

INTRODUCTION

GOOD NEWS FOR THE AFFLICTED

*The Spirit of the Lord God is
upon me . . . He has sent me to
bring good news to the afflicted.*

—Isaiah 61:1 (NASB)

The conference room, overlooking the rolling Amish countryside in southeastern Pennsylvania, quickly filled to capacity. The nervous energy and anticipation in the room was palpable as the students settled into their seats. I felt honored to be invited to teach this course on “Sexual Healing and Redemption” for the Theology of the Body Institute and grateful to be accompanied by my good friend Fr. Mark Toups, who would serve as our chaplain for the week.

After nearly three years of preparing the material for this course, I felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness. My own feelings were compounded by the rising anxiety among the students that permeated the atmosphere of the retreat center. Most had taken other courses at the institute, but they somehow intuited that *this course* was going to involve a deeper immersion into their sexual brokenness, before experiencing the healing and redemption that the course title promised.

Sensing the nervousness among the students, Fr. Mark wisely opened with a prayer welcoming the Holy Spirit’s presence. He then offered a few words of exhortation that brought immediate peace to the participants, and to me as I prepared to give an overview of the material. Here is a paraphrase of Fr. Mark’s opening remarks:

It's normal to feel anxious as we begin this course, as we address our sexual brokenness. We all have sexual wounds, and for some of us these may run very deep. But you don't need to muster more courage right now. Courage is not the opposite of fear. The opposite of fear is *communion*. The only answer to your fear and anxiety is the knowledge that Jesus is here, intimately present with us. He will personally walk with each of you through these five days.

After Fr. Mark finished his brief exhortation, he introduced me and told the class I had been working with his seminarians for the past several years. To encourage them, he shared about the healing and restoration that he and his seminarians had received. As I stood and greeted the class, I began a bit tentatively, feeling unusually nervous. But within a few minutes, I experienced a surge of confidence, sensing the inspiration of the Spirit as I spoke.

Piggybacking on Fr. Mark's comments, I shared that Jesus' entire mission was one of redemption and restoration. After reciting one of my favorite passages from scripture, from Isaiah 61, I emphasized that Jesus proclaimed these verses as his messianic mission (in Luke 4). I assured the class that Jesus' mission of restoration is as real today as it was two thousand years ago.

Applying the phrases from Isaiah 61, I continued:

If you have been sexually violated in any way, your trust has been betrayed and your heart has been wounded. Jesus desires to heal your broken heart and give you joy instead of mourning. If you are struggling with habitual sexual sins or compulsions, you are in captivity. He desires to bring you into his glorious freedom. In the place of your shame, he intends to give you double honor, and to offer you beauty instead of ashes. He desires to restore the generations of your family and to make you oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for his glory (see Isaiah 61:1–7).

Looking at the attentive faces around the room, I could tell these truths were deeply penetrating many of their hearts. They were also touching my own heart. I stopped briefly and allowed myself to feel the impact of these truths. In those few seconds, I reflected on what Jesus had been doing in my own life and in my family over the years, healing my broken heart, freeing me from sin, healing the generations of our family, and replacing my shame with his glory. My presence in teaching this course was evidence of all he had been doing in my life and in our family. I thought about all the ways he led me to face my sexual sins and wounds over the years and the restoration he brought about in the generations of my family. (I will share elements of this throughout the book.)

In that moment, I felt prompted to do something I had not anticipated and had never done before in public. Liberated from the shackles of shame, I began to vulnerably share with the attendees about those areas of sexual sin and wounds in my own life and in our family, and how the Lord continues to bring restoration. After my personal sharing, I emphasized again, “This is Jesus’ desire for each of you. He promises to reveal his glory in the places of your shame.” I continued: “That means he isn’t satisfied merely eliminating your sin and healing your wounds. The area that you are most ashamed of right now is the area he most desires to reveal his glory in your life.” As I spoke these words, a stillness descended upon the room. A collective sense of awe came upon all of us, as we pondered that reality. In the quietness, I encouraged everyone to reflect on the deepest area of sexual shame in their life, past or present, and to think of what it would mean not only to have that shame dispelled but also for it to become the very area of his glory shining in and through their life.

