beat up? Where were you when me and my brothers were going hungry?" In his frustration John said to God "You either prove who you are or leave me alone!"

John said he then fell into a deep sleep. In his dream he found himself in a train that was rushing towards hell. He stepped out of the doors of the train into hell and immediately realized this was not where he wanted to be. He looked around and saw other people involved in the occult in hell with him. Then John said he saw Satan himself trying to kill him but a cross then appeared and protected him. When John woke up from his dream he heard the voice of Yashuah say to him "I've always loved you."

That night John surrendered his life to Christ and felt overwhelmed by His love and His power. Now John Ramirez is an active evangelist and author who travels the world sharing his testimony of how Yashuah saved him, as well as how to engage in effective spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness.

Wow! If God has the love and compassion to save someone who was actively involved in the occult and even swore his life to Satan to do his bidding, it shows there's no lengths Yashuah wouldn't go through to save any of us! Christ wants to rescue us from our sinful past and transform our lives into something new.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." People in our lives may want to remind us of our mistakes and tell us we'll never change. But God sees in you the person He's always wanted you to be and the person you *will* become.

John 1:12 says “But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons [and daughters] of God.”

Once we acknowledge that we have sinned and accept the forgiveness of the Father, He gives us the supernatural power to now be able to resist sin! His Holy Spirit comes to live in our heart, to comfort and guide us. But in order for Him to do that we must submit to His instruction. It means accepting Yashuah as the new Lord of our lives. Not living for ourselves anymore to fulfill our own selfish desires but living for Christ and joining Him in the fight to save the souls of men from the destructive power of sin. It means loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving our fellow man, drawing each person back to God by demonstrating His love to them.

A life in devotion to God means making His will and instructions the first priority of our lives. It’s a huge commitment! It’s one I myself have made, and I’ve never regretted it! This world may seemingly offer fame and fortune, but these are all temporal and offer no long-term satisfaction. The things of this earth will pass away, but Yahweh, the Father wants to offer us eternal destinies!

Yashuah says in Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

God wants to be our treasure. And when He is, He will fill our hearts with so much love and compassion, not just for ourselves, but even for those who hurt us, that we will experience a healing that no worldly doctor or drug could ever provide.

To begin a journey with God means you’ll never be alone. No matter what challenges are ahead of me I know that the Father’s Holy Spirit is with me. Yashuah says in Matthew 28:20 “And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

I hope if you haven’t yet, you will allow Lord Yashuah to come into your life and transform you and lead you on your journey to healing from trauma God’s way.

What is Trauma?

According to the American Psychological Association¹ trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, assault or a natural disaster. Trauma can result from a particular event, or from ongoing situations, like living in an abusive home, or staying in an abusive relationship. Trauma can even be classified as “secondary” where even when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma of someone else, it can cause a similar psychological response. In the bible a good example of this would be in 2 Peter chapter 2 where it mentioned Lot “a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)” (2 Peter 2:7-8). Even if you’ve never been a victim of a crime yourself, just living in a violent neighborhood or country can be traumatic. If you’ve ever watched the news and felt intense emotions from disturbing news reports, that can also be a form of secondary trauma.

Experiences that traumatize and re-traumatize are the reality for men, women and children living in Jamaica. In 2021 Jamaica had the highest homicide rate out of 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean². Domestic and intimate partner violence is also high³. And in UNICEF’s 2015-2021 Report on Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean, Jamaica had the *highest* prevalence of severe physical punishment of children ages 1 to 14 out of 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries. There’s no sense in denying it -- the country has been in crisis for some time, and the results mean a crisis for mental health. The Psychiatric Nursing Aide Association of Jamaica⁴ predicted that in the 15 years between 2017 and 2032 the number Jamaicans receiving mental illness diagnoses will double or even triple. We’re a very proud nation, and because of that we don’t like to admit it, but Jamaicans are traumatized. Even people who are high-functioning and seemingly unscathed.

¹ American Psychological Association, Trauma, <https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma#:~:text=Trauma%20is%20an%20emotional%20response,symptoms%20like%20headaches%20or%20nausea.>

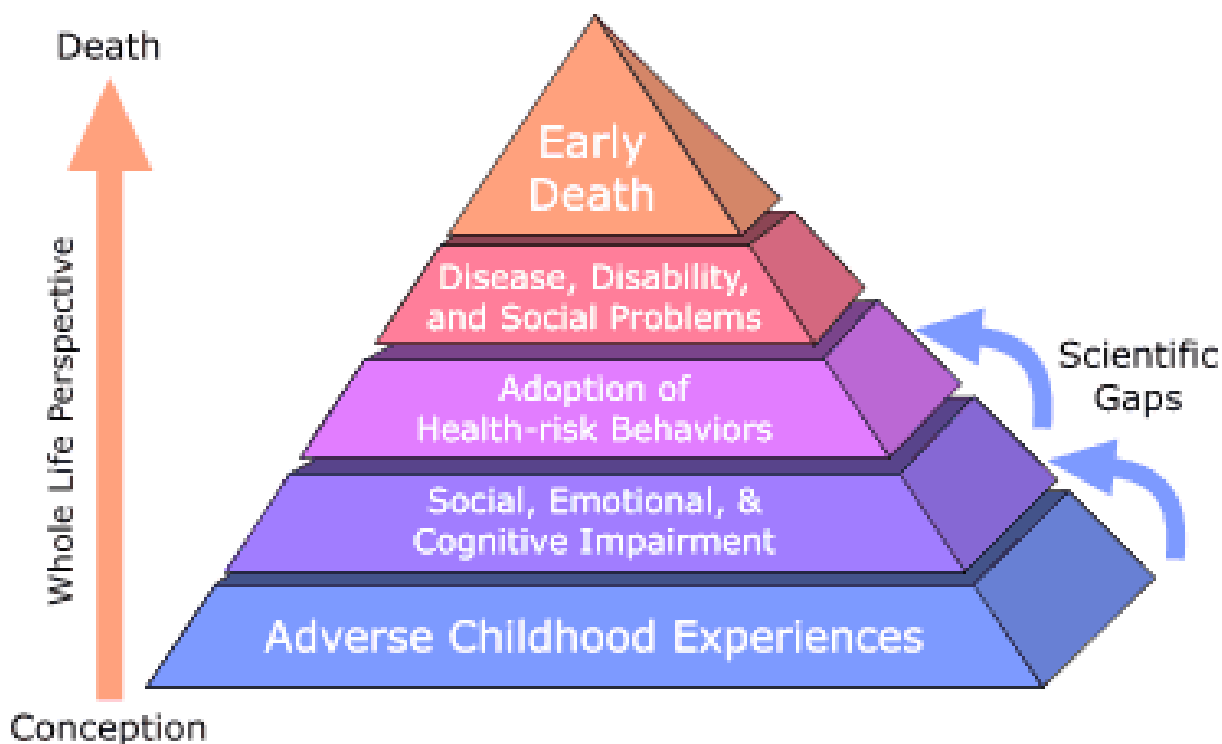
² Statista, Homicide rates in Latin America and Caribbean Countries in 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/947781/homicide-rates-latin-america-caribbean-country/#:~:text=Latin%20America%20%26%20Caribbean%3A%20homicide%20rate%202021%2C%20by%20country&text=In%202021%2C%20the%20highest%20homicide,murders%20committed%20per%20100%2C000%20inhabitants.>

³ International Journal of Child Youth and Family Studies, Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in Jamaica: Implications for Prevention and Intervention https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307948862_PREVALENCE_OF_INTIMATE_PARTNER_VIOLENCE_IN_JAMAICA_IMPLICATIONS_FOR_PREVENTION_AND_INTERVENTION

⁴ Jamaica Observer, Mental Illness Worry, http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/front-page/mental-illness-worry-professionals-say-data-suggest-doubling-of-cases-in-10-years_99700?profile=0

So what are the symptoms of trauma? Experiencing a traumatic event can leave you in a state of hypervigilance where you constantly have your fight or flight response at the ready, because you're fearful for the next occurrence. Some people can be in shock, denial or disbelief. Some can experience intrusive memories or flashbacks of the event or events. With intrusive memories or flashbacks, this can put your mind right back in the situation, as if you were experiencing it in the present. And this can result in flashes of anger, fear, guilt, shame or even depression.

In the mid 90s, researchers Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda conducted a specific study⁵ looking at the effects of childhood adversity on the health and wellness of adults, and the findings were very interesting. The researchers found that the more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) adults reported from their childhoods, the worse their physical and mental health outcomes. The adverse experiences were placed in seven different categories: physical, sexual and emotional abuse, witnessing domestic violence, living with someone who is mentally ill; living with someone with substance abuse issues, and having an incarcerated household member. The study found that these adverse experiences had a domino effect on the health and wellbeing of the individual.



⁵ Child Trends, Adverse childhood experiences are different than child trauma, and it's critical to understand why, Jessica Dym Bartlett, Vanessa Sacks, April 10, 2019, [https://www.childtrends.org/blog/adverse-childhood-experiences-different-than-child-trauma-critical-to-understand-why#:~:text=Adverse%20childhood%20experiences%20\(ACEs\)%E2%80%94a%20subset%20of%20childhood%20adversities.](https://www.childtrends.org/blog/adverse-childhood-experiences-different-than-child-trauma-critical-to-understand-why#:~:text=Adverse%20childhood%20experiences%20(ACEs)%E2%80%94a%20subset%20of%20childhood%20adversities.)

The above ACES pyramid shows how adverse childhood experiences can lead to social, emotional and cognitive impairment, which can then lead to the adoption of health-risk behaviors (self-medicating behaviors such as substance use or self-harm) which can in turn lead to disease, disability and social problems, finally resulting in early morbidity.

So this shows that trauma has not only psychological effects on us but also effects on our physical health. The trauma of living in a violent country or region has very real consequences for Jamaicans and Caribbean people. Research⁶ shows that people of Afro-Caribbean descent – whether they live in the islands or in other parts of the world – experience higher rates of hypertension compared to other populations. Stroke and heart disease are also the leading causes of death in the Caribbean. And Jamaica's obesity prevalence⁷ is higher than the regional average for women. It's not uncommon for people who've experienced trauma to develop life-long chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure or even chronic pain.

Childhood trauma of course affects the mind differently than trauma experienced in adulthood and can have more longstanding or chronic events. But regardless of when trauma is experienced, the resulting negative emotions and even physical health issues are similar.

Coping Mechanisms and Desensitization

The Lord hates the traumatic effects of this sinful world on His creation. Psalm 11:5 says “those who love violence, he hates with a passion.” One coping mechanism of the brain in response to trauma is to switch off our emotions, which can anesthetize us from our own suffering but also make us blind or indifferent to the suffering of others. Matthew 24:12 says “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.”

Another coping mechanism is the normalization of our traumatic experiences. If we were abused as children we may say “well everyone got beat as a kid, and I'm none the worse for wear!” We may even make jokes, use comic relief help us deal with the memories or even try to see it as a good thing. However, scripture says we are not to do that! Isaiah 5:20 says “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

One of the first problems with using normalization as a coping mechanism is that if the individual sees this traumatic event as normal or even “good,” they may enact this behavior on others, and they shift from being victim to victimizer. This is why things like childhood physical or sexual abuse become cyclical in nature. Because an individual

⁶ Proactive Health, Afro-Caribbeans Need to be Extra Vigilant about Hypertension, J Stephenson-Laws, <https://www.phlabs.com/afro-caribbeans-need-to-be-extra-vigilant-about-hypertension#:~:text=Monitor%20your%20blood%20pressure.,and%20don't%20know%20it.>

⁷ Global Nutrition Report, Country Nutrition Profiles, Jamaica, <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/caribbean/jamaica/>

was treated like that as a child and has “normalized” it in their mind, there is now no reason why as they as an adult can’t then treat their own children this way or children they are around. They go on to sexually victimize children or act in inappropriate ways around them. Their own traumas have been minimized either by themselves or by those around them, which then lends the individual to believe “it’s no big deal, so why can’t I act like that towards my own son or daughter.” Whether it was assault or sexual harassment, the sexual abuse of children is unfortunately normalized within the culture and not recognized for what it is.

But there is no ambivalence or ambiguity with God. The abuse of children, whether physical, emotional or sexual incenses the Lord! Christ says in Matthew 18:6 “If you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

We cannot fall into the trap of desensitizing ourselves, minimizing or normalizing sin. This is exactly what Satan wants; For us to be so desensitized to sin it could be happening in our midst and instead of standing up for the right we turn a blind eye, deny its reality, or see it as an unavoidable evil. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were so entrenched in sin they didn’t even realize their own moral depravity before “the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky” (Genesis 19:24) in judgement of their wickedness. No, instead the Father wants us to speak out against it and advocate for victims and the vulnerable. Isaiah 1:17 says “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” Yashuah who is our ultimate example never failed to call out injustice when He saw it. In Matthew 23:23 Christ scolded “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

God wants us to move out of the sleep of desensitization and into wakeful action. Becoming aware of our past traumas may mean mourning the loss of our own innocence and acknowledging feelings of hurt and anger but it also means becoming empowered to be a warrior for justice on behalf of the Lord. We can’t change the past but we can change the future for younger generations! We can be the advocate for another that we never had for ourselves.

It can be easy to sink into cynicism, with the prevalence of crime and the constantly disheartening local news. But cynicism is not an option in the Christian walk. Yashuah rebukes the church of Laodicea when he says “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 2:15-16)

If we are to be obedient to Christ, when it comes to the victimization of others, we cannot be on the fence about it. It means not tolerating it in our own lives or tolerating it for others. For the Father there is no middle ground. In Deuteronomy 17:7 the Lord says

“You must purge evil from among you.” Never accept the abuses done to you as “Okay.”

Flashbacks and Intrusive Memories:

Though some people may completely dissociate from their past traumas and bury it so deeply into their subconscious they may have no recollection of it at all, the more common experience for most people is to have memories and flashbacks that we don't want. Once we've undergone an experience, the brain stores this information in our memory bank, much like a computer. But unlike a computer we can't just hit delete and have it permanently wiped from our hard drives. Memories of trauma are much like scars left on our psyche. Some have time to fade and heal, but because of re-traumatization, some are raw, and some become soar and festering.

When it comes to trauma experienced as a child, children typically don't have the vocabulary or understanding to describe, process or comprehend what has happened to them. Emotional and sexual abuse to a child can be hurtful and confusing. They may not know what has happened, but they know it didn't feel good. And with no one to turn to whom you could even tell what has happened you (often children get a sense of whether an adult will be sympathetic, react in anger or even blame the child) these emotions tend to be buried or kept secret because of guilt and shame. In a home of severity where children are to be seen and not heard or where corporal punishment is always at the ready, children are very keen to judge whether it is safe to disclose their abuse. But even in a home without physical abuse, if children are not usually encouraged to share or talk about how they feel, or if they do their feelings are minimized, dismissed, or even ridiculed, the child may also not feel safe in disclosing. Consequently, many persons don't end up even being able to confront their memories until adulthood.

But even then in Jamaica there are not enough safe spaces for victims of any category of abuse to get trauma support or counselling. The best thing to do if you're suffering from intrusive memories is not to suppress them or pretend they aren't there, but to try to understand where they are coming from and why. Scripture says “in all your getting, get understanding.” Proverbs 4:7 In some translations it says “though it cost all you have, get understanding.” or “get insight.”

We need insight when it comes to our past traumas. Memories of the event may trigger a variety of emotions, one of the strongest of which is anger. We may be angry with our victimizers, and we may even be angry with God. “Why did He allow these things to happen to me?!” However understanding the cycle of trauma and abuse can give us insight as to why human beings victimize each other. There are a lot of angry people out there, but at the heart of this anger is hurt and brokenness.

The need for trauma informed counselling is so critical! And not just counselling from a professional psychologist, but also peer-support: Support groups of persons who share a common hurt or category of trauma who can come together and create a safe space

in which persons can share their emotions without fear of judgement. James 5:16 says “Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be *healed*.” Do not underestimate the value of support groups! When we have flashbacks and intrusive memories we can feel completely alone in our experiences. But scripture says “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) One translation says “No trial has come to you but what is human.” (New American Bible).

I would say there is a dearth of support groups and safe spaces for trauma recovery in Jamaica, but thanks to COVID19 there are now quite a number of North American and international support groups that are conducted online through Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms. The appendix of this book will have a list.

Flashbacks and intrusive memories are quite common, but it’s important when they happen to know that we are safe and not in that reality. Satan loves to use the tactics of flashbacks and intrusive memories or thoughts to stir up our emotions -- especially our anger towards our victimizers or abusers. We have to recognize this as a form of spiritual warfare which we will get into in a later chapter of this book.

Flashbacks are not always a negative though! They are sometimes just a way of the brain telling us we have some undealt with issues. Many people -- mostly people who are living in denial -- like to think “I don’t have any issues, nothing bothers me! I’m as cool as a cucumber!” My friends, this is pride, and also evidence of a leathery heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (ESV). The Lord did not create or design us to be impervious to psychological pain. Ephesians 4:32 says “Instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as Christ has forgiven you.” In fact, throughout the bible, Yahweh makes many appeals to the children of Israel to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts. Jeremiah 4:4 says, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.”

It’s typical for one to hear “you’ve got to develop thicker skin!” My friends, this is contrary to the principles of scripture. We are to be reflections of God’s image and His character. Exodus 34:6 says, “The Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and filled with gracious love and truth.” The same God who appeared in fire and smoke on Mount Horeb causing the mountain to tremble violently, is the same God who designed the intricate and delicate petals of the lily. He designed us to feel compassion and empathy for our fellow man and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. To be sensitive to trauma and the sufferings of ourselves and others, is not evidence of weakness, but is to be exactly who Lord Yahweh designed us to be! Don’t feel shame or embarrassment. Only the sensitive heart can hear the gentle urgings of the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 6:10 says “To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold the word of the Lord is

to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it.” Hebrews 3:15 says “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” But let’s be courageous as we continue on our journey to heal ourselves and to heal others. Joshua 1:9 says “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Unlearning the Lies of Emotional Abuse

If you've grown up in Jamaica, chances are you've probably grown up in a home where you were subject to a regular tongue lashing from a parent or relative. The person will probably excuse this behavior by saying "I was just being honest," or "I'm telling you this for your own good." But friends, this is nothing more than an individual who has lost control of their own emotions and, in their anger, are using their tongue as a psychological weapon. Reprimanding a child for bad behavior is one thing, in which case, in a *controlled* manner, you explain to the child what they did wrong and why they are not to do it and employ non-physical disciplinary measures. But yelling, calling a child derogatory names or deriding their character is simply verbal and emotional abuse.

