Outline: "Arsenal Against Accusation"

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  + Childhood abuse and its impact on self-worth.
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  + Guiding readers toward helpful resources for their own journey.

Introduction

In the journey of life, we encounter moments that shape our beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. These moments can plant seeds—seeds of truth or seeds of deception—that take root in the soil of our hearts and minds. For me, these seeds of deception were sown early on, leading me down a path of self-condemnation and fear.

Reflecting on my childhood, I remember the subtle yet profound impact of parental words and actions. Little did I know then, the weight these interactions carried in shaping my self-image. The shattering experience of my parents' divorce left me grappling with a misplaced burden of blame as if my existence had caused their rift. Coupled with high expectations from authority figures, I grew up believing I could never measure up, that my best efforts were inherently inadequate.

The trauma of childhood abuse further distorted my perception of self-worth, planting insidious lies that I somehow deserved such treatment. As I stumbled through adolescence, facing challenges like delayed graduation from high school, I internalized the lie of being a failure—a narrative that echoed relentlessly in my mind.

These early experiences birthed a cascade of fears—fear of success, fear of failure, fear of making decisions, and ultimately, fear of being myself. They built a stronghold in my mind, fostering a constant state of anxiety and self-doubt. Little did I realize then, this was the enemy's strategy—to ensnare me in a web of lies that would cripple my potential and suffocate my spirit.

As I ventured into adulthood, the seeds of deception blossomed into a full-blown crisis of identity. Depression became a familiar companion, fueled by the lies I had unwittingly accepted about myself. My marriage bore the brunt of this internal turmoil, with the weight of imagined inadequacies straining its foundations.

Rock bottom arrived swiftly, accompanied by the haunting echoes of double-mindedness and addiction. The desire for escape, even from existence itself, became palpable. Amidst physical decline and spiritual numbness, I found myself at a crossroads—a precipice between life and death.

It was here, in the depths of despair, that revelation dawned. I began to discern the difference between truth and deception, realizing that God—the embodiment of ultimate truth and perfect love—held the key to liberation. Through a journey of self-discovery and spiritual warfare, I learned to identify and dismantle the lies that had held me captive for so long.

This book is a testament to that journey—a narrative of redemption, resilience, and relentless pursuit of truth. It is my earnest hope that in sharing my story, others may find solace, encouragement, and practical tools for their own battles against accusation and fear. May we embark together on a quest for freedom—a journey toward embracing our true identities in the light of God's unyielding love and grace.

Chapter 1

**It Starts with a Seed:** *Childhood Influences*

As trivial as it may seem, I can recall a particular experience I had as a child that was imprinted in my soul and became one of the many things I experienced that shaped my perception of self-worth. I can l laugh about it now, but it genuinely stifled me back then! My mom was a cosmetologist. We had a garage that was attached to our house renovated into a beauty salon and I would be tasked with helping her around the house, with my siblings, and little tasks around the shop. I don’t remember my age, but I know I was pretty young. My mom asked me to fold her shop towels.

Considering that she was nearly out of clean towels you can imagine how large of a load of towels needed to be folded. I took the large load of towels out of the dryer and was sure to take my time folding them as neatly as possible. I had every corner facing the same direction -store shelf-worthy! I wanted her to be happy that I didn’t just barrel through the task to get it over with, but took my time and did a neat job folding and stocking her towels. I was extremely excited to take that basket into the shop and load them into her cubby where she kept them nice and neat, and wait for her response. When she came near her wash bowl and saw the towels, to my surprise she was far from amused. I can still see her eyebrow raise and hear the tone in her voice asking me “Why you fold the towels like that?!”

My little excited heart sank. That was the polar opposite response I expected to receive for what I believed to be some very good work. In my mind, I folded those towels like Jesus himself asked me to do them and she asked me *why did I fold them that way* as if they were hideous. She went on fussing about how she folds them and asking when I ever saw her fold them that way and I was furious. She gave me a brief tutorial on how they should be folded and asked me to redo them the way she would fold them.

