



Understanding God's Design for Healing, Boundaries, and Personal Responsibility

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For many women who have survived domestic abuse, the word healing can feel both beautiful and frightening. It is beautiful because it points to the possibility that pain does not get the final word, that the confusion, fear, shame, and exhaustion of abuse can begin to lift. Yet it can also feel frightening because healing requires a survivor to face realities that may have been buried for years. She may have been told that what happened was not really abuse, that her pain was exaggerated, that her boundaries were selfish, or that personal responsibility meant carrying the weight of someone else's cruelty. In that kind of environment, even the language of healing can be twisted until it sounds like pressure instead of hope.

A biblical approach to healing must begin in a different place. It must begin with God's character. Scripture reveals a God who sees affliction, hears the cries of the oppressed, defends the vulnerable, and calls human beings to walk in truth. The Lord does not heal by pretending harm did not happen. He does not restore people by asking them to deny danger, silence their voice, or remain under destructive control. Biblical healing is rooted in truth, ordered by righteousness, strengthened by grace, and guarded by wisdom. It invites the wounded person to come out of confusion and back into reality as God defines it.

This is also where Christ-Centered Reality Therapy offers a strong and compassionate framework for survivors of domestic abuse. CCRT teaches that healing requires alignment with God-created reality. Abuse distorts reality by replacing love with control, responsibility with blame, and safety with fear. The survivor's work is not to excuse the abuser, spiritualize the harm, or rush toward an outward appearance of peace. The work is to regain clarity, exercise wise choice, accept responsibility for what truly belongs to her, and refuse responsibility for what belongs to the one who chose to harm. In that process, boundaries are not signs of bitterness or rebellion. They are part of returning to God's design for life, dignity, and moral order.

God's Design for Healing Begins with Truth

Healing begins when truth is allowed to speak. Abuse flourishes in secrecy, distortion, and confusion. A woman may be told that the violence was her fault, that the cruel words were only jokes, that the control was protection, or that the spiritual manipulation was biblical leadership. Over time, these false messages can become deeply embedded. She may start to doubt her own perception. She may apologize for things she did not do. She may feel guilty for wanting peace, safety, or room to breathe. This is why truth is not optional in healing. Truth is the first doorway out of captivity.

Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, KJV). In domestic abuse recovery, this truth must be applied carefully and concretely. It is not a vague religious slogan. It means abuse must be named as abuse. Control must be named as

control. Manipulation must be named as manipulation. A survivor does not become free by calling evil good or by calling fear love. She becomes free as God's truth gently but firmly corrects the false reality that abuse created around her.

In CCRT terms, this is the restoration of reality. The survivor is not helped by being pushed into denial, nor is she strengthened by being told to simply think positive thoughts. She is helped when she is supported in seeing what is actually true before God. If she was harmed, that harm matters. If she was threatened, that threat matters. If Scripture was used to silence her, that misuse of Scripture matters. Healing requires more than emotional comfort; it requires moral clarity. Comfort without clarity can leave a woman vulnerable to the same patterns that wounded her in the first place.

God's design for healing is not harsh, but it is honest. Psalm 51:6 says, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (KJV). Survivors often need truth in the inward parts because abuse reaches into the inward places. It shapes how a woman thinks about herself, how she interprets conflict, how she understands God, and how she evaluates danger. Biblical healing brings wisdom back into those hidden places, not with condemnation, but with compassionate light.

Boundaries Are Part of God's Moral Order

One of the most common struggles survivors face is the fear that boundaries are unkind, unspiritual, or selfish. Many women have been trained, sometimes by family systems and sometimes by religious language, to believe that love means unlimited access. They may feel guilty for saying no, for needing space, for refusing a conversation that becomes abusive, or for protecting children from harmful behavior. But a boundary is not an act of hatred. A boundary is a truthful line that recognizes where one person's responsibility ends and another person's responsibility begins.

Scripture is filled with boundaries. God placed boundaries around the garden, around moral behavior, around worship, around the treatment of the vulnerable, and around the use of authority. Boundaries are not opposed to love; they are part of righteous love. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (KJV). To keep the heart is to guard it wisely. It does not mean hardening the heart against God. It means refusing to leave the deepest places of life unprotected before destructive behavior.

