



Biblical Truths That Help Survivors Replace Shame with Hope **Dr. Carrie Kitay**

An Empower Yourself Today Educational Article

For many women who have lived through domestic abuse, shame becomes one of the deepest wounds left behind. The bruises may fade, the threatening voice may no longer be heard in the house, and the immediate crisis may begin to settle, but shame often lingers quietly in the heart. It whispers that the survivor should have known better, left sooner, spoken louder, prayed harder, submitted differently, or prevented what happened. Shame does not merely say, “Something painful happened to me.” It often says, “Something must be wrong with me.” That is why spiritual instruction for survivors must be handled with great tenderness, biblical accuracy, and trauma-informed wisdom.

Empower Yourself Today serves women who have been harmed by domestic abuse, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, and coercive control. In that work, spiritual instruction is not simply the presentation of religious information. It is the careful restoration of truth where lies have taken root. It helps a woman understand God’s design for her life, her dignity, her emotional health, her boundaries, and her personal responsibility. This kind of instruction must never be harsh, hurried, or condemning. It must reflect the heart of Christ, who meets the broken with truth and compassion, and it must be grounded in a counseling framework that understands how abuse damages perception, identity, agency, and hope.

Christ-Centered Reality Therapy provides a helpful framework for this work because it begins with reality as God defines it. In CCRT, healing cannot be built on denial, confusion, blame-shifting, or spiritual pressure. Healing begins when truth is restored. Domestic abuse distorts reality by confusing love with control, responsibility with blame, submission with silence, and forgiveness with unsafe reconciliation. Biblical spiritual instruction corrects those distortions. It does not shame the survivor for being wounded; it helps her understand that abuse is a violation of God’s design, not a reflection of her worth.

Shame Is Not the Voice of God

One of the first biblical truths survivors often need to hear is that shame is not the same thing as conviction. Conviction, when it comes from the Holy Spirit, leads a person toward truth, repentance, clarity, and restoration. Shame, by contrast, often drives a wounded person into hiding, silence, fear, and self-condemnation. Many survivors already carry a heavy burden of accusation, especially if the abuser repeatedly told them they were the cause of the abuse. When spiritual language is added to those accusations, the harm becomes even deeper. A woman may begin to believe that God is disappointed in her for being afraid, for needing help, for setting boundaries, or for struggling to trust.

The Bible gives a very different picture of God's response to the brokenhearted. Psalm 34:18 says, "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." This verse does not portray God as distant from those who are crushed. It shows Him drawing near. For a survivor, that truth matters deeply. Abuse often isolates. It convinces a woman that no one will understand, no one will believe her, and perhaps even God is against her. Biblical instruction must answer that lie with the character of God. He is not repelled by wounds. He is near to the brokenhearted.

CCRT helps survivors separate false shame from true moral responsibility. A survivor may need to take responsibility for future choices, safety planning, boundaries, healing work, and personal growth, but she is not responsible for another person's decision to intimidate, control, degrade, threaten, or harm her. This distinction is essential. Without it, spiritual instruction can accidentally become another form of burden. With it, truth becomes freeing. The survivor can begin to say, "I am responsible for my response before God, but I am not responsible for the abuse committed against me."

The Survivor's Worth Is Not Defined by What Was Done to Her

Abuse attacks identity. It is not merely a series of painful events; it is often a long campaign against a woman's sense of self. She may have been called names, criticized daily, mocked for her emotions, told she was unstable, accused of being rebellious, or made to feel spiritually inferior. Over time, repeated words and repeated fear can begin to feel like truth. A survivor may look at herself through the abuser's interpretation rather than through God's Word. One of the great tasks of spiritual instruction is to gently restore the difference between accusation and identity.

Genesis teaches that human beings are made in the image of God. That truth is foundational. A woman's worth does not begin with her marital status, her past, her strength, her appearance, her productivity, or another person's approval. Her worth is rooted in the Creator who made her. When abuse has trained her to see herself as small, disposable, foolish, or defective, biblical truth must patiently speak a better word. She is not what the abuser called her. She is not reduced to what happened to her. She is not disqualified from dignity because she has been wounded.

