

Recovering the Self: Co-Dependence After Narcissistic Abuse

A Faith-Based Journey from Trauma Bonds to True Identity in Christ

Chapter 1: Understanding the Cycle of Narcissistic Abuse

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

— John 8:32 (NASB)

There is a particular cruelty in being told you are the problem when you are, in fact, the victim. And there is a particular freedom in finally being able to name what happened to you.

If you are reading this chapter, you may already suspect that something was deeply wrong in a relationship that once felt intoxicating, necessary, even divinely ordained. You may have been told—or told yourself—that you were too sensitive, too demanding, too broken. You may have apologized for things that weren't your fault. You may have tried harder, loved more, given until you had nothing left.

And still, it wasn't enough.

This chapter is about naming the cycle you've been caught in. Not to dwell in victimhood, but to step into truth. Because as Jesus promised, it is the truth—not denial, not blame, not spiritual bypassing—that sets us free.

What Is Narcissistic Abuse?

Narcissistic abuse is a pattern of psychological, emotional, and sometimes spiritual manipulation employed by someone with narcissistic traits or Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Unlike ordinary relationship conflict—where both parties contribute to problems and can work toward resolution—narcissistic abuse is characterized by **an intentional power imbalance** designed to control, exploit, and dominate.

The narcissist's primary goal is not connection, but **supply**: validation, attention, admiration, and control. When you cease to provide what they need, or when you begin to assert your own needs, the abuse escalates.

What makes this form of abuse particularly insidious is its invisibility. There may be no bruises, no broken bones. The wounds are internal: shattered self-worth, eroded identity, chronic self-doubt. Victims often don't recognize they've been abused until long after the relationship has ended—if at all.

The Four Stages of the Narcissistic Cycle

Narcissistic relationships follow a predictable, devastating pattern. Understanding these stages is critical because it helps you see that **what happened to you was not random, not your fault, and not evidence of your inadequacy**. It was a calculated cycle.

1. Idealization (Love-Bombing)

In the beginning, you were everything. The narcissist mirrored your values, finished your sentences, and seemed to see into your soul. The connection felt fated, spiritual, too good to be true.

Because it was.

This stage is called "love-bombing"—an avalanche of affection, attention, gifts, promises, and intensity designed to overwhelm your defenses and create rapid attachment. You were placed on a pedestal, told you were special, unlike anyone they'd ever known.

For those with faith, this stage often includes **spiritual manipulation**:

- "God told me you're my wife/husband."
- "I've been praying for someone like you my whole life."
- "This is a divine connection."

The idealization phase creates what psychologists call a **trauma bond**—an intense emotional attachment formed through intermittent reinforcement. Your brain released dopamine and oxytocin in response to the intensity, creating an addictive cycle that would later make leaving feel impossible.

The truth: This version of you they adored was not real. It was a projection, a fantasy they created to meet their needs. And when you inevitably revealed your authentic, imperfect humanity, the pedestal crumbled.

2. Devaluation

The shift is often subtle at first. A comment that stings. A criticism disguised as concern. Withdrawal of affection for reasons you can't quite pinpoint.

Then it intensifies.

In the devaluation stage, the narcissist systematically dismantles the identity they once praised. You are now:

- Too emotional or not emotional enough
- Too needy or too independent
- Too spiritual or not spiritual enough

The goal is to keep you off-balance, constantly trying to regain their approval. Common tactics include:

- **Gaslighting:** Denying your reality ("That never happened." "You're remembering it wrong.")
- **Projection:** Accusing you of their own behavior ("You're the selfish one." "You're the one who's manipulative.")
- **Triangulation:** Using other people to create jealousy and competition
- **Silent treatment:** Withholding communication as punishment
- **Blame-shifting:** Making you responsible for their emotions and actions
- **Spiritual abuse:** Using Scripture to control ("Submit to me." "Judge not." "Forgive seventy times seven.")

You begin walking on eggshells. You monitor your words, your tone, your facial expressions. You become hypervigilant, trying to prevent the next outburst, the next cold silence, the next withering look.

This is where co-dependence deepens. You lose yourself trying to manage their emotions, trying to be good enough, trying to earn back the love that was never real to begin with.

3. Discard

When the narcissist has extracted all the supply they can from you—or when you begin to set boundaries or see through the manipulation—they discard you. Sometimes this is dramatic: a sudden breakup, an affair revealed, an explosive confrontation. Sometimes it's a slow fade, a cold withdrawal, a relationship that becomes a hollow shell.

The discard is designed to inflict maximum pain. It often includes:

- Blame for the relationship's failure placed entirely on you
- Rewriting history to paint themselves as the victim
- Immediate replacement with a new source of supply
- Smear campaigns to damage your reputation
- Using your vulnerabilities against you

For victims, the discard is devastating not just because of the loss, but because of the **cognitive dissonance**: How could the person who once called you their soulmate now treat you with such contempt?

The answer is painful but liberating: **That person never truly knew you.** They loved what you could provide, not who you actually were.

4. Hoovering

Hoovering (named after the vacuum cleaner brand) is the attempt to suck you back into the relationship after a discard or period of separation. When the narcissist's new supply disappoints, when they need validation, or when they sense you're healing and moving on, they return.

Hoovering can look like:

- Love-bombing again: "I've changed." "I realize now what I lost." "God has been working on me."
- Appeals to your compassion: "I'm struggling." "I need you." "No one understands me like you do."
- Manufactured crises: Illness, job loss, family emergency
- Using children, mutual friends, or church community as flying monkeys
- Nostalgic reminiscence: "Remember when we..."

The trap: If you return, the cycle begins again. Often, the stages accelerate. The idealization is shorter, the devaluation harsher, the discard more brutal.

The Psychological Manipulation That Fosters Co-Dependence

Co-dependence doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is cultivated through systematic psychological manipulation that exploits normal human needs for love, connection, and purpose.

How Narcissists Create Co-Dependent Bonds:

1. Intermittent Reinforcement

Like a slot machine, the narcissist provides unpredictable rewards (affection, praise, intimacy) mixed with punishment (criticism, withdrawal, rage). This creates a powerful addiction. Your brain becomes wired to chase the "high" of their approval.

2. Isolating You from Support

Slowly, subtly, they distance you from friends, family, and community. They

criticize your loved ones. They monopolize your time. They create drama that makes social connection exhausting. Eventually, you are alone with only their version of reality.

3. Eroding Your Sense of Reality

Through gaslighting and projection, they make you doubt your own perceptions, memory, and judgment. You begin to rely on them to tell you what is true, what is real, even what you feel.

4. Exploiting Your Strengths

Your empathy becomes a tool they use to avoid accountability. Your faith becomes a weapon they wield to demand forgiveness without repentance. Your loyalty becomes a chain that keeps you bound.

5. Creating Learned Helplessness

No matter what you do, it's wrong. This creates a state of psychological paralysis where you stop trying to advocate for yourself because you've learned that resistance is futile.

Co-dependence in narcissistic relationships is not a personality flaw. **It is a survival strategy in an environment of chronic invalidation and control.**

How Victims Internalize Blame and Lose Identity

One of the most devastating effects of narcissistic abuse is the internalization of the narcissist's narrative. Over time, you begin to believe:

- The problems in the relationship are your fault
- If you were just more patient, more understanding, more forgiving, things would improve
- Your needs are selfish
- Your feelings are excessive
- Your perceptions are unreliable

This internalized blame serves a psychological purpose: **If it's your fault, then you have control.** If you can just be better, the abuse will stop. This false sense of agency is less terrifying than the truth—that you are in a relationship with someone who cannot or will not see you, value you, or love you in a healthy way.

As you internalize blame, you lose your sense of self:

- You don't know what you like anymore
- You can't make decisions without anxiety
- You apologize constantly
- You feel guilty for having needs
- You don't recognize yourself in the mirror

Your identity becomes fused with their assessment of you. And because that assessment is ever-shifting and always critical, you exist in a perpetual state of inadequacy.

The Biblical Mirror: Genesis 3 and the Serpent's Tactics

The dynamics of narcissistic abuse are not new. They are as old as Eden.

In Genesis 3, we see the serpent employ tactics that mirror narcissistic manipulation:

1. Questioning God's Goodness

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1, NIV)

The serpent distorts God's generous provision (every tree but one) into a picture of deprivation (you can't have *any* tree). Narcissists do the same—they reframe your reasonable boundaries as unreasonable restrictions, your self-care as selfishness.

2. Contradicting Truth

"You will not certainly die," the serpent says (Genesis 3:4, NIV), directly contradicting God's warning.

Gaslighting. Denying reality. Insisting their version of events is the truth, even when you know what you experienced.

3. Promising False Enlightenment

"You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5, NIV).

Narcissists promise you wholeness, purpose, specialness—if you just submit to their vision, follow their lead, sacrifice your needs. But the promise is a lie. Instead of becoming more yourself, you become less.

4. Creating Shame

After the fall, Adam and Eve hide. They cover themselves. They experience shame for the first time.

Narcissistic abuse plants toxic shame deep in your soul. You feel exposed, defective, unworthy of love. You hide—from God, from others, from yourself.

5. Blame-Shifting

Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. Neither takes responsibility.

This is the narcissist's playbook. Nothing is ever their fault. Someone else is always to blame—and that someone is usually you.

The pattern is ancient. The pain is real. But so is the path to restoration.

The Goal: Naming the Cycle Is the First Act of Reclaiming Truth

Evil thrives in darkness, in confusion, in unnamed pain.

When you name narcissistic abuse for what it is, something shifts. The fog begins to lift. The self-blame loosens its grip. You start to see that **the problem was not your inadequacy but their pathology.**

Naming is not about hatred or unforgiveness. It is about **clarity**. It is about refusing to gaslight yourself any longer. It is about honoring your experience and acknowledging that what happened to you was wrong.

Jesus said, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (John 8:32, NASB).

Not positive thinking. Not denial. Not forced forgiveness or premature reconciliation.

Truth.

The truth is:

- You were abused
- It was not your fault
- You are not crazy
- You did not deserve it
- You are not beyond healing

This chapter is your permission to stop making excuses for what was done to you. It is your invitation to step out of the fog and into the light.

As C.S. Lewis understood, "**Evil's greatest triumph is convincing its victims that they are the cause.**"

You are not the cause.

You are the survivor.

And your healing begins with the courage to tell the truth.

Reflection Questions

1. Which stage of the narcissistic cycle do you recognize most clearly in your experience?

2. What tactics of manipulation were most effective in keeping you bound?
3. How did you internalize blame? What lies did you come to believe about yourself?
4. Where do you see parallels between the serpent's tactics in Genesis 3 and the dynamics in your relationship?
5. What feels difficult about naming your experience as abuse? What feels liberating?

Prayer

Father, I thank You that You are the God of truth. You do not traffic in confusion, manipulation, or shame. You see clearly what was done to me, and Your heart breaks with mine.

Help me to stop protecting those who hurt me and start protecting myself. Give me courage to name what happened. Give me wisdom to see clearly. Give me grace to release the blame I've carried that was never mine to bear.

You promise that the truth will make me free. I am stepping toward that truth today, even though it's painful. Walk with me. Hold me. Remind me that I am Yours, that I am loved, and that my identity is rooted not in what was done to me, but in who You say I am.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 2: Recognizing Trauma Bonding

"The cords of death encompassed me... In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; He heard my voice."

— Psalm 18:4–6 (NASB)

If someone had told you, early in the relationship, that you would one day be begging for scraps of affection from someone who routinely hurt you—you wouldn't have believed them.

If someone had told you that after the tenth betrayal, the twentieth cruel remark, the hundredth broken promise, you would still defend them, still make excuses, still believe *this time* would be different—you would have insisted you had more self-respect than that.

And yet, here you are. Or here you were.

Perhaps you've left and returned multiple times. Perhaps you stayed years longer than you thought you could. Perhaps even now, long after the relationship ended, you find yourself missing them, romanticizing the good times, wondering if you overreacted, if you were too harsh, if maybe—just maybe—you should reach out.

And you hate yourself for it.

You wonder: *Why can't I just move on? Why do I still care about someone who treated me so terribly? What's wrong with me?*

The answer may surprise you: **Nothing is wrong with you. You are experiencing trauma bonding, and it is not a character flaw—it is a neurological and spiritual reality that needs to be understood, named, and healed.**

This chapter will help you understand why you felt so attached to someone who harmed you, why leaving felt impossible, and why recovery requires more than willpower—it requires rewiring, spiritual warfare, and divine intervention.

What Is Trauma Bonding?

Trauma bonding is a powerful emotional attachment that forms between an abuser and their victim, created through cycles of abuse followed by positive reinforcement. First identified by psychologist Patrick Carnes, trauma bonds are paradoxical attachments: **the victim becomes psychologically dependent on the very person who is hurting them.**

Trauma bonds are characterized by:

- Intense attachment despite harmful treatment
- Loyalty to someone who betrays you
- Defending or making excuses for the abuser's behavior
- Feeling unable to leave even when you want to
- Returning to the relationship despite promises to yourself that you wouldn't
- Feeling withdrawal symptoms (anxiety, depression, physical pain) when separated from the abuser
- Believing you can't live without them or that no one else will love you

Critical truth: Trauma bonding is not the same as genuine love. It is a survival response, an addiction, a psychological trap. Understanding this distinction is essential for your healing.

The Paradox: Why We Attach to What Hurts Us

The human brain is wired for attachment. From infancy, we seek connection with caregivers, and our nervous systems are designed to bond with those who are present in our lives—especially those who evoke strong emotions in us.

In healthy relationships, this bonding creates security, trust, and mutual flourishing. But in abusive relationships, this same bonding mechanism becomes weaponized.

Here's the paradox: **The combination of fear and relief, pain and comfort, creates a more intense bond than consistent love ever could.**

Think of it this way: If someone is kind to you all the time, you feel grateful, but you don't become addicted to their presence. But if someone hurts you and then comforts you, terrorizes you and then rescues you, your brain creates an intense attachment to them because **they become both the source of your pain and the solution to it.**

The narcissist creates the wound and then offers the bandage.

They generate the chaos and then provide moments of calm.

They tear you down and then, occasionally, build you back up.

Your nervous system becomes conditioned: **You need them to survive the pain they're causing.**

The Neurobiology of Trauma Bonding: Addiction by Design

What you're experiencing isn't just emotional—it's neurological. Your brain has been chemically altered by the abuse. Understanding the science doesn't diminish the spiritual reality; it illuminates how comprehensively the enemy works to ensnare us—body, mind, and spirit.

The Dopamine Rollercoaster

During the idealization phase and in moments of intermittent kindness, your brain releases **dopamine**—the "reward" neurotransmitter associated with pleasure, motivation, and reinforcement. The narcissist's affection, attention, and approval trigger the same brain pathways activated by drugs, gambling, and other addictive substances.

But here's the key: **Unpredictable rewards create stronger addiction than consistent ones.**

This is called **intermittent reinforcement**, and it's the same principle that makes slot machines so addictive. When you don't know *when* you'll receive affection but you know it's *possible*, your brain releases even more dopamine in anticipation. Every time the narcissist is kind after being cruel, your brain gets a hit that reinforces the bond.

You become addicted to the hope that *this time* they'll be the person they were in the beginning. Every small kindness feels like evidence that you were right to stay, right to believe, right to hope.

The Cortisol Trap

During devaluation and conflict, your body floods with **cortisol** and **adrenaline**—stress hormones designed for survival. When these are chronically elevated (as they are in an abusive relationship), your body exists in a constant state of hypervigilance and anxiety.

This creates two devastating effects:

1. You become addicted to the relief.

When the narcissist finally shows you affection after a period of cruelty, your cortisol drops and feel-good chemicals rush in. The contrast between high stress and sudden relief creates an intense biochemical experience. You don't just feel happy—you feel saved. Your nervous system interprets their kindness as rescue from a threat *they created*.

2. Your judgment becomes impaired.

Chronic stress literally shrinks the hippocampus (involved in memory and decision-making) and weakens the prefrontal cortex (involved in rational thinking). Meanwhile, the amygdala (the fear center) becomes hyperactive. This is why you couldn't "think your way out" of the relationship. Your brain's capacity for clear thinking was physiologically compromised.

Oxytocin: The Bonding Hormone Weaponized

Oxytocin is released during physical intimacy, emotional vulnerability, and moments of connection. It's the "bonding hormone" that helps mothers attach to infants and partners attach to each other.

In a narcissistic relationship, oxytocin is released during:

- Make-up sex after conflict
- Moments of emotional intensity (even negative)
- Physical touch, even when it follows abuse
- Trauma sharing (when the narcissist reveals vulnerability to hook you)

Each release of oxytocin deepens the bond—even when the relationship is toxic. Your body doesn't distinguish between healthy and unhealthy attachment; it only knows: *This person is significant to me.*

The Result: You Are Biochemically Bonded

By the time you recognize the abuse, your brain has been rewired. You are:

- Chemically addicted to the highs
- Conditioned to endure the lows in hopes of the highs
- Impaired in your ability to think clearly
- Experiencing withdrawal when you try to leave

This is why willpower alone is not enough. You're not weak. You're up against neurobiology that needs time, support, and often professional intervention to heal.

The Spiritual Battle: Soul Ties and False Intimacy

While the neuroscience explains *how* trauma bonding works, it doesn't fully explain the depth of entanglement many survivors describe. There is a spiritual dimension to these bonds that must be acknowledged and addressed.

The Concept of Soul Ties

Scripture speaks of deep connections between people that go beyond emotional attachment. We see healthy soul ties—like the bond between David and Jonathan: *"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David"* (1 Samuel 18:1, NASB).

But bonds can also form through:

- Sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 6:16)
- Covenant relationships (even false or manipulative ones)
- Deep emotional enmeshment
- Spiritual manipulation and control

When intimacy is corrupted by abuse, deception, and control, an **unhealthy soul tie** forms—a spiritual entanglement that keeps you bound even when logic tells you to leave.

You may experience this as:

- Intrusive thoughts about the narcissist
- A sense that part of you is still "with" them
- Spiritual oppression or heaviness
- Inability to pray or feel God's presence clearly
- Dreams about the person
- A pull to return that feels beyond your control

This is not imagination. **The enemy exploits covenant language, sexual bonding, and emotional intimacy to create chains that require spiritual intervention to break.**

False Intimacy and Spiritual Manipulation

Many narcissists—especially those in religious settings—use **spiritual language to create false intimacy**:

- "God told me we're meant to be together"
- "I've never felt this spiritually connected to anyone"
- "You're my ministry"
- Intense worship experiences together
- Praying over you in manipulative ways
- Using prophetic language to control

This creates a particular kind of soul tie because it **conflates intimacy with God with intimacy with the abuser**. You may find yourself unable to distinguish between the narcissist's voice and God's voice. You may feel that leaving them means leaving God's will.

This is a lie from the pit of hell.

God never uses manipulation, coercion, fear, or shame to lead His children. If someone is using spiritual language to control you, they are not speaking on behalf of God—they are speaking on behalf of their own ego and, ultimately, the enemy of your soul.

Biblical Parallel: Israel's Longing to Return to Egypt

One of the most striking biblical pictures of trauma bonding appears in the book of Exodus.

God had miraculously delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea. He provided manna from heaven. He led them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. His presence was tangible among them.

And yet, when faced with difficulty in the wilderness, their response was stunning:

"The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat,

when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

— Exodus 16:2–3 (NASB)

Read that again. They wanted to go back to **slavery**. They romanticized their captivity. They remembered the food but forgot the whips, the forced labor, the murder of their children.

Later, they said even more explicitly:

"We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic."

— Numbers 11:5 (NASB)

"Free" in Egypt? They were slaves. But trauma bonding distorts memory and perception.

Why Did They Want to Return?

1. The familiar felt safer than the unknown.

Even though Egypt was oppressive, it was predictable. The wilderness was uncertain. Freedom is terrifying when you've been conditioned to survive in captivity.

2. They forgot the full reality of their bondage.

Time and distance created selective memory. The narcissist does this too—after a breakup, you remember the good times and minimize the bad.

3. Immediate discomfort outweighed long-term freedom.

Hunger in the wilderness felt worse than slavery because it was happening *now*. Recovery often feels harder than staying because you feel the pain of withdrawal without yet experiencing the fullness of freedom.

4. They doubted God's provision.

Despite miracles, they questioned whether God truly had their best

interest at heart. After abuse, you may struggle to trust God's love or believe He has something better for you.

God's Response

God didn't shame them. He didn't minimize their struggle. Instead:

- He provided for their immediate needs (manna, quail, water)
- He continued to lead them
- He was patient with their process
- He gradually taught them a new way of living

But He also **did not let them return to bondage**. When they wanted to go back, He said no. Not because He was cruel, but because **He valued their freedom more than their comfort**.

The same is true for you.

The Spiritual Warfare of Breaking Trauma Bonds

Make no mistake: **Breaking a trauma bond is spiritual warfare**.

The enemy has invested in keeping you entangled because your captivity serves his purposes:

- It keeps you from your God-given identity and calling
- It distorts your understanding of love
- It damages your ability to trust God and others
- It saps your energy and joy
- It models dysfunction to those who look to you

Breaking free threatens his strategy. Expect resistance—not just from the narcissist, but from spiritual forces that want you to remain bound.

You may experience:

- Intense loneliness or fear
- Spiritual attack (oppression, nightmares, intrusive thoughts)
- Physical symptoms (anxiety, panic attacks, exhaustion)
- Pressure from others to reconcile
- Sudden contact from the narcissist (hoovering)
- Doubt about whether you're doing the right thing

These are not signs that you should go back. They are signs that you're over the target.

Paul reminds us:

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

— Ephesians 6:12 (NASB)

Your struggle is not just with the narcissist—it's with the spiritual forces working through them to keep you enslaved.

Faith-Based Exercises for Breaking Trauma Bonds

Breaking a trauma bond requires intentional, multi-faceted intervention: psychological, relational, physical, and spiritual. Here are practices rooted in Scripture and therapeutic wisdom to help you begin.

1. Prayer for Cutting Soul Ties

This is not magic or a formula, but a sincere act of surrender and declaration before God. You are inviting Him to sever what He never intended to be joined.

Prayer:

Father God,

I come before You in the name of Jesus Christ, acknowledging that I have been in a relationship that created an unhealthy bond—a soul tie that was not ordained by You.

I confess any ways I have given my heart, my body, my mind, or my spirit to someone who used that access to harm me. I repent for any agreements I made—spoken or unspoken—that allowed this person to have authority over my thoughts, emotions, or decisions.

By the authority given to me as Your child and through the blood of Jesus, I sever this soul tie. I break every ungodly connection between myself and [name]. I release them to You and I release myself from any bond that is not of You.

I ask You to close every door I opened to them—emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually. Seal those places with Your blood. Heal what was damaged. Restore what was stolen. Fill every empty place with Your presence.

I renounce any lies I believed because of this relationship. I renounce the idea that I need this person, that I can't live without them, that my worth is tied to their approval, or that I am responsible for their wellbeing.

I declare that my identity is in Christ alone. My provision comes from You. My worth is established by Your sacrifice. My future is in Your hands.

Help me to walk in freedom. Give me strength when I'm tempted to return. Remind me of the truth when my emotions lie to me. Surround me with Your love and protection.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Follow-up action: After praying this prayer, it may be helpful to:

- Write down what you're releasing and then destroy the paper (burn it safely, shred it, bury it) as a physical act of release
- Ask a trusted pastor, counselor, or prayer partner to pray with you

- Return to this prayer whenever you feel the pull to reconnect

2. Grounding in God's Steadfast Love

Trauma bonds thrive on instability—the unpredictable cycle of affection and rejection. Healing requires anchoring yourself in the **unchanging, steadfast, reliable love of God.**

Scripture meditation: Choose one or more of these verses and meditate on them daily. Write them on cards. Put them on your mirror. Set them as phone reminders.

- *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." — Lamentations 3:22–23 (NASB)*
- *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness." — Jeremiah 31:3 (NASB)*
- *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." — Romans 8:38–39 (NASB)*
- *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." — 1 John 3:1 (NASB)*

Practice: Each morning, before you check your phone or engage with the day, speak this declaration aloud:

"God's love for me does not change based on my performance. His affection is not withdrawn when I fail. His presence is not dependent on my perfection. I am unconditionally loved, eternally secure, and deeply valued. Today, I rest in His steadfast love."

3. The "When/Then" Worksheet

Trauma bonding creates associations in your brain: certain times of day, songs, places, or emotions trigger thoughts of the narcissist. These triggers can feel overwhelming.

Create a written plan for these moments:

When I feel...	Then I will...
The urge to contact them	Call my support person / Journal / Go for a walk / Read my "reasons I left" list
Lonely at night	Listen to worship music / Pray / Read Scripture / Call a friend
Like I'm romanticizing the good times	Read my journal entries from the worst times / List the lies they told / Remember the times I felt small
Spiritually attacked	Pray the armor of God prayer / Read Psalm 91 / Worship / Speak truth aloud
Physical anxiety or panic	Practice deep breathing / Ground myself (5 senses exercise) / Move my body / Call my counselor

Keep this list accessible—on your phone, by your bed, in your car.

4. No Contact as a Spiritual Discipline

If it is safe and possible to do so, **no contact with the narcissist is essential for breaking the trauma bond**. Think of it as a fast—not a punishment, but a consecration.

Every time you engage with them—even to "check in" or "see how they're doing"—you reset the neurological clock. You feed the addiction. You reopen the wound.

No contact includes:

- No calls or texts
- No checking their social media
- No asking mutual friends about them
- No responding to hoovering attempts
- No "closure" conversations (they rarely provide closure anyway)

Reframe this: You're not doing this to be cruel. You're doing this to heal. You're creating space for God to do surgery on your heart, and that requires distance from the infection source.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

— Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

5. Reclaiming Your Body

Trauma is stored in the body. Your nervous system has been conditioned to respond to the narcissist's presence, voice, even the thought of them. Healing requires re-regulating your nervous system.

Practices:

- **Breath prayer:** Inhale slowly while thinking, *"The Lord is my shepherd."* Exhale while thinking, *"I shall not want."* Repeat for 5 minutes.
- **Grounding exercise:** Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste.
- **Movement:** Walk, dance, stretch, yoga. Physical movement helps release stored trauma.
- **Safe touch:** If appropriate, ask a trusted friend for a hug, get a massage, hold a pet. Your body needs to relearn that touch can be safe.
- **Sleep hygiene:** Trauma disrupts sleep. Create a bedtime routine, limit screens, pray before bed, ask God to guard your dreams.

6. Community as Antidote to Isolation

The narcissist isolated you. Healing requires reconnection—but with safe, healthy people.

"Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up."

— Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NASB)

Action steps:

- Join a support group (abuse recovery, codependency, etc.)
- Reconnect with friends or family you were distanced from
- Find a therapist trained in trauma and abuse
- Get involved in a healthy church community (if your church enabled the abuse, find a new one)
- Be honest with safe people about what you're experiencing

You cannot heal in isolation. The trauma bond was created in secrecy and distortion. Healing happens in community and truth.

7. Rewriting the Narrative

Your mind will try to pull you back by rewriting history. Combat this with truth.

Journaling exercise:

- Write down every instance of abuse, betrayal, and manipulation you can remember. Be specific. Include how you felt.
- When you start to romanticize the relationship, read this list.
- Add to it as you remember more (trauma memories often return gradually).

Create a "Future Self" letter: Write a letter from your healed future self to your current self. What would she/he say? What would she/he thank you for? What would she/he want you to know?

Keep this letter and read it when you're tempted to go back.

The Long Road to Freedom

Breaking a trauma bond doesn't happen in a day, a week, or even a month. It's a process—often taking 6-12 months or more, depending on the length and intensity of the relationship.

You will have good days and hard days. You will have moments of clarity and moments of confusion. You will take two steps forward and one step back.

This is normal. This is not failure.

Remember Israel in the wilderness. It took them 40 years to travel an 11-day journey—not because God was slow, but because **He was transforming them from slaves into free people.** The geography was quick. The identity shift took time.

The same is true for you.

God heard the Israelites when they cried out from bondage. He heard them when they grumbled in the wilderness. And He hears you now.

"The cords of death encompassed me, and the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!' Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate."

— Psalm 116:3–5 (NASB)

You are encompassed, but not overcome.

You are distressed, but not destroyed.

You are in the wilderness, but you are no longer in Egypt.

And the God who brought you out will bring you through.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do you recognize trauma bonding in your relationship? Which aspects (neurological, emotional, spiritual) resonate most with your experience?
2. What "Egypt moments" have you experienced—times when you romanticized the relationship or wanted to return despite knowing it was harmful?
3. What specific triggers make you want to reach out to the narcissist? How can you prepare for these moments?
4. Have you experienced spiritual manipulation or false intimacy in the relationship? How has that affected your relationship with God?
5. What would it look like for you to practice "no contact" as a spiritual discipline? What support do you need to maintain it?

Prayer

Father, I am entangled. The cords of this relationship have wrapped around my heart, my mind, my body, my spirit. I thought I could free myself, but I can't. I need You.

I confess that I have been bonded to someone in a way that was never Your design. I have made excuses, minimized the harm, and believed lies. I have been addicted to crumbs when You offer me a feast.

Break these chains, Lord. Sever what was never meant to be joined. Heal the places in my brain that have been hijacked by this addiction. Restore my nervous system. Renew my mind. Reclaim my spirit.

When I am tempted to return, remind me of Your steadfast love. When I feel alone, surround me with Your presence. When I doubt my worth, whisper Your truth to my soul.

I am Yours. I belong to You. My identity is not found in this person's opinion of me but in Your sacrificial love for me.

Lead me through this wilderness. I trust that You are bringing me not just out of bondage, but into freedom, into wholeness, into the life You always intended for me.

Thank You for hearing my voice.

Thank You for holding me even when I couldn't feel You.

Thank You for the freedom that is coming.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 3: Grieving the Person Who Never Existed

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

— Psalm 34:18 (NASB)

There is a particular loneliness in grieving someone who is still alive.

There is a particular confusion in mourning a relationship that others say "wasn't even real."

There is a particular agony in missing someone who never actually existed.

If you are in the aftermath of a narcissistic relationship, you are likely experiencing a grief that others struggle to understand. Well-meaning friends may say:

- "You should be relieved it's over."
- "They weren't good for you anyway."
- "Just move on—you dodged a bullet."
- "At least you found out now."

And while these statements may be factually true, they bypass the raw, disorienting reality of what you're experiencing: **You are grieving someone you loved who was never real.**

You're mourning a future that was promised but never intended.

You're crying over tenderness that was performed, not felt.

You're aching for a person who existed only in carefully crafted moments designed to entrap you.

And the grief is excruciating.

This chapter is about honoring that grief—not rushing it, not minimizing it, not spiritualizing it away—while also guiding you toward a truth that will eventually

set you free: **You are not mourning a person. You are mourning an illusion. And illusions, once shattered, cannot be rebuilt.**

Understanding the Fantasy Bond

In 1985, psychologist Robert Firestone introduced the concept of the "fantasy bond"—an imaginary connection that substitutes for genuine love and intimacy. In healthy relationships, bonds deepen as partners truly know and accept each other. In narcissistic relationships, the bond is based on **who you needed the person to be, not who they actually were.**

The narcissist presented you with a carefully curated version of themselves:

- During idealization, they mirrored your values, desires, and dreams
- They became whoever you needed them to be to secure your attachment
- They presented a false self—charming, attentive, deeply connected to you
- They sold you a vision of a future together that felt destined, sacred, unshakeable

You fell in love with a marketing campaign, not a person.

But here's what makes this so painful: The feelings you experienced were real. The hope you felt was genuine. The connection you believed in was sincere—*on your end*. You weren't lying to yourself. You were lied to.

The fantasy bond is what you're grieving:

- The person you thought you knew
- The relationship you believed you had
- The future you were building together
- The version of yourself that felt loved, seen, and chosen

None of it was real. But the loss of it is.

Why This Grief Is Uniquely Devastating

Grief after narcissistic abuse is complex and often misunderstood because it doesn't follow the typical pattern of mourning. You're not just grieving the loss of a relationship—you're grieving multiple losses simultaneously.

1. You're Grieving a Person Who Never Existed

In a normal breakup, you grieve someone you actually knew—flawed, yes, but real. In narcissistic abuse, you grieve a fiction. The person you loved was a character they played. When the mask falls, you're left with the horrifying realization: *I never knew them at all.*

This creates what's called **ambiguous loss**—grief without closure, mourning without a body, loss without clear finality. The person is still alive, perhaps thriving with new supply, but the version you loved is simply... gone. Erased. Revealed to have never existed in the first place.

2. You're Grieving Your Own Judgment

Part of the grief is the loss of trust in yourself. You believed the lie. You didn't see the red flags (or you saw them and rationalized them). You gave your heart to someone who exploited it.

This creates a secondary grief: *If I was wrong about this, what else am I wrong about? Can I ever trust my judgment again?*

3. You're Grieving Lost Time

Months. Years. Perhaps decades. Time you can't get back. Opportunities you missed. Relationships you neglected. Dreams you deferred. All in service of someone who was using you.

4. You're Grieving Your Own Innocence

You entered the relationship with hope, openness, trust. You leave it cynical, guarded, and hypervigilant. There's a grief in realizing the world is not as safe as you thought, that people can be cruel in ways you didn't imagine, that evil can wear the face of love.

5. You're Grieving the Version of Yourself You Lost

Who were you before this relationship? What parts of yourself did you suppress, abandon, or lose in order to survive? That version of you—the one who laughed easily, who trusted readily, who dreamed boldly—may feel irretrievable.

6. You're Grieving Alone

Unlike other forms of loss, narcissistic abuse often leaves you isolated. The narcissist may have poisoned your reputation. Mutual friends may not believe you. Your church may pressure you to reconcile. Even those who support you may not understand the depth of what you're mourning.

All of this compounds into a grief that is heavy, layered, and profoundly lonely.

The Emotional Stages of Grief in Narcissistic Abuse

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), but grief after narcissistic abuse often follows a different, more complex trajectory. These stages are not linear—you will cycle through them multiple times, sometimes experiencing several in a single day.

Stage 1: Shock and Disbelief

"This can't be happening. There must be some mistake. Maybe I'm overreacting."

In the initial aftermath—whether after a discard, a revelation of betrayal, or the moment you finally see clearly—your nervous system goes into shock. You

may feel numb, disconnected from reality, unable to process what's happening.

During this stage:

- You may minimize the abuse ("It wasn't that bad")
- You intellectually know the relationship is over, but it doesn't feel real
- You function on autopilot
- You may experience physical symptoms: insomnia, loss of appetite, brain fog

What's happening: Your mind is protecting you from the full weight of the truth. Shock is a mercy—it gives you time to metabolize reality in doses your psyche can handle.

What you need: Gentleness with yourself. Basic self-care. Trusted people who will sit with you without rushing your process.

Scripture: *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."* — Isaiah 40:29 (NIV)

Stage 2: Denial and Cognitive Dissonance

"Maybe I'm remembering wrong. Maybe if I had just tried harder. Maybe they'll change."

Cognitive dissonance is the psychological discomfort of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. In your case:

- "This person loved me" vs. "This person abused me"
- "They said they'd never hurt me" vs. "They hurt me repeatedly"
- "God brought us together" vs. "This relationship nearly destroyed me"

Your brain struggles to reconcile the idealization phase with the devaluation. You may find yourself:

- Making excuses for their behavior
- Blaming yourself for the relationship's failure
- Romanticizing the good times
- Minimizing the abuse
- Hoping they'll return to who they were in the beginning

What's happening: Your brain is trying to maintain the fantasy bond because accepting the truth is too painful. Denial is not weakness—it's your psyche's attempt to survive emotional overload.

What you need: Truth-telling from safe people. Journaling the facts. Returning to your list of abusive incidents when you start to minimize.

Scripture: "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" — John 8:32 (NIV)

The truth will set you free, but first it will devastate you. That's okay. Freedom is on the other side.