Restoring the Glory

You may be wondering why I am sharing all this with you, about an event that took place more than a decade ago. The reason is straightforward. These promises from Isaiah 61 are for *you*. The teaching from that first class at the Theology of the Body Institute is the

foundation for the book you hold in your hands. Sr. Miriam, who wrote the foreword, teaches a version of this material with me at the John Paul II Healing Center. The conference is now called Restoring the Glory. (The talks and workbook are available on our website at jpiihealingcenter.org).

As Sr. Miriam can attest, every time we teach this material, we see Jesus do amazing things in the lives of the attendees. Obviously, none of us is completely restored in a week because restoration is a lifelong process. But as you will see later in the book, Jesus did visit that class at the Theology of the Body Institute (TOBI), in ways beyond anything any of us could have imagined. He continues to amaze us every time we share this teaching.

I am confident that Jesus desires to bring restoration in every area of your sexual brokenness, past or present. My continual experience as a therapist, teacher, and conference leader applying these truths assures me that he will restore you to sexual wholeness to the degree that you invest yourself in this process and actively seek his help. If you have experienced any kind of sexual brokenness in your life—and we all have—you realize that these wounds can be a source of ongoing shame and intense anguish, long after the events themselves.

Whether from broken attachments, identity distortions, sexual compulsions, sexual sins, or sexual abuse, our unhealed wounds have robbed us of the fulfillment we desire. We are left mired in shame, rather than radiating God's glory. These wounds have left each of us with a lingering belief that "something is inherently wrong with me." We may believe any of the following identity lies: "I am inadequate," "I am bad," "I am dirty," "I'm perverted," "I'm tarnished," "I'm ugly," "I'm weak," "I'm unlovable," and so forth. It is within these very areas of shame in each of our hearts that Jesus speaks his astounding words of hope and restoration: "In place of your shame I will give you double honor" (Is 61:4).

This is why Jesus came to earth: to restore the glory of our broken human nature. He is the embodiment of graciousness and truth (Jn 1:14). As Sr. Miriam is fond of saying, "Only authentic love can restore broken and distorted love." His merciful love is the antidote to

our shame. But this battle between love and shame is ongoing. Christian psychiatrist Dr. Curt Thompson observes: “All that we do . . . is done in response to love and shame competing for our attention.”¹

Shame is the inner consciousness of our sin and our brokenness. Left unaddressed, it becomes a shield blocking our capacity to give and receive love. Toxic shame keeps us in hiding. It isolates us, fragments us internally, thwarts our creativity, and leaves us in constant fear of being condemned. Genuine love, on the other hand, is the only force on earth that can break through our shame and restore us to wholeness. God’s love reveals the truth of our identity in a world of confusing identities. Love integrates us interiorly, while restoring our communion with God and others.²

After forty years of accompanying people of all backgrounds and ages on their healing journey, I am convinced that Thompson’s observations are applicable to every person. We all know this fierce battle, between the competing forces of love and shame, in the depths of our being. This spiritual battle is fought most fiercely in the area of our sexuality. Have you ever wondered why sexual shame seems most powerful? Sexuality is one of God’s most beautiful gifts and reveals the most intimate aspects of our person, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When violated in any way, our sexuality becomes the target of the deepest shame.

I write in the hope that you and I will recognize the intense battle in our hearts between shame and love, especially in the area of our sexuality, and fight valiantly until we experience “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

Overview

This book is the culmination of years of experience and study about the process of healing and restoration. In many cases, I have included stories from my own life, as well as those from family members and men and women I have accompanied in the process of restoration. To protect the privacy of individuals, I have used pseudonyms wherever necessary.

Part I begins with an exploration of the many sources of our sexual shame and brokenness and how these affect us and our relationships. The individual chapters examine areas of our sexual wounds, psychosexual deprivations, identity distortions, sexual compulsions, sexual sins, and sexual trauma, in light of God's design for sexual wholeness.

Part II is a guide to restoring sexual integrity. By bringing our woundedness and shame to Jesus, we discover ways to experience freedom, healing, and integration. This involves renouncing the barriers that keep us bound in shame and pain, releasing the trauma of our sexual wounds, and forgiving those who have hurt us. The appendices at the end of the book provide tried and tested prayers and activities that are essential for restoration.

