

Unbroken Identity

How I healed from feeling broken, depressed and without any hope, to feeling peace, love, joy, and purpose.

Life growing up was not easy. If you've read or heard my testimony, you'll know it was filled with painful memories of my parents fighting.

This caused a lot of fractures in my identity growing up.

No one has a completely perfect upbringing, and mine was not as bad as many.

However, it still left me with scars I sometime have to process even to this day.

In this short book, I want to write about the things that God did to restore me and bring me to a place of peace and purpose.

It did not happen overnight — and it took many people, mentors and ministries to help me to recover.

Sometimes I didn't know what I needed. But God did.

A Search for Healing

We'll start with my testimony, because that's where my emotional healing journey began.

I was turning 17, and was in between high school and college. I was kind of estranged from friends from high school because I decided to go to college early for joint enrollment.

That summer, I was very depressed. All the scars from childhood were catching up with me. My mom wanted to take me out for my birthday, and all I could think about was how sad that was, that the only person who wanted to hang out with me for my birthday was my mom. (Nevermind that I was too wrapped up in my own pain to make more friends and develop connections where that would have been possible!)

I was feeling so depressed and was in such pain that I was contemplating suicide. I said to God, "God, why am I on this planet if it is only to suffer?"

My mom and I drove up to the restaurant where we were going to eat, and what I saw next completely surprised me.

A big, beautiful rainbow was right above the restaurant! It was so big and vibrant you could not miss it.

The sight of it struck me, and I heard God speak to my heart for the first time:

“Charis, I love you. This is a gift to you on your birthday. I do have a plan for your life.”

All throughout my life rainbows were my favorite thing. Rainbow Brite was my favorite cartoon from the 80s when I was growing up, and to see that beautiful rainbow and hear God’s voice like that was life-changing. Tears were streaming down my face. My mom asked me what was wrong and I told her. She must have thought I was crazy!

From then on, I went on a journey of seeking God.

The Book

The first Christian book that ministered to me was a book by Joyce Meyer called *“Finding the Confidence to Fulfill Your Destiny.”* I was in a bookstore one day, and that title jumped out at me from the shelf. I lacked confidence, was very shy and timid, and it was the perfect title for where I was.

I bought it myself (huge for me, because I had sworn off most Christian material my dad was trying to get me to read), and read the whole thing within a few days.

Joyce’s stories of her upbringing really resonated with me as a child of abuse. Her journey of forgiveness of her father who abused her really helped me as well. I did not really know to what extent I had been emotionally abused; I just knew that I struggled with depression and anger and bitterness as a result of my experiences.

At a certain point in the book, she was teaching on “grace” and how it came from the root word “Charisma.” Well, obviously, that was part of my name! She wrote that grace is an “undeserved gift,” and that resonated with me a lot, because I always felt that I had to work hard and do all the right things in order to be approved by God. But, it was “undeserved.” A gift. No strings attached. That’s what my name meant!

I wrote to them to thank them for the book and how God was speaking to me through it. They graciously replied, and I was so blessed by their ministry.

Just to give a snapshot of where I was in life at that time and the state of my heart, here's what I believed about myself, consciously or unconsciously:

- I need to protect myself, because no one will do it for me (I had learned not to cry in order not to show any weakness)
- I need to work hard and be perfect in order to be approved
- I feel unworthy of love or anything good in my life
- I deserve what had happened to me
- (I held unforgiveness in my heart for the things that had happened)

There was more of course, but these were some core beliefs I had. Though I now had hope and faith, there was still a lot more that I needed.

The Prophet

Around this time my dad was really getting into ministry. He had written a email devotional, and it was now being received by thousands around the world.

Due to our history, he and I were not close, but we would meet on occasion. (I'll admit, many times I went because I felt like I had to in order to honor my dad. I did not want to, because he had a history of using religion as a weapon against me. He did not understand when I would try to tell him how his actions hurt my feelings.) Today he is much different than he was back then.

One time we met, he told me about a new friend of his. He said, "My friend is a prophet. He said that God knows that you like to write poetry."