Stage 3: Anger

"How dare they. How could they. I gave them everything."

Eventually—and mercifully—the numbness breaks, and anger rushes in. You may be angry at:

- The narcissist for lying, using, and discarding you
- Yourself for staying, for believing, for ignoring red flags
- God for allowing this, for not protecting you, for being silent when you prayed
- Others who enabled the abuse, didn't believe you, or pressured you to stay
- The injustice of it all—they move on unscathed while you're left in ruins

This anger is healthy and necessary. It is evidence that you are beginning to recognize the injustice of what was done to you. Anger is your psyche's way of creating distance from the abuser. It's saying: *This was wrong. I did not deserve this. I will not accept this treatment.*

Many Christians struggle with anger because they've been taught it's sinful. But Scripture makes a distinction:

"Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger."

— Ephesians 4:26 (NASB)

Anger itself is not sin—it's a God-given emotion that signals boundary violation. What you do with that anger matters, but feeling it is not only acceptable—it's essential for healing.

What's happening: Your nervous system is finally mobilizing for self-protection. Anger is the energy that helps you maintain boundaries and resist hoovering.

What you need: Safe outlets for anger. Physical activity. Therapy. Journaling. Perhaps even rage rooms or screaming into a pillow. You need to metabolize this emotion, not suppress it.

Caution: Don't act on anger by seeking revenge, engaging with the narcissist, or hurting yourself. Feel it, express it safely, and let it move through you.

Stage 4: Bargaining

"Maybe if I pray harder. Maybe if I forgive more. Maybe if I reach out one more time."

Bargaining is the stage where you try to negotiate with reality. You may find yourself:

- Rereading old messages, looking for evidence that they really loved you
- Fantasizing about reconciliation

- Making deals with God ("If I just forgive them completely, will You restore the relationship?")
- Believing that if you change, grow, or heal enough, they'll come back and treat you better
- Focusing on your flaws instead of their abuse

This is particularly dangerous for people of faith because spiritual language can be used to keep you stuck:

- "God hates divorce"
- "Love covers a multitude of sins"
- "Forgive seventy times seven"
- "With God, all things are possible—including their transformation"

All of these statements may be true in appropriate contexts, but **they are not invitations to return to abuse.**

What's happening: You're trying to regain control over an uncontrollable situation. If you can just find the right formula, the right behavior, the right prayer—maybe you can get back what you lost.

What you need: Reality checks from trusted people. Reminders that you cannot change another person. Prayer for acceptance of what is, not negotiation for what you wish could be.

Scripture: *"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."* — Reinhold Niebuhr (The Serenity Prayer)

Stage 5: Deep Sorrow

"I can't believe this is my life. How did I get here? What have I lost?"

This is the valley. The darkness. The place where the full weight of the loss settles on your chest and makes it hard to breathe.

In this stage, you may experience:

- Profound sadness that feels bottomless
- Crying without knowing exactly what you're crying for
- Exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix
- A sense of emptiness or meaninglessness
- Difficulty imagining a future without them
- Depression (clinical or situational)

This is the most painful stage, and it's the one people most want to rush you through. They'll say:

- "You should be over it by now"
- "They're not worth your tears"
- "Just choose joy"

But deep sorrow is not something you can bypass. It's something you must walk through. This is where the real grief work happens—where you mourn not just the relationship, but everything it represented, everything it cost you, everything you'll never have with them.

What's happening: Your soul is metabolizing loss. Tears are not weakness—they are the body's way of releasing pain. Sorrow is the price of love, even when that love was manipulated.

What you need: Permission to grieve fully. Safe people who won't shame your tears. Professional support if the sorrow becomes clinical depression. Most importantly: the presence of God, who **is near to the brokenhearted**.

Scripture: "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

— Psalm 34:18 (NASB)

"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?"

— Psalm 56:8 (NASB)

God doesn't rush your grief. He collects every tear. He records every moment of sorrow. He sits with you in the darkness and says, *I know. I see. I'm here.*

Stage 6: Acceptance and Surrender

"It happened. It was real. It was wrong. And I'm going to be okay."

Acceptance is not the same as approval. You're not saying the abuse was acceptable. You're saying: **I accept that this happened, that I cannot change it, and that I must now move forward.**

In this stage:

- The obsessive thoughts about them decrease
- You stop checking their social media
- You can talk about the relationship without falling apart
- You begin to reinvest in your own life
- You experience moments—and then days—of genuine peace
- You start to believe in a future beyond this pain

Surrender, in the biblical sense, is releasing the outcome to God:

- Surrendering the need for the narcissist to acknowledge what they did
- Surrendering the fantasy of who you thought they were
- Surrendering the timeline of your healing

- Surrendering the desire for revenge or vindication

What's happening: Your nervous system is beginning to regulate. Your identity is separating from theirs. You're reclaiming your life.

What you need: Continued support. Ongoing therapy or counseling. Spiritual practices that ground you in God's truth. Patience with yourself when you have setbacks.

Scripture: *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"*

— Isaiah 43:18–19 (NIV)

The Difficulty of Grieving What Felt Real but Was Manipulative

Here is the paradox you must hold: **Your feelings were real. Their intentions were not.**

You genuinely loved. They strategically manipulated.

You authentically hoped. They calculatedly performed.

You sincerely trusted. They systematically deceived.

This creates a unique form of grief because you're mourning something that existed for you but not for them. It's like discovering that the person you had deep conversations with for years was actually reading from a script. The conversations felt real to you—and your experience of them was valid—but the other person was never truly present.

Why You're Not Crazy for Grieving

You may feel foolish for mourning someone who hurt you. You may wonder why you can't just "get over it." But consider:

Your brain formed real neural pathways around this relationship. Those pathways don't disappear just because you learned the relationship was a lie.

Your body released real bonding hormones in their presence. Your nervous system was genuinely activated and attached.

Your heart experienced real hope, real joy, real love—even if the object of those feelings was a fiction.

Your spirit invested real faith in this connection, perhaps believing it was divinely ordained.

All of that was real **for you**. The grief honors your sincerity, even as you come to terms with their duplicity.

Scripture Focus: God Collects Your Tears

One of the most tender images in Scripture is found in Psalm 56:8:

"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" (NASB)

In ancient Near Eastern culture, mourners would collect their tears in small bottles as a tangible expression of grief. David uses this image to describe God's attentiveness to our sorrow: **God collects every tear. Not one is wasted or forgotten.**

This means:

- Your grief matters to God
- He doesn't minimize your pain or tell you to "get over it"
- He keeps a record—not to shame you, but to honor the depth of what you've endured
- He is present in the mourning, not distant or disappointed

Jesus Himself was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3, NASB). He wept at Lazarus' tomb—not because He lacked faith, but because He felt the weight of loss. He understands your tears because He shed His own.

He Heals the Unseen Wounds

Much of narcissistic abuse leaves no visible scars. There are no bruises to photograph, no bones to x-ray. The wounds are:

- Emotional: shattered self-worth, chronic anxiety, hypervigilance
- Psychological: PTSD, depression, complex trauma
- Spiritual: broken trust in God, distorted view of love, shame

But God sees what others miss:

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

— Psalm 147:3 (NASB)

The Hebrew word for "wounds" here (atstsebeth) refers to emotional pain, mental anguish, inner sorrow. God doesn't just heal physical injuries—He heals the places no one else can see, the places you might not even have words for.

He doesn't need you to explain it. He already knows.

Healing Practice: Writing Letters

One of the most powerful exercises in grief work is writing—not for the purpose of sending, but for the purpose of release. You're externalizing what's been trapped inside, giving voice to what's been silenced, honoring what needs to be said.

Exercise 1: The Goodbye Letter to the False Relationship

This letter is your opportunity to say everything you never got to say—or everything you said but weren't heard. Write to the fantasy, to the person you thought they were, to the relationship you believed you had.

Guidelines:

- Write by hand if possible—it engages different neural pathways than typing

- Don't edit yourself—let it be messy, angry, contradictory
- You are not sending this letter. It is for your healing, not their education
- Include everything: gratitude for good moments, rage at betrayal, grief over loss, clarity about truth

Prompts to consider:

- "I believed you when you said..."
- "The person I thought you were would have..."
- "I gave you..."
- "You took from me..."
- "I'm angry that..."
- "I'm sad about..."
- "I'm releasing..."
- "I'm saying goodbye to..."

Write until you have nothing left to say.

Then, choose a ritual of release:

- Burn it safely (in a fireplace, fire pit, or metal bowl)
- Bury it
- Tear it into pieces
- Seal it in an envelope and give it to your therapist to hold

The physical act of destroying the letter symbolizes release. You're letting go—not just of them, but of who you thought they were, who you thought you were with them, and the future you thought you'd have together.

Prayer after the goodbye letter:

Father, I release this relationship into Your hands. I release the person I thought they were. I release my need for them to see, to acknowledge, to change. I release the version of myself that believed the lie. I cannot carry this anymore. Take it. Hold it. Transform my loss into something redemptive. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Exercise 2: The Hello Letter to Your Redeemed Self

After saying goodbye to the illusion, it's time to welcome the truth of who you are and who you're becoming.

This letter is written **from your future healed self to your current grieving self**. It's a letter of encouragement, truth, and hope.

Guidelines:

- Imagine yourself five years from now—healed, whole, free
- Write from that place to where you are now
- Include what you've learned, who you've become, what life looks like on the other side

Prompts to consider:

- "Dear [your name], I want you to know that you're going to make it..."
- "The grief you're feeling right now won't last forever..."
- "You're not broken beyond repair. In fact, you're..."
- "The things you think you've lost—your ability to trust, to love, to hope—are not gone. They're..."
- "In five years, you'll look back and see that this season taught you..."
- "The relationship didn't destroy you. It revealed..."
- "You're becoming someone who..."
- "God is using this to..."

- "I'm proud of you for..."

Read this letter regularly—especially on hard days when you doubt whether healing is possible. Let your future self encourage your present self.

This is not toxic positivity or denial. It's prophetic declaration. It's choosing to believe that God is who He says He is and will do what He promises to do.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NASB)

Exercise 3: Redefining Love

Part of grief after narcissistic abuse is grieving your understanding of love itself. The narcissist taught you that love is:

- Conditional and performance-based
- Unpredictable and anxiety-producing
- Demanding and depleting

But real love is nothing like that.

Create two columns:

What I Was Taught Love Is What Love Actually Is (1 Corinthians 13)

Love keeps score

Love keeps no record of wrongs

Love is controlling

Love does not seek its own

Love is conditional

Love never fails

Love withdraws when I fail

Love bears all things, believes all things

Love demands perfection Love is patient, love is kind

Write your own list based on your experience. Then read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and redefine love according to Scripture.

You are retraining your mind to recognize real love so that you never settle for counterfeit again.

The Timeline of Grief: How Long Will This Take?

One of the most common questions survivors ask is: *How long until I feel better?*

The truth: **There is no universal timeline.** Grief is not linear, and healing is not a race.

Factors that influence your timeline:

- The length of the relationship
- The severity of the abuse
- Whether there are children or other ongoing ties
- Your support system
- Whether you're in therapy
- Your history of previous trauma
- Your physical health and nervous system regulation

General patterns (with much individual variation):

- **0-3 months:** Acute grief, shock, survival mode
- **3-6 months:** Processing, anger, beginning to accept reality
- **6-12 months:** Deep sorrow, identity reconstruction, occasional good days
- **12-24 months:** More stability, longer periods of peace, occasional setbacks

- **24+ months:** Integration, wisdom, capacity for new relationships

But here's what matters more than the timeline: Are you moving toward healing?

You don't need to be "over it." You need to be moving through it. And movement doesn't mean constant forward progress—it means you're not stuck, you're not in denial, and you're doing the work.

Signs You're Healing:

- You have more good days than bad
- You think about them less obsessively
- You've stopped checking their social media
- You can talk about the relationship without breaking down
- You're reconnecting with old friends and interests
- You're setting boundaries in other relationships
- You're experiencing moments of genuine joy
- You're hopeful about the future
- You're learning to trust yourself again

When Grief Becomes Clinical Depression

There is a difference between grief (which is healthy and necessary) and clinical depression (which requires intervention). If you're experiencing:

- Persistent thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Complete inability to function (work, self-care, relationships) for weeks
- Substance abuse as a coping mechanism
- Physical symptoms that interfere with daily life

- Lack of improvement despite time and support
- Intrusive thoughts you can't control

Please seek professional help immediately. This is not a sign of weak faith—it's a sign that your nervous system needs clinical support. God often heals through medication, therapy, and medical intervention. There is no shame in needing help.

The Witness of Your Tears

Your tears are not wasted. They are not evidence of weakness or lack of faith. They are sacred.

Every tear you cry is:

- An act of truth-telling ("This hurt me")
- An act of resistance ("I will not pretend it didn't happen")
- An act of honor ("What I hoped for mattered")
- An act of faith ("I believe healing is possible")

Jesus wept. Paul wept. David wept. The prophets wept.

Grief is not the opposite of faith. It is faith's companion in the valley.

You are not broken because you grieve. You are human. You are tender. You are alive.

And the God who collects your tears is standing with you, holding you, promising you:

"Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning."
— Psalm 30:5 (NASB)

The morning is coming. It may not be tomorrow. It may not be next month. But it is coming.

And when it does, you will look back and see that **you did not grieve alone.**

Reflection Questions

1. Which stage of grief are you currently in? Do you find yourself cycling between stages?
2. What are you grieving most—the person you thought they were, the future you imagined, the version of yourself you lost, or something else?
3. How have others responded to your grief? Have you felt supported, or have people minimized your pain?
4. What messages did the narcissist teach you about love? How does that contrast with 1 Corinthians 13?
5. What would your healed future self say to you right now?

Prayer

Lord, I am brokenhearted, and You promise that You are near. I need You now.

I am grieving someone who never existed, mourning a relationship that was never real. And yet the pain is profound. The loss is crushing. The tears won't stop.

Collect my tears, Father. Put them in Your bottle. Let them be recorded in Your book. Don't let them be wasted. Let them water something new in my soul.

I release the fantasy. I release who I thought they were. I release the future I imagined. I release the version of myself that believed the lie.

Heal the wounds no one else can see. Bind up the places that are broken. Restore what was stolen. Redeem what was lost.

Teach me what real love looks like—Your love, which is patient and kind, which never fails, which casts out fear. Retrain my heart to recognize the counterfeit and to run toward the real.

Give me permission to grieve fully without shame. Surround me with people who won't rush my process. Hold me when the sorrow feels too heavy to bear alone.

And when the morning comes—and I believe it will—remind me of this valley. Remind me of Your faithfulness in the darkness. Let my tears become a testimony of Your nearness to the brokenhearted.

Thank You for seeing me.

Thank You for staying with me.

Thank You for the healing that is already beginning, even when I can't feel it yet.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 4: Recovering Reality After Gaslighting

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

— Numbers 23:19 (NASB)

"Did that really happen, or am I making it up?"

"Maybe I'm remembering it wrong."

"Am I being too sensitive?"

"They said it never happened. Maybe they're right."

"I don't trust my own mind anymore."

If these thoughts have become your constant companions, you are not losing your mind. **Your mind has been systematically attacked.** You have been subjected to one of the most insidious forms of psychological abuse: gaslighting.

Gaslighting is crazy-making by design. It destabilizes your sense of reality so completely that you become dependent on the abuser to tell you what is true, what is real, even what you feel. It is a theft of the most fundamental kind—**the theft of your ability to trust yourself.**

But here is the promise that will anchor this chapter: **God is not a man that He should lie.** His Word does not shift. His truth does not change based on someone else's manipulation. And His voice—though it may have been drowned out by the gaslighter's lies—has never stopped speaking truth over you.

This chapter is about coming back to reality. Not the distorted version you were fed, but the solid, unchanging, trustworthy reality grounded in a God who cannot lie.

What Is Gaslighting?

The term "gaslighting" comes from the 1944 film *Gaslight*, in which a husband systematically manipulates his wife into believing she's losing her sanity by dimming the gaslights in their home and then insisting she's imagining the change.

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which the abuser causes the victim to question their own memory, perception, judgment, and sanity. It is deliberate, sustained, and devastatingly effective.

Gaslighting tactics include:

1. Outright Denial of Reality

- "That never happened."
- "You're making things up."
- "I never said that."
- "You're imagining things."

Even when you have clear memories—or even evidence—the gaslighter flatly denies reality with such confidence that you begin to doubt yourself.

2. Trivializing Your Feelings

- "You're being too sensitive."
- "You're overreacting."
- "You're too emotional."
- "It's not that big of a deal."

Your legitimate responses to mistreatment are pathologized. Over time, you learn to suppress your feelings because you've been taught they're invalid.

3. Countering and Questioning Your Memory

- "That's not how it happened."

- "You always remember things wrong."
- "Are you sure? I remember it differently."
- "Your memory is terrible."

They rewrite history with such conviction that you start to believe their version over your own recollection.

4. Withholding and Diverting

- "I don't want to talk about this again."
- "You're just trying to confuse me."
- "Why are you always bringing up the past?"
- "I don't know what you're talking about."

They refuse to engage with your reality, making you feel that your concerns are unreasonable or fabricated.

5. Using Compassion Against You

- "I'm worried about you—you haven't been yourself lately."
- "I think you should see a therapist; you're not thinking clearly."
- "Are you taking your medication? You seem off."

They frame their abuse as concern for your wellbeing, positioning themselves as the stable, rational one while painting you as unstable.

6. Twisting and Reframing

- "I only said that because you provoked me."
- "If you hadn't done X, I wouldn't have done Y."
- "You're the one who started this."

They shift blame and reframe situations so that you become responsible for their behavior.

7. Strategic Forgetting

- "I don't remember saying that."
- "That conversation never happened."
- "You must be confusing me with someone else."

Whether they genuinely don't remember (unlikely) or are pretending not to (more likely), the effect is the same: you are left feeling unmoored from shared reality.

8. Weaponizing Others' Opinions

- "Everyone agrees with me—you're the only one who thinks that."
- "I talked to your sister, and even she thinks you're overreacting."
- "Our pastor said you need to submit more."

They triangulate, using (real or fabricated) third-party validation to make you feel isolated in your perception.

9. Spiritual Gaslighting

- "God told me this is His will."
- "You're not hearing from God clearly."
- "If you were more spiritually mature, you'd understand."
- "Your lack of peace is evidence of your lack of faith."

They use God's name to authorize their version of reality and delegitimize yours.

The Impact of Gaslighting on Perception and Self-Trust

Gaslighting doesn't just make you doubt a single conversation or event—it systematically dismantles your ability to trust your own mind. Over time, victims of gaslighting experience:

1. Chronic Self-Doubt

You second-guess everything: your memories, your feelings, your perceptions, your decisions. Simple questions become paralyzing: *What did they really say? Did I overreact? Am I being unfair?*

2. Loss of Confidence in Your Judgment

If you can't trust your memory of what happened yesterday, how can you trust your judgment about anything? This erodes your decision-making capacity in all areas of life.

3. Hypervigilance and Rumination

You replay conversations obsessively, trying to figure out what "really" happened. You record conversations. You save text messages. You need evidence to prove to yourself that you're not crazy.

4. Emotional Confusion

You're not sure what you're allowed to feel. Are you overreacting, or is your response justified? You learn to suppress your emotions because they've been deemed invalid so many times.

5. Dependency on the Gaslighter

Paradoxically, the person who is making you doubt reality becomes your reference point for determining what is real. You need their validation to know if what you're experiencing is legitimate.

6. Shame and Self-Blame

You begin to believe that the problem is you—your memory, your perception, your emotional instability. You apologize constantly, even when you've done nothing wrong.

7. Isolation from Reality

You withdraw from others because you're afraid they'll see how "crazy" you've become. You don't trust yourself to accurately report events, so you stop talking about them.

8. Disassociation

In severe cases, the cognitive dissonance becomes so unbearable that you disconnect from your body, your emotions, or your sense of self. You go through life feeling numb, distant, unreal.

The goal of gaslighting is control. When you can't trust yourself, you become dependent on the gaslighter to tell you what is true. They become the arbiter of reality, and you lose your autonomy.

Cognitive Dissonance and the Erosion of Truth

Cognitive dissonance is the psychological discomfort that arises when you hold two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. Your mind naturally seeks consistency, so when faced with contradictions, it works to resolve them—even if that means distorting reality.

In gaslighting, you experience constant cognitive dissonance:

- "They said they love me" vs. "They hurt me repeatedly"
- "They said that didn't happen" vs. "I clearly remember it happening"
- "They're a good person (Christian, respected, kind to others)" vs. "They treat me terribly"
- "My feelings tell me something is wrong" vs. "They tell me I'm being irrational"

How Your Brain Resolves This Dissonance

When you can't reconcile these contradictions, your brain takes the path of least resistance. Unfortunately, in an abusive relationship, that path usually leads to **self-blame and reality distortion**:

Option 1: Believe the gaslighter is lying or abusive

This creates massive conflict, especially if:

- You're married to them
- You share children
- You're in a faith community that pressures reconciliation
- You're financially dependent on them
- You've invested years in the relationship

Option 2: Believe yourself—your memory and your perception

This requires you to accept that the person you love is hurting you intentionally or is incapable of seeing reality clearly.

Option 3: Distort your own reality to match theirs

This is psychologically "easier" in the short term. You tell yourself:

- "Maybe it didn't happen the way I remember"
- "Maybe I am too sensitive"
- "Maybe I am the problem"

Your brain chooses Option 3 because it preserves the relationship, maintains hope, and gives you a sense of control ("If I'm the problem, I can fix it").

But this comes at a devastating cost: **You lose your grip on reality.**

Over time, the erosion of truth becomes so complete that you can no longer distinguish between what actually happened and what you've been told happened. Your internal compass spins wildly, unable to find true north.

The Spiritual Warfare of Lies

Gaslighting is not just psychological manipulation—it is spiritual warfare.

Consider the first recorded instance of gaslighting in Scripture: Genesis 3.

The serpent approaches Eve and asks, "*Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?*" (Genesis 3:1, NASB).

Notice the tactic: He questions what God clearly said. He introduces doubt into established truth.

Eve corrects him, but the serpent persists: "*You surely will not die!*" (Genesis 3:4, NASB).

This is outright contradiction of God's Word. The serpent is gaslighting Eve, telling her that what God said is not true, that her understanding is wrong, that she's missing the real story.

Then he offers an alternative narrative: "*For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5, NASB).

He reframes God's boundary as oppressive restriction and God's protection as selfish control. He plants seeds of doubt about God's goodness and truthfulness.

This is the enemy's primary strategy: distorting truth.

Jesus identifies Satan as fundamentally a liar:

"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

— John 8:44 (NASB)

When someone gaslights you, they are operating from the same playbook:

- Questioning established truth
- Denying reality
- Offering alternative narratives that serve their interests
- Attacking your confidence in what you know to be true

The antidote to lies is truth. And the foundation of all truth is God, who cannot lie.

Anchoring in the God Who Cannot Lie

The reason Numbers 23:19 is so powerful in the context of gaslighting recovery is this: **God's nature is the opposite of the gaslighter's nature.**

The gaslighter:

- Changes their story constantly
- Denies what they clearly said
- Manipulates reality to serve themselves
- Cannot be trusted

God:

- Never changes (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17)
- Cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18)
- Keeps His promises (Numbers 23:19)
- Is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13)

When your sense of reality has been shattered, you need something **unchanging and immovable** to anchor to. That anchor is God's Word.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."
— Isaiah 40:8 (NASB)

"Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven."
— Psalm 119:89 (NASB)

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."
— John 17:17 (NASB)

God's Word doesn't shift based on someone else's mood, agenda, or manipulation. It is objective truth—solid ground for your shattered sense of reality.

Restoring Mental Clarity: Practical Recovery Tools

Recovery from gaslighting requires intentional, sustained effort to rebuild trust in your own perceptions. This isn't instant, but it is possible. Here are evidence-based, faith-integrated practices:

1. Journaling Reality

One of the most powerful tools for combating gaslighting is a **contemporaneous written record of events**.

How to do it:

- Keep a private journal (password-protected digital document or hidden physical journal)
- After significant conversations or events, immediately write down:
 - What was said (as close to verbatim as possible)
 - What happened
 - How you felt
 - What you observed in their behavior
 - Date and time
- Include specific details: tone of voice, body language, exact phrases
- Note any witnesses

Why this works:

- It creates an objective record you can return to when they deny or rewrite history

- It helps you see patterns over time
- It validates your experience: *"This happened. I'm not making it up."*
- It provides evidence for yourself and potentially for counselors, lawyers, or church leaders

Example entry: *"Tuesday, 7:30pm. He came home angry. I asked how his day was. He said, 'Why do you always interrogate me?' I said I was just asking. He said, 'You're so controlling. I can't even come home without you demanding to know everything.' I felt confused because I only asked one question. I felt my stomach drop and started to wonder if I was being controlling. But I looked back at last week's entry and saw the same pattern—he reacts with anger to normal questions and then accuses me of the very behavior he's displaying."*

Scripture anchor:

"Buy truth, and do not sell it." — Proverbs 23:23 (NASB)

Your journal is your investment in truth. Don't let it be stolen from you.

2. The Reality Testing Checklist

When you're questioning whether something really happened or whether you're "overreacting," use this checklist:

Ask yourself:

1. **If my best friend told me this exact story, would I think they were overreacting?**
2. **Would I advise someone I love to tolerate this behavior?**
3. **Is there any evidence that contradicts my memory?** (text messages, emails, witnesses)
4. **Have I felt this way before in this relationship?** (patterns indicate reality)

5. **Am I being asked to deny my direct sensory experience?** (what I saw, heard, felt)
6. **Would I be comfortable sharing this story with my counselor or trusted friend?** (shame often indicates truth being suppressed)
7. **Does their explanation require me to believe I'm fundamentally unreliable?**

If the answer to most of these questions validates your experience, **trust yourself.**

Scripture anchor:

"The naive believes everything, but the sensible man considers his steps." — Proverbs 14:15 (NASB)

Being sensible means weighing evidence, not dismissing your own perceptions.

3. Third-Party Validation

Gaslighting thrives in isolation. **Breaking the silence breaks the spell.**

Action steps:

- Share your experiences with a trusted friend, counselor, or pastor who is:
 - Trauma-informed
 - Not connected to the narcissist
 - Able to maintain confidentiality
 - Knowledgeable about abuse dynamics
- Play recordings or show text messages if you have them
- Ask: "Am I crazy, or is this problematic?"

Why this works: A healthy, objective observer will often immediately recognize what you've been conditioned to doubt. Their validation helps recalibrate your sense of normal.

Caution: Don't go to people who:

- Are connected to the narcissist and may report back
- Have a vested interest in you staying ("But what about the children/ministry/family reputation?")
- Spiritualize away abuse ("Just pray more," "Submit and God will change them")
- Are also abusive or have disordered thinking

Scripture anchor:

"Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory." — Proverbs 11:14 (NASB)

4. Physical Evidence Collection

If possible and safe, document:

- Save text messages and emails
- Screenshot social media interactions
- Record phone conversations (check local laws—some states require two-party consent)
- Take photos of any property damage
- Keep a calendar of incidents

This is not paranoia—it's protection. Gaslighters will deny, minimize, and rewrite history. Evidence protects your sanity.

Scripture anchor:

"By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." —

Matthew 18:16 (NASB)

5. Scripture-Based Affirmations

Your mind has been filled with lies. You need to actively **replace distortions with divine truth.**

Create a list of affirmations based on Scripture. These are not "name it and claim it" prosperity gospel statements—they are declarations of what God has already said is true about you.

Affirmation Structure:

1. Identify the lie you've believed
2. Find Scripture that contradicts it
3. Create a personal declaration

Examples:

Lie Believed	Scripture Truth	Affirmation
"I can't trust my own mind"	Philippians 4:7 - "The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds"	"God guards my mind. I can trust my perceptions when they align with His truth."
"I'm crazy/unstable"	2 Timothy 1:7 - "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind" (NKJV)	"God has given me a sound mind. I am not crazy."

Lie Believed	Scripture Truth	Affirmation
"My feelings are wrong"	Psalm 139:23-24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart"	"God sees my heart and validates my emotions. My feelings matter."
"I'm the problem"	Psalm 139:14 - "I am fearfully and wonderfully made"	"I am God's creation, made with intention and purpose. I am not defective."
"I can't trust myself"	John 10:27 - "My sheep hear My voice"	"I can hear God's voice. I can discern truth."
"Nobody believes me"	Psalm 56:8 - "You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle"	"God sees everything. He knows my truth. His witness is enough."
"I deserved the treatment I received"	Romans 8:1 - "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus"	"I am not condemned by God. I did not deserve abuse."
"I'm unlovable"	1 John 3:1 - "See how great a love the Father has given us"	"I am deeply loved by God. His love is not based on my performance."
"I have no value"	Matthew 10:31 - "You are more valuable than many sparrows"	"God values me infinitely. I am precious to Him."

How to use these:

- Write them on index cards
- Put them on your bathroom mirror
- Set them as phone alarms throughout the day

- Speak them aloud morning and evening
- Read them whenever the old lies resurface

Scripture anchor:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."— Romans 12:2 (NASB)

Your mind needs active renewal. Affirmations are part of that process.

6. The "Fact vs. Feeling" Exercise

Gaslighting confuses objective reality with subjective experience. This exercise helps you separate them.

In your journal, create two columns:

Facts (Observable, Provable)	Feelings (My Experience)
He yelled at me for 20 minutes	I felt scared and small
He denied saying he would be home by 6pm	I felt confused and doubted my memory
He has broken three promises this month	I feel disappointed and unimportant
He called me "crazy" five times this week	I feel hurt and ashamed

Why this works:

- It validates both objective reality AND your emotional response
- It shows you that even if your feelings are dismissed, the facts remain
- It helps you see patterns that would otherwise be hidden

Then ask:

- Are the facts consistent with their narrative or mine?
- Are my feelings appropriate responses to these facts?
- Would I judge someone else harshly for feeling this way in this situation?

Scripture anchor:

"Test all things; hold fast what is good." — 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NKJV)

Faith Exercise: Philippians 4:8 Meditation

One of the most profound ways to restore mental clarity is through intentional, Scripture-directed thought control. Paul gives us a framework in Philippians 4:8:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

— Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

Notice the first filter: "**whatever is true.**"

Gaslighting fills your mind with lies. Recovery requires filling your mind with truth.

The Philippians 4:8 Replacement Exercise

Step 1: Identify the Distorted Narrative

Write down the specific lie or distortion you're struggling with.

Examples:

- "I'm too sensitive"
- "That conversation never happened the way I remember"
- "I'm the abusive one"
- "If I were a better Christian, this wouldn't be happening"

Step 2: Apply the Philippians 4:8 Filter

Test the thought against each criterion:

Filter	Question	Assessment
True	Is this objectively true? Is there evidence?	Yes/No
Honorable	Does this thought honor God and others?	Yes/No
Right	Is this aligned with Scripture and righteousness?	Yes/No
Pure	Is this thought free from manipulation or malice?	Yes/No
Lovely	Does this thought promote beauty, kindness, compassion?	Yes/No
Good repute	Would wise, godly people affirm this thought?	Yes/No
Excellent	Does this thought bring out the best in me and others?	Yes/No
Praiseworthy	Is this thought worthy of being lifted up?	Yes/No

If the thought **fails even one filter**, it should not be dwelled upon.

Step 3: Replace with Truth

Find the Scripture or objective truth that contradicts the lie, and reframe your thinking.

Example:

Distorted narrative: "I'm too sensitive."

Philippians 4:8 test:

- True? No. My reactions are proportionate to mistreatment.
- Honorable? No. This thought dishonors my God-given emotions.
- Right? No. God gave me emotions for a reason.

- Pure? No. This is a manipulation tactic to silence me.
- Lovely? No. This creates shame.
- Good repute? No. Healthy people would say my responses are normal.
- Excellent? No. This keeps me in bondage.
- Praiseworthy? No. There's nothing worth praising here.

Replacement truth:

"God gave me emotions as a gift. They are signals, not sins. Jesus wept, felt anger, experienced compassion. My sensitivity is not a flaw—it's evidence that I'm human and made in God's image. I will honor my feelings and not allow anyone to weaponize them against me."

Scripture anchor:

"God created man in His own image." — Genesis 1:27 (NASB)

If I'm made in God's image, and God feels, then my feelings reflect His design.

Daily Philippians 4:8 Practice

Each morning:

1. Identify one lie you believed yesterday
2. Test it against Philippians 4:8
3. Replace it with truth
4. Speak the truth aloud
5. Thank God for His unchanging nature

Sample prayer:

"Father, yesterday I believed the lie that I'm the problem in this relationship. But Your Word says I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. That lie doesn't pass the test of what is true, honorable, right, or lovely. I reject it. I replace it with Your truth: I am Your beloved child, created with dignity and worth. Thank You"

that You never lie to me. Thank You that Your Word is my anchor. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Special Section: When the Gaslighter Uses Scripture

One of the most painful forms of gaslighting occurs when an abuser weaponizes Scripture to control you. This is spiritual abuse, and it compounds the trauma because it confuses God's voice with the abuser's voice.

Common ways Scripture is weaponized:

1. "Submit to me" (Ephesians 5:22)

Used to demand unquestioning obedience and silence your concerns.

Biblical truth: Submission is mutual (Ephesians 5:21) and never requires you to submit to sin, abuse, or harm. Christ-like leadership is sacrificial service, not domination.

2. "Forgive seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22)

Used to demand you continue forgiving without repentance or change.

Biblical truth: Forgiveness doesn't mean no consequences. Forgiveness is internal release; reconciliation requires repentance and changed behavior (Luke 17:3-4).

3. "Judge not" (Matthew 7:1)

Used to prevent you from discerning their behavior or setting boundaries.

Biblical truth: Jesus teaches us to judge rightly (John 7:24) and to discern wolves from sheep (Matthew 7:15-16). We're called to test spirits (1 John 4:1) and confront sin (Matthew 18:15).

4. "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16)

Used to trap you in an abusive marriage.

Biblical truth: God also hates violence and oppression (Malachi 2:16 in full context; Psalm 11:5). Divorce is permitted in cases of sexual immorality and

abandonment (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15), and safety always takes precedence.

5. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8)

Used to demand you hide or overlook abuse.

Biblical truth: This means we extend grace for ordinary offenses, not that we cover up sin or enable evil. Love also "does not rejoice in unrighteousness" (1 Corinthians 13:6).

If someone is using Scripture to make you doubt reality, control you, or prevent you from protecting yourself, they are not speaking for God—they are speaking for themselves.

Test everything against:

- The character of God (loving, just, truthful, protective)
- The full context of Scripture (not isolated verses)
- The fruit being produced (Galatians 5:22-23)
- The witness of the Spirit in your heart (Romans 8:16)

When You Still Doubt: The "Trust Yourself Incrementally" Approach

If you've been deeply gaslighted, you may not be ready to trust your perceptions fully. That's okay. **Start small.**

Week 1: Trust your physical sensations

- "I feel tightness in my chest when they raise their voice" = Trust that sensation
- "I feel nauseous before they come home" = Trust that response
- Your body doesn't lie. Start there.

Week 2: Trust your immediate emotional reactions

- "I feel hurt when they say that" = Trust that feeling

- You don't need to justify why you feel hurt. The feeling is real.

Week 3: Trust your memory of recent events

- Start with yesterday, then the past week
- Write things down immediately to have a record

Week 4: Trust your judgment about small decisions

- What to wear, what to eat, what route to take
- Rebuild confidence in low-stakes choices

Week 5: Trust your perception of patterns

- Look at your journal
- Notice what repeats
- Trust what you see

Week 6 and beyond: Trust your "gut" / the Spirit's witness

- When something feels "off," trust that
- When you sense danger, honor that
- When you feel peace, receive that

This is not about perfection. It's about rebuilding trust one small decision, one validated feeling, one confirmed memory at a time.