My prayer is that you will find this book to be more than an insightful resource. I believe it can also lead you into life-changing encounters with the merciful love of Jesus and some of the most profound healing you have ever experienced in your life. Each chapter includes eternal wisdom from scripture and Church teaching, as well as insights from my personal and professional experience. I also draw on the knowledge and experience of those who have walked this journey personally, as well as those who have accompanied others in the restoration process. At the end of each chapter, you will find "Take a Moment" reflection questions and a "Personal Activity." I can assure you that if you will take these seriously, you will experience substantial freedom and healing.

As you work your way through this book, I encourage you to be kind and gracious to yourself and those you accompany, while remaining patient and hopeful as the process of restoration unfolds (see 1 Corinthians 13:4).

Patience and Kindness

Because this process is deeply personal and can sometimes evoke strong emotions, including stirring up shame, I offer a note of caution as you reflect and work through the activities. Be patient and kind with yourself and with the unfolding of your own story. Healing from the

effects of sexual wounds and shame is not a quick fix. Rather, it is a work of deep and ongoing restoration through God's grace and mercy. Though glorious in many ways, it is not always without challenges and obstacles.

If you have been sexually wounded, are a family member or friend of someone who has been, or have participated in the sexual wounding of another, you may experience increased feelings of shame, anxiety, depression, sorrow, or anger as you read the stories of brokenness or learn about the process of healing and recovery. If this is the case, I encourage you to pause and allow some time for reflection and prayer so you can restore your peace. As Fr. Mark told the class at TOBI, *you are not alone*. Rest secure in the knowledge that Jesus is with you throughout the process. Remember his kindness and compassion revealed in Isaiah 61 and internalize these truths for yourself. Be attentive to your reactions. Notice which stories or ideas trigger these feelings and why. Also pay attention to topics you find yourself wanting to skip over or resist. These probably reveal specific areas of your shame and brokenness. The entirety of the book will help you explore where those reactions are rooted in your personal history. Appendices 1–4 will help you work through their deeper roots.

You may also benefit from one or more of the resources listed in appendix 5, including the healing conferences, books, or workbooks that are available through the John Paul II Healing Center or my *Restore the Glory* podcast with Catholic therapist Jake Khym.

As you begin, I pray you will encounter the merciful love of Jesus in every area of your sexual sins, wounds, and shame. I ask Jesus to give you an abiding confidence in his presence and in the power of the Holy Spirit to turn your mourning into joy and transform your shame into his glory. May you become his oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for his glory (Is 61:1–4).

PART I

REVEALING OUR
SEXUAL BROKENNESS

You may have noticed the subtitle of this book emphasizing Jesus' merciful love and *our* sexual wounds. We are in this together. We all have sexual wounds. It is not hard to see that sexual brokenness is endemic to our culture and present within our Church. But if we look closely enough, we can also recognize how sexual sins and wounds have affected our families and each of us personally. I daresay that sexual wounds, and the shame they engender, have become embedded into the fabric of our souls, many of our relationships, and into our cultural norms. In this broken world, I believe we are all wounded in our sexuality in one way or another. We all need ongoing encounters with Jesus' merciful love. Part I of this book lays out the areas of our sexual woundedness.

- Chapter 1, "Shining Light in the Darkness," identifies the various ways we have been sexually wounded and how they impact us and our relationships. I share some of my personal and family experiences, as well as my awakening when I began my career as a family therapist that these realities of sexual brokenness are endemic in all families. At the end of the chapter, you will have an opportunity to identify the various sources of your sexual wounds, within two umbrella categories: sexual violations and psychosexual deprivations.
- Chapter 2, "Living the Truth in Love," focuses on our integral human development and how we can become wounded in our psychosexual identity. Many of us have hidden wounds from experiences of deprivation or distortions in love, which hinder our maturity and lead to disintegration. At the end of the chapter you will have an opportunity to understand how deprivations of love have affected your personal psychosexual development.
- Chapter 3, "Reflecting God's Image," focuses on our God-given identity as male and female and the factors that influence our acceptance or rejection of our gender. When our identity is not affirmed by our family and culture, or has been disrupted by sexual wounds, we develop distortions in our identity. Conversely, when our gender is affirmed and accepted, we become increasingly more

confident in who we are. The chapter ends with reflection and application questions, allowing you to assess your own gender awareness and acceptance.