Even Yashuah says in Matthew 5:22 "anyone who says, 'you fool!' will be in danger of the fires of hell." Make no mistake, the bible speaks about the evil of the tongue, and Matthew 12:36 says we all "must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak."

Words used carelessly and recklessly by anyone is not taken lightly by God. Anyone who resorts to what we in Jamaica call "cus' and gwaan" ("cursing and going on" for the non-Jamaican reader) is simply a person who has unbridled anger and lack of self-control.

Ephesians 5:19-23 says "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; **hatred, discord**, jealousy, **fits of rage**, selfish ambition, **dissensions**, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness and self-control.**"

If you have or had a parent who may not have been physically abusive but was subject to "fits of rage" which resulted in them yelling and lashing out verbally, then you had a parent who was or is being controlled by their carnal, sin nature. They have probably learned this behavior from their own parents. It is unfortunate in our culture, this is mistaken as a "parenting technique." But all it is, is a behavior that is then carried outside the home, into the community and ignites conflict. Proverbs 15:1 says "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Scripture warns about the danger of angry words. James 3:6-8 says "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind. But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

At the very heart of Jamaica's crime problem are angry words, which stir up emotions, that lead to rage and then violence. And these angry words start from within the home.

A parent who relates to a child using angry words, is teaching that child how to relate to others using the same behavior. And then you have entire communities that are in conflict and dissension with one another.

Confusing Love and Emotional Abuse:

James 3:9-11 says “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring?”

Many times a parent or relative who becomes verbally abusive will turn around and tell that child how much they love them. Make no mistake friends. 1 Corinthians 13 gives us the explicit definition of what love is: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ***It is not rude,*** it is not self-seeking, ***it is not easily angered,*** it keeps no account of wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

There is no confusion when it comes to what love is in the scriptures, which comes from the Spirit of God, and what unbridled anger and lack of self-control is, which comes from the sin nature. It is unfortunate that when these parents tell their child that their uncontrolled anger and reckless words come from love, the child is inclined to believe that this is what love is and how it is to be expressed to others. This confusing salt and fresh water mixture then leads the child to become an adult who will stay in a verbally abusive intimate partner relationship, because they learned this “love” at home.

As adults, we now have to unlearn this pattern of behavior. We have to unlearn the lies we have been told about love and about ourselves. There is a reason the Savior says we will have to give an account of every idle word spoken on judgement day. This is because the Lord knows that our words have power! It is with words that God spoke the universe into existence. Our words too have creative and destructive power. With our words we can build up or tear down. With our words we can heal or we can harm.

It boggles me that there are parents who will literally curse their own children. They will call them names or predict horrible things to happen to them. The reason this is completely illogical and absurd is because it is these same children they will have to rely on as adults to look after them when they are too old and frail to look after themselves. And if something horrible befalls your children, then who will be there for you? When we curse our own children we really are pronouncing a curse on ourselves.

Scripture says “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) So if a child is told they are rude, manipulative, stupid, or will never amount to anything, that parent may just get back a self-fulfilling prophecy which will only hurt them in the end.

My friend if you have been subject to verbal abuse, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have got to unlearn the lies spoken over you. First of all we have to unlearn the lie that love is verbally abusive. There is also no such thing as an angry verbally abusive

Christian. Galatians 5:24 says “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” This individual could go to church every Sunday or Sabbath and even be singing on the church choir or the head deacon or deaconess. But if they are given to anger, fits of rage, or becoming verbally abusive, this is a person who is still in the throws of Satan’s influence.

Matthew 7:16-20 says “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

Next we have to unlearn who that individual says we are, and instead learn who the word of God says we are. 1 Peter 2:9 says “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

Whatever mistakes or self-defeating behavioral patterns you have made or suffered from in the past, God grants us the power to be transformed! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” Anyone who tries to convince you any differently has the spirit of Satan within them.

The Emotional Abuse of the Accuser of the Brethren:

It's interesting to note that Satan’s name, literally means accuser. In Revelations 12:10 he is described as “the accuser of the brethren... who accuses them before God day and night.” Satan, the fallen angel who was cast out of heaven does not want us to change, but to continue in our sin so that we can share in his punishment of the lake of fire. The term “misery likes company” has never fit a better person!

In the book of Job, Satan kept arguing to God why he felt Job was unworthy. God said to Satan “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (Job 1:8) Here is the Lord, so proud of His servant Job, even bragging about him, like a father bragging over his favorite son!

But here is Satan, who wants to deride his character and constantly accuse him: “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?... he will surely curse you to your face!”

Satan’s interaction with God here is so typical of those who are given to being verbally and emotionally abusive. God sees the best in us, and sees who we can become. But those with the spirit of Satan always see the worst in people and can never see the good.

Satan is the author of the “crab basket” mentality. “Crab basket” in Jamaican culture describes the behavior of the crabs caught in the cages used to trap them. When one reaches close to the cages opening, another crab in their effort to escape pulls them back down to the bottom. Satan does not want you to escape being captive to sin, and so he’ll do everything he can to convince you that you’ll never change and can never be who God wants you to be. He is literally the “accuser of the brethren.” But when we choose to follow Christ, God says “you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 7:6) John 1:12 says “to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Using your Past Against You:

Another tactic of the enemy (and those controlled by the spirit of the enemy) is to use your past against you, and to constantly remind you of mistakes you’ve made, to discourage you and convince you it’s impossible for you to change. That person will take the lowest points in your life and when you were at your weakest and say “remember when...” It could be a parent, family member, spouse or partner. They’ll say things like “You’ll never be anything but a (fill in the blank!)”

Friends this is just another feature of emotional abuse, usually used when the person feels threatened. When you start recognizing emotional abuse for what it is and start to have esteem and respect for yourself and become empowered, emotional abusers begin to feel a loss of control. People who are emotionally abusive know that destroying your self-esteem and breaking your spirit is how they are more easily able to control you. They need to get you to give yourself a “vote of no confidence.” So if insults don’t work anymore, then they’ll use the truth of your past to convince you of your unworthiness or that you’ll never change. Recognize the tactic for what it is. When Yashuah found Peter and the other disciples, they were just impoverished fishermen. They had no formal education in becoming great apostles. Simon Peter said to Jesus “Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8) Peter knew the truth of his past. But Christ said to him “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19).

Friends Christ wants to make you a world changer. He wants you to work with Him to transform lives and rescue people for the kingdom. He has confidence in His workers! He says in John 14:12 “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, **and they will do even greater things than these**, because I am going to the Father.” Satan wants to tell you you’ll achieve nothing, but Christ wants to tell you you’ll achieve everything! Philippians 4:13 says “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

It doesn’t matter whether you were a drug addict, uneducated, an academic screw-up, came from an impoverished crime-riddled neighborhood, formerly incarcerated (or currently incarcerated) or whatever else may be in your past. Didn’t even the Samaritan woman at the well who was living in fornication become the first one to spread the

gospel in her neighborhood? Wasn't even Mary Magdalene, a woman who was possessed by seven demons, one of Christ's key followers and the first person to see Him after His resurrection? Christ wants you to achieve His glory. Matthew 5:14-16 says "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Paul says that even though he is not perfect "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14) Let's leave the mistakes and the emotional abuse in our past behind and press towards the high calling that God has for us!

Establishing Healthy Boundaries:

We are required by God to forgive those who sin against us, which releases us from bitterness and anger. No matter what, we should never hold ill will towards those who have mistreated or abused us. However, it is still necessary to establish healthy boundaries. It is going to be crucial going forward in our walk with Christ to be very selective about those we let into our inner circle. As Christ says in Matthew 7:6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Yashuah Himself was very selective in choosing His disciples. In John 2:23-24 it says "Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs He was performing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind for he knew what was in each person."

There are only two supernatural forces in this world; Yahweh's forces of good and light, and the Satanic forces of evil. Though the Holy Spirit of God makes an appeal to the hearts of all men to follow Him, any person who is not under the control of the Holy Spirit of Yahweh, is still under the influence of the evil one, and a potential agent of Satan. Yashuah says in Matthew 10:16 "Behold I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

Christ wants us to have a wise spirit of discernment. Even relatives in your family who claim to love you still need to be filtered through the discerning eye of the Holy Ghost. Yashuah says in Luke 8:21 "My mother and my brothers are all those who hear God's word and obey it."

Though it is always important to forgive those who have hurt us and not hold on to resentment, a person who is being controlled by their carnal nature and is reckless with their tongue and given to anger, is someone who needs to be loved and prayed for from a distance. Even if they claim to be a Christian! As John says in 1 John 4:1 "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many

false prophets have gone out into the world.” There are many people who falsely profess that they are followers of Christ, yet they are still given to anger, gossip, character assassination, lasciviousness and course joking. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says “Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

For persons who are emotionally abusive, without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we may have to accept the reality that they may *never* realize their behavior is wrong. This is someone who needs prayer and healthy boundaries. Titus 3:10-11 says “Warn a divisive person, once and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.”

Healthy boundaries are a must for our own mental health. Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” We have to be diligent about the things we allow into our thoughts. If a person is given to reviling you and being emotionally abusive with reckless words, these words can echo in our minds and corrupt our thoughts. In Matthew 15:17-20 Yashuah tells his disciples “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a persons mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person;”

Remember that Yashuah warns that “if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” (Matthew 5:30). If there are people in our lives that lead us back into sinful behaviors or ways of thinking because of their own sinful behaviors or habits, these are people we will need to disengage ourselves from. It may mean finding a new place to live or interacting with them less and less. Friends if you are trapped in an abusive domestic relationship, whether with a spouse, intimate partner, parents or any other family member, pray earnestly and believe in the supernatural power of God to create a way of escape. It may mean telling your situation to a church, a shelter, the YMCA/YWCA or finding someone who can help you find accommodations. There will be resources listed in the appendix of this book.

Leaving Abuse takes Courage and Strength:

Putting distance between yourself and an emotional abuser, especially if they are a parent, close relative or spouse, takes courage and strength. Sometimes it is easier to stay within the familiar, even when it is an abusive environment. But Christ beckons us to leave everything behind to follow Him. In Luke 14:26 Yashuah says “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”

When Christ wants to transform your entire life, sometimes that also means leaving harmful or destructive relationships behind, because they can keep our minds chained to old patterns of thinking about ourselves when Christ wants you to be made new!

Romans 12:2 says “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” There are several calls made to the people of God to “come out from among them.” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Abraham was called by God to leave his country, people and father’s household, and leave their pagan practices behind so he could learn the ways of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 6:17 says “Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them says the Lord. Don’t touch their filthy things and I will welcome you.” Finally in Revelation 18:4 the call is made to the followers of Yashuah to “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;”

Friends, this world is going one way, and Yashuah wants us to go another. And unfortunately if parents, spouses, or other relations do not want to leave their sinful and abusive behaviors behind, the Lord still wants us to come out from them and be separate. “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14) Instead of following the crowd to destruction, let’s follow the Great Shepherd on the road that leads to life.

Signs and examples of Emotional Abuse:

According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation⁸ emotional abuse can involve humiliation and derision. This can include:

calling you names;

making patronizing comments or subtle “put downs”;

publicly embarrassing you;

making jokes at your expense and dismissing any hurt feelings you have as “not being able to take a joke”;

belittling your accomplishments;

making insults about your appearance;

putting down your interests;

Trying to control your physical appearance;

infantilizing you or acting as if only they know what’s best for you. (Just to explain infantilization a bit more, its when someone treats you, a grown adult as if you are still a child, that might even include baby talk in their tone of voice, and belittling your intelligence because “after all you’re only a child” they may use nicknames that you had when you were little or just a toddler. But the overall goal is to get you to lose

⁸ Canadian Women’s Foundation, Signs of Emotional Abuse, <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/signs-of-emotional-abuse/>

confidence in yourself and your ability to think for yourself and make your own decisions.)

Deliberately putting you in physically or emotionally comfortable positions such as locking you out of your home or making a scene in a social situation.

Gaslighting and Manipulation:

In a healthy relationship, your feelings, thoughts and perceptions of reality will be validated. While disagreements happen in all relationships. An emotional abuser tries to destroy your confidence in your own perceptions and feelings through “gaslighting”. Gaslighting is a term derived from the title of a 1938 British stage play “Gas Light” a story in which Bella is being emotionally manipulated by her husband, Jack so that she feels she is going insane or her perception of reality was distorted, but it was trickery and deception being used in his efforts to steal some family jewels from his wife.

A “gaslighter” often dismisses your feelings as crazy, dramatic, overreacting or emotional. According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation an emotional abuser who gaslights will sometimes use others to validate their point of view and invalidate your belief in yourself saying things like “everyone thinks your crazy”. AN emotional abuser will also refuse to take responsibility for their actions or how they made you feel. They may try to frame everything including your own pain as “your fault” this is also called “Blame shifting”

If you feel you are the victim of domestic violence, or emotional abuse please contact the Jamaican Coalition Against Domestic Violence (JCADV) which has a 24-hour nationwide helpline at 1-800-598-7607. They can help with getting alternative shelter and other resources. The website is www.jcadv.org and to get local help go to their website www.jcadv.org/get-help

Hypersexuality and the Normalization of Sexual Harassment and Abuse

In Jamaica sexual abuse or assault is so prevalent whether against children or adults, and regardless of gender (little boys can be victimized almost as much as little girls), that it's almost come to be known as a "horrendous rite of passage"⁹ for most Jamaican children.

UNICEF¹⁰ estimates that at least 120 million adolescent girls under the age of 20, or about one in ten, experience child sexual abuse worldwide. And in Jamaica the Child Protection and Family Services Agency¹¹ received 9,800 cases of abuse against children in 2020 with 20 percent of the cases involving sexual abuse. But the true number of victims is still difficult to know because, according to UNICEF's 2017 Global report¹², only about 1 percent of adolescent girls experiencing sexual violence reach out for help, and for boys the numbers are even lower because of stigma surrounding the sexual abuse of males.

According to the None in Three Research Centre at the University of Technology¹³ child sexual abuse has two categories: contact abuse, which involves touching, and noncontact abuse, that can range from verbal harassment to forcing a child to look at pornographic pictures or films. None in Three's report also considers the effects of negative social and cultural attitudes and perceptions that normalize sexual abuse and increase its prevalence.

It's unfortunate that entrenched in Jamaican society is a culture that promotes hypersexuality and the normalization of sexual harassment and abuse. In North America, this term would more popularly be known as "rape culture,"¹⁴ a phrase coined in the 1970's used to describe the ways in which society normalizes sexual violence. The bible says in Romans 13:13 "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies

⁹ UNICEF Jamaica, Here is what happens in Jamaica when you report a rape, <https://blogs.unicef.org/jamaica/happens-jamaica-report-rape/>

¹⁰ UNICEF, Nearly one in four adolescent girls experience physical violence, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/nearly-one-in-four-adolescent-girls-experience-physical-violence#:~:text=Around%20120%20million%20girls%20under,by%20their%20husbands%20or%20partners.>

¹¹ The Gleaner, Horrific! – 20% spike in child abuse cases reported to CPFSA so far this year, <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20181029/horrific-20-spike-child-abuse-cases-reported-cpfsa-so-far-year>

¹² UNICEF, UNICEF deeply concerned about child murders, sexual violence and violent discipline, <https://www.unicef.org/jamaica/press-releases/unicef-deeply-concerned-about-child-murders-sexual-violence-and-violent-discipline#:~:text=Sexual%20violence%20against%20girls%20and%20boys&text=In%20Jamaica%2C%20among%2010%2D15,an%20intimate%20partner%20sought%20help>

¹³ None In Three Research Centre, "It Affects You For a Lifetime!" Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse in Jamaica https://www.noneinthree.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ni3-Jamaica_Executive-summary_V3.pdf

¹⁴ Brandon University, Rape Culture, <https://www.brandonu.ca/sexualviolence/education-prevention/rape-culture/#:~:text=Rape%20culture%20is%20a%20term,%E2%80%9Cdon't%20rape%E2%80%9D.>

and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality...” However we have cultural values that uplift sensuality and sexual immorality. It’s celebrated in the songs, the dances, the movies and entertainment. We are bombarded by hypersexualized images of black women, degraded, scantily clad and objectified in commercials, music videos and magazines. The lyrics of dancehall and soca songs celebrate and encourage promiscuity and lewdness. And every year during the summer we have the season of Carnival where men and women parade themselves in the streets half-naked, usually intoxicated and dancing provocatively, in full view of our children.

And don’t naively think that exposing children to sexually charged entertainment has no effect on them or flies over their heads. Another alarming trend is the growing incidence of child-on-child sexual abuse (COCSA) which is where a prepubescent child is sexually abused by one or more other children or adolescents¹⁵. The trauma for these victims can be just as damaging as if they had been abused by an adult. And according to a 1997 study¹⁶ the perpetrating child tended to be exposed to pornography or repeatedly witnessed sexual activity of adults at a very young age.

Sex has always been designed by God to be a private and sacred act, to be reserved for the context of a marriage between a man and woman. Genesis 2:24 tells us “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” And our bodies, in the bible, are also to be considered sacred temples. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.”

But the principles of modesty and chastity in the bible are typically scoffed at and ridiculed, while our culture treats the act of sex, and the sacredness of our bodies with nonchalance, casualty and indifference. Course joking, corrupt conversation and lewd talk is commonplace even within the Christian church. All together it cultivates a dangerous environment where anyone, including young children, can be seen as a sexual object to be preyed on. And this has nothing but dire effects, both spiritually and psychologically.

According to the study by Jamaica’s University of Technology¹⁷, the effects of sexual abuse can last a lifetime. Female survivors reported challenges with psychological functioning, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. Victims can experience a range of distressing emotions including suicidal thoughts, self-harming behaviors, and poor self-esteem. Male survivors in the study suffered from aggressive and out-of-control behaviors, hypersexuality, poor social interactions, poor academic outcomes and substance abuse issues.

¹⁵ Psychology Wiki, Child-on-child sexual abuse, https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Child-on-child_sexual_abuse

¹⁶ Children with sexual behavior problems and their caregivers: Demographics, functioning, and clinical patterns. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 9 (4): 267–290.