The Role of Community in Reality Testing

You cannot recover from gaslighting in isolation. You need people who:

- Believe you
- Validate your perceptions
- Won't gaslight you further

- Reflect reality accurately

Find:

- A trauma-informed therapist
- A support group for abuse survivors
- Friends who have earned your trust
- A church community that takes abuse seriously

Avoid:

- Anyone who dismisses your experience
- Anyone who pressures premature reconciliation
- Anyone who spiritualizes away your concerns
- Anyone who makes you doubt yourself further

Red flags in "helpers":

- "I think you're being too harsh"
- "It takes two to have problems"
- "Have you considered your role in this?"
- "Maybe you're not hearing from God clearly"
- "I think you're too emotional to see straight"

These statements are gaslighting too. Walk away.

Green flags in safe people:

- "I believe you"
- "That sounds really hard"
- "Your feelings make sense"
- "You're not crazy"

- "What do YOU think you should do?" (not telling you, but empowering you)

Recovering Your Voice

Gaslighting silences you. Recovery means reclaiming your voice—the ability to name reality, to say what happened, to trust your words.

Practice:

1. Speak simple truths aloud, even when alone:

- "That hurt me."
- "I didn't deserve that."
- "I'm not crazy."
- "That was wrong."

2. Say "no" to small things to rebuild your assertiveness:

- "No, I don't want to go there."
- "No, I'm not comfortable with that."
- Start small, build momentum.

3. Stop apologizing for things that aren't your fault:

- Notice when you say "I'm sorry" reflexively
- Pause and ask: "Did I actually do something wrong?"
- Replace with: "Thank you for your patience" or just state your need

4. Name abuse when you see it:

- "That's gaslighting."
- "You're rewriting history."

- "I know what I heard."
- You don't have to debate—just name it and walk away

Your voice is powerful. The enemy wanted to silence it. God wants to restore it.

Reflection Questions

1. What specific gaslighting tactics were used against you? Which ones were most effective in making you doubt yourself?
2. In what areas of your life do you still struggle to trust your own perception or judgment?
3. What lies have you internalized? How do they fail the Philippians 4:8 test?
4. Who in your life can provide safe, objective reality-testing? Who should you avoid?
5. What small step can you take this week to rebuild trust in yourself?

Prayer

Father God, You are the God of truth. You cannot lie. Your Word does not shift. When everything else feels unstable, You are my solid ground.

I confess that I have been lied to, manipulated, and made to doubt my own mind. I have questioned my sanity, my memory, my perceptions. I have wondered if I'm the problem, if I'm crazy, if I can trust anything I think or feel.

But You say You are not a man that You should lie. Your Word is truth. Your nature is unchanging. And You promise that the truth will set me free.

Restore my mind, Lord. Heal the cognitive damage done by gaslighting. Help me trust myself again—not arrogantly, but with healthy confidence rooted in Your design of me.

Give me discernment to recognize lies when I hear them. Give me courage to name manipulation when I see it. Give me wisdom to test everything against Your Word.

Replace every distorted narrative with Your truth. When the enemy whispers "You're crazy," remind me that You've given me a sound mind. When I'm told "That never happened," help me trust my memory and the evidence. When my feelings are dismissed, remind me that You created me with emotions and they matter.

Surround me with people who speak truth, who believe me, who won't gaslight me further. Protect me from those who would use Your name to control me.

Anchor me in Your Word. Let it be my reality check, my truth standard, my immovable foundation. When everything else is shaken, let me stand firm on what You have said.

Thank You for seeing the truth of what was done to me. Thank You for collecting my tears. Thank You for the clarity that is coming, even when it's still foggy right now.

I trust You to restore my mind, my voice, and my confidence in perceiving reality.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Chapter 5: When You Waver: Breaking No-Contact with Grace and Strength

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

— Galatians 5:1 (NASB)

You promised yourself you wouldn't respond.

You blocked their number. You deleted their messages. You told your friends to hold you accountable. You prayed for strength. You felt strong, clear, resolved.

And then:

- They texted from a new number
- You saw them at a family event
- They sent flowers with a note that said exactly what you needed to hear
- You had a weak moment—lonely, tired, doubting yourself
- You wondered if maybe this time would be different
- You convinced yourself that one conversation wouldn't hurt

And you reached out. Or you responded. Or you agreed to "just talk."

And now you're here: ashamed, angry at yourself, feeling like you've undone all your progress, wondering if you'll ever be strong enough to truly walk away.

Let me say this clearly: You are not weak. You are not a failure. You are human.

Breaking no-contact is not evidence of your deficiency—it's evidence of the depth of the trauma bond, the power of the manipulation, and the very real biological, psychological, and spiritual warfare you're engaged in.

This chapter is about understanding why you waver, extending grace to yourself when you do, and learning how to recommit to freedom—again and again, as many times as it takes—until the pull weakens and your resolve strengthens.

The Reality of No-Contact: It's Not a Light Switch

In a healthy breakup, you miss the person, you grieve, and eventually you move on. The longing diminishes naturally over time.

In narcissistic abuse, **no-contact feels like withdrawal from an addictive substance**—because neurologically, that's exactly what it is.

Remember from Chapter 2:

- Your brain has been conditioned by intermittent reinforcement
- Dopamine pathways have been hijacked
- Cortisol and adrenaline have created a hypervigilant state
- Oxytocin has bonded you at a deep level
- Your nervous system has been dysregulated

No-contact is the intervention that allows these systems to heal. But healing takes time—often 6-12 months or more before the neurological pull begins to significantly lessen.

This means:

- The urge to contact them doesn't mean you're doing something wrong
- Moments of weakness don't erase your progress
- Breaking no-contact once (or multiple times) doesn't mean you've failed
- Recovery is rarely linear

Think of no-contact not as a single decision, but as a series of daily—sometimes hourly—choices to choose freedom over familiar bondage.

Why Survivors Relapse Into Contact

Understanding *why* you break no-contact is essential for compassion toward yourself and for creating better strategies moving forward.

1. Emotional Addiction and Trauma Bonding

The most common reason: **You're chemically addicted to the relationship.**

Even though you know intellectually that they hurt you, your limbic system (the emotional, non-rational part of your brain) is screaming for the fix:

- The high of their attention
- The relief when they're kind after being cruel
- The hope that this time will be different
- The familiar rhythm of the relationship, even if it's painful

This is not weakness—it's neurobiology.

Addicts in recovery don't blame themselves for cravings; they recognize cravings as part of the disease and work through them without acting on them. The same principle applies here.

2. Loneliness and Isolation

Narcissists systematically isolate their victims. When you go no-contact, you may find yourself:

- Without a social circle (they poisoned or controlled your friendships)
- Without family support (they've turned family against you, or your family enables the abuse)
- Without a partner (and the human need for connection is real)

In moments of profound loneliness, even toxic connection feels better than no connection. Your brain whispers: *At least they're someone. At least I'm not alone.*

The lie: That they're better than nothing.

The truth: Toxic connection prevents healthy connection from forming. An empty space can be filled with good things, but a space occupied by poison cannot.

3. Guilt and False Responsibility

Many survivors break no-contact because they feel guilty:

- "What if they really need me?"
- "What if something bad happens to them?"
- "What if I'm being too harsh?"
- "What if God wants me to give them another chance?"

This guilt is often a **trained response**. The narcissist conditioned you to believe:

- You're responsible for their emotional wellbeing
- Their failures are your fault
- Abandoning them is the ultimate cruelty
- You're not a good Christian/person if you cut them off

The truth: You are not responsible for another adult's choices, emotions, or consequences. Boundaries are not cruelty—they're self-preservation.

4. Hoovering Tactics

When you go no-contact, the narcissist often escalates their efforts to pull you back in. Common hoovering tactics include:

Emotional manipulation:

- "I can't live without you"
- "You're the only one who understands me"
- "I'm going to hurt myself if you don't talk to me"

False transformation:

- "I've changed"
- "I'm in therapy now"
- "I've found God/recommitted to my faith"
- "I finally understand what I did wrong"

Manufactured crises:

- Health emergencies
- Financial disasters
- "Our child needs you"
- Family pressure

Apologies and promises:

- "I'm so sorry for everything"
- "I'll never do it again"
- "I see clearly now how I hurt you"
- "Please give me one more chance"

Nostalgia and good memories:

- Old photos
- "Remember when we..."
- Gifts that reference inside jokes
- Recreating idealization-phase behaviors

These tactics are designed to exploit your compassion, your hope, and your trauma bond. **They work because they're designed to work.**

5. Hope That This Time Is Different

Perhaps the most painful reason survivors break no-contact: **hope**.

You want to believe:

- The apology is real this time
- They've actually changed
- Your prayers have been answered
- God has softened their heart
- The therapy/consequences/intervention finally worked

Hope is not a character flaw. It's evidence of your capacity for faith, for seeing the best in people, for believing in redemption.

But hope must be grounded in **evidence and wisdom**, not wishful thinking.

6. Grief and Unfinished Business

You may break contact because:

- You need closure (which they likely won't give)
- You want to be heard and understood (which they're incapable of)
- You're still processing the loss
- You want one more chance to "fix" things
- You're bargaining in the grief process

The truth: Closure comes from within, not from them. Understanding comes from God, not from your abuser.

7. Testing Your Own Healing

Sometimes survivors break no-contact to see if they're "over it."

"Maybe I'm healed enough now that it won't affect me."

"Maybe I can handle seeing them and it won't hurt."

"Maybe I'm strong enough now."

This is like an alcoholic testing their sobriety by taking a sip. Even if you're "healed enough" (which usually you're not as soon as you think), reengaging resets the neurological clock and often reignites the trauma bond.

8. Spiritual Warfare

Never underestimate the spiritual dimension. The enemy has a vested interest in keeping you entangled because your bondage:

- Prevents you from your calling
- Damages your witness
- Exhausts your resources
- Distorts your understanding of God's love

When you're about to break through, expect increased spiritual attack:

- Intrusive thoughts about the narcissist
- Dreams about them
- "Chance" encounters
- Sudden bombardment of contact attempts
- Doubts about whether you're doing the right thing

This is warfare, not weakness.

Biblical Wisdom: The Danger of Looking Back

Scripture provides vivid warnings about the danger of longing for what enslaved us.

Lot's Wife: The Fatal Backward Glance

When God delivered Lot's family from Sodom's destruction, He gave one clear instruction: *"Escape for your life! Do not look behind you."* (Genesis 19:17, NASB)

But Lot's wife looked back. And she became a pillar of salt.

This is not a story about God being petty or cruel. It's a story about **the spiritual danger of nostalgia for bondage.**

Looking back wasn't just a physical glance—it represented:

- Attachment to what she was leaving
- Doubt about whether leaving was the right choice
- Longing for the familiar, even if it was toxic
- Hesitation in her commitment to freedom

The result was deadly.

Jesus Himself references this story when teaching about discipleship:

"Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."

— Luke 17:32-33 (NASB)

Application: When you look back, when you romanticize the relationship, when you second-guess your decision to leave—you're standing in the place of Lot's wife. Not physically, but spiritually.

Israel's Longing for Egypt

We've touched on this in Chapter 2, but it bears deeper examination here.

After God miraculously delivered Israel from slavery, they repeatedly expressed desire to return:

"Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full."

— Exodus 16:3 (NASB)

"Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us?"

— Numbers 16:13 (NASB)

Notice the distortion: They remember Egypt as "a land flowing with milk and honey"—language God used to describe the Promised Land. **They're projecting onto their captivity the qualities of their destiny.**

This is what nostalgia does in abusive relationships:

- You remember the good times and forget the bad
- You minimize the pain and magnify the pleasure
- You project onto the past what actually belongs to your future

God's response is instructive: He provides for them in the wilderness, but He does not let them return to Egypt. Why?

Because **He values their freedom more than their comfort.**

The Prodigal Son's Father: Waiting, Not Chasing

When the prodigal son left, the father didn't:

- Chase him
- Make excuses for him
- Enable his destructive behavior
- Rescue him from consequences

He let him go. He let him experience the full weight of his choices. And when the son came to his senses and returned **genuinely repentant**, the father celebrated.

Key distinction: The father welcomed a repentant son, not a manipulative hoovering attempt.

True repentance includes:

- Acknowledgment of specific wrongdoing
- Taking full responsibility without blame-shifting
- Evidence of changed behavior over time

- Respect for your boundaries
- Patience with your process
- No pressure for immediate reconciliation

If these elements are absent, it's not repentance—it's hoovering.

Paul's Teaching: Don't Return to Slavery

Paul writes to believers who were being pressured to return to legalistic bondage:

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

— Galatians 5:1 (NASB)

The Galatians had been set free from the slavery of earning God's approval through works. But false teachers were trying to entangle them again.

The parallel: You've been set free from the slavery of a toxic relationship. But the narcissist (and sometimes well-meaning but misguided people) will try to entangle you again.

Paul's instruction: **Keep standing firm.**

Not "stand firm once and never waver." But "keep standing"—a continuous, active choice to remain in freedom.

When You Break No-Contact: Extending Grace to Yourself

If you've already broken no-contact—whether once or multiple times—you need to hear this:

You are not starting over from scratch. You are continuing a journey that includes setbacks.

What Breaking No-Contact Is NOT:

- Evidence that you're weak or deficient

- Proof that you'll never be free
- A reason to give up entirely
- Unforgivable
- Something that negates all your progress

What Breaking No-Contact IS:

- A normal part of recovery for many survivors
- An opportunity to learn what triggered you
- Information about what additional support you need
- A chance to practice self-compassion
- Evidence that you're human, not superhuman

The Difference Between Shame and Conviction

Shame says:

- "You're so stupid"
- "You'll never learn"
- "You're too weak to do this"
- "You might as well give up"
- "Something is fundamentally wrong with you"

Conviction says:

- "That wasn't good for you"
- "You can make a different choice next time"
- "You have the strength to walk away again"
- "Let's figure out what you need to stay strong"
- "You're learning and growing"

Shame is from the enemy and keeps you stuck. Conviction is from the Holy Spirit and moves you toward change.

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

— Romans 8:1 (NASB)

God doesn't condemn you for breaking no-contact. He extends grace and invites you back to freedom.

Creating Boundaries Anchored in God's Protection

Boundaries are not walls meant to keep everyone out. They're gates that allow good in and keep harm out. And they must be **anchored in something stronger than your willpower.**

Biblical Foundation for Boundaries

1. God Himself Has Boundaries

God doesn't tolerate sin in His presence. He establishes requirements for relationship. He doesn't force Himself on anyone. He respects human free will.

If God—who is perfect love—has boundaries, then boundaries are not unloving.

2. Jesus Modeled Boundaries

- He withdrew from crowds to pray (Luke 5:16)
- He said "no" to people's demands (John 7:6)
- He didn't heal everyone everywhere (John 5:1-9)
- He allowed people to reject Him (John 6:66-67)
- He physically removed Himself from danger (John 10:39)

3. Scripture Commands Boundaries

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"

— 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NASB)

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness?"

— 2 Corinthians 6:14 (NASB)

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you... If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

— Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB)

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

— Romans 12:18 (NIV)

Notice: "As far as it depends on you." There are some people with whom peace is not possible.

Your No-Contact Boundary Is:

- **An act of obedience:** You're refusing to return to slavery (Galatians 5:1)
- **An act of wisdom:** You're not casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6)
- **An act of self-protection:** You're guarding your heart (Proverbs 4:23)
- **An act of faith:** You're trusting God to protect and provide for you

It is not:

- Unforgiving (forgiveness happens in your heart; reconciliation requires repentance and safety)
- Unloving (love does not enable sin or tolerate abuse)
- Un-Christian (Jesus protected Himself from harm; you can too)

Steps for Recommitment to Freedom

Whether you've never broken no-contact and want to stay strong, or you've broken it multiple times and need to recommit, these steps will help.

Step 1: Assess What Happened (Without Shame)

If you broke no-contact, examine the circumstances without self-judgment:

Ask:

- What was happening right before I reached out/responded?
- What emotional need was I trying to meet?
- What lie did I believe in that moment?
- What would have helped me resist?

Common triggers:

- Loneliness (especially at night or on weekends)
- Special dates (anniversaries, birthdays, holidays)
- Stress or crisis in other areas of life
- Seeing them on social media
- Contact from mutual friends
- Physical exhaustion or illness

Action: Make a list of your specific triggers so you can anticipate and prepare for them.

Step 2: Forgive Yourself and Receive God's Grace

Prayer of Self-Forgiveness:

Father, I broke no-contact. I reached out when I promised I wouldn't. I responded when I said I wouldn't. I feel ashamed and disappointed in myself.

But Your Word says there is no condemnation for those in Christ. You offer grace upon grace. Your mercies are new every morning.

I receive Your forgiveness. I forgive myself. I am not defined by this setback. I am defined by Your love and Your power working in me.

Help me learn from this without being crushed by it. Give me wisdom to know what I need moving forward. Strengthen my resolve. Guard my heart.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Then move forward. Don't dwell in self-flagellation. That's not humility; it's pride disguised as self-punishment.

Step 3: Implement Stronger Protective Measures

If willpower isn't enough (and it often isn't), create external barriers:

Technology boundaries:

- Block their number (if you've unblocked, re-block)
- Block on all social media platforms
- Use apps that block websites or apps during vulnerable times
- Delete their contact entirely so you'd have to actively seek their number
- Change your number if harassment continues
- Set your accounts to private
- Ask mutual friends not to share information about them with you

Physical boundaries:

- Change your routes to avoid places you might see them
- Don't go to events where they'll be (if possible)
- Have a friend screen your mail/packages

- Move if the situation is dangerous and you're able

Accountability boundaries:

- Give a trusted friend permission to ask hard questions
- Share your phone passcode with your accountability partner
- Call someone before you reach out to the narcissist
- Check in daily with your support system

Spiritual boundaries:

- Daily prayer for strength and protection
- Scripture memorization for weak moments
- Spiritual direction or pastoral counseling
- Deliverance prayer if you sense spiritual oppression

Step 4: Address the Underlying Need

Breaking no-contact is often an attempt to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

If you reached out The legitimate need because you felt: is: **Healthy ways to meet it:**

Lonely	Connection	Call a friend, join a support group, attend church, volunteer
Unlovable	Validation	Remind yourself of God's love, ask safe people for affirmation, therapy
Bored	Stimulation	Engage in hobbies, exercise, creative projects, learning something new

**If you reached out The legitimate need
because you felt: is:** **Healthy ways to meet it:**

Curious about them	Information/closure	Journal, talk to therapist, pray, remind yourself closure comes from within
Guilty	To alleviate guilt	Examine if guilt is true guilt or false guilt, confess real sin, reject manipulation
Hopeful they changed	To believe in redemption	Trust God with their soul, focus on your own healing, set realistic expectations

Action: Create a "Instead of contacting them, I will..." list and keep it accessible.

Example: *Instead of texting them, I will:*

1. *Text my accountability partner*
2. *Go for a 20-minute walk*
3. *Read my "reasons I left" list*
4. *Pray Psalm 91*
5. *Journal what I'm feeling*
6. *Call the abuse hotline (1-800-799-7233)*

Step 5: Build a Life Worth Protecting

The stronger your life becomes without them, the less appealing contact will be.

Invest in:

- **Therapy/Counseling:** Professional help to process trauma
- **Support groups:** Connect with others who understand
- **Friendships:** Rebuild relationships that were neglected or sabotaged
- **Faith community:** Find a healthy church (if yours enabled the abuse, find a new one)
- **Hobbies:** Rediscover what you enjoy
- **Career/Education:** Pursue goals that were deferred
- **Physical health:** Exercise, nutrition, sleep
- **Spiritual practices:** Prayer, worship, Scripture reading, silence and solitude

The goal: Create a life so fulfilling that returning to bondage becomes increasingly unappealing.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

— John 10:10 (NASB)

Jesus offers abundant life. The narcissist offers crumbs. Choose abundance.

Step 6: Create a "Emergency Contact Plan"

For moments when you feel you might break no-contact:

Tier 1: Immediate Intervention (Use when urge is strong)

1. Text accountability partner: "I'm struggling. Need to talk NOW."
2. Call abuse hotline: 1-800-799-7233
3. Leave your location (go to a coffee shop, friend's house, church)
4. Physical activity (run, dance, punch a pillow—release the energy)

Tier 2: Cognitive Intervention (Use when you're rationalizing)

1. Read your journal entries from the worst times
2. Review the list of abuse incidents
3. Read letters from friends reminding you why you left
4. Look at your "goodbye letter to the relationship"
5. Read your "hello letter from future self"

Tier 3: Spiritual Intervention (Use always)

1. Pray the no-contact prayer (see end of chapter)
2. Read Galatians 5:1 aloud
3. Worship (music that centers you on God)
4. Read Psalm 91, 23, or 121
5. Declare truth aloud: "I am free. I will not return to slavery."

Keep this plan on your phone, in your car, by your bed—accessible at all times.

Step 7: Celebrate Milestones

Recovery is hard work. Celebrate victories:

- One day of no-contact
- One week
- One month
- Three months
- Six months
- One year

How to celebrate:

- Acknowledge your strength to a trusted friend
- Do something kind for yourself
- Journal about how far you've come
- Thank God for His faithfulness
- Donate to a domestic violence organization
- Write an encouraging letter to yourself for the next hard moment

Each day of no-contact is a victory. Don't minimize your progress.

When Contact Is Unavoidable: Co-Parenting, Family, Work

For some survivors, complete no-contact is not possible because:

- You share children
- You work together
- You share family or social circles
- Legal proceedings require communication

In these cases, you need **modified contact** strategies.

The Gray Rock Method

When you must interact, become as boring and unresponsive as a gray rock.

Principles:

- Give minimal information
- Show no emotion
- Provide no supply (attention, reaction, engagement)
- Keep responses brief and factual
- Don't take bait

Example exchanges:

Narcissist: "You look terrible. Are you taking care of yourself?"

Gray Rock: "I'm fine."

Narcissist: "I can't believe you're doing this to our family."

Gray Rock: "Noted."

Narcissist: "Remember when we went to that restaurant? Those were good times."

Gray Rock: "I need to discuss Tuesday's pickup time."

Narcissist: "You're such a [insult]. No wonder no one likes you."

Gray Rock: "The answer is no."

Goal: Be so boring they lose interest in engaging with you.

Parallel Parenting (Not Co-Parenting)

If you share children, recognize that healthy co-parenting requires:

- Mutual respect
- Effective communication
- Shared goals
- Flexibility
- Putting children first

Narcissists cannot co-parent. They use children as:

- Weapons to hurt you
- Sources of information about you
- Pawns in manipulation
- Audiences for their victimhood narrative

Instead, practice **parallel parenting**:

- Minimal direct communication (use apps like OurFamilyWizard or TalkingParents)
- All communication in writing (protects you and creates records)
- Strictly adhere to court orders
- Don't attend events together if possible; split them
- Don't discuss anything beyond logistics
- Disengage from drama

Boundaries in co-parenting:

- Communication is limited to children's schedules, health, education
- No discussions about the relationship, your personal life, or their opinions
- Exchanges happen in public places or via third party
- Document everything
- Don't argue; state your position once and disengage

Protecting your children:

- Don't badmouth the other parent (even if they deserve it)
- Provide stability and emotional safety in your home
- Get them therapy if needed
- Teach them boundaries without making them choose sides
- Trust God to protect what you cannot

"Let your yes be yes and your no be no." — Matthew 5:37

Managing Unavoidable Family Events

If you must be at the same wedding, funeral, or family gathering:

Before:

- Decide in advance if you'll attend (it's okay to skip)
- Bring a support person
- Plan your exit strategy
- Set time limits
- Prepare responses to expected questions
- Pray for protection and peace

During:

- Stay with safe people
- Use the gray rock method if they approach
- You don't owe them conversation; a polite "excuse me" and walk away is fine
- Don't drink alcohol (you need full faculties)
- Leave early if needed

After:

- Debrief with your support person
- Journal
- Extend grace to yourself if it was hard
- Celebrate that you survived it

Remember: You don't have to attend every event you're invited to. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do for yourself and your children is to be absent.

Work Situations

If you work together:

- Notify HR if appropriate
- Request schedule or location changes if possible
- All communication via email (creates records)
- Keep interactions strictly professional
- Don't engage in personal conversations
- Document any harassment
- Consider finding new employment if the situation is unmanageable

The Role of Community and Accountability

You cannot maintain no-contact in isolation. The pull is too strong. The loneliness is too deep. The spiritual warfare is too intense.

What You Need from Your Support System:

Permission to struggle:

"It's okay that this is hard. You're not weak for finding this difficult."

Reality checks:

"Remember what they did to you. Let me read you your own words from your journal."

Availability:

"Call me anytime—even 3am—if you're thinking about contacting them."

Non-judgment:

"You broke no-contact? Okay. Let's figure out what happened and how to move forward."

Spiritual support:

"Let me pray with you. Let me speak truth over you."

Celebration:

"You've made it two weeks! I'm so proud of you."

Who Should NOT Be in Your Support System:

- People who maintain relationship with the narcissist and report back to them
- People who pressure reconciliation
- People who minimize the abuse
- People who are emotionally unavailable
- People who make it about themselves

Action: Identify 2-3 people who can serve in this role. Ask them explicitly if they're willing. Give them permission to be honest with you.

Prayer as Warfare

No-contact is not just a psychological battle—it's spiritual warfare. Prayer is your most powerful weapon.

Daily No-Contact Prayer

Father, I need Your strength today. The pull to contact [name] is strong. My emotions lie to me. My body craves the familiar. My heart hopes for change that may never come.

But You have called me to freedom. You have delivered me from bondage. You value my safety and wellbeing. You do not want me entangled again in slavery.

Give me strength to resist every urge, every rationalization, every manipulation. Guard my mind from intrusive thoughts. Protect my phone from my own hands. Close every door of opportunity for contact.

When I'm lonely, remind me that You are with me. When I doubt my decision, remind me of the truth. When I'm tempted to romanticize the past, show me reality.

Station angels around me. Break every spiritual chain that still connects me to this person. Sever every unhealthy soul tie. Cast out every spirit of bondage, fear, manipulation, and control.

I declare my freedom in Christ. I choose life. I choose peace. I choose Your will over my feelings. I choose the wilderness of healing over the false comfort of Egypt.

Hold me, Father. I'm weak, but You are strong. My resolve fails, but Yours never does. Keep me in Your hand where no one can snatch me away.

In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.

When You're About to Break No-Contact (Emergency Prayer)

Jesus, I'm about to do something I know I shouldn't. My hand is on my phone. The urge is overwhelming. I'm rationalizing. I'm hoping. I'm hurting.

STOP ME.

Send someone to call me right now. Create a distraction. Remove the opportunity. Flood me with Your presence. Remind me of the truth. Give me a vision of my future if I stay free vs. if I return.

I don't trust myself right now, so I'm trusting You. Take control. Intervene. Don't let me sabotage my healing.

Holy Spirit, strengthen me. Right now. This moment. Hold my hand. Lead me away from this. Show me what to do instead.

I need You. Come quickly.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Then put the phone down and do something from your emergency plan.

The Long View: Why This Matters

When you're in the thick of it—when you're lonely, when they're hoovering, when you doubt yourself—it's hard to remember why no-contact matters.

Here's why:

Your Future Self Is Counting on You

The version of you that exists five years from now—healed, whole, thriving—is looking back at this moment. She needs you to be strong. He needs you to choose wisely. Your future depends on your present choices.

Your Children Are Watching

If you have children, you're teaching them:

- What love looks like
- What they should tolerate in relationships
- Whether boundaries matter
- How to respond to abuse

Do you want them to learn that abuse is acceptable? Or do you want to model that freedom is worth fighting for?

Your Calling Is Waiting

God has purposes for your life that cannot be fulfilled while you're entangled in toxicity. There are people you're meant to serve, gifts you're meant to use, joy you're meant to experience. **The narcissist is standing between you and your destiny.**

Your Testimony Is Being Written

One day—maybe not today, maybe not this year, but one day—your story of freedom will encourage someone else. Your perseverance will give them hope. Your healing will be their roadmap.

But only if you stay the course.

"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary."

— Galatians 6:9 (NASB)

The harvest is coming. Don't give up right before breakthrough.

When You Waver: Come Back

If you break no-contact—today, tomorrow, next week, next month—**come back.**

Don't stay in shame. Don't wallow in regret. Don't throw your hands up and give up entirely.

Just come back.

Recommit. Start again. Learn from what happened. Implement new strategies. Ask for more help. Lean harder into God.

The path to freedom is not perfection. It's persistence.

Every time you recommit, you're building strength. Every time you choose freedom again, you're reinforcing new neural pathways. Every time you get back up, you're embodying resurrection.

Jesus doesn't condemn the woman caught in adultery. He says, *"Go, and sin no more"* (John 8:11).

He doesn't say, "One strike and you're out."

He says, "Get up. Move forward. Don't stay here."

That's His message to you:

Get up. You wavered. I still love you. You broke no-contact. I'm still with you. You feel weak. I am still strong. Come back to freedom. I'm here. And I will be here every time you need to recommit.

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning."

— Lamentations 3:22-23 (NASB)

New. Every. Morning.

Including this one.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you broken no-contact? If so, what were the circumstances? What can you learn from that without shaming yourself?
2. What are your specific triggers for wanting to reach out? How can you prepare for those moments?
3. Who in your life can serve as accountability partners? Have you asked them explicitly for help?
4. If contact is unavoidable, what boundaries do you need to implement to protect yourself?
5. What would your future healed self say to you right now about staying strong?

Closing Prayer

Father, this is so hard. Harder than I thought it would be. Harder than people understand.

I want to be strong, but I feel weak. I want to move forward, but I keep looking back. I want freedom, but sometimes bondage feels more comfortable because it's familiar.

Forgive me for the times I've wavered. Forgive me for the times I've chosen temporary relief over lasting healing. Forgive me for doubting that You have something better for me.

Give me strength—not just today, but every day. Every hour. Every moment I'm tempted to reach out, to respond, to hope in what will not change.

Surround me with people who will hold me accountable in love. Protect me from those who would guilt me into returning to harm. Give me wisdom to know the difference.

When I'm lonely, be my companion. When I'm doubting, be my truth. When I'm weak, be my strength. When I'm tempted, be my way of escape.

Help me trust that You are doing something in this wilderness season that could not happen any other way. Help me believe that the Promised Land is worth the journey through the desert.

I choose freedom. Today. Right now. In this moment. And tomorrow, I'll choose it again. And the next day, and the next.

Not because I'm strong enough, but because You are. Not because I have perfect willpower, but because You have perfect faithfulness.

Hold me, Father. Don't let me go. Even when I try to wander back, pull me forward. I belong to You. I am Yours. And You are mine.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 6: Healing from Spiritual Abuse by Narcissists

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

— Matthew 7:15-16 (NASB)

There is a particular devastation in having your faith weaponized against you.

There is a particular betrayal in hearing Scripture—the Word meant to bring life—twisted into chains.

There is a particular agony in being unable to distinguish between God's voice and your abuser's voice because they've so thoroughly intertwined the two.

If you have experienced narcissistic abuse at the hands of someone who claimed to speak for God—whether a spouse, parent, pastor, or church leader—you carry wounds that others often cannot see or understand. You may have been told:

- "God called me to lead you"
- "Your submission to me is submission to God"
- "If you leave, you're leaving God's will"
- "Your suffering is God's way of teaching you obedience"
- "To question me is to question the Holy Spirit"

And so you stayed. You submitted. You silenced yourself. You suppressed your God-given discernment. You accepted treatment that contradicted everything you knew about Jesus—all while being told it *was* Jesus, that *this* was the way of the cross, that *your resistance* was evidence of spiritual rebellion.

This is spiritual abuse. And it is evil dressed in holy language.

This chapter is about naming that evil, untangling God's truth from the abuser's lies, and beginning the sacred work of healing your relationship with

a Father who never wanted you bound, never ordained your suffering, and is heartbroken over what was done to you in His name.

What Is Spiritual Abuse?

Spiritual abuse is the misuse of spiritual authority, religious belief, or Scripture to control, manipulate, shame, or exploit another person. It occurs when someone leverages God's name, biblical teaching, or religious position to gain power over you.

Spiritual abuse can happen in:

- Marriages where one partner uses "biblical headship" to dominate
- Parent-child relationships where obedience to parents is equated with obedience to God
- Churches where leaders demand unquestioning submission
- Spiritual friendships where one person claims special revelation about your life
- Ministry settings where power is consolidated through "God's calling"

Characteristics of Spiritual Abuse:

1. Authority Without Accountability

The abuser claims God-given authority but refuses oversight, correction, or transparency. Questions are framed as spiritual rebellion rather than healthy discernment.

2. Scripture Weaponization

Bible verses are taken out of context and used as clubs to beat you into submission. The Word becomes a tool of control rather than life and freedom.

3. Isolation from Other Spiritual Input

You're discouraged from seeking counsel elsewhere, reading other teachers,

or being part of community outside the abuser's control. They become your sole mediator to God.

4. Guilt and Shame as Control Mechanisms

You're made to feel that any discomfort, disagreement, or boundary-setting is evidence of spiritual immaturity, demonic influence, or rebellion against God.

5. Confusion Between Human and Divine Authority

The abuser conflates their will with God's will. To disobey them is to disobey God. To question them is to doubt God's voice.

6. Spiritual Elitism

They position themselves as more spiritually mature, more discerning, more favored by God—and you as deficient, spiritually weak, or under deception.

7. Use of "Divine" Language

"God told me," "The Lord revealed," "The Spirit showed me"—all used to shut down dialogue and demand compliance.

8. Manipulation Through "Blessing" and "Curse"

Obedience brings God's blessing; disobedience brings His judgment. You're kept in fear of divine retribution if you step out of line.

9. Selective Application of Scripture

Verses about submission, obedience, suffering, and sacrifice are emphasized for you. Verses about freedom, justice, love, and protection are ignored or minimized.

10. Reframing Abuse as God's Will

Your mistreatment is spiritualized: "God is teaching you patience," "This is your cross to bear," "Suffering produces character."

The Unique Devastation of Spiritual Abuse

While all forms of narcissistic abuse are damaging, spiritual abuse creates wounds that reach into the deepest parts of your being because **it corrupts your relationship with God Himself.**

It Distorts Your View of God

When an abuser claims to represent God, speak for God, or embody God's will—and then treats you with cruelty, manipulation, and control—you begin to believe:

- God is harsh, demanding, impossible to please
- God's love is conditional and performance-based
- God is angry at you
- God uses people to punish and control you
- God doesn't care about your pain
- God values your usefulness over your wellbeing

This is heresy. But it becomes your lived theology.

It Steals Your Direct Access to God

In spiritual abuse, the abuser positions themselves as mediator between you and God:

- You can't trust your own discernment
- You need them to interpret God's will for you
- Your prayers and Scripture reading are insufficient; you need their insight
- God speaks to you *through them*, not directly to you

This violates the core of the gospel: Christ is our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), the veil was torn (Matthew 27:51), and every believer has direct access to the Father through the Holy Spirit.

It Makes You Afraid of God

You may find yourself:

- Terrified of making wrong decisions lest you fall out of God's will
- Anxious that God is angry or disappointed with you
- Unable to feel His presence or hear His voice
- Convinced that your suffering is divine punishment
- Fearing that leaving the abusive situation means leaving God's protection

This is the opposite of the gospel message. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

It Silences Your Spirit

God gave you a conscience, discernment, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual abuse teaches you to:

- Ignore your internal warning signals
- Override your God-given intuition
- Dismiss the Spirit's gentle conviction that something is wrong
- Gaslight yourself spiritually

You become deaf to the very voice that was meant to guide and protect you.

It Creates Shame at the Core

Unlike other forms of abuse that attack your behavior or your circumstances, spiritual abuse attacks your *soul*. It tells you:

- You're spiritually deficient
- Your faith is weak
- You're under demonic influence
- You're the problem in God's eyes

- You deserve this suffering because of your sin

This is toxic shame masquerading as conviction. And it's nearly impossible to heal from what you believe God Himself has decreed.