- Chapter 4, “Lured by Desires,” explores how wounds in our psychosexual development and gender identity are often the driving force behind our disordered desires and sexual compulsions. Facing these underlying wounds and unmet needs enables us to experience freedom and integration in our sexual desires. You will have an opportunity at the end of the chapter to explore and reflect on how your sexual desires express unmet needs and unhealed wounds.
- Chapter 5, “Crushed by Iniquities,” acknowledges the crushing reality of sexual sin and how these inevitably wound the heart of God, our own integrity, and our intimate relationships. Conversely, when we honor God’s holy boundaries for sexual expression, we reverence every person as a temple of the Holy Spirit. The personal activity at the end of the chapter offers an opportunity for you to review your sexual history and receive Jesus’ mercy for any areas where you have not lived according to God’s design for your sexuality.
- Chapter 6, “Mourning Broken Hearts,” examines the heart-shattering trauma resulting from sexual violations. In this chapter, we carefully examine the “seven deadly wounds” and corresponding “identity distortions” that remain long after the experiences of sexual violation have occurred, offering the hope of restoration when these are uncovered and the trauma is released. The activity at the end of the chapter provides an opportunity to uncover these wounds and identity lies in your own life.

Considered together, these chapters show how wounds in our psychosexual development distort our gender identity, fueling our sexual compulsions and leading to sexual sins, which inevitably cause sexual trauma. All point to our need for a Savior.

Dear Reader, I am sensitive to where you are as you begin this book. We are addressing some very tender topics related to sexuality. I have tried to balance honesty with modesty in my descriptions of sexuality, in my own story and in all the others. *The use of such stories and examples helps to illustrate the deep and lasting impact that trauma has upon the heart and life of one who suffers it. In the same moment, these stories help to make concrete what otherwise might remain only theoretical.* With that said, I realize that mentioning certain words and experiences can trigger emotional reactions. Please know that my intention is to bring you healing and not trigger you in any way. But if it does happen, feel free to pause or skip over those sections. If you are triggered in any way by the stories or descriptions in this chapter or throughout the book, you may find it helpful to go back to the appendices immediately to use the prayers and exercises there to help you return to peace.

SHINING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: IDENTIFYING OUR SEXUAL WOUNDS

*Live as children of light, for light produces
every kind of goodness . . . and truth.*

—Ephesians 5:8–9

When I began my career as a marriage and family therapist in the early 1980s, I had no formal training concerning how to help people heal from sexual wounds. Nor had I faced areas of my own sexual sin and wounds, or my self-righteous judgments toward family members and others in the areas of their sexual brokenness. As a result, I did not realize how much sexual shame affected nearly every person and every family, including my own. My graduate-school education focused primarily on relationship dynamics and generational patterns of family interaction. At the time, I had little understanding of how these relational dynamics and generational patterns might be intertwined with sexual wounds and shame. By the time I retired thirty-five years later, I realized that some degree of sexual wounding and shame was endemic to nearly every person and family I met with as a therapist.

My naivete from graduate school did not last long. The first three people I counseled after opening my therapy practice had experienced

profound wounding from very diverse kinds of sexual violations. I soon realized that these experiences from their past were continuing to have a significant impact on their current relationships, including the way they saw themselves (identity), how they related to God (worship), and how they interacted with their loved ones (intimacy).

The first person I counseled was Susan, a female graduate student in her early twenties.¹ She told me in the initial interview that she had no religion and did not believe in God. Halfway through our first therapy session she revealed that her father had sexually molested her throughout her childhood. She added, without much emotion, that she had also been sexually involved with her three previous therapists. After that initial meeting, she never talked about these experiences again, and I was reluctant to ask. Instead, she spent session after therapy session sharing intimate details of her sexual relationship with her live-in boyfriend. Desiring to be supportive, I sat quietly and listened. But underneath my professional veneer, I felt extremely uncomfortable with the detail of her sharing. I felt bombarded by her incessant barrage of sexual words and images, but I never considered the possibility that I could redirect our conversation.