¹⁷ None In Three Research Centre, “It Affects You For a Lifetime!” Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse in Jamaica https://www.noneinthree.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ni3-Jamaica_Executive-summary_V3.pdf

To make matters worse, there are very few safe spaces, supports and resources in Jamaica for male and female survivors of sexual abuse. For one thing, for many years the government of Jamaica had no policy or legislation outlawing or prohibiting verbal sexual harassment, and only in 2021 introduced the Sexual Harassment Protection and Prevention Act. Even with its introduction, the act still does not address the issue of intrafamilial or domestic sexual harassment that occurs within the home. And because of the policy's late introduction it's been a long held cultural belief that verbal sexual abuse is normal, unavoidable, or even should be viewed as a light or casual compliment.

There is nothing "light", "casual", or "normal" about sexual abuse. The trauma from sexual abuse, whether physical or verbal (contact or non-contact) is a very real and life-long challenge for survivors. But it is a common response and coping mechanism for most survivors, especially within a culture that normalizes abuse, to bury the memories and experiences and pretend it never happened, dissociate from it completely, or simply never address it while the psychological effects of their trauma continue to fester. This avoidant strategy is why high rates of sexual violence continue to persist in Jamaica, as some victims (especially male victims suffering with aggression and anger in response to their traumas) later turn into victimizers perpetuating the cycle, and why the country is also facing a "mental health crisis."¹⁸

First Steps to Healing -- Recognizing Sexual Abuse for What It Is:

The first step to healing is not using man's moral compass that normalizes or makes excuses for sexual abuse or sexually inappropriate behavior, but using the moral compass of the word of God. There is one context, and one context alone in which sex is acceptable to God; and that is in the context of a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman and where consent is given. Any other context abuses the gift that Yahweh the creator has given mankind. Some may see this as too straight-laced and too strict. But God is Holy and desires "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6) Yashuah says "anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28)

Our worldly culture may be ambiguous or "gray" when it comes to sexual immorality, but there is no moral ambiguity with God. Sexual immorality needs to be called out for what it is. Ephesians 5:3-7 says "But among you there must ***not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity...*** because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be ***obscenity, foolish talk or course joking***, which are out of place... For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a person is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ***Therefore do not be partners with them.***"

¹⁸ Television Jamaica, Jamaica's Mental Health Crisis – Part 1|TVJ News – Oct 11 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1OkANtWwBc>

Healing means acknowledging that the abuse done to you whether physical or verbal was wrong. The Lord has no tolerance for anyone who would sexually abuse another. It is not to be normalized or minimized. As you can see in Ephesians 5 even “foolish talk, or course joking” gives place to God’s wrath.

The Reality of Male Victims:

Healing also means recognizing the reality of male sexual abuse victims. While being a victim of child sexual abuse does not destine a person to grow up to be a perpetrator who victimizes others, the fact is a large number of male sexual predators have learned these predatory behaviors from childhood because of being exposed to inappropriate sexual material or activity or being preyed upon themselves. Let it be quite clear: exposing a child to any form of sexually explicit content, entertainment or activity is a form of child sexual abuse.

In Jamaica there is also the false cultural perception or belief that boys or men cannot be “real” victims of sexual abuse because sex is always “enjoyable” for a male whether or not they have given their consent, and especially if their perpetrator is a female. And for a man or boy who was victimized by a male they face even more social stigma than women and girls because they are seen as “weak” or “emasculated” for “allowing” the assault to happen. Or they are even seen as automatically homosexual even though being victimized has nothing to do with one’s sexuality.

To make matters worse, for a long period Jamaica’s Sexual Offences Act had such a narrow definition of rape¹⁹ (by assuming the victim was female and the offender was male) that it failed to protect male victims and only in 2011²⁰ expanded the definition to consider possible male victims.

Jamaican author and sexual abuse survivor, O’Brien Dennis, had interviewed several male victims for his book “The Cries of Men: Voices of Jamaican Men Who Have Been Raped & Sexually Abused” and in a Jamaicans.com article²¹ spoke on the hypermasculinity (or toxic masculinity) prevalent in the culture that keeps male victims silent. “Male sexual abuse in Jamaica is not on the decline; it is gradually increasing and grossly under-reported. Jamaica’s cultural values, which include religion, music and our political framework has been a major deterrent in forcing young boys and men to be silent about sexual abuse. Society has narrowly defined masculinity and expects its boys to be fearless, strong, always in control and defenders... What abuse does is to steal your authentic self and bring you in a state of confusion, fear, anger and denial.”

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, Redefining Rape in Jamaica, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/24/redefining-rape-jamaica>

²⁰ The Sexual Offences Act, <https://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Sexual%20Offences%20Act.pdf>

²¹ Jamaicans.com, Male Sexual Abuse and Jamaica, <https://jamaicans.com/malesexabuse/>

Recognizing Some Cultural Myths:

In Jamaica there are unfortunately several false social and cultural perceptions and myths that facilitate and enable sexual abuse and we'll examine a few of them here:

Myth 1: "Teaching" a Child or Adult how to be "Good in Bed":

One of the first myths is that a child (or adult, because this can happen at any age) needs to be "taught" sex, through exposure to pornographic material, explicit and inappropriate conversations or descriptions of sex acts, touching and fondling, or even full sexual intercourse, so that as adults they'll be "good lovers." Again there is only one context in which sexual activity of any kind is acceptable – It is between two consenting adults (a man and a woman) who have chosen to give themselves to each other in the legal confines of marriage.

Yahweh, the eternal creator, has given the human body the perfect design for sex, in that when it is the appropriate time biology will take over – there is no need for a "practice run." If an adult married couple feel they are experiencing sexual dysfunction then there are always professional resources and counselling that is available to them. Also, formal sex education in school (or a "birds and the bees" conversation with a parent) that teaches the biology of the human reproductive system, birth control options and the reality of STIs is perfectly appropriate – But outside of that context there is no need for any minor (or adult) to be "taught" how to be a "good lover," by touching or "test driving" their private parts or exposing them to sexually explicit material or lewd conversation. This is sexual abuse hidden under the guise of "pure motives." This behavior is predatory and any person who does this is taking advantage of the imbalance of power between an adult and child (although there can be an imbalance of power between adults as well or children close in age) and using this falsehood as an excuse to enact their own perversions, which they probably learned from being preyed upon themselves. This is how sexual abuse becomes cyclical in nature.

Myth 2: If It "Felt Good" It Wasn't Sexual Abuse:

Many victims of abuse don't realize they have been victimized or are confused about their abuse because the experience felt physically "good." This can happen a lot for boys, but this can also happen with girls as well. But the body is designed with autonomic functions that you cannot control and that regardless of whether you have given your consent or not will still be triggered. For example, peristalsis, where your intestines move food and waste through the body is autonomic – you have no control over it; your heartbeat is autonomic; certain brain and organ functions are autonomic and likewise the body's ability to become sexually aroused is autonomic when exposed to certain stimulus.

A person may be confused because they felt a sense of guilt, shame and violation from the experience, but they also experienced feelings of arousal. There are also many

predators who will also say they never abused their victims because they noted that the victim experienced physical arousal. Let this be clear: physical arousal is never an excuse to violate someone else's body and the sacredness and sanctity of God's design. Our bodies are temples unto the Lord and are to be kept holy and pure until marriage. There is never an occasion when it is "okay" for someone else to violate the sanctity of your body. Even within a marriage both partners require consent. If you have ever been coerced or pressured into engaging in sexual activity, whether by man or woman, by an adult or even another child close in age, sexual abuse has occurred, and the trauma from that experience can be just as psychologically damaging as an act committed with physical force or violence.

Myth 3: Being a Virgin is a Bad Thing:

Unfortunately, we live in a culture that decries sexual purity and celebrates promiscuity and lewdness. The values in our society, which can be seen in the music and entertainment, are in direct contravention to the bible, where sexual immorality is praised and glamorized, and chastity and modesty are seen as undesirable. Don't be deceived. Isaiah 5:20 says "woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

It is a deception of Satan that someone who is a virgin is "undesirable" but having sex outside of marriage is "cool" or shows that you have "prowess." Every time you commit an act of sex with someone who is not your spouse you sin against your own body. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body." We don't realize this but sexual sin actually desecrates our body.

Sex is not just a physical act, but a spiritual and emotional act in which two people become one. That act that has been done in the spiritual has lasting consequences. For one thing having multiple sexual partners before marriage increases your risk for an unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease. But it can also leave you feeling used and emotionally empty because gradually we are desensitized to how holy and sacred the gift of sex is. God can heal and make whole, but the more scars there are the longer and more difficult the healing process.

Myth 4: A child who has a voluptuous body is now ready for sex or to be seen as a sexual object:

In Jamaica children are unfortunately sexualized from a very young age, particularly girls who may be overweight or have developed early physically. We live in such a morally corrupt nation that many adults don't see the perversity in viewing a 10-, 11-, 12-, or 13-year-old in a sexual way. As a result, child and adolescent pregnancy rates in

Jamaica are much higher than the global average²², even though under the Sexual Offences Act it is illegal for a child to engage in sexual activity before the age of 16.

A child or minor may have a physically developed body, but children go through several stages of development before they are psychologically mature enough to engage in consensual sexual activity. Child development²³ sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, physical and mental health. The experiences children have throughout childhood shape the brain, their capacity to learn, socialize with others and regulate their emotions in response to stress. Unfortunately, there is a complete disregard for this development process that is happening in young and pubescent children and the trauma of being sexually harassed or abused so young can completely stunt this necessary mental growth.

The normalization of hypersexuality in Jamaican culture means children are being exposed to explicit and age-inappropriate music, entertainment and conversation. It introduces toxic, abusive and dysfunctional sexual behaviors, and quite frankly “grooms” the child to be more easily victimized, because after all, sex is “normal” and “no big deal.” The effect of sexual abuse on a child is devastating where children develop low self-esteem where they view their bodies as only good for what they can be “used” for. It can cause them to question their sexuality, their identity, and according to a 2017 study published in the *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*²⁴, child sexual abuse is also significantly associated with a wide range of psychiatric disorders ranging from depression, PTSD and psychosis to substance abuse later in adulthood.

Myth 5: Sexual Harassment is Really Just a Compliment:

Many perpetrators who engage in verbal sexual harassment often excuse their behavior as being complimentary. But truthfully an adult has no business in commenting on the sexual attractiveness of a minor. The bible also makes it explicitly clear that even looking at a woman to lust after her is an act of sexual immorality (Matthew 5:27). Unwanted sexual remarks towards someone, whether the victim is an adult or child, are still a violation of that individual’s consent regardless of whatever the perpetrators “intentions” are. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women²⁵, sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for a sexual favor, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature that can cause offense or humiliation to the person its directed towards. Many policies toward sexual harassment, look at the issue within a work environment, however sexual harassment can happen anywhere – at work, on the street, in the home, and even amid

²² Mary Fowles, Teen Pregnancy - Jamaica, <https://www.maryfowles.com/teenpregnancy>

²³ Best Start, Importance of the Early Years https://www.beststart.org/OnTrack_English/1-importance.html

²⁴ *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, Child sexual abuse and the development of psychiatric disorders: a neurobiological trajectory of pathogenesis <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5810166/>

²⁵ UN Women, Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordinated/antiharassment.html#:~:text=Sexual%20harassment%20is%20any%20unwelcome,interferes%20with%20work%2C%20is%20made>

friends or family members. Though most reports of sexual harassment tend to involve men as the perpetrators, women can also sexually harass a male or female victim, and these incidents should not be minimized or made light of.

Verbal sexual harassment can be just as emotionally traumatizing as a physical act, but unfortunately since in Jamaica sexual harassment is fairly commonplace, it has been normalized as something men or women (or children) should just “deal with.” Sexual harassment²⁶ can include jokes, unwanted discussion of sexual topics, exposing oneself, unwanted physical contact such as a hug or a kiss or making sexual comments about a person’s body.

These are just a few of the myths that have been entrenched in Jamaican culture and that enable sexual abuse and exploitation, but there are certainly many more dangerous and normalized societal beliefs and perceptions. But when we can identify these abusive behaviors and the social myths that enable them, it empowers us to be able to call them out for what they are and say “no.”

Power Dynamics of Abuse:

Sexual abuse tends to happen where there are asymmetrical power dynamics – the perpetrator has a more powerful or dominant position than the victim.

Adult and Child Power Imbalance: A power imbalance exists when one person has the ability (power) to influence the choices and actions of the other person. In the case of an adult and a child, the power dynamics are more obvious, especially if the adult is a family member. Children are, for the most part, absolutely helpless. They rely on parents or the adults in their lives for food, shelter, clothing and other basic needs. And if their perpetrator is their main caregiver, such as a parent, or another member of the household, there’s nowhere to run.

Another aspect that makes a child more prone to victimization is the unlikelihood that the child will be believed -- Especially if the adult abuser is well respected in their community or social circles. The accusations can easily be turned on the child that they are, for example, “an ungrateful liar” with “no appreciation for all the financial sacrifices that have been made for” them. These power dynamics make it very difficult for a child to escape the circumstances or even disclose the abuse.

What’s worse is that in Jamaican culture, because little is understood about the power imbalance involved in sexual abuse and that it is not the child’s fault, the child can easily be blamed and even physically punished for the fact that the abuse happened. This is one of the many reasons many child sexual abuse victims can only confront their trauma as adults or when they have been able to put space between themselves and their adult abusers.

²⁶ <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/whatish.pdf>

A child can **never** be held responsible for the predatory and sexually inappropriate behaviors of an adult – even if they “consent” to or participate in the abuse. First off, a child or adolescent’s cognitive abilities to even understand what they are consenting to is underdeveloped which is why even Jamaica’s Sexual Offences Act makes any sexual activity with a minor under the age of 16 years illegal. But even for minors 16 years and over, the adults in their lives have the moral and ethical responsibility (and obligation) of making decisions on the child’s behalf for their care. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁷, parents (or other adults responsible) are given the primary responsibility of ensuring their child’s proper health and development, which includes protection from abuse and exploitation.

Adults are always in the superior position to the child, -- physically, psychologically, financially – even if the adult perpetrator is a woman and the child is a male, the victim and perpetrator are the same sex, or whether they are a member of the same household (and especially when they are a member of the same household) or not. Whatever the abuse, whether contact or non-contact, and whether you “consented” to it or not, know that it is *not* your fault and that it is the adult(s) that have (or had) the moral burden to protect you.

Child on Child Power Imbalance: It unfortunately does occur where a child will sexually victimize another child. In this case the perpetrating child may not always have the cognitive ability to know that what they are doing is wrong. Power imbalances can still exist, for example if the child is slightly older or several years older, physically stronger or more cognitively mature to be able to coerce their victim. With child-on-child sexual abuse the role of victim and victimizer can be of either sex, whether a boy victimizing a girl (which tends to be more common), a girl victimizing a boy, or same sex victimization. Know, however, that child perpetrators are very likely to be victims of sexual abuse themselves since studies²⁸ have shown that children with inappropriate or abusive sexual behaviors have often been exposed to adult sexual activities, age-inappropriate entertainment or pornographic material. However, the trauma can be just as devastating, and child-on-child sexual abuse should not be minimized or mistaken as not a “valid” form of abuse. Child-on-child sexual abuse survivors need as much support and resources as victims of adult perpetrators and there is a list of such resources in the appendix of this book.

Adult Male/Female Power Imbalance: A power imbalance can exist between men and women in several ways. Men tend to be larger and physically stronger than women. In the case of the relationship between intimate partners that power imbalance can also be greater if one partner is more financially independent and the other is reliant on that person for financial security. There can also be a *social* power imbalance where the

²⁷ Parenting and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk//pdfs/Parenting%20and%20the%20UNCRC%20v2.pdf>

²⁸ Children with sexual behavior problems and their caregivers: Demographics, functioning, and clinical patterns. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 9 (4): 267–290.

abuser is more well known in society, has a prestigious reputation and enjoys a level of social status among their peers, in their community or social circles. This can make it very difficult for a victim of abuse to be believed or find support, because people may be afraid of the consequences of going against an abuser who is well known in society or has a prestigious reputation by taking the side of or supporting the victim.

This is not to say that it is impossible for a grown man to be sexually abused by a female perpetrator -- sexual harassment can go in either direction. However, with the way society is currently structured, and especially within a work environment or intimate partner relationship, it is more common for men to have the upper hand when it comes to a power imbalance and for women to be the victims. And with regard to finances, even though a 1984 study²⁹ found that women in Jamaica are “often the sole financial, social, and emotional providers for their families,” a report by Amnesty International³⁰ found that gender-based violence still affects women disproportionately when compared to men. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women also observed that discrimination and sexual violence against women has been fueled by toxic stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about women in Jamaica. These negative stereotypes and cultural beliefs make it hard for a woman’s testimony to be believed in court or even to be taken seriously by local police, which can further add to the power imbalance already faced by women.

Power Dynamics can Take Several Different Forms: Though adult-to-child, and male-to-female, are two of the most well-known power dynamics when it comes to perpetrator/victim roles in sexual abuse, this shouldn’t discount same-sex victimization either. At the core of abuse of any kind, physical, psychological or sexual, is an imbalance of power which can happen in several different scenarios and can take many different forms. This needs to be stressed to break down the stigma surrounding male victims of sexual abuse, or any victim whose abuse may not have happened within a “stereotypically” known way. Power dynamics exist in the home, at work, school, or any other kind of scenario, and it doesn’t make the abuse less “valid” or traumatic.

What is Consent and what is Coercion?

When it comes to issues surrounding sexual abuse, another core issue is consent versus coercion. Consent can be the key difference between an act of abuse and exploitation, and two individuals engaging in intimacy. Consent is simply giving your permission, and that permission is given *freely* and *voluntarily* without the use of threats or physical force. Don’t make socially accepted norms and beliefs about intimate partner relationships fool you – consent is even needed in marriage. Jamaica’s Sexual Offences

²⁹ Segree, W. (1984) Health Problems of Women in Jamaica. *Association of General Practitioners Newsletter*, 4(2), 4-19,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249675454_Intimate_Partner_Violence_in_Jamaica_A_Descriptive_Study_of_Women_Who_Access_the_Services_of_the_Women's_Crisis_Centre_in_Kingston

³⁰ Jamaica: Sexual Violence against women and girls in Jamaica: “just a little sex”
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/amr380022006en.pdf>

Act recognizes the crime of “Marital Rape³¹”. And consent is not just needed for sexual intercourse. It’s needed for any intimate act, from a touch, kiss or hug, to even sharing pictures, texting or engaging in conversation. If you never gave your consent or you were never asked for your consent, this person has violated your boundaries and your body.