Well, at first I did not appreciate someone telling my dad this, someone I did not trust! But I could not help my eyes welling up with tears. No one knew I wrote poetry.

I asked him about this prophet, and he said he prayed for he and my stepmom.

A little while later, this prophet was at their house, and they invited me over for prayer.

Now, for some of you, this is going to be a very unusual story. You may have been taught cessationism, which is the view that things like prophecy, speaking in tongues and healing were given to the early church, and they do not exist today. Well, I would tell you that the only reason I became healed is that these gifts DO exist today. I believe much of the church is confused and weak because we have not been taught how to receive and properly steward these gifts, available to each of us. My view may ruffle some feathers, but it is the truth of my story.

Ok, back to the story!

I arrived and I felt a peace in the house. They had already been praying for several people, and I had to wait my turn.

When they got to me, the prophetic man prayed, and I felt the Holy Spirit's presence. It was like invisible liquid love all around me. I began to sob, and I had not cried in a really long time, because I did not want to show any weakness and I believed I had to protect myself.

I cried so much, I think my nose ring popped out. He mentioned things like I had been in a boxing ring, and I was radical for the Lord. It wasn't so much the words, though they were encouraging and they spoke exactly to my situation. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit, and truly experiencing for the first time how much God loved me.

I went away from that experience completely changed. However, there were still more things in the shadows that were dragging me down.

The Prophet, round 2

Some things in my life had taken a turn: I had moved out of living with my mom after I turned 17 and found an apartment with a roommate — then that fell through and I lived with another roommate and that fell through in a big way. My mom had moved out to Colorado, her dream, and I was glad to be independent — until I wasn't.

I had said to my dad before that I would NEVER live with him. Living with him meant emotional abuse and control, but I did not know how to put it into words at the time.

I was in a rock and a hard place with the roommate situation, so I asked my dad and his wife if I could live there. It was a very awkward situation — I was to work there shipping books and pay rent out of the college savings my dad had given to me. I choose the smaller room with a metal bunk bed in order to save money. I went to school and worked there, but it was difficult. There were lots of rules. I hadn't been a drug addict or anything, so I wondered why there were so many limitations.

In spite of the awkwardness and the fact that it didn't feel like home, God did a lot while I was there.

The prophet came back to visit, and he noticed something was "off" with me. I had been still battling heaviness and depression, and so we set up a time for prayer. During this time, I was learning about worshipping and praising God, and how that would exchange "heaviness for joy", but I still struggled.

As it turns out, the prayer lasted much of the day.

He asked me to make a list of any sins I had ever been involved in. This included anything of the occult or New Age (I had attended a New Age workshop with my mom when I was 16), tarot cards, palm reading, or any sexual sins such as sex before marriage, or relationships with anyone that I was not married to.

My stepmom was sitting with me through the whole prayer, and he asked me to confess each sin and ask for God's forgiveness and renounce it.

I did, and each time I asked forgiveness for something new, it was like I felt lighter and lighter, like a veil was being lifted from my eyes.

There was also a big focus on forgiveness. At the time, I was learning that forgiveness was not a feeling. It was a choice. I had to choose to forgive even if I didn't feel like it, because forgiveness meant freedom. I was also learning that the other person didn't need to be sorry or understand in order for me to forgive.

There were lots more tears, and he kept praying. At the end, he prayed for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit.

I felt so light and free! I could not believe this was how you were supposed to feel.

I learned that each sin I had committed opened doors to the enemy that allowed him legal access to my heart and my life. When I repented and closed the doors, he did not have access to me anymore. He could not weigh me down with depression any longer.

This is something I think every Christian needs to do, if they haven't! A good ministry resource for this is SOZO. Find more information at <https://www.bethelsozo.com/>.

The Sacrificial Mentor

Living with my dad wasn't all bad. Awkward, yes. But it was nothing like the growing up years.

During this time I lived with he and my stepmom, my stepmom would pour out her stories of falling in love with Jesus. Before she married my dad, this was her testimony.

She was working in the corporate world in marketing and met Jesus when she was 29. She had all kinds of stories of God showing up for her when she needed Him most, and how He became her husband.

