



Christian Discipleship After Abuse: Rebuilding Faith, Identity, and Confidence

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When I think about Christian discipleship in the life of a woman who has survived domestic abuse, I do not think first about a classroom, a workbook, or a list of religious duties. I think about a woman sitting across from me with her shoulders slightly drawn inward, her voice careful, her eyes searching for permission to say out loud what she has carried in silence. Abuse does not merely wound the body or bruise the emotions; it often reaches into the places where a woman's faith, identity, and confidence were once anchored. It teaches her to question what she knows, to distrust what she sees, and sometimes even to fear the very Scriptures that should have brought comfort. Christian discipleship, when it is wise, gentle, and grounded in truth, helps her begin again. It does not rush her. It does not shame her for being wounded. It walks beside her as she learns that God's Word was never meant to be used as a chain around her soul.

I have watched discipleship become a quiet pathway of restoration. I have seen a woman who once apologized for every tear begin to speak with steadiness. I have seen her move from saying, "I do not know what God thinks of me anymore," to saying, "I know the Lord has not abandoned me." That kind of change rarely happens in one dramatic moment. More often, it comes through repeated encounters with truth, safety, prayer, wise instruction, and patient application. It comes when biblical principles are joined with Christ-Centered Reality Therapy in a way that restores clarity instead of increasing confusion. CCRT gives us a framework for helping a survivor name reality truthfully, understand choice and responsibility rightly, and rebuild her life according to God's design rather than the distorted world created by abuse.

For the purpose of this article, I will describe this process through the story of a woman I will call Anna. Her name is changed, and her story is a composite of many women I have worked with over the years. Anna came for help after years of emotional, spiritual, and verbal abuse. She had not been beaten in ways people could easily see, but she had been diminished every day. Her husband had mocked her intelligence, questioned her faith, controlled her decisions, and used Scripture as a tool to silence her. By the time she arrived, she did not know whether she was disobedient, overly sensitive, mentally unstable, or simply exhausted. She still believed in God, but she no longer knew how to approach Him without fear.

Beginning with Safety and Truth

The first principle I used with Anna was simple but essential: discipleship must begin with truth and safety. I did not begin by asking her how she could be a better wife, how quickly she could forgive, or when reconciliation might be possible. Those questions would have placed spiritual pressure on a woman who had not yet regained clarity about what had happened to her. Instead, I began by helping her separate abuse from ordinary conflict. This distinction mattered deeply

because Anna had been told for years that every problem in the relationship was either her fault or the result of her failure to submit properly.

In CCRT terms, we began by naming reality. Reality is not determined by the abuser's accusations, the victim's fear, or the family's discomfort with scandal. Reality is determined by God's truth. If behavior is coercive, controlling, destructive, degrading, or deceptive, it must be named honestly. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That verse became important to Anna because she had lived for so long in a house where truth was bent around someone else's anger. She needed to understand that truth was not cruel. Truth was not disloyal. Truth was the beginning of freedom.

In those early conversations, I explained to her that Christian discipleship does not require a woman to pretend evil is good. It does not require her to call manipulation leadership or intimidation love. Biblical submission has never meant surrendering one's moral agency to another person's sin. Godly authority protects; abusive control consumes. When Anna began to understand that distinction, something in her posture changed. She was not healed yet, but she was less confused. In abuse recovery, that is not a small thing. Confusion is one of the chains that keeps a woman emotionally captive, and truth is one of the first tools God uses to loosen it.

I also made sure that safety was not treated as a lack of faith. Many women have been taught, directly or indirectly, that taking protective action means they do not trust God. I told Anna that safety planning is not rebellion against God; it is stewardship of life. Scripture repeatedly shows God as a refuge, a shield, and a defender of the oppressed. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We talked about what it means for God to be a refuge, not merely in poetry, but in real decisions, real boundaries, real support systems, and real wisdom.

Restoring Her View of God

The second step was helping Anna rebuild her view of God. Abuse often damages theology at the emotional level before a woman can explain it doctrinally. Anna could still say that God was loving, but inwardly she felt that God was disappointed with her. She had been told that a godly woman endures, stays quiet, forgives quickly, and does not expose the sins of her household. Over time, those messages fused with her image of God until she imagined Him as another authority figure standing over her with expectations she could never satisfy.

I did not try to correct this with quick slogans. A wounded view of God cannot be healed by telling a survivor, "Just remember God loves you," and moving on. We opened Scripture slowly and looked at the heart of God toward the oppressed, the brokenhearted, and the fearful. We talked about the Lord who hears cries, the Shepherd who restores the soul, and the Savior who refuses to crush the bruised reed. Isaiah 42:3 says, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." That verse gave Anna language for something she had not known how to say. She felt bruised. She felt like the smallest remaining flame of faith might go out. But Scripture revealed a God who does not break what is already wounded.

