

# Burying the Skeletons that Haunt Us

by clint wagnon

I am not an abuse victim. Nor am I an abuse survivor. I am, however, through Christ, an abuse conqueror. I have stared the dark demons of my past squarely in the eyes and have limped away bloodied and bruised, but limped away none the less. Leaving their lifeless corpses lying outstretched on the cold floor of what was once my own prison, I have buried the skeletons that haunted me. No longer a prisoner, not even a fugitive, I am a refugee running free in the wide-open spaces beneath the sheltering wings of the Living God, singing the music of the *rescued ones*. Once held hostage by hate, a slave to my abusers, I have been liberated by the scars of Jesus Christ. Paul was writing my story when he penned, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:37 NIV)

My fight was not an easy one, mind you. It was not a war I could wage on my own. And make no mistake, the wounds left scars that are tender-to-the-touch reminders of a dark dungeon, a powerful enemy, a bloody battle, and a great Deliverer. Still, from time to time, those corpses attempt an unholy resurrection... undead zombies who try to coax me back to my chains. I guess even though the war is over, the skirmishes rage on.

*“Resentment is nothing less than bondage. A life wrecked by resentment leaves the soul in shackles.”*

Thankfully, I’ve traded in my rusted shackles for running shoes. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” (Prov 18:10 NIV)

Abuse that binds comes in many forms: a trusted neighbor who turns out a sexual predator, a guilt-merchant parent, a husband who argues with his fists, a friend that betrays a sacred confidence, a wife that breaks her holy vow, a malevolent religious “leader”... the list goes on and on. Whatever shape the abuse takes, the aftermath usually looks the same. Broken expectations

that result in hurt. Hurt that almost always grows into anger. Anger that left unchecked cures like concrete into resentment. That is how the process works: broken expectations  
○ hurt ○ anger ○ resentment. Understanding the process helps to find the road to freedom.

Resentment is nothing less than bondage. A life wrecked by resentment leaves the soul in shackles. When we live in this prison, we are slaves to our abusers. Their momentary past impact becomes a constant present control. They direct our appetites. They depreciate our immune systems. They dominate our relationships. They are on our minds when we fall asleep, in our thoughts when we wake up, and even lurk through our dreams. When we hate, we capitulate to our captors, and the cycle rolls on. Eventually, we become what we hate. We start to look like our skeletons. A bizarre paradox for sure, but the hurt become the hurters... unless we break free.

Freedom begins with acceptance. There is no treatment without diagnosis. Unfortunately, acceptance is no easy task. The diagnosis is often distorted by denial (the maddening way a disease protects itself.) Sometimes admitting to one’s self the reality and impact of the

skeletons that haunt us is the most difficult step. Denial wears many faces: avoidance, minimizing, rationalization, projection (often the wounded person focuses their anger at God, or a spouse, or child, or all of the above) and on and on. In my own experience, acceptance was the most startling and painful part of the healing process. But only after I had identified my demons was I ready to engage them in battle. And battle I did.

After acceptance, we begin to work through the aftermath of abuse. This is the dangerous opportunity, because here we may find that the resentment erupts like magma as the pressure beneath steams to the surface. *Sometimes* the eruption forces a confrontation with a skeleton... or even a human. Eventually, we must come to the sacred door that leads us to freedom. The key that unlocks that door? Forgiveness. Wait! Don't stop reading yet. Stay with me for just a little bit longer. Let me tell you first what forgiveness is

*“This is the dangerous opportunity, because here we may find that the resentment erupts like magma as the pressure beneath steams to the surface.”*

not. Forgiveness is *not* endorsement. Forgiveness is *not* approval. Forgiveness is *not* forgetting. Forgiveness is not saying, “What you did to me is acceptable.” Forgiveness is *not* accepting responsibility for someone else's wrongs, nor is it dismissing them.

But forgiveness is a choice. (It usually takes time for the feeling to catch up to the choice.) Forgiveness is saying, “I choose to not live in shackles any more. I choose to not let your abuse be my taskmaster. I choose not to hate you... not anymore.” Turning the other cheek is not weakness. It is defiance. *Do your worst, I'm not afraid. Is that all you've got? Here, give it another shot!*

When we forgive, we are freed. The paradox is that what we are instructed to do, we are incapable of doing. We are unable to forgive. We are unable to let go. We are unable to halt our hate. We are unable, that is, on our own. These things are not in our nature or in our power. These things require the Divine Nature and Divine Power. And only when we have found acceptance and forgiveness in Him are we able to practice those things us. Yes, it is impossible to free yourself when you are chained to a corpse that refuses to die. Your non-competence will never allow you to bury the skeletons on your own. But His omni-competence will.

I'm not sure I'm entirely accurate on this point, but here goes: Maybe forgiveness isn't meant for the good of the offender... maybe it's meant for the good of the offended. Maybe it is the gospel made full circle when, after we have bathed in the forgiveness that comes to us in Christ, that same forgiveness refuses to be kept in a prison of our souls, but is so powerful, so free, it forces itself out. Maybe the recipient becomes a conduit, and then we see the deep mystery of the Majesty's unfathomable mercy that frees us. Maybe it is then, and only then, we are able to say with first-person knowledge, “Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.”