By the time I was finished, I was more hurt than angry. I began to take it very personally. I felt my way wasn’t good enough even though I had truly done my best. As an adult, I can see that my mom just had a particular way she wanted things done in her shop and there was a method to the madness. The way she folded them though not my esthetic preference made more space and made them easier to grab. As a child, I didn’t see this and it didn’t help that it wasn’t explained. In my mind, I couldn’t do something as basic as folding a towel right, and though I didn’t let it show, it devastated me.

Through experience, I have come to realize there are ways parents can communicate with their children that, although culturally accepted and seemingly harmless, can play a major role in the framing of an individual’s perception of themselves and how they either impact or interfere with the world around them. What we experience from birth through adolescence, shapes how we interact in our workspaces, relationships, and most importantly how we view God.

I was blessed to have some amazing, and caring parents who always encouraged me to follow my dreams and be the best that I could be. They are both God-fearing and raised me in the fear of the Lord. Neither of them would ever do anything to intentionally harm me and I am certain that if at the time I knew how to express what I was experiencing or how certain things that were said made me feel, they would’ve assured me that that was not their intent. The issue was in our home I experienced more criticism than I did affirmation. As the firstborn, I felt like everything I did was under a microscope and the only time I seemed to get some form of praise was when I was singing or dancing or doing something praiseworthy in church. Hearing things like, “if you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself”, though said jokingly, made me feel insecure about my abilities to do very simple tasks. Hearing the black parent staple: stop that cryin’ before I give you somethin’ to cry for” taught me to internalize my pain. In my adult life, I noticed how I’d ask a ton of questions before making a decision or doing a new task even if it was very basic, for fear of doing it wrong and being ridiculed. I also internalized all of my pain and if I was sad no one knew it but the walls of my bedroom and the soaked pillow I’d cry myself to sleep on. These were some of the very first things the enemy used to begin chipping away at my identity and installing a fear to be myself. I was buying the lies that I couldn’t do anything right, and crying was for babies.

Being the firstborn and a PK laid a foundation of high expectations for me both in and outside of the home. There wasn’t anywhere I could go where someone didn’t know who I belonged to. My parents went to two different churches and in both I was in the forefront of everything by default. My dad was a preacher and the minister of music-everyone knew my family in his church. There was no hiding. At my mom’s church, my name may as well have been “Tina’s grandbaby” or “Rita Ri’s twin” (my mother).Our church was fairly large and my granny was a very well known vocalist. If that wasn’t enough, the majority of our church and those in positions of leadership of some sort were our family. No matter where I went, someone knew me in connection to one of the churches I attended. I couldn’t get away with anything if I tried! Because of my involvement in ministry and who my family was I was put on a pedestal I never asked to be placed on but I was too afraid to step down. I had to continue to be the person they saw me being. I couldn’t mess up. I couldn’t fall. I felt the need to be as perfect as possible since I was constantly reminded that people were watching and looking up to me and that God had this major call on my life I had no clue about. The lie that you have to be perfect is exhausting!

The next lie I believed, is very common amongst children that have divorced parents. In this significant core memory from my childhood, I was sitting against the headboard of my bed in the dark, my knees to my chest and my arms wrapped tight around them, burying my head in my legs, in an attempt to muzzle the sound of the arguing in the room behind me. I was terrified and distraught, unable to sleep. I was young and really didn’t understand what was happening. I just knew heavy things were being thrown towards walls and bits and pieces of the conversation sounded like it was about money needed for things for me. My eyes swelled with tears and I thought they would be happier without me. Out of all the things I’m sure my parents were arguing about, that’s all I heard and I was convinced I was the cause of all of their problems.

