

Throughout my career in the fields of counseling and academe, I have been blessed with wonderful mentors who have taught me so much. One of the most important things, I believe I have learned from those mentors is the fact that my Greatest Teachers would be the patients and students I would be privileged to serve. Over the course of years in a part-time private practice, I was amazed at the number of my patients who had suffered from childhood trauma. The trauma may have taken the form of abuse including physical, emotional or sexual, or some other type of abusive trauma such as bullying. Being most aware of my ignorance of how exactly to help ease my patients' pain, I began reading every piece of literature I could find. I also attended numerous conferences and workshops. It seemed to me that no one had the answers I needed to aide my patients. And then I began to listen to the experts, my patients, to attempt to find a way to genuinely help. Their childhood journeys were nothing short of horrifying, and yet these people had an incredible resilience. Many of them had chosen careers in teaching, ministry, or other forms of service. Those who were blessed to become parents themselves were caring, gentle and loving as parents.

At first glance it makes sense that those who had experienced such pain in their childhood would be the last one's to inflict pain on others. While this would make sense in a logical world, we know that this is not a logical world. And we also know, too well, that many victims have become abusers. Having worked with the abused who became abusers, and "survivors" who chose not to abuse children or adults, I began to see how all of them struggled. Whether they struggled with alcohol, food, pornography, saying "yes", allowing themselves to be used, they were all in pain, and no drug or behavior made it truly stop. As I continued to work with the patients, many, if not all, talked about a "thing" that came over them that "baited" them into their negative self-destructive behaviors.

About 15 years ago, I began to theorize about this "thing", and began to use the metaphor of a "Parasite" to describe the "thing". One may ask, why a Parasite? Well, first of all, we are all familiar with the term and that ingesting a parasite can make us ill. I have come to believe that all childhood abuse/trauma is similar in function to a physiological "Parasite." This Parasite is ingested into the child's/adolescent's psyche disguised as "nourishing love". Once ingested into the child/adolescent, the Parasite causes ego fragmentation. This ego fragmentation is due to the conflicting feelings the child/adolescent typically experiences. The fragmentation of the ego leads to the child /adolescent to incorporate both the pain of the abuse and the responsibility for the abuse. The responsibility for the pain is one of the most difficult burdens for the victim. Think of these examples: "If I had only been good, mommy would not have drank tonight and beat me and Sis" or "I wanted him to touch me, BUT not like that, not there." The logical adult mind might be able to come to a different conclusion, but typically the child/adolescent feels the responsibility. And then, the child/adolescent sets off on a course to change the unchangeable. It also sets the stage for the victim to create an abuse-pain-abuse - pain addictive cycle. This cycle causes the abuse victim to plunge into a journey of self-loathing, self-abusive, and self-destructive behaviors. The Parasite model aides the victim in relinquishing the responsibility for the pain. The Parasite model also affords victims an opportunity to attack something other than the self.

The treatment approach of the Parasite Model incorporates the disease model often used in the field of addictions. I am not saying that victims are "sick", but I am saying they have a horrible illness that they

have through no fault of their own. Perhaps, more importantly, they have an illness that only they, with their God can achieve healing. In addition, the treatment approach which is contained in the book and which I will discuss in the workshop, includes sections on Development, Issues to consider in therapy, Forgiveness, and Boundaries to name a few.

The Parasite model also incorporates numerous Alcoholics Anonymous principles in the course of treatment. The incorporation of these concepts has enabled the victims to bifurcate the pain and responsibility aspects of their trauma, and, thus, empowers them to direct their energies at healing the pain while shedding the responsibility for their pain. The first step is to surrender to the reality of what has happened to them. Unfortunately, I have no answers to the human question “why me?” I do know that no one can give them back their childhood, but I also know that they with their God do not need to give their abuser one more minute of their life.

Another key element of the model is the need to examine the individual’s spirituality, including the image of a God or Higher Power. The Judeo-Christian religions, as well as many other forms of religion, rely heavily on the notions of Parent or Sibling: God, the Father, God our Mother, even the use of Brother. If my earthly father was vindictive and abusive, how difficult might it be to experience the embrace of a Heavenly Father? Or perhaps, my brother molested me. How difficult might it be to experience the warm embrace of the Father, the Mother, or the Christ?

In my treatment of adult survivors of abuse, I have discovered that many individuals hold both a “cognate” and an “affect” image of God or a Higher Power. The cognate higher power is often caring, benevolent, and compassionate. This cognate higher power is the one the individual talks about, and wants to believe in. The affect higher power, however, is punitive, conditional, and often abusive. Unfortunately, the abused individual typically relates to the affect higher power, which is more consistent with the earthly parental (or authority) figure. Thus, it is critical that an investigation of the image of God or a Higher Power be afforded to the victim. As a psychologist, I am well aware of psychology’s reluctance to delve into the spiritual aspects of our clients. If we as counselors or psychologists are not comfortable with using Spirituality as a part of our therapy, we can work hand in hand with trained spiritual directors. I have witnessed the tremendous healing when a “victim” comes to truly believe God did not cause their pain, nor did God abandon them. I firmly believe that unless a modification into the person’s affect notion of a God or Higher Power is achieved the abusive cycle will not be thwarted, and true healing will not occur.

I have been privileged to work with so many incredibly resilient people. I needed to tell their some of their stories to bring hope to those who suffer from childhood trauma. I urge anyone who has suffered from childhood trauma to begin their “journey” of healing , and make sure you take the gentle, loving God with you.

## **Some Works That Have Shaped the Thoughts in This Book**

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