

You Are Not Alone God Is With You



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This booklet is designed for people troubled by their current or past conflictual relationships.

We hope it will help you navigate through difficult challenges to a new place of understanding, healing and peace.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE GOD IS WITH YOU



Many victims or survivors of domestic violence ask:
What did I do wrong?
Why is my marriage not working?
I'm afraid for my children.
Why does God not answer my prayers?
I have no one who understands or who will help me.
If I am more patient and understanding, things might
work out. But I have done all that and nothing changes.
Maybe I just need to try harder.
If you have had these thoughts or other troubling ideas
or feelings, you are not alone.

As you use this booklet, we want you to be safe. Your safety is most important. If you are living with someone causing you harm, you need a safety plan designed for your special situation. It would include things like important documents you might need if separated, safe steps for exiting the house like spare car keys and money in a safe place, and contact information for a trusted person to help you, etc. A thorough safety plan should be developed with the help of a professional domestic violence counselor.

If you are confused or troubled by what you are experiencing, you should talk with a professional counselor (all services are free) in order to get clarity and help you make a decision about next steps. You can find professional assistance by calling the **National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-799- 7233, TTY 800-787-3224**. There you can chat with a service provider and find the domestic violence services nearest you. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

In this booklet we use the feminine pronoun because the vast majority of victims are women, but we do not want to forget there are male victims as well.

To Begin Your Reflection

Find a quiet place where you can be alone for five or 10 minutes to read a section and reflect on it. Gradually you will remember reassuring phrases while doing daily activities to strengthen your confidence and self-care.

In a time of crisis, most people feel overwhelmed by many emotions: confusion, fear, anger, guilt, shame, doubt, depression, hopelessness, anxiety and more.



When the crisis involves abuse (physical, emotional, verbal, financial or sexual) the victim usually feels completely alone. Often victims are afraid or embarrassed to tell anyone; they fear no one will understand. They may think God has

abandoned them and plead: “Oh God, where are you? Did you forget me?” “Why does God permit this abuse”.

Having questions and feelings like that is normal. When these questions come to mind, remember you are not crazy; you are not weird, and you are not alone. As a Christian community we want to support you as you search for freedom from abuse and healing from its painful wounds. We want to reflect with you and help

you develop a new awareness about God's love for you. We believe Jesus loves you and accompanies you, a beloved person created in God's image. You are a child of God.

1. God Wants You Healthy and Whole



One way we rediscover God's love for us is by listening to God speaking to us personally through the words of the Bible. If you recall words or messages from the Bible that inspire or resonate with you, they are important to reflect on. They have a special message for you. Whenever you begin thinking about the abuse you suffered or worry about the future, or feel afraid or confused, repeat those words to yourself.

Think about life. Things don't always go the way we wish or expect. Life is full of surprises, unexpected events and changes. Life in general challenges each of us to develop

our talents, make choices, like applying for school or a job, choosing a partner, raising a family, dealing with family and social problems. Life is difficult, not just for some people but for everyone. It is a journey which may include suffering, but that suffering is not a punishment.

Sometimes our life is changed by a serious accident, a bad choice or sickness. Sometimes we make mistakes, but we can all learn from our mistakes and not just regret or mourn them. We experience these challenges because we are human and imperfect beings. God wants us healthy, experiencing love and peace and free from suffering. Jesus told us, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

For the Jews of the Old Testament, the most important experience of God was as a liberator of their ancestors from the slavery in Egypt. God saw their suffering and freed them from oppression. "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt; I have heard their cry to be rescued from slave drivers. I know all about their sufferings, and so I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and bring them out of Egypt to a fertile and spacious land that flows with milk and honey." The Jews never forgot what God did; their liberation was God's most significant revelation of love and compassion in the history of their people. God liberated them from slavery and led them into the Promised Land. (Exodus 3:7-8)

Jesus was sent to teach us about God's love and establish a kingdom of peace, justice and love. He began his ministry by proclaiming the words of Isaiah in the synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18).

