

Chapter Five

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?



"And the truth will set you free."

—John 8:32

Christian women usually try to be honest. They recognize that honesty is a Christian virtue and agree it should be part of a Christian's daily walk. But the "truth" we are talking about here isn't about not lying to avoid consequences or to impress other people. The truth and lies referred to here form the foundation of your soul, from which your value, and hence your behavior, springs.

Look up John 14:6.

Notice that in this verse, Jesus didn't say He would lead you to truth, show you the truth, and or reveal the truth to you. He is the Truth.

Look up John 8:32.

What does Truth do for us?

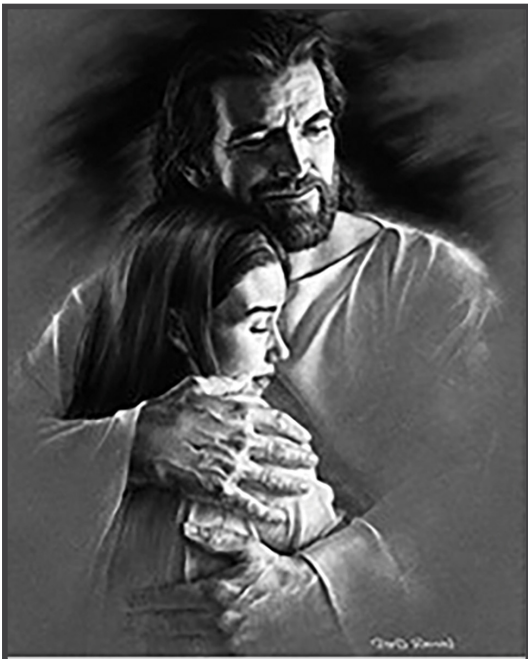
Look up John 8:44 and 1 Peter 5:8.

What, according to these verses, is the intention of Satan?

SATAN IS A LIAR

We are in a battle between Truth and lies, between Jesus and Satan! Psalm 86:11 says, "Teach me Your way, LORD; I will walk in Your truth."

What does "walking in His truth" really mean? In the physical world, there is truth all around us that is easy to see. When it is winter, we see a tree whose leaves are gone so its branches are bare and ugly. The truth we therefore know is that it is winter, because trees lose their leaves in winter. Similarly, the truth that God is talking about here in Psalm 86:11 is not about our surroundings, however the principle still applies. It is about looking beyond outward appearances, like the attitudes and behaviors we are aware of, to our heart, knowing His truth. It is about continually connecting our spirits to His and having confident assurance of His love. However, this can be more difficult to discern than making the intellectual leap that it is winter just because one tree's branches are bare.



Now imagine you are walking along in the heat of the summer and you see a tree that should be leafed out and a beautiful green color, but it is bare and leafless. Do you look at it and say, "That tree is bare and ugly? It must be winter." No, because other evidence of summer is all around you. Again, the truth God is talking about here is not about our surroundings, however the principle still applies. It is about our heart knowing His truth. But this is not as easy as considering the trees outside.

Look up Psalm 51:6.

Truth in our hearts is what God desires: the truth about God's love for us, the forgiveness of our sins, the acceptance of ourselves, our value as His children, His purpose for our lives, and more. Shame robs us of these truths.

In *The Soul of Shame*, Curt Thompson writes this about shame and its spiritual ramifications: "It is also important to note... that I don't consider the infestation (shame) to be neutral



or benign. This is not a felt emotion that eventually morphs into such felt words as 'I'm bad.' As I will suggest, this phenomenon (shame) is the primary tool that evil leverages, out of which emerges everything that we call sin." These are strong words. How is it possible to make such a strong statement about something of which women are so unaware?

MESSAGES ESTABLISH TRUTH OR LIES

Parents teach their children with words and actions. Those words and actions send messages to the children about how the world works, their significance in the world, and their value as human beings. Those messages become the underlying rules (lies) by which

the children learn to interpret their emotions and to function in life. If the adult's message is counter to a child's emotional experience or need, the child will learn not to trust their own emotions. And these rules don't just magically disappear when a child turns eighteen. They are taken into adulthood, having become deeply embedded lies that influence behavior.