Spiritual Gaslighting: Using Scripture to Control

Gaslighting is disorienting enough when it's purely psychological. When it's wrapped in Scripture and presented as God's truth, it becomes spiritually lethal.

Common Verses Weaponized by Spiritual Abusers:

1. "Wives, submit to your husbands" (Ephesians 5:22)

How it's misused:

Used to demand unconditional, unquestioning obedience. Any expression of your needs, boundaries, or concerns is framed as rebellion against God's design for marriage.

The fuller truth:

- The passage begins with "Submit to *one another*" (Ephesians 5:21)—mutual submission
- Husbands are commanded to love sacrificially, as Christ loved the church—which means laying down their lives, not demanding their way
- Submission is voluntary response to Christ-like leadership, not forced compliance to domination
- Submission never means tolerating sin or abuse
- The context is about love and honor, not control and fear

God's heart:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." — Ephesians 5:25 (NASB)

Christ gave Himself *for* the church, not *against* her. He died to protect, not to exploit.

2. "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12)

How it's misused:

Used by abusive parents to demand complete obedience, silence criticism, and prevent adult children from setting boundaries.

The fuller truth:

- Honor doesn't mean blind obedience, especially for adults
- Honor can be given from a distance when proximity is harmful
- You can honor someone's position while rejecting their behavior
- God never commands you to enable sin or subject yourself to abuse
- The command comes with a caveat: "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger*" (Ephesians 6:4)

God's heart:

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." — 1

Timothy 5:8 (NASB)

Parents have responsibilities toward children. When they abdicate those, the dynamic changes.

3. "Judge not" (Matthew 7:1)

How it's misused:

Used to prevent you from discerning their behavior, naming abuse, or holding them accountable.

The fuller truth:

- Jesus isn't forbidding all judgment; He's forbidding hypocritical judgment
- We're commanded to judge rightly: "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*" (John 7:24)
- We're told to test spirits: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God*" (1 John 4:1)
- We're instructed to recognize false teachers: "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matthew 7:16)
- Church discipline requires judgment (Matthew 18:15-17)

God's heart:

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." — Matthew 7:15 (NASB)

Jesus warns us to *identify* wolves. That requires judgment.

4. "Forgive seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22)

How it's misused:

Used to pressure you to remain in abusive situations, to reconcile without repentance, and to erase consequences for sin.

The fuller truth:

- Forgiveness is internal release of bitterness; reconciliation requires repentance
- Jesus also teaches confrontation: "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault*" (Matthew 18:15)
- True repentance includes changed behavior: "*Bear fruit in keeping with repentance*" (Luke 3:8)
- Forgiveness doesn't mean no boundaries or consequences

- You can forgive and still protect yourself

God's heart:

"If he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." — Luke 17:4 (NASB)

Notice: "saying 'I repent.'" Repentance is required for reconciliation, not just for forgiveness.

5. "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16)

How it's misused:

Used to trap victims in dangerous, abusive marriages by conflating all divorce with sin.

The fuller truth:

- The full verse says God hates "him who covers his garment with wrong" (violence/treachery)
- God permits divorce for sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9)
- God permits divorce when an unbeliever abandons (1 Corinthians 7:15)
- God values human life and safety over preservation of marriage at all costs
- Many scholars interpret "porneia" (sexual immorality) broadly to include abuse

God's heart:

"The LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth... Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously." — Malachi 2:14 (NASB)

God is a witness against treachery. He sees the abuse. He doesn't demand you stay in it.

6. "Suffering produces perseverance" (Romans 5:3-4)

How it's misused:

Used to spiritualize abuse and prevent victims from escaping harm. "This is God's refining fire."

The fuller truth:

- Paul is describing suffering *for the gospel*, persecution for faith—not abuse in relationships
- God doesn't orchestrate abuse to teach you lessons
- Choosing to leave abuse isn't avoiding God's sanctification; it's honoring His design for safety and dignity
- God can redeem suffering, but He doesn't mandate you stay in it

God's heart:

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

God is in the business of healing, not prolonging harm.

7. "Touch not God's anointed" (1 Chronicles 16:22)

How it's misused:

Used by leaders to shield themselves from accountability, correction, or consequences.

The fuller truth:

- This verse is about God protecting His people Israel from harm, not about shielding abusive leaders
- Leaders are called to *higher* standards, not immunity (James 3:1)
- Paul publicly rebuked Peter when he was wrong (Galatians 2:11-14)
- Prophets confronted kings

- God Himself judges leaders harshly for abusing their position (Ezekiel 34)

God's heart:

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" — Jeremiah 23:1 (NASB)

God is angry at abusive leaders. He doesn't protect them—He confronts them.

The Pattern: Selective, Out-of-Context, Control-Oriented

Notice the pattern: Abusers use Scripture selectively, rip verses from context, and twist God's Word to serve their agenda of control.

This is satanic strategy. Satan himself quoted Scripture to Jesus during the temptation (Matthew 4:6), taking Psalm 91 out of context to tempt Jesus to sin.

Using Scripture doesn't mean someone is godly. The devil can quote the Bible too.

Distinguishing God's Voice from Manipulative Misuse of His Word

After spiritual abuse, you may struggle to discern what's actually God and what's the echo of your abuser's distortions. Here's how to tell the difference:

God's Voice vs. The Abuser's Voice

God's Voice

Brings peace (Philippians 4:7)

Is patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13:4)

The Abuser's Voice (Disguised as God)

Brings confusion and fear

Is harsh and demanding

God's Voice

Leads gently (Isaiah 40:11)

Gives freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Produces life (John 10:10)

Aligns with Scripture *in context*

Confirmed by wise counsel (Proverbs 11:14)

Produces fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

Convicts of specific sin to bring repentance

Values you as a person

The Abuser's Voice (Disguised as God)

Drives forcefully

Creates bondage

Produces death (spiritual, emotional)

Uses Scripture out of context

Isolates you from other input

Produces anxiety, shame, fear

Condemns your whole person to control

Values your compliance/usefulness

Questions to Ask When Someone Says "God Told Me..."

- 1. Does this align with Scripture *in context*?**
- 2. Does this produce the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of fear?**
- 3. Would Jesus say this, or does it contradict His character?**
- 4. Does this give the speaker power over me?**
- 5. Am I being asked to violate my conscience or ignore internal warning signals?**
- 6. Would godly, mature believers affirm this as God's voice?**
- 7. Is this invitation to freedom or coercion into bondage?**

If any of these raise red flags, you are right to question whether this is truly God's voice.

The True Character of God

To heal from spiritual abuse, you must encounter the real God—not the imposter your abuser presented.

What God Is NOT:

✗ God is not a narcissist.

He doesn't demand constant admiration, exploit your weaknesses, or discard you when you fail to meet His needs.

✗ God is not a gaslighter.

He doesn't make you doubt your own perceptions or twist reality to confuse you.

✗ God is not an abuser.

He doesn't use fear, shame, and control to manage you.

✗ God is not capricious.

His character doesn't change. His love isn't conditional on your performance.

✗ God is not silent when you need Him most.

He doesn't withhold His presence as punishment.

✗ God is not impossible to please.

He doesn't move the goalposts so you can never succeed.

What God IS:

- ✓ **God is love** (1 John 4:8)—not just loving, but love itself. His essence is love.
- ✓ **God is good** (Psalm 34:8)—always, unchangingly, completely good.
- ✓ **God is faithful** (1 Corinthians 1:9)—He keeps His promises; He doesn't abandon you.

- ✓ **God is just** (Deuteronomy 32:4)—He sees the abuse. He will judge wickedness.
- ✓ **God is compassionate** (Psalm 103:13)—like a father who tenderly cares for his children.
- ✓ **God is patient** (2 Peter 3:9)—He doesn't rush or pressure you.
- ✓ **God is gentle** (Matthew 11:29)—Jesus describes His own heart as gentle and humble.
- ✓ **God is near to the brokenhearted** (Psalm 34:18)—He doesn't distance Himself from your pain.
- ✓ **God is your defender** (Psalm 68:5)—He stands with victims, not oppressors.
- ✓ **God gives freedom** (Galatians 5:1)—He came to set captives free, not to enslave them.

Jesus: The Gentle Shepherd, Not the Accuser

One of the most important distinctions to make in healing from spiritual abuse is understanding **who Jesus actually is** versus who the abuser claimed Him to be.

The Abuser's False Jesus:

The Jesus presented by spiritual abusers is:

- Harsh and demanding
- Quick to anger, slow to show mercy
- Focused on your failures
- Impossible to please
- Using suffering as punishment
- Distant and conditional in His love

- Requiring perfection before acceptance
- Aligned with your abuser's agenda

This is not Jesus. This is a false christ.

The Real Jesus:

Look at how Jesus actually interacts with hurting, broken, "sinful" people in the Gospels:

With the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11):

The religious leaders (spiritual abusers) want to stone her. Jesus protects her, refuses to condemn her, and sends her away with dignity.

With the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42):

A woman with a complicated past, from a despised people group. Jesus doesn't shame her—He offers her living water and reveals Himself to her.

With Peter after his denial (John 21:15-19):

Peter betrayed Jesus three times. Jesus doesn't condemn him—He restores him with love and gives him purpose.

With the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12):

Jesus sees his need and meets it. When religious leaders criticize, Jesus defends the man and prioritizes his healing over their rules.

With children (Mark 10:13-16):

When disciples try to push children away, Jesus rebukes the disciples and welcomes the children, blessing them.

With the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-34):

She's been suffering for 12 years, considered unclean. Jesus doesn't rebuke her for touching Him—He calls her "daughter" and commends her faith.

Over and over, Jesus:

- Protects the vulnerable
- Confronts abusive religious leaders

- Prioritizes people over rules
- Extends compassion to the broken
- Offers rest to the weary
- Stands with the marginalized
- Defends those who cannot defend themselves

Jesus' Own Words About Himself:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

— Matthew 11:28-30 (NASB)

Gentle. Humble. Rest. Easy yoke. Light burden.

This is the opposite of spiritual abuse.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

— John 10:10 (NASB)

Your abuser stole from you, killed your joy, destroyed your peace. That's the thief.

Jesus came to give you **abundant life**. That's His heart.

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

— John 10:11 (NASB)

A good shepherd:

- Protects the sheep
- Doesn't exploit them
- Gives his life *for* them, not *against* them
- Seeks the lost, binds up the injured, strengthens the weak (Ezekiel 34:16)

Jesus is your good Shepherd. Your abuser was a wolf.

Healing from Religious Trauma: Restoring Trust in a Loving, Just God

Healing from spiritual abuse is a journey—often a long one. Here are steps to begin:

1. Give Yourself Permission to Be Angry at the Abuse

Many survivors feel guilty for being angry at spiritual abuse because they conflate anger at the *abuse* with anger at God.

Listen carefully: Being angry at what was done to you in God's name is not the same as being angry at God.

In fact, **God is angry about it too.**

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

— Matthew 18:6 (NASB)

Jesus has strong words for those who harm His children. Your anger aligns with His.

It's okay to be angry. It's okay to grieve. It's okay to name what happened as evil.

2. Separate the Abuser from God

You may need to actively, consciously untangle the two:

Exercise: The Separation List

Create two columns:

What My Abuser Did/Said	What God Actually Says/Does
Example: Used Scripture to shame me	God's Word brings life, not death (John 6:63)
Example: Made me feel I could never please them	God is pleased with me in Christ (Ephesians 1:6)
Example: Withheld love when I failed	God's love is unconditional and steadfast (Romans 8:38-39)

Work through this list slowly. For every lie the abuser told you about God, find the Scripture that reveals His true character.

3. Reread Scripture with Fresh Eyes

If the Bible has become triggering because of how it was weaponized, you may need to approach it differently:

Strategies:

- Start with the Gospels—watch Jesus interact with people
- Read Psalms—see David's raw honesty with God
- Avoid the verses that were weaponized against you until you've healed enough to see them in context
- Use a different translation than the one your abuser used
- Read with a trusted, trauma-informed spiritual director or counselor
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you God's heart, not the abuser's distortion

Suggested passages for healing:

- Psalm 23 (The Lord as loving Shepherd)
- Psalm 34 (God is near to the brokenhearted)

- Psalm 91 (God as protector and refuge)
- Isaiah 40:11 (God gently leads)
- Zephaniah 3:17 (God rejoices over you with singing)
- Matthew 11:28-30 (Jesus offers rest)
- Romans 8:31-39 (Nothing can separate you from God's love)
- 1 John 4:7-21 (God is love; perfect love casts out fear)

4. Rediscover God Through Creation, Not Just Religion

Sometimes you need to step away from formal religious settings and encounter God in:

- Nature (Psalm 19:1—the heavens declare His glory)
- Music (not worship music that's triggering, but beauty that moves you)
- Art (God is creative; creativity reflects Him)
- Silence (where His still, small voice can be heard)
- Service to others (encountering Christ in "the least of these")

Give yourself permission to find God outside the box your abuser tried to contain Him in.

5. Find Safe Spiritual Community (Eventually)

You may need a break from church. That's okay. Jesus isn't offended.

But eventually, safe community is important for healing. Look for:

Green flags:

- Leaders who are accountable to others
- Transparent financial practices

- Preaching that is expositional (verse-by-verse) rather than proof-texting
- Emphasis on God's love alongside His holiness
- Freedom to ask questions
- Diverse input and shared leadership
- Appropriate boundaries
- Trauma-informed care
- Takes abuse seriously
- Encourages believers to think critically

Red flags:

- One person has all the power
- Questioning is framed as rebellion
- Heavy emphasis on authority and submission
- Isolation from outside teaching
- Financial secrecy or pressure
- Shaming and fear-based motivation
- Love-bombing followed by control
- "Us vs. them" mentality
- Covering up abuse

If you're unsure, trust your gut. The Holy Spirit will guide you.

6. Work with a Trauma-Informed Spiritual Director or Therapist

Healing from spiritual abuse often requires professional help. Look for:

- A therapist who understands religious trauma

- A spiritual director who won't re-traumatize you
- Someone who validates your experience
- Someone who won't rush you back into church or spiritual practices

You can't heal in the same environment that wounded you. You need safe, skilled people to walk with you.

7. Reclaim Spiritual Practices That Were Hijacked

If prayer, worship, or Bible reading have become painful, you may need to:

- Take a break and give yourself permission to not engage for a season
- Reimagine what these practices look like for you
- Remove the abuser's voice from them

Prayer:

You don't have to use formulaic prayers or the language your abuser used. Talk to God like a father who loves you. Be honest. Be angry if you're angry. Be confused if you're confused.

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us."

— Romans 8:26 (NASB)

Worship:

Find music that moves you toward God without triggering you. It's okay to skip songs that were "yours and the abuser's." It's okay to worship in silence or through nature.

Scripture:

Read slowly. Read for connection with God, not out of obligation. It's okay to read devotionally rather than academically. Let the Word speak life, not law.

8. Process Your Doubts Honestly

Spiritual abuse often creates profound doubt:

- Doubt about God's goodness
- Doubt about His existence
- Doubt about whether any of it was ever real

These doubts are normal. They're not sin. They're the natural response to having your faith weaponized.

Safe places to process:

- Journaling
- Therapy
- Trusted friends who won't shame your questions
- Prayer (yes, you can tell God about your doubts—He already knows)

God is big enough to handle your questions. He's not offended by your struggle. He's grieved by what caused it.

Recognizing False Prophets and Abusive Leaders

Jesus warned us that false teachers would come. Here's how to recognize them:

By Their Fruits (Matthew 7:16-20)

Bad fruit includes:

- Division and strife
- Control and manipulation
- Fear-based compliance
- Financial exploitation

- Sexual misconduct
- Isolation from other input
- Crushing burdens placed on followers
- Leaders' personal gain at followers' expense
- Covering up sin rather than addressing it

Good fruit includes:

- Unity in diversity
- Freedom and invitation
- Love-motivated obedience
- Transparency and integrity
- Appropriate boundaries
- Connection to broader body of Christ
- Reasonable expectations
- Servant leadership
- Accountability and repentance when wrong

By Their Character (Ezekiel 34)

God condemns shepherds who:

- Feed themselves instead of the flock
- Exploit the weak
- Rule harshly and brutally
- Scatter the sheep
- Don't bind up the injured or strengthen the weak

These are the narcissistic leaders who abuse in God's name.

God promises to:

- Search for His sheep Himself
- Rescue them from bad shepherds
- Bind up the injured
- Seek the lost
- Bring justice

"I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick."

— Ezekiel 34:15-16 (NASB)

This is God's heart for you. If your leader doesn't reflect this, they're not operating in God's authority.

The Role of the Church in Enabling Abuse

Sometimes the spiritual abuse doesn't come from one person—it comes from an entire system that enables, covers up, or perpetuates harm.

Church communities can enable abuse when they:

- Prioritize the abuser's reputation over the victim's safety
- Pressure victims to forgive and reconcile without requiring repentance
- Use Matthew 18 to silence victims rather than address abusers
- Believe the charismatic leader over the "emotional" victim
- Frame leaving an abusive situation as "breaking covenant"
- Spiritualize domestic violence as "spiritual warfare in the marriage"
- Shame victims for going to authorities
- Misapply church discipline to victims instead of abusers

If your church enabled your abuse, it's not a safe place for your healing.

You may need to leave—not because you're leaving God, but because that community failed to reflect His heart.

Prayer of Release from Misused Authority

This prayer is for those who need to break spiritual ties to abusive religious authorities:

Father God, I come before You acknowledging that I have been spiritually abused. I have been controlled, manipulated, and wounded by someone who claimed to speak for You, to represent You, to embody Your will.

I have believed lies about You because of what they said and did in Your name. I have confused their voice with Yours. I have accepted treatment that contradicted Your character because I was told it was Your will.

I confess that I gave authority to [name/role] that belonged only to You. I allowed them to become a mediator between You and me. I silenced my own discernment because they claimed to have greater spiritual insight.

I now renounce that false authority. I take back the power I gave them. I reject every lie they told me about You, about myself, about Your will for my life.

By the authority I have as Your child, purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, I break every ungodly spiritual tie to [name/role]. I release them from any hold they have on my spiritual life. I sever any cord of manipulation, control, fear, or false obligation.

I renounce:

- *The lie that their will was Your will*
- *The lie that questioning them was rebelling against You*
- *The lie that my suffering under them was Your design*
- *The lie that leaving them means leaving You*

- *Every false teaching that contradicted Your Word*
- *Every shame-based message that attacked my identity in Christ*

I reclaim my direct access to You through Jesus Christ. I declare that I can hear Your voice, discern Your will, and walk in Your truth without needing them as an intermediary.

Holy Spirit, I invite You to be my teacher, my guide, my comforter. Reveal to me the true character of the Father. Show me Jesus as He really is—gentle, humble, compassionate, the defender of the oppressed.

Heal my view of You. Restore my trust in Your goodness. Help me to read Your Word with fresh eyes, free from the distortions I was taught.

I choose to believe:

- *You are love, not control*
- *You offer freedom, not bondage*
- *You are gentle, not harsh*
- *You value me, not just my usefulness*
- *Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light*

Protect me from future spiritual abuse. Give me discernment to recognize false teaching. Surround me with safe, healthy spiritual community. Lead me to teachers who reflect Your true heart.

I release [name/role] to You. Their soul is not my responsibility. Their sin is not my fault. Their healing is not my burden. I entrust them to Your justice and Your mercy.

Thank You for rescuing me. Thank You for being nothing like the false version of You I was taught. Thank You for Your patience as I heal.

I am Yours. I belong to You alone. No human authority stands between us. The veil was torn. I have access to You through Christ.

In Jesus' name—the true Jesus, the gentle Shepherd, the defender of the oppressed—Amen.

Rebuilding Faith: Practical Exercises

Exercise 1: The "God I Was Taught vs. God of Scripture" Journal

For 30 days, each day:

1. Write one thing you were taught about God through the abuse
2. Find a Scripture that reveals His true character
3. Write a prayer releasing the lie and receiving the truth

Example:

- **Lie taught:** God is disappointed in me and will punish me for my failures
- **Scripture truth:** *"There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1)
- **Prayer:** *Father, I release the lie that You are disappointed in me. I receive the truth that I am in Christ, and therefore not condemned. You are pleased with me because of Jesus. Help me live from this truth.*

Exercise 2: Encountering Jesus in the Gospels

Read one Gospel story per week where Jesus interacts with someone.

Ask:

- How does Jesus treat this person?
- What does this reveal about His character?
- If I were in this story, how would Jesus respond to me?

Suggested stories:

- Woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11)
- Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- Prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)
- Woman at the well (John 4:1-42)
- Bleeding woman (Mark 5:25-34)
- Peter's restoration (John 21:15-19)

Exercise 3: Writing Letters to God

You may struggle with traditional prayer. Try writing letters to God instead:

Letter 1: The Angry Letter

Tell God everything you're angry about. Don't hold back. Be raw and honest.

Letter 2: The Confused Letter

Tell God all your questions, doubts, and confusion. Ask Him why He allowed this.

Letter 3: The Grieving Letter

Tell God what you've lost—your innocence, your trust, your joy.

Letter 4: The Listening Letter

After pouring out your heart, sit in silence. Then write what you sense God saying back to you (filter it through Scripture and wise counsel).

Exercise 4: The Names of God Meditation

When the abuser distorted God's character, anchor yourself in His biblical names:

- **Jehovah Rapha** (The Lord who heals) - Exodus 15:26
- **Jehovah Shalom** (The Lord is peace) - Judges 6:24

- **Jehovah Roi** (The Lord my Shepherd) - Psalm 23:1
- **El Roi** (The God who sees me) - Genesis 16:13
- **Abba** (Father) - Romans 8:15
- **Immanuel** (God with us) - Matthew 1:23

Choose one name per week. Meditate on it. Journal about what that name means for your healing.

Exercise 5: Truth Declarations

Speak these truths aloud daily until they sink deeper than the lies:

I am known by God (Psalm 139:1-4)

I am loved by God (1 John 3:1)

I am chosen by God (1 Peter 2:9)

I am free in Christ (Galatians 5:1)

I am not condemned (Romans 8:1)

I have direct access to God (Hebrews 4:16)

I can discern truth from lies (1 John 2:27)

I am the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19)

God's plans for me are good (Jeremiah 29:11)

Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18)

A Word About Forgiveness

You may have been told you must forgive your spiritual abuser to heal. Let's be clear about what forgiveness is and isn't:

Forgiveness IS:

- An internal release of bitterness for your own freedom
- A process, not a one-time event

- Possible even when the abuser doesn't repent
- Letting go of the right to vengeance (Romans 12:19)

Forgiveness IS NOT:

- Reconciliation (that requires repentance and changed behavior)
- Forgetting what happened
- Trusting them again
- Returning to relationship with them
- Excusing or minimizing the abuse
- Happening on someone else's timeline

You can forgive and still:

- Have boundaries
- Refuse to return to unsafe relationships
- Acknowledge the harm that was done
- Seek justice
- Feel anger about what happened
- Take time to heal before even thinking about forgiveness

God doesn't pressure you to forgive on a timeline. He walks with you through the process.

The Journey Forward

Healing from spiritual abuse is not about leaving faith behind—it's about finding authentic faith for the first time.

It's about:

- Knowing God as He actually is, not as the abuser portrayed Him

- Experiencing Jesus as the gentle Shepherd, not the harsh taskmaster
- Hearing the Holy Spirit's voice without the static of manipulation
- Reading Scripture as life-giving truth, not weaponized control
- Finding community that reflects Christ's love, not religious abuse
- Walking in freedom, not bondage

This is the gospel:

Christ came to set captives free (Luke 4:18).

He came that you might have abundant life (John 10:10).

He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

Your spiritual abuse was the work of the devil, not the work of God.

And Jesus came to destroy it—to heal you, to restore you, to bring you into the full freedom of being His beloved child.

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."

— Isaiah 61:1 (NASB)

This is Jesus' mission.

This is what He's doing in your life right now.

You are being set free.

Reflection Questions

1. How was Scripture or spiritual authority weaponized against you?
2. What lies about God did you internalize because of spiritual abuse?
3. Which characteristics of God (love, gentleness, faithfulness) feel hardest to believe right now?

4. What spiritual practices (prayer, worship, Bible reading) have become painful or triggering?
5. What would it look like to encounter Jesus with fresh eyes, separate from the abuser's distortions?

Closing Prayer

Father God—Abba, my true Father—I come to You wounded by those who claimed to speak for You.

My faith has been weaponized. Your Word has been twisted. Your name has been used to control and harm me. And I don't know how to trust anymore—not spiritual leaders, not religious institutions, not even You.

But I want to. Deep in my soul, I want to know You as You truly are. Not the harsh, demanding, impossible-to-please god my abuser portrayed. But You—the Father who runs to meet the prodigal, the Shepherd who carries the wounded lamb, the God who collects my tears in a bottle.

Show me who You really are. Reveal Jesus to me—not the false Christ used to shame me, but the true Jesus who defended the woman caught in adultery, who welcomed children, who stood up to abusive religious leaders, who gave His life to set me free.

Holy Spirit, be my teacher now. Undo the damage. Untangle the lies from the truth. Give me discernment to recognize when someone is speaking for themselves and calling it Your voice.

Heal my ability to read Your Word without flinching. Let Scripture become life-giving again, not a weapon. Let prayer become conversation again, not performance. Let worship become genuine again, not manipulation.

I release every person who abused me spiritually into Your hands. Their sin is not mine to carry. Their soul is not mine to save. Their judgment is Yours, not mine.

Protect me from future spiritual abuse. Give me wisdom to recognize red flags. Lead me to safe community where Your true character is reflected. Surround me with people who will speak truth, not control.

I choose to believe—even when it's hard, even when I'm not sure—that You are good. That You are love. That You are for me, not against me. That my suffering was never Your will. That You see what was done to me, and You are angry about it too.

Restore my faith, Lord. Not religious performance, but genuine relationship. Not fear-based obedience, but love-motivated devotion. Not bondage, but the glorious freedom of Your children.

Thank You for being nothing like what I was taught. Thank You for Your patience with my doubt. Thank You for the healing that is beginning, even now.

I am Yours. And You are mine. And no one—no abuser, no false teacher, no religious system—stands between us anymore.

In the name of Jesus—the true Jesus, the gentle Savior, the Liberator of captives—Amen.

Chapter 7: Forgiving Without Reconciling

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

— Ephesians 4:32 (NASB)

"You need to forgive them."

"If you don't forgive, you're the one who's sinning."

"Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

"Jesus forgave those who crucified Him. Can't you forgive this?"

"Your bitterness is blocking God's blessing in your life."

If you've heard these statements—or variations of them—you know the weight they carry. The pressure. The guilt. The implication that your healing is contingent on forgiving someone who hurt you deeply, who may not be sorry, who might still be dangerous.

And underneath the pressure is a question that haunts many survivors: **"If I don't forgive, am I defying God? Am I the problem now?"**

Here is the truth you need to hear at the beginning of this chapter:

Forgiveness is essential for your healing. But forgiveness does not mean reconciliation. It does not mean trusting again. It does not mean reopening the door to someone who abused you. It does not mean forgetting what happened or pretending it wasn't that bad.

Forgiveness is not permission for continued abuse.

This chapter is about untangling the confusion around forgiveness, understanding what God actually asks of us, and learning how to release the burden of bitterness without compromising your safety, dignity, or boundaries.

The Forgiveness Confusion: What Most People Get Wrong

In many Christian circles, forgiveness has been conflated with a host of other concepts that are actually distinct from it. This conflation creates immense harm to survivors because they're told they must do things God never required.

What People Often Mean When They Say "You Must Forgive":

When well-meaning (or manipulative) people pressure you to forgive, they usually mean some combination of:

1. **Reconcile with the person** (return to relationship)
2. **Trust them again** (give them access to your life)
3. **Stop talking about what happened** (pretend it's in the past)
4. **Stop feeling hurt or angry** (suppress your emotions)
5. **Forget the offense** (erase your memory)
6. **Excuse their behavior** ("They didn't mean it")
7. **Minimize the harm** ("It wasn't that bad")
8. **Give them another chance** (expose yourself to further abuse)
9. **Let them off the hook** (remove consequences)
10. **Do it immediately** (on their timeline, not yours)

Here's the problem: None of these are biblical forgiveness.

When these things are presented as requirements for forgiveness, survivors are placed in an impossible position: either compromise their safety and healing, or live under condemnation for "unforgiveness."

This is a false dilemma. There is a third way—the biblical way.

What Biblical Forgiveness Actually Is

Let's go back to Scripture and examine what forgiveness truly means.

The Greek Words for Forgiveness:

The New Testament uses primarily two Greek words:

- 1. Aphiēmi (ἀφίημι)** — "to send away, to let go, to release, to cancel a debt"
- 2. Charizomai (χαρίζομαι)** — "to show grace, to grant forgiveness as an act of grace"

Notice what these words mean:

- Releasing a claim
- Letting go of the debt they owe you
- Canceling their obligation to make it right
- Choosing grace over revenge

Notice what these words DON'T mean:

- Pretending it didn't happen
- Trusting them with your heart again
- Allowing them back into your life
- Immediately resuming relationship

Biblical Forgiveness Is:

1. An Internal Release

Forgiveness is first and foremost something that happens *in your heart*, not in the relationship. It's releasing the right to personal vengeance and entrusting justice to God.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

— Romans 12:19 (NASB)

2. A Decision to Stop Holding the Debt

When someone wrongs you, they incur a debt—they owe you an apology, restitution, changed behavior. Forgiveness means you stop demanding they pay you back. You release them from owing you.

This doesn't mean they face no consequences. It means you're not the one administering punishment or demanding repayment.

3. A Choice to Not Let Bitterness Control You

Unforgiveness, when it hardens into bitterness, becomes a prison. You're shackled to the person who hurt you through your hatred of them.

"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."

— Hebrews 12:15 (NASB)

Forgiveness frees you from that prison. Not for their sake—for yours.

4. An Ongoing Process, Not a One-Time Event

The Bible speaks of forgiving "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22)—not because you'll be abused 490 times, but because forgiveness is often a process. You may need to forgive the same offense multiple times as new layers of pain surface.

5. Possible Without the Offender's Participation

You can forgive someone who:

- Never apologizes
- Doesn't think they did anything wrong
- Is deceased
- You have no contact with
- Is still actively harming others

Your forgiveness doesn't require their cooperation. It's between you and God.

What Biblical Forgiveness Is NOT

It's equally important to understand what forgiveness doesn't mean:

Forgiveness Does NOT Mean:

1. Reconciliation

Forgiveness is unilateral (you can do it alone). Reconciliation is bilateral (requires both parties).

2. Trusting Them Again

Forgiveness is given freely. Trust is earned over time through demonstrated change.

3. Forgetting What Happened

God may forget our sins (Hebrews 8:12), but humans don't have selective amnesia. Forgiveness means you don't use the memory as a weapon, but you're allowed to remember for your protection.

4. Excusing the Behavior

Forgiveness doesn't say "It's okay." It says "It was wrong, and I'm releasing you to God."

5. Immediate Restoration

You can forgive someone and still maintain boundaries, distance, or no contact.

6. No Consequences

You can forgive and still press charges, divorce, end the relationship, or allow natural consequences.

7. Suppressing Your Emotions

You can forgive and still feel hurt, angry, or sad about what happened.

Forgiveness doesn't erase emotional pain.

8. Happening on Someone Else's Timeline

Forgiveness is a process. No one gets to tell you when you should be "over it."

9. Giving Them Another Chance

You can forgive seventy times seven and still never allow them back into your life.

10. Enabling Continued Sin

True love doesn't cover up abuse or enable destruction. Sometimes the most loving thing is to allow consequences.

The Critical Distinction: Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

This is perhaps the most important section of this chapter, because **confusing forgiveness with reconciliation keeps countless survivors in bondage.**

Forgiveness:

- Requires one person
- Can happen without the offender's knowledge
- Releases internal bitterness
- Is commanded unconditionally

Reconciliation:

- Requires two people
- Cannot happen without mutual participation
- Restores relationship
- Is conditional on repentance

Biblical evidence for this distinction:

1. Jesus Forgave from the Cross, But Reconciliation Came Later

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
— Luke 23:34 (NASB)

Jesus forgave those who crucified Him *in the moment*. But were they immediately reconciled to God? No. Reconciliation came when individuals repented and believed (Acts 2:37-41).

Forgiveness was immediate. Reconciliation required response.

2. God Forgives, But Not Everyone Is Reconciled to Him

God offers forgiveness to all, but not all accept it. He extends grace, but doesn't force reconciliation.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them."

— 2 Corinthians 5:19 (NASB)

The offer is universal. The reconciliation is conditional on receiving Christ.

If God Himself doesn't force reconciliation, why would we be required to?

3. Paul and Barnabas: Forgiveness Without Reconciliation

Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over Mark (Acts 15:36-41). They parted ways. There's no biblical record of reconciliation, yet both continued effective ministry.

Not every broken relationship must be restored. Sometimes the healthiest thing is to separate peacefully.

4. David and Absalom: A Tragic Example

David tried to reconcile with his son Absalom without dealing with the underlying issues (2 Samuel 14). The result? Absalom attempted a coup and died in rebellion.

Premature reconciliation without true repentance can be dangerous.

Why Reconciliation Is Unsafe with Unrepentant Narcissists

Here's the difficult truth: **Most narcissists are not capable of the genuine repentance required for safe reconciliation.**

What True Repentance Looks Like:

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* (μετάνοια)—a fundamental change of mind and direction.

Biblical repentance includes:

1. Acknowledgment of Specific Sin

Not vague apologies like "I'm sorry if I hurt you" or "I'm sorry you felt that way." But: "I manipulated you. I lied to you. I controlled you. What I did was wrong."

2. Taking Full Responsibility

No blame-shifting, no excuses, no "but you..." True repentance says: "This was my fault. I am responsible."

3. Genuine Remorse

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

— 2 Corinthians 7:10 (NASB)

Godly sorrow grieves the sin itself. Worldly sorrow grieves getting caught or facing consequences.

4. Changed Behavior Over Time

"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

— Matthew 3:8 (NASB)

True repentance produces lasting change, not temporary compliance to win you back.

5. Making Amends Where Possible

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before

the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother."

— Matthew 5:23-24 (NASB)

True repentance seeks to make things right, not just get forgiveness.

6. Patience with Your Process

True repentance respects your need for time, space, and boundaries. It doesn't pressure or manipulate.

7. Submission to Accountability

True repentance welcomes oversight, counseling, and accountability structures.

What Narcissists Offer Instead (False Repentance):

1. The Non-Apology

- "I'm sorry you feel that way"
- "I'm sorry if I hurt you"
- "Mistakes were made"

2. The Conditional Apology

- "I'm sorry, but you..."
- "I wouldn't have done it if you hadn't..."

3. The Self-Pitying Apology

- "I'm such a terrible person"
- "I don't deserve you"
- (Making you comfort them for their wrongdoing)

4. The Minimizing Apology

- "I'm sorry, it wasn't that big of a deal"
- "I'm sorry you're so sensitive"

5. The Pressure Apology

- "I said I'm sorry, what more do you want?"
- "How many times do I have to apologize?"
- "I thought Christians forgive"

6. The Performative Apology

- Grand gestures
- Public declarations
- Temporary change to win you back (love-bombing 2.0)

7. The Spiritual Manipulation Apology

- "God has forgiven me, so you have to"
- "I've repented to God, that's all that matters"
- "God told me you need to give me another chance"

Why Reconciliation Is Dangerous Without True Repentance:

1. It Enables Continued Abuse

Without genuine change, you're returning to the same dynamic.

2. It Teaches Them Manipulation Works

If fake apologies get you back, they'll use fake apologies forever.

3. It Exposes You to Further Harm

You're vulnerable. They know your weaknesses. They'll exploit them again.