Coercion: A lot of people may feel they were never sexually abused because they gave the other person their consent, or they were not physically forced. However, if you gave your consent because you were threatened or intimidated, you did not consent to the act. You were instead coerced. Coercion happens if the person uses threats of any kind, whether threats of physical violence or some other abuse of power or means of intimidation to get their victim to cooperate. Coercion happens a lot where there is a power imbalance, and the perpetrator can use their power as leverage over their victim. That power could be physical, financial, social, or even psychological. A parent, for example, can have a lot of psychological power over a child, saying for instance, that if that child does not allow the abuse or keep it secret, they don’t “really love” them, or they are “ungrateful” if they tell.

One form of psychological coercion is the use of blackmail where the threat could mean the perpetrator discloses damaging information. In the very famous North American case of Amanda Todd in 2012, a Canadian teen who was a victim of cyberbullying, her abuser threatened to widely publish nude pictures of the 15-year-old.

Outside of coercion here are some other circumstances in which you cannot give your consent:

- If you’re intoxicated
- If you’re unconscious
- If you’re under the influence of a mind-altering drug
- If you’re under the age of consent

What is Grooming?

A very important term to know when it comes to sexual abuse is “grooming.” Grooming is the method a perpetrator may use to break down their victim’s psychological defenses or boundaries so that they may more easily accept the sexual abuse or not even recognize when it is happening.

When it comes to an adult abusing a child, the adult “grooms” the child by establishing a relationship with them, (if they don’t have one already) building an emotional connection and trust, so that the child will more easily allow the abuse. The abuser might give the child money, gifts, or even just their undivided attention which children tend to yearn for. The abuser may build a relationship with the child’s parents or family, gaining their trust and even more access to their child victim.

³¹ The Sexual Offences Act, Page 6, <https://moj.gov.jm/sites/default/files/laws/Sexual%20Offences%20Act.pdf>

Grooming can happen slowly and over time, where the perpetrator can gradually introduce sexual suggestions and ideas, “testing the waters” of the child’s boundaries and their acceptance of the perpetrator’s behaviors. This can even include viewing mildly sexual entertainment with the child which can then increase over time. The abuser can also “condition” their victim by using casual or “innocent” touch like a hug which then gradually over time increases in how much and where these touches occur.

Wade Robson, one of the main subjects of the HBO documentary film “Leaving Neverland” (2019), described the gradual grooming he experienced as a child when left with his pop idol, Michael Jackson, who he claimed sexually abused him since the age of seven:

“First day at Neverland was Michael making physical contact with me. Like his hand on my thigh, hugs. You know, it felt great. And out of all the kids in the world he chose me to be his friend. And he’s holding my hand. Within the context of what was going on it seemed normal, you know? The days were filled with playing tag, watching movies... This contrast began between the day and the night.”³²

Another psychological technique that can be used by an abuser is convincing the victim that they wanted it, or it was their idea. Robson later said in an interview with The Guardian³³ “He made me feel complicit, that I wanted it at least as much, if not more than him... But what does that mean, that I liked it? Like, I’m a freak too.”

The Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre³⁴ divides grooming into six stages:

- 1 – **Targeting the victim:** The offender targets a victim by sizing up a child’s vulnerability; emotional neediness, isolation, and low self-confidence.
- 2 – **Gaining the victim’s trust:** here the offender watches and gathers information about the child, getting to know his/her needs and how to fill them... “they generate warmth and genuine concern for the child” while also gaining the trust of the parents.
- 3 – **Filling a need:** “The adult could be providing the child with special attention that only they can give such as coaching, mentoring... gifts, extra attention, time.”
- 4 – **Isolating the child:** Perpetrators “create situations in which they are alone together. This isolation further reinforces a special connection and allows them to avoid oversight and scrutiny from others. Babysitting, tutoring, coaching and special trips all enable this type of isolation.”

³² Leaving Neverland Part 1, HBO, Director Dan Reed.

³³ The Guardian, The Michael Jackson Accusers: “The abuse didn’t feel strange, because he was like a god”, March 4, 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/mar/04/the-michael-jackson-accusers-the-abuse-didnt-feel-strange-because-he-was-like-a-god>

³⁴ Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre, Grooming <https://ssaic.ca/learning-resources/child-sexual-abuse-what-is-grooming/#:~:text=What%20is%20grooming%3F,adult%20in%20that%20child's%20life>.

5 – Sexualizing the relationship: Once the perpetrator has established sufficient trust, “the offender progressively sexualizes the relationship. Desensitization occurs very slowly and often portrayed as innocent encounters. ‘Accidentally’ walking in on the child or having the child walk in on them when one is naked or in a stage of undress, or creating situations (like going swimming) in which both offender and victim are less clothed.”

6 – Maintaining Control: “Offenders commonly use the child’s affection, secrecy, blame and threats to maintain the child’s continued participation and silence.”

Mass Cultural Grooming: It’s important to note that a key element in grooming children for sexual abuse is “desensitization.” In Jamaica there is a blatant disregard for shielding children from sexually inappropriate entertainment. Dancehall songs with lewd and explicit lyrics blare from the radios of the minibuses and taxis school children have to use for transport to and from school. Carnival participants scantily clad, dance provocatively in the streets in broad daylight and in full view of children of all ages. This “normalization” of sexual behavior, and where the topic of sex is “casually” joked about creates a “desensitization” which primes our young children for victimization by strangers, friends, family or acquaintances. This early (and constant) exposure to sexual content can also create in the victims mind an unawareness that they are even being abused because “after all, isn’t sex just a normal part of life?” To spurn or shrink away from sexual advances is seen as “prudish” and “immature,” making the victim even less likely to report the abuse or say “no” to their abuser.

Grooming Is Not Just for Children: Grooming does not just happen when a perpetrator is an adult preying on a child. According to Ann Craft Trust³⁵, a leading UK authority on safeguarding adults and young people at risk, anyone who is in a position of power and trust can abuse and victimize someone else, including an adult, in a more vulnerable position.

Online Grooming/Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse and victim grooming doesn’t just happen in person anymore. The internet and social media, especially since COVID19 has revolutionized the way we interact and connect to each other. Now abuse can happen in online and virtual spaces that make it easier for a perpetrator to hide their age, gender and identity. Social media accounts can be completely anonymous, use fake photos to impersonate a celebrity or public figure and, such as in the case of the Canadian teen Amanda Todd, the perpetrator can inveigle or blackmail their victim to send explicit photos or videos of themselves. Now most social media platforms and applications offer report and blocking tools, but the children of today are definitely living in a more complex and dangerous “cyber” world.

Sexual Abuse in Religious Settings: In Jamaica we also have a disturbing trend of pastors and church leaders sexually abusing minors. Internationally, the Catholic

³⁵ Ann Craft Trust, Signs of Grooming in Adults – What to Watch Out for, by Elliot Davies, 16 May, 2019, <https://www.anncrafttrust.org/signs-of-grooming-in-adults-what-to-watch-out-for/>

Church has been no stranger to sexual abuse scandals involving minors, but any denomination can be vulnerable to this type of corruption. According to a Gleaner article³⁶ published June 7, 2021 “In the last seven years, a number of young Jamaican women have accused pastors throughout the island of sexual abuse, with one of the youngest cases being a 12-year-old, whose abuser... was charged in 2017.”

This is one of the reasons the church particularly needs to take an objective stance against sexual abuse -- calling it out, educating people on what it is, and protecting its members, (especially its most vulnerable members – children). Many church denominations across Canada and the United States have adopted a “safe Church”³⁷ policy or charter that equips congregations in sexual abuse awareness, prevention, and response. Church staff, leadership and volunteer teams receive training through workshops and webinars in preventative measures and also how to respond when there is an incident of abuse.

Allegations of sexual abuse need to be taken seriously and not just minimized or seen as a minor offence or “an unavoidable evil.” *Anyone* can be a victim of sexual abuse, and victims need to feel heard, believed and supported, not silenced and simply told to “get over it.” Sexual abuse of any kind, including verbal sexual harassment can have devastating lifelong psychological effects, such as mood disorders and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that can lead to self-harming behaviors such as substance use, eating disorders and other forms of addiction. It can be a long psychological and spiritual road to recovery for survivors of sexual abuse, but that’s what this book is all about! And thanks to the promises of Yahweh who sent His son Yashuah on a *mission* “to heal the brokenhearted” and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18) we know that we can be made whole again.

Acknowledging the Emotions from Trauma:

For many people, especially if the sexual abuse happened in childhood, the realization of what actually happened and how you were victimized may only happen years later in adulthood. This is a common response because in order to cope and survive, the mind has a way of compartmentalizing trauma and its associated emotions until the person is ready or in a safe enough environment to confront them. When this happens, a person can feel a wide variety of emotions; from anger at the abuser, to shock, horror and even confusion, especially if the perpetrator was a close family member like a parent or sibling. Questions like “why would they do this?” or “How could they do this?” might come up. There might even be anger towards persons you disclosed the abuse to because you weren’t believed, or you were silenced. If the perpetrator was someone you love dearly and have a close relationship with, there can be many “mixed feelings.”

³⁶ The Gleaner, St James pastor accused of raping 15-y-o on the run, Janet Silvera, June 7, 2021 <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20210607/st-james-pastor-accused-raping-15-y-o-run>

³⁷ Safe Church Ministry https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/what_we_do_safechurch.pdf

It is very important for survivors of trauma to be in a safe environment where you can acknowledge and be allowed to feel these different emotions and talk about them. For people who are still living with the family members or intimate partners who abused them, or you are living with household members who don't recognize (or refuse to recognize) abusive behaviors, this is not a safe environment for confronting and acknowledging your abuse. And unfortunately, in Jamaican culture which minimizes and normalizes sexual abuse and, even within the church, has a very low bar for what should be considered immoral or abusive behavior (usually limiting it to only a violent rape) it can be very hard for survivors to find this safe space. There's also little education in the country about what sexual abuse even is, so it can be hard to find anyone supportive to confide in. Luckily, thanks to COVID 19 there are survivor support groups in North America that have moved to online virtual platforms like zoom making them now accessible from anywhere in the world.

Being Honest with God: That being said, it can still be difficult for survivors to acknowledge their feelings when their immediate environment around them is unsafe or indifferent to their pain. But this is why a relationship with Yahweh the Father, through the Savior, Yashuah is so lifesaving. You don't have to stifle your emotions with Him. You can take them to Him honestly in prayer because the Lord knows all your thoughts and emotions anyway. Psalm 139 says "You have searched me, Lord and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely."

The Lord beckons us to take our hurts and traumas to Him. Christ says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). The abuse that has happened to you is no secret to the Lord. Luke 8:17 says "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."

We live in a sin-sick world -- a world that normalizes sexual immorality and abuse, even towards children, and is indifferent to the pain and suffering of its victims. Matthew 24:12 says "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." However Yahweh is not indifferent to our pain. Psalm 11:5 says "but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion." For the Father, sin is no "minor offence" to Him. Isaiah 5:20 says "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." God cares deeply about the effect that sin has on mankind and He asks us to "humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7)

The Freedom of Forgiveness:

A necessary step in the healing process is forgiveness: Forgiveness towards our abusers and forgiveness towards ourselves. With Lord Yahweh, forgiveness is non-

negotiable. Matthew 6:15 says “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.” I believe that forgiveness is such an essential principle to God because for us to be reconciled to Himself, He had to extend His forgiveness to us while we were yet sinners and did not deserve it. No matter who we are, Romans 3:22-23 says “...There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Even though there are people who have sinned against us, we have also sinned against and hurt others at some point (or several) in our lives. When we sin against men, we sin against God. When David, who the bible describes as a man after God’s own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah, her husband killed on the front lines of the battle, David confessed “Against you, you only have I sinned and done evil in your sight.” (Psalm 51:4)

How liberating to know that no matter what lies in our past, the Father, because of the sacrifice made by our Lord Yashuah, forgives us completely! Psalm 103:12 says “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” In Hebrews 8:12 God says “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

When we repent (turn away from our sin) God’s forgiveness is complete. He does not hold our past sins against us. 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love “keeps no record of wrongs.” As God extends this mercy to us who have sinned against Him, He also expects us to extend that forgiveness to those who have wronged us.

But there’s another reason we have to forgive – when we hold onto anger and bitterness towards our abusers, this negative energy and emotion can destroy us from the inside out. James 1:20 says “human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” We have to realize that humanity is flawed and corrupted by sin. Unless a person is under the control of the Holy Spirit they *will* live according to the carnal nature or the “flesh.” Galatians 5:19-21 says “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these. I warn you as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.”

Yashuah instructs us that we need to pray for people who live this way. Matthew 5:44 says “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” Now at first this may seem difficult, but I can promise you that there is a spiritual and emotional release that happens when you purpose in your heart to do good (or at least even pray for) your abuser.

Anger can feel good to have at first, but it can quickly ensnare you to a cycle of pain and negative emotions recalling what your abuser did. And the more we indulge our flesh by engaging in anger the more our anger will end up controlling us!

Some people have the incorrect view that if we don't hang on to our anger then our abusers "get away" with what they've done. But we don't have to hold onto these negative emotions for us to receive justice. We can release this to the Lord. Romans 12:19 says "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."

The Lord wants everyone to come to repentance so that they can receive mercy. In Ezekiel 18:23 Yahweh says "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" As such the Lord chastens and disciplines everyone so that they will see the error of their ways and repent. The Lord corrects us *all* when we do wrong, so you can guarantee He doesn't leave anyone out.

Humanity is also quite complex. Many people who become abusers and perpetrators have probably been exposed to this abuse themselves and become trapped in a cycle of dysfunctional behaviors. We don't know the full history of our abusers – their childhood, their upbringing, the moral guidance they were brought up with. These things are only known to God. As such we need to have compassion and understanding, and the humility to know that we don't know the full story or motives behind a person's behavior – how that person came to be who they are today. There is a healing balm that happens in our own hearts when we can have that humility and compassion for those who have harmed us.

Forgiving Ourselves: Another step in the healing process is forgiving ourselves. Sometimes we can look back and wonder why we "allowed" this abuse to happen. We want to rewrite history, or we wish we hadn't made certain decisions in the time leading up to the assault. It can be easier to forgive yourself when you were a child because children and adolescents are very helpless and ignorant when it comes to how to handle a situation of sexual abuse. However, if the abuse/assault happened to us in adulthood, particularly with an intimate partner, or if it happened while you were intoxicated, we can be very hard on ourselves. Especially if when we disclosed our assault, the person we disclosed to engaged in victim blaming. Questions like "Why did I drink so much," or "Why did I go to that party" or "Why did I stay in that relationship so long?" can echo in our minds.

But the fact is every human being on this earth has made bad decisions and none are exempt. It's important we take our past mistakes to the Lord and ask for His forgiveness. When we do that, we know we have the forgiveness of God which we can then extend to ourselves. The past is the past. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

It is also important to know that Satan and his demonic forces will constantly want to bombard your mind with your past mistakes, making you feel shame and humiliation. Recognize this tactic of the enemy! Whenever he says "remember when you..." we

have got to remember that we are in a spiritual war and part of that warfare means “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Whenever we get a negative thought, whether about our abuser or ourselves, we have got to take that thought captive and in the name of Yashuah declare “no, I have forgiven them” or “I am forgiven.”

Scripture promises “that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) Yahweh has a purpose for you. Ephesians 2:10 says “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Not only can God heal you from your past, but He can take your pain and use it for His glory. This journey to healing that you’re on will not only end in your own healing but the healing of others once we submit ourselves to the Lord’s leading. “To all who mourn in Israel, He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for His own glory.” (Isaiah 61:3)

Unlearning And Letting Go of Perverse Sexual Behaviors:

Sexual abuse, particularly when it happens during childhood where the brain and the mind are still developing, can lead to us developing wrong or perverse ideas about sex as well as perverse sexual behaviors.

For one thing, the abuser could have made you believe that sex is perfectly fine outside of the context of marriage. They might have told you that looking at pornography or masturbation is also “normal.” Or that it’s natural to explore same-sex attraction, multiple partners, or even different gender identities. But these things only develop strongholds of lust in our lives that can lead to things like hypersexuality, promiscuity, compulsive sexual behaviors, preoccupations with sexual fantasies and urges, pornography addiction, and other behaviors that become difficult to control. And the longer we have engaged in these behaviors, the more difficult it is to break free of these addictions.

The good news is Yahweh, through the power of His Holy Spirit can cleanse us of these fleshly lusts. But we have to let go of worldly ideas that engaging in these different sexual behaviors or sexual orientations is “normal” or “natural.” There is one context alone in which sex was designed for, which is marriage between a man and a woman (and where both parties have given consent).

There are several ideas about sex that are quite prevalent in our culture and the world at large, one of which is that it is impossible not to engage in masturbation. Friends, this behavior is an addiction like any other. And if Yahweh has the ability to deliver us from

strongholds like alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling, gluttony and food addiction, He has the ability to deliver us from any other “lusts of the flesh.”

We can be pure, and we can be delivered! Romans 12:2 says “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of you mind.**” This means throwing out the old junk -- old ideas, beliefs, ways of thinking and habits -- and welcoming in the “new wine.” It means fixing our minds on the things of God. Philippians 4:8 says “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” We have to fill our minds with the things and purposes of Christ.

This may also mean letting go of friends and acquaintances that are ungodly in thought, deeds and conversation. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” Christ warns us that it is necessary to “quarantine” ourselves from sin. In Matthew 5 He says “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30).

Brethren, sin is a serious and gravely issue. We will not enter the kingdom of heaven if we indulge sin in our lives, even if it was because of a stronghold developed from childhood sexual abuse. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither **the sexually immoral** nor idolaters **nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers no swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Sexual purity is a must for anyone who would enter Yahweh’s kingdom. And not just sexual purity in deed, but even in thought. Job said in Job 31:1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.” If there is anything in our lives that causes our minds to go down a lustful path, whether because of music, entertainment, magazines, or certain content on social media, we have to rid ourselves of it.

And don’t be fooled – it won’t be easy! The flesh, our carnal nature, will protest, especially if it is used to having its own way indulged. But scripture tells us we must **crucify** this flesh. If you think about it, crucifixion was a very painful process. It was one of the worst ways to die! And Christ in His mercy to us all showed us through His *literal* crucifixion how we must go through our own *spiritual* crucifixion.

