



How Discipleship Helps Survivors Grow in Strength, Wisdom, and Stability

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Teaching Focus: This article explains Christian discipleship in the recovery journey of a woman survivor of domestic abuse. It is written in the tone of a teacher helping students understand how faith, identity, confidence, strength, wisdom, and stability are rebuilt through biblical truth and Christ-Centered Reality Therapy.

Introduction: Discipleship After Abuse Is Not Pressure to Perform

When we teach about Christian discipleship in the life of a woman who has survived domestic abuse, we must begin with tenderness and accuracy. Discipleship is not a program for making a hurting woman appear stronger than she feels. It is not a spiritual assignment that demands instant confidence, quick forgiveness, or immediate readiness to serve others again. In the context of abuse recovery, discipleship is the patient process of helping a woman learn again who God is, who she is before Him, what truth sounds like, and how to walk in obedience without surrendering her safety, dignity, or agency. Students, this distinction matters because many wounded women have already been pressured by religious language. They may have been told to submit more, forgive faster, pray harder, or stop talking about what happened. True Christian discipleship does not deepen those wounds. It brings truth, protection, clarity, and hope into them.

The Empower Yourself Today foundation describes Christian Discipleship Training as structured spiritual growth, accountability, and practical application of faith. That is a strong and necessary foundation, but it must be applied carefully in domestic abuse recovery. A woman coming out of abuse often has not merely experienced painful events; she has lived inside a distorted reality. She may have been taught to distrust her perception, to silence her emotions, to accept blame that did not belong to her, and to call control love. If spiritual abuse was present, she may also fear that God is disappointed with her for wanting safety. This is why discipleship must be both biblical and reality-based. Christ-Centered Reality Therapy helps us hold these truths together: God defines reality, the survivor's choices matter, the abuser remains responsible for his choices, and healing requires alignment with truth rather than compliance with fear.

In this article, I want to speak as a teacher walking students through the process. Imagine a woman we will call Anna. Anna is not a real client, but her story reflects the patterns many survivors experience. She has endured years of intimidation, manipulation, blame-shifting, spiritual pressure, and emotional cruelty. She loves God, but she is exhausted. She wants to

grow, but she is afraid. She wants to make wise choices, but she no longer trusts herself. She wonders whether her desire for boundaries is rebellion. She wonders whether her voice matters. She wonders whether God sees her pain. Our task in Christian discipleship is not to give Anna shallow encouragement. Our task is to help her rebuild faith, identity, and confidence through biblical truth, wise instruction, and responsible action.

Step One: Establish Safety Before Expecting Growth

The first discipleship principle students must learn is this: safety comes before spiritual performance. A woman cannot meaningfully grow while she is being actively terrorized, controlled, or punished for speaking the truth. This does not mean she cannot love God in the middle of suffering. Many survivors cling to the Lord with remarkable faith while living in danger. But organized discipleship that calls her to deeper growth must not ignore the environment in which she is trying to grow. If her life is dominated by fear, surveillance, threats, financial restriction, or spiritual manipulation, then the first act of discipleship is helping her recognize that God is not the author of that bondage.

Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Notice that God is not described as the One who minimizes trouble or tells the suffering person to pretend the danger is not real. He is refuge. He is strength. He is present help. When I teach students to work with survivors, I want them to understand that biblical discipleship begins by bringing a woman back to the reality that God’s heart is protective. The Lord does not require her to confuse danger with devotion. He does not command her to remain silent so that an abuser can continue without accountability. A proper discipleship process teaches her that seeking safety is not a lack of faith; it is often the first step of walking in truth.

With Anna, this meant we did not begin by asking how she could become a better wife, a stronger Christian, or a more patient person. Those questions would have placed responsibility in the wrong location. Instead, we began with reality. What was happening? What did she fear? What patterns repeated? What happened when she said no? What happened when she asked for help? Did she have a safe person, a safe place, and a plan for crisis moments? In CCRT terms, we helped her identify reality rather than the distorted version of reality she had been forced to accept. Once she could name what was happening, the fog began to lift. Growth did not begin with a dramatic emotional breakthrough. It began with simple truthful sentences: “This is control.” “This is intimidation.” “This is not my fault.” “God does not require me to pretend this is normal.”

Step Two: Rebuild Faith by Separating God’s Voice from the Abuser’s Voice

The second step in discipleship is helping the survivor distinguish God’s voice from the voice of control. Students, this is one of the most important lessons you can learn. Many abused women have heard Scripture used against them. The abuser may have quoted verses about submission while ignoring verses about love, gentleness, sacrifice, justice, and accountability. He may have demanded forgiveness while refusing repentance. He may have used the name of God to silence her pain. When that happens, the woman’s faith can become tangled with fear. She may still believe in God, but she may flinch when spiritual language is used because it has been connected to punishment and coercion.