4. It Damages Your Children (If Applicable)

Children learn from your example. Reconciling with an unrepentant abuser teaches them to tolerate abuse.

5. It Prevents Real Healing

You can't heal in the environment that wounded you.

6. It Reinforces Their Delusion

If you return, they assume nothing was really that wrong. Their distorted view of reality is confirmed.

7. It Often Gets Worse

Many survivors report that post-reconciliation abuse is more severe because the narcissist is angry you left in the first place.

The Theology of Forgiveness: Jesus as Our Model

Let's look carefully at how Jesus modeled forgiveness—because His example is our guide.

Jesus Forgave on the Cross:

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

— Luke 23:34 (NASB)

What Jesus Did:

- Forgave those actively harming Him
- Released them from the debt they owed
- Prayed for their souls
- Did not retaliate

What Jesus Did NOT Do:

- Minimize what they were doing ("It's okay, crucifixion isn't that bad")
- Immediately trust them
- Come down from the cross to restore relationship with them
- Remove the consequences of their actions

Jesus forgave from the cross, but reconciliation came later—when individuals repented and believed.

The thief on the cross was forgiven and reconciled immediately (Luke 23:43). Peter was restored after he wept bitterly and was confronted in love (John 21). Paul was struck blind and transformed (Acts 9).

Each experienced reconciliation, but only after genuine repentance.

Jesus and Judas: Forgiveness Without Reconciliation

Jesus knew Judas would betray Him. At the Last Supper, He washed Judas's feet (John 13). He gave him opportunity to repent. But when Judas hardened his heart, Jesus let him go.

"Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'"

— John 13:27 (NASB)

Jesus didn't chase Judas. He didn't force reconciliation. He released him.

Jesus modeled:

- Loving your enemy (washing Judas's feet)
- Offering opportunity for repentance
- Releasing those who choose betrayal
- Not forcing relationship with unrepentant people

Jesus and the Religious Leaders: Strong Boundaries

Jesus called out the Pharisees' hypocrisy publicly (Matthew 23). He overturned tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13). He didn't soften His words to keep the peace.

When they sought to kill Him, He withdrew (John 10:39-40). He didn't stay in dangerous situations to prove He'd forgiven them.

Jesus modeled:

- Confronting sin directly
- Maintaining boundaries for safety
- Not subjecting Himself to abuse in the name of love

Jesus' Teaching on Forgiveness and Reconciliation:

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

— Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB)

Notice the progression:

1. Confront privately
2. Bring witnesses
3. Involve the church
4. If they refuse to repent, **separate from them**

Jesus doesn't say "forgive them and pretend it never happened." He says confront the sin, and if they won't repent, **create distance**.

Forgiveness doesn't mean no boundaries. Jesus modeled both.

The Process of Forgiving Without Reconciling

So how do you actually do this? How do you forgive someone you're no longer in relationship with?

Step 1: Grieve the Debt You'll Never Collect

The hardest part of forgiveness is accepting that the person who hurt you will likely never:

- Truly understand what they did
- Offer a genuine apology
- Make amends
- Give you closure

You must grieve the apology you'll never receive, the acknowledgment you'll never hear, the justice that may never come in this lifetime.

This is painful. Let yourself feel it. Cry about it. Be angry about it. Bring it to God.

"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?"

— Psalm 56:8 (NASB)

God sees. He records. Even if they never acknowledge it, **He knows the truth.**

Step 2: Name the Specific Offenses

Forgiveness isn't vague. It's specific.

Journaling Exercise:

Write: "I forgive [name] for..."

Then list every specific thing:

- Lying to me about ____
- Manipulating me by ____
- Gaslighting me when ____
- Using my vulnerabilities against me
- Isolating me from ____
- Weaponizing Scripture to ____
- Stealing ____ years of my life
- Damaging my ability to trust
- Harming my children by ____

This isn't dwelling on the past—it's bringing it into the light so you can release it.

You can't forgive what you haven't named.

Step 3: Feel the Full Weight of the Hurt

Before you can release something, you must acknowledge how heavy it is.

Many survivors rush to forgiveness because they're uncomfortable with their anger or pain. But **premature forgiveness is just suppression.**

Permission to feel:

- Angry at what they did
- Sad about what you lost
- Betrayed by their deception
- Devastated by the damage

These feelings are not unforgiveness. They're honest acknowledgment of harm.

Forgiveness doesn't mean you stop feeling the pain. It means you don't let the pain turn into bitterness that poisons your soul.

Step 4: Release Them to God's Justice

This is the core of forgiveness: transferring the judgment from your hands to God's.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

— Romans 12:19 (NASB)

What you're releasing:

- Your right to make them pay
- Your attempts to punish them

- Your desire to make them understand/feel what you felt
- Your energy spent obsessing over what they deserve

What you're trusting:

- God sees everything they did
- God is just—He will bring ultimate justice
- God's judgment is perfect—better than yours would be
- God's timing is wise—even if it doesn't happen in your lifetime

Step 5: Bless Them (From a Distance)

Jesus gives a command that feels impossible:

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
— Matthew 5:44 (NASB)

This doesn't mean:

- Returning to relationship
- Trusting them
- Exposing yourself to them

It means:

- Praying for their soul
- Hoping they come to genuine repentance
- Wishing them redemption (not revenge)

A prayer for your abuser (that protects your heart):

"God, I pray for [name]. I pray that You would convict their heart, break through their delusion, and bring them to genuine repentance. I pray they would come to know true love, true humility, true transformation. Not so they can come

back into my life, but so their soul would be saved. I release them to You. Amen."

Notice: You can pray for their soul without wanting them back in your life.

Step 6: Stop Rehearsing the Offense

Forgiveness means you stop replaying the hurt, stop imagining revenge scenarios, stop fantasizing about them finally understanding.

This doesn't mean you forget. It means you redirect your thoughts when they spiral.

When you find yourself obsessing:

1. Acknowledge: "I'm thinking about [name] again"
2. Redirect: "I've given this to God. I don't need to carry it"
3. Replace: Focus on something present—prayer, gratitude, a task, connection with safe people

Scripture to meditate on: *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."*

— Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

Obsessing over your abuser is none of these things.

Step 7: Accept That Forgiveness Is a Process

You may need to forgive the same person hundreds of times—not because you're doing it wrong, but because:

- New memories surface
- New layers of pain emerge

- Triggers remind you of the hurt
- You discover new damage they caused

Each time, return to the process:

- Name the hurt
- Feel it
- Release it to God

This is not failure. This is healing layer by layer.

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

— Lamentations 3:22-23 (NASB)

New mercies. Every morning. Including mercy for yourself when forgiveness feels impossible.

Responding to Pressure to Reconcile

Well-meaning people—or manipulative ones—may pressure you to reconcile. Here's how to respond:

"You need to forgive them."

Response: "I have forgiven them in my heart. I've released them to God's justice. But forgiveness doesn't require me to return to an unsafe relationship."

"The Bible says to forgive seventy times seven."

Response: "Yes, and I will continue forgiving as many times as needed. But Jesus also teaches us to confront sin and, if there's no repentance, to separate (Matthew 18:15-17). I'm following His full teaching."

"God hates divorce / family division / broken relationships."

Response: "God also hates violence, oppression, and abuse (Malachi 2:16 in context; Psalm 11:5). He values my safety and wellbeing. Sometimes separation is the loving thing to do."

"What about your children? They need both parents."

Response: "My children need to be safe and to see healthy boundaries modeled. I will not expose them to abuse to maintain the appearance of an intact family."

"You're being unforgiving / bitter / holding a grudge."

Response: "I'm setting boundaries to protect myself and my healing. That's not bitterness—it's wisdom. I've entrusted judgment to God, which is the definition of forgiveness."

"How do you know they haven't changed?"

Response: "If they've genuinely changed, they'll respect my boundaries, give me time, and prove it through sustained transformation over months or years. They won't pressure me for immediate reconciliation."

"Jesus reconciled with Peter after he denied Him."

Response: "Yes, after Peter wept bitterly in repentance and Jesus gently restored him (John 21). If my abuser shows the same kind of genuine repentance and God leads me to reconcile, I'll be open to it. Until then, I'm protecting myself."

When You're Stuck in Unforgiveness

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you find yourself unable to forgive. The bitterness feels too strong. The anger too justified. The hurt too deep.

This is normal. This doesn't make you a bad Christian.

Why You Might Be Stuck:

1. You Haven't Fully Grieved

You're trying to forgive before you've allowed yourself to feel the full weight of the loss.

2. You're Confusing Forgiveness with Excusing

You fear that forgiving means saying what they did was okay.

3. You're Being Pressured

External pressure creates internal resistance. You can't forgive on someone else's timeline.

4. The Abuse Is Ongoing

It's nearly impossible to forgive someone who's still actively harming you. Safety first, forgiveness later.

5. You Haven't Experienced Justice

When there are no consequences, no accountability, no validation of your experience, forgiveness feels like letting them "win."

6. You're Afraid

You worry that if you forgive, you'll let your guard down and be hurt again.

7. It's Too Soon

Some wounds are so deep that forgiveness is a long-term process, not a short-term task.

What to Do When You're Stuck:

1. Confess Your Struggle to God

"Father, I want to forgive, but I can't. The hurt is too deep. The anger is too strong. I need Your help. I surrender my inability to forgive. Will You do in my heart what I cannot do on my own?"

2. Ask for the Gift of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is ultimately a grace from God, not something you manufacture through willpower.

"Lord, give me the grace to forgive as You have forgiven me. I can't do this in my own strength."

3. Focus on Your Own Forgiveness First

Meditate on how much God has forgiven you. Not to guilt yourself, but to soften your heart.

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

— Ephesians 4:32 (NASB)

4. Give Yourself Time

Stop beating yourself up for not being there yet. Healing is not linear.

5. Work with a Counselor

Sometimes unforgiveness is layered with complex trauma that requires professional help to untangle.

6. Seek Justice Appropriately

Sometimes what you need before you can forgive is to see accountability. File the police report. Get the restraining order. Pursue the divorce. These aren't "unforgiveness"—they're appropriate consequences.

The Freedom of Forgiveness Without Reconciliation

Here's what life looks like when you've forgiven but not reconciled:

You Are Free:

✓ To remember without bitterness

You can acknowledge what happened without it consuming you.

✓ To set boundaries without guilt

You protect yourself not out of revenge, but out of wisdom.

✓ **To wish them well from a distance**

You hope they find redemption, but not through access to you.

✓ **To invest your energy elsewhere**

You're no longer obsessing over them or what they did.

✓ **To trust God with justice**

You've released the outcome to Him.

✓ **To live in peace**

Not because everything is resolved, but because you're no longer carrying the weight of unforgiveness.

✓ **To have joy again**

Bitterness no longer poisons every area of your life.

✓ **To love again**

You're not holding everyone else responsible for what one person did.

Prayer Practice: Placing the Offender on God's Altar

This is a powerful exercise for releasing the burden of unforgiveness while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

The Altar Prayer

Find a quiet place. Have paper and pen available.

Step 1: Write Their Name and the Offense

On a piece of paper, write:

- The person's name
- The specific things they did
- The impact it had on you

Step 2: Bring It Before God

"Father, I bring [name] before You. I bring every hurt, every betrayal, every wound they caused. I've been carrying this, and it's too heavy. I can't carry it anymore."

Step 3: Acknowledge Your Desire for Justice

"God, part of me wants them to hurt the way they hurt me. Part of me wants them to finally understand. Part of me wants revenge. I'm being honest with You about where I am."

Step 4: Release Them to God's Justice

"But vengeance is Yours, not mine. Judgment is Yours, not mine. Justice belongs to You. I place [name] on Your altar. I release them from my court to Yours. You are the Judge. You will handle this better than I ever could."

Step 5: Ask for Freedom from Bitterness

"Lord, I don't want to be poisoned by bitterness. I don't want to give them power over my peace. Release me from the chains of unforgiveness. Give me the grace to forgive as You have forgiven me."

Step 6: Declare the Release

"I choose to forgive [name] for [specific offenses]. I release them to You. I cancel the debt they owe me. I will not pursue revenge. I will not harbor bitterness. I am free. They are no longer on my shoulders—they are on Your altar."

Step 7: Physical Act of Release

- Burn the paper (safely)
- Tear it up and throw it away
- Bury it

This physical act symbolizes the spiritual reality: you've released them.

Step 8: Pray for Protection and Boundaries

"Father, I've forgiven, but I also need protection. Give me wisdom to maintain healthy boundaries. Don't let my forgiveness be mistaken for an open door to further harm. Protect me, guide me, keep me safe as I walk in freedom."

Step 9: Receive God's Peace

Sit in silence. Receive the peace of God that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7).

You may need to repeat this prayer multiple times as different layers surface. That's okay.

A Word to Those Who Feel Guilty for Not Reconciling

If you've forgiven but chosen not to reconcile, and you feel guilty about it, hear this:

God is not disappointed in you.

He doesn't require you to subject yourself to ongoing abuse to prove you've forgiven.

He doesn't ask you to be a martyr to someone else's dysfunction.

He doesn't demand you sacrifice your peace on the altar of someone else's ego.

You can be fully obedient to God's command to forgive and fully wise in your decision not to reconcile.

These are not contradictory. They are complementary.

Jesus forgave Judas. But He didn't beg Judas to stay.

Jesus loved the rich young ruler. But He let him walk away.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. But He didn't force them to receive Him.

Forgiveness releases. It doesn't chase. It doesn't cling. It doesn't sacrifice safety for sentiment.

You are allowed to forgive and still say no.

You are allowed to release bitterness and still maintain boundaries.

You are allowed to pray for their soul and protect your own.

This is not a lack of love. This is wisdom. And wisdom is a fruit of the Spirit too.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you been confusing forgiveness with reconciliation? How has that confusion affected you?
2. What specific offenses do you need to name in order to forgive?
3. What are you afraid will happen if you forgive?
4. In what ways are you still trying to collect a debt from your abuser (trying to make them understand, apologize, change)?
5. What would it look like to release them to God's justice while maintaining your boundaries?

Closing Prayer

Father God, this is hard. Forgiving feels like letting them off the hook. It feels like saying what they did was okay. It feels like I'm the one who has to do all the work while they get away with everything.

But I know that's not what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is not for them—it's for me. It's not excusing them—it's releasing me. It's not about them deserving it—it's about me being free.

So I come before You today and I lay [name] on Your altar. I've been carrying them on my shoulders—carrying the anger, the bitterness, the desire for revenge—and I can't carry them anymore. They're Yours. Judgment is Yours. Justice is Yours. Vengeance is Yours.

I forgive [name] for:

[Take time to list the specific offenses]

I release them from the debt they owe me. I cancel their obligation to make it right. Not because they deserve it, but because You've commanded it, and because I need freedom more than I need revenge.

But Father, I also need Your protection. Forgiving doesn't mean I have to let them back into my life. It doesn't mean I have to trust them again. It doesn't mean I have to be unsafe.

Give me wisdom to maintain boundaries. Give me strength to resist pressure to reconcile when reconciliation would be dangerous. Give me peace that I'm doing the right thing even when others don't understand.

Heal my heart from the bitterness that has taken root. Pull it up by the roots so it doesn't poison me anymore. Replace it with Your peace, Your joy, Your freedom.

If [name] ever comes to genuine repentance, show me clearly. Until then, help me walk in the freedom of forgiveness without the bondage of reconciliation.

I trust You, Father. I trust that You see everything. I trust that You are just. I trust that You will handle this better than I ever could.

Thank You for forgiving me—not because I deserved it, but because of Your grace. Help me extend that same grace, from a distance, to those who hurt me.

I am free. I am released. I am no longer in bondage to bitterness.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 8: Rebuilding Self-Trust

"The LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught."

— Proverbs 3:26 (NASB)

"I don't trust myself anymore."

"What if I'm wrong again?"

"What if I choose another narcissist?"

"What if my judgment is just broken?"

"I second-guess everything now."

"I don't know what I feel, what I want, what I think."

"I'm afraid to make decisions because I made such a terrible one before."

If these thoughts echo in your mind, you're experiencing one of the most insidious effects of narcissistic abuse: **the complete fracturing of self-trust.**

You once believed you were a reasonably good judge of character. You trusted your instincts. You made decisions with confidence. You knew what you felt, what you wanted, what was true.

And then you met someone who systematically dismantled all of that.

They gaslit you until you doubted your own memory. They manipulated you until you couldn't trust your perceptions. They confused you until you didn't know what was real. They conditioned you to override every internal warning signal until the voice of your own discernment became silent.

And now, even though they're gone, the damage remains.

You stand at a crossroads, afraid to move forward because you don't trust yourself to choose the right path. You question every feeling, analyze every

thought, second-guess every decision—paralyzed by the fear that your judgment is fundamentally broken.

But here is the truth you need to hear: **Your discernment isn't broken. It was broken into. It can be restored.**

This chapter is about the sacred, gradual, grace-filled process of learning to trust yourself again—not independent of God, but *in partnership with Him*. Because when Scripture says "The LORD will be your confidence," it doesn't mean you abdicate all self-trust and become a passive vessel. It means your confidence is *anchored* in Him, *informed* by Him, and *sustained* by Him—but you still have a self to trust.

God created you with the capacity for discernment, intuition, wisdom, and choice. Narcissistic abuse didn't destroy those capacities. It buried them under layers of manipulation, fear, and doubt.

It's time to excavate what was buried and rebuild what was broken.

How Narcissistic Abuse Fractures Self-Trust

Before we can rebuild, we must understand what was broken and how.

The Mechanisms of Self-Trust Destruction

Narcissistic abuse doesn't accidentally damage your self-trust—it **systematically targets it**. Here's how:

1. Gaslighting Erodes Confidence in Your Perceptions

When someone repeatedly tells you that what you saw didn't happen, what you heard wasn't said, what you felt was wrong—you begin to doubt your basic ability to perceive reality.

The result: You stop trusting your eyes, ears, memory, and judgment.

2. Emotional Invalidation Destroys Confidence in Your Feelings

When your emotions are consistently dismissed, minimized, or pathologized ("You're too sensitive," "You're overreacting," "That's not how you really feel")—you lose confidence in your emotional responses.

The result: You stop trusting your feelings as valid sources of information about your experience.

3. Manipulation Creates Doubt About Your Motivations

When the narcissist projects their own motives onto you ("You're selfish," "You're manipulative," "You're controlling")—you begin to doubt your own intentions.

The result: You stop trusting that you're a good person with good motives.

4. Intermittent Reinforcement Confuses Your Pattern Recognition

The unpredictability of narcissistic behavior (kind one moment, cruel the next) scrambles your ability to read patterns and predict outcomes.

The result: You stop trusting your ability to assess situations or people accurately.

5. Isolation Removes External Validation

When you're cut off from people who could confirm your reality, you have no one to reality-check with.

The result: You stop trusting your perceptions because you have no external corroboration.

6. Fear-Based Decision-Making Overrides Discernment

When every decision is made under duress—will this anger them? Will this trigger punishment?—your decision-making becomes survival-based rather than wisdom-based.

The result: You stop trusting your ability to make good decisions because you've only been making fear-based ones.

7. The "Outcome" Seems to Validate Their Narrative

The relationship failed (or became abusive). From the outside, it looks like you made a terrible choice. Even you question: "How did I not see this?"

The result: You stop trusting yourself because you believe your judgment led you into disaster.

The Cumulative Effect: Learned Helplessness and Paralysis

After months or years of this systematic assault on your self-trust, you develop what psychologists call "learned helplessness"—the belief that your choices don't matter because you can't trust yourself to make good ones.

This manifests as:

- **Decision paralysis:** Unable to make even small choices
- **External dependency:** Needing others to validate every decision
- **Chronic self-doubt:** Second-guessing yourself constantly
- **Analysis paralysis:** Over-thinking until you're frozen
- **Self-sabotage:** Making bad choices because you expect to fail anyway
- **Hypervigilance:** Obsessing over every detail to avoid being "wrong" again

You're not weak. You're not broken. You're traumatized. And trauma can heal.

The Biblical Foundation: You Were Created to Discern

Before we discuss *rebuilding* self-trust, we need to establish that self-trust—rightly understood—is not unbiblical. God created you with capacities that are meant to function properly.

What God Gave You:

1. A Mind to Think

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

— Romans 12:2 (NASB)

God gave you a mind capable of discernment, wisdom, and decision-making.

2. A Conscience to Guide

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness."

— Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)

God wrote His law on your heart. Your conscience is meant to guide you.

3. Emotions as Information

"Jesus wept." — John 11:35 (NASB)

Jesus felt and expressed emotion. God created emotions as signals that provide valuable information about our internal and external world.

4. The Holy Spirit as Internal Guide

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth."

— John 16:13 (NASB)

The Holy Spirit dwells within believers, providing internal guidance, conviction, and wisdom.

5. Wisdom Through Experience

"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

— Hebrews 5:14 (NASB)

God intends for you to develop discernment through practice and experience.

The Balance: Self-Trust Anchored in God-Trust

Scripture presents a both/and, not an either/or:

Trust God completely:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding."

— Proverbs 3:5 (NASB)

Use your God-given faculties:

"But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."

— 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NASB)

Self-trust and God-trust are not opposites. Healthy self-trust is trust in the person God created you to be, equipped with the faculties He gave you, guided by His Spirit.

Unhealthy self-trust is pride—believing you don't need God, that you're sufficient in yourself.

What you're rebuilding is healthy, God-anchored confidence in your ability to perceive, discern, and decide.

Biblical Model: Gideon's Fear and God's Patience

One of the most encouraging biblical narratives for rebuilding self-trust is the story of Gideon in Judges 6-7.

Gideon's Starting Point: No Confidence

When God calls Gideon, this is his state:

"The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior.' Then Gideon said to him, 'O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?'"

— Judges 6:12-13 (NASB)

Gideon's self-concept:

- Afraid (hiding while threshing wheat)
- Doubtful (questioning God's presence)

- From the weakest family in the weakest tribe
- Self-described as "the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15)

God's perspective: "Valiant warrior"

The gap between God's view and Gideon's self-view is massive.

Sound familiar? After narcissistic abuse, there's often a huge gap between who God says you are and who you believe yourself to be.

God's Patient Process of Rebuilding Gideon's Confidence

Notice what God doesn't do:

- He doesn't shame Gideon for his fear
- He doesn't get impatient with his doubt
- He doesn't withdraw the calling because Gideon lacks confidence

Instead, God patiently walks Gideon through a process of confidence-building:

Step 1: God Affirms Who Gideon Is (Not Who He Feels Like)

"The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior." — Judges 6:12 (NASB)

God speaks identity before Gideon feels it. This is prophetic—calling forth what will be.

Application: God sees who you truly are underneath the trauma. He's calling it forth even when you can't see it yet.

Step 2: God Gives a Small, Manageable Task

"Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"

— Judges 6:14 (NASB)

God doesn't immediately send Gideon into battle. He gives him a smaller task first: tear down his father's idols (Judges 6:25-27).

Application: Rebuilding confidence happens through small, incremental steps, not giant leaps.

Step 3: God Allows Gideon to Ask for Signs

Gideon asks for a sign—not once, but twice (the fleece test, Judges 6:36-40). And God graciously provides both signs without rebuke.

Application: God is patient with your need for confirmation. He doesn't shame you for needing reassurance as you rebuild trust.

Step 4: God Provides Confirmation Through Others

God has Gideon overhear a Midianite soldier's dream that confirms God's plan (Judges 7:9-15).

Application: Sometimes God uses external confirmation to validate what He's speaking internally. This isn't lack of faith—it's wise discernment.

Step 5: God Reduces the Army to Prove It's His Power, Not Gideon's

God whittles Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 (Judges 7:2-7).

Application: God isn't trying to build your self-confidence in isolation from Him. He's building God-anchored confidence—you learn to trust yourself because you trust Him working through you.

Step 6: Victory Confirms God's Calling and Gideon's Obedience

Gideon wins the battle, and his confidence is established—not in himself alone, but in God's power working through him.

Application: Each small act of obedience and trust builds the foundation for greater confidence.

What We Learn From Gideon:

- 1. God is patient with your fear and doubt**
- 2. Rebuilding confidence is a process, not an event**
- 3. Small steps lead to big breakthroughs**

4. **It's okay to ask for confirmation**
5. **True confidence is anchored in God, not independent of Him**
6. **God sees your potential even when you can't**

The Process of Learning to Trust Your Perceptions Again

Rebuilding self-trust is gradual. Here's how to begin:

Phase 1: Establish Safety (Weeks 1-4)

You cannot rebuild self-trust while still in danger. First priority: **create physical, emotional, and psychological safety.**

Actions:

- No contact with the narcissist (if possible)
- Surround yourself with safe people
- Establish a trauma-informed therapist
- Create a stable routine
- Meet basic needs: sleep, nutrition, exercise

Why this matters: Your nervous system must downregulate before you can access higher-level thinking and discernment. You can't rebuild trust while in survival mode.

Phase 2: Distinguish Between Voices (Ongoing)

After abuse, your internal world is crowded with competing voices. You must learn to distinguish between them.

The Three Primary Voices:

1. The Abuser's Voice (Internalized)

Even after they're gone, their voice remains in your head:

- "You're too sensitive"
- "No one will believe you"
- "You're crazy"
- "You can't trust yourself"

How to recognize it: This voice is shaming, condemning, hopeless, and sounds like the abuser.

2. The Enemy's Voice (Spiritual Opposition)

Satan is called "the accuser of the brethren" (Revelation 12:10). His voice sounds like:

- "You're worthless"
- "God is disappointed in you"
- "You'll never recover"
- "You deserved this"

How to recognize it: This voice is accusatory, despairing, and contradicts Scripture's declarations about your identity in Christ.

3. The Holy Spirit's Voice

The Spirit's voice is:

- Convicting but not condemning (John 16:8 vs. Romans 8:1)
- Aligning with Scripture
- Producing peace, even when corrective (Philippians 4:7)
- Leading toward growth and freedom
- Gentle and patient

How to recognize it: This voice brings life, hope, and aligns with God's character.

4. Your Own Voice (Your True Self)

Underneath the trauma is the real you—the person God created with thoughts, feelings, preferences, and wisdom.

How to recognize it: This voice is authentic, reflects your values, aligns with who you were before the abuse, and feels like "you" at your core.

Exercise: Voice Identification

When you have a thought, ask:

- 1. Does this sound like something the abuser said?** → Internalized abuser voice
- 2. Does this contradict what God says about me in Scripture?** → Enemy's voice
- 3. Does this align with Scripture and bring peace/conviction toward growth?** → Holy Spirit
- 4. Does this feel authentically me, reflecting my values and preferences?** → Your voice

Practice this daily. Over time, you'll become fluent in distinguishing between these voices.

Phase 3: Validate Your Past Discernment (Weeks 4-8)

One reason you don't trust yourself is because you believe your discernment was completely wrong. But was it?

Exercise: "I Actually Saw the Red Flags" Journal

Go back through the relationship and list every moment your intuition warned you:

Example:

- *"On our third date, he said his ex was 'crazy.' I felt uncomfortable but ignored it."*
- *"When he love-bombed me, something felt too intense, but I thought I was being cynical."*
- *"I felt uneasy when he isolated me from my friends, but he convinced me they were bad influences."*
- *"My stomach hurt every time he came home. I noticed that but told myself I was anxious."*

Now write next to each one:

"My discernment was correct. I saw the red flag. I just didn't honor what I saw."

The revelation: Your discernment wasn't broken. It was overridden.

Why you overrode it:

- You were manipulated (not your fault)
- You wanted to believe the best (not a flaw)
- You were trauma-bonded (not weak)
- You were isolated from validating voices (not your choice)
- You were gaslighted (not gullible)

The truth: Your warning system was functioning. You just learned to ignore it. Now you need to learn to honor it again.

Phase 4: Practice Incremental Decision-Making (Ongoing)

You can't rebuild confidence by making huge decisions right away. Start small.

The Ladder of Decision-Making:

Rung 1: Body-Level Decisions (No Risk)

"Am I hungry? Am I tired? Am I cold?"

Practice tuning into your body and honoring what it tells you.

Rung 2: Preference Decisions (Low Risk)

"Do I want coffee or tea? Do I want to watch this show or that one?"

Practice making choices based on your preferences without needing permission or validation.

Rung 3: Schedule Decisions (Moderate Risk)

"Do I want to go to this event? Do I need a rest day?"

Practice setting boundaries around your time and energy.

Rung 4: Relational Decisions (Higher Risk)

"Does this friendship feel healthy? Do I want to continue this conversation?"

Practice discerning relationships and setting boundaries.

Rung 5: Major Life Decisions (Highest Risk)

"Should I change jobs? Should I move? Should I date again?"

Only attempt these after you've built confidence on the lower rungs.

The Rule: Don't skip rungs. Build incrementally.

Phase 5: Journal "Truth Moments" (Daily Practice)

Create a daily practice of recording moments when your perceptions were validated.

Truth Moments Journal Template:

Date:

What I Perceived/Felt:

"I felt uncomfortable when [person] made that comment."

What Happened Next That Validated My Perception:

"Later, [safe person] said that comment was inappropriate."

What This Teaches Me:

"My discomfort was a valid signal. I can trust that feeling."

Example entries:

Day 1:

- **Perceived:** "I felt like I needed alone time today."
- **Validated:** "After taking alone time, I felt recharged and clearer."
- **Lesson:** "I can trust my need for solitude."

Day 5:

- **Perceived:** "Something felt off about that person's story."
- **Validated:** "I found out later they lied about their credentials."
- **Lesson:** "My suspicion was correct. I can trust my intuition about dishonesty."

Day 10:

- **Perceived:** "I felt peace about declining that invitation."
- **Validated:** "I didn't regret it, and I used the time well."
- **Lesson:** "I can trust my sense of what's right for me."

The Goal: Accumulate evidence that your perceptions are reliable. Over time, this creates a new narrative: "I can trust myself."

Phase 6: Invite the Holy Spirit Into the Process (Ongoing)

Rebuilding self-trust is not a solo journey. The Holy Spirit is your guide.

The Holy Spirit's Roles in Discernment:

1. Teacher

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will

teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

— John 14:26 (NASB)

2. Guide

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth."

— John 16:13 (NASB)

3. Convictor

"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

— John 16:8 (NASB)

4. Counselor

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth."

— John 14:16-17 (NASB)

5. Giver of Wisdom

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

— James 1:5 (NASB)

Daily Prayer for Discernment:

"Holy Spirit, I invite You into my day. Teach me to recognize Your voice. Guide me into truth. Convict me when I'm off-course, but don't condemn me.

Counsel me when I'm confused. Give me wisdom for every decision, big and small.

Help me distinguish between Your voice, my voice, the enemy's voice, and the echo of my abuser. Sharpen my discernment. Restore my confidence. Anchor my trust in the Father.

I don't want to lean on my own understanding alone, but I also don't want to abdicate the faculties You've given me. Teach me to walk in partnership with You—trusting You fully while also learning to trust the person You created me to be.

In Jesus' name, Amen."

Phase 7: Test Your Discernment in Low-Stakes Situations (Ongoing)

You need practice. The way to build trust is to make predictions and see if they're accurate.

The Discernment Testing Exercise:

Step 1: Make a Prediction

Before entering a situation, note your intuition:

- *"I think this person is trustworthy"*
- *"I sense this opportunity isn't right for me"*
- *"I feel peace about this decision"*
- *"Something feels off about this situation"*

Step 2: Observe What Happens

Move forward and gather data.

Step 3: Evaluate Your Accuracy

Was your intuition correct? If so, celebrate. If not, analyze what you missed (without shame).

Step 4: Adjust and Learn

Over time, you'll notice patterns in when your discernment is most accurate and when you need more information.

The Goal: Build a track record of accurate discernment. Each success builds confidence.

Practical Exercises for Rebuilding Self-Trust

Exercise 1: The "Permission Slips" Practice

After abuse, you may feel you need permission for everything. Practice giving yourself permission.

Daily practice: Each morning, write three "permission slips" to yourself:

"I give myself permission to say no today if I'm tired."

"I give myself permission to change my mind."

"I give myself permission to trust my feelings."

Then honor them.

Exercise 2: The "I Trust Myself To..." List

Create a running list of things you trust yourself to do:

"I trust myself to know when I'm hungry."

"I trust myself to recognize unsafe people."

"I trust myself to make good decisions about my schedule."

"I trust myself to set boundaries."

"I trust myself to hear God's voice."

Add to this list regularly as you build evidence.

Exercise 3: The "Honoring My Intuition" Challenge

For one week, commit to honoring every intuitive hit, no matter how small:

- If you feel like you should take a different route, take it
- If you feel uncomfortable around someone, create distance
- If you sense you need rest, rest
- If something feels "off," investigate

Record what happens. Often, you'll discover your intuition was protecting you.

Exercise 4: The "Decisions I Made Right" Journal

Counteract the narrative that you can't trust yourself by documenting decisions you made well:

"I chose a good therapist."

"I left the relationship before it got worse."

"I reached out for help."

"I protected my children."

"I set that boundary even though it was hard."

Evidence matters. Build the case that you can, in fact, make good decisions.

Exercise 5: Body-Based Discernment Practice

Your body often knows before your mind catches up. Practice tuning in:

Ask yourself:

- *"When I think about [decision], what do I feel in my body?"*
- *"Do I feel expansion (openness, lightness) or contraction (tightness, heaviness)?"*
- *"Does my stomach relax or tense?"*
- *"Do I feel energized or drained?"*

Your body is an instrument of discernment. Learn to read it.

Biblical precedent:

When Paul tried to enter Bithynia, *"the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them"* (Acts 16:7). They felt a check in their spirit—likely a physical/emotional sense of "no."

Exercise 6: The "Red Flag Recognition" Practice

Since you now know the red flags you ignored before, practice identifying them in low-stakes situations:

Watch a movie: Can you spot manipulation, gaslighting, or love-bombing in the characters?

Observe interactions: When you watch others interact, can you identify unhealthy dynamics?

Read news stories: Can you recognize narcissistic behavior in public figures?

The Goal: Sharpen your radar in non-threatening contexts so it's ready when it matters.

Common Obstacles to Rebuilding Self-Trust

Obstacle 1: "But I Was So Wrong Before"

Reframe: You weren't wrong about everything. You ignored red flags because you were manipulated, not because you're defective.

Obstacle 2: "What If I Choose Another Narcissist?"

Reframe: Now that you know what to look for, you're far less likely to miss it. Education + awareness + boundaries = protection.

Obstacle 3: "I'm Afraid to Make Decisions"

Reframe: Start with small, reversible decisions. Build confidence incrementally. Not every choice is life-or-death.

Obstacle 4: "People Keep Telling Me to Trust God, Not Myself"

Reframe: Trusting God includes trusting the faculties He gave you. It's not either/or.

Obstacle 5: "I Still Feel Anxious About Decisions"

Reframe: Anxiety is normal after trauma. It will decrease as you build evidence that you can make good choices. Give it time.

The Role of Community in Rebuilding Self-Trust

You cannot rebuild self-trust in isolation. You need people who:

1. Validate Your Perceptions

"Yes, that was inappropriate." "Yes, you're reading that correctly."

2. Reflect Reality Back to You

"Here's what I observed." "Here's what actually happened."

3. Encourage Your Decision-Making

"What do you think?" "I trust your judgment."

4. Challenge You Gently When Needed

"I wonder if you're being too hard on yourself." "Is that old fear talking, or current wisdom?"

5. Celebrate Your Growth

"You trusted yourself in that moment!" "Look how far you've come."

Safe community is like training wheels—providing support as you relearn to balance.

When Self-Trust and God-Trust Work Together

The goal is not self-trust *independent of God*, but self-trust *anchored in God*.