I was encouraged by her stories and she also shared with me some important life lessons that I did not get from my mom, who was not a career person. She taught me how to be detailed and how to find a great bargain. Also probably one of the biggest things — I was so shy when I met her and she was so outgoing. She was the life of the party and liked to play tricks on people for fun. She definitely helped me to break out of my shell a little. I have benefitted from her example so much in my personal and professional life!

Another thing I did not realize until later — when my dad could not pay child support and alimony for my mom and I, she paid it. Her dad had gotten remarried a couple of times and she remembers how she felt in that situation. She was so accommodating to me when my dad got remarried to her.

Though my dad and her aren't married anymore, she and I still hang out to this day, and she is a beloved part of our friend group. I call her "my stepmom once removed."

It's important to find good mentors who have attributes you admire. Their good attributes can "rub off on you" and help you in your journey!

The Church

Around this time, I received prayer from another prophetic person, who happened to be my dad's pastor.

In the prayer he said, "You're going to a school to learn about Him."

Well, I had already been researching worship arts schools, and so this was a confirmation! (A prophetic prayer should be a confirmation of what God is already speaking to you about. It should never be taken as a directive as we as people "see in part.")

I ended up becoming a member of the church where the school was hosted, although I had had a good experience with a previous church and made some friends there. (God gave me a sign of a rainbow at that one, so I knew I was in the right place!)

As I continued to attend the church and the school, I grew more in my faith. I learned about the gifts of the Spirit, and though I did not lead worship as was my original goal, I learned a lot about ministry and made a lot of good friends I am still connected to to this day.

This church's approach was very modern, and they were a church plant out of Australia.

This church was also where I met my husband!

We heard many great speakers while we were members, including Nancy Alcorn of Mercy Ministries, J. John, Sy Rogers, and others.

One speaker in particular was very special, and he prayed for me personally a few times. His name was Fergus McIntyre, and he was also a prophet like my Dad's friend.

In one of his talks, he said the following words I will never forget:

"God didn't have one of you, and He wanted one of you, so He made one of you."

Those words struck me to my core, and I broke down into tears.

If you've ever felt like you were a mistake or not wanted as a child, those words are for YOU!

The Guy I Wasn't Looking For

After watching my parent's marriage and subsequent divorce, I had made a vow that I would never get married. However, deep down I wanted to believe that marriage was a good thing.

As my healing journey continued, I became open to the idea of marriage. I had dated a Christian guy from college, but he wasn't the right one for me.

In fact, during a women's conference at church, a prophetic speaker was sharing a message on running the race of faith. She was quoting Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:24 where it says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it."

She stopped in the middle of her sermon and said, "Now there's someone here, and you're promised to someone, but the man you're with is not the gold. God has something better. God has something different. Don't settle."

Well, I wasn't even at the event but a lady had handed me a recording of the message the next Sunday at church. When I heard that, I realized I had to break things off with him immediately. So I did. I met him that night, and gave him his promise ring. That was the end!

I was so nervous to break things off, because although I knew it wasn't healthy, I was afraid I would be by myself.

Many people in our church were pairing off and getting married. A guy I knew from church and our 20-somethings group asked me if I'd like to start a singles group with him. I said sure, and we organized the group.

He wasn't my type at all. So we were totally just friends. Several years prior to this, he had tickets for a concert and asked a bunch of us in the Bible college if any of us would like to go. I said sure, because I liked music, but it was a country band, and though I didn't particularly like country, I went anyway. It was fun, and that was that.

But now that we were communicating to organize this group, I realized how nice of a guy he was, and how much he cared about his friends and family. I really began to like him, and we started dating several months later.

We dated for nearly 2 years, went through marriage counseling (very important!) and then got married. Justin is the kindest, most patient, wonderful guy I have ever had the privilege to know. He has helped me through so much, (we've been there for each other), and shown me what true love is. Our home is nothing like the home I grew up in — there are no games, there is no drama — it is peaceful and loving. We have our two pups (right now), and I am so grateful that this is my life now instead of the abuse I grew up in that was "CINO" — Christian in name only."