Jesus saw the suffering of the people in his time. He reached out to the sick, lepers, women, immigrants, children and those of different beliefs. He wanted to show the magnificence of God's love for all, starting from the lowest, the poorest and the marginalized. He walked through the streets willing to heal anyone asking for help. He didn't want anyone to suffer. He healed the sick, cast out demons and denounced leaders who failed to care for the poor, welcomed immigrants and respected women. His actions reflected his words: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)



Jesus experienced suffering and understood the cause of his suffering. For his commitment to alleviate the people's suffering, the authorities arrested, tortured and crucified him. In the Garden of Olives he asked God to remove the “chalice” of his suffering. In the end, however, he accepted it as a consequence of his faithfulness to the mission his Father had given him. He did not embrace suffering as something good but as a result that sometimes is a consequence for doing the right thing. Suffering is caused by the evil of others not by God.

Sometimes, that is exactly what happens to us. Although we resist evil, it causes us to suffer. God does not want us to suffer but to live peacefully and lovingly. We challenge the evil and seek to escape its harm. That is what you are doing. Jesus wants you to accept and actively respond one step at a time to the new life his liberation offers you. He wants you to live in his love and experience his peace.

To receive Jesus' liberation and healing we may have to make some changes in our thinking and our lives. But change is not always easy. It is a process of growth and development that can cause its own suffering but in the end results in new life. You are on the path, sometimes winding and bumpy, but it leads to a new life of inner freedom and healthy relationships.

God is certainly not punishing you, no matter what you might have done. Jesus showed us the greatness of his Father's love by reaching out to the sick and disabled, always explaining their weakened condition was not caused by anything they had done or by any sin. He always added that whatever sins they may have committed, they were forgiven. In every case, Jesus wanted the people to enjoy good health, dignity and be empowered to live their lives to the fullest.

Think about how God has blessed you. God created you because God loves you. God gave you a heart capable of loving as God loves. God brought people into your life, certainly your children, who are God's blessing upon you. God now wants you to be free from abuse and heal from its wounds. God wants you to be healthy, safe and happy.

Jesus came to convince us of God's infinite love, to show us that God's love extends to every person. It extends to you. Try to accept and believe in God's love by reflecting on words of the Bible each day.

God is not a cruel judge interested in punishing you but a God of infinite mercy. You may think you have done wrong, committed sin or are unworthy of God's love and feel guilty and ashamed. But that is not true. Jesus showed us there is no sin God will not forgive. God loves us; God loves you. God wants you to experience God's personal love for you. Remember: God is with you in the here and now, in the present moment. The past is not happening anymore, and the future doesn't exist yet. God is with you in the here and now. You are a beloved child of God.

2. Explore Your Image of God

Common images of God may feel uncomfortable, such as "God the Father" because your father was an angry man; negative memories and feelings might come to your mind.

You may think of God as a judge, strict, demanding, and ready to punish you. Maybe you feel afraid of God, someone who doesn't listen, is distant, and doesn't care about you.



What do you think about God? Do you have a favorite name for God? Is there an image that comes to mind when you think of God? Reflect a while on your names and images of God, for example, the Good Shepherd, Sacred Heart, Jesus Crucified or Resurrected, Jesus the Healer, Lover of Children, Savior, Divine Infant, etc. If you have favorites, write them down.

Take another moment. Recognize God is working in your life. The fact that you are reading this booklet shows that God is inspiring you to strengthen your relationship with God.

We tend to acquire our idea of God from people who taught us about God, maybe our parents, a local pastor, a teacher. As we mature, we need to form our own image of God, and, thankfully, we have the Bible to help us do that.

The scriptures, notably Jesus in the New Testament, present a very compassionate and merciful image of God. God is actively reaching out to you in the words of the Bible. God invites you into a conversation.