If dealing with this guilt wasn’t enough, years later I wrestled with the weight of internalizing my abuse to protect my mom from the hurt of ruining her new marriage with news that would destroy it. I was sexually abused repeatedly over the course of almost 3 years and I kept it to myself because I didn’t want to be the reason both of her marriages ended. This is genuinely what I thought. I’d brought this upon myself, I did something that made him do this to me, I was a “mess things up magnet” waiting to ruin everything connected to me because I just coldn’t do anything right. Believing that for so long, I began to believe that anything wrong-was inherently my fault. So I kept it in, I smiled like I wasn’t broken, and I just kept going. The enemy was playing a fun game of archery with my soul-he sneakily used those closest to me to be the bow that shot the arrows of lies. He hit his target successfully on countless occasions.

Because of the abuse I endured, my mind was flooded with shame and overwhelmingly perverse desires. I was very young and had very mixed feelings about what was happening to me. Something deep inside of me felt it was something off, but I was being groomed with everything I could ask for and honestly, I was confused about how something that felt so weird could also feel good. Physically my body craved more of this new sensation. I didn’t even know what to call it, I was too young to know it had a name, and I was torn between pleasure and shame. I began to wonder: “Is this normal?” “Does this mean he’s picking me over my mom?” “Why can’t I ever tell him to stop?” “Will he be mad and hurt me if I tell him to stop?” Will he do this to my sister if I don’t let him do it to me? “He said this is how you show love to people in a special way and it’s a special secret just between the two of you, so why does it feel so wrong?” “Does this happen to other people?”

The questions in my mind were endless. I remember one day after dealing with this for at least, I was in the house and mom was in her shop doing hair. I turned on this channel she liked to watch and watched the movie that was playing. It was Lifetime Movie Network. In the movie, the man the woman was dating after a divorce was always going into her daughter’s room and closing the door while she wasn’t around and telling her things similar to what I was being told. I was following bits and pieces of the storyline but towards the end of the movie, the girl was questioned in court and when questioned about what the man had done, what she mentioned was alarmingly parallel to my experience. When the man was sentenced to prison I felt sick to my stomach. This was the worse awakening. I now knew what was being done had a name and hat it was bad enough to put someone away for 15 years.

Instead of being more upset at my abuser, I was overtaken by the thought that questioned why I didn’t trust my gut. I allowed this. I was dumb for not knowing this was bad. And something was wrong with me because something bad enough to put someone in jail felt good to my body. I was confused and began to dislike myself. At this point I’d become terrified of everything. Terrified to say something, terrified not to, terrified to be alone, terrified that if I wasn’t with him, he’d be with me baby sister. All I coud hear n m thoughts was: “It’s your fault” “You shouldv’e told him no.” You are dirty.” “ You didn’t tell him to stop because you liked it.” “You love messing things up!” “If you don’t stay close to him, he’ll get to your sister and it will all be your fault!”-It wouldn’t stop!!!

I can recall, in Jr. High School, having this 4”x6” fuzzy Lisa Frank zebra print diary. It had a little silver lock on it…my faviorite little book. I came up with the bright idea to grab it and write out what happened to me in complete detail and, leave the lock off ankd leave it somewhere my mom would see it. I didn’t have the courage to tell anyone. I was panncing at the thought of it being read even while writing and had several panic attacks that day waiting for my om to approach me about the diary. Once she finally came to me about it I completely froze and told her it was a story I was aking up for a movie like LMN. It was normal for me to do creative writing so she bought it. The shame and guilt I was experiencing seemed to be like a thick and dark cloud hanging over me, and life itself began to feel like one small dark room with walls slowly caving in… No windows… No outlets. Everything was imploding.

My abuser taught me that masterbation was self love. In his words “this is how you love yourself and you won’t need a boy to do it because no one can know you better than you.” I had these perverse lessons while he had something playing on tv lke Girls Gone Wild or some other form of porn, mainly lesbian pornography. Unbenownst to me, another lie was given life This seed of perversion was being watered regularly and the vines began to twice around my identity-it’s thorns puncturing my fragile soul. I began to develop an attraction to women, and knowing that this wasn’t normal brought, on more shame.