Linda's father was a harsh, angry man. He saw any expression of emotion as a weakness. When she was five years old, they lived in rural Arizona with lots of wildlife—not all of it friendly. One night she was told to go out and do a chore. She reluctantly went into the darkness, but then she turned and ran back in, terrified of a mountain lion's screech. Her father belittled her, then forced her to go outside and stand in the yard for an hour and afterward come in without any expression of fear.

While each of us can see the cruelty of her father's act, let's look at the messages sent to Linda that became the lies that dictated her adult life.

- She was bad when she felt strong emotions.
- The expression of her emotions is wrong, a sign of weakness.
- Her feelings don't matter, and they are not important.
- She is powerless.

This message was communicated to Linda in countless ways throughout her childhood. Her emotions would be dismissed or belittled. She was told harshly not to cry, and she would be criticized for reacting like a normal little girl would react.

Now fast-forward. As an adult, this lie was the filter through which Linda viewed life. Healthy people have a range of emotions from joy to grief. But Linda would not allow herself to feel anything except an even, unemotional response. If emotions were too strong, she couldn't handle them. As a child, she was not allowed to practice managing and validating her emotions. So, when she grew to be an adult, emotions were frightening to her; they made her feel like she was being bad. The fear and shame she experienced caused her to "stuff" her emotions and return to her flat response. You can imagine that her marriage and her children suffered as she tried to navigate life without any emotions. She, however, was persistent in seeking truth, and now she can look back on a life that is full and rich and restored through God's grace! She still is not an overly emotional person, but she has great compassion and concern for others, and a deep love for her husband and children.



WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

One of the key indicators of shame-bound parents passing on shame to their children is how they deal with mistakes, childish foolishness, emotional needs, and age-appropriate childhood abilities. These parenting flaws permeate the day-to-day interactions between shame-bound parents and their children. It is the most significant way parents distort the lens through which the children perceive their value and worth. The normal, simple, and innocent happenings in children's day-to-day lives become loaded with lies and shaming messages as the parents react to these childhood incidents. This happens when parents deal with the normal misbehavior, accidents, childish foolishness, and predictable childhood mistakes. A relatively shame-free response would address the behavior itself. A shame-bound response would attack the children's character. Consider the scenarios below to understand how this works.

Scenario One: A toddler is sitting at the table talking excitedly when she accidentally knocks over her milk.

Shaming reaction by mom: "Look what you did! What is wrong with you? You are a clumsy, stupid girl. You are a bad girl! I told you not to spill your milk."

Message to Child: I am clumsy, bad, and stupid. There is something wrong with me that is not wrong with other kids.

Shame-free reaction by Mom: "Uh-oh. Look what you did. Let's get some paper towels and wipe this up."

Message to Child: Spilled milk happens, and paper towels clean up spilled milk.

Scenario Two: Mom and her little girl are walking between stores. Mom is preoccupied about her date that night. She is in a hurry to get home. Her little girl hurries on her short legs to keep up with her mother, but she can't. Like all little girls, she is distracted by the pretty things in the store windows and stops to look.

Shaming reaction by Mom: "Will you hurry up? Why can't you keep up with me! What's wrong with you? Stop being naughty and stay up with me. You are impossible!"

Message to Child: There is something wrong with me because I can't keep up with Mom. I am bad.

Shame-free reaction by Mom: "Sweetie, we need to hurry. Your legs are shorter than mine, so I'll slow down a bit, and you speed up. And don't stop to look at things right now—we don't want to be late."

Message to Child: To keep up with Mom, I have to walk faster and not look at store windows. Mom cares about me and will slow down so I can keep up.