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and overburdened, 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)

Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love." (John 15:9)

Later Jesus adds, "The Father himself loves you dearly because you love me." (John 16:27)

St. John writes, "See how much the father has loved us. His love is so great that we are called God's children-and that is what we are." (1 John 3:2)

Jesus told people, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26)

Frequently those who suffer abuse, whether as a child or an adult, feel guilty or responsible for the abuse and, consequently, may even feel shame and embarrassment. But we know that victims of abuse are not responsible for the abuse they have experienced. They did not cause the relationship to fail, but the attitude and behavior of their partners did.

Think of the woman who suffered from bleeding for 12 years. She was so ashamed, she snuck up behind Jesus, hoping to be cured, and touched the edge of his cloak. She was cured. When Jesus felt that power had gone out of him, he turned and said "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." In so many instances, Jesus demonstrated his love and compassion as well as that of his Father. God has that same love and compassion for you.

Jesus did not shame the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-8), the woman who washed his feet and dried them with her hair (Luke 7:36-48) or the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). He did not embarrass Zacchaeus, the sinful tax collector who changed his life because of meeting Jesus (Luke 19:1-10), Peter for his denials (John 21:15-19) or Thomas for doubting his resurrection (John 20:24-29). Jesus loved them all, and he loves you and wants you to believe in his love.

3. Celebrate Your Many Positive Qualities



You have many positive qualities. Take a moment to write down some of them, such as your talents, friends, accomplishments, experiences, places you enjoy. Although none of us is perfect,

we can learn to focus on the positive, the blessings and gifts we have received and celebrate them. Let gratitude rise in your heart. Don't let the negative dominate your thoughts.

What are some of your positive characteristics? For example: Family members and friends support me. I am a mom. I love to cook. I like to listen to music: I really love to celebrate birthdays: I like warm weather: I'm a hard worker: I get along with others: I tell the truth, and so forth. Keep adding to your list. I love my culture and where I was born. Write them down.

What do your friends say about you? Listen to them and trust the positive things they say. For example: "You are a good friend." "You are responsible and willing to help." "You are fun to be with." "You have a good heart."

Select an affirmation or make up a positive statement about yourself, such as, "I'm a hard worker." "I'm friendly." Repeat it to yourself when nagging memories of abuse or arguments come to mind.

The good news is you possess many qualities and talents.

Happiness is my choice; it grows from within me.

I'll get through this; God is with me.

God loves me.

I like to help others.

My body is healthy; I am at peace.

I have been given many talents which I will use today.

My ability to overcome my challenges is limitless.

I am courageous and I stand up for myself.

My thoughts are filled with positivity and gratitude.

I am blessed with an incredible family and wonderful friends.

Although these times are difficult, they are only a short phase of my life.

My fears of tomorrow are melting away.

I belong to God; I am a child of God.

My life is just beginning anew.

Remember St. Paul's words to the Philippians (4.13)

"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."

4. Recognize and Strengthen Your Spirituality



Spirituality is the way we view the relationships we have with ourselves, other people, situations in our lives, the world around us and with God. We all have a spirituality, but it can change and develop over time. Our view of

ourselves, others and God grows and develops from childhood to adulthood and often after a crisis. We benefit from getting in touch with our own spirituality and pursuing ways to strengthen it.

Intimate partner violence breaks tender relationships and can turn us away from ourselves and even our relationship with others and with God. Some persons think they'll never trust another person again. Our self-esteem plummets along with the ability to think clearly. We hear the abusive criticisms again and again until we almost believe them and doubt ourselves. "Am I crazy like he says I am?" "Am I such an awful person?" He calls me "stupid" and "incompetent." We may feel devastated mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Our spirituality can help us cope with the many challenges that come our way. St. Paul wrote: "Jesus said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may work in me. I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) You also have Jesus with you, supporting you; you are strong.

You are probably using spirituality right now to cope with your situation and struggle to find peace, safety and love. Healthy spirituality is positive. It helps you see the unique person you are, loved dearly by God and with many strengths and dreams.