What This Looks Like:

You pray for guidance (trusting God)

And you pay attention to your internal response (trusting yourself)

You read Scripture (trusting God's Word)

And you apply wisdom to your unique situation (trusting your discernment)

You seek counsel (trusting God's wisdom through others)

And you weigh it against your own sense of God's leading (trusting your relationship with Him)

You ask for confirmation (like Gideon)

And you step forward when you have peace (trusting God's peace within you)

The Dance:

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB)

Don't lean on your own understanding: Don't trust yourself in isolation from God.

In all your ways acknowledge Him: Involve God in every decision.

He will make your paths straight: Trust that as you walk with Him, your discernment will be sharpened.

This is partnership, not passivity.

A Word About Patience

Rebuilding self-trust takes time. Be patient with yourself.

Gideon didn't go from hiding in a winepress to leading an army overnight.

The Israelites didn't go from slavery to freedom to confidence in a day—it took a wilderness.

You won't rebuild decades of confidence in weeks or months.

But every small act of trusting yourself—and being proven right—is a brick in the foundation.

Every decision made with prayerful confidence that leads to good fruit is evidence you can build on.

Every time you honor your intuition and it protects you, your trust grows.

Be patient. Be gentle. Be persistent.

"The LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught."

— Proverbs 3:26 (NASB)

Your confidence is being rebuilt—not independent of God, but grounded in Him.

Reflection Questions

1. In what specific ways did narcissistic abuse damage your ability to trust yourself?
2. Can you identify moments when your discernment was actually correct, but you overrode it? What does that tell you?
3. What "rung" of decision-making are you currently on? Are you trying to skip rungs?
4. What does the Holy Spirit's voice sound like to you? How can you better distinguish it from other voices?
5. What small decision can you make today to practice trusting yourself?

Closing Prayer

Father, I come to You with a fractured sense of self. I don't trust my own mind, my own heart, my own discernment. I've been so wrong before—or at least, I feel like I was. And I'm afraid to trust myself again.

But You say that You will be my confidence. So I'm anchoring myself in You. I'm not asking You to make decisions for me like I'm a puppet. I'm asking You to

restore what You created in me—a mind that can think, a heart that can discern, a spirit that can hear Your voice.

Holy Spirit, teach me to distinguish between voices—the abuser's voice that still echoes, the enemy's accusations, Your gentle guidance, and my own authentic self. Give me clarity. Give me wisdom. Give me discernment.

I invite You into every decision, big and small. Guide me. Correct me. Affirm me. Show me when I'm on track and when I'm off course. Give me the humility to seek counsel and the confidence to trust what You're showing me.

Help me be patient with myself. I'm rebuilding what was systematically destroyed. It won't happen overnight. But You're patient with me, so I will be patient with myself.

Restore my confidence—not arrogant self-sufficiency, but humble, God-anchored trust in the person You created me to be. Let every small decision I make well be a brick in this new foundation. Let every correct intuition rebuild my confidence.

I trust You, Lord. And I'm learning to trust myself again—because I trust that You made me capable of wisdom, discernment, and good choices.

Thank You for Your patience with me, like You had with Gideon. Thank You for calling forth the "valiant warrior" in me even when I feel like I'm still hiding.

I'm stepping forward today, one small step at a time, trusting that You'll keep my foot from being caught.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Chapter 9: Attracting Different Partners

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

— 2 Corinthians 6:14 (NASB)

"What if I do it again?"

"What if I'm just attracted to narcissists?"

"What if there's something broken in me that always chooses the wrong person?"

"What if I can't tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy anymore?"

"What if I end up in the exact same situation with a different face?"

These are the haunting questions that keep many survivors single long after they've healed enough to date. The fear isn't just about being hurt again—it's deeper than that. **It's the terrifying possibility that something in your wiring, your patterns, your very chemistry pulls you toward people who will destroy you.**

And here's the part that makes it even more confusing: **You probably weren't initially attracted to the narcissist because they seemed dangerous. You were attracted because they seemed perfect.**

The intensity felt like passion. The immediate connection felt like fate. The overwhelming attention felt like true love. The speed felt like efficiency, not recklessness. And by the time you realized what you'd gotten into, you were bonded, entangled, unable to easily walk away.

So now you face the future with a critical question: **How do I make sure I choose differently next time?**

This chapter is about understanding why you were vulnerable to a narcissist in the first place, how trauma bonding has rewired your attraction patterns,

and—most importantly—how to heal your "chooser" so that healthy people become attractive and unhealthy people set off alarm bells.

The good news: You can learn to be attracted to different people. Your patterns can change. Your discernment can be restored.

But it requires understanding, healing, time, and the renewal of your mind.

Understanding Your Old Attachment Patterns

Before we discuss how to choose differently, we must understand why you chose as you did. And the answer often lies in your attachment patterns—formed long before you ever met the narcissist.

Attachment Theory: The Foundation

Attachment theory, developed by psychologist John Bowlby, explains how our earliest relationships shape our expectations and behaviors in future relationships.

The four primary attachment styles:

1. Secure Attachment (Healthy)

Formed when: Caregivers are consistently available, responsive, and attuned.

Characteristics:

- Comfortable with intimacy and independence
- Can trust others without losing sense of self
- Communicates needs clearly
- Handles conflict constructively
- Not afraid of abandonment or engulfment

In relationships: Seeks mutual respect, emotional safety, and balanced intimacy.

Vulnerability to narcissists: Low. Secure people recognize dysfunction quickly and exit.

2. Anxious Attachment (Preoccupied)

Formed when: Caregivers are inconsistent—sometimes responsive, sometimes unavailable or intrusive.

Characteristics:

- Craves intimacy but fears abandonment
- Hypervigilant to relationship threats
- Needs constant reassurance
- Can be "clingy" or demanding
- Self-worth tied to partner's attention
- Prone to emotional reactivity

In relationships: Seeks fusion, intensity, and constant connection. Tolerates poor treatment to avoid abandonment.

Vulnerability to narcissists: High. The narcissist's intermittent reinforcement triggers the anxious person's fear of abandonment, creating intense bonding.

3. Avoidant Attachment (Dismissive)

Formed when: Caregivers are emotionally distant, rejecting, or dismissive of emotional needs.

Characteristics:

- Uncomfortable with emotional intimacy
- Values independence over connection
- Suppresses emotions and needs

- Appears self-sufficient
- Keeps partners at arm's length
- May intellectualize feelings

In relationships: Seeks space, autonomy, and emotional distance. May choose partners they don't have to fully commit to.

Vulnerability to narcissists: Moderate to High. Can be drawn to narcissists who also avoid deep intimacy, or who promise connection without demanding emotional vulnerability (until they do).

4. Disorganized Attachment (Fearful-Avoidant)

Formed when: Caregivers are frightening, abusive, or deeply unpredictable—the source of both comfort and terror.

Characteristics:

- Wants intimacy but fears it
- Conflicted: craves connection, pushes it away
- High anxiety and high avoidance
- Difficulty trusting
- Chaotic relationship patterns
- May self-sabotage

In relationships: Seeks connection but panics when it's offered. May attract or be attracted to chaotic, unstable relationships.

Vulnerability to narcissists: Very High. The push-pull dynamic of narcissistic relationships mirrors the disorganized person's internal conflict and early experiences.

Why Attachment Matters

If you grew up with secure attachment, you likely wouldn't have tolerated the narcissist long enough to become entangled.

But if you grew up with anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment—formed through **no fault of your own** in childhood—you were primed to be vulnerable to someone who exploited those patterns.

This is not your fault. But it is your responsibility to heal.

Your Specific Vulnerabilities: The Narcissist's Target Profile

Narcissists don't choose randomly. They target people with specific characteristics that make them easy to manipulate.

Who Narcissists Target:

1. Empathetic, Compassionate People

You see the best in people. You believe in redemption. You offer second (and third, and fourth) chances. You feel others' pain deeply.

Why you were vulnerable: You extended compassion to someone who weaponized it against you.

2. People-Pleasers

You were taught (explicitly or implicitly) that your worth comes from meeting others' needs. You avoid conflict. You prioritize others' comfort over your own.

Why you were vulnerable: The narcissist exploited your desire to keep the peace and make them happy.

3. Fixers and Rescuers

You believe love can heal. You're drawn to wounded people. You want to "save" them or prove your love through sacrifice.

Why you were vulnerable: The narcissist presented as wounded (the victim narrative) or special (the grandiose narrative), triggering your rescue instinct.

4. People with Weak or Porous Boundaries

You struggle to say no. You feel guilty advocating for yourself. You were taught that boundaries are selfish.

Why you were vulnerable: The narcissist trampled boundaries you couldn't defend.

5. High-Achievers and Competent People

You're successful, capable, admired. You have resources (emotional, financial, social) the narcissist wants to access.

Why you were vulnerable: You were supply—status, money, connections, stability. Your competence made you valuable to them.

6. People with Unhealed Trauma

You may have childhood wounds, past abuse, or unresolved pain. You're accustomed to dysfunction.

Why you were vulnerable: Chaos felt normal. Red flags didn't register because you'd seen worse.

7. Spiritual, Faith-Filled People

You believe in forgiveness, grace, redemption, submission (if in marriage), and giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Why you were vulnerable: Your faith was weaponized. Scripture was twisted to keep you compliant.

8. Lonely, Isolated, or Transitional People

You were in a vulnerable season—new to an area, grieving a loss, going through a transition.

Why you were vulnerable: You needed connection, and the narcissist offered it (before withdrawing it to create dependency).

The Critical Insight

These characteristics aren't flaws. They're beautiful qualities that were exploited.

- Empathy is a gift
- Compassion reflects Christ
- Wanting to help others is noble
- Being capable and successful is admirable
- Faith is precious

You don't need to become cold, cynical, or self-protective. You need to direct these beautiful qualities toward people who honor them, not exploit them.

How Trauma Bonding Shapes Future Attraction

Here's the disturbing reality: **After narcissistic abuse, your attraction compass may be broken.**

What used to feel like love—intensity, urgency, chaos, unpredictability—was actually trauma bonding. And now your brain associates those feelings with "chemistry" or "passion."

Meanwhile, healthy people—who are consistent, calm, transparent, and respectful—may feel boring, unexciting, or spark-less.

This is a neurological problem, not a character flaw.

Why Healthy Feels Boring:

1. Your Nervous System Was Conditioned to High Drama

During the narcissistic relationship, your nervous system was in chronic activation—cortisol, adrenaline, hypervigilance. The calm, stable presence of a healthy person doesn't trigger those stress hormones, so your brain misinterprets the absence of chaos as absence of attraction.

Translation: You confuse "calm" with "boring" because your body was trained to associate stress with passion.

2. Intermittent Reinforcement Created Addictive Patterns

The unpredictable cycle of idealization, devaluation, and hoovering created a dopamine pattern similar to gambling addiction. Consistent kindness from a healthy person doesn't produce those dopamine spikes.

Translation: Predictable love feels flat because your brain was wired for the high of unpredictable reinforcement.

3. Love-Bombing Set an Unrealistic Baseline

The intensity of the idealization phase—constant texting, over-the-top declarations, rapid escalation—felt like "true love." Normal courtship, which is gradual and measured, feels insufficient by comparison.

Translation: You expect fireworks when real love is often a slow-burning flame.

4. You Mistake Anxiety for Chemistry

After trauma bonding, the nervous, uncertain, "do they like me?" feeling can be misinterpreted as attraction. Meanwhile, the secure feeling of being liked and treated well feels "too easy."

Translation: You're attracted to people who make you anxious because anxiety feels like excitement.

5. You're Drawn to the Familiar

Even when the familiar is painful, it's still familiar. Your unconscious mind seeks what it knows, even if what it knows is dysfunction.

Translation: You're attracted to what feels like "home," even if home was unhealthy.

The Result:

Red flags feel like green flags. And green flags feel like red flags.

This is temporary. It can be rewired. But you must intentionally recalibrate your attraction compass.

The Renewal of Your "Chooser": Healed Discernment

The question isn't "Will I ever be attracted to anyone again?" The question is: **"How do I become attracted to healthy people?"**

The answer: **Heal, educate, practice, and trust the process.**

Step 1: Heal Before You Date

You cannot make healthy choices from an unhealthy place. **If you're still trauma-bonded, if you're still in active grief, if you're still in survival mode—you're not ready to date.**

Indicators you're not ready yet:

- You're obsessing about the narcissist
- You're lonely and desperate for connection to fill the void
- You're not sleeping, eating, or functioning well
- You haven't established boundaries or practiced saying no
- You're isolated from healthy support systems
- You haven't worked through your anger and grief
- You don't know your red flags or green flags
- You're hoping a new relationship will heal the old wounds

Indicators you're getting ready:

- You have more good days than bad
- You can think about the narcissist without spiraling
- You're content alone (even if you'd like partnership eventually)
- You've rebuilt your self-trust and boundaries
- You have a strong support system
- You've identified your vulnerabilities and triggers
- You know what you're looking for and what you're avoiding
- You're seeking partnership to share wholeness, not to create it

Timeline: Most experts recommend 6-12 months minimum after leaving a narcissistic relationship before dating. Some need longer. There's no shame in taking time.

Step 2: Do a "Relationship Autopsy"

Before you date again, you must understand what happened in your last relationship so you don't repeat it.

The Relationship Autopsy Exercise:

Part 1: Red Flags I Missed or Ignored

List every warning sign you saw but minimized:

- Love-bombing
- Moving too fast
- Inconsistencies in their story
- Treatment of exes, waitstaff, or animals
- Lack of accountability
- Isolation tactics
- Early boundary violations
- Your gut feeling that something was off

Part 2: Why I Ignored the Red Flags

For each red flag, ask: *Why did I overlook this?*

- Was I lonely?
- Did I want to believe the best?
- Was I afraid of being judgmental?
- Did I minimize because I wanted the relationship to work?
- Was I trauma-bonded before I realized it?

Part 3: My Vulnerabilities

What about me made me susceptible?

- Attachment style (anxious, avoidant, disorganized)
- Unhealed childhood wounds
- Poor boundaries
- People-pleasing tendencies
- Fear of abandonment
- Rescue/fixer complex
- Low self-worth
- Spiritual manipulation vulnerability

Part 4: What I Need in Future Relationships

Based on what went wrong, what do I need?

- Slow pacing
- Consistency
- Transparency
- Respect for boundaries
- Emotional availability
- Mutual sacrifice
- Accountability
- Alignment of values
- Secure attachment

This autopsy isn't about blame. It's about learning.

Step 3: Learn the Difference Between Red Flags and Green Flags

You must retrain your brain to recognize what's healthy and what's dangerous.

Red Flags That Should End Dating Immediately:

These are non-negotiable. If you see these, walk away:

Early Relationship Red Flags:

- **✗ Love-bombing:** Over-the-top declarations, intensity, speed
- **✗ Future-faking:** Promises about the future very early
- **✗ Mirroring:** They seem "too perfect," sharing all your interests
- **✗ Isolation attempts:** Discouraging friendships, monopolizing time
- **✗ Disrespect for boundaries:** Pushing when you say no
- **✗ Badmouthing exes:** All exes are "crazy," and they're the victim
- **✗ Inconsistency:** Words don't match actions
- **✗ Secrecy:** Evasive about past, present, or digital life
- **✗ Lack of accountability:** Never their fault
- **✗ Entitlement:** Expects special treatment
- **✗ Disrespect for others:** Rude to servers, dismissive of "lesser" people
- **✗ Gaslighting:** Denies things they said or did
- **✗ Pressure for commitment/sex:** Rushing physical or emotional intimacy
- **✗ Jealousy disguised as care:** Possessiveness presented as love

Character Red Flags:

- **✗ Unrepentant patterns of lying**
- **✗ Substance abuse without recovery commitment**

- **✗ Uncontrolled anger or violence**
- **✗ Financial irresponsibility or exploitation**
- **✗ Chronic victimhood (nothing is ever their fault)**
- **✗ No close, long-term friendships (they've burned every bridge)**
- **✗ Hostile toward their children or yours**
- **✗ Contradicts core Christian values (if faith is important to you)**

If you see these: RUN. Don't give chances. Don't make excuses. Don't hope they'll change. Just leave.

Green Flags That Indicate Health:

These are what you're looking for. Healthy people consistently display these:

Early Relationship Green Flags:

- **✓ Gradual pacing:** No rush; comfortable with slow development
- **✓ Consistency:** Words match actions; reliable
- **✓ Respects boundaries:** Honors "no"; doesn't push
- **✓ Takes responsibility:** Owns mistakes; apologizes genuinely
- **✓ Has healthy relationships:** Close friends; good family relationships (or healthy distance if family is toxic)
- **✓ Speaks respectfully of exes:** Takes some responsibility for past relationship failures
- **✓ Emotionally available:** Can discuss feelings; shows vulnerability appropriately
- **✓ Asks about you:** Genuinely interested in your life, not just talking about themselves

- **Has their own life:** Hobbies, friends, interests independent of you
- **Transparent:** Open about their life; nothing hidden
- **Handles conflict well:** Discusses disagreements calmly; seeks resolution
- **Gives you space:** Comfortable with time apart
- **Supports your growth:** Encourages your goals, friendships, interests
- **Values-aligned:** Shares core beliefs, life goals, parenting philosophy

Character Green Flags:

- Demonstrates humility and teachability
- Shows compassion without being a doormat
- Has a history of commitment (jobs, friendships, previous relationships)
- Financially responsible and generous
- Kind to people "below" them (servers, janitors, customer service)
- Has dealt with their own trauma/past healthily
- Active faith that's authentic, not performative (if relevant)
- Treats children (yours or theirs) with patience and respect

**Green flags feel boring at first because they're stable. Give them time.
Chemistry can develop in safety.**

Step 4: Practice with Low-Stakes Relationships First

Before diving into dating, practice discernment in friendships and professional relationships.

Ask yourself about new people:

- How do I feel in their presence? Energized or drained?
- Do they respect my boundaries?
- Are they consistent?
- Do they take responsibility for mistakes?
- Do I feel safe being myself around them?
- Do they celebrate my wins or feel threatened?
- Is there reciprocity, or is it one-sided?

If you struggle to assess these things in friendships, you're not ready for dating.

Step 5: Date Slowly and Intentionally

When you're ready to date again, do it differently this time.

The Slow Dating Principles:

1. No Rushing

- Don't commit quickly
- No "I love you" in the first month (or three)
- No moving in together for at least a year
- No introducing children until the relationship is established and serious

2. Observe Over Time

- Watch how they handle stress, disappointment, conflict
- Notice patterns, not isolated incidents
- Look for consistency across contexts (how they treat you, their family, strangers)

3. Include Community

- Introduce them to friends and family early
- Listen to trusted people's observations
- Don't isolate yourself in the relationship

4. Maintain Your Life

- Keep your friendships, hobbies, routines
- Don't abandon your life to merge into theirs
- A healthy partner will encourage this, not resist it

5. Test Boundaries

- Say "no" to something small and see how they respond
- Share a preference that differs from theirs
- Disagree about something minor
- **How they handle these tells you everything**

6. Watch How They Handle Your "No" This is the single most important test:

- Do they respect it graciously?
- Do they push back, guilt you, or punish you with withdrawal?
- Do they manipulate you into changing your mind?

A healthy person respects your "no." An unhealthy person makes you feel bad for having one.

Step 6: Trust Your Body

Your body is an early warning system. Learn to listen to it.

Red flag body sensations:

- Tightness in chest or stomach
- Shallow breathing
- Feeling "on edge" or hypervigilant
- Exhaustion after time with them
- Feeling small, anxious, or insecure
- Sense of walking on eggshells

Green flag body sensations:

- Relaxation and ease
- Deep, natural breathing
- Feeling energized (not drained) after time together
- Sense of safety and groundedness
- Feeling like yourself, not a performance
- Peace and contentment

If your body is screaming "danger," listen—even if your mind can't articulate why.

Step 7: Pray and Involve God

This may seem obvious, but it's worth stating explicitly: **Invite God into your dating life.**

Prayer before dating: *"Father, I don't trust my own judgment yet. I've been hurt. I've made mistakes. I need Your wisdom. Close doors that need to be closed. Open doors that need to be opened. Give me discernment. Protect me from deception. Help me recognize both red flags and green flags. Don't let me settle for less than Your best. And give me patience to wait for it. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

Ongoing prayer:

- Ask God to reveal truth about the person
- Invite the Holy Spirit to give you discernment
- Pray for clarity, not just "chemistry"
- Ask God to remove your rose-colored glasses

Biblical principle: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."*

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NASB)

Biblical Model: Ruth and Boaz—Mutual Honor vs. Exploitation

The book of Ruth provides one of Scripture's most beautiful pictures of a healthy, God-honoring relationship—a stark contrast to narcissistic exploitation.

Ruth's Story: From Trauma to Redemption

Ruth was a widow—likely traumatized by loss, vulnerable, in a foreign land, economically dependent, socially marginalized.

She was exactly the kind of person a narcissist would target.

But God brought her to Boaz, and what unfolds is a masterclass in healthy love.

Boaz: The Anti-Narcissist

Let's examine Boaz's character through the lens of green flags:

1. Boaz Notices and Provides Without Demanding

When Ruth gleans in his field, Boaz:

- Notices her immediately (she wasn't invisible)
- Asks about her (genuine interest)
- Instructs workers to protect her (provides safety)
- Ensures she has water and food (meets practical needs)
- Invites her to stay in his fields (offers stability)

He gives without strings attached. He protects without possessing.

"Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?' Boaz replied to her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me.'"

— Ruth 2:10-11 (NASB)

Notice: He's heard about her character. He values her for who she is, not just her appearance or what she can provide him.

2. Boaz Speaks Blessing, Not Control

"May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.' Then she said, 'I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

— Ruth 2:12-13 (NASB)

Boaz's speech:

- Affirms her faith
- Pronounces blessing
- Speaks kindly (not flattery, but genuine encouragement)
- Elevates her (doesn't demean or diminish)

Contrast with narcissists: They use words to manipulate, control, and eventually degrade. Boaz uses words to bless and build up.

3. Boaz Respects Her Agency and Boundaries

When Ruth comes to the threshing floor (Ruth 3:7-9)—a risky, vulnerable move—Boaz:

- Honors her boldness
- Doesn't take advantage sexually
- Praises her for seeking him (not a younger man)
- Promises to act honorably
- Protects her reputation (has her leave before dawn)

"And he said, 'May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.'"

— Ruth 3:10-11 (NASB)

He doesn't exploit her vulnerability. He honors her.

4. Boaz Follows Through on Promises

Boaz said he would redeem Ruth, and he immediately sets about doing it (Ruth 4). He doesn't delay, manipulate, or create drama.

He's a man of his word. Consistency. Reliability. Integrity.

Contrast with narcissists: Promises are empty. Future-faking is common. Words mean nothing.

5. Boaz Honors the Community and Legal Process

He doesn't rush Ruth into relationship. He follows proper procedure, involves elders, handles the legal redemption publicly (Ruth 4:1-12).

He values transparency, accountability, and doing things rightly.

Contrast with narcissists: They isolate, hide, avoid accountability, rush everything, and disregard proper process.

Ruth: A Model of Healthy Response

Ruth also demonstrates healthy relationship qualities:

1. She's not desperate

She's vulnerable, yes, but she's also dignified, hardworking, loyal to Naomi.

2. She doesn't settle

Naomi encourages her to seek Boaz specifically—a man of character. Ruth doesn't just grab any man.

3. She's wise and takes godly counsel

She listens to Naomi's guidance (Ruth 3:1-5).

4. She's patient

She doesn't force Boaz to act. She waits for him to handle the situation properly.

5. She has her own character and reputation

Boaz says "all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:11). She's known for her integrity.

The Contrast: Exploitation vs. Mutual Honor

Narcissistic Relationship Ruth & Boaz

Love-bombing, intensity, speed Gradual development, patience

Demands, controls, isolates Provides, protects, involves community

Uses vulnerability to exploit Honors vulnerability, doesn't exploit

Empty promises, future-faking Keeps promises, follows through

Erodes dignity and identity Elevates and affirms

Takes, drains, depletes Gives, blesses, shares

Secrecy, deception Transparency, accountability

You shrink, lose yourself You flourish, become more yourself

Ruth went from widowhood to wholeness. From grief to redemption. From scarcity to abundance.

Because she was in relationship with a man who honored God and honored her.

This is what you're waiting for. Don't settle for less.

Learning to Be Whole Before Seeking Relationship

The cultural lie says: "You complete me." "You're my other half." "I can't live without you."

This is codependency disguised as romance.

The biblical truth: You are already complete in Christ. A healthy relationship is two whole people choosing to walk together, not two broken people clinging to each other to avoid falling apart.

The Danger of Dating from Brokenness

If you enter a relationship:

- To fill the void left by the narcissist
- To prove you're lovable
- To escape loneliness
- To heal your wounds
- To feel valuable

You will attract someone who exploits that need.

Predators smell desperation.

What "Wholeness" Looks Like

You don't need to be perfect. You don't need to have "arrived." But you do need to be in a healthy place:

1. You're content alone

You'd *like* partnership, but you're okay without it. Your identity isn't dependent on relationship status.

2. You've done your healing work

Therapy, support groups, spiritual direction, trauma processing. You're not healed perfectly, but you're actively healing.

3. You have healthy boundaries

You know how to say no. You can articulate your needs. You don't sacrifice your wellbeing for others' approval.

4. You have a full life

Friends, hobbies, purpose, connection to God. Your life isn't an empty shell waiting to be filled by a partner.

5. You know your worth in Christ

Your value isn't determined by whether someone chooses you. It's established by the One who already has.

6. You've identified your patterns

You know your attachment style, your triggers, your vulnerabilities. You've worked on them.

7. You can be alone without being lonely

Solitude is peaceful, not terrifying.

8. You're not trying to "fix" anyone

You're looking for partnership with a healthy person, not a project to rescue.

The Biblical Model: Wholeness in Christ

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

— Colossians 2:9-10 (NASB)

You are complete in Christ. Not in a romantic relationship. Not in another person. **In Him.**

This doesn't mean you won't desire partnership. God said "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Desire for companionship is God-given and good.

But **companionship is meant to be partnership between two whole people, not two halves desperately trying to become one.**

Reflection: The Season of Singleness as Sacred

Many survivors view post-abuse singleness as a waiting room—a frustrating limbo before "real life" (partnership) begins again.

What if it's not a waiting room but a healing room?

What if this season is sacred?

What This Season Is For:

1. Rebuilding Your Identity

Who are you outside of relationship? What do you like? What are your dreams? Who is the person God created you to be?

2. Deepening Your Relationship with God

Without the distraction and trauma of an abusive relationship, you can encounter God more deeply than ever before.

3. Establishing Non-Negotiables

What will you tolerate? What will you never accept again? What are your values? Your boundaries? Your standards?

4. Healing Your Attachment Wounds

This takes time, therapy, and safe relationships (friendships, family, community). Do the work now.

5. Building a Life You Love

Don't put life on hold waiting for a partner. Create a life so full and joyful that a partner would be an addition, not a completion.

6. Learning to Hear God's Voice

Without the narcissist's noise, you can discern the Spirit's leading more clearly.

7. Becoming the Person You Want to Attract

If you want a healthy partner, become a healthy person. Like attracts like (eventually, once you've healed).

The Temptation to Rush

You may be tempted to rush back into dating because:

- You're lonely
- You're afraid you'll be alone forever
- You see others in happy relationships

- You want to prove you're desirable
- You want to "move on" from the narcissist

Resist the rush.

Isaiah 40:31 says: *"Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength."*
(NASB)

Waiting isn't passive. It's active healing, active growth, active preparation.

Don't waste your waiting. Let it transform you.

Practical Exercises for Renewing Your Chooser

Exercise 1: Create Your "Never Again" List

Write down every behavior, pattern, or red flag you will never tolerate again:

"Never again will I..."

- Ignore my gut
- Stay with someone who lies
- Accept love-bombing as romance
- Sacrifice my friendships for a relationship
- Date someone who disrespects boundaries
- Make excuses for someone's poor character
- Rush into commitment

Post this where you can see it. Refer to it when you're tempted to compromise.

Exercise 2: Define Your Green Flags

What are you looking for? Be specific:

"I am looking for someone who..."

- Respects my boundaries consistently
- Has close, long-term friendships
- Takes responsibility for mistakes
- Shares my core values and faith
- Treats everyone with respect, not just me
- Has dealt with their own trauma healthily
- Communicates clearly and kindly
- Is patient and doesn't rush
- Supports my growth and goals
- Makes me feel safe and valued

Exercise 3: The Attraction Recalibration

When you meet someone new and feel "chemistry," pause and ask:

"Is this attraction or anxiety?"

- Does my heart race because I'm excited or because I'm nervous about whether they like me?
- Do I feel energized or on edge?
- Is this calm and peaceful, or intense and chaotic?
- Do I feel like myself, or am I performing?

If it's anxiety, walk away—even if it feels like "passion."

Exercise 4: The "Would I Want This for My Daughter/Son?" Test

When you're unsure about someone, ask:

- If my child brought this person home, would I be thrilled or concerned?
- Would I want my best friend to date this person?
- If this person treated my loved one the way they're treating me, would I be okay with it?

If the answer is no, you have your answer.

Exercise 5: The Boaz Checklist

Using Boaz as the standard, evaluate potential partners:

- Do they notice and value my character?
- Do they speak blessings, not manipulation?
- Do they respect my boundaries and agency?
- Do they follow through on what they say?
- Do they honor community, accountability, and transparency?
- Do they protect my reputation and dignity?
- Do they point me toward God?

If most of these are missing, keep looking.

When You're Ready: A Prayer for God's Guidance

Father, I bring my desires for companionship to You. You know my heart. You know my loneliness. You know my fear of being hurt again. You know my longing for partnership.

But I also know that I can't trust my own judgment yet. I've been deceived before. I've ignored red flags. I've been attracted to the wrong people for the wrong reasons. My "chooser" is broken.

So I'm asking You to be my discernment. Close doors that need to be closed—even if I want them open. Open doors that need to be opened—even if I'm afraid. Give me eyes to see clearly. Give me a heart that recognizes health and rejects dysfunction.

Heal my attraction patterns. Rewire my brain. Make healthy people attractive to me and unhealthy people repulsive. Let red flags disturb me and green flags delight me.

Give me patience to wait. Don't let me settle out of loneliness, fear, or desperation. Help me be content in this season, knowing that You're preparing me for something better.

And if You have someone for me, prepare them too. Let them be doing their own healing work. Let them be whole, healthy, and walking with You. Bring us together in Your timing, not mine.

Until then, help me build a life I love. Help me find wholeness in You. Help me become the person I want to attract. Help me trust that You have good plans for me.

I release my timeline. I release my control. I trust You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. What attachment style do you have? How did it make you vulnerable to the narcissist?
2. What specific vulnerabilities (empathy, people-pleasing, weak boundaries, etc.) did the narcissist exploit in you?

3. How has trauma bonding affected what feels "attractive" to you? Do healthy people feel boring?
4. What red flags did you ignore in your last relationship? Why did you ignore them?
5. What are your non-negotiable green flags for future relationships?
6. Are you whole enough to date, or do you need more healing time?
7. What does this season of singleness have to teach you?

Closing Prayer

Father, I'm afraid. I'm afraid I'll choose wrong again. I'm afraid my judgment is broken. I'm afraid I'm attracted to the wrong kind of person. I'm afraid I'll end up right back where I started.

But I know You can heal me. You can renew my mind. You can restore my discernment. You can change what attracts me and what repels me.

I confess that I've ignored red flags before. I've romanticized dysfunction. I've confused intensity with intimacy, chaos with chemistry, anxiety with attraction. Forgive me. Heal me.

Teach me what healthy love looks like. Show me Boaz-like men [or Ruth-like women]. Let me recognize those who honor You and honor me. Give me the courage to walk away from anyone who doesn't.

Help me be patient. Help me be content in this season. Help me trust that You have someone for me—or that You Yourself are enough if You don't.

Heal my attachment wounds. Strengthen my boundaries. Build my confidence. Restore my identity in You. Make me whole so that when I do enter relationship again, I'm bringing wholeness, not brokenness.

I trust You with my future. I trust You with my heart. I trust You to protect me from deception and lead me into truth.

Do not be unequally yoked—help me understand this not just in terms of faith, but in terms of health, character, and values. Help me choose light, not darkness. Righteousness, not lawlessness. Partnership, not exploitation.

Thank You for loving me. Thank You for the healing You've already done. Thank You for the healing that's still to come.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 10: Recognizing Covert Narcissism

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

— 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 (NASB)

You know what overt narcissism looks like now. You can spot the grandiose displays, the obvious manipulation, the blatant cruelty. You've learned the warning signs: love-bombing, devaluation, gaslighting, rage.

But what if the narcissist doesn't look like that?

What if they're quiet, humble, self-deprecating?

What if they're the victim in every story?

What if they use words like "servant-hearted," "broken," "just trying to help"?

What if they cry when confronted, apologize profusely, and seem so genuinely wounded by your concerns?

What if they quote Scripture more than you do?

What if everyone else thinks they're wonderful?

What if you're the only one who feels something is wrong?

What if the wolf isn't roaring—but weeping?

This is covert narcissism, and it is far more dangerous than the overt kind because it **hides in plain sight, wrapped in the language of humility, service, and spiritual maturity.**

Covert narcissists don't announce their superiority—they demonstrate it through their martyrdom. They don't demand attention—they manipulate others into giving it. They don't rage—they withdraw and make you feel guilty for "hurting" them. They don't overtly control—they subtly manipulate through guilt, obligation, and spiritual language.

And in Christian communities, they are everywhere—camouflaged as the most humble, the most spiritual, the most wounded.

This chapter is about learning to see what hides in shadow, to recognize the manipulation that masquerades as ministry, and to trust the Holy Spirit's discernment when something feels wrong even though it looks right.

Because Satan doesn't always come as a roaring lion. Sometimes he comes as a wounded lamb.

Understanding Covert Narcissism

Overt vs. Covert: Two Faces of the Same Disorder

Both overt and covert narcissists have the same core issues:

- Fragile ego requiring constant validation (narcissistic supply)
- Inability to truly empathize with others
- Sense of entitlement
- Exploitative behavior
- Lack of genuine accountability

The difference is in presentation and tactics.

Overt Narcissist	Covert Narcissist
Grandiose, confident, boastful	Humble, self-effacing, modest
Demands admiration directly	Elicits admiration through victimhood or sacrifice
Openly entitled	Covertly entitled ("I deserve better after all I've sacrificed")
Explosive anger and rage	Passive-aggression, silent treatment, wounded withdrawal

Overt Narcissist	Covert Narcissist
"I'm the best"	"I'm the worst" (but expects you to disagree and reassure them)
Overtly controlling	Controls through guilt, manipulation, and playing victim
Takes credit openly	Takes credit subtly ("I'm just happy to serve")
Easy to identify	Difficult to identify; looks like the victim or the saint

The covert narcissist's superpower: They make you feel like YOU'RE the problem for noticing anything wrong.

The Covert Narcissist's Playbook

1. The Perpetual Victim

The covert narcissist positions themselves as the long-suffering victim in nearly every story:

- Everyone has misunderstood them
- Everyone has hurt them
- They've been betrayed, abandoned, mistreated
- Life has been uniquely cruel to them

The manipulation: You feel compelled to rescue, defend, or reassure them. Your empathy is exploited.

Example:

- "I've been hurt so many times. I don't know if I can trust anyone anymore."
- "My ex destroyed me. I'm still recovering." (Repeats this for years)

- "I just keep giving and giving, and no one appreciates it."

What's really happening: They're creating a narrative where they're the hero of their own tragedy, garnering sympathy while avoiding accountability for their role in relational dysfunction.

Scripture warns: *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness."*

— Isaiah 5:20 (NASB)

The covert narcissist has flipped the script—they're the victim when often they were the aggressor.

2. False Humility and Self-Deprecation

The covert narcissist appears humble:

- "Oh, I'm nobody special."
- "I'm just trying to help in my small way."
- "I'm so flawed. I don't know why God uses me."
- "I'm the worst parent/spouse/Christian."

