

Chapter 1

Questions to Ponder

At this point in every chapter, I'd like you to write out your thoughts. If you do not have a journal, now is the perfect time to start one. This is your space to be honest, to say what is actually on your heart and mind. Record what has happened, put your stake in the ground, mark where you are, and watch how you will grow.

Please be aware that what you share in this journal needs to be private. You will want to keep it in a safe place. If you know that it will never be read by anyone else, you will find the freedom to speak truth without fear.

Take the time right now to begin writing your story. Even if what you actually put to paper is brief, even if it is just the start of your story, that's okay. It's important that you see something written out. Your story matters. You matter.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

1. Begin writing your story today. You may want to include the following points:
 - a. How did the two of you meet?
 - b. What attracted you to him?
 - c. Can you identify some things in your life that may have caused a void that you thought perhaps he could fill (such as family-of-origin experiences and belief systems)?

- d. Early on, what were some of the things he said and did that were warning signs that you may not be able to trust him with your heart?

As difficult as it may be, I encourage you to utilize the abuse evaluation form (refer to appendix A). Circle every word or phrase listed on that form that describes what you have experienced in your relationship (even if it happened “only once”).

- e. Add anything else you think is important to your story to include at this time.
2. Do you believe it’s possible for you to heal well from the pain you have experienced in your relationship?
 3. When you reflect on the concept of freedom as it applies to an intimate partner relationship, what would it look like for you? How does your current experience compare?
 4. Are you willing to invest the time in yourself to heal well and live free? If this decision is a struggle, I encourage you to believe that you are worth it.

Prayer of Reflection

At the end of each chapter, I’d like to offer a prayer for you to read and meditate on. I hope it will be just a start, the nudge you need to pray on your own. Perhaps you are a person of prayer and turn to God regularly with your deepest hurts and concerns. Or you may be someone who struggles with belief in God, especially in light of the pain you are experiencing. But for now, will you give me permission to pray with you here, to give you a start, to open the door to encourage you to be honest before God? Prayer is simply talking with God. It’s a way for you to share your deepest hurts and emotions with Him. You can tell God, honestly, what is

on your heart. Pray with me. Unburden yourself before God and know that He hears and that He cares for you.

God, I'm scared. There's a brokenness inside me that feels beyond repair. My life has not turned out as I had hoped. I trusted and loved someone who betrayed me and bruised me in ways that only You can see. It is so painful to think about my own story. It feels almost unbearable. Help me to believe that I can heal—not just heal but heal well. Your Word says that You, Jesus, died so I can be free. Show me how this translates in my life. I am not sure how to be free or where to begin. But You do. You know me. You know my story. You alone can heal my broken heart. Today I place my heart, my hopes, and my life into Your safe hands. The safest place I can be is with You. Your Word promises that You will never leave me. Thank You for loving me even when I doubt You, when I feel abandoned and so alone. You're with me now. Please take my hand and walk me through this journey to healing well. Together, we can do this. Amen.

God's Enduring Promises

You may be very familiar with the Bible, or this might be the first time you've ever read it. No matter what your personal faith journey looks like, I'd like to share some of the Bible passages that were helpful to me. There were times when I read these verses over and over again, through tears, clinging to the hope that they promise.

I am sick at heart.

How long, O LORD, until you restore me?

Return, O LORD, and rescue me.

Save me because of your unfailing love.

For the dead do not remember you.

Who can praise you from the grave?

I am worn out from sobbing.

All night I flood my bed with weeping,

drenching it with my tears.

My vision is blurred by grief;

my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.

Go away, all you who do evil,

for the LORD has heard my weeping.

The LORD has heard my plea;

the LORD will answer my prayer. (Psalm 6:3–9 NLT)

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;

you consider their grief and take it in hand.

The victims commit themselves to you;

you are the helper of the fatherless. (Psalm 10:14)

I call on you, my God, for you will answer me;

turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

Show me the wonders of your great love,

you who save by your right hand

those who take refuge in you from their foes.

Keep me as the apple of your eye;

hide me in the shadow of your wings

from the wicked who are out to destroy me,

from my mortal enemies who surround me. (Psalm

17:6–9)

He reached down from heaven and rescued me;

he drew me out of deep waters.

He rescued me from my powerful enemies,

from those who hated me and were too strong for me.

They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress,

but the LORD supported me.

He led me to a place of safety;

he rescued me because he delights in me. (Psalm 18:16–

19 NLT)

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

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