

## Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

### Healing from Wounds Caused by Others

**Amy Thomas**

Hi, my name is Amy Thomas, and in this session I would like to talk with you about healing from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. But before we start, let's begin with a prayer.

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Father, there are many, many people out there hurting from many different types of abuse, and sometimes the healing just doesn't seem to come. But I pray that through this talk that truths might be revealed, that others might find ways to start the healing process. And most of all, I pray that those watching reach out to You, God, and find ways to open their heart to what You can do in their souls, in their minds, and in their hearts. And I pray that You are with me, and help me to give them things that are helpful and that they can use in their lives to bring about healing. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Okay. So I want to share with you my story, and to do what we're going to have to go back a little ways in time. So, growing up, I was a tomboy, and in middle school I did not care about guys at all. But there was this one boy who was particularly keen on me, and he was always at my locker, and he was always bugging me for my phone number. But I couldn't date until 16, so... and I wasn't that interested in boys anyway, so I didn't really care. But I did enjoy his attention nevertheless. But we were good friends, we sat next to each other in band, played the trumpet, and, you know, he was kind of one of those class clowns, made everybody laugh, but I just didn't see him that way.

And so all through middle school he pursued me, and my sophomore year puberty finally hit for me and I started seeing boys in a different light. And that first day of my sophomore year, when I walked into the school, I saw him in a different light, and everything changed. All those years of him pursuing me, I finally let down my guard and I just... I'm the type of person that when I get involved with anything or anyone, I dive right in, full swan dive with a triple flip. And I did that with him. And I thought, because he had pursued me all those years, I was the only one he'd ever wanted – he had made me feel so special that we would just, like, have this magnificent relationship.

But, sadly, what happened was as soon as I, you know, gave into him and wanted to pursue a relationship with him, his interest level just dropped off the face of

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the earth. And we dated, but it was never in a fulfilling way. He never actually took me out on a date, he mostly just had me over at his house and we didn't really do anything. And slowly, as our relationship went on, he... he started to say things that were emotionally hurtful. Like when we would be at the mall, he would just comment and comment about the other pretty girls that were there, and why couldn't I look like them. And because we were in band together, we were in pep band during basketball season, and of course, you know, the cheerleaders and the dance team would come out at halftime, and he would always make comments about, oh, you know, "Oh, they're so good-looking. Why can't you be like them?" And this just really hurt my self-esteem.

And he was always saying things to knock me down just a little bit. And because I had put so much of myself into him, I couldn't walk away. I mean, I was totally vested in this guy. And just as time went on, my self-esteem fell further and further. He's not the one I wanted to focus on, but he really tanked my self-esteem. And when I finally got the courage to leave him after many, many months of emotional – it did get physical, he ended up hitting me with a baseball bat, he was mean to me a lot of the times. But I finally got the courage to break up with him. But my self-esteem was so low, and I felt so bad about myself, that really I thought the only way, I just... I needed to prove that I was loveable. The thing with him was that I just couldn't understand why he didn't love me. What was it about me? Something was wrong with me. I was always trying to be that girl that he wanted me to be, or I thought he wanted me to be. And so I was always just trying to be somebody who I wasn't.

So anyway, I quickly got into another relationship my junior year with a friend of his, and I mostly did it for very bad reasons. I wanted to make the first boyfriend jealous, which is never a good reason to start dating somebody else. Anyway, this guy, he took it to a whole 'nother level of abuse. And I don't want to go into tons and tons of detail with you, but anyway, one night... he was in college already when I was a junior, and I drove to his college and I was going to pick him up and visit him that night. And I never really enjoyed being with him, and I remember very clearly that night I did not want to go. It was like, ugh, I just did not want to go see him. Again, I just felt like I had to stay with him because having a boyfriend gave me worth or something in my mind.

And I got there, and when I got to his college he came outside with 2 other friends. And my boyfriend said, you know, "Scoot over. Get in the back. I'm driving." And I didn't like that, but I did it anyway. And anyway, he drove to a

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secluded place. And as we were there, he pulled out a bag of weed, marijuana, and him and his friends started smoking it, and I wanted no part of it. So I got out of the car, and I went around to the back, and I just kind of leaned against the car, and I was just like “What am I doing? Why am I here?” And then they got out of the car. And, again, and like I said, I’m not going to go into details, but the worst night of my life happened. And I can’t remember all of it, which maybe is a grace from God, but I do remember a lot of bits and pieces of it that I can’t quite put together.