Throughout this booklet we offer suggestions for activities and healthy thinking that may nurture and strengthen you on your journey toward peace with yourself, stronger self-esteem, renewed energy and a sense of who you truly are – a beloved child of God.

5. You Have Rights in a Relationship

As human beings we are called to enjoy life and the relationships we form. As a person, a child of God, you have rights that protect you from manipulation by others. These rights are like personal permissions. They help you trust yourself and increase your self-esteem. Knowing and practicing your rights can help you make better choices and create boundaries that safeguard what you need to be happy and at peace. Here are some of those rights.

I have the right to not dominate or be dominated in a relationship.

I have the right to act in one way with one person and another way with another person.

I have the right to change my opinion when I want to.

I have the right to begin and continue a relationship at my own speed and rhythm.

I have the right to be friendly towards others and to have



friends.

I have the right to stay in touch with my parents and relatives.

I have the right to say: "I want to know you better before becoming involved with you."

I have the right to be myself without changing to please others.

I have the right to end a relationship when my experience and feelings change.

I have the right to say: "We seem to be close to one another; I want something different."

I have the right to not want physical closeness with anyone.

I have the right to end an abusive relationship and seek a divorce.

I have the right to say “No.”

6. Forgiveness

Forgiving is difficult and often confusing. The primary focus of your forgiving ought to be yourself, not the person who caused you harm. To free yourself from the pain of being a victim it is important to forgive yourself. Generally, there are feelings of guilt for having permitted someone to invade your space and harm your dignity. Perhaps you feel guilty for not responding appropriately in the relationship, for not protecting yourself from the abuse. Thus, the first step is that you, the victim, forgive yourself.

Perhaps, you think you are responsible for breaking up the marriage. But the abused person is never at fault. The United States Catholic Bishops state in their pastoral letter, *When I Call For Help*, “We emphasize that no one is expected to stay in an abusive marriage.” (Google: *When I Call for Help*.) The church does not want you to stay in an abusive relationship. (You are to be congratulated for your courage if you leave it. The one who breaks up a marriage is the one who perpetrates the abuse.)

We all can look at the past and see mistakes and think of better decisions we could have made. The good news is that God is infinitely merciful. We only have to recognize our mistakes and sincerely ask for forgiveness. God's mercy and strength are there for you. God denies pardon to no one.

The invitation to forgive is a challenge that calls you to put a stop to all those prejudicial thoughts towards yourself and others. Accepting forgiveness of yourself guides you to consciously recall thoughts that help you feel compassion, wisdom and understanding.

Forgiving the offending person is secondary, and it may take a lot of time even to consider it. After all, the wounds are very deep. You need not feel guilty for not being able



to forgive the person who caused you harm. It takes much time and is a slow process. It is also important for you to believe that in the end it is God who will deal with the one who caused you harm. You don't have to worry about that.

Forgiving the person who caused harm is not for the benefit of the aggressor but to liberate you, the victim. It frees you from bitterness, anger and resentment and gives you openness for love and compassion. With God's help, you will grow toward forgiveness.

We may think that abusive persons don't deserve

forgiveness or to forgive them would be letting them off the hook. Perhaps, they don't deserve forgiveness. But we don't forgive because the offender deserves it. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting hurtful behavior or even reconciling with the offender. It does not condone the wrongs done or eliminate the need for the offender to take responsibility for his actions. The primary focus is that the victim finds peace and forgiveness for herself.

Survivors who have gained a deep level of peace and self-confidence can look back at the abuse as a period of suffering but more importantly a time of learning. Survivors who remain angry and resentful and still look upon themselves as victims need to move on to living in the present and not focus on remembering and reliving past abuse. Without realizing it, they are bringing back more of the past and continuing to be the victim. Even though they are not aware of it, they feel the hurt as if they were receiving the mistreatment all over again. It is important for all survivors to tell themselves, "It is not happening now."