Yashuah says in John 12:24 “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” A relationship with Yashuah means that we have to die to the flesh in order to bare the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 says “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Dying to our flesh is also not just a one-time deal. As long as we are living in this fallen world (especially a world that normalizes sexual sin) there will always be tests and trials that will try to derail us or get us off track. 1 Peter 5:8 instructs us to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Crucifying our flesh is something we have to do daily – even hourly! But Christ promises to give us the power to resist sin if we abide in His Holy Spirit.

Yashuah says in John 15:5-6 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.”

Abiding in Christ means dedicating ourselves completely to Him, in thought, word and deed all the time. Paul actually says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Paul actually tells us to “pray without ceasing.” This is not an exaggeration! But the more we starve our flesh and the more we engage ourselves in prayer and the things of God, our spirit, (or the Spirit within us) will become stronger and stronger and better able to resist sin.

James 4:7-8 says “Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you.” We can have victory over sexual or lustful addictions and behaviors.

Another idea you might have had because of your abuse, or any other previous sexual experiences is that perhaps because it was with a person of the same sex you must be homosexual. The world is very quick to assign these labels of different sexual orientations and gender identities, especially if there are characteristics about you that persons don't regard as “stereotypically” male or female. But it's very important to reject these labels and instead accept who Christ says we are. Even if you've indulged several times in same-sex attractions in the past, this does not define who you are. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11 “That is what some of you **were**. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Scripture says that as a person “thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) Sexual purity is possible, but you also have to *believe* it is possible for you. There are certain worldly or secular beliefs that behaviors like sexual urges and masturbation are impossible to control. But we know from scripture this is not true. Christ, through His Holy Spirit gives us the ability to conquer all sin. Romans 6:14 says “sin shall not have dominion over you.”

Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” We have to do all we can to guard the avenues of our heart. Really these are the avenues of our mind -- What we see, hear and experience. Yashuah tells us in Matthew

6:22-23 “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” What kind of material do we put before our eyes? Is it lustful and sexual in nature such as pornography, filthy magazines, or R-rated movies and entertainment? What kind of things are we listening to? Is it music with sexually explicit lyrics? Are we around people who engage in lewd behaviors and “course joking”? Galatians 5:9 says “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” These are things we have to cut out of our lives if we want to achieve the sexual purity that Christ requires of us. It also means leaving behind sexually illicit relationships that the bible speaks against: fornication, adultery and same-sex partnerships.

Sexual addictions such as pornography addiction and sex addiction are real issues faced by the body of Christ. And these addictions can be just as powerful and damaging as alcoholism or any kind of substance abuse issue. Sometimes these addictions can have such a stronghold over an individual, it can take more than just fasting and prayer to break these bondages. The bible says in Galatians 6:2 “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Sometimes the crosses we have to carry can be so heavy, like Christ we might need the support of others to help us bare the weight. Similar to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, there are addiction support groups available for things like pornography and sex addiction and even Christians struggling with same-sex attraction. These groups provide community, emotional support and accountability for people struggling with these issues, and resources are listed in the appendix of this book.

Through Christ and the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, we can take back our sexual purity. We can take back the innocence that was stolen from us. Christ is the restorer of all things. He transforms us “by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2). We can leave behind the behaviors of our past and become a new creation where “old things have passed away.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Breaking the Silence Around Sexual Abuse:

It is ironic that within Jamaican culture and communities we have high rates of incidents like child and intrafamilial sexual abuse, but yet there is still a code of silence when it comes to exposing and talking about it. These abuses are spoken about in hushed tones and whispers and there is much fear and stigma surrounding the subject. Victims are intimidated into silence, called liars and troublemakers, or are stigmatized and seen as “betraying” their family or community. And in the meantime, abusers enjoy the unwritten rules and secrecy that help to facilitate their vices.

But these are issues that need to be talked about. These are abuses that have to be exposed. It is under a cover of darkness that bacteria and vermin like to fester. Likewise, it is within a code of silence that issues like sexual abuse tend to thrive. John 3:19-21 says it best: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates

light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

Where darkness and secrecy exists, sin abounds! Most communities feel that if an issue is not spoken about, then the problem will go away on its own. However, the opposite is usually what is achieved. The stigma and silence that surrounds sexual abuse, particularly child and intrafamilial sexual abuse, actually *enables* perpetrators. It makes it easier for abusers to victimize their targets because victims have nowhere to turn and no one to confide in. Most people are more afraid of the consequences of exposing the perpetrator and the upheaval it will cause the community, than the consequences faced by the victims. But as Christians, we are *actually obligated* to expose sin and corruption. Ephesians 5:11-13 tells us “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather **expose them**. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible – and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.”

In an April 2022 Jamaica Observer article³⁸, gender and development practitioner Judith Wedderburn stated that a culture of silence doesn’t just exist in Kingston’s impoverished garrisons ruled by drug dons who prey on young girls, but even addressed the issue happening within the church:

“Not all churches, but some. The male power is even further glorified if the man in question is a pastor. You’re not going to embarrass pastor... you’re going to keep your mouth shut. It’s: ‘Never mind if the girl child has been raped.’ For me, that is the most painful part of the culture of silence. This culture of silence works because it stands on a number of pillars. The church is one, violence is one, poverty is one...

“The persons who break the silence; where do they go? What refuge do they find? The Government could work hand in hand with some of the NGOs because it requires not just Government. The NGOs could identify alternatives.”

Of course, intrafamilial abuse (that is sexual abuse that occurs within the family) is even more shocking. And for most persons who discover that abuse has been perpetrated by a family member there are intense feelings of horror, rage, confusion, denial, disbelief and guilt. So much so that persons would rather believe that it didn’t happen – even the victims themselves would rather live in disbelief! Coming to terms with sexual abuse from a close family member such as a parent can be very difficult. It’s hard to wrap our minds around the idea that someone could be that sick. But intrafamilial sexual abuse is a very present reality for many adults who have survived it, and many children who are still in the midst of it. As Paul said in Ephesians 5:12 “It is shameful even to mention

³⁸ “Sex abuse’s culture of silence” Jamaica Observer, Romardo Lyons, April 24, 2022, <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/sex-abuses-culture-of-silence/>

what the disobedient do in secret.” However, turning a blind eye to its reality does a disservice to victims while liberating perpetrators to continue their perversions.

Codes of silence don’t just exist within Jamaican culture and communities. Sexual abuse and the secrecy that shrouds it exists the world over. But thankfully since around 2017 the #MeToo movement has created inroads to an international awareness of the issue of sexual abuse. Ever since the very public exposure of Hollywood executive, Harvey Weinstein, who was implicated in a number of sexual abuse allegations, the widespread media coverage of the issue (along with the social media hashtag #MeToo) has placed the reality of sexual abuse and sexual harassment internationally in the public consciousness. It has also emboldened victims to speak out about their abuse, and increased the number of resources they can reach out to (which is listed in the appendix).

Exposing abuse, or “whistleblowing” is necessary because it enables transparency and accountability, which can also lead to justice for victims. Ronan Farrow, the investigative journalist who exposed Weinstein’s sexual indiscretions with various Hollywood actresses, said in an interview³⁹ with Out magazine “...uncovering the truth is the first and one of the most important steps towards holding powerful people accountable and protecting our basic rights. But change doesn’t happen without people taking hard truths and translating them into social progress.”

In His time on this earth Christ would often implore the pharisees and spiritual leaders not just to observe religious practices and traditions, but to advocate for the rights of the lowly and oppressed. Matthew 23:23 says “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

The bible is clear; the church has a responsibility to call out and expose injustice and corruption, and breaking the code of silence around sexual abuse is part of this mandate.

“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” (Isaiah 1:16-17)

³⁹ “How Ronan Farrow Became the Most Feared Journalist in the World” Out, November 19, 2019, <https://www.out.com/print/2019/11/19/ronan-farrow-me-too-tarana-burke>

Child Abuse: A Devastating Reality

Child abuse is a devastating reality that happens all across the world, but Jamaica particularly has a serious problem with this issue. In UNICEF's 2015-2021 Report on Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean, Jamaica had the *highest* prevalence of severe physical punishment of children ages 1 to 14 out of 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Child abuse does not just mean physical injury to a child. Child abuse also includes emotional or psychological abuse where a child is subjected to treatment which can cause psychological trauma, resulting in emotional disorders such as anxiety or depression, problems with cognitive development or learning disabilities and poor academic performance as well as chronic or lifelong mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse or riske sexual behavior.

If you think the issue of child abuse is not one that is extremely close to God's heart, you can just consider Matthew 18:6, where the Lord says "if anyone causes one of these little ones --those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Lord Yashuah had a particular tenderness and compassion towards children. While His disciples were shoing them away the Lord said "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Children have a vulnerability both physically and emotionally that demands our nurture and protection as parents or the adults in their lives. What happens in these years has such far reaching consequences, not only for the child, but for us as adults and our world in the future. So the effects of child abuse are more damaging than people realize. The high prevalence of child abuse in Jamaica means entire generations are being raised to become adults with lifelong psychological issues, a predisposition towards criminal violence and activity, and difficulties in professional development or advancement because of impaired cognitive development and poor academic performance.

According to the World Health Organization ⁴⁰some factors that make particular societies at high risk for child maltreatment is high levels of unemployment or poverty, the easy availability of alcohol and drugs, and social and cultural norms that promote or glorify violence towards others, support the use of corporal punishment and diminish the status of the child in parent-child relationships.

We've often heard it said in Jamaican culture that children should be seen and not heard, to not spare the rod and spoil the child. But if the use of corporal punishment in child rearing was effective in bringing up disciplined, professional and successful adults, why are we seeing such adverse effects?

⁴⁰ World Health Organization, "Child Maltreatment" <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

I'm going to share with you some very disturbing statistics. Even though just a tiny island of 2.8 million people, in recent years the United Nations listed Jamaica as having the world's sixth worst homicide rate. In 2005, with 1674 murders, Jamaica had the highest murder rate in the world! Over the last 30 years, real per capita GDP increased at an average of just one percent per year, making Jamaica one of the slowest growing developing countries in the world. Jamaica's literacy rate also lags behind many of its Caribbean neighbors at only 87% with the vast majority of Jamaica's working-age population considered to be low-skilled workers, many without even a high school diploma. And according to the United Nations Development Programme, in 2013 Jamaica had the highest number of youth convicted of crime in the region.

Why are our juvenile detention facilities so full? Why are so many of Jamaica's youth involved in criminal activities? If you were to look at these boys and ask them, do you think any of these children were growing up in households that didn't believe in corporal punishment?

Some facts about the use of corporal punishment such as spanking might surprise you. A 2009 study from the University of New Hampshire⁴¹ which studied corporal punishment since 1969 found that children who were physically punished had up to a five point lower IQ score than children who weren't. Among the 32 countries studied, for those in which spanking was accepted, the average IQ of the survey population was lower than in nations where spanking was rear.

Did you know that Nordic countries like Sweden have outlawed the spanking of children all together? In 1979 spanking was banned by Swedish law⁴², and the statute actually states that no child may "be subjected to physical punishment or other humiliating treatment." And guess what? Do you think Sweden has a crime problem? In Sweden they're actually having to close down prisons because of their declining prisoner populations. Swedish prison buildings are having to be converted for other uses because of the low crime rate! Sweden was among the first countries to ban the physical punishment of children, but other political leaders are seeing the benefits and are following suit! Jamaica's current Prime Minister, Andrew Holness would like Jamaica to join the 59 other countries around the world that have banned corporal punishment. Holness himself said "We are not going to advance our human

⁴¹ University of New Hampshire Family Research Laboratory, "Children Who Are Spanked Have Lower IQs, New Research Finds"

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwjrw92ky7X8AhWpkWoFHRNbCYcQFnoECA8QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fscholars.unh.edu%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Farticle%3D1204%26context%3Dnews&usg=AOvVaw1Kcz6f1w5OeUwQSB6H6m6>

⁴² BYU Law Review "The Swedish Ban of Corporal Punishment"

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj4pK2BzbX8AhV1llkEHagjDhcQFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdigitalcommons.law.byu.edu%2Fcgi%2Fviewcontent.cgi%3Freferer%3D%26httpsredir%3D1%26article%3D2738%26context%3Dlawreview&usg=AOvVaw0hs3XaJScmZA6WvjSnB2Ea>

development as long as we beat our children. The research is very clear. Where there are high levels of violence against children, the society does not advance.”⁴³

The Holy Spirit has revealed to me that a lot of the violence we’re seeing in Jamaica is due to child abuse. It’s not for lack of beatings that these young men are joining gangs. As a child, we are all extremely vulnerable and helpless, and if you’re growing up in a home where you are regularly physically, emotionally and sexually abused, a child can feel so powerless. So when these kids get a little older and become teenagers, they want to be put in a position where now *they* have the power. A young man who’s joined a gang is not living in fear anymore because now people are afraid of him. These young men are being driven into these gangs because of childhood trauma, where they can say “look at me now! Now you have to be afraid of me!”

A lot of Jamaicans have grown up in homes where they never even heard “I love you” as a child. We actually have a belief in our culture where we think it’s wrong to hug a child too much or to comfort them when they are crying! Our Jamaican culture says we are not to pick up a crying child and give them physical affection because it’s said “you’re spoiling the child.” But the reality is the opposite is true! When you starve a child of physical affection and gentle words of affirmation, that’s when you spoil a child, because that child grows up to an adult who doesn’t know how to be affectionate. They don’t know how to be vulnerable. They don’t even have any understanding of the concept of “gentleness” that’s talked about in the bible because they’ve never seen gentleness demonstrated in their homes. The idea of saying “I love you” is awkward and alien to them. A child who has been starved of affection while growing up has really been set up for failure because when they become husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, they have no idea how to love their spouses and how to love their children and they grow up to repeat the cycle of an abusive, toxic and dysfunctional home.

As a result Jamaica’s domestic violence statistics are through the roof. In 2022, according to Jamaica’s minister of state in the Ministry of National Security ⁴⁴“the annual number of reported cases of domestic violence increased from just over 4,000 to around 8,000; a rise of almost 100 per cent.”

As a homework afterschool program teacher with the YWCA back in around 2006 in Kingston Jamaica, I saw that the children in the program were hardened by the violence they experienced in their homes and community. And it manifested in a lot of indiscipline. Chief Executive Officer of the Child Protection and Family Services Agency, Rosalee Gage Grey said in a CVMTV news article⁴⁵ “The psychological impact of

⁴³ Prime Minister Andrew Holness Facebook Post https://www.facebook.com/AndrewHolnessJM/photos/if-prime-minister-andrew-holness-has-his-way-jamaica-will-join-the-59-countries-/1716069895071521/?paipv=0&eav=AfbmpZQQuDsstZwDiz8474b-g4eoSZW4U0SzySBT0mRhYJyz0Qz1VydH_dGd3p3KR&_rdr

⁴⁴ The Gleaner, July 20, 2022 <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20220720/near-100-cent-rise-domestic-violence-reports-five-years>

⁴⁵ CVMTV, “Long Term Effects of Abuse On Jamaica’s Children”, June 19, 2020 <https://www.cvmtv.com/news/long-term-effects-of-abuse-on-jamaicas-children/>

violence and trauma that children suffer as a result of the abuse is causing a severe mental health issue among our children in Jamaica.”

And what about psychological abuse? Sadly, many children growing up in Jamaican homes experience psychological abuse, but the local, cultural norms and attitudes of the population don't accept that psychological or emotional abuse causes actual injury to a child. Psychological abuse includes things such as name calling, yelling, insulting or disparaging the child such as calling them ugly or stupid, threatening, imitating or mocking, swearing at the child, neglect or isolation.

The verbal berating of a child by an angry parent is simply seen as a scolding and parents don't understand the extent of damage this kind of psychological attack may cause. Many children under the stress and anxiety of physical or psychological abuse find it difficult to focus or concentrate. They may fall behind in school academically or even develop learning challenges or disabilities. Where a child is constantly berated or made to feel ashamed or embarrassed, they may lack confidence, shying away from any activity that may put them at the centre of attention. So don't be surprised when a teacher reports that the child hardly participates in class and is reluctant to answer questions or speak in front of a group.

Children not only fear the act of physical discipline, but also fear the potential of doing anything that may trigger a parent's anger. A constant fear of physical punishment or harsh, abusive scoldings at home for something as simple as a school uniform getting soiled or a missing pencil case could trigger a frightened child into running away instead of facing the consequences that might await them at home.

A study published in 2012 by the official journal of the American Academy of Paediatrics⁴⁶ found a close relationship between physical punishment and mental disorders. Researchers found that harsh physical punishment was associated with increased odds of mood disorders, anxiety disorders and substance abuse. Research by Florida State University⁴⁷ also shows a high correlation between spanking and a wide range of behavioral outcomes in children including aggression, psychopathology and criminal involvement. What makes the situation even worse, is that parents will often try to offset defiant or aggressive behavior in their children with even harsher or more severe punishments instead of changing their technique.

A defiant or rebellious child often finds that they are met with even more psychological beratement. Because of their aggressive behavior or poor academic performance they are told even more how worthless and stubborn they are, and how they'll never achieve anything in life. These harsh scoldings only further cement in the child's mind they're low sense of self-worth and hopelessness. This child is at high risk of becoming another of Jamaica's criminal statistics.

⁴⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics, Physical Punishment and Mental Disorders: Results from a Nationally Representative US Sample <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/130/2/184/29954/Physical-Punishment-and-Mental-Disorders-Results?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

⁴⁷ Scientific American, “What Science Really Says about Spanking” <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-science-really-says-about-spanking/>

But what of children who aren't beaten? Who aren't psychologically berated and scolded? Surely they must become undisciplined, aggressive perpetrators, incapable of achieving success because of what must be spoiled, selfish tendencies!

On the contrary! A study featured in *Scientific American*⁴⁸ shows that from as early as infancy babies respond positively to physical affection and soft gentle tones of voice. Babies hugged and cuddled and held often thrive not only physically but in cognitive development. Loving interactions between parent and baby causes stimulation and brain activity that encourages neuro-connections.

Children who don't experience the duress and anxiety of physical punishment or psychological scoldings are able to learn through play and develop confidence as well as cognitive skills. Secure in a parents love through affection and words of encouragement and positive reinforcement, their identity and sense of self are healthy and positive. And a child who is not exposed to abuse, violence or psychological damage is more likely to develop the social ability of empathy, sympathy and kindness, rather than be hardened by severity. Children aren't afraid to shine academically and also learn through being allowed to make mistakes

We even see the economic effects in countries where the rate of child abuse is lower in comparison with countries where the rate of child abuse is high. The criminality in countries such as Sweden where a ban has been put on corporal punishment ranks low in comparison with countries like Jamaica.