Isaiah 43:1 says, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Although this verse was spoken in its original context to Israel, it reveals the tenderness of God's covenant care and His personal knowledge of those He redeems. For survivors, the principle is powerful: God does not relate to His people as nameless damage. He calls, knows, claims, and restores. Abuse depersonalizes. God dignifies. Abuse says, "You are nothing." God's truth reminds the wounded, "Thou art mine."

From a Christ-Centered Reality Therapy perspective, this is not sentimental encouragement. It is reality correction. Shame creates a false identity system. It persuades the survivor to interpret herself through fear, humiliation, and blame. CCRT works to realign belief with reality. When biblical instruction affirms God-given dignity, it is not merely trying to make someone feel better; it is helping her return to what is true. Hope becomes possible when identity is no longer built on abuse's accusations.

God Is Not the Author of Confusion

Domestic abuse frequently produces confusion. A survivor may remember moments of kindness mixed with cruelty, apologies followed by repeated harm, spiritual words followed by control, or affection followed by intimidation. This inconsistency can make it difficult to think clearly. She may wonder whether the relationship is abusive or whether she is overreacting. She may feel guilty for wanting safety. She may struggle to explain what happened because the abuse was not always physical or obvious to others. In such situations, spiritual instruction must not deepen confusion by offering simplistic answers.

First Corinthians 14:33 says, “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” While the immediate context concerns order in the church, the principle reflects God’s character. God does not create moral chaos. He does not require His daughters to live in a fog where evil is renamed love, fear is renamed submission, and silence is renamed faithfulness. When a woman has been trained to distrust her perceptions, biblical truth can help her regain moral clarity. God’s peace is never the peace of pretending. It is the peace that comes from truth, righteousness, and rightly ordered reality.

CCRT places great emphasis on restoring reality orientation. In abuse recovery, this means helping the survivor name what happened accurately. If she was threatened, it was a threat. If she was controlled, it was control. If Scripture was used to silence her while protecting the abuser, that was spiritual misuse. Naming reality is not bitterness. It is a necessary part of healing. A person cannot make wise choices about what remains unnamed, minimized, or spiritually disguised.

This is why Empower’s commitment to spiritual instruction is so important. Women recovering from abuse often need more than encouragement; they need careful teaching that helps them distinguish God’s voice from the voice of manipulation. They need to know that biblical peace does not mean tolerating destruction. They need to understand that forgiveness does not erase the need for safety, that compassion does not require enabling, and that love does not demand surrendering personal dignity to someone else’s control.

Boundaries Are Not Rebellion

Many survivors feel shame when they begin to consider boundaries. If they have been spiritually manipulated, they may have been told that saying no is selfish, that seeking separation is unfaithful, or that asking for accountability is unforgiving. Some have been taught to confuse Christian humility with unlimited access to their lives. As a result, even wise and necessary boundaries can feel frightening. A survivor may know she needs safety while also feeling as though she is disobeying God by pursuing it.

Biblical instruction must correct that fear. Proverbs 22:3 says, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Wisdom recognizes danger and responds appropriately. Safety planning, emotional boundaries, financial boundaries, relational boundaries, and spiritual boundaries are not acts of rebellion when they are rooted in truth and protection. They are often expressions of prudence. In domestic abuse situations, boundaries may be necessary for survival, clarity, and healing.

Christ-Centered Reality Therapy understands boundaries as part of responsible choice. Boundaries help define what is real, what is safe, what is acceptable, and what is destructive. They do not exist to punish the abuser or control outcomes. They help the survivor act responsibly within reality. A woman cannot make someone else repent, change, or tell the truth. She can, however, learn to make choices that align with safety, dignity, and God's design for her life. That is not selfishness. That is restored agency.

It is important to say this with compassion because many survivors have been trained to feel guilty for protecting themselves. They may need to hear repeatedly that God does not despise wise protection. The Lord cares about life. He cares about truth. He cares about the vulnerable. When a woman begins to rebuild her life after abuse, boundaries may be one of the first signs that shame is losing power. She is no longer organizing her life entirely around fear of another person's reaction. She is beginning to live in truth.

Hope Is Built on Truth, Not Denial

Some people speak of hope as if it means believing that everything will quickly improve. Survivors of abuse often know better. They may have hoped through many apologies, promises, counseling appointments, emotional speeches, and temporary changes. They may have been disappointed so many times that the word hope now feels dangerous. Biblical hope must therefore be taught carefully. It is not wishful thinking. It is not denial. It is not pretending that abuse was less harmful than it was. Biblical hope is confidence in God's truth, presence, justice, and redemptive work, even when the path forward is difficult.

