

OPEN EYES, HAPPY HEART

**A Story of Healing from Sexual Abuse
and Childhood Trafficking**

Carolyn Thompson

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DEDICATION

To my mom,
who encouraged me to do whatever
I needed to do in order to heal

To my friend Shannon,
for pointing me to God multiple times a day
when the fear was bad

To my husband Will,
for bringing joy and light into
the darkest parts of my journey

Thank you for loving me so well

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

"Call to Me and I will answer and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3 BSB



A lot of survivors talk about how they got their voices taken away and spent years struggling to find them. And that's true and important. But I'm here to tell you about how I got my sight taken away and spent years struggling to find it. And beyond that, I'm here to tell you about how the world has had its sight taken away, and the Lord wants to give it back.

The two biggest commandments God gave us were to love Him and to love our neighbors as ourselves. But can we love God if we can't see who He truly is? Or love ourselves, if we can't grasp how God sees us? Or love our neighbors the way God was actually describing?

The most terrible thing that happened to me through the years of childhood abuse I suffered wasn't the damage it did to my physical being or to my mind. It was the damage it did to my soul. The worst thing that happened was that the eyes of my heart were blinded.

This book is the story of how God healed the eyes of my heart. And it's an invitation from Him to you to do the same in your life.



**Would
you like
to see
the world
as God
intended?**

CHAPTER ONE: THE BEGINNING AND THE END

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom the work that god has done from beginning to end.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 BSB



My story begins near the end of what has been my life so far. It will take you on a journey through a valley which the Lord ordered me to enter and I tried to run away from instead. My valley story is messy, painful, humbling, and—to me at least—incredibly beautiful because of what God did there and how it changed everything.

In December of 2018, I thought my life was manageable. I was serving in volunteer ministry and had just finished improving my marriage through a wonderful re|engage course. But the truth was I was already wandering in the wilderness. My sense of purpose was adrift. I had finished homeschooling, entered the empty nest phase, and had no clear vision for what to do with the rest of my life.

At the end of Christmas vacation in Oklahoma with my husband’s family, I slipped away, pulled out my iPhone, and watched a Sunday service broadcast online from my home church, the Church at Rock Creek in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The message was about happiness, of all things: how the church had an artificial distinction between the words “happiness” and “joy”. Our Teaching Pastor Greg Kirksey shared that there was no scriptural, linguistic or historical basis for making that distinction: that in fact, the Bible was filled with references to happiness, because the primary Hebrew and Greek words for “blessed” and “happy” were the same words. Therefore God was interested in our happiness, just not the worldly version that involved no suffering. God’s version of happiness was holy.

Greg used Psalm 1 to make a case for what Christ-centered

happiness looked like vs. self-centered happiness. Christ-centered happiness involved keeping our distance from the world (being in it, but not of it); keeping our delight in the Word of God; and keeping our devotion to the Work of God. So the road to a Happy New Year was paved with three habits: scheduling our time wisely, studying our Bibles regularly, and serving the Lord unselfishly.

I knew that I wasn't happy. And I thought I knew what my biggest area of unhappiness was. The perplexing thing was that I thought I was regularly practicing the habits that Greg listed.

I decided I'd make "happiness" my focus for 2019 and see if I could figure out what was out of alignment. I had absolutely no idea what I was getting into—it turned my world upside down. But it's a decision I'm profoundly grateful that I made.



While I was still in Oklahoma, I had gotten a text from my friend Samantha about her husband, my friend Travis. Travis had suffered a bad bicycle accident. After a complicated surgery in early January, he ended up with a plate and screws to rebuild his shattered left collarbone, and 2 plates and screws in his right hand. With neither arm functioning, he was temporarily helpless.

By the middle of January, Travis was doing well enough to have visitors at home. I went to see him, and of course asked all about the wreck. He said that he and a friend, both experienced riders, had gone to check out the new Northwood MTP Trail system in Hot Springs, AR. They were having fun but being cautious to examine unfamiliar terrain as they went. Travis said that when he scoped out a Black Diamond trail they were about to ride, he looked long and hard at the last big gap they were going to jump. It was really wide. He decided that if he hit the jumps preceding that one perfectly—was in the zone—he'd go for that last jump. Otherwise, he wouldn't.

He did hit those jumps perfectly as he rode down the trail. He was feeling secure as he went for the last one. It was only after he launched into the air that he realized it was all going wrong, and that he was going to need to ditch his bike before hitting the other side. Ditching the bike was better than hitting, but it still left him lying broken on the ground, unable to get up unaided or even to unclip his own helmet.

Travis and I sat for a long while and had a deep conversation about what it was like to have your “normal” shattered—to go from independent and doing your own thing to needing to rely on God and other people just to get through everyday tasks. It could have been a downer of a conversation, but it wasn't: it was exactly the opposite. We were focused on the amazing and eye-opening things God was doing in the middle of humbling circumstances. Travis had a lot to share with me from just the few weeks of healing he had already been through—and he knew he had a long journey still ahead of him.