But many Christians will no doubt quote the scripture Proverbs 13:24 which says "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." Thus if you don't beat the child you rob them of discipline! Hold on there Speedy Gonzales! There are several ways you can instill discipline in a child and it does not have to include physical violence which is what spanking is. First of all if we're going to use biblical standards of punishment let's not forget that children were not the only ones subject to physical beatings for acts considered against God's laws. In Deuteronomy 25 when two persons had a dispute and took it to the courts, a judge will decide if the guilty party deserves to be beaten "If the guilty person deserves to be beaten the, judge shall make them lie down and have them flogged in his presence the number of lashes the crime deserves" (Deuteronomy 25:2) Flogging was in biblical law the standard punishment for all offenses. And in biblical times, this was a very barbaric period of human history if we even look at how slaves were treated.

Exodus 21:20 says "anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property."

Now being Black Jamaicans, anyone hearing this scripture should be filled with a righteous anger given our traumatic colonial history with the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that existed from the 1500s to the 1800s. Now the bible shows that in biblical times this was how adults were to be treated if they were enslaved. And even if not enslaved, if

⁴⁸ *Scientific American*, "How Important is Physical Contact with Your Infant?", Katherine Harmon, May 6, 2010, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/infant-touch/>

you got into a dispute with a neighbor you could be subject to a public flogging. Now if this is not the way any of us as adults would want to be treated now, why would we want to subject our dear children to the stringent and physically abusive standards that existed in the days of Moses?

Would we still subject a virgin who was not pledged to be married and was raped in the country with no one to rescue her, to marry her rapist? (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)
Brethren, these laws were in place because there were several cultural and social contexts in which this was the right action at the time. But these social and cultural contexts do not exist today.

But if corporal punishment and harsh scoldings aren't allowed, what will parents use to keep their children on the right path?

Great question! Because there are many parenting resources with alternative methods for the development of the child, one of the most important methods being an active parent-child relationship where parents take the time to learn about their children, the challenges they are having, support them in school activities and assignments, engaging them in conversation and play. Using a rewards system, rather than a system based on punishment and being generous with positive encouragement and physical affection. In warm, loving homes, children grow into becoming warm and loving adults with social skills and cognitive abilities that will propel them into having not only successful careers, but successful relationships, marriages and families of their own.

How interesting that our Lord Yashuah as a child of only 12 years old was able to speak and ask questions in such a way that amazed the religious leaders and sages in the temple! Luke 2:46-47 says "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers." It was clear that even at this tender age, Our Lord and Savior had quite the IQ! One wonders if His mother Mary, under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit used a gentle and tender touch in raising the babe who would one day become the sacrifice for all men.

Now if you're reading this chapter and reflecting on your own childhood with sadness and despair because of the violence and abuse that sullied it, let me encourage you: You are not damaged goods! No matter what kind of childhood trauma existed in our past, God has the power to heal and make new! He promises in His word that He will give us beauty for ashes and gladness for mourning. And there is no trauma in our past that our Lord cannot use towards His purposes in us. Romans 8:28 says "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Just like Joseph who was betrayed so deeply by his own brothers, he could look back and say "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Genesis 50:20)

And as we reflect not just on our childhood traumas, but on our abusers, we also need to ask Yahweh to give us a heart of forgiveness towards them. Often times our abusers were abused themselves in such a way and were under the deception that the way they were raised is the "right" way to raise a child. With their own traumas undealt with, they lacked the understanding of how they were now traumatizing their own children, and

causing psychological scars that would last a lifetime. Let us also remember that it also says in Ezekiel 33:11 "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live." Let us pray, not for their destruction, but that the Holy Spirit gives our former abusers understanding and enlightenment so they can understand the state of their condition and now be filled with a heart of compassion, contrition, and love and awareness of their need for God.

The Demonic Stronghold of Anger

I want to particularly go into the demonic stronghold of anger because unfortunately, it is no secret to many that Jamaicans on a whole have a problem with anger. We have a culture which has normalized anger, aggression and being verbally abusive and colloquially we call it “cus an’ gwaan.”

We’ll say “Mi did haffi cus an gwaan because (etc...)” In other words many Jamaicans feel that losing your temper and becoming verbally abusive or aggressive is warranted in certain situations. But dear reader, the Holy Spirit has revealed to me that a large part of Jamaica’s current problems with crime and violence comes from the stronghold of anger.

Someone might say “Well I don’t have an anger problem because I don’t murder people, and I don’t commit crime!” But guess what: even for the murderous criminals and people committing double homicides etc. their issues usually started from something small. It doesn’t have to escalate to the level of murder or physical abuse for a person to consider that they have an anger problem.

Brethren, if you’re saying things that you regret, slamming doors, yelling, raising your voice and losing your cool, you probably have an anger problem. I even met a Christian woman who said she would regularly break dishes! These releases of anger may feel good in the moment but afterwards it can leave you feeling guilty and ashamed of your behavior, and one can almost feel enslaved to one’s own anger! But thanks to the gift of the word of God, the example of Yashuah and the power of the Holy Spirit, friends we can be delivered from being a slave to anger or a slave to our emotions.

Galatians 5 says that if you walk by the Spirit you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:16-23)

Now what is an anger problem. According to the bible it is not a sin to feel anger, because it says in Ephesians 4:26 says “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sin go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4:26-27) So clearly the emotion of anger is not a sin. If someone is rude or disrespectful to us or wrongs us in some way we’re going to feel angry. Christ says in Matthew 5:22 “Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement.” Note it says *without cause*. So Christ recognizes that sometimes a person

may wrong you or hurt you so that you have a cause to be angry. But *STILL* the bible says “in your anger do not sin.”

1 Peter 3:9 says “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” So if someone hurts you, your flesh or your carnal nature is going to rise up and you’re going to want to get revenge. But not only do the scriptures say do not get revenge, we are actually so bless to them. And this is very contrary to what our carnal nature wants. Our carnal nature wants to teach that person a lesson. But Yashuah asks us to do something so contrary to our nature. Christ says in Matthew 5 starting from verse 39 “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.” (Matthew 5:39-40)

This is so profound! Yet also very difficult, because our culture says if someone does you wrong, you get them back. You teach them a lesson. Because if you don’t they’ll just always be taking advantage of you, right? But Christ tells us to resist that knee-jerk reaction to get them back and turn the other cheek.

Lord Yashuah says in Luke chapter 6 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28). This seems almost counterintuitive, but here’s why this is the best wisdom: If someone does something to you and you get them back, that’s just going to start an endless war, because they’ll strike you back for what you did, and then you’ll strike them back for what they did, and on and on it goes!

There’ll be feuds between two people, or two families, or two communities for years and years. The two parties will be repaying each other back for so long they don’t even remember what the original argument was about, and these are the things that cause gang wars. But by loving your enemies, by not repaying evil for evil or insult, you’re actually stopping the cycle right there! You’re stopping the cycle of hatred and anger.

Some might fear that if they don’t strike back, the ones who hurt us won’t learn their lesson and they’ll think that what they did is okay. But God promises that He does not leave the guilty unpunished. Romans 12:19 says “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge: I will repay,” says the Lord.” Exodus 34:7 says “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

You can count on the Lord. He disciplines and chastens all His children. He disciplines and chastens us when we do something wrong, so trust me He will discipline and chasten all wrong doers, because at the end of the day the Father wants people to turn from their sins so they won’t perish in the final judgement, so trust me, leave it up to Him, he does not let the guilty of the hook. It is not our duty to punish people for their wrongdoing. It is, however our responsibility to forgive people who’ve wronged us and to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. And remember that forgiveness is non-

negotiable with the Father. Christ says in Matthew 6:15 “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

But how do we forgive when the person has hurt us so badly? Solomon in his wisdom said “with all thy getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7) Understanding our human behavior is the key to forgiveness. The book of Genesis said we’ve been made in the image of God. So how does a tiny innocent baby coming into this world, created in the image of God, turn into a monster that hurts and abuses others? This is the prime work of the enemy, who is filled with enmity towards us. Christ says the adversary is like a thief who “comes only to steal kill and destroy.” (John 10:10) He destroys us through trauma, abuse and psychological manipulation. And unfortunately he uses other human beings as his agents to do it. Satan knows that trauma and abuse in all its forms are the perfect recipe for creating a monster. And so he uses strife and discord to turn us against each other to do his own dirty deeds. “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy;” Galatians 5:20

James 3:16 says “wherever you find jealousy and fighting, there will be trouble and every other kind of wrong-doing.” James 4:1-2 says “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.” These are the things that enemy uses to turn us against each other and cause another soul hurt and suffering.

And of course then there is the tongue! James 3:6 says “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” Verse 8 says the tongue is “a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.” Christ says in Matthew 5:22 that “anyone who says “You fool” will be in dangers of the fire of hell.” Lord Yashuah did not underestimate the power of the tongue to hurt and harm. Words are so powerful! With them we can tear down and destroy, or we can heal and build up. What damage can a tongue stirred up with anger do to another human soul! Yet with that same mouth, healing words can be like the balm of Gilead. James 3:18 says “Those who plant seeds of peace will gather what is right and good.”

Violence starts with words first. It’s words that stir up emotions and create conflicts and then escalates until you have a crime scene. We can see this when we look back to the story of Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of His brother, because Yahweh accepted Abel’s offering and not his own. Then Genesis 4:7-7 says “The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Well, we all know what unfortunately happened in the rest of the story. Cain murdered his own brother. This is how we know we *must* rule over our anger! Uncontrolled anger can be like a wild beast! If you cannot control your tongue, whether it's to give someone a piece of your mind, or to engage in lascivious gossip against your neighbor, then you do not yet have a character that can be trusted in heaven, and you may ultimately bar yourself from the Kingdom of God.

Some may say they don't engage in physical violence. But instead they engage in psychological violence with each other: when you use the N-word, when you insult another person about the darkness of their skin or the texture of their hair, or you verbally berate each other.

There are many Christians who comfort themselves from the knowledge of their temper by saying "well I do so many good deeds." But Paul says that if you give all you have to the poor and hand over your body to be burned, yet you do not have love you're a clanging symbol. If you do not have the gentleness, that patience, that kindness and that self-control, you've gained nothing.

What is *true* love? If we look at the love chapter 1 Corinthians 13 we see that "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast. It does not dishonor others (is not rude), 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." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Some think that the God of the old Testament had a short fuse and was an angry tyrant. But this is simply not true. But when He passed in front of Moses on Mount Horeb He declared His true character: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, ***slow to anger***, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Brethren, the God who passed in front of Moses on Mount Horeb is the same God who laid down His life for us on the cross, bidding us to become sons and daughters of the Most High! But as sons and daughters we should be like our Father in heaven, who is ***slow to anger***, abounding in love and faithfulness. Amen.

What Lies Beneath: The Motives of the Heart

Jeremiah 17:9-10 says “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”

There is more to us than meets the eye. While we have our outward appearance – how we dress, look and act – we have our inward thoughts, feelings and emotions. And God is well aware of this! Which is why scripture says “the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) We may be able to hide things from other people, but nothing is hidden from God. He knows our inner thoughts, emotions and motives. That being said we might as well be honest about them to Yahweh.

But sometimes it is even difficult for us to be honest with ourselves. It is difficult for us to be honest about our past hurts and traumas, and many people find it quite difficult to be emotionally vulnerable. Especially in a culture that very much despises vulnerability. Emotional vulnerability, or even struggling with mental health issues such as depression is seen as weak in Jamaican culture. To struggle with feelings of sadness, loneliness, low self-worth or low self-esteem is still very much a taboo and shamed – even though we have all at some point struggled with this in our lives!

But our culture says you must be strong and tough and able to withstand! There is no room in this world for the weak and vulnerable. It’s survival of the fittest and you have to be in it to win it! Now some of these characteristics are admirable. It certainly is a good quality to have endurance and to be able to withstand hardships. However many Jamaicans do this at the expense of their emotional vulnerability, and try to develop a “thick skin” when it comes to whatever life may throw at us.

However scripture is quite to the contrary! Psalm 51:17 says “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” James 4:6 says “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Lord Yashuah says in Matthew 11:29 “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, **for I am gentle and lowly in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Christ in His life on earth introduced something almost paradoxical: That there is strength in vulnerability! It takes courage to be honest with ourselves about our hurts, about our past, and about our flaws. It takes courage to know that we need God. That without him, we are like lost sheep.

This is why Lord Yashuah gave the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector. Luke 18:9-14 says “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

When we are humble enough to be vulnerable before God, this is when the Holy Spirit can work with us and the healing can begin (which may not happen all at once by the way!). Because how can you ask for healing, when you don't even know you need it?

Trauma and Separation from our Emotions:

Here's how trauma works. When we experience trauma, in order to cope sometimes our mind may bury the memories, or our mind may bury the emotions associated with those memories. It's a survival mechanism really. It allows us to stay functional in a world that has no time for our vulnerabilities. But the problem is, when we become disconnected from our emotions it also comes at the expense of our ability to have empathy: empathy for ourselves and empathy for our fellow man. We develop that "thick skin", that the world tells us is a good thing but the bible speaks of it quite negatively. It's called having a stony heart. Scripture says in Deuteronomy 10:16 "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn."

Stephen said to the Pharisees and religious leaders "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit." Pharaoh was unable to see the truth of his oppressive rule over the Hebrews and that Lord Yahweh was the one true God because his heart was hard.

Being disconnected from our emotions is in essence to have a "hardened heart." It's a heart that tends to be devoid of empathy and because of this we also miss out on the Spiritual things that God is trying to show us. Jeremiah 6:10 "To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear."

Christ explained to His disciples in Matthew 13, that most people cannot understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them." (Matthew 13:15).

Having a "thick skin" or stony heart may prepare you to be a part of this world which can be cold and cruel to the weak and the vulnerable. But unfortunately it won't prepare you to become a part of the Kingdom of God. Our Jamaican culture may tell you to bury your feelings and not be "too soft." But the bible tells us to "be ye kind one to another, **tenderhearted**, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32)

This world is under the influence of the evil one, and so will always have a value system that is contrary or in opposition to the word of God. The world will tell you that the important thing is to have a great career, financial security, position, status and to fulfill mostly material goals. But our Savior says “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21).

For most people this will be difficult to accept, because our identities are more often tied to our material worth: What we’ve accomplished, our jobs, our careers, the things we own. Without these things we feel lost, worthless and without purpose or identity. So for most Jamaicans, it is important to achieve these things. And in order to get them, we bury our deepest hurts and past traumas. We bury the negative emotions of our psychological scars and disconnect from them so we can achieve what we *think* will bring us happiness, respect and worth. Perhaps marriage, a family, home and a great career. For some it may also include a business venture, or maybe even politics. None of these things are in and of themselves bad. But for some, when they do achieve these worldly goals they actually are deceived into thinking that that’s all there is to life. They’ve made it! And this is success. They are “the Rich Fool” that the scriptures speak of.

Lord Yashuah says in Luke chapter 12 “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take like easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.”

How sad that there will be some who believed the deception that our worth was tied to our social position, influence and material possessions. And on that terrible day before God, how they will mourn that they didn’t realize sooner that our true worth was tied to something infinitely greater.

Who Are We?

But what is my worth or identity then? If it is not that I am a wife and mother? Or a husband and father? Or a teacher or businessman? A philanthropist, or lawyer? A doctor or police officer? All of these roles are needed for our day to day life in the world as it is now. However these are not who we are. These are tasks God has given us to do as his stewards.

In regards to our worth Christ says in Matthew 10 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the

very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

We are worth more than many sparrows. And that is quite the understatement! In fact we are worth so much to God, indeed we were worth dying for. Every human being on this earth means so much to our Lord Yahweh, we are even worth the precious blood of His Son, the Christ.

If you have been blessed with the gift of children who are also biologically your own, what a wonder it is when we look into their faces and see our own features in theirs! Their eyes, their lips, their nose – something about them reminds us of ourselves. And in the same way, man was made in the image of God. He said in Genesis 1:26 "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

We were made in His image, and so even though we have been marred by sin, when God looks at us, he sees a little bit of Himself. And that to Him was worth dying for.

As David says in Psalm 8 "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet." (Psalm 8:4-6)

When we can see ourselves as we truly are – a reflection of the image of the One who made us; a work of love of the One who formed us with His own hand -- then we will begin to understand what our true worth is! How much more are we than tied to the material things of this age, an age ruled by Satan. Our Lord would like to give us the secret things of the Kingdom to be, if we are willing to let go of the current temporal things that are.

As Lord Yashuah says in Matthew 13 "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you." But with uncircumcised hearts of stone how can we perceive them?

What Does Having A Heart of Flesh Mean?

It means having a heart that is driven by compassion, empathy and love – All of which are characteristics of Lord Yashuah, our Savior, which we often saw in His ministry. In healing the man with leprosy in Mark 1 it says "**Moved with compassion**, Jesus reached out and touched him." (Mark 1:41) With the many who would follow the Lord on His travels it says in Matthew 9 "When He saw the crowds **He had compassion on them** because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) When He saw the funeral procession for the widow who had just lost her only son, it says "When the Lord saw her, **His heart overflowed with compassion.**" Luke 7:13.

Beyond a doubt, Christ was a man who was tenderhearted and empathetic, particularly towards the downcast and the brokenhearted. Hebrews 4:15 says “For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin.”

In order to emulate Christ in ourselves, we must likewise have a heart that is compassionate and empathetic and *moved* by that compassion and empathy. But we cannot feel this compassion or empathy if we are disconnected from our own emotions. If we are disconnected from our own hurts, how can we feel compassion for the hurts of others? In our efforts to survive this cruel world which is run by Satan, we have calloused our hearts to our own suffering and in so doing, to the suffering of others.

The average Jamaican would rather watch a slapstick comedy than a reflective tragedy that might trigger their own tormented memories. Or perhaps they might self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. Anything to keep those feelings and memories at bay. Perhaps they might throw themselves into their work or career and become a workaholic. It may not be a “drug” in the sense of a banned substance, but we busy ourselves with things or activities that anesthetize us from the sad and broken world that surrounds us or the sad and broken realities of our own lives.

Confronting Trauma:

It’s a difficult thing to confront trauma. It’s not for the faint of heart. For some, the trauma of abuse and other horrific events in the past can be so overwhelming it can even cause insanity: A complete breakdown of the psyche. There’s only so much the mind can take before it finally breaks. There is only so much trauma and undealt with emotions that can be swept under the rug before the mound beneath becomes impossible to ignore. But instead of the confronting it, which invariably is going to be a painful process, many would rather take it to the grave. Removing the bandages from a festering wound is painful, but it must be done in order for it to be cleansed and rinsed from infection. But you can only ask for healing if you know you are infirmed!