When you choose to forgive, don't use your mind to judge, or repeat thoughts of anger and hatred that stress your mind and body. If you do that, over time you will hurt your emotional, mental, spiritual and physical health. Rather, use your imagination to raise up ideas of your best self and desires for yourself and direct your efforts to achieving the goals and objectives you have set for yourself.

God is patient with those who struggle to forgive the persons who have offended them. Remember that forgiving is a process, and it takes time. God will give you the wisdom, strength and patience you need to achieve it in good time..

7. Reflecting on the Word of God – the Bible

God is revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, the Bible, which we believe is the Word of God. It is informative, encouraging and inspiring to reflect on a text and apply it to yourself. The following passages from the Bible may help you as you work toward greater healing and peace. Highlight a phrase or words that touches your heart and spend a little more time with them. Notice the emotions you feel.



Isaiah wrote:

“Some say 'The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me,' but can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even if she would forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name.” (Isaiah 49:15-16)

“Do not be afraid. I will save you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:1-3)

“The Lord said, 'Because you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you, fear not, for I am with you.'” (Isaiah 43:6)

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love. He will sing joyfully because of you. As one sings at festivals. 'I will remove disaster from you so that none may speak of your disgrace.'” (Zephaniah 3:17)



The psalms offer praise for a loving, compassionate God.

Psalm 27:1, 7-10

The Lord is my light and salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge;
Of whom should I be afraid?
Hear my voice, Lord, when I call;
Have mercy on me and answer me.

“Come,” says my heart, “Seek God's face”;
Your face, Lord, do I seek!
Do not hide your face from me;
Do not repel your servant in anger.

You are my salvation; do not cast me off;
Do not forsake me, God my savior!
Even if my father and mother forsake me,
The Lord will take me in.

Psalm 25: 4-6; 12

Show me your ways, Lord;
Teach me your paths.
Guide me by your fidelity and teach me,
For you are God, my Savior;
For you I wait all day long.
Remember your compassion and your mercy, O Lord,
For they are ages old.
Who is the one who fears the Lord?
God shows them the way to choose.

Psalm 139: 1-3,13,17

Loving God, you have probed me, you know me.
You know everything I do;
You see me, whether I am working or resting,
You know all my actions.
Even before I speak,
You already know what I will say.
You are all around me on every side;
You protect me with your power.
From far away you understand all my thoughts.
You created every part of me.
You put me together in my mother's womb.
How precious to me are your designs, O God;
How vast the sum of them.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
In green pastures you let me repose;
To safe waters you lead me;
You restore my strength.

You guide me along the right path for the sake
of your name.
Even when I walk through the valley of darkness,
I fear no harm for you are at my side;
Your rod and staff give me courage.

You prepare a banquet for me,
Where all my enemies can see me.
You welcome me as an honored guest,
And fill my cup to overflowing.

I know that your goodness and love
will be with me all my life;
And your house will be my home as long as I live.

More comforting words from Jesus:

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "On that day you will ask in my name, and I do not tell you that I will ask the Father for you. For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God."
(John 16:27)

St. Paul and St. John in their letters write:

"And we know, all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into God's plans."
(Romans 8, 28)

“I am certain that nothing can separate us from the Lord's love; neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the



future, neither the world above nor the world below. There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:38-39)

“See how much the Father loved us. His love is so great that we are called God's children, and, in fact, we are.”
(1 John 3:1)

“Dear Friends, let us love one another because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world so we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. (1 John 4:7-11)

What phrase or words encourage you to change and heal and help you feel God's love?

8. Focus on the Blessings of Today

A Daily Meditation

In addition to reflecting on God's word in the Bible as prayer, you can reflect on your life today, especially everything that is positive and a blessing. Everything belongs in your conversations with God. As you become more aware of God's goodness in every part of your life, it gives you a reason to be grateful. The following meditation invites you to use your mind and all your senses.

Take a few minutes each day to repeat this exercise. The first step is to practice calming yourself; begin by being aware of your breathing. Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. In and out slowly. What a gift it is to be able to breathe and experience the faithful service of your body.