For survivors of domestic abuse, boundaries may begin very simply. A woman may decide she will no longer remain in a room where she is being screamed at. She may refuse to discuss serious issues when threats are being made. She may seek outside support rather than keeping dangerous secrets. She may create a safety plan, limit contact, document patterns, or involve appropriate helpers. These actions are not revenge. They are not attempts to control the abuser. They are choices made in response to reality. They say, in effect, "I am responsible before God for stewarding the life He has given me, and I will not pretend that harm is harmless."

CCRT helps clarify this by distinguishing responsible choice from controlling choice. An abuser uses control to dominate another person's freedom. A survivor uses boundaries to protect her own agency and safety. These are not morally equivalent. When a woman sets a boundary, she is not doing to the abuser what the abuser did to her. She is stepping out of the distorted system of control and beginning to act from truth. That difference matters deeply,

especially in Christian counseling, where the language of forgiveness and submission has too often been misused to erase necessary protection.

A healthy boundary also gives responsibility back to the person who owns it. If someone lies, threatens, rages, manipulates, or uses Scripture as a weapon, the consequence belongs to the one choosing that behavior. A boundary does not force repentance, but it does stop pretending that repentance is unnecessary. It does not guarantee change, but it refuses to reward continued harm with unlimited access. In this way, boundaries can become one of the first visible signs that reality is being restored.

Personal Responsibility Without Victim-Blaming

Personal responsibility is one of the most important ideas in Christ-Centered Reality Therapy, but in abuse recovery it must be taught with great care. Survivors have often been buried under false responsibility. They have been told they caused the anger, provoked the violence, failed to submit correctly, did not pray enough, did not love well enough, or did not forgive fast enough. These accusations are not biblical responsibility. They are forms of blame-shifting, and they keep the survivor trapped in confusion.

Biblical responsibility begins with truth. Galatians 6:5 says, “For every man shall bear his own burden” (KJV). Each person is morally accountable for his or her own choices before God. This means the abuser is responsible for choosing abuse. The survivor is not responsible for making another person cruel, controlling, deceptive, or violent. No amount of disappointment, stress, jealousy, insecurity, or anger gives one person the right to harm another. Strong emotion does not erase moral responsibility.

At the same time, survivors do have real and meaningful choices in the healing process. This must be said gently, because agency is not the same as blame. A woman may not have chosen the abuse, but as clarity grows, she can begin making choices about support, safety, truth-telling, counseling, boundaries, spiritual care, and rebuilding her life. These choices may be small at first. Sometimes the first responsible choice is simply telling the truth to one safe person. Sometimes it is admitting, “I am afraid.” Sometimes it is allowing herself to consider that God does not require her to live under ongoing harm.

CCRT is especially helpful here because it does not reduce a survivor to helplessness, but neither does it blame her for being harmed. It recognizes that abuse restricts choices through fear, dependency, isolation, and distorted beliefs. Therefore, counseling must restore agency patiently. A survivor may need time to think clearly again. She may need repeated reassurance that safety is not selfish. She may need to grieve the relationship she hoped she had before she can face the relationship as it truly is. These are not signs of weakness. They are part of the difficult work of returning to reality after prolonged distortion.

Personal responsibility, rightly understood, becomes empowering. It says, “I cannot choose another person’s repentance for him, but I can choose to walk in truth. I cannot undo the past, but I can take the next faithful step. I cannot control every outcome, but I can seek wisdom, safety, and support.” This kind of responsibility does not crush the survivor. It gives her back the dignity of choice. It reminds her that she is not merely the sum of what happened to her. She is a person made in the image of God, capable of wisdom, courage, growth, and renewed purpose.

Healing Includes the Restoration of God-Given Agency

Agency is the ability to act, choose, and respond as a responsible person before God. Domestic abuse attacks agency directly. It narrows a woman's options, trains her to anticipate punishment, and teaches her to manage another person's emotions as if survival depends on it. In many abusive relationships, the victim learns to ask silent questions all day long: Will this upset him? Should I say less? Should I explain more? Did I make the wrong face? Will the children be safe tonight? That kind of constant vigilance is exhausting. It pulls a woman away from peace, creativity, confidence, and worshipful rest.

God's design is not for a person to live as a captive inside another person's instability. Second Timothy 1:7 says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (KJV). This verse should never be used to shame a woman for feeling afraid. Fear in the presence of danger is not spiritual failure; it is often a God-given warning system. But the verse does show that fear is not meant to be the governing atmosphere of a believer's life. God's desire is that His children grow in power, love, and a sound mind, not in chronic terror and confusion.