Christian discipleship must patiently untangle that knot. We do not tell Anna, “Just trust God,” as though trust can be commanded back into place by a slogan. Instead, we help her see the character of God again. Scripture reveals the Lord as righteous, merciful, just, holy, compassionate, and near 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.” That verse does not shame the brokenhearted. It does not tell them to hurry up and look whole. It tells them that God draws near. For a survivor, that truth can be deeply healing because abuse often teaches her that her pain is inconvenient, exaggerated, or spiritually immature. God says something different. God comes near.

In Anna’s discipleship process, we spent time identifying false spiritual messages. She had absorbed the belief that setting boundaries meant she was hard-hearted. She believed that fear of her abuser meant she lacked faith. She believed that if she told the truth about the abuse, she was dishonoring her family. We examined these beliefs slowly, one at a time. A teacher must show students that discipleship is not merely adding Bible verses to a wounded mind. It is replacing false interpretations with truthful ones. The question is not only, “What verse do we know?” but also, “How has this verse been used, and does that use reflect the character of God?” This is where CCRT is especially helpful, because it insists that truth must be aligned with God’s reality, not with manipulation, fear, or personal preference.

Gradually, Anna began to hear Scripture differently. Passages that once sounded like accusations began to sound like invitations to clarity. She learned that forgiveness is not the same as pretending harm did not occur. She learned that reconciliation requires truth and repentance, not pressure and appearances. She learned that submission is never a license for abuse. Her faith was not rebuilt by denying the damage that had been done to her. It was rebuilt by discovering that God had never been on the side of the damage.

Step Three: Restore Identity by Teaching Her Who She Is Before God

After safety and spiritual clarity, discipleship must address identity. Abuse attacks identity relentlessly. It tells a woman she is foolish, unstable, selfish, rebellious, unwanted, incapable, or spiritually inferior. Over time, she may stop describing herself according to truth and begin describing herself according to the abuser’s accusations. Students, when you hear a survivor say, “Maybe I really am crazy,” or “Maybe I caused all of this,” or “Maybe I am just hard to love,” you are hearing the residue of repeated identity assault. Discipleship must answer that assault with the truth of God’s design.

Genesis teaches that human beings are created in the image of God. For a survivor, this is not an abstract doctrine. It means her worth is not assigned by her abuser, her marital status, her emotional exhaustion, or her ability to keep everyone calm. Her dignity is not negotiable. Her voice is not worthless. Her body is not property to be controlled. Her conscience is not a tool for someone else to manipulate. Christian discipleship helps her return to the truth that she belongs first to God. She is accountable to Him, loved by Him, and called to walk in truth before Him.

With Anna, restoring identity required repeated teaching and repeated practice. I explained to her, as I would explain to students, that a wounded identity is not usually repaired in one conversation. She needed to hear truth, then apply truth, then return to truth when fear rose

again. We worked through statements such as: “I am not responsible for another person’s sinful choices.” “I can be compassionate without surrendering my boundaries.” “God does not define me by what was done to me.” “My emotions are signals to be understood, not enemies to be silenced.” These were not empty affirmations. They were discipleship statements rooted in biblical reality and reinforced by responsible choices.

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.” This verse must be handled carefully. It should never be used to shame a survivor for feeling afraid. Fear after abuse is often a normal response to danger. But the verse does show God’s design. He does not desire His daughters to live permanently governed by terror. He gives power, love, and a sound mind. In discipleship, we help the woman move toward that design at a safe and realistic pace. Anna did not wake up one morning suddenly confident. She became more confident as truth began to replace accusation and as wise choices began to replace survival-driven appeasement.

Step Four: Teach Wisdom as the Skill of Seeing Reality Clearly

Christian discipleship must also teach wisdom. Wisdom is more than knowing moral rules. Wisdom is the ability to see life accurately before God and respond responsibly. Survivors of abuse often have had their discernment attacked. They may have been told that obvious cruelty was love, that intimidation was leadership, that jealousy was protection, or that silence was peace. A major part of discipleship is helping the woman recover the ability to call things by their right names.

Proverbs 4:7 says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” In a classroom, I would tell students that this verse is extremely practical in abuse recovery. A survivor needs wisdom about relationships, emotions, safety, finances, parenting, church involvement, forgiveness, and trust. She needs to understand the difference between remorse and repentance, apology and change, discomfort and danger, hope and denial. Without wisdom, she may interpret every kind moment from the abuser as proof that the abuse is over. Without understanding, she may mistake her own guilt for the voice of God. Discipleship gives her categories for reality.