Deep breathing offers several benefits besides helping us focus our minds: it calms the nervous system, reduces stress, increases alertness, and boosts the immune system. Conscious deep breathing helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

God's life-giving Spirit lives and breathes in you. As you inhale you might quietly pray, "Come Spirit of Life" and when you exhale imagine the darkness, fear and confusion flowing out of you. Keep your focus on your breath. God is present to you. When your mind drifts, just come back. This is a form of meditative prayer and takes practice.



This exercise is also a path to help you be mentally alert and more resilient to handle the events of the day. Prayer will help you discover the power within and the dignity you share with all life. Prayer

will empower you to go beyond your fears, loneliness and harsh memories and discover God in your inmost self.

Dear God, I come to you as I struggle to forgive. Thank you for graciously forgiving me. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Please help me let go of bitterness and forgive others. Give me the strength and power to forgive those who have hurt me. I need the strength to trust that your way is best. In Jesus' name. Amen!

Your prayer:

9. Additional Ways to Support Your Prayer and Meditation

* Light a candle, watch the flickering flame and smell its aroma. Notice your focus shifting from the past moment to the present. Experience your breathing and think about a blessing you have received, like this very moment of life. Come back to the present when your mind wanders.



* Spend some time looking at a favorite religious article, picture or image. Why do you like this item? Let it speak to you.

* Pray your favorite prayer, maybe the Lord's Prayer or another favorite. Your faith can be a great strength for you when you feel down or troubled.

* Make your prayer a conversation with God about anything you wish. Let nature speak to you. Notice the beauty of the sky, the zip of the wind, the changing weather, pets, trees, flowers and on and on. Think about what satisfies you, gives you pleasure or makes you happy. Maybe it is visiting a friend, a moment of peace and quiet,

your favorite food or music. This connects you with your best self and with God. Everything belongs in your life.

*Think of people or experiences for which you are grateful, like somebody important in your life, giving birth, humor, love, fun or good food. Try the gratitude practice: Every night before you sleep, think of one or two experiences from the day for which you are grateful. Gradually you will be more aware and appreciative of small and big blessings you receive each day.

Your emotions come from what you are thinking. For that reason, be aware of your thoughts. Healthy thinking produces healthy feelings or emotions. Emotions give you the energy to help you focus on what you really need to feel satisfied or to sort out what bothers you. Noticing your emotions and discovering the thinking that causes them can help you take the next right step toward what you really need. With more clarity you will recognize your connection with God and God's loving connection with you.

When you experience overwhelming stress, remembering that you are accompanied by God and by people in your life can comfort and motivate you. Repeating short reminders can be helpful:

“Jesus, be with me.”

“Jesus, help me grow stronger.”

“Jesus, be my light and strength.

“Holy Spirit, come and enlighten me.”



If you are devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. Jude or other saints, ask for their help to deal with your challenges. Pope Francis leans on a devotion to Mary, the Undoer of Knots. His favorite image is of Mary seated between two angels. The angel on her left hands Mary a ribbon full of knots. She graciously receives the knotted ribbon (symbol of problems a person is facing), and in her gentle, motherly way unties the knots and hands it to the angel on her right. She helps us resolve our problems.

Above all keep thinking and living in the present. Where your body is, your mind should be too. Remember you are loved by God and others. You are not alone.

10. Meditation and Deep Breathing

Another activity will help you enjoy the ordinary things in your life. You can spend as much time as you have with these steps. If you feel uncomfortable or anxious at any point, acknowledge those feelings and be reassured you are safe. Read this activity over once and then, gently using the guide, try it.

*Feel the weight of your body and its heaviness on the seat.

Notice where your body and the seat meet.

Feel the pressure of your body on the seat.

Feel the support of the seat against your body.

*Surrender your body into that support.

Welcome the lightness that comes with that.

*Bring your attention to your breath.

Try not to alter it; just notice it.

Is it shallow or deep?

Where is your body rising and falling?

Don't judge your breath as good or bad, just observe.