And, anyway, I was sexually abused. I don’t remember driving back to their college, I don’t remember how I got into the driver seat, I don’t remember anything. The next thing that I knew I woke up in the middle... I was slamming on my brakes in the middle of a red light of an intersection, and I looked down and I was covered with grass and dirt, and I just was like “Oh my God, what has happened?” And I was kind of in a state of shock. And I drove home, I knew what had happened, but I just could not process anything. And so I got home, it was very late, and I parked in the driveway, and I got out. And I was going to go in and tell my dad, and it was late and my mom and dad were already in bed. And I went to the door, and my parent’s bedroom was closed, and I raised my fist getting ready to knock, and I stopped because I thought “If I tell my dad, he will go kill him, kill them, and I’ll be visiting my dad in prison.” And so I just didn’t do it.

So I was still just so upset, and I went to the one place where I felt confident in myself, and that was the track field. So I went to my high school track field late at night, on the 50-yard line, I walked out there, the moon was shining, and I just fell to my knees. And to my everlasting shame, I cursed God that night. I was in a lot of pain, and I could not understand how a good and loving God would allow such a bad thing to happen to a good girl, you know, I was a pretty good girl. And I told God, I said “You know what? You turned Your back on me, I’m going to turn my back on You, and I’ll do this on my own.”

And so I did. I still believed in God, but my relationship with Him was just non-existent. I was mad, and I tried all kinds of different ways to cope with what happened. I tried drinking, I tried other guys. I had zero confidence. I was very angry inside, but the one thing I had was that I was not going to forget these guys. Not going to do it. They did not deserve it, I owed them nothing, and so I was going to hold on to that. So over time it just made me so bitter and angry, and I think back on myself when I was in college – this happened when I was 17 – and I hadn’t told anybody. And I was trying to process this all on my own, and I didn’t

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have anybody to tell, and I was not healing, I was not healing, and I was very angry.

And I look back on myself and I was always lashing out at people, and a lot of that was I was mad about something, but it was this hurt that was inside of me. And I was... I was not an enjoyable person to be around. Well, flash forward, I met my husband, we got married, he's a wonderful man. When we met, he was Cradle Catholic, I was Protestant. I can't go into all the details, but when I met my husband I finally was given that permission. I loved him so much and I didn't want to bring a bunch of baggage into our marriage, but he was a safe person to start talking to. And so I started opening up all of this hurt and pain in my life, and he listened, and he was a great comfort to me, and he started me on that road to healing.

But there was other things that I needed to heal from, and that's what I really want to talk to you about today. 8 years into our marriage, I converted to the Catholic faith, and... all on my own, my husband didn't pressure me. But what was interesting was I had to do my first reconciliation, but I had this one sin that I just did not want to confess. I mean, I had cursed God. I mean, talk about just the worst of the worst sin. And I... I told the priest when I went in and I said "I have a sin that is... it's just huge." And he said "Let's just give it a try. Just start talking to Jesus." And when he gave me that permission in my first reconciliation, I mean tears were just streaming down my face.

And I just told him the whole story, how I couldn't forgive, what I had done on that 50-yard line, all the bad ways I had coped afterwards that were sinful. And when he put his hand on my head and said the words of absolution, I just felt like my heart, my soul had been let out of a cage. I cannot describe the weightlessness that I felt. It was just magnificent. And I learned, in time, to forgive those who had hurt me. And I haven't forgotten, and that's something that's never going to happen – as humans we just don't have that ability to just forget wrongs – but I did learn to forgive them, whether they deserved it or not. It opened up healing in me.

So there are 2 things I want to leave you with. Wounds from others can really hurt us, and it's natural to not want to forgive them. But I promise you, if you give them forgiveness it will start you on the road to healing. It doesn't mean you have to agree with what they did, it doesn't mean you have to accept it, it doesn't mean that you are condoning what they did in any way. Forgive them and let God handle that, and He will deal with it in His own way.

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The second thing is, is the power of the sacrament of reconciliation. You know, I grew up Protestant, we don't have the sacrament of reconciliation, so it's something I had never heard about before, you know. You just kind of ask God to forgive you kind of generally. But, oh, of that healing power was just amazing. And if you've done anything in your life, bad coping from the wounds from other people, go to the sacrament of reconciliation. You don't need to ask forgiveness for what they've done, but maybe you've done things like I did and tried to cope with it in very wrong ways to hide that pain. And I promise you, the power of the sacrament of reconciliation can get you on the road to healing.

And I just pray for those of you out there who are struggling with this. I went through this a long time ago, and I talk about it because I was a counsellor for victims of domestic and sexual violence, and I know that there are a lot of people out there hurting from it. But healing is possible, and you've just got to start. One baby step at a time, and I promise that will happen. Let's end in a prayer.

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that those that are watching this that have been wounded by others start to... start on that path of healing one step at a time. That it is possible, and I pray that they trust in You that healing is possible. I pray that they open themselves up to You, I pray that they find forgiveness for those that have wounded them, and release that to You. And I pray that if they need to forgive themselves, or if they need to feel Your grace poured out on them, that they go and seek You and reconciliation and the Eucharist. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thank you.*