As we talked, I mentioned to Travis that I was going to pursue “happiness” as my goal for 2019. I didn't share much, just that it seemed that God wanted to do something different with my family circumstances to achieve that goal, and it was likely to be hard. Travis gave a short laugh and warned me that praying for happiness could be dangerous, like praying for patience—an invitation to a whole bunch of testing. He also said that family change could be hard. But he finished by saying that hard things were often worth doing. It was a great visit, and we both parted encouraged.



There was a reason I wasn't more forthcoming with Travis about my family situation. I had a secret which my husband knew, but which the rest of my daily world did not: that my dad had sexually abused me as a child.

As an adult I had forgiven my dad, even before I came to Christ. And to all appearances, though not in words, my dad

was sorry for everything that he had done. He had gone to great lengths to try and be a better father. When I forgave him back in 1995, we resumed a relationship, though not a close one.

Then, in 2012, three things happened: my dad had an accident which injured his brain and could have killed or permanently disabled him (but didn't, thank God); he chose to stay sober after he recovered; and I altered my boundaries and really rebuilt our relationship. I was praying to get the gospel in front of him and help him find Jesus like I had. I was afraid of what would happen to him if he didn't: he was a confirmed Christ-denier. So I believed it was worth the moderate worsening of my PTSD symptoms to make the effort.

And it did make my PTSD symptoms worse. For seven years, while I built relationship and looked for opportunities to share my faith, I suffered more sleep problems, appetite problems, recurring depression and anxiety. And my panic and hyperawareness problems, especially at night, ranged from annoying to occasionally debilitating.

I hadn't fully trusted or understood who God was when He saved me. And I still hadn't wholly embraced the new identity He had given me. Blind to the riches before me, I suffered in silence and did my best to hide my struggle. I plunged forward, not seeking help, until the day I prayed for happiness. And God was ready for that moment—even though He knew it meant I would need to have an unexpected crash of my own.



I had done my very best to forget an additional part of my childhood, lumping it under “sexual abuse” and never discussing it with anyone—not even my husband. I was hiding from the reality that my dad hadn't just sexually abused me himself but had also trafficked me during my elementary school years.

The reality of having been trafficked was beyond my capacity to deal with alone; and I wasn't planning to share it with another soul. This left me fighting an endless battle to block it out and shove it down into the deepest recesses of my brain.

I did everything possible to pretend either that it didn't matter, because I'd forgiven my dad; or that it didn't affect me in any way, which wasn't true; or even that it never happened at all. My internal "truth" was whatever would help keep me going at any given time. The repressed memory problems inherent in PTSD fueled this and kept me functioning in my dysfunction for many years. But it was exhausting.



Are you
endlessly
battling
something
in your
past?

After I started focusing on happiness, I had moments of awareness that God was shepherding me toward dealing with exactly what I was trying so hard to avoid. But the glimpses were so overwhelming to me that I would "know" and then "not know" where we were headed.

On February 9, 2019, when we streamed the second day of the IF:Gathering at Rock Creek, I'd had a complete meltdown over what God had put in front of me. During the IJM presentation about child sex trafficking in Cambodia I had panicked and desperately wanted to run. But I was also too terrified to move. I was afraid that if I got up and exited the event, people would somehow know what my history was. The irrational fear was intense. It was only with enormous effort that I was able to get up and leave for the ladies' room.

When I got there, I hid in a stall, hyperventilated, tried not to throw up, and was generally miserable. I wanted to pound on the metal stall walls. I wanted to ball up on the floor and sob. I did neither. Instead I froze there, my face buried in my hands.

Eventually enough time passed that I became worried

someone would check on me to see if I was okay—attention I didn't want either. So I slowed my breathing as best I could, got some water from the fountain, and headed back to the Community Room.

Thankfully, the IJM presentation was over, and no one had been looking for me. Trembling, I sat and wrote these words in my event journal, praying no friend would look over my shoulder:

IJM / Cambodia

- I feel terrible guilt that I am not freeing children from the kind of abuse I suffered.
- I want to be free from the abuse being my life.
- My own pain from what I've been through is unresolved.
- I have/Have I moved forward?
- I don't feel called to it. God has not asked.
- Why do I feel guilty?

Temporarily unburdened, I shut the journal. Then PTSD blocked out the experience, allowing me to go back to my “normal” life—more or less. But the words are there in my February 9 notes—in my own handwriting—undeniable. I was shocked to discover them as I pulled material together for this book. I “forgot” the entire experience you just read about until I rediscovered what I had written.



It wasn't until May, after God spent a whole lot more time working on me, that He finally encouraged me to look at the problem of unhappiness and have an actual conversation with Him about where we were going. It started on Mother's Day with another sermon, this one from our Senior Pastor Mark Evans.

I was at home sick and joined the online stream from Rock Creek late. Mark was already launching into his first point. As I listened to the sermon, “Showing Mercy to Family,” I was increasingly uncomfortable.