*If your mind wanders, that's okay, just notice that and gently bring yourself back to the breathing. There is no expectation for perfection in meditation; it is just about you in this moment.

*If you feel comfortable, add a count to your inhales and exhales.

Count how long your inhales and exhales are - it may be a count of 2 or 3, or maybe more.

Then add a count of four to your inhales and exhales.

Inhale 1, 2, 3, 4...exhale 4, 3, 2, 1.

If this is difficult, return to the natural rhythm of your breath. There is no right or wrong, just observe.

*Finally, resume the natural rhythm of your breath and focus on your senses.

*Still with eyes closed:

Think of five things you feel (e.g., wind, clothing, etc.)

Now name in your mind four things you hear (e.g., a dog barking, cars in the street, voices, etc.)

Think of three things you smell (e.g., fresh coffee, perfume, food cooking, etc.)

Two things you taste (e.g., a taste that lingers from the last meal, a taste of something you like, etc.)

*Begin to bring small movements into your toes and fingers to awaken the body. Gently open your eyes and focus on one thing you see.

*Appreciate your experience; rest in it.

*Thank God for God's presence with you in this meditation.

*Say thank you and goodbye. Finish off with a couple deeper breaths.



11. Your Self Care

You are precious in God's sight because you are God's child – created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). Since you are beloved by God, join with God's way of thinking about yourself. We offer you a few more suggestions to reinforce your practice of freeing your mind from fixating on past abuse and victimization or negative thoughts, all of which worsen how you are feeling. Your self-image can make a big difference for you and help you regain perspective.

Getting enough rest and eating well are so important but may be challenging for you. Your body needs rest and nourishment to meet the demands of the day. If you are not sleeping or eating well, consider talking to your doctor. Difficulties with sleep or eating may make you irritable and be signs of depression.

Connect with friends when possible. Participating in a support group will help you feel connected and not alone.

Exercise helps your brain do the hard work of dealing with your challenges. Daily exercise helps you be in the moment and releases anti-depressant hormones that will help you feel better physically and emotionally.

Sunshine will help lift your mood. Try to spend 5-10 minutes outside. Go for a walk; let the sun touch you.

Set healthy boundaries; Boundaries help you sort out what is really happening and help you stop taking things personally. Boundaries are not selfish but rather healthy self-care. If you must communicate with the person who

abused you, you can set the conditions, the limits on time, place and topics.

Break the silence by speaking your truth and not letting the person who abused you define what happened. You know the true story, and you need to believe that truth



and tell it. Telling the true story may seem harsh, but help is more accessible when the truth is known.

Mindfulness is a way of calming both mind and body by responding to thoughts and emotions in the present moment, in a compassionate and nonjudgmental manner. Our minds are naturally wired to protect us and try to resolve past problems and worries about the future.

Our minds tend to wonder and try to fix what has already happened. So it is important to return to the present, to what you are doing.

Discover a safe place where you can be yourself and accept yourself. Instead of thinking about what happened in the past or problems in the future try to keep your mind where your body is. Whatever happened or may happen is not happening now. Do what you are doing and focus on that. Remember, God is with you in the present moment and will be with you in the future. You just need to reach out and ask for help.

12. You Are Not Alone

The Community Supports You

Often it is difficult to reach out to others as you are healing. Make the effort to connect with others who can support you on your journey. You may have family, friends or coworkers who support you; they understand. Or maybe you don't think you can talk to anyone; you feel alone and fear you'll be misunderstood or criticized.

In fact, there are people who will walk with you and support you. You only need to connect with them. Maybe a good friend or sister or a counselor from a community agency dedicated to assisting victims of domestic violence will listen to and support you. These agencies have support groups for people who have been abused and feel alone. There you will find others who feel just like you and want to experience God's love and peace as you do.

Others can help you make sense of your experience and find new meaning in your life. In a group it is easier to recognize that you are not the only one dealing with domestic abuse. The group can also give you information that will help you refocus, leave hurt and shame, guilt and anger behind and motivate you to live one day at a time with a hopeful attitude.