At the time, I did not realize that her sharing was stirring unresolved issues in my own sexual history. Nor did I realize until after we terminated therapy that she was unwittingly testing me to see if I would be the next therapist to sexually violate her. Thank God I was never tempted. Looking back, I am not sure I did much to help her heal during these therapy sessions, except the most important thing, which was to treat her with the dignity and respect she deserved but had failed to receive from other men.

After she graduated and moved away, Susan wrote me a letter to thank me for showing her that it was possible to have a man honor her and not use her sexually. She shared that it was a huge breakthrough for her and that, as a result, she had subsequently broken up with her boyfriend because she was feeling used in that relationship as well. She also realized in retrospect that she had been using him. It dawned on her after therapy that she had unconsciously reenacted her earlier sexual abuse with her father with her boyfriend, as well as with her

three previous therapists. She expressed joy, hoping that this lifelong pattern of abuse and sexual compulsion had come to an end.

The second person I accompanied in therapy was a middle-aged man I'll call Jimmy. He came to therapy desiring to address his suicidal depression. Within a few sessions it became apparent that he carried a lot of unresolved pain and shame from his childhood. As a twelve-year-old boy he had been taunted by older boys in the locker room about his physical anatomy (while he was naked coming out of the shower). He carried the shame of that humiliating experience throughout his life, affecting not only his self-image but also his current work and family relationships. He told me he felt weak and ineffectual as a man and that his wife "wore the pants" in their family.

During one session, which will be forever etched in my memory, he painfully recounted the details of the incident when he was ridiculed by the older boys in the locker room. While describing these events to me, he suddenly stood up and pulled his pants down, as a way of reliving his traumatic experience in the locker room. To say I was shocked would be an understatement. Sitting there, I felt trapped and intensely anxious, fearfully imagining someone walking into my office to witness this scene. My fight-or-flight response immediately kicked into high gear. My first impulse was to run out into the hallway of my professional building. But then, imagining him chasing me down the hallway with his pants around his ankles and people gawking at us, I realized that was probably not a good idea. In a millisecond, I switched from flight to fight. Jumping to my feet, I sternly commanded him to put his pants back on. Though not the most compassionate response, I am thankful he did because after that I had run out of creative ideas.

Soon after he was fully clothed again, we both regained our composure (somewhat) and began to discuss the situation "therapeutically." I invited him to talk about what he was feeling and why he had acted as he did. As he spoke, my bewilderment slowly turned into compassion, realizing that my forceful reaction further traumatized him. After we both apologized, he talked through his initial motivation, which was to overcome his feelings of inadequacy and to

receive affirmation for his masculinity. The more we spoke, the more he realized that his shame over his manhood went much deeper than this incident in the locker room or his physical anatomy. It originated in his father's emotional disconnection and lack of affirmation, starting in early childhood. The shower incident with the older boys only confirmed his self-doubt and his sense of impotence as a man.

The third person I met in the early months of my therapy practice was a married woman, Joyce. She came for healing from a more immediate sexual wound, one caused by her husband's infidelity. Suffering from what I now understand as betrayal trauma, she despaired over ever being able to rediscover the sacredness of their marriage or restore the broken trust with her husband. She wondered if her husband ever really meant the sacred vows he spoke to her on their wedding day. Her husband's betrayal left her feeling self-protective and insecure in her desirability. Long after the affair had ended, she struggled with her body image and felt incapable of giving herself to her husband. When they attempted to be sexually intimate, she reported feeling paralyzingly self-conscious and simultaneously disgusted with her husband.

As I listened to Joyce share her pain, I felt compassion for her. But without any training in this area, I had little to offer her regarding how she might heal from this soul-shattering betrayal wound. In the subsequent months, we made minimal progress in therapy, even after inviting her husband in for marital counseling. Several years later, I grieved hearing they had divorced. At the time I did not make the connection that this woman's situation mirrored my own family growing up. As a young teenager, I had felt helpless responding to my mom's pain following my dad's infidelity, as well as the distress in our family with their subsequent divorce.