Matthew 5:3 says “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Lord Yashuah says in Mark 2:17 “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

There is a healing work the Holy Spirit must do within us. Christ has been sent to “heal the brokenhearted.” And knowing that we need this healing is ironically the first step to healing!

There is Nothing New Under the Sun – The Need for Deliverance Ministry:

One of the reasons we might shy away from confronting our trauma is because we feel a sense of shame and think we must be the only ones who have experienced this. But clearly as you can see in this book I have outlined several studies and statistics that show the various types of abuse and events that can cause trauma, how they can affect us emotionally, spiritually and even physically. If there’s one thing you can be assured

of, it's that you are not alone. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 1:9 "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." Though we all have our own unique lives and experiences, really there's a commonality we all have as human beings. The psyche, our emotions and our response to trauma lie within those commonalities.

I personally believe that demonic forces and entities take advantage of our traumas and deliberately torment us with the memories of our past, creating intrusive thoughts, images, nightmares and flashbacks. These entities may also fill our heads with lies regarding our traumas and say things like "it's all your fault" or "God has forgotten you," or "you're cursed!" These same demonic forces with their whisperings of the lies of Satan can fill a tormented heart with venom and anger that causes them then to become violent, lashing out and hurting themselves or another person.

The need for deliverance ministry is quite real in this world ruled by "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). It was not in vain that Lord Yashuah spent much of his ministry delivering men, women and children of demonic forces which tormented them. Mary Magdalene was one of the Lord's most faithful followers "out of whom He had driven seven demons" (Mark 16:9) In fact Lord Yashuah and His disciples "drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." (Mark 6:13)

And like Solomon wrote, "there is nothing new under the sun." The sad reality is demons existed back then, and they exist today. Many people who would be labelled by modern medicine as "clinically insane" or "psychotic" often speak of having some kind of "spiritual experience." So much so these symptoms are listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the DSM-5) as "religious delusions." According to a 2015 study published in the International Journal of Social Psychiatry⁴⁹ "religious themes are commonly encountered in delusions and hallucinations associated with major mental disorders."

But let us not fall into the deception that only those with mental illnesses are demonically possessed, tormented or influenced. There certainly are some maniacal tyrants and dictators who rule over countries and who I would say are also being influenced and manipulated by the evil one with their thirst for power.

But sadly the topic of demonic possession and deliverance is one that is only talked about in hushed tones in the church. And because of this, spiritually tormented souls are often ignored because of the cowardice of church leadership who then shunt the responsibility that should be theirs onto secular clinical institutions. These modern psychiatric hospitals because of their lack of knowledge of the source of the patient's troubles often over-medicate these individuals with various psychopharmaceuticals

⁴⁹ International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 2015 Jun; 61(4): 404-425, "Religious psychopathology: The prevalence of religious content of delusions and hallucinations in mental disorder"
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4440877/>

which may temporarily numb their pain and sedate them, but cause so much physical harm, many have often died from these drugs, particularly antipsychotics⁵⁰. According to a 2009 study published in the New England Journal of Medicine “current users of both typical and atypical antipsychotics had a similar, dose-related increased risk of sudden cardiac death.”

I do not write this to shame anyone who may be taking psychiatric medication to help with their mental health. But I must warn that these medications only help abate the symptoms of trauma, and not the source itself. Mental health issues are invariably linked to trauma, and as long as this trauma is left undealt with, the psychological and spiritual scars will continue leak and fester. What’s worse is that the efficacy of these drugs fade over time because our body naturally adapts to chemicals introduced into it. Antipsychotics may theoretically reduce the amount of dopamine speculated by scientists to cause mania and psychosis. But the brain then works overtime to produce this hormone that the body is naturally inclined to have at a certain level. Ergo the psychiatric prescription that once was effective at a certain dose either needs to be changed or increased. And with every increase of these drugs comes the physical consequences to the body with adverse side effects that can be deadly or even cancel out any benefit the drug had to begin with!

The fact is, the reason modern-day psychiatry is failing the psychologically unstable, rendering them with physical ill-health and shorter lifespans⁵¹, is because it is the church’s duty to do this psychological and spiritual healing. Not secular medical practitioners and institutions who have no idea of the true rulers and principalities at play. Lord Yashuah our Messiah made it perfectly clear. “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12). Our Lord and Messiah cast out demons, hence we in the church should also be casting out demons.

Many Christians shy away from this form of ministry because, even though the supernatural is spoken of continually in the bible, we as worldly Christians busy with the material worries of everyday life find the idea of the supernatural quite foreign and alien to us. It is the frightening stuff of Hollywood movies, and so is not part of the “real” world – or so we try to comfort ourselves to think. In that, we limit the world only to what we can see and feel through the carnal senses. How paradoxical since we serve an invisible God that clearly exists in a realm we cannot perceive. We are like Elisha’s servant who could not see the spiritual forces of Yahweh that surrounded the Aramean army. When we see someone who may be demonically possessed we say to each other ““Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” (2 Kings 6:15) But scripture goes on to say

⁵⁰ “Atypical Antipsychotics and the Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death” New England Journal of Medicine, https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMoa0806994?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%3dwww.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

⁵¹ “Schizophrenia, neuroleptic medication and mortality” Joukamaa, M (2006) British Journal of Psychiatry, 188, 122-127

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:16-17).

We ourselves cannot fight this foe on our own. We must recognize our need for the power of our Lord and Savior. A Savior scripture says even demons believe in “and they tremble in terror.” (James 2:19). When we face these demons, it is our Lord who stands with us to cause them to retreat, and not our own authority.

I myself have seen and heard human beings in the throws of demonic position, speaking with voices that were not their own, tormented by demonic presences filling their minds with confusion despair and hopelessness driving them either to suicidal behaviors or to harm another. These manifestations are the same manifestations that Yashuah contended with during his earthly ministry such as the demoniac who was chained among the tombs. In looking at this example we must bear in mind the difference between the man and the demonic entities who held him captive. We must not conflate the two. The demonic entities were terrified of our Lord and begged Him not to cast them into the abyss. However the man who was held captive by the demons ran to Lord Yashuah collapsing at his feet.

Luke 8:26-39 says “They sailed to the region of Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you don’t torture me!”

What an interesting paradoxical reaction. The demon was terrified of the Lord, yet the man ran towards Him and fell at his feet. It is clear that while the man wanted deliverance and was rushing towards the light of God, the demon did not, for when the man opened his mouth to speak the demon instead cried “What do you want with me, Jesus son of the most high God? I beg you do not torture me!”

Many are like this man in the chains of a demonic stronghold or bondage, some so tightly bound they cannot even utter their own speech or their own words, but the demon speaks for them.

Luckily Lord Yashuah knew it was the demon within who was speaking and sternly addressed him “What is your name?” To which the entities replied “Legion.” this vast company of demons would drive the man into lowly places, but the man seeing the Lord Yashuah, God’s Salvation, in desperation ran towards him and threw himself at his feet. Clearly the man is wanting deliverance while the demonic forces wanted their continued hold on their vessel.

The asked the Lord if they could instead of being sent into the abyss, be sent into the nearby heard of swine, wish the Lord aloud but only for the swine to drown themselves by rushing down a steep bank into the lake.

Now the man who was previously possessed and tortured sat calmly clothed and in his right mind. But Yashuah knew that this was not the end of the story.

In Luke 11:24-25 our Lord teaches “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house I left” When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there, And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.”

Once we have been cleansed of demonic strongholds in our lives we cannot afford to leave out “houses” our minds empty of the things of God. His words, His thoughts, His meditations, His actions. Otherwise this demonic world which is ruled by Satan will slowly creep back into our lives and our minds potentially putting us back in a worse state. This is why the psalm says “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

The commandment by our Savior based on Deuteronomy 6:5 is “Love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37) In so doing we guard well the avenues of the heart.

According to prolific author Ellen White in her book Patriarchs and Prophets page 460 “We have a work to do to resist temptation. Those who would fall prey to Satan’s devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The minds should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest.”

But how can we rest in the confidence that the authority given to us by our Lord Yashuah will help us in the daunting tasks of deliverance ministry?

John 14:12-14 our Lord says “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.”

Our Lord promises we do not face this tasks of deliverance ministry on our own and He will do as we ask so that the Father may be glorified.

When Christ was filled with trepidation at the task that was before Him he said in John 12:27-28 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name.”

That ought to be our prayer too when faced with the work in front of us.

Self Medicating

There are several reasons a person may choose to sin. Envy for what another has, anger and the desire for revenge, fleshly carnality. But the reason a person may choose to sin against their own body, or sin that is a self defeating behavior is usually due to trauma.

The flesh's response to stress or trauma is to desire something that brings immediate relief and gratification, and usually these behaviors are negative and can ensnare us in a cycle of addiction. For some it might be emotional eating, for others it might be substance use, promiscuity, pornography, internet/tv binge watching. Name the drug of choice and you've got a behavioral pattern that is difficult to change. On top of it, these self-medicating behaviors can make us feel guilty and disgusted with ourselves. It's a vicious cycle, but the good news is, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Yahweh can give us the power to break it. But there's no way around it, it's going to be hard work!

The first thing you need to do to defeat self-defeating self-medicating behaviors is to understand first why you do it. And the way you can discover why you do it, is simply going through a period where you don't have that thing you do. Without this self-medicating behavior how does it make you feel? Lonely? Sad? Depressed? Anxious? Do disturbing memories begin to flood your mind? Well then you've discovered something! When you don't do your self-medicating behavior there's a negative reaction that drives you to it, and analyzing this negative reaction could be the key in how to break it.

For instance for me I know my drug of choice is binge watching a series on netflix or some youtube channel dealing with an interesting topic. When I find I don't do these digital binges I feel a sense of loneliness and isolation. And so constant youtube streaming or netflix binge watching was simulating for me human connection. Instead of making these connections in real life I was making artificial connections either watching a fiction, or a drama. Some true crime story about people long dead or moved on with their lives. But for me that fired up all the emotional connections in my mind. It stimulated intellectually, however what I really should have been doing was building these connections with real people. Now good luck doing that because most people are plugged into social media and binge watching from their favorite streaming service. You will hardly see a person on a subway or streetcar whose eyes are not glued to their phone and whose ears are not tethered by an earbud. We are living in a world where instead of making connection with each other, we are making connections artificially through binge watching. Now don't get me wrong, social media has been able to connect humanity and communities in a way that couldn't be done previously in history because of geographical distance. I still have my Seventh-Day Adventist Jamaican friends right here with me in Canada due to Facebook. And these are genuine connections.

However, our addiction to fictional (or nonfiction) stories, which yes give us something to talk to each other about, however, also lure us away from the things of God. Time streaming a Netflix series could be better spent mentoring a young Christian or comforting a lost soul bringing them to the light of the True Path.

And so whatever the drug of choice that numbs the pain of loneliness, or traumatic memories, these are things that take us out of the will of God, and out of the much needed army in the war for the souls of me. And we must remember what is at stake when realize the need to break a self-medicating habit.

Paul says "I beat my body into submission" and that's no overstatement. When we try to break an addictive behavior that we rely on for comfort, our body's will rebel. Just like any addiction, once you quit it you will experience withdrawal, perhaps some sleepless nights. But the good news is, once we starve the flesh of the toxic habit it wants, it will be easier and easier the next time, but each time we give in, it will be harder and harder.

Another important step in breaking a self-medicating habit is filling the void with something good. James 3:17 says "But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds." Let us not simply starve ourselves of the self-defeating acts we used to indulge ourselves in but let us be rich towards the good works that God has called us to do. Let us fill ourselves with the character of the Holy Spirit which spurs us on to do these good works!

Another great practice that the Bible teaches is fasting. Appetite is one of the most primal and carnal instincts we have as living creatures. But regularly putting our appetites into subjection with a weekly 24 hour fast from food allows us to get used to not giving in to our carnal nature. Fasting is not pleasant, but prayer and fasting humbles us to rely on God to sustain us through difficulty and discomfort. And once you've come out on the other side, this regular fasting will give us the confidence to obtain from other carnal behaviors which are more difficult to control such as sexual lust. Little by little, we begin to conquer the flesh and it's desires that are contrary to the Spirit. You can certainly choose with how much regularity you fast. Some do weekly, some do twice weekly. But regular fasting must be among the Christian's regime, to put the flesh and it's desires into subjection. Watch and see how you become empowered to put other desires into subjection! But don't be intimidated. A special key to fasting is to start small. try fasting a meal. Then maybe going 12 hours, perhaps fast from meat or only do fresh fruit and vegetables. However you need to work your way up to a 24 hour fast that then can be taken on regularly.

And the Holy Spirit will do something more - He will give you a healthy desire that replaces the self-medicating behavior. Instead of time spent on an addictive vice, Yahweh's Holy Spirit will give you an insatiable desire to pursue Him. To learn about the Beautiful mystery that is God and His character. His story of redemption for mankind

and an incomprehensible love He has for every single Human Being. Yahweh will become your passion and your desire. To pursue Him and to please Him will consume your life. What a fire the Holy Spirit places within us! It gives us new life, new purpose and new meaning and changes our perception of the world where we no longer just contemplate the physical and temporal, but the Spiritual and the eternal. A life dedicated to Yahweh means we have joined with Him in the fight to save men's souls, through telling people about Yashuah, and by ministering to and helping our fellow man and demonstrating the Love of God. The Holy Spirit will fill us with such love and Purpose that those old self-medicating behaviors will be a thing of the past. We have a new fix now, and it's loving and serving the master and serving mankind. We are created in advance to do good works.

Understanding your identity: The Kingdom of God is an Egalitarian Kingdom

Did you know that the kingdom of God is an egalitarian kingdom? This is quite foreign to us as Jamaicans because our history comes from British Colonialism which is quite “classist”: Meaning in a classist society all men were not created equal. There is a wealthy ruling class and a poor working class and several levels that fall in between to form a linear hierarchy from the bottom to the top. The most important and valuable persons are at the top of the social hierarchy and the least valuable and least important fall to the bottom. But Christ wants to turn this concept on its head.

Though Lord Yashuah is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords He came to earth as a suffering servant and to demonstrate this, at the last supper he took off his outer garment, wrapped a towel around his waist like a common servant and washed his disciples' feet.

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:13-17)

Luke 22:24-27 says “A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

It is interesting that when John the revelator saw an angel before him for perhaps the first time in his life, he bowed down to worship him. But even the angel cautioned him not to that and saw himself as a fellow servant!

“I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” (Revelation 22:8-9)

Not to mention that when John saw Lord Yashuah Himself in His heavenly form with eyes like blazing fire and his voice like the sound of rushing water, our Lord still took a familiarly humble and comforting approach to John when he touched him on the shoulder and told him not to be afraid.

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:17-18)

Now if the one who lives forever and ever and who holds the keys of death and Hades still treats a servant so gently and so comfortingly, how much more so are we to treat our fellow man with this kindness, gentleness, respect and dignity.

No matter how rich or power, hoe light or dark, how beautiful or plain, of how much influence or how much power, we all human beings are worth the precious blood of our Lord Yashuah Hamashiach! We were all made in the image of God.

Funnily enough the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights also holds to these biblical principle. Article 1 says “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” The United Nations UDHR is based on the concept of an egalitarian society. Your worth is not based on your position, your wealth or education, your beauty, intelligence or influence, or your career. But you have inherent worth - that is worth you are born with - simply by virtue of being a human being. Did God not say in Genesis 1:26 “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all creatures that move along the ground.”

David said in the psalm “what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:4-5)

When we look at our fellow human beings, do we see the inherent dignity within them as a creation made in the image of God? And can we see that same dignity in ourselves? Our master saw our worth when he said “don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.” (Matthew 10:31) which is why he came to serve us tenderly laying down His life for His church.

Let us be prepared to do likewise, and not jostle for position and influence, importance and status, because Lord Yahweh has a way of turning these things on their heads. 1 Corinthians 27 says “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

“For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” (1 Corinthians 1:19)

There’s a reason Christ says in Matthew 19:14 that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children - those who are humble, teachable, willing to learn and willing to serve, caring and tenderhearted.

Instead of going after the things of this world, power, wealth, influence and a thriving career, let us instead “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Because where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also.

Toxic masculinity and the plight of men and boys

They say boys don't cry, but is this really true? According to the American Psychological Association higher levels of testosterone may inhibit one's ability to shed tears⁵². This does NOT mean that men and boys don't have emotions however. They simply express it in different ways.

As a matter of fact according to a study "The Effect of Testosterone Levels on Mood in Men: A Review"⁵³, high levels of testosterone are related to increased rates of depression as well as hypomania, whereas low levels of testosterone are related to depressive disorders in certain persons. So make no mistake: mental and emotional health is a big issue for men and boys.

And while higher rates of women may attempt suicide, higher rates of men actually succeed at completing suicide because men tend to use more deadlier and violent means according to a WeryWell Mind article "Differences in Suicide Among Men and Women."

While women and girls are more vulnerable to physical and sexual assault and abuse, societal pressures placed on men and boys which have very narrow definitions of what it means to be a man are driving men of all ages to commit desperate acts. According to Statista⁵⁴, an online platform specialized in market and consumer data, almost 100% of mass shootings in the United States between 1982 and January 2023 have been men or boys.

And of course the last ten years saw the development of the "Incel" movement, a community mostly across North America, of angry young men who have felt bullied and rejected by society, particularly women because of their lack of physical attractiveness and masculine traits.

But what about our young Black Jamaican men? If ever there was a definition for toxic masculinity, I would say it is the social expectations our culture has (or lack thereof) of our young black males. That they are violent, hypersexual and promiscuous; fathering several children by several women whom they bear no financial responsibility for. That they are incapable of monogamy; must have strong athletic prowess and anything less than being a "shotta" could get you labeled as a homosexual or some other derogatory term for it. Boyhood is brutal for many Jamaican young men. According to a 2017 Sunday Gleaner Article "Deaf to the Cries of Boys: Jamaicans more likely to report abuse of girls" "An under reporting of instances of the abuse of boys, fueled by a

⁵² American Psychological Association, Why We Cry, by Lorna Collier, February 2014 Vol 45 No2, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/02/cry>

⁵³ The effect of testosterone levels on mood in men: a review, Justin M Johnson, Lisa B Nachtigall, Theodore A Stern <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24016385/>

⁵⁴ Statista, Number of mass shootings in the United States between 1982 and January 2023, by shooter's gender <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476445/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-gender/>

general belief that boys are ‘tough’ and should be punished accordingly, is among the reasons being given for more young females being in state care than young males.” In the article, professor of Child Health and Development Dr. Maureen Samms-Vaughan unveiled the findings of a study which showed that young boys in Jamaica suffer far more physical abuse than girls.⁵⁵ This violent raring of boys is no doubt why the country is enveloped in crime and violence and in a mental health crisis.