Information about the dynamics of domestic violence, how it affects children and other topics will increase your understanding of the abuse and the meaning of your struggle. A support group offers the opportunity to learn that what happened to you (the abuse) is not your fault.



Hopefully, a new door will open for you to feel better and be your best self.

In Chicago, one example of an agency helping victims of domestic violence is HOPE Family Services. It provides counseling, accompaniment and support groups in a faith-based environment. It serves mostly Spanish-speakers who have suffered abuse or are feeling alone and despondent. They will be glad to help.

Hope Family Services
1914 S. Ashland Ave.
Chicago, IL 60608
312-421-7647



Participate in your faith community. Sunday Mass or a religious service can highlight your week. Gathering with members of your church will remind you that you are not alone. As members of the Body of Christ, you connect with others to offer praise and thanks, hear the Word of God in the Scriptures, seek God's forgiveness, ask for what you need, and receive the Eucharist to strengthen you to live another week more fully.

List important people for you:

13. Conclusion:

You Are a Person of Hope

As you continue your journey toward healing, we encourage you to have hope for your future. You have been working on your life, have practiced healthy activities and learned coping skills. Your hope for your life and children is returning.

++ You have gained a more conscious and loving awareness about yourself, your relationship with God and all of creation. You have clarified your values and truth about your worth in God's eyes. You have explored your rights, the power of positive thinking, practiced meditation and deep breathing. You have new tools to increase your self-confidence and help you distinguish between what is healthy for you and what is not.

++ You are more confident in your identity as a beloved child of God. As your self-confidence grows you will find your voice as a person of hope for others.

++ You are seeing beyond the suffering you have experienced and are becoming an authentic source of encouragement for others. You understand that living in the present is key. You handle the haunting memories as past events that are not happening now.

++ You affirm your personal value as you reach out in daily life with empathy and kindness toward yourself and others. Your increasing inner strength will be available to support another wounded victim in a least expected moment. You know words from the Bible that inspire your thinking and support you as you continue growing in the amazing love God has for you.

++ You no longer feel judged, put down, and humiliated as before. This is the fruit of your hard, personal work. Your strength, truth and self-confidence are values you can now share with others.



The prophet, Jeremiah wrote:

“There is a ray of hope; God's compassion never ends. The Lord's mercies never end and have kept us from complete destruction. Great is God's faithfulness; God's loving kindness begins afresh every day. My soul claims the Lord as my inheritance, therefore, I will hope in the Lord. The Lord is wonderfully good to those who wait, to those who seek.” (Lamentations 3: 21, 24-25)

One final reminder: No matter how overwhelmed you may feel, you are more than your emotions. By shifting your thoughts to the present moment where God is present and actively loving you, you can develop a new awareness that changes how you feel. God who loves you here and now wants to walk with you as you sort out your options, face your emotions and formulate new goals for today and beyond.

**Patricia Broderick, LCSW
and Charles W. Dahm, O.P., Ph.D.**

Charles W. Dahm, O.P., a Dominican priest, served as pastor of a large inner city Hispanic parish in Chicago, St. Pius V parish, for 21 years. There he cofounded the largest parish-based program in the country for victims of domestic violence, their children and those who cause harm. He currently serves as Director of the Archdiocese of Chicago Domestic Violence Outreach.

Patricia Broderick has ministered pastorally in the USA and Mexico. She holds a license in social work, Illinois certification in domestic violence and is a certified Pastoral Associate in the Archdiocese of Chicago. She has accompanied persons caught in abusive relationships through counseling, education, and formation for themselves and their families and communities.

If you think you are in danger, call 911. If you need answers to questions or a counselor or simply want someone to talk to about your relationship, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline for assistance or just to chat. **800-799-7233, TTY: 800-787-3224**



This book is free to survivors.
For others, \$4.00 for handling and mailing cost.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUTREACH
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