In discipleship, I wanted Anna to see that God's holiness is not the enemy of her healing. His holiness means He does not approve of oppression. His justice means He does not look away when power is misused. His compassion means He does not despise her weakness. His truth means He will not build her recovery on denial. This was important because Anna had learned to associate

spiritual seriousness with harshness. She needed to rediscover that biblical truth can be firm without being cruel and compassionate without being vague.

As her understanding of God became clearer, her prayers changed. At first, she prayed as though she were reporting to a judge. Later, she began to pray as a daughter speaking to a Father. She still had fear. She still had questions. But she was no longer praying from the assumption that God was against her. Discipleship helped her see that her suffering had not made her spiritually defective. It had revealed her need for the Lord's care, and receiving that care was not weakness. It was faith.

Rebuilding Identity Through Biblical Truth

The third step was rebuilding identity. Abuse attacks identity relentlessly. It tells a woman who she is until she begins to forget who God says she is. Anna had been called foolish, unstable, rebellious, ungrateful, and spiritually immature. She had been corrected so often that she no longer trusted her own thoughts. When I asked her to describe herself, most of her words sounded like accusations she had absorbed from someone else. This is one of the reasons discipleship is so important after abuse. A survivor does not only need encouragement; she needs a renewed understanding of personhood grounded in Scripture.

I helped Anna begin distinguishing between accusation and conviction. Accusation produces shame, paralysis, fear, and self-hatred. Biblical conviction is specific, truthful, and leads toward repentance and restoration. The Holy Spirit does not need the tactics of an abuser. He does not gaslight, mock, threaten, or degrade. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." We returned to that truth many times because Anna had lived under condemnation so long that peace felt suspicious to her.

From a CCRT perspective, identity must be restored according to reality. The abuser's version of Anna was not reality. Her trauma-shaped self-perception was understandable, but it was not the final truth. God's Word provided the higher and truer standard. She was created in the image of God. She was morally responsible for her own choices, but not responsible for another person's cruelty. She was called to walk in wisdom, but not called to absorb destruction. She was a person with agency, not an object to be controlled. She was a disciple of Christ, not a servant of another person's entitlement.

I encouraged her to begin practicing truth in small, steady ways. At first, that meant replacing self-accusing statements with biblical reality. When she said, "I am so stupid for staying," we explored a more truthful statement: "I was afraid, confused, and trying to survive, but I can learn to make wise choices now." When she said, "I ruined everything," we examined responsibility carefully and separated her choices from his. This was not an exercise in self-flattery. It was discipleship. It was learning to speak truthfully before God about herself, her past, and her present choices.

Over time, Anna began to carry herself differently. She did not become arrogant or hard. In fact, she became more tender because she was no longer using all her strength to survive condemnation. When a woman's identity is rebuilt in Christ, confidence does not have to look loud. Sometimes it looks like a calm answer. Sometimes it looks like saying, "I need time to think." Sometimes it looks like refusing to accept a false accusation without becoming defensive. For Anna, identity was restored one truthful sentence at a time.

Teaching Boundaries as Faithful Obedience

The fourth step was teaching boundaries as faithful obedience rather than selfishness. This was one of the most difficult areas for Anna. She had been trained to believe that a boundary was an act of rejection, punishment, or rebellion. Whenever she tried to say no, ask for space, or request respectful communication, she was accused of being unloving. Because of that, even healthy boundaries felt sinful to her. She needed patient instruction, not pressure.

I explained that boundaries are not walls built out of bitterness. They are lines of stewardship. They help define what belongs to me, what belongs to another person, and what belongs to God. In CCRT, this connects directly to responsibility. A survivor must not carry responsibility for the abuser's choices, moods, repentance, or consequences. At the same time, she must be strengthened to take responsibility for her own choices, safety, healing, and obedience to God. Boundaries help restore that order.

We looked at the life of Jesus and noticed that He was never controlled by the demands of others. He was compassionate, but not manipulated. He gave generously, but not under coercion. He withdrew to pray. He asked direct questions. He refused dishonest traps. He entrusted Himself to the Father. That helped Anna see that boundaries are not contrary to Christlikeness. Proper boundaries often make Christlike love possible because they prevent love from being confused with fear, compliance, or enabling.

Practically, I helped Anna develop boundaries in layers. First came emotional boundaries: she did not have to accept every accusation as truth. Then came communication boundaries: she could end a conversation that became threatening, degrading, or circular. Then came relational boundaries: she could choose who had access to her story and who had proven unsafe. Then came spiritual boundaries: she could reject interpretations of Scripture that were being used to excuse sin or silence her. Each boundary was connected to truth, safety, and personal responsibility.