With Anna, wisdom training included helping her examine patterns rather than isolated moments. An abusive relationship often contains cycles of cruelty followed by apology, affection, promises, or spiritual language. If Anna looked only at the tender moments, she felt guilty for being afraid. If she looked only at the terrifying moments, she felt hopeless. Wisdom required her to look at the whole pattern. Did responsibility increase? Did the behavior change over time? Were boundaries honored? Was accountability welcomed or resisted? Did repentance produce measurable fruit? These questions helped her move from emotional confusion to sober discernment.

This is an important teaching point: biblical wisdom does not make a survivor suspicious of everyone, but it does make her discerning. It teaches her not to hand trust to people who have not become trustworthy. It teaches her that love is not proven by words alone. It teaches her that peace is not merely the absence of an argument; peace includes righteousness, truth, and safety. As Anna grew in wisdom, she began to make decisions with less panic. She still felt

grief. She still had moments of doubt. But her choices were increasingly guided by truth rather than fear.

Step Five: Build Confidence Through Responsible Choices, Not Forced Boldness

Confidence after abuse should not be confused with loudness, speed, or emotional certainty. Many survivors are quiet, careful, and cautious, and that does not mean they are weak. Confidence grows when a woman learns that she can make wise, responsible choices and survive the discomfort of change. In CCRT, this matters because human beings are understood as responsible moral agents. Abuse damages agency, but discipleship helps restore it. We do not restore agency by taking over the survivor's life. We restore agency by helping her see options, evaluate reality, and choose wisely before God.

With Anna, I did not make decisions for her. I helped her slow down enough to see what decisions were actually before her. Sometimes the choice was small: whether to answer a hostile text immediately or wait until she was calm. Sometimes the choice was larger: whether to speak with a trusted pastor, contact an advocate, set a financial boundary, or refuse a private meeting that felt unsafe. Each responsible choice became a brick in the rebuilding of confidence. She was learning, not merely that she had choices, but that she could choose in alignment with truth.

Students should pay close attention to this principle. Survivors have often been controlled by people who claimed to know what was best for them. Helpers must not repeat that pattern in a softer voice. Christian discipleship is directive in truth but not controlling in method. We teach, guide, warn, encourage, and clarify, but we do not dominate. We respect the woman's agency while helping her understand reality. That balance is essential. Compassion without truth becomes sentimentality. Truth without compassion becomes harshness. Discipleship requires both.

Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This verse is often quoted broadly, but in the life of a survivor it can be applied with humble realism. Anna did not need to believe she could solve everything in one week. She needed to believe Christ could strengthen her for the next faithful step. Strength came as she practiced truth in small, concrete ways. She kept appointments. She wrote down what happened instead of minimizing it. She asked for help. She prayed honestly. She resisted the urge to accept blame that was not hers. Little by little, she stopped seeing herself as helpless. She began to see herself as a woman learning to walk in the strength God provided.

Step Six: Use Accountability as Support, Not Shame

Christian discipleship includes accountability, but accountability must be rightly understood. In abusive systems, accountability is often twisted into surveillance, criticism, or punishment. The abuser may demand access to every thought, every movement, every conversation, and every emotion, then call that control spiritual leadership. Real biblical accountability is different. It is not the destruction of privacy or agency. It is loving support that helps a person remain aligned with truth, wisdom, and godly responsibility.

For Anna, accountability meant having safe people who helped her remain grounded when confusion returned. It meant she could say, “I am starting to feel guilty again,” and someone would help her examine whether the guilt was godly conviction or trauma-conditioned fear. It meant she could review her boundaries without being mocked. It meant she could be reminded of truth when loneliness tempted her to return to unsafe patterns. This is one of the reasons Christian community matters so deeply in abuse recovery. A survivor needs more than private strength; she needs a circle of truth.

Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” This kind of burden-bearing does not mean taking over another person’s responsibilities. It means walking with them under the weight they are carrying. Students, when you think about discipleship for survivors, imagine steady companionship rather than dramatic rescue. The helper does not become the savior. Christ is the Savior. The helper becomes a faithful witness to truth, a calm presence in confusion, and a wise encourager of responsible action.

Accountability also helped Anna distinguish between compassion and enabling. She could pray for the abuser’s repentance without placing herself back under his control. She could desire his salvation without accepting his excuses. She could grieve the brokenness of the relationship without denying the seriousness of the harm. In discipleship, we helped her understand that godly love does not require cooperation with sin. Love can set boundaries. Love can require truth. Love can refuse to participate in deception.