The first thing I would say in the dilemma facing men and boys in Jamaica and indeed across the black diaspora and beyond is that they are not being given the vocabulary necessary to analyze and understand their own emotions. Because of the prevalence of child abuse and bullying especially towards boys, these emotions are being bottled up deep down inside until finally they become explosive in an expression of violence.

According to an article by Verywell Mind⁵⁶ emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively. The scripture says “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who does not control his temper” (Proverbs 25:28) the NIV translation says “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.”

But self-control is not merely gotten by burying one’s emotions. We arrive at a sense of peace and self-control when we have *understanding*. Understanding our emotions and why we feel them is the key in how we relate to ourselves as well as our ability to understand, interpret and relate to others.

According to verwell Mind some key signs and examples of emotional intelligence include:

An ability to identify and describe what people are feeling

An awareness of personal strengths and limitations

Self-confidence and self-acceptance

The ability to let go of mistakes

An ability to accept and embrace change

A strong sense of curiosity, particularly about other people

Feelings of empathy and concern for others

Showing sensitivity to the feelings of other people

⁵⁵ The Sunday Gleaner, September 24, 2017, B7, “Deaf to the cries of Boys: Jamaicans more likely to report abuse of girls.”

⁵⁶ verywell Mind “What is Emotional Intelligence?” by Kendra Cherry, Nove 7, 2022
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-emotional-intelligence-2795423>

Accepting responsibility for mistakes

The ability to manage emotions in difficult situations

When we feel an emotion we need to give ourselves time to understand and process what we've felt and why. It could have come from a trigger from a past traumatic experience, or a traumatic memory. But this sort of intelligence - EQ, instead of IQ is not being taught in our schools, yet this may take you further in life than mere book smarts. Scripture says "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (James 1:19) Proverbs 4:7 says "Get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding." Understanding our human emotions is pivotal for our survival and emotional health. As a matter of fact it is not just pivotal for survival but to thrive!

And our young boys and men must be given these tools so they can understand their inner traumas, their inner thoughts and emotions instead of burying them deep within - which is inevitably impossible and will only lead to some violent outburst later down the line, some mental health issue or even a physical health issue.

Of course the man we must look to as an example for all men was Yashuah Hamashiach, our Lord and Savior, the Christ. Our Lord was tenderhearted, and moved with compassion for the most vulnerable. Tender and loving towards children, yet always courageous in calling out injustice. He was the same man who drove out the money changers with their animals out of the house of the Lord with whips made from chords. Yet He still said in Matthew 11:29 "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Quite a contrast from the hypermasculine, hypersexual, brutish image being touted as true masculinity in our Jamaican culture. Christ calls all the young men who would follow him to be meek and humble and to stand up to protect the vulnerable. He scolded the pharisees "you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness." Justice, mercy and faithfulness. These are the attributes that He holds up for us to look to. And finally laying His life down for us on the cross as an example to all men in how they ought to treat the women in their lives.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

Our men are called to love: To love each other, to love the women in their lives and to love their children. "Fathers do not antagonize your children, so that they will not become discouraged." (Colossians 3:21).

How many fathers deal so harshly with their children, particularly their sons so that their poor boys become embittered and disillusioned, learning from early to either bury their feelings, disconnect from them completely, or else express them in a violent manner or dull them through substance abuse and addiction issues.

Our young men are being robbed of what true manhood is because the tenderness, affection and love needed for them in childhood is also sadly being robbed from them. And this lack of tenderness that is crucial for the proper development of the brain and intellect is causing the brutality we are seeing across our nation.

Women and girls need advocacy but men and boys need advocacy as well. Every male criminal you can imagine locked away in a jail cell was a small and innocent child once, who was neglected, abused physically, psychologically and even sexually. But the good news is that Christ, Yashuah has come to set the captives free. But in order to do this we must be the hands and arms and feet of the body of Christ "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." (Isaiah 61:1)

Spiritual Warfare: The Battle for your mind is never over

-As Christians sometimes we will have mountain top experiences of victory, and sometimes we will have valleys in which we still see how much we still miss the mark and how far we are from Yahweh's Holiness and perfection. Even if we overcome certain sins the Holy Spirit will still reveal to us flaws in our character where we are still wanting. But if you fall into temptation and sin, don't be overwhelmed with discouragement. Remember that the battle is never over. As long as we are in our perishable bodies we will always face temptation. This is also why scripture says we are to walk humbly with our God. Having complacency or arrogance can blind us to the tactics of the enemy who is always trying to cause our downfall. However Yahweh can still give us the victory. Be sober and be vigilant as your adversary the devil roams about as a roaring lion seeking whom he will devour. Paul tells us to pray without ceasing, and it's no overstatement. Unless we constantly abide in the presence of the Holy Spirit, meditating on His principles and His character, as Yashuah said "without me you can do nothing."

We cannot lead lives of victory if we allow ourselves to slip back into our worldly habits and worldly thinking. The flesh wants all too much to go back into its self-pleasing desires. Let your guard down for a moment and don't be surprised if you have an outburst of anger, or fall into some carnal habit you wouldn't have indulged if you were keeping your mind on the character of the Holy Spirit and constantly praying for His guidance and insight. Don't be deceived! Our characters are constantly being tried and tested as God readies us for His eternal kingdom. No sooner do we let ourselves fall down the rabbit hole of social media and secular entertainment than we find ourselves falling into sinful temptations, even if just in thought. We must pray constantly, as Lord Yashuah said "lead us not into temptation." I don't believe there is any Christian who can say "they've arrived." Even Paul said "I have not yet apprehended." I don't believe we will ever be able to let our guards down until Lord Yashuah comes back for us and transforms us from perishable to imperishable. Even looking at Yashuah's example, Once He had risen and Mary encountered Him in the cemetery, He still warned her not to touch Him "I have not yet ascended to my father." Even after so great a feat as to defeat death on a cross, He still carefully guarded His purity and propriety towards women. Then how much more should we as believers! The battle is never over friends. Not on this side of heaven. We have to continue the struggle, and not let sorrow, loneliness, and other perplexities overwhelm us. "pressed but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned"

The best armor we can use for this spiritual warfare is of course the armor of God and to realize "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12) These same spiritual powers will try to bring up past mistakes and traumatic memories and lie to you to say you will never change. But this is where the armor of God comes in. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around

your waist" (Ephesians 6:14) What is the truth? "As far as the east is from the west, so far had he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) and "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Don't let the enemy lie to you and say you're the same evil sinner you always were. The word of God says differently!

Paul says we also need "the breastplate of righteousness in place" (Ephesians 6:14) This means we ought to live righteously. It's easy for the enemy to use our past against us when we're still living in our past. Living in sin makes us lack confidence before the Lord. Scripture says "The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." (Proverbs 28:1) When we are living in the righteousness of God that is when we have the boldness to call out injustice! We have the boldness to be warriors for Christ and help the downfallen.

Next Paul says to have "your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." (Ephesians 6:15) in other words we ought to be ready to do the good works Christ has called us to do. We ought to be ready to share the gospel, and to preach the good news, which can be a very daunting task in today's highly polarized political climate where it is assumed that if you are a Christian you are hateful, homophobic and politically conservative. People may have their stereotype of what they think a Christian is or what they think the gospel is but we must live our lives to prove them otherwise and also share that Yashuah Hamashiach is the only way to the Kingdom of God

"Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Next Paul says "take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (Ephesians 6:16) This is an important one because "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Oftentimes it may *SEEM* in the natural that we have been abandoned, but in reality we are not. Christ says "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20) Our Lord also says "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." There is a reason our Lord Yashuah's name is also Emmanuel, which means God with us. He is with us even in our darkest moments.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." Christ is with us even in moments when we seem to be abandoned and the saddest of souls. Because we don't go after earthly treasures of wealth and position and all the things that the world would have to offer. Some would look at us and see us as impoverished but in the spiritual we are rich towards the one who sent us. For where our treasure lies there our hearts lie also.

Paul goes on to say "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17) We must protect our minds with the assuredness of

our salvation. That as long as we follow in the footsteps of our Lord we will see His face on that day. As Proverbs 4:18 "The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day." But we must follow that path. 1 John 2:3-6 says "We know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commands. "Whoever says "I know Him," but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." We must follow in the footsteps of the master. This is the Helmet of Salvation: we must walk as He walked and do as he did. Lord Yashuah preached the gospel and the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him anointing Him to proclaim the good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and to set the oppressed free. This is what we are called to do as His followers and so we must in this warfare not only for our souls, but for the souls of all men.

Finally Paul talks about "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." No greater weapon do we have against the enemy's lies than the Word of truth which we must also internalize, because remember, the battlefield is also in the mind. David says "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 199:11) Having God's word at the ready in our heads is how we prepare our minds for the mental attacks of the enemy.

And finally Paul says "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." (Ephesians 6:18) Never underestimate the importance and the power of prayer. Our Lord spent hours all night long in prayer for His people. In Luke 6:12 it says "Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." The enemy is always at the ready to try to take out the people of God and so we must be at the ready with prayer. Let me remind you that John Ramirez who was mentioned in the beginning of this book was trained from the age of eight years old to the age of 35 to be a high ranking priest in a satanic cult in New York City and during one of his astral projection sessions in which he was trying to pronounce a curse on different communities he came upon a group of Christians holding hands in a circle and praying and he felt a power he had never felt before which frustrated his plans to curse that neighborhood.

Another thing we ought to do in this spiritual warfare is to act defensively by doing what it says in Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." This means guarding our eyes ears and mouths; Guarding the things we watch listen to and say. This may seem quite strange to hear but quite a lot of music movies and entertainment have occult influences and are enmeshed in witchcraft and we can easily open up ourselves to demonic entities if we do not guard ourselves from them. And these things can be quite enticing: a piece of jewelry with an ancient south Asian goddess on it, stones or crystals, tarot readings. T-Shirts with Hindu gods or goddesses printed on them.

Remember the sin of Achan. In Joshua's army Achan decided to keep some of the plunder from their victorious battle of the city of Jericho. "It's true. I sinned against GOD, the God of Israel. This is how I did it. In the plunder I spotted a beautiful Shinar robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a fifty-shekel bar of gold, and I coveted and took them." (Joshua 7:20-21) These occult objects that Achan took which were used in the worship of the pagan gods of Jericho caused Joshua's army to lose the battle at Ai. Let us not sabotage ourselves by holding onto trinkets of the occult in this very serious spiritual battle. These seemingly innocent trinkets have very real consequences in the spiritual realm, and in a battle where life and death is at stake they are not worth the risk.

Spiritual warfare is an ongoing process. We will not stop warring in the spiritual until Christ returns for us His people, so until that day let us put off the old identity that our past traumas had pigeonholed us in and put on our new identities in Christ. If you have not yet been baptized, now is the time to do so, to declare our new commitment and our new journey following after the one who would call us by His name, Yahsuah Hamashiach, Christ our living Messiah.

Appendix

Sources for Mental Health Support in Jamaica and Canada

Jamaican Mental Health And Victim Supports			
Organization	Address	Phone No.	Email
(Portland) Victim Support Unit (SVU)	Shop#3, 17 West Palm Court, Port Antonio	1-876-993-4542	Averia.jacksonharris@moj.jm
(Portland) Child Protection and Family Services Agency	Shop 45 West Palm Court Plaza, Port Antonio, Portland	1-876-993-9289 or 1-876-715-4939	www.cda.gov.jm
(St. Catherine) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	10 Hanover Street, Spanish Town	1-876-749-2359 1-876-749-0714	
(St. Ann) Victim Support (VSU)	61 Main Street, St. Ann's Bay	1-876-972-9489	
(St. Ann) Child Development Agency (CDA)	Lee-Sin Center, Windsor Road, St. Ann's Bay	1-876-972-2686	
(St. Thomas) Child Development Agency (CDA)	Shop 6 and 7, 52 Queen Street, Morant Bay	1-876-734-0373	
(St. Thomas) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	15 Church Street	1-876-734-5638 1-876-734-5650	
(Clarendon) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	RM Court Building, May Pen	1-876-902-1613 1-876-902-1623	
(Clarendon) Child Development Agency	Shop #7 16 A Manchester Avenue, May Pen	1-876-986-6934	
(St. Mary) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	RM Court House, Main Street, Port Maria	1-876-994-9125	
(St. Mary) Child Development Agency	Credit Union Building, Main Street Highgate	1-876-992-2212	
(Kingston) Bureau of Gender Affairs	5-9 South Odean Avenue Kgn	1-876-754-8577-8 1-876-929-6660	Director srobinson@mcges.gov.jm
(Kingston) Victim Support Unit	47E Old Hope Road	1-876-946-0663 1-876-946-9287	
(Kingston) The Crisis Center a Center for Women	4 Ellesmere Road Kingston	1-876-929-2997 24 hour hotline	wicrisiscentre@yahoo.com

(Kingston) Children's Coalition of Jamaica (CCJ)	3A Richmond Ave, Kingston 10	1-876-906-5535	childrenscoalition@gmail.com
(Kingston Corporate Office) Child Development Agency (CDA)	48 Duke Street, Kingston	1-876-948-6678 1-876-948-2841-2	info@cda.gov.jm
(Kingston) Women's Resource and Outreach Center	47 Beechwood Avenue, Kingston 5	1-876-929-8873 1-876-960-9067	communications@wrocjamaica.org
(St. James) The Crisis Center a Center for Women	53 St. James Street, Montego Bay	1-876-929-2997 24 hour hotline	wicrisiscentre@yahoo.com
(St. James) Child Development Agency (CDA)	4 Kerr Crescent, Montego Bay	1-876-979-3446 1-876-979-1024	
(Manchester) Child Development Agency (CDA)	Lot 19 Caledonia Mall, Mandeville	1-876-962-2558	
(Manchester) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	The RADA Building, Caledonia Road, Mandeville	1-876-624-4112-3	
(Westmoreland) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	Rose Street Upstairs Family Court Savanna-La-Mar	1-876-918-1741 1-876-918-0815	
(Westmoreland) Child Development Agency (CDA)	26 Rose Street, Savanna-La-Mar	1-876-918-1943	
(St Elizabeth) Victim Support Unit	80 Main Street Santa Cruz	1-876-966-3481	
(Trelawny) Child Development Agency (CDA)	Duke Street, Falmouth	1-876-954-4344	
(Trelawny) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	19 Victoria Street, Falmouth	1-876-617-5522	
(Hanover) Victim Support Unit (VSU)	Uptown Shopping Center Mosely Drive, Lucea Hanover	1-876-956-3143	

(Kingston) Family Life Ministries (Counselling Service)	1 Cecelio Avenue, Kingston 10, St. Andrew	1-876-926-8101 1-876-920-1034 1-876-929-4360 1-876-960-8614	flmjamaica@gmail.com www.familylifeministriesjamaica.com
Canadian Mental Health And Victim Supports			
(Toronto) Distress Line		1-416-408-4357	
(Toronto) The Crisis Line		1-416-929-5200	
(Toronto) CMHA Wellness Together Counselling Line		1-866-585-0445	
(Toronto) Hope + Me, Mood Disorder Association of Ontario Warm Line		1-888-486-8236	
(Toronto) Hope + Me Mood Disorder Association of Ontario	2300 Yonge Street, Suite 1600, Unit 17, Toronto, Ontario M5P 1E4	1-416-486-8046	https://moooddisorders.ca
(Etobicoke) The Gatehouse	3101 Lake shore Blvd W, Etobicoke, Ontario M8V 3W8	1-416-255-5900	https://thegatehouse.org
(Toronto) Gerstein Crisis Centre	100 Charles St E, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 1V3	1-416-929-5200 24 hours	https://gersteincentre.org
(Toronto) Assaulted Women's Helpline		1-416-863-0511 1-866-863-0511 (toll free)	
(Toronto) Progress Place Warm Line		1-416-960-9276 8pm-midnight	
(Peel) 24/7 Crisis Support		1-905-278-9036 1-888-811-222	
(Durham) Crisis Line		1-905-666-0483	
(Oakville) Distress Centre		1-905-849-4541	
Kids Help Phone		1-800-688-6868	

(Brampton, Mississauga) Spectra Helpline		1-416-020-0497 1-905-459-7777	
(Scarborough & Rouge Hospital) Community Crisis Line		1-416-495-2891	
(Toronto) Good Shepherd Ministries	412 Queen Street East, Toronto	1-416-869-3619	https://goodshepherd.ca
(Toronto) The Scott Mission	502 Spadina Ave, Toronto	1-416-923-8872	https://scottmission.com
(Toronto) Neighbourhood Information Post	269 Gerrard Street East, Toronto	1-416-924-2543	https://nipost.org
(Toronto) Fred Victor Housing	145 Queen Street East, Toronto	1-416-364-8228	https://www.fredvictor.org
(Toronto) Homes First Society	90 Shutter Street, Toronto	1-416-214-1870	https://homesfirst.on.ca
(Toronto) Yonge Street Mission	306 Gerrard St E, Toronto	1-416-929-9614	https://www.ysm.ca
(Toronto) Woodgreen Community Services	721 Braodview Ave	1-416-641-5294	https://www.woodgreen.org
(Toronto) The Access Point	661 Yonge Street #4, Toronto	1-416-640-1934	https://theaccesspoint.ca
(Toronto) Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Call Access – Centralized Info, Intake and Scheduling for Most CAMH services)		1-416-535-8501	https://www.camh.ca
(Toronto) Adelaide Resource Centre for Women	67 Adelaide Street East,	1-416-392-9243	https://www.centralwesthealthline.ca
(Toronto) Covenant House	20 Gerrard Street East	1-416-598-4898	https://covenanthousetoronto.ca
(Toronto) YWCA Arise Shelter (For Women and Children)	87 Elm Street, Toronto	1-416-929-3316	https://www.ywcatoronto.org
(Toronto) YMCA Young Men's Hostel	485 Queen Street West	1-416-504-9700	https://ymcagta.org