At one point she said, "I feel guilty when I do not explain myself." I told her that explanations are helpful in healthy relationships, but in abusive dynamics they are often used as openings for more control. This was a difficult lesson for her because she had spent years trying to find the perfect words that would finally make him understand. Discipleship helped her see that wisdom sometimes speaks, and wisdom sometimes refuses to keep offering sacred truth to someone who is only looking for another way to twist it.

Strengthening Responsible Choice Without Blame

The fifth step was helping Anna recover responsible choice without slipping into victim-blaming. This balance is central to Christ-Centered Reality Therapy. Abuse constrains choice, but it does not erase the survivor's personhood. If I had told Anna that she had no agency at all, I would have unintentionally reinforced the helplessness abuse had taught her. If I had told her that everything was simply a matter of her choices, I would have burdened her with blame that did not belong to her. The goal was neither rescuing nor blaming. The goal was restoration.

We began with small choices because small choices help rebuild confidence. I asked her what she wanted to do with one afternoon, one conversation, one support call, one devotional reading, one practical step. At first, she was uncomfortable answering. She was used to scanning the room for

someone else's preference. Over time, she began to recognize her own God-given capacity to choose. That may sound simple to someone who has never lived under coercive control, but for a survivor, choosing can feel like stepping onto a bridge that might collapse. She needed repeated experiences of choosing wisely and surviving the discomfort that followed.

I often reminded her that responsibility is not the same as blame. Blame says, "You caused the abuse." Responsibility says, "You can respond to reality now with wisdom, support, and faith." Blame crushes. Responsibility strengthens. In biblical terms, God calls His people to walk in truth, but He does not assign guilt for another person's sin. Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We used that principle carefully: each person stands responsible before God for his or her own choices. Anna was not responsible for the cruelty done to her, but she could become responsible for the next faithful step in her healing.

This was where discipleship became very practical. We discussed how to make decisions without panic, how to seek counsel without surrendering agency, how to pray for wisdom while still gathering facts, and how to avoid confusing fear with the voice of God. Anna had often interpreted anxiety as a warning that she was doing something wrong. I helped her understand that trauma can make even healthy steps feel frightening. Fear deserves attention, but it does not always deserve authority.

Restoring Confidence Through Practice

The sixth step was building confidence through practice. Confidence after abuse is not rebuilt merely by telling a woman she is strong. She may appreciate the words, but if her inner world has been shaped by years of intimidation, encouragement alone may feel out of reach. Confidence grows when truth is practiced in real situations. Anna needed opportunities to act on what she was learning, reflect on the outcome, and recognize evidence of growth.

We practiced simple responses. We practiced how to answer intrusive questions without overexplaining. We practiced how to say, "I am not ready to discuss that." We practiced how to ask for help without apologizing for needing it. We practiced how to read Scripture without hearing it through the voice of the person who had used it against her. We practiced grounding exercises for moments when fear rose suddenly. We practiced reviewing reality: What happened? What do I know? What is my responsibility? What is not my responsibility? What would wisdom require next?

Each practice connected back to CCRT principles. Anna was learning to align her thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with reality as God defines it. She was learning that responsible choices are not always easy choices, and peaceful feelings do not always come immediately after obedience. Sometimes obedience feels shaky at first. Sometimes wisdom trembles. But trembling obedience is still obedience, and small steps taken in truth can become the path toward long-term stability.

One of the most beautiful changes I saw in Anna was her ability to participate in Christian community again with discernment. At first, she avoided church settings because she feared being judged or pressured. I did not push her back into unsafe environments. Instead, we talked about what healthy spiritual community should look like. It should reflect truth, humility, protection, accountability, and compassion. It should not demand silence from the wounded in order to

preserve the comfort of the uninformed. As Anna learned this, she became better able to recognize safe people and unsafe people. That discernment became part of her confidence.

Helping Her Rebuild Faith Without Forcing Performance

The seventh step was helping Anna rebuild faith without forcing spiritual performance. Survivors of abuse often feel pressure to prove they are healing by sounding spiritually strong. They may think they should be able to forgive without struggle, pray without numbness, worship without tears, and trust without fear. But discipleship must make room for honest lament. The Psalms are full of cries from people who loved God and still felt overwhelmed. Biblical faith is not pretending pain is absent. Biblical faith brings pain into the presence of God.

I encouraged Anna to pray honestly. Some days her prayers were long. Some days they were only a sentence. Some days the most faithful thing she could say was, “Lord, help me.” That mattered. I did not want her to confuse emotional intensity with spiritual sincerity. Healing faith may begin very quietly. It may begin as a willingness to sit with Scripture for five minutes without running from it. It may begin as the courage to say, “I do not understand, but I want to know You rightly again.”