Justin is a true example of the verse, "For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church." -Ephesians 5:25-29

Ladies, don't settle!

The Mirage

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." -Colossians 3:12

"I'm not good enough."

"It's my fault."

"I don't matter."

"I have to be perfect in order to be accepted."

"No one will believe me."

"I'm too sensitive."

"I need to keep the peace."

"I can't trust anyone."

"I'm not worthy of love."

"I feel uncomfortable in my own skin."

"I don't feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing."

Do you resonate with any of the above?

I know I shared statements earlier that I believed were true about myself consciously or unconsciously. Now I want to share more specifically where some of these beliefs came from.

Not too long ago, I saw a video from someone describing children of narcissistic abuse. The title mentioned something about "not feeling like they are doing what they are supposed to be doing."

As I remembered this video while at the gym, I asked AI a question: "Do children of narcissistic abuse constantly feel like they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing?"

This was the answer I got:

"Children of narcissistic abuse often feel like they're not doing what they're 'supposed' to do. This stems from a few key factors tied to their upbringing. The narcissistic caregiver may impose rigid, unrealistic expectations or constantly shift the goalposts, leaving them with a lingering sense of inadequacy or failure. Alternatively, they might receive little guidance or support, making it hard to develop a clear sense of purpose or direction. As a result, they can internalize a belief that they're perpetually off track—either chasing an elusive standard of 'enough' or feeling lost about what they should be pursuing. This can manifest as self-criticism, like 'I should be further along by now' or 'I'm not living up to what's expected,' even if those expectations are vague or self-imposed. Healing and self-reflection can help shift this, but the feeling often lingers without intentional work."

I broke down into tears, right there on the leg machine.

I cannot tell you how many times I've said that statement to my husband or friends!

Now it all made sense. The "pressure" I was feeling was not godly. It was from what I had experienced growing up.

All this time, I thought the pressure was God's calling. It appeared about the time I went to Bible college, so I thought it was part of God's calling.

But "pressure", stress, or shame from that pressure is not from God. A "leading", however, or an "inspiration" **is** from Him.

I have been to so many healing workshops, so many counseling classes, and I did not know this was a faulty belief. But I realized it was the result and evidence of having grown up in narcissistic abuse.

According to a writeup by Grok, "narcissistic abuse is a form of emotional and psychological maltreatment where a parent or caregiver with narcissistic traits exploits, manipulates, or neglects the child's emotional needs to prioritize their own ego, control, or self-image. It often involves behaviors like:

- **Emotional Manipulation:** Using guilt, shame, or gaslighting to control the child or make them doubt their reality.
- **Neglect of Needs:** Ignoring the child's emotional or physical needs in favor of the narcissist's desires or image.
- **Conditional Love:** Offering affection or approval only when the child meets the narcissist's expectations, often tied to achievements or compliance.
- **Criticism and Belittling:** Constantly demeaning the child's worth, abilities, or feelings to maintain dominance.
- **Parentification:** Forcing the child to take on adult responsibilities or meet the narcissist's emotional needs, reversing the caregiver-child role.
- **Exploitation:** Using the child as a tool to boost the narcissist's status, such as pushing them into activities to gain praise or attention.

This abuse can lead to long-term effects like low self-esteem, anxiety, difficulty with boundaries, or complex trauma in the child. It's often subtle, making it hard to recognize, as it lacks physical evidence but deeply impacts the child's sense of self and safety."

All of the beliefs above are beliefs children of narcissistic abuse struggle with. I thought I healed from all of the above, but as it turns out, one of my driving beliefs, "feeling like I wasn't doing what I was supposed to do," was still unresolved.

When I realized what had happened, it was like the mirage faded. I didn't have to strive anymore. I didn't feel like there was a lane I was supposed to be in that I just couldn't get to.

If you've struggled with any of the above, I want to invite you to work this through with a Christian counselor or talk about it with someone you trust.

Even if we are called to a specific ministry, it is important that we heal from and resolve any lies about our identity, so that we don't minister from any deficiencies. When we minister from deficiencies, we point to ourselves, leading to burnout. When we minister from a place of healing, we don't have anything we need to prove. It's not about us. It's about Him.