Since that inauspicious beginning as a therapist, I have come to realize that I cannot help others heal from their sexual wounds unless I first face my own and find healing for them with God's help. I have also discovered that all of us have much more in common in our sexual brokenness than I could have imagined back then. I now see that we are all sexually wounded in one way or another. As the three

stories above illustrate, these violations may occur in very different ways, and at any age or stage of our development.

Consider the different sources of sexual wounding in the three situations. The young woman, Susan, was sexually violated by her father during childhood and then rewounded in adolescence and adulthood by her previous therapists and live-in boyfriend. The middle-aged man, Jimmy, had been verbally assaulted by older boys at a crucial stage of his psychosexual development and had experienced deeper wounds in his masculine identity from his earliest years in his family. These wounds continued to impact him in adulthood and especially in his marriage. The married woman, Joyce, was wounded by her husband's adultery, shattering her trust and simultaneously desecrating their marriage. This traumatic wound tapped into areas of shame and her unaffirmed identity as a wife (and as a daughter from her earliest days with her mother and father).

I have come to believe that many of us are sexually wounded in one or more of these ways: sexual boundary violations, lack of affirmation in our gender, and/or betrayal from our loved ones. These wounds can affect us throughout the crucial years of our development and even into adulthood. Many of these wounds are caused by others. But some come through our own actions and reactions. If left untended, these sexually wounding experiences will inevitably become sources of debilitating shame and disintegration, which will bring us into a cycle of compulsive sin and effectively hinder our capacity for intimacy and authentic love.

Sexually Wounding Experiences

Our sexuality is one of the greatest gifts we have received from God. "However," as Christian therapist and author Dr. Juli Slattery observes, "we rarely see it as a gift because it has been so twisted and tainted in our personal experiences and in our culture. There is perhaps no aspect of humanity that represents more pain and shame than sexuality."² Slattery continues: "While some of us have not experienced anything as horrific as rape or sexual abuse, we have all been

broken by the world's consistent vandalism of sexuality."³ Catholic sex therapists Christopher and Rachel McCluskey elaborate: "We have become the proverbial frog in the pot, so used to daily portrayals of live action sexuality that we fail to appreciate how desensitized we have become."⁴

Consider all the ways our minds and hearts have been, and continue to be, sullied through sexual images. These enticing visual and verbal images bombard us from the internet, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, romance novels, music, fashions, television, movies, and our daily interactions with the people around us. Few of us escape the effects of this barrage of sexual imagery.

In addition to these pornographic images, we have been forced destructive sexual ideologies and agendas for decades since the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s and beyond. These influences distort our understanding of sexuality and violate God's wholesome design for love and procreation. Immersed in this sexually obsessed culture, none of us can remain entirely untarnished. All of these sources of sexual violation, though often unconscious, leave an imprint of shame in our bodies and souls. Whatever generation we belong to, many of us have shameful images impressed in our memories. Some of us lost our sexual innocence "from the tenderest ages." And it has only gotten worse over time. "All those born in the 1970s and 1980s have grown up in a pan-sexualized and hypereroticized cultural climate. . . . Images never seen in earlier times . . . remain impressed in our memory, fantasy, and even in the subconscious of persons from the tenderest ages."⁵

Loss of Innocence

Can you recall how and when you lost your sexual innocence? Apart from original sin and generational influences, we all start off life with a measure of innocence. Personally, I do not remember any shame about sexuality until hearing obscene words in second grade from my friends at school. This was compounded by seeing images of naked women in third grade when a friend discovered *Playboy* magazines in

his brother's room and secretly shared it with me. For many years, I didn't consider these experiences to be sexually wounding. No one forced me to do anything against my will. But now looking back, I see how these alluring images of naked women became implanted in my imagination and then left me feeling dirty and ashamed. I did not have words back then to describe my experience. I hid these shameful experiences from my parents and others in authority. They continued, however subtly, to color my perception of sexuality for years to come.

Can you remember how and when you were exposed to sexual experiences in ways that negatively affected your understanding of sexuality? Can you see how those incidences were sexually wounding and led you to internalize shame? In addition to images and words, many of us have been touched or touched others in ways that violated appropriate sexual boundaries and awakened sexual desire before its proper time and place.