Restoring agency often happens gradually. A survivor may begin by naming what she wants, what she needs, what she fears, and what she believes God is showing her. She may learn to distinguish between guilt and conviction. Guilt often comes from conditioning, manipulation, or fear of displeasing people. Conviction comes from the Holy Spirit and leads toward truth, repentance, and life. Learning the difference can be deeply freeing for a woman who has been spiritually manipulated.

In CCRT, restored agency is tied to responsible need-meeting. Human beings have God-given needs for survival, love, power or meaningful achievement, freedom, joy, and relationship with God. Abuse corrupts these needs. It may make survival the only daily focus. It may redefine love as appeasement. It may make power feel dangerous, freedom feel guilty, and joy feel impossible. Healing helps the survivor learn to meet these needs in healthy, truthful, God-honoring ways. She begins to see that wanting peace is not sinful. Wanting safety is not rebellion. Wanting to grow, work, learn, parent well, worship freely, and make wise decisions is consistent with God's design.

This is why Empower's work with survivors is not merely about getting through a crisis moment. Crisis care matters, but long-term healing also matters. A woman may need counseling, spiritual instruction, discipleship, education support, life-skills training, job readiness, parenting support, and a compassionate community that believes healing is possible. Each area can become part of restoring agency. Each area helps a survivor move from reacting to danger toward building a stable, purposeful, God-honoring life.

The Difference Between Forgiveness and Unsafe Access

Any discussion of healing, boundaries, and responsibility must address forgiveness because survivors are often pressured at this very point. Forgiveness is a sacred biblical truth, but it is frequently misapplied in domestic abuse situations. A woman may be told that if she has forgiven, she should immediately trust again, return home, stop talking about the abuse, or remove all boundaries. This is not biblical wisdom. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, and reconciliation is not the same as restored access.

Forgiveness releases vengeance to God. It refuses to let hatred become the survivor's identity. It allows the wounded person to entrust justice to the righteous Judge. But forgiveness does

not erase consequences, remove the need for repentance, or require a victim to place herself back under danger. Proverbs 22:3 says, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (KJV). Prudence is not unbelief. Wisdom sees danger and responds appropriately.

CCRT supports this distinction because it refuses to confuse words with reality. If an abuser says he is sorry but continues to intimidate, blame, threaten, stalk, manipulate, or spiritually pressure the victim, reality has not changed. The survivor does not need to pretend that it has. Genuine repentance is visible in responsibility, humility, accountability, changed behavior, and respect for boundaries. Even then, trust is rebuilt slowly, and in some cases reconciliation may not be safe or wise. Christian counseling must be honest enough to say this without apology.

For the survivor, this truth can lift a heavy burden. She can forgive without surrendering wisdom. She can pray for an abuser’s repentance without giving him unrestricted access. She can desire redemption while still requiring accountability. She can honor God without sacrificing safety. These distinctions are not technical details. They are often the difference between genuine healing and renewed harm.

A Compassionate Path Forward

God’s design for healing is not rushed. Survivors of domestic abuse often need space to breathe, time to think, and support that does not shame them for the pace of recovery. Some days may feel strong and clear. Other days may feel heavy, uncertain, or lonely. Healing is not a straight line, and a compassionate Christian response will not treat every struggle as failure. The Lord is patient with the brokenhearted. He does not despise small steps taken in faith.

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” (KJV). This nearness of God is not abstract. It is the foundation of hope. The survivor is not abandoned in the work of rebuilding. God’s truth can steady her mind. God’s wisdom can guide her decisions. God’s people, when properly informed and humble, can become instruments of safety rather than sources of further confusion. Christian counseling, spiritual instruction, and discipleship should all work together to help a woman see herself and her situation through the lens of God’s reality rather than through the distorted mirror of abuse.

Empower’s focus on biblical truth, Christ-centered counseling, and practical restoration reflects this broader vision. Healing after domestic abuse requires more than encouragement. It requires truth that names harm, boundaries that protect life, responsibility that refuses blame-shifting, and hope that is strong enough to face reality. A woman recovering from abuse does not need to be pushed into silence or rushed into pretending. She needs patient support, biblical clarity, and tools that help her rebuild from the inside out.

Understanding God’s design for healing, boundaries, and personal responsibility allows survivors and helpers to walk a safer and wiser path. It reminds the survivor that her life matters to God. It reminds the counselor that truth and compassion must never be separated. It reminds the church that peace without righteousness is not biblical peace. And it reminds every wounded woman that healing is not the denial of what happened; healing is the restoration of reality, dignity, wisdom, and hope under the care of a faithful God.