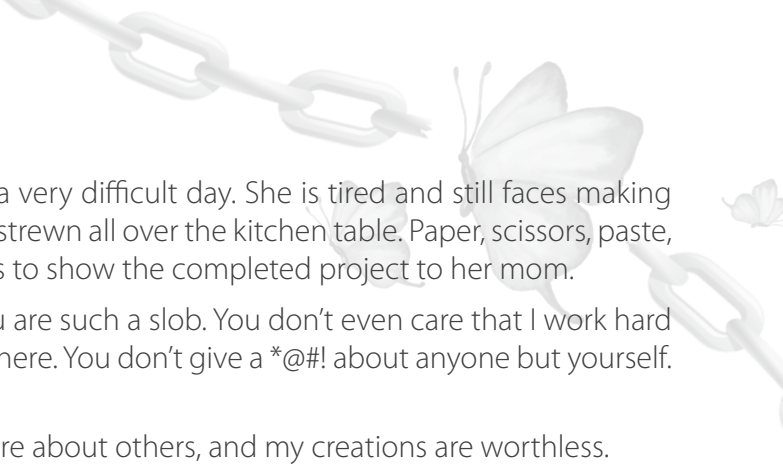
Scenario Three: Dad is lying on the sofa watching TV. He tells his six-year-old daughter to bring him the remote. She can't find it where he is pointing. He points over and over, and she looks harder but still can't find it.

Shaming reaction by Dad: "What the *@#! is wrong with you? It's right in front of you. Quit being such an idiot! Can't you see—it's right in front of you! You are such a worthless little girl!"

Message to Child: I am bad. I am an idiot. I am worthless. I must be worse than every other six-year-old child!

Shame-free reaction by Dad: "It's right there. Can't you see it? It's right there. Okay, I'll come and show you."

Message to Child: Dad will help me if I can't find something.



Scenario Four: Mom comes home from work after a very difficult day. She is tired and still faces making dinner. Her twelve-year-old daughter has her project strewn all over the kitchen table. Paper, scissors, paste, and crayons are spread everywhere. She proudly tries to show the completed project to her mom.

Shaming reaction by Mom: “Look at your mess! You are such a slob. You don’t even care that I work hard all day. You just make messes and leave them everywhere. You don’t give a *@#! about anyone but yourself. Clean up that mess!”

Message to Child: I am a selfish slob who doesn’t care about others, and my creations are worthless.

Shame-free reaction by Mom: “That is really beautiful work. Now, clean up so we can set the table for dinner.”

Message to Child: My creations are good. I need to clean up after myself.

Do you see how shame can be embedded in a child’s heart? How their soul-deep identity is that of a flawed human being? How if they make a mistake, they are a mistake? Remember, this happens when the parent’s response is consistently shaming to a child. It happens when MOST of the time, parents respond in a shaming manner. This poem speaks volumes about this dynamic:

He’ll Never Drop a Pea Again

As a child, he scooped peas

Onto his fork.

One day a pea dropped

Onto the table.

That’s the day he learned

From his father that he was clumsy,

Would amount to

Nothing,

A lecture that stretched

Over the years

Until nothing was left of the boy

Who scooped peas.

He now spears them one by one.