Step Seven: Teach Stability as a Fruit of Ordered Truth

Stability is one of the great needs in a survivor’s life. Abuse creates chaos. The survivor often learns to live in a state of emotional readiness, watching facial expressions, tone of voice, footsteps, spending patterns, religious comments, and small shifts in mood. Her nervous system becomes trained to anticipate danger. Her spiritual life may become reactive as well, moving between desperate prayer, guilt, numbness, and exhaustion. Christian discipleship helps restore stability by bringing order through truth.

Stability does not mean the survivor never cries, never struggles, or never feels afraid. It means her life is no longer organized around the abuser’s control. It means she is learning to organize her thoughts around God’s truth, her choices around wisdom, and her relationships around healthy boundaries. In CCRT terms, stability develops as the person increasingly aligns with normal reality, meaning God’s design for life, responsibility, and relationship. Abnormal patterns lose some of their power when they are consistently named, resisted, and replaced with truthful patterns.

With Anna, stability grew through rhythms. She developed a rhythm of Scripture reading that focused on God’s character rather than on verses that had been weaponized against her. She developed a rhythm of journaling reality: what happened, what she felt, what she believed, what was true, and what responsible step came next. She developed a rhythm of safe conversation with trusted helpers. She developed a rhythm of practical planning. These rhythms were not glamorous, but they were deeply healing. They gave her life structure after years of unpredictability.

Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” This peace is not denial. It is not pretending the past did not happen. It is the steadiness that grows when the mind is anchored again in God’s truth. Anna’s peace came gradually. Some days were still painful. Some decisions were still difficult. But she was no longer drifting entirely inside the emotional weather of someone else’s control. She was learning to stand.

Step Eight: Help Her Move from Survival to Purpose

As a survivor grows stronger, discipleship begins to include purpose. This must not be rushed. A woman who has just escaped danger does not need to be told immediately that God will use her story. That may be true, but when spoken too soon it can feel like her pain is being turned into a lesson for other people. First, she needs safety. She needs healing. She needs space to lament. She needs time to regain strength. But eventually, as God restores her, she may begin to ask, “Who am I now?” and “How do I live from here?” Christian discipleship helps her answer those questions with hope.

Purpose after abuse is not limited to public ministry, testimony, or helping other survivors. Sometimes purpose begins quietly: raising children in a safer home, learning to worship without fear, completing education, developing work skills, serving in small ways, rebuilding friendships, or simply living honestly before God. Students must remember that ordinary stability can be a powerful testimony. A peaceful home, a clear mind, a truthful prayer, a wise boundary, and a restored sense of dignity all reflect the grace of God.

With Anna, purpose emerged as she began to recognize gifts that had been buried under survival. She had wisdom. She had compassion. She had perseverance. She had the ability to notice hurting people. But she also had to learn that her gifts did not require self-erasure. Before abuse, and during abuse, she often believed love meant exhausting herself to keep everyone else stable. Discipleship taught her that service must flow from truth, not fear. She could help others without abandoning herself. She could be generous without becoming unsafe. She could be faithful without returning to bondage.

Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” This verse helped Anna see that she was not merely a collection of wounds. She was God’s workmanship. Abuse had affected her deeply, but it had not erased God’s design. Her future did not have to be controlled by the one who harmed her. In Christ, she could walk forward into good works prepared by God, one faithful step at a time.

Conclusion: What Students Must Remember

When teaching Christian discipleship in the context of domestic abuse recovery, remember that discipleship is not a demand for quick spiritual appearance. It is a careful, compassionate, truth-filled process of helping a woman rebuild her life according to God’s reality. She must learn that God is not the author of abuse. She must learn that safety matters. She must learn that her identity is not defined by accusation, trauma, or another person’s sin. She must learn wisdom, practice responsible choices, receive healthy accountability, and build stability through truth.

Anna's story, though representative, teaches us a pattern. Faith was rebuilt when God's voice was separated from the abuser's voice. Identity was restored when biblical truth replaced shame. Confidence grew when she practiced responsible choices. Wisdom developed when she learned to examine patterns rather than promises. Stability came as she ordered her life around truth instead of fear. Purpose began to return when she saw herself again as God's workmanship rather than as a woman permanently defined by harm.

This is why Christian Discipleship Training is such an important part of Empower's work with women survivors. Counseling may help a woman name what happened. Spiritual instruction may help her correct false beliefs. Discipleship helps her keep walking. It teaches her how to live in truth after confusion, how to make choices after control, how to pray after spiritual injury, how to trust wisely after betrayal, and how to grow without pretending she was never wounded. In the hands of compassionate, biblically grounded helpers, discipleship becomes one of the pathways through which God restores strength, wisdom, and stability to women who have suffered deeply and are learning to live again.