It may be hard to believe but the process to forgive my abuser was pretty easy. I can’t take any redit for that though-I literally had an encounter with the Holy Spirit that made it impossible not too. Don’t get me wrong, at first this was not a thought. I honestly couldn’t phonthom why God wanted him alive. Before this quick shift, I lived years in anger. This anger festered in my sould until I found myself sneaking into a room while he was asleep with the largest knife I could find in hand. I stood there and the anger kindled further like a flame being fanned as I wondered how he could sleep so peacefully knowing what he’d done. Just as I lifted the knife I heard “ This is not you.” I tried to ignore that voice and I heard “ It wasn’t him-we wrestle not against flesh and blood-don’t look at him.” My heart felt as if it could leap out of me and drop into my stomach at the same time, that rage melted, and my eyes began to swell with tears as I walked quietly to return the knife to the ktchen. On my way back to my room the enemy was quick to come for me whispering ‘You’re a punk. You let him punk you. Your scared. You can’t do anything right. Now if he gets to your sister it will be your fault!

I did my best to tune out the lies though they were successful jabs at my mind and chose to see that my fight was withsomething I couldn’t see and I forgave.That night, I began to let him go and prayed for him that he woud come to repentance, come to know God, and no longer be used by the enemy. This was a win for me, but the enemy was just waiting for an opportune time. Forgiving my abuser did not mean I was healed of the trauma. It just meant I no longer saw him as the cause of my affliction and I released him. I forgave the man, but I was still reliving the effects of the trauma as I grew into my teenage years. I internalized this pain for all those years and I finally broke. I was in High School-fighting depression and suicidal ideations, completely condemened because of my inability to break my addictions to porn and masterbation-considering I was constantly being asked to lead the coir at church or pray for someone. I was fighting something that appeared to hae no end, and again, the enemy caused me to walk in condemnation with thoughts of failure. I began to believe that everything going wrong in my life internally and externally was because I couldn’t do anything right.

Speaking out about my abuse didn’t yeild the results that I thought it would and I began to feel numb. I remember hearing “we don’t have enough evidence to build a case” and being handed a teddy bear and sent on my way. I felt completely unheard and that my ain didn’t matter. I got to a point where I never wanted to be home. Home was a place where I felt I was given task after task, expected to do for myself and my siblings, while no one saw I was dying inside.I joined every auxilary that I could. Musical theater, 9 out of the 10 choirs, badminton, you name it, I was at school all day! My grades startd to take a hit and the last year of school I failed the entire year of geometry. Of course it would become a requirement the ear i graduate-and I did everything I could, even got a tutor but I couldn’t pass and didn’t get to walk the stage with my peers. Even though 3 months later I still got my regular High School diploma through American school it wasn’t good enough. This in my mind was proof I was a failure. I was actually told this by a substitute teacher in a study hall class. I was a sophomore and a friend and I had a test in our next class. She was struggling and asked if I could help. English was my jam so I agreed. The teacher told me to stop talking. I respectfully raised my hand and ask to continue as we were studying for an exam-I informed her that normally we study together at this time. Now, I was raised with some sense so if she still said no I would’ve listened. I knew better than to talk back to adults. Yet she stood up and began to yell at me: “You are o disrespectful. Who do you think you are!? You are one of those people that will end up under a bridge living out of box with that attitude! Now i’m mentally rehearsing what I said and how I said it and genuinely caught of guard at her response, and although in that moment I stood up and respectfully informed her I did nothing to deserve her saying that and I was going to xcuse myself to speak with my dean…it still stuck with me. It stuck with me so much so that when I didn’t get to walk the stage-I heard her voice… I saw herr face. Indicatively, another seed had been planted amongst the forest i my mind that was already filled with a large harvest of shae, guilt, condemnation, fear and self hatred.