The manipulation: When you hear this, you're expected to rush in with reassurance:

- "No, you're amazing!"
- "You're so humble and servant-hearted!"
- "You're too hard on yourself!"

What's really happening: This is a covert demand for narcissistic supply. They're fishing for compliments while appearing humble. If you don't provide the reassurance, they punish you with withdrawal or guilt.

True humility vs. false humility:

True Humility	False Humility (Covert Narcissism)
Acknowledges limitations without drama	Dramatizes limitations to elicit reassurance
Receives compliments graciously	Denies compliments to extract more
Doesn't need constant affirmation	Constantly seeks affirmation through denial
Serves without needing recognition	Serves but ensures everyone knows they're serving
Points to God, not self	Uses God-language to point back to self

3. Passive-Aggressive Control

Instead of overt demands, the covert narcissist uses:

The silent treatment:

Withdrawing emotionally or physically to punish you. You're left guessing what you did wrong.

Subtle digs disguised as jokes:

"Well, *some* people remember their commitments." (Said with a smile, but aimed at you)

Guilt trips:

"It's fine. I'll just do it myself. Again."

"I wouldn't want to burden you. I know you're busy."

Backhanded compliments:

"You look so much better when you make an effort."

"I'm proud of you for finishing, even though it took longer than expected."

The manipulation: You feel guilty, controlled, or wrong-footed, but you can't quite articulate why because nothing overtly abusive was said.

4. Spiritual Superiority Disguised as Concern

This is particularly insidious in Christian contexts:

Examples:

- "I've been praying for you. I sense God showing me you're in spiritual bondage."
- "I don't think you're hearing from God clearly on this."
- "God laid it on my heart to tell you..." (proceeds to criticize)
- "I'll pray about whether I should keep this friendship. I'm concerned about your spiritual state."
- "Your boundaries are evidence of unforgiveness."
- "You're being led by emotions, not the Spirit."

The manipulation: They position themselves as more spiritually mature, more in tune with God, more discerning. You're made to feel spiritually deficient.

What's really happening: They're using God's name to control you, silence you, or make you doubt yourself.

Jesus addressed this directly: *"Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."*

— Luke 20:46-47 (NASB)

Religious language can be a disguise for exploitation.

5. Martyr Complex and Excessive "Service"

The covert narcissist over-gives, then resents it:

- Volunteers for everything
- Insists they don't need help (but secretly tallies every sacrifice)
- Makes grand gestures of service
- Then holds it over you later

Examples:

- "I gave up everything for this family."
- "I put my dreams on hold to support you."
- "After all I've done for you, this is how you treat me?"

The manipulation: You feel indebted. You can never repay the "debt" of their sacrifice, and they won't let you forget it.

What's really happening: Their service wasn't given freely—it was an investment with expected returns (loyalty, compliance, gratitude, control).

Biblical service vs. manipulative service:

"Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NASB)

True service is joyful, not resentful. If they're keeping score, it's not service—it's manipulation.

6. Victim Language That Avoids Accountability

When confronted, the covert narcissist:

- Becomes tearful and wounded
- Accuses you of being harsh or judgmental
- Flips the script so you're comforting them for *their* wrongdoing

- Uses phrases like:
 - "I can't do anything right."
 - "You're right, I'm terrible."
 - "I should just give up."
 - "Everyone always blames me."

The manipulation: You end up comforting the person who hurt you. The focus shifts from their behavior to their feelings. You never get resolution or true accountability.

Example conversation:

You: "When you said X, it hurt me. Can we talk about it?"

Covert narcissist: *[Tears up]* "I'm so sorry. I'm the worst. I don't know why you even put up with me. You should probably just leave." *[Collapses into tears]*

You: "No, no, it's okay. I didn't mean to upset you. It's not that bad."

Result: They've successfully avoided addressing the issue. You're now reassuring them instead of receiving the apology you deserved.

7. Triangulation Through "Concern"

The covert narcissist creates alliances and division through feigned concern:

- "I'm worried about Sarah. I think she's struggling spiritually. Have you noticed?"
- "Don't tell anyone, but I'm concerned about John's decisions."
- "I love them, but I've been praying because I sense they're on the wrong path."

The manipulation: They're gossiping while appearing concerned. They're positioning themselves as spiritually superior while undermining others.

What's really happening: Triangulation—pitting people against each other, creating division, gathering information, consolidating power.

8. Hypersensitivity and Thin Skin

The covert narcissist is easily wounded:

- Takes everything personally
- Interprets innocent comments as attacks
- Holds grudges for perceived slights
- Makes you walk on eggshells

Examples:

- You forgot to text back → "I thought our friendship meant more to you."
- You declined an invitation → "I guess I'm not important to you."
- You set a boundary → "You're so cold. I'm just trying to love you."

The manipulation: You become hypervigilant, constantly managing their emotions, unable to be authentic.

Why Christians Are Especially Vulnerable

Covert narcissists thrive in Christian communities because our values, when distorted, become tools of manipulation.

1. We're Taught to Be Empathetic and Compassionate

The truth: Empathy and compassion are beautiful, Christ-like qualities.

The distortion: Covert narcissists exploit these qualities, positioning themselves as wounded people who need your endless compassion while never actually healing or changing.

Example: They share their "trauma" repeatedly, eliciting sympathy, but reject therapy, accountability, or growth. They use their pain as a shield against criticism.

2. We're Taught to Forgive "Seventy Times Seven"

The truth: Forgiveness is commanded and essential for our freedom.

The distortion: Covert narcissists weaponize this teaching to demand you forgive without requiring repentance, changed behavior, or consequences.

Example: "I thought Christians forgive. Aren't you supposed to forgive me?"

3. We're Taught to Give the Benefit of the Doubt

The truth: Love believes the best (1 Corinthians 13:7).

The distortion: Covert narcissists count on you dismissing red flags because you don't want to be judgmental.

Example: "They're just going through a hard time." "Maybe I misunderstood." "I should be more grace-filled."

4. We're Taught to Be Servants

The truth: Servanthood is at the heart of the gospel.

The distortion: Covert narcissists frame every boundary or "no" as selfishness, and every act of service toward them as your Christian duty.

Example: "I thought you were a servant-hearted person. I guess I was wrong."

5. We're Taught Not to Judge

The truth: We shouldn't be hypocritical or condemn others (Matthew 7:1-5).

The distortion: Covert narcissists use "judge not" to prevent any evaluation of their behavior or character.

Example: "Who are you to judge me? Only God can judge."

But Scripture also says: *"You will know them by their fruits."* — Matthew 7:16 (NASB)

"Test all things; hold fast what is good." — 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NKJV)

We're commanded to discern.

6. We Value Humility and Meekness

The truth: Humility is a virtue (Philippians 2:3-8).

The distortion: Covert narcissists perform humility to gain trust and admiration while operating from ego.

Example: The pastor who constantly talks about his "unworthiness" while ensuring everyone knows about his sacrifice and spiritual depth.

7. We're Uncomfortable with Confrontation

The truth: Peace is valuable (Romans 12:18).

The distortion: Covert narcissists count on Christians avoiding confrontation, allowing them to operate unchecked.

Example: "I don't want to cause division in the church." "Maybe I should just let it go."

But Jesus confronted:

- The Pharisees (Matthew 23)
- The money changers (Matthew 21:12-13)
- Peter when he was wrong (Matthew 16:23)

Sometimes love requires confrontation.

Signs of Covert Narcissism: A Comprehensive Checklist

Relational Patterns:

- They're always the victim in their stories
- Every relationship in their past ended with them being wronged
- They have few or no long-term friendships
- They "love" intensely but withdrawal comes suddenly and without warning
- You feel responsible for their emotional well-being
- You're walking on eggshells to avoid upsetting them
- They're hypersensitive to perceived rejection or criticism
- They expect special treatment because of their suffering
- They guilt-trip rather than communicate directly
- They use silent treatment or withdrawal as punishment

Communication Patterns:

- They speak in vague, confusing language when confronted
- They deflect when you raise concerns
- They cry or become wounded when held accountable
- They turn confrontation around so you end up apologizing
- They say "I'm sorry you feel that way" (non-apology)
- They use passive-aggressive comments
- They make backhanded compliments

- They triangulate—discuss others' problems with you

Spiritual Patterns:

- They frequently claim God told them things (conveniently aligned with their desires)
- They position themselves as spiritually superior
- They use Scripture to control or manipulate
- They judge others' spiritual maturity
- They speak frequently about their humility (true humility doesn't announce itself)
- They perform public piety but private character doesn't match
- They use "I'll pray about it" to avoid accountability
- They weaponize grace, forgiveness, or submission

Behavioral Patterns:

- They over-give, then resent it
- They keep score of what they've done for you
- They need constant reassurance despite appearing humble
- They deny compliments to extract more
- They compare their suffering to yours (and theirs is always worse)
- They lack genuine empathy—they might say the right words, but there's no emotional resonance
- They subtly compete with you
- They undermine your successes with concern ("I hope you're not getting prideful")

The Feeling Test (How You Feel Around Them):

- Confused (their words and actions don't align)
- Guilty (you can never give enough)
- Exhausted (emotionally drained)
- Inadequate (never good enough, spiritual enough, serving enough)
- Crazy (they deny things you clearly remember)
- On edge (walking on eggshells)
- Obligated (you "owe" them)
- Small (they subtly diminish you)

If you checked many of these boxes, you may be dealing with covert narcissism.

How to Discern Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

1. Watch for Fruit, Not Performance

Jesus gives us the key to discernment:

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

— Matthew 7:15-16 (NASB)

Don't listen to their words. Watch their fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23):

- Love (selfless, sacrificial—not conditional or manipulative)
- Joy (genuine, not performance)
- Peace (internal, stable—not constant drama)
- Patience (long-suffering with others)
- Kindness (genuine, not tactical)

- Goodness (moral integrity in private, not just public)
- Faithfulness (reliable, keeps promises)
- Gentleness (tender, not harsh or punishing)
- Self-control (masters impulses, emotions, reactions)

Ask yourself:

- Does this person consistently display these qualities?
- Is their character consistent in private and public?
- Do they produce peace or chaos?
- Do people feel built up or torn down?
- Are they the same with everyone, or do they have favorites and scapegoats?

Bad fruit looks like:

- Manipulation, control, and emotional chaos
- People feel drained, confused, guilty around them
- High turnover of relationships (they're always the victim)
- Public piety, private cruelty
- Conditional love and loyalty

2. Test Their Response to "No"

The single most revealing test: Set a boundary. Say "no" to something small.

Healthy person's response:

- "Okay, no problem."
- Respects your decision without guilt or punishment

- Doesn't make it about them

Covert narcissist's response:

- Guilt trips: "Oh, okay. I understand. I'll just figure it out myself."
- Withdrawal: Silent treatment, cold shoulder
- Passive-aggression: "Some people care about others."
- Victim: "I thought I could count on you."
- Spiritual manipulation: "I thought we're supposed to bear one another's burdens."

A person's true character is revealed when you say "no."

3. Observe Patterns Over Time

Covert narcissists are skilled performers. You might not see the manipulation in one interaction. But **patterns emerge over time.**

Ask:

- Is there a pattern of others leaving this relationship feeling hurt or confused?
- Is there a pattern of them being the victim?
- Is there a pattern of hypersensitivity?
- Is there a pattern of guilt-tripping?
- Is there a pattern of promises that aren't kept?

One incident could be a misunderstanding. A pattern is character.

4. Notice Who They Are When No One Is Watching

Covert narcissists perform in public but relax the mask in private.

Questions:

- How do they treat people "below" them (waitstaff, janitors, subordinates)?
- How do they speak about others when those people aren't present?
- What are they like when they're not performing for an audience?
- Do they change behavior depending on who's in the room?

Character is who you are when no one is watching. Reputation is who people think you are.

5. Pay Attention to Your Body

Your body is an early warning system.

In the presence of a covert narcissist, you might feel:

- Tightness in chest or stomach
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- On edge
- Dread before seeing them
- Relief when they leave

Don't dismiss these signals as "irrational." Your body knows before your mind catches up.

6. Seek Outside Perspective

If you're confused, get a reality check from safe, wise people **who don't have a relationship with the person in question.**

Ask them:

- "Can you help me process this interaction?"
- "Am I being too sensitive, or is this concerning?"
- "What do you observe about this person's behavior?"

Covert narcissists isolate their targets from outside input. Resist isolation.

7. The "Peace Test" (Colossians 3:15)

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

— Colossians 3:15 (NASB)

The word "rule" (Greek: *brabeuō*) means "to act as an umpire." **Peace is the umpire that calls safe or out.**

Ask yourself:

- Do I have peace about this relationship?
- Do I feel peace after spending time with them, or am I disturbed?
- When I pray about this relationship, what do I sense?
- Is there an internal "check" I'm ignoring?

God's peace is a gift of discernment. If you lack peace, investigate why.

Holy Spirit Discernment Checklist

The Holy Spirit is your primary source of discernment. Here's how to tune in:

1. Pray Before Interactions

"Holy Spirit, give me eyes to see and ears to hear. If this person is unsafe, reveal it to me. If I'm being deceived, open my eyes. Give me discernment. Protect me from manipulation. Let Your peace guide me."

2. Ask the Spirit to Highlight Red Flags

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will bring something specific to your attention:

- A phrase that doesn't sit right
- An inconsistency you might have dismissed
- A feeling of unease you can't explain

Don't dismiss these promptings. The Spirit often speaks through your intuition.

3. Test the Spirit of the Interaction

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

— 1 John 4:1 (NASB)

After an interaction, ask:

- Did that conversation produce fruit of the Spirit (love, peace, patience)?
- Or did it produce confusion, anxiety, guilt, shame?
- Did I feel built up or torn down?
- Did I feel closer to God or further away?

The Spirit produces peace. The enemy produces chaos.

4. Notice When the Spirit Gives You a "Check"

Have you ever felt an internal "stop" when considering a decision? That's often the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14: *"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* (NASB)

The Spirit leads—sometimes through peace, sometimes through unease.

If you feel that "check," honor it. Even if you can't articulate why.

5. Ask for Confirmation

If you're uncertain, ask God for confirmation through:

- Scripture
- Wise counsel
- Circumstances
- Consistent witness of the Spirit

God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). If you're confused, keep seeking clarity.

6. Compare Their Fruit to Galatians 5:22-23

Ask the Holy Spirit: *"Does this person consistently display the fruit of the Spirit?"*

If the answer is no, proceed with caution.

Practical Tools for Protecting Yourself

Tool 1: The "Gray Rock" Method (Revisited)

If you must interact with a covert narcissist (family, work, church), become as uninteresting as possible:

- Give minimal information
- Show no emotion
- Provide no supply (compliments, sympathy, engagement with drama)
- Keep responses brief and factual

Example: Covert narcissist: "I'm just so overwhelmed. No one understands how hard my life is."

Gray Rock Response: "I'm sorry to hear that."

Covert narcissist: "Don't you think people should be more supportive?"

Gray Rock Response: "Maybe."

The goal: Become so boring they lose interest.

Tool 2: Refuse to JADE

JADE = Justify, Argue, Defend, Explain

Covert narcissists bait you into these conversations to maintain engagement and control.

Instead:

- **They push:** "Why can't you help me?"
- **You respond:** "It doesn't work for me."
- **They push:** "But why?"
- **You respond:** "I've made my decision."

Don't JADE. You don't owe them explanations.

Tool 3: Document Patterns

Covert narcissists are masters of gaslighting. Combat this by documenting:

- Conversations (date, content, your feelings after)

- Promises made and broken
- Instances of guilt-tripping or manipulation
- Patterns that emerge

This creates objective evidence when you start to doubt yourself.

Tool 4: Create Distance

If possible, reduce contact:

- Limit time spent together
- Meet in group settings, not one-on-one
- Keep interactions brief
- Don't share personal information

You can't heal in the presence of ongoing manipulation.

Tool 5: Build a Support Network

Covert narcissists isolate. Counter this by:

- Maintaining close friendships outside the relationship
- Joining support groups
- Working with a therapist
- Staying connected to healthy church community

Isolation is their ally. Community is yours.

Tool 6: Trust the "Peace Umpire"

When in doubt, return to Colossians 3:15. Ask yourself:

"Do I have peace about this relationship/interaction/decision?"

- If yes → Proceed with wisdom
- If no → Investigate why. Don't dismiss your unease.

When the Covert Narcissist Is in Leadership

This is particularly dangerous and complex when the covert narcissist is:

- Your pastor
- A church leader
- Your boss
- A ministry head
- Someone with spiritual authority over you

They use their position to:

- Silence criticism ("Touch not God's anointed")
- Demand loyalty and submission
- Exploit your service
- Manipulate through spiritual language

What to Do:

1. Document everything.

Keep records of concerning behavior.

2. Seek wise counsel outside the organization.

Talk to people who aren't under the leader's influence.

3. Report to appropriate authorities if needed.

Elders, denominational leadership, HR, etc.

4. Don't go alone.

If confronting, bring witnesses (Matthew 18:16).

5. Be prepared to leave.

If leadership won't address the issue, you may need to exit for your spiritual and emotional health.

6. Trust God to vindicate.

You may not see justice in this life. Trust God to handle it.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

— Romans 12:19 (NASB)

The Danger of Enabling Covert Narcissism

Because covert narcissists appear wounded, humble, and "trying," we often enable them by:

- Making excuses for their behavior
- Rescuing them from consequences
- Believing their victim narrative without question
- Giving endless chances
- Tolerating manipulation because we don't want to seem unloving

But enabling is not love. It's allowing sin to continue unchecked.

True love:

- Speaks truth (Ephesians 4:15)
- Sets boundaries
- Allows consequences
- Refuses to participate in manipulation

- Protects the vulnerable

Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is refuse to play the game.

Case Studies: Recognizing Covert Narcissism

Case Study 1: The Martyr Mother

Sarah's Story:

Sarah's mother has always been "the sacrificial one." She gave up her career for her children. She never bought anything for herself. She served everyone.

But now, every family gathering includes:

- Reminders of all she sacrificed
- Guilt trips when Sarah sets boundaries
- Passive-aggressive comments about how "some people" visit more often
- Crying when confronted about anything
- Playing victim: "I'm just a terrible mother. You should cut me out of your life."

Sarah ends every visit exhausted, guilty, and confused.

Recognition: This is covert narcissism. The "service" was an investment with expected returns. The martyrdom is manipulation.

Sarah's Response:

- Set boundaries without guilt
- Refuse to engage with victim language
- Limit visits to what she can handle emotionally
- Stop over-explaining her choices

- Seek therapy to process the relationship

Case Study 2: The Wounded Pastor

Michael's Story:

Michael's pastor presents as humble, broken, and "just a fellow traveler." But Michael notices:

- The pastor frequently shares his "woundedness" from the pulpit
- He positions himself as uniquely misunderstood
- He interprets any disagreement as persecution
- He surrounds himself with loyalists who defend him
- Those who leave the church are labeled "divisive" or "wounded"
- He uses tears and vulnerability to avoid accountability

Michael raised a concern about financial transparency. The pastor cried, said he felt "attacked," and that Michael "must be struggling spiritually" to question leadership.

Michael is now being ostracized from his church community.

Recognition: This is covert narcissism in spiritual leadership. The humility is performance. The vulnerability is manipulation.

Michael's Response:

- Document the interaction
- Seek counsel from mature believers outside the church
- Consider reporting to denominational authorities if appropriate
- Be prepared to leave if leadership won't address the issue
- Trust God to vindicate

Case Study 3: The "Humble" Friend

Jennifer's Story:

Jennifer's friend Emma constantly talks about how "unworthy" she is, how "broken," how "everyone leaves her."

But Jennifer notices:

- When Jennifer shares a struggle, Emma redirects to her own (worse) struggle
- Emma expects Jennifer to drop everything when she's in crisis (which is constant)
- When Jennifer sets any boundary, Emma cries and accuses her of abandonment
- Emma never takes advice or goes to therapy, just repeats the same patterns
- Emma uses spiritual language: "God is the only one who understands me"

Jennifer feels drained, guilty, and like she can never do enough.

Recognition: This is covert narcissism in friendship. Emma is exploiting Jennifer's empathy with no intention of growth or reciprocity.

Jennifer's Response:

- Set clear boundaries about availability
- Refuse to engage with guilt trips
- Encourage professional help but don't force it
- Limit the friendship or end it if Emma won't respect boundaries
- Release guilt about "abandoning" Emma—boundaries aren't abandonment

When You Realize YOU Were the Target

If you're reading this and recognizing that you've been in relationship with a covert narcissist:

1. You're not crazy.

Covert narcissism is designed to make you doubt yourself. You're not imagining it.

2. You're not unloving for recognizing it.

Discernment is a spiritual gift. Using it is wisdom, not judgment.

3. You're not obligated to stay.

Even if they're wounded. Even if they say they need you. Even if they cry.

You're not their savior. Jesus is.

4. It's okay to grieve.

You thought this person was humble, broken, safe. Discovering they were manipulating you is a loss.

5. Trust your "peace umpire."

If you've never had peace in this relationship, that's information.

6. Get support.

Covert narcissism is crazy-making. You need outside perspective and validation.

7. Learn from it.

What made you vulnerable? How can you strengthen your discernment?

Reflection Questions

1. Have you encountered covert narcissism? How did it present differently from overt narcissism?
2. Which tactics from this chapter do you recognize from your experience?

3. Why do you think Christians are especially vulnerable to covert narcissists?
4. How can you strengthen your ability to discern between true humility and false humility?
5. What role does the Holy Spirit's peace play in your discernment process?
6. Are there relationships in your life right now where you lack peace? What might that be telling you?

Closing Prayer

Father, I confess that I'm easily deceived. I want to believe the best in people. I want to extend grace. I want to be compassionate. And sometimes, those beautiful qualities make me vulnerable to manipulation.

Give me discernment, Lord. Help me recognize wolves in sheep's clothing. Help me see through false humility, victim narratives, and spiritual manipulation.

I invite the Holy Spirit to be my guide. When something is off, give me that internal "check." When someone is safe, give me peace. Don't let me dismiss my intuition when You're trying to warn me.

Teach me the difference between true humility and covert narcissism. Show me the fruit—not the performance, not the words, but the fruit over time.

Protect me from those who use Your name, Your Word, and spiritual language to control and manipulate. Give me courage to confront when needed, wisdom to know when to walk away, and strength to maintain boundaries without guilt.

For those who are covert narcissists—whether they're in my life or not—I pray for their souls. I pray they would encounter the real Jesus, experience genuine

repentance, and find authentic humility. But I also pray that their manipulation would be exposed and that the vulnerable would be protected.

Help me trust Your peace as my umpire. When I feel disturbed, anxious, guilty, confused, or drained in a relationship—help me pay attention. Let those feelings be information, not something to dismiss.

Thank You for loving me enough to warn me. Thank You for the Holy Spirit who leads me into all truth. Thank You that I don't have to be a victim of deception.

Give me eyes to see, ears to hear, and the courage to act on what You show me.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 11: God's Truth vs. Their Lies

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

— John 17:17 (NASB)

The narcissist told you a story about who you are.

They told you that you were:

- Too much or not enough
- Crazy, unstable, irrational
- Unlovable, unwanted, disposable
- The problem in the relationship
- Selfish for having needs
- Wrong for having feelings
- Broken beyond repair
- Lucky they even tolerated you

And somewhere along the way, you started to believe them.

Their narrative became your internal monologue. Their accusations became your self-perception. Their lies became the lens through which you viewed yourself, your worth, your future, and even your God.

But here is the truth that will set you free: The narcissist was a liar. And you don't have to believe their lies anymore.

There is another story—a truer story, an older story, an eternal story—about who you are. It was written before the foundation of the world by a God who knows you intimately and loves you completely. It's a story not of shame and worthlessness, but of dignity, purpose, and infinite value.

This chapter is about learning to distinguish between the narcissist's lies and God's truth, systematically dismantling the false narrative that was built in

your mind, and allowing Scripture to rewrite your story with truth that sanctifies, heals, and restores.

The battle for your healing is largely a battle for your mind. And the weapon that wins this battle is truth—God's truth, spoken over the lies until the lies lose their power.

Understanding the Narcissist's Narrative System

Before we contrast the lies with truth, we must understand how the narcissist's narrative functioned and why it was so effective.

The Three Core Functions of the Narcissist's Lies:

1. Control

The narcissist's lies were designed to control you:

- "You can't survive without me" → Kept you dependent
- "No one else will love you" → Kept you isolated
- "You're too emotional" → Kept you silent
- "You need me to interpret reality for you" → Kept you from trusting yourself

Control through narrative is subtle but powerful. If they can control how you see yourself, they can control how you behave.

2. Projection

Narcissists project their own characteristics onto you:

- They're manipulative → They accuse you of manipulation
- They're selfish → They call you selfish
- They lack empathy → They say you're cold and uncaring

- They're dishonest → They accuse you of lying

This serves two purposes:

1. It deflects attention from their own issues
2. It makes you doubt yourself and internalize their flaws as your own

3. Accusation

The narcissist functions as "the accuser" (a satanic role—Revelation 12:10):

- Constantly pointing out your failures
- Never acknowledging your efforts
- Highlighting flaws while ignoring strengths
- Creating an internal voice of condemnation that continues even after they're gone

The result: You became your own accuser, continuing their work long after they left.

How These Lies Embed Themselves:

The narcissist's lies don't stay external—they become internalized through:

1. Repetition

Hearing something over and over makes it feel true, even when it's not.

2. Isolation

Without outside voices to contradict the lies, they became your only narrative.

3. Emotional Intensity

Lies spoken in moments of high emotion (fights, tears, rage) create deeper neural pathways.

4. Intermittent Reinforcement

Sometimes they'd affirm you, making you doubt whether the negative messages were real or if you were being "too sensitive."

5. Spiritual Manipulation

When they used God's name or Scripture to reinforce their lies, it created spiritual confusion that made the lies feel divinely authorized.

The result: A deeply embedded false belief system that requires intentional, sustained truth to dismantle.

The Power of God's Truth to Sanctify

Jesus prayed for His disciples:

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

— John 17:17 (NASB)

Sanctify (Greek: *hagiazō*) means "to set apart, to make holy, to purify, to consecrate."

God's truth doesn't just inform—it transforms. It sanctifies. It sets you apart from the lies and purifies your mind.

Why God's Truth Is More Powerful Than the Narcissist's Lies:

1. God's Truth is Eternal

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

— Isaiah 40:8 (NASB)

The narcissist's words were temporal, shifting, unreliable. God's Word is unchanging.

2. God's Truth is Objective Reality

The narcissist's lies were subjective opinion presented as fact. God's truth is actual reality—what is true whether you feel it or not.

3. God's Truth Brings Freedom

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

— John 8:32 (NASB)

The narcissist's lies created bondage. God's truth creates freedom.

4. God's Truth is Living and Active

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

— Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)

God's Word doesn't just sit on a page—it actively penetrates, divides, and heals.

5. God's Truth Renews the Mind

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

— Romans 12:2 (NASB)

The renewing of your mind is the core of your recovery. As your mind is renewed with truth, your life is transformed.

Contrasting the Narratives: Lies vs. Truth

Let's systematically dismantle the narcissist's lies by contrasting them with God's truth.

Category 1: Your Worth and Value

**The
Narcissist's Lie God's Truth Scripture**

"You're worthless."	You are priceless—worth the blood of Christ.	<i>"You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." — 1 Peter 1:18-19</i>
"You're not enough."	You are complete in Christ.	<i>"In Him you have been made complete." — Colossians 2:10</i>
"No one will ever love you."	You are loved with an everlasting love.	<i>"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness." — Jeremiah 31:3</i>
"You're lucky I put up with you."	You are chosen, treasured, delighted in.	<i>"The LORD your God is in your midst... He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." — Zephaniah 3:17</i>
"You're a burden."	You are a joy to God.	<i>"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." — 1 John 3:1</i>
"You're defective."	You are fearfully and wonderfully made.	<i>"I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well." — Psalm 139:14</i>

Category 2: Your Identity and Character

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You're crazy."	You have a sound mind.	<i>"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline [sound mind]."</i> — 2 Timothy 1:7
"You can't trust yourself."	You have the mind of Christ.	<i>"But we have the mind of Christ."</i> — 1 Corinthians 2:16
"You're too emotional/sensitive."	Your emotions are God-given and valuable.	<i>"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."</i> — Romans 12:15
"You're selfish."	You are being transformed into Christ's image.	<i>"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image."</i> — 2 Corinthians 3:18
"You're manipulative."	You desire integrity and truth.	<i>"Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being."</i> — Psalm 51:6
"You're the problem."	You are being sanctified.	<i>"For this is the will of God, your sanctification."</i> — 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Category 3: Your Capability and Competence

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You can't do anything right."	You can do all things through Christ.	<i>"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." — Philippians 4:13</i>
"You'll never succeed without me."	God has plans to prosper you.	<i>"For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." — Jeremiah 29:11</i>
"You're incompetent."	You are equipped for every good work.	<i>"That the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." — 2 Timothy 3:17</i>
"You always fail."	God works all things together for good.	<i>"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." — Romans 8:28</i>
"You'll never change."	You are being renewed day by day.	<i>"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." — 2 Corinthians 4:16</i>

Category 4: Your Relationships and Belonging

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You're alone."	God is always with you.	<i>"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." — Hebrews 13:5</i>

**The
Narcissist's Lie God's Truth Scripture**

"Everyone will leave you."	Nothing can separate you from God's love.	<i>"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life... will be able to separate us from the love of God."</i> — Romans 8:38-39
"You don't belong."	You are part of God's family.	<i>"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household."</i> — Ephesians 2:19
"You're unlovable."	You are God's beloved.	<i>"The beloved of the LORD dwells in security."</i> — Deuteronomy 33:12
"You need me to survive."	God is your sufficiency.	<i>"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."</i> — 2 Corinthians 3:5

Category 5: Your Purpose and Future

The Narcissist's Lie God's Truth Scripture

"You have no purpose."	You were created for good works.	<i>"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."</i> — Ephesians 2:10
"Your life is wasted."	God redeems and restores.	<i>"I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten."</i> — Joel 2:25

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You'll never be happy."	Joy is available to you.	<i>"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." — John 15:11</i>
"Your best days are behind you."	Your future is bright with hope.	<i>"For I know the plans I have for you... plans... to give you a future and a hope." — Jeremiah 29:11</i>
"You've ruined everything."	God works beauty from ashes.	<i>"To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning." — Isaiah 61:3</i>

Category 6: Your Responsibility and Fault

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"Everything is your fault."	You are not responsible for another's sin.	<i>"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity." — Ezekiel 18:20</i>
"If you were better, I wouldn't hurt you."	Abuse is never the victim's fault.	<i>"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil." — Isaiah 5:20</i>
"You made me do this."	Each person bears their own load.	<i>"For each one will bear his own load." — Galatians 6:5</i>
"You're guilty."	You are forgiven and cleansed.	<i>"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to</i>

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You deserve this treatment."	You deserve dignity and respect.	<i>cleanse us from all unrighteousness." — 1 John 1:9</i>
		<i>"For You created my inmost being... I am fearfully and wonderfully made." — Psalm 139:13-14</i>

Category 7: Your Perception and Reality

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"That never happened."	God sees and knows all truth.	<i>"You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle." — Psalm 56:8</i>
"You're remembering wrong."	Your perceptions can be trusted (when healed).	<i>"But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." — Hebrews 5:14</i>
"You're imagining things."	The Holy Spirit guides you into truth.	<i>"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth." — John 16:13</i>
"You're too sensitive."	God values your tender heart.	<i>"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." — Psalm 51:17</i>

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"You overreact."	Your feelings are valid.	<i>"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." — Romans 12:15</i>

Category 8: Your Spirituality

The Narcissist's Lie	God's Truth	Scripture
"God is disappointed in you."	God delights in you.	<i>"The LORD your God... will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." — Zephaniah 3:17</i>
"You're not spiritual enough."	You have direct access to God.	<i>"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." — Hebrews 4:16</i>
"God agrees with me about you."	God is your defender, not your accuser.	<i>"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies." — Romans 8:33</i>
"Your prayers don't work."	God hears and answers.	<i>"Call to Me and I will answer you." — Jeremiah 33:3</i>
"God is using me to discipline you."	God's discipline is loving, not abusive.	<i>"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines." — Hebrews 12:6</i>

Rewriting Your Story Under God's Authorship

The narcissist wrote a story about you. **But they were never the author of your life—God is.**

"Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them."

— Psalm 139:16 (NASB)

Before you ever met the narcissist, God had already written your story. What the narcissist did was attempt to deface what God had written, to tear out pages, to scribble lies in the margins.

But the original story—God's story—remains true.

The Process of Rewriting:

Step 1: Identify the False Narrative

What story has the narcissist told you about yourself?

Write it out: *"The narcissist said I was..." "The narcissist said I would..." "The narcissist said I could never..."*

Name the lies specifically. You can't dismantle what you haven't identified.

Step 2: Grieve the Damage

The false narrative caused real harm. It shaped your self-perception, your decisions, your relationships.

It's okay to grieve:

- The years you believed the lies
- The opportunities you missed because you thought you were incapable
- The joy that was stolen
- The identity that was distorted

Grieving isn't dwelling—it's acknowledging reality so you can move forward.

Step 3: Search Scripture for God's Truth

For every lie, find the corresponding truth in God's Word.

Use the chart above as a starting point, but also:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to relevant passages
- Use a concordance or Bible app to search keywords
- Ask mature believers for Scripture that speaks to your specific lies

Write these truths down. Memorize them. Speak them aloud.

Step 4: Declare the Truth Over Yourself

Don't just read the truth—**declare it.**

Example:

- **Lie:** "I'm worthless."
- **Truth:** "I am priceless, bought with the blood of Christ. I have infinite value."
- **Declaration:** "*I am not worthless. I am priceless to God. Christ deemed me worthy of His life. I reject the lie of worthlessness and receive the truth of my value.*"

Speak these declarations:

- Daily, as part of your morning routine
- When the old lies resurface
- Before challenging situations

- During prayer

Step 5: Act on the Truth

Truth must move from head knowledge to lived experience.

Ask yourself: *"If I truly believed this truth, how would I live differently?"*

Examples:

- If I believe I'm capable → I'll take on new challenges
- If I believe I'm lovable → I'll allow safe people to love me
- If I believe I have a sound mind → I'll trust my decisions
- If I believe I'm not alone → I'll reach out for connection

Let truth change your behavior.

Step 6: Surround Yourself with Truth-Tellers

You need people in your life who reflect God's truth back to you:

- Safe friends who affirm your identity in Christ
- A therapist who validates your experience
- A support group that reminds you you're not crazy
- A church community that sees and values you

Healthy community reinforces truth. Isolation reinforces lies.

Step 7: Be Patient with the Process

The narcissist's lies didn't embed overnight. They won't be fully dismantled overnight.

This is a process that includes:

- Immediate declarations (speaking truth now)
- Repetitive practice (daily renewal of the mind)
- Time (neural pathways rewiring)
- Grace (for the days you slip back into old thinking)

"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

— Philippians 1:6 (NASB)

God is still working. Trust the process.

The Renewing of the Mind: The Core of Recovery

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

— Romans 12:2 (NASB)

This verse is central to your healing.

Breaking It Down:

"Do not be conformed to this world"

= Don't let external influences (including the narcissist's lies) shape your thinking

"But be transformed"

= Greek word *metamorphoō* (where we get "metamorphosis")—complete transformation, like a caterpillar to butterfly

"By the renewing of your mind"

= The transformation happens through mental renewal—changing what you believe

"So that you may prove what the will of God is"

= When your mind is renewed, you'll be able to discern God's will clearly

"Good and acceptable and perfect"

= God's will for you is good (not the abuse you endured), acceptable (right and proper), and perfect (complete, lacking nothing)

How the Mind is Renewed:

1. Exposure to Truth (Input)

"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

— Romans 10:17 (NASB)

- Read Scripture daily
- Listen to truth-filled teaching
- Surround yourself with truth-tellers

2. Meditation on Truth (Processing)

"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night."