Romans 15:13 says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." This hope is rooted in God Himself. It does not require the survivor to minimize danger or ignore reality. In fact, hope becomes stronger when it is connected to truth. A woman can hope because God sees clearly. She can hope because her worth is not destroyed. She can hope because wise choices are possible. She can hope because healing may be gradual and still be real.

CCRT is especially helpful here because it connects hope to restored agency. Hope is not merely something a survivor waits to feel. It grows as she begins to see clearly, choose responsibly, establish safe supports, receive biblical truth, and rebuild life one decision at a time. Even small steps matter. Making a phone call, attending a counseling session, telling the truth about what happened, learning a Scripture correctly, setting one boundary, or accepting help can become part of hope's reconstruction.

This kind of hope does not shame a woman for still being afraid. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is movement toward truth while fear is still present. A compassionate spiritual instructor or counselor understands that recovery is not instant. A survivor may need time to grieve, to rest, to learn, to question, to regain confidence, and to trust again. Hope grows best in an environment where truth is spoken gently and consistently, not where quick spiritual answers are forced upon a wounded heart.

Scripture Restores Dignity When It Is Used Correctly

Many survivors have heard Scripture used in ways that harmed them. Passages about forgiveness, submission, patience, suffering, or reconciliation may have been quoted without

context, without safety, and without accountability for the abuser. When this happens, the survivor may not simply feel hurt by a person; she may feel hurt by the Bible itself. Spiritual instruction must be sensitive to that wound. It is not enough to quote more verses quickly. The helper must patiently show that the misuse of Scripture is not the same thing as the meaning of Scripture.

Correctly used, Scripture does not erase abuse. It exposes evil, protects the vulnerable, calls sinners to repentance, honors truth, and restores dignity. Psalm 82:3-4 says, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” These words reveal that God’s moral order includes protection and deliverance, not passive tolerance of harm. For a survivor who has been told that faith means endurance without protection, this truth can be deeply healing.

Within CCRT, Scripture functions as a stabilizing reference point because it reflects God’s reality. The Bible is not used as a tool to pressure a survivor into compliance; it is used to clarify what is true. Spiritual instruction should help a woman understand that God’s Word does not contradict God’s character. The same God who calls His people to forgive also calls evil evil. The same God who values marriage also values justice, life, and righteousness. The same God who teaches humility also condemns oppression and misuse of power.

Moving from Shame to Hope

The journey from shame to hope is not usually a straight line. A survivor may believe truth one day and struggle with old accusations the next. She may understand intellectually that the abuse was not her fault while still feeling guilty in her body and emotions. She may know God cares while still feeling spiritually numb. This does not mean she is failing. It means healing is reaching places where harm has been deeply stored. Compassionate spiritual instruction allows room for that process.

Over time, biblical truth begins to rebuild what abuse damaged. Shame says, “I am ruined.” God’s truth says the brokenhearted are seen and near to Him. Shame says, “I am to blame for everything.” Reality says each person is responsible for his or her own choices. Shame says, “I cannot trust myself.” Healing says perception can be restored through truth, safety, wise counsel, and time. Shame says, “There is no future for me.” Hope says God can lead His daughters into clarity, dignity, and renewed life.

Empower’s work with women who are survivors of domestic abuse is therefore more than a service program. It is a ministry of truth, safety, and restoration. Through biblical principles and Christ-Centered Reality Therapy, women can be helped to replace false beliefs with truth, fear-based compliance with wise boundaries, and shame-based identity with God-given dignity. The goal is not merely to help a woman survive what happened, but to help her recover the ability to see clearly, choose wisely, live safely, and walk forward with hope.

For the survivor who feels buried under shame, the message of biblical hope is not that her pain does not matter. It is that her pain is seen, her life has value, and her future is not owned by abuse. God’s truth does not crush the wounded; it lifts them. It does not deny evil; it exposes it. It does not bind the oppressed to confusion; it leads them toward freedom. When

shame is answered by truth, and truth is ministered with compassion, hope can begin to rise again.