God is not like our parents, even if they were religious or in ministry themselves. He is a Perfect Heavenly Father, and He can fill in all the areas we lack.

The Peace

I think this is a delicate chapter to write, because we each have to handle our own situations with prayer and discernment. I want to credit Dr. Henry Cloud with so many "ahas" and wisdom that I have received over the years.

Recently, he posted this: "Sometimes the healthiest thing you can do is stop hoping they'll become someone they've shown they're not."

He included this with more explanation: "How long have you spent hoping they will change? Has it ever happened? Does it bring you any long-lasting peace? It's okay to stop waiting. It's okay to grieve the version of them you wished existed. And it's okay to accept who they've already shown you they are. Acceptance isn't giving up — it's the beginning of true peace."

As I mentioned earlier, I learned that forgiveness had to be a default for me no matter what in my Christian walk. I also learned that the Bible was clear about guarding our hearts as well, and that Jesus didn't even trust people, because He knew what was in their hearts. How do the two of these ideas coexist?

I have landed on this thought, after much reflection, processing, and seeking guidance: *You can love people at a distance that is safe for both of you.*

I realize that the people that would need this kind of advice are those who have experienced some kind of abuse. Abuse should not be tolerated. Yes, Jesus said to turn the other cheek. But He also said we are His children who He dearly loves. He does not want his sheep to be continually hurt and abused.

There may come a time when you can be around someone and it does not hurt or affect you anymore. But if you are not to that place yet, there needs to be enough space to allow that to happen.

Boundaries, as Dr. Cloud has said, are what keep the good things in and the bad things out. One thing I had to understand was that even if someone is a blood relative, that doesn't automatically allow them access to your inner circle. Only YOU can decide that. I can say that I have some friends in my inner circle and some family in my outer circle. And that is OK.

Relationships can get messy. But God is there to help us through them. No matter what, He wants us to live in peace:

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."
-Isaiah 26:3

To summarize, from my experience becoming a follower of Jesus, here's what I know to be true:

- God has a plan for each of us — we all have a purpose to love others and share the good news of Jesus with them.
- God may have called you to any kind of vocation, including ministry. Christians are needed in every industry. I say this because for a long time, it was taught that being in ministry was the highest calling you could have, and all good Christians should pursue ministry. This is **not** true! The highest calling for you is whatever God has called YOU to do. For example, if you have a burning desire for justice, you may be called to be a godly, ethical lawyer, which is very much needed in our culture. "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." -Colossians 3:17
- God wants us to live in the fruits of the Spirit, every day: Peace, love, joy, faithfulness,. It does not mean we won't have a bad day. But it means, most of the time, we will feel peace and wholeness in our hearts.
- God wants to heal our hearts. He does not want to leave us broken. He wants us know to know Him as our Perfect Heavenly Father, waiting with open arms to love us and heal us!"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." -Psalm 147:3 "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." -Psalm 68:5-6
- God wants us to have healthy families. This means being kind and loving toward one another. It's possible to be a "CINA" — "Christian in Name Only." Let us not be

- that. God has strong words for that! Family can also be our family of faith —our friends who are like family to us. Sometimes God blesses us with these kinds of special people, especially if we do not have natural family we can rely on or trust.
- God wants to walk with us through the battles of life. In the last year or so, I have been learning about being specific in prayer due to some battles we have been facing. God hears our prayers. He does! Keep on praying. Prayer is a powerful tool to defeat the enemy. "The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous." -Proverbs 15:29 "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." -1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

If this short book has resonated with you, I want to invite you to seek God more in your life. Seek out mentors who can help you. Attend a solid Bible-based church that can help you grow in your faith. (Note that no church is perfect. Let God lead you to the right one.) Take trainings to help you grow in your faith. Go to a Christian counselor if needed. Develop a habit of reading God's word, and journaling what He is saying to you. The most important decision we can ever make is to decide to follow Jesus and stay connected to Him.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." -John 15:1-4

Additional resources:

- <https://www.healingrooms.com/>
- <https://www.bethelsozo.com/>
- <https://prismministries.org/>



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