— Joshua 1:8 (NASB)

- Don't just read—meditate (chew on, ponder, internalize)
- Ask: "What does this mean for me? How does this counter the lies?"

3. Declaration of Truth (Output)

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart."

— Romans 10:8 (NASB)

- Speak truth aloud
- Write it down

- Pray it back to God
- Share it with others

4. Action Based on Truth (Application)

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

— James 1:22 (NASB)

- Live as if the truth is true
- Make decisions based on God's truth, not the lies
- Step out in faith based on your renewed identity

5. Time and Repetition (Transformation)

Neural pathways are formed through repetition. The more you rehearse truth, the more automatic it becomes.

Think of it like this:

- The narcissist created a well-worn path in your brain (lies)
- You're creating a new path (truth)
- At first, the new path feels unfamiliar and requires effort
- Over time, with repeated use, the new path becomes the default
- Eventually, the old path becomes overgrown from disuse

This takes time—often 6-12 months of consistent practice before truth feels more natural than lies.

Devotional Exercise: "My Truth vs. God's Truth" Journal

This is a powerful daily practice for mind renewal.

The Format:

Each day, journal using this template:

Date: _____

1. The Lie I Believed Today:

"Today I found myself believing..."

Examples:

- I'm not capable of handling this.
- I'm unlovable.
- I can't trust my own judgment.
- I'm too damaged to have a healthy relationship.

2. Where This Lie Came From:

"This lie originally came from..."

Examples:

- The narcissist said this repeatedly
- This was implied through their treatment of me
- This is how they made me feel
- This is the message I internalized from the abuse

3. The Evidence This Lie Provided:

"The 'evidence' for this lie is..."

Examples:

- I made a mistake today, which my brain used as "proof" I'm incompetent
- Someone seemed distant, which triggered the belief I'm unlovable
- I second-guessed a decision, which reinforced that I can't trust myself

4. God's Truth That Counters This Lie:

"God's Word says..."

Write out the full Scripture verse(s) that speak truth into this lie.

Example: *"I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well."* — Psalm 139:14

5. The Truth I Choose to Believe:

"The truth is..."

Write the truth in your own words, personalizing the Scripture.

Example: "The truth is that God created me intentionally and carefully. I am not a mistake. I am wonderfully made. My worth is not determined by the narcissist's opinion or by my mistakes. God says I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and I choose to believe Him."

6. How I Will Live Differently Based on This Truth:

"Because this is true, today I will..."

Examples:

- Extend grace to myself when I make a mistake
- Take a risk I've been afraid to take
- Set a boundary I've been hesitant to set
- Accept a compliment instead of deflecting it

- Make a decision without asking for excessive validation

7. Prayer:

"Father, help me..."

Pray through the lie and the truth. Ask God to:

- Root out the lie
- Establish the truth
- Give you grace to live from truth
- Renew your mind

Example Journal Entry:

Date: March 15, 2025

1. The Lie I Believed Today:

"I believed today that I'm too broken to ever have a healthy relationship."

2. Where This Lie Came From:

"My ex-husband repeatedly told me I was damaged goods. He said no one else would want me because I was 'too much work.' That message sank deep."

3. The Evidence This Lie Provided:

"I went on a date this week and felt anxious the whole time. I kept worrying I was saying the wrong things or being too much. When the person didn't text immediately after, I spiraled into believing it's because I'm broken."

4. God's Truth That Counters This Lie:

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." — 2 Corinthians 5:17

"I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten." — Joel 2:25

5. The Truth I Choose to Believe:

"The truth is that I am a new creation in Christ. My past does not define my future. God is restoring what was stolen. I am not too broken for love—I am in the process of healing, and healing doesn't disqualify me from relationship. My worth is not determined by one person's opinion or by how quickly someone texts back. I am being made new, day by day."

6. How I Will Live Differently Based on This Truth:

"Because this is true, today I will stop catastrophizing about the date. I will trust that if this person is right for me, my authentic self won't be too much. I will not apologize for being in process. I will remind myself that healing and being relationally ready are not mutually exclusive."

7. Prayer:

"Father, help me believe I'm not too broken. Root out the lie my ex planted that I'm damaged goods. Establish the truth that You're making me new. Give me patience with my process. Help me trust that You're restoring what was stolen. When I feel anxious in relationships, remind me that my worth isn't proven by someone else's response to me. Thank You that I'm not who I was—I'm who You're making me. Amen."

Additional Practices for Replacing Lies with Truth

Practice 1: Scripture Cards

Create physical cards (index cards, phone notes, whatever works):

- One lie per card (front)
- Corresponding truth and Scripture (back)

Carry them with you. Review them daily.

When the lie surfaces, pull out the card and read the truth aloud.

Practice 2: Mirror Declarations

Every morning, look in the mirror and declare truth over yourself:

"Good morning, [your name]. This is who you are today:

- *You are loved by God.*
- *You are capable and competent.*
- *You have a sound mind.*
- *You are not who the narcissist said you were.*
- *You are who God says you are.*
- *Today, you will walk in truth, not lies."*

At first, this will feel awkward or even untrue. Do it anyway. Feelings follow belief, not the other way around.

Practice 3: The "Lie Funeral"

For major lies that have deeply embedded themselves, hold a symbolic funeral:

1. Write the lie on paper

"I am unlovable and no one will ever want me."

2. Acknowledge the damage it caused

"This lie kept me isolated. It made me tolerate abuse. It stole years of joy."

3. Declare it dead

"This lie is dead. It has no more power over me. I bury it today."

4. Physically destroy the paper

Burn it, tear it up, bury it—whatever feels right.

5. Plant truth in its place

"In the place where the lie lived, I plant this truth: I am deeply loved by God and worthy of healthy relationships."

Practice 4: Accountability Partners

Share your lies and truths with a safe person. Ask them to:

- Remind you of truth when you're spiraling into lies
- Speak truth over you
- Gently challenge you when you're believing lies
- Celebrate when you act on truth

Practice 5: The "Evidence for Truth" Log

Just as you gathered evidence for the lies (moments when you felt incompetent, unlovable, etc.), now gather evidence for the truth.

Weekly, write down:

- Moments when truth was proven (you made a good decision, someone showed you love, you handled something well)
- Instances where God's character was evident (provision, comfort, guidance)
- Times when acting on truth produced good fruit

Over time, this creates a competing narrative—a record of truth that outweighs the lies.

Practice 6: The "But God" Reframe

When a lie surfaces, use the "But God" reframe:

Lie: "I'm worthless."

But God: "But God says I'm worth the blood of Christ."

Lie: "I'll always be alone."

But God: "But God says He will never leave me or forsake me."

Lie: "I'm too damaged."

But God: "But God says He makes all things new."

The "But God" statement is a pivot from the enemy's lie to God's truth.

Testimony: The Power of Renewed Thinking

Sarah's Story:

For two years after leaving her abusive marriage, Sarah believed she was "crazy." Her ex-husband had convinced her that her perceptions were wrong, her emotions were excessive, and her judgment was flawed.

She started a "Lie vs. Truth" journal. Every day, she wrote:

- The lie: "I'm crazy and can't trust my own mind."
- The truth: "God has given me a sound mind. My perceptions can be trusted."

For six months, she declared this truth daily—even when she didn't believe it.

She also began documenting moments when her perceptions were validated:

- She felt uneasy about a new acquaintance. Later, others confirmed the person was untrustworthy.
- She sensed a friend was struggling. When she reached out, the friend confirmed she was going through a hard time.
- She made a decision that turned out well.

After a year, Sarah wrote:

"The lie that I'm crazy doesn't have power anymore. I still hear the echo of it sometimes, but I've built such a strong case for the truth that the lie can't compete. I trust myself now. I trust my God-given discernment. The narcissist tried to steal my mind, but God gave it back."

This is the power of renewing the mind.

When the Lies Feel More Real Than the Truth

There will be days—especially early on—when the lies feel more real than the truth.

This is normal. It doesn't mean the truth isn't true.

Why the Lies Feel More Real:

1. The lies are familiar.

You've lived with them longer. Familiarity feels like truth.

2. The lies are reinforced by past experience.

The narcissist "proved" the lies through their treatment of you. Your brain associates the lies with survival.

3. The lies are fear-based.

Fear is a powerful emotion that makes lies feel urgent and true.

4. The truth requires faith.

Believing what God says when you can't see it yet requires faith—which is harder than believing what feels tangible.

What to Do When Truth Feels Unreal:

1. Acknowledge the feeling without letting it dictate belief.

"I feel like I'm worthless. But feelings are not facts. The fact is that God says I'm priceless."

2. Speak truth aloud anyway.

Even if you don't feel it. Even if it feels like you're lying to yourself. You're not lying—you're declaring objective reality.

3. Ask God to make the truth real to you.

"Father, I know Your Word is true, but I don't feel it. Make Your truth real to my heart."

4. Give it time.

Feeling follows belief, but not immediately. Keep declaring truth, and eventually your emotions will catch up.

5. Celebrate small shifts.

Maybe you don't fully believe you're lovable yet, but you believe it 10% more than you did last month. Celebrate that.

The Ultimate Truth: You Are God's Beloved

If you remember nothing else from this chapter, remember this:

You are God's beloved.

Not because of what you do, but because of who He is.

Not because you're perfect, but because He's gracious.

Not because you've earned it, but because He chose you.

"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are."

— 1 John 3:1 (NASB)

Such we are.

Not "such we might be someday" or "such we were before the narcissist ruined us."

Such we are. Right now. Today. Beloved.

The narcissist tried to convince you otherwise. But their opinion doesn't change reality.

God is the Author. He gets the final word. And His word over you is love.

Reflection Questions

1. What specific lies did the narcissist tell you about yourself? List them.

2. Which lie has been hardest to shake? Why?
3. What Scripture speaks most powerfully against the lies you've believed?
4. How has believing the narcissist's lies affected your behavior, relationships, and decisions?
5. What would change in your life if you fully believed God's truth about you?
6. What is one small step you can take today to act on truth instead of lies?

Closing Prayer

Father, I come before You acknowledging that I've believed lies about myself. Lies that came from the narcissist, but also lies I've told myself. Lies that have shaped how I see myself, how I live, and how I relate to You and others.

I confess that I've let the narcissist's narrative become more real to me than Your Word. I've believed their accusations more readily than Your affirmations. I've trusted their assessment more than Your truth.

Forgive me. And sanctify me in the truth.

Your Word is truth. Not their words. Not the enemy's words. Not even my own feelings and perceptions when they're rooted in lies.

Renew my mind, Father. Transform me by the washing of Your Word. Root out every lie. Establish every truth. Make Your Word more real to me than anything else.

When I hear the old lies echo in my mind, remind me they're not true. When I'm tempted to believe the worst about myself, speak Your truth over me. When I act from fear and insecurity, redirect me to live from my identity in You.

Help me believe:

- *I am loved, not worthless.*

- *I am complete, not lacking.*
- *I have a sound mind, not a broken one.*
- *I am capable, not incompetent.*
- *I am forgiven, not condemned.*
- *I am Yours, not defined by the narcissist.*

Give me patience with this process. It took years for the lies to embed—I know it will take time to fully uproot them. But I trust You're doing a deep work, not a shallow fix.

Surround me with people who reflect Your truth back to me. Remove voices that reinforce lies. Give me discernment to know the difference.

Thank You that You are the Author of my story. Thank You that the narcissist doesn't get the last word—You do. And Your word over me is love.

I am Yours. I am beloved. I am being made new.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Chapter 12: Complete Restoration of Identity

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

You've walked a long road to get here.

You've named the abuse. You've understood the trauma bonding. You've grieved what was lost. You've broken no-contact over and over until it finally held. You've learned to recognize gaslighting, to rebuild self-trust, to distinguish between God's voice and the narcissist's lies. You've replaced their narrative with God's truth, one declaration at a time.

And now, you stand at a threshold.

Behind you is the wreckage of what was—the relationship that nearly destroyed you, the version of yourself that believed the lies, the years lost to survival mode.

Before you is something new—not just recovery from what happened, but **restoration of who you were always meant to be.**

This is not about returning to who you were before the abuse. You can't go back, and that's actually a grace. Because who you're becoming is not merely healed—you're being transformed.

This chapter is about stepping fully into your restored identity in Christ. Not as someone defined by what happened to you, but as someone defined by who God says you are.

You are not a victim anymore.

You are not even just a survivor.

You are a new creation—chosen, beloved, free, and commissioned for purpose.

Welcome to restoration.

The Difference Between Recovery and Restoration

Many people use "recovery" and "restoration" interchangeably, but they are distinct processes with different goals.

Recovery: Getting Back to Baseline

Recovery is the process of:

- Healing from trauma
- Returning to stability
- Regaining function
- Processing pain
- Rebuilding what was broken

The goal of recovery: To return to a state of normalcy, to function again, to stop actively suffering.

Recovery asks: *"How do I survive this?"*

Recovery is necessary. But it's not the end goal.

Restoration: Becoming More Than You Were Before

Restoration is the process of:

- Transformation beyond the original state
- Discovering identity and purpose
- Flourishing, not just functioning
- Redemption of suffering
- Becoming who you were created to be

The goal of restoration: Not just to survive, but to thrive. Not just to return to normal, but to become more fully yourself than you ever were.

Restoration asks: "Who am I becoming through this?"

Biblical Restoration: The Pattern of Redemption

Throughout Scripture, God doesn't just restore people to their previous state—**He restores them to something greater.**

Joseph: Betrayed, enslaved, imprisoned → Second in command of Egypt, saving nations

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." — Genesis 50:20

Job: Lost everything, suffered immensely → Restored double what he lost

"The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning." — Job 42:12

The Prodigal Son: Squandered inheritance, lived in shame → Restored as beloved son with robe, ring, feast

"This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." — Luke 15:24

The Church: Dead in sin, enemies of God → Adopted children, co-heirs with Christ

"But God, being rich in mercy... made us alive together with Christ." — Ephesians 2:4-5

Peter: Denied Christ three times in His darkest hour → Restored and commissioned to shepherd the church

"Tend My sheep." — John 21:16

Paul: Persecutor of Christians, murderer → Apostle to the Gentiles, writer of much of the New Testament

"But by the grace of God I am what I am." — 1 Corinthians 15:10

The Pattern:

God doesn't waste suffering. He redeems it.

He takes what was meant to destroy you and transforms it into your testimony, your ministry, your purpose.

This is what restoration looks like: Not erasing the past, but redeeming it. Not returning to who you were, but becoming who you were meant to be.

The Journey: From Brokenness to Belovedness

Your journey through narcissistic abuse and healing has not been linear. It's been more like a spiral—revisiting the same themes at deeper levels, sometimes feeling like you're going backward when you're actually going deeper.

Let's trace the journey to understand where you've been and where you're going.

Stage 1: Victim — "I Am What Happened to Me"

Characteristics:

- Identity defined by the abuse
- Powerlessness and passivity
- Believing the narcissist's narrative
- Unable to see a way out
- Self-blame and shame

Core belief: "This is my fault. This is who I am."

In this stage: You were trapped—emotionally, psychologically, sometimes physically. You couldn't see clearly. You believed you deserved the treatment or that you were powerless to change it.

What God says: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me... to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."* — Isaiah 61:1

Stage 2: Survivor — "I Survived What Happened to Me"

Characteristics:

- Recognition that abuse occurred
- Taking action to escape or establish boundaries
- Beginning to process trauma
- Learning about narcissism and abuse dynamics
- Finding validation and support

Core belief: "I survived. I'm out. I'm safe now."

In this stage: You've left (or created distance). You're learning. You're naming what happened. You're beginning to heal. But your identity is still largely shaped by the abuse—now as someone who survived it rather than someone enduring it.

What God says: *"You will be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD."* — Isaiah 62:3

Stage 3: Overcomer — "I Am Conquering What Tried to Destroy Me"

Characteristics:

- Active healing and growth
- Reclaiming your voice and power
- Setting boundaries with confidence
- Challenging the false narratives
- Rebuilding self-trust and identity

Core belief: "I'm becoming stronger. I'm taking my life back."

In this stage: You're doing the hard work. You're in therapy. You're journaling. You're practicing new skills. You're confronting lies with truth. You're learning to trust yourself again. You're building a life you love.

What God says: *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ."* — 2 Corinthians 2:14

Stage 4: Beloved — "I Am Who God Says I Am"

Characteristics:

- Identity rooted in Christ, not circumstances
- Deep knowing of your worth and belovedness
- Freedom from the past's definition
- Living from wholeness, not woundedness
- Using your story to help others

Core belief: "I am not defined by what happened to me. I am defined by who God says I am. I am His beloved."

In this stage: The abuse is part of your story, but it's not the defining part. Your identity is anchored in Christ. You know who you are. You live with freedom, purpose, and joy. You use your healing to help others.

What God says: *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are."* — 1 John 3:1

You may move back and forth between these stages—that's normal. But the trajectory is always forward: from victim to survivor to overcomer to beloved.

This chapter is about stepping fully into Stage 4: Beloved.

Embracing Your True Identity: In Christ

The phrase "in Christ" appears over 200 times in the New Testament. It's not incidental—it's **the foundation of Christian identity**.

To be "in Christ" means:

- You are united with Him
- His identity becomes your identity
- His righteousness covers you
- His life empowers you
- His Father becomes your Father
- His inheritance becomes yours

**Everything you need to know about your identity is found in this phrase:
You are in Christ.**

Let's unpack what that means practically for someone recovering from narcissistic abuse.

1. You Are a New Creation

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

What this means:

You are not who you were before the abuse.

The person who tolerated mistreatment, who believed the lies, who lost herself in someone else—that version of you has passed away.

You are not defined by the abuse.

The abuse happened to you, but it didn't remake your core identity. In Christ, you're being remade.

You are becoming new.

This is present, ongoing reality. God is making you new—new thoughts, new patterns, new ways of relating, new vision for your life.

The practical impact:

- You don't have to be stuck in old patterns
- Change is not just possible—it's already happening
- Your future is not a repetition of your past
- You get to become someone new

2. You Are Chosen

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

— 1 Peter 2:9 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist made you feel disposable.

They discarded you, replaced you, made you feel like you were lucky they tolerated you. But that was a lie.

God chose you.

Not reluctantly. Not as a backup plan. Not because you earned it. He chose you before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) because He wanted you.

You are not an afterthought.

You're not too much, not too little, not too broken. You are chosen, wanted, pursued.

The practical impact:

- You no longer need to earn love or approval
- You don't have to perform or prove yourself
- Rejection from others doesn't determine your worth
- You belong to God—you're His possession, His treasure

3. You Are Known

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways."

— Psalm 139:1-3 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist never truly knew you.

They knew your usefulness. They knew how to manipulate you. But they never knew your heart, your dreams, your true self.

God knows you completely.

He knows your thoughts, your wounds, your hopes, your fears. He knows the real you—not the performance, not the mask, not the version you showed the narcissist. The real you.

And He loves what He sees.

His knowledge doesn't lead to rejection. It leads to deeper love.

The practical impact:

- You don't have to hide anymore

- You can be authentic without fear
- Being fully known and fully loved is possible
- There's no shame in being yourself

4. You Are Loved with Everlasting Love

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness."

— Jeremiah 31:3 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist's "love" was conditional.

It came and went based on your compliance, your usefulness, your ability to provide supply. It was never real love.

God's love is everlasting.

It doesn't fluctuate. It doesn't withdraw. It's not based on your performance. It's based on His character.

You are pursued, not tolerated.

God doesn't put up with you. He delights in you. He draws you with kindness, not coercion.

The practical impact:

- You never have to fear abandonment from God
- Love is safe when it's God's love
- You can rest in being loved rather than constantly earning it
- God's love provides the security human love never could

5. You Are Free

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

— Galatians 5:1 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist enslaved you.

Through manipulation, fear, guilt, trauma bonding—they created bondage.

Christ has set you free.

Free from the narcissist's control. Free from the lies. Free from the shame.

Free from the fear. Free from the need to earn worth.

You are called to walk in freedom.

Not to return to bondage. Not to exchange one set of chains for another. But to live in the spacious freedom Christ purchased for you.

The practical impact:

- You don't owe anyone your freedom
- Boundaries are not selfish—they protect your freedom
- You can make choices based on wisdom, not fear
- Living free glorifies God

6. You Are Holy and Blameless

"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

— Ephesians 1:4 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist heaped blame on you.

Everything was your fault. You carried shame that wasn't yours.

In Christ, you are blameless.

Not because you're perfect, but because Christ's righteousness covers you.

God sees you through Jesus—holy and blameless.

You don't have to carry shame anymore.

True guilt should lead to repentance. False shame should be rejected. In Christ, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

The practical impact:

- You can release the burden of false guilt
- You're not responsible for the narcissist's behavior
- Mistakes don't define you
- You can walk with your head held high

7. You Are Adopted and Belong

"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

— Ephesians 1:5 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist made you feel like you didn't belong.

You were always on the outside, always trying to earn your place, always at risk of being expelled.

God adopted you.

You're not a servant, not a stranger, not a guest. You're a child—fully adopted, fully belonging, with all the rights and privileges of a son or daughter.

You have a family.

The church, the body of Christ, the communion of saints—this is your family. You belong.

The practical impact:

- You don't have to earn your place
- You have inheritance rights (you're a co-heir with Christ)
- You're not an orphan
- You have a Father who will never abandon you

8. You Are Empowered

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

— Acts 1:8 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist made you feel powerless.

They took your agency, your voice, your choices.

God has empowered you with His Spirit.

You're not operating in your own strength. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you (Romans 8:11).

You have power to:

- Resist temptation
- Make wise choices
- Set boundaries
- Heal and grow
- Live according to truth
- Fulfill God's purposes for your life

The practical impact:

- You're not weak or helpless
- You can do hard things

- God's power is made perfect in your weakness
- You don't face life alone—God's Spirit is with you

9. You Are Purposed

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

— Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist told you your life was wasted.

They made you feel insignificant, purposeless, like your only value was in serving them.

God created you for specific purposes.

Not generic purposes. Not just "be a good person." Specific good works that He prepared in advance for you to do.

Your life has meaning and direction.

What you've been through is not meaningless. God will use it. He's already planned how.

The practical impact:

- Your life matters
- Your story has redemptive purpose
- You're not here by accident
- God has plans for your future

10. You Are Victorious

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

— 1 Corinthians 15:57 (NASB)

What this means:

The narcissist tried to destroy you.

They attacked your mind, your heart, your spirit, your sense of self.

But you're still here.

You survived. You're healing. You're becoming. You didn't let them destroy you.

In Christ, you are victorious.

Not because you're strong in yourself, but because Christ in you cannot be defeated.

The practical impact:

- The narcissist doesn't get the last word
- You're not a victim anymore
- Your story is one of triumph, not tragedy
- You overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony (Revelation 12:11)

Living from Your New Identity

Knowing your identity intellectually is important. But **living from your identity transforms everything.**

The Shift:

Old Identity (Defined by the Abuse):

- "I'm damaged."
- "I'm a victim of narcissistic abuse."
- "I'm broken."
- "I'm the person who was manipulated and discarded."

New Identity (Defined by Christ):

- "I'm a new creation."
- "I'm a beloved child of God who survived abuse and is being restored."
- "I'm being made whole."
- "I'm the person God created me to be, and my story includes redemption."

Practical Ways to Live from Your New Identity:

1. Make Decisions from Wholeness, Not Woundedness

Before: *"I'll say yes because I'm afraid of conflict."*

Now: *"I'll say yes if it aligns with my values and capacity, no if it doesn't."*

Before: *"I'll tolerate poor treatment because I don't think I deserve better."*

Now: *"I deserve respect because I'm made in God's image."*

Before: *"I'll stay isolated because I'm too broken for relationships."*

Now: *"I'm worthy of healthy connection and will pursue it."*

2. Speak About Yourself the Way God Speaks About You

Stop saying:

- "I'm such a mess."
- "I'm too damaged."
- "I'll never be normal."
- "I'm worthless."

Start saying:

- "I'm in process, and God is working."
- "I'm being healed and restored."

- "I'm becoming who I was created to be."
- "I'm priceless to God."

Your words shape your beliefs. Speak life.

3. Filter Opportunities Through Your Identity

When faced with a decision—a relationship, a job, a ministry opportunity, a commitment—ask:

"Does this align with who God says I am?"

- If you're chosen, you don't chase people who don't value you
- If you're free, you don't enslave yourself to obligations born of guilt
- If you're holy, you don't compromise your values
- If you're empowered, you don't shrink to make others comfortable
- If you're purposed, you don't waste time on distractions

Your identity guides your choices.

4. Set Boundaries from Security, Not Fear

Old motivation: "I'll set this boundary because I'm afraid of being hurt."

New motivation: "I'll set this boundary because I'm honoring the person God created me to be."

Boundaries aren't walls to hide behind. They're perimeters that protect your God-given identity, purpose, and peace.

5. Serve from Overflow, Not Depletion

Before: You gave until you had nothing left, trying to earn worth.

Now: You give from the overflow of being loved, filled, and secure.

Before: Your service was compulsive, fear-based, identity-seeking.

Now: Your service is joyful, Spirit-led, identity-expressing.

"Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NASB)

Using Your Healing for Ministry: From Brokenness to Blessing

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NASB)

God wastes nothing.

The abuse you endured was not His plan, but **He will redeem it**. The comfort you've received in your healing is not just for you—it's meant to overflow to others.

This is the redemptive purpose of suffering: Your pain, when healed, becomes your ministry.

You Are Uniquely Qualified

You understand:

- What it's like to be gaslit
- The confusion of loving someone who hurts you
- The fear of leaving
- The shame of staying
- The difficulty of healing

- The power of truth to set you free

You can offer:

- Validation that others desperately need
- Hope that healing is possible
- Wisdom from your journey
- Compassion born of experience
- Living proof that restoration is real

No one can minister to a hurting person quite like someone who's walked the same road.

Ways to Use Your Story:

You don't have to be "fully healed" to help others. (You'll never be perfect this side of heaven.) But as you heal, you can:

1. Share Your Testimony

With individuals:

When someone shares they're in an abusive relationship, you can say: *"I've been there. You're not crazy. Let me tell you what helped me."*

In groups:

Support groups, church testimonies, online communities—share your story when God opens doors.

In writing:

Blog, social media, articles—your words can reach people you'll never meet.

The power of testimony:

"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony."

— Revelation 12:11 (NASB)

2. Lead or Join a Support Group

Find or start a group for survivors of narcissistic abuse in your church or community. Be the safe person you needed when you were in the thick of it.

3. Advocate for Awareness

Help churches, organizations, and communities understand narcissistic abuse—what it looks like, how to respond, how not to enable it.

Many faith communities are ignorant about abuse dynamics. Your voice can educate and protect others.

4. Mentor Someone Newer in the Journey

One-on-one, walk with someone who's a few steps behind you. Offer guidance, prayer, accountability.

5. Volunteer with Domestic Violence Organizations

Even if your abuse wasn't physical, your understanding of psychological and emotional abuse is valuable in helping others.

6. Pray

Intercede for those still trapped in abusive relationships. Pray for their eyes to be opened, for doors of escape, for healing and restoration.

Your prayers matter.

When to Share and When to Wait

Not every season is a season for public ministry. There are times to:

Heal privately:

Early in recovery, focus on your own healing. You can't pour from an empty cup.

Process deeply:

Some wounds need more time before they're ready to be shared.

Protect your peace:

If sharing reopens wounds or triggers you, wait.

Guard against re-traumatization:

If telling your story keeps you stuck in victim mode, step back and heal more first.

Ask God for timing:

"Lord, is this the time? Is this the person? Is this the platform?"

Trust His leading.

The Balance: Testify Without Being Defined by It

Your story is part of you, but it's not all of you.

You can:

- Share your testimony without making it your only topic
- Help abuse survivors without making it your entire identity
- Use your pain for purpose without being stuck in the past

You are not:

- "The abuse survivor"
- "The narcissist's ex"
- "The trauma victim"

You are:

- A child of God who survived abuse and now helps others
- A redeemed daughter/son with a story of restoration
- A whole person whose life includes, but is not limited to, overcoming abuse

Let your testimony be a chapter in your book, not the entire book.

Stepping Into Your New Season of Wholeness

There comes a moment—not a single day, but a season—when you realize:

"I'm not just surviving anymore. I'm thriving."

You know you're in this season when:

- You think about the narcissist less and less
- Triggers don't derail you like they used to
- You have more good days than bad
- You're excited about your future
- You've forgiven (even if reconciliation isn't possible)
- You trust yourself again
- You can be in healthy relationships
- You have energy for things other than healing
- You feel joy regularly, not just occasionally
- You're using your story to help others
- Your identity is rooted in Christ, not in what happened to you

This doesn't mean:

- You're perfect
- You never have hard days
- You're done growing
- The past is completely forgotten

It means:

- The worst is behind you
- You're living from freedom, not fear
- You're anchored in truth
- You're moving forward with hope

Welcome to wholeness.

Commissioning: God's Call Over Your Restored Life

This is not the end. **This is the beginning of your new chapter.**

God is commissioning you—just like He commissioned the disciples, just like He commissioned Paul, just like He commissions every healed, restored, redeemed child of His.

Your Commission Includes:

1. Live Free

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free." — Galatians 5:1

Don't go back. Don't return to bondage—not to the narcissist, not to toxic patterns, not to old lies. Live in the freedom Christ purchased for you.

2. Walk in Love

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God." — 1 John 4:7

Love well. Not the codependent, self-sacrificing, boundary-less "love" you showed the narcissist. But healthy, God-honoring, boundaried, mutual love.

3. Speak Truth

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor." — Ephesians 4:25

Tell the truth. About abuse. About your experience. About God's faithfulness. Your voice matters.

4. Pursue Wholeness

"May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely." — 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Keep growing. Wholeness is not a destination but a journey. Keep pursuing healing, maturity, Christlikeness.

5. Help Others

"Comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which you yourselves are comforted by God." — 2 Corinthians 1:4

Reach back. Pull others out of the pit you escaped. Be the voice of hope they need to hear.

6. Glorify God

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." — 1 Corinthians 10:31

Live for His glory. Not for the narcissist's approval, not for anyone else's validation, but for the glory of the God who saved you, healed you, and restored you.

Spiritual Commissioning Prayer

This is a prayer to mark your transition from surviving to thriving, from recovering to being restored. You can pray this alone or with trusted friends who've walked with you.

The Commissioning Prayer:

Father God, I stand before You today—not who I was, but who You're making me.

I was broken, but You have healed me.

I was enslaved, but You have freed me.

I was defined by lies, but You have established me in truth.

I was lost, but You have found me.

I was shamed, but You have clothed me in righteousness.

I was alone, but You have adopted me.

I was purposeless, but You have commissioned me.

I declare today:

I am not a victim. I am victorious.

I am not broken. I am being made whole.

I am not worthless. I am priceless.

I am not abandoned. I am beloved.

I am not powerless. I am empowered by Your Spirit.

I am not defined by what happened to me. I am defined by who You say I am.

I am in Christ. I am a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

Father, I receive my new identity. I step into this new season. I walk forward in freedom.

I commit to:

- *Live in the freedom You purchased for me*
- *Love with the healthy, boundaried love You model*
- *Speak truth even when it's hard*
- *Continue pursuing wholeness all my days*
- *Use my story to help others still trapped*
- *Glorify You with my restored life*

I release:

- *The narcissist and their hold on me*
- *The lies I believed*
- *The shame I carried*
- *The fear that kept me bound*
- *The old identity that no longer fits*

I embrace:

- *My identity as Your beloved child*
- *My calling to live free and help others find freedom*
- *My story as a testimony of Your redemption*
- *My future with hope and expectation*
- *My purpose in Your kingdom*

Thank You, Father, for not wasting my suffering.

Thank You for walking with me through the valley.

Thank You for restoring what the locusts ate.

Thank You for beauty from ashes.

Thank You for new beginnings.

I am ready. Send me. Use me. I am Yours.

In Jesus' name—the name above every name, the name that breaks every chain, the name in which I am made new—

Amen.

Closing Encouragement: You Are Not What Happened to You

Listen to these final words and let them sink deep:

You are not:

- The abuse you endured
- The narcissist's opinion of you
- The trauma you carry
- The mistakes you made while trapped
- The years you lost
- The person who believed the lies

You are:

- God's beloved child
- A new creation in Christ
- Chosen, known, loved, and free
- Being restored day by day
- Commissioned for purpose
- A living testimony of redemption

The narcissist told you a story about who you were. But they were wrong.

Your story is not:

"Once upon a time, there was a broken person who was abused and never recovered."

Your story is:

"Once upon a time, there was a beloved child of God who was attacked by the enemy, but God fought for her. He healed her wounds, restored her identity, and gave her a future filled with hope. She overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of her testimony. And she spent the rest of her life helping others find the same freedom."

This is your story. This is your identity. This is your truth.

You Have Come So Far

When you started reading this book, you may have been:

- Unsure if what you experienced was abuse
- Doubting your own sanity
- Trapped in the relationship
- Newly escaped and terrified
- Wondering if you'd ever be okay again

Look at you now.

You've done the work. You've faced the pain. You've deconstructed the lies and rebuilt with truth. You've learned to trust yourself. You've set boundaries. You've forgiven. You've grieved. You've grown.

You are not the same person.

You are stronger, wiser, freer, and more grounded in your identity than you've ever been.

Celebrate that. Honor the journey. Thank God for bringing you through.

The Road Ahead

Your healing journey doesn't end here. You'll continue to grow, to learn, to heal at deeper levels. There will still be hard days. Triggers won't disappear completely. You may have setbacks.

But you know the way forward now. You have the tools. You know the truth. You're anchored in Christ.

And most importantly: You're not alone.

God is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. His Spirit lives in you. His Word guides you. His love sustains you.

You're going to be okay. More than okay. You're going to thrive.

A Benediction

As you close this book and step into your next chapter, receive this blessing:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May He lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

May you walk in freedom, live in love, and speak in truth.

May you know—deeply, unshakably—that you are beloved.

May your wounds become wisdom.

May your pain become purpose.

May your story bring hope to others.

May you remember who you are: chosen, known, loved, free, and made new.

You are not what happened to you.

You are who God declares you to be.

Go in peace. Live in freedom. Thrive in His love.

You are His. And He is yours. Forever.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NASB)

Behold, new things have come.

Welcome to your new beginning.

Reflection Questions

1. Where are you in the journey from victim to survivor to overcomer to beloved?
2. Which aspect of your identity in Christ is hardest for you to believe? Why?
3. How has God already begun to redeem your suffering?
4. What would it look like for you to use your healing to help others?
5. What does "stepping into wholeness" mean for you specifically?
6. What old identity markers do you need to release?
7. What new identity markers are you ready to embrace?
8. How will you live differently now that you know who you are in Christ?

A Final Prayer

Father, I can hardly believe I'm here. When I was in the thick of it, I didn't know if I'd survive. I didn't know if healing was possible. I didn't know if I'd ever feel like myself again.

But You knew. You knew the whole time. You knew I'd make it through. You knew You were going to restore me. You knew this day would come.

Thank You.

Thank You for not giving up on me when I wanted to give up on myself.

Thank You for being patient with my process.

Thank You for walking with me through the valley.

Thank You for restoring my soul.

Thank You for making me new.

I'm not who I was. And I'm not yet who I'll be. But I'm Yours. And that's enough.

I step forward into this new season with hope, with peace, with anticipation of all You have planned.

Use my story. Use my healing. Use my life for Your glory and for the good of others.

I am Yours. Completely, unreservedly, joyfully Yours.

And You are mine.

Let's do this.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

You made it. You're here. You're healing. You're whole.

Go live your beautiful, free, restored life.

You are not what happened to you.

You are who God declares you to be.

Beloved.

THE END

—AND THE BEGINNING—