I vividly remember my initial awkwardness and then the exciting sexual touches in eighth and ninth grade with my first two girlfriends. These experiences awakened my sexual desires as well as those of my girlfriends. Though I justified my actions as "normal for my age," I knew even then they were not in accord with God's protective boundaries for sexual expression. I now believe these experiences were "violations" of my sexuality as well as that of my girlfriends, even though we were mutually consenting.

These kinds of experiences usually aren't considered to be sexually wounding by many in our society. Many consider them normal developmental experiences. Since no one forced anyone to do something against their will, we naively think there are no lasting effects. But after some healthy soul searching, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I have come to believe differently. Any time we violate God's intention for sexuality, we harm ourselves and others in the process. Any sexual act outside of God's will constitutes a desecration of our body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, shame and disintegration inevitably accompany these violations against purity.

During my early teen years, I had other experiences of sexual violation that could more classically be defined as sexual abuse. The first occurred when a teacher and coach from grade school tried to molest me on a camping trip while I was sleeping. Though I woke up and got away, I was troubled by the experience. The fact that I did not tell anyone about it is a clear indication I felt overwhelmed and ashamed. For a long time, I didn't perceive that I was wounded by his attempt to violate me, because I got away after he touched me the first time. But years later, when I heard he was in jail for molesting other students, I realized I too had been groomed to be one of his victims. I began to blame myself for being so naïve and not telling someone. I never thought that my telling could protect others.

Around this same time, I had other indirect sexual experiences that I now realize further stole my innocence and distorted my view of sexuality. After being invited into a neighbor's tent, I watched a male neighbor, who was my brother's age, perform oral sex on my brother. I was sworn to secrecy. I felt both curious and repulsed by what I saw but remained silent and told no one.

Similarly, I remember being at a bowling alley a few miles from home when a middle-aged man came up and offered me money in exchange for oral sex. I felt repulsed by his request and left immediately. I now realize this too was a form of sexual abuse, even though I told myself at the time that it didn't bother me. In reality, I felt violated by his proposition, even if nothing further came of it. Collectively these violations of my sexual boundaries affected me even if I didn't realize it at the time. The fact that I kept them hidden shows that they left an ongoing impression of shame. They also exacerbated the hidden shame and pain resulting from my psychosexual wounds.

Psychosexual Wounds

Most of the above incidents were onetime events and impacted me less than the subtler psychological wounding of my sexuality that was part of living within my family during school-age and teenage years. At the time, I never thought of these as being sexually damaging

interactions, but now I see them in a different light—that is, God’s light that “produces every kind of goodness . . . and truth” (Eph 5:9).

In the darkness of the night, when I slept at my grandparents’ house, I would be startled awake by my grandfather raging at my grandmother for refusing him sexual intercourse. My young mind and heart raced with anxiety overhearing his tirades. Though an otherwise good man in many respects, these outbursts affected my view of my grandfather and contaminated my perception of masculinity and sexual intimacy. I vowed I would not be a sexually aggressive man as he was. As often happens with such vows, this led me to repress my sexuality in subtle ways that were not healthy.

Another deeply damaging situation was my father’s adultery. His unfaithfulness to my mom and violation of their marital covenant devastated our entire family and many in our social network. It shattered my trust in my father and the positive view I held regarding the sacredness of marriage. Moreover, it ruptured our intact family when I was a young teenager. As a result, I lost respect for my father who had been my primary role model and protector. I loved my dad and always wanted to be like him, but when I found out about his adultery, I feared I would become sexually out of control, as he was. To protect myself, I resolved that I would never be like him. In overreaction, I suppressed my sexual desires and felt shame about them when they came to the surface. In many ways this hampered my normal psychosexual development as a teenager, almost as much as not having my father around to guide and protect me and lead me in virtue.

When my parents divorced, we were all deeply hurting. I felt responsible to tend to my mother’s emotional needs, taking on a role that was inappropriate for my stage of development. This too, I have come to discover, was a type of psychosexual wounding, often referred to in the literature as *emotional incest*.⁶ According to Dr. Dan Allender, it involves “using a child as a spouse surrogate (confidant, intimate companion, protector or counselor).”⁷ Feeling responsible to meet my mom’s needs was not healthy for me or for her. This violation of emotional boundaries has impacted me more than I imagined. This wound, hidden in my consciousness for so long, has been difficult