We also worked on separating God’s voice from abusive religious language. This was crucial. When Scripture had been misused, Anna needed to learn how to read it in context, according to God’s character, and with attention to truth rather than control. We examined passages about love, authority, forgiveness, repentance, and peace. Again and again, we asked: Does this interpretation reflect the character of Christ? Does it protect the vulnerable? Does it place responsibility where God places it? Does it require denial of reality? Those questions helped her regain spiritual clarity.

Faith returned not as a performance, but as relationship. Anna began to see that God was not asking her to hurry past grief. He was inviting her to walk with Him through it. She began reading Scripture not as a weapon pointed at her failures, but as light for the next step. Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” We talked about how a lamp does not illuminate the entire road at once. It gives enough light for the next faithful step. That image comforted her because she did not yet know what her whole future would look like. She only needed enough light to walk today.

Developing a New Pattern of Discipleship

The eighth step was helping Anna establish a new pattern of discipleship that could continue beyond our sessions. Abuse had trained her in patterns of fear, appeasement, self-doubt, and spiritual confusion. Discipleship needed to train her in new patterns: truth, prayer, wise counsel, responsible choice, boundaries, Scripture, service, and rest. These were not presented as a rigid checklist. They were presented as rhythms of life that could help her grow steadily.

We developed a simple weekly pattern. She would spend time in Scripture, but not in a hurried or guilt-driven way. She would write down one truth about God, one truth about herself, and one wise action for the week. She would identify any false belief that had become loud in her mind and answer it with biblical truth. She would stay connected to at least one safe support person. She would practice one boundary or one act of responsible choice. She would also include rest, because rest is often difficult for survivors who have lived in constant vigilance.

I emphasized that discipleship is not merely information transfer. It is formation. Anna was not simply learning facts about God; she was learning to live in God's reality. She was learning to see herself through truth, not through accusation. She was learning to make choices from wisdom, not panic. She was learning to engage community with discernment, not isolation. She was learning that healing is not a straight line, but a faithful process of returning again and again to what is true.

As months passed, Anna began to describe herself differently. She no longer introduced every decision with an apology. She could recognize manipulation sooner. She could receive correction without collapsing into shame because she had learned the difference between conviction and condemnation. She could read Scripture with tears, but not only with fear. She could speak about the future with cautious hope. That hope was not shallow optimism. It was hope anchored in a God who restores reality, dignity, and agency.

What Christian Discipleship Gave Back to Her

When I look back on Anna's journey, I do not see discipleship as an accessory to counseling. I see it as central to her restoration. Christian discipleship gave her a framework for understanding God rightly again. It gave her language for truth. It gave her permission to grieve without surrendering hope. It helped her separate humility from self-erasure, forgiveness from unsafe reconciliation, and love from compliance. It taught her that personal responsibility is not the same as carrying someone else's sin.

It also gave her a renewed identity. Abuse had told her she was small, foolish, and difficult to love. Scripture told her she was created by God, seen by God, and accountable to God for her own faithful steps. CCRT helped her live that truth practically by examining choices, needs, beliefs, and behaviors in light of God's design. When her thinking drifted back into fear, we did not shame her. We returned to reality. When she felt responsible for another person's anger, we returned to responsibility. When she felt guilty for having boundaries, we returned to stewardship. When she felt hopeless, we returned to the God who restores.

Most of all, discipleship helped her confidence become rooted rather than reactive. At first, Anna wanted confidence to feel like fearlessness. Eventually, she learned that confidence is not the absence of fear; it is the growing ability to act according to truth even when fear is present. Her confidence became quieter, deeper, and more stable. She could say, "I do not have to be controlled by what was done to me. I can walk with God today." That sentence represented a great deal of healing.

There is something sacred about watching a woman recover her voice after abuse. It should be handled with tenderness. Christian discipleship must never be used to pressure her into a performance of healing for the comfort of others. It should help her come alive in truth. It should help her know God as refuge, Shepherd, Father, Judge of evil, and Restorer of the brokenhearted. It should help her understand that the Christian life is not a call to disappear under someone else's control, but a call to walk in the light of Christ with wisdom, courage, and love.

Conclusion

Christian discipleship helped Anna rebuild her faith because it reintroduced her to the character of God without the distortions of abuse. It helped rebuild her identity because it taught her to measure

herself by God's truth rather than another person's accusations. It helped rebuild her confidence because it gave her practical ways to choose, speak, pray, set boundaries, and walk in wisdom. This is the kind of discipleship survivors need. It is biblical without being harsh. It is compassionate without being vague. It is patient without being passive. It is rooted in truth, but it carries truth with the gentleness of Christ.

For women recovering from domestic abuse, Christian discipleship can become a pathway from confusion to clarity, from shame to dignity, and from fear to grounded hope. The process is not rushed, and it is not always easy. But when discipleship is built on biblical principles and guided by Christ-Centered Reality Therapy, it can help a survivor recover what abuse tried to steal: her faith, her identity, her agency, her confidence, and her ability to move forward with God.