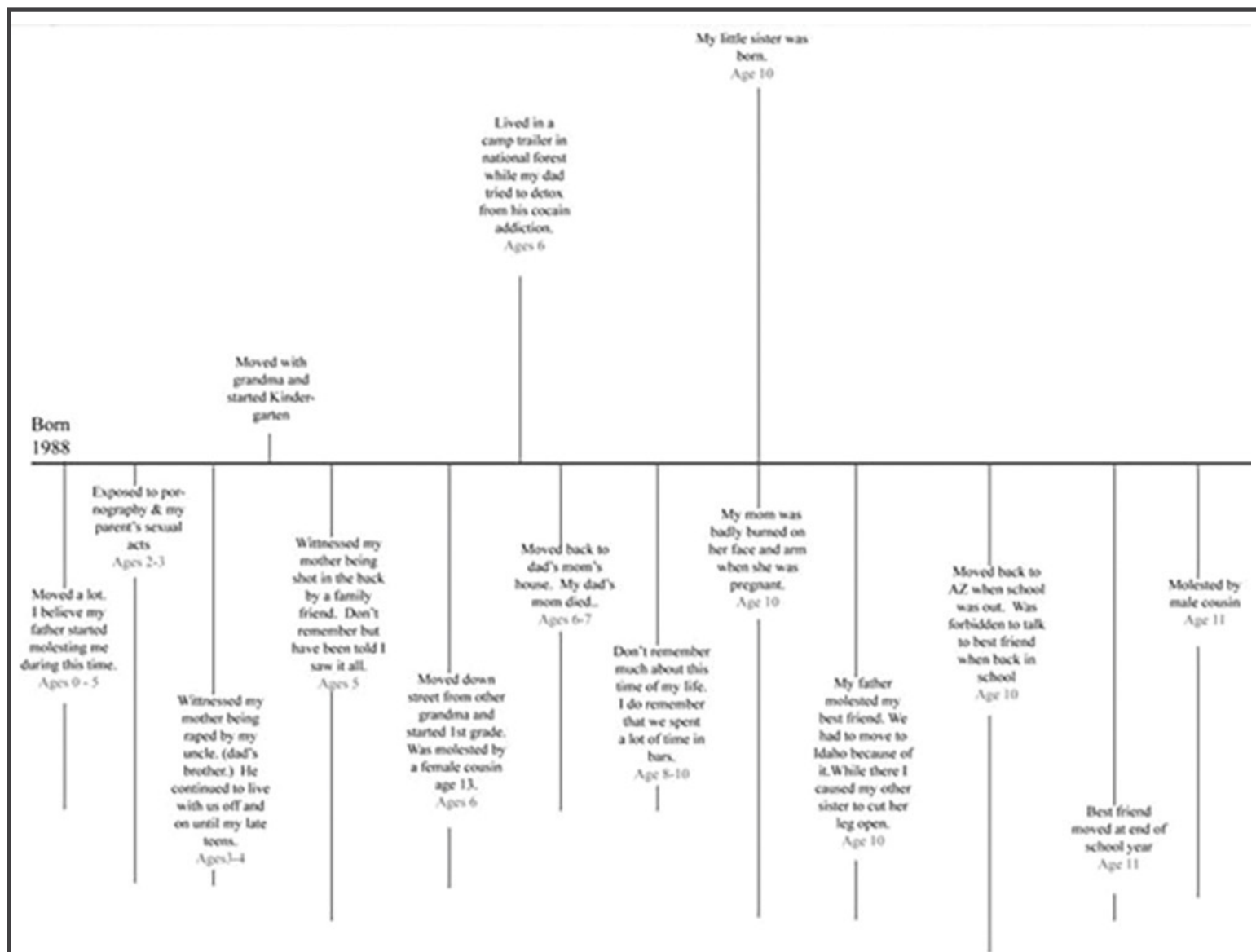
The message for the little boy in this poem wasn’t about the peas. It was about his value. Subtle messages embed themselves in the lies that children end up living by as adults. They don’t question them. They don’t even know the lies exist. Yet these lies distort the lens through which a woman sees herself, others, and the world around her. It is through this distorted lens that people’s actions, reactions, motives, and emotions are interpreted. This lens wreaks havoc with the truth, and the end result is reinforced shame in the woman and difficult relationships with others.



OUR LIVES REFLECT THE LIES CREATED BY THE MESSAGES

Years ago, I worked with a young mother of two named Suzanne. Her life story was something Charles Dickens himself could not have made up. She lived a childhood of fear and abuse. (Below is her Lifeline.) During our sessions together, we went through her Lifeline and talked about the messages and lies the events had laid down in her heart. She also wrote an additional piece on some prominent memories she had from her childhood.

Her Lifeline below is disturbing to read, knowing that there was so much more between the lines! Yet it gives you an understanding of the childhood messages imparted through events experienced at the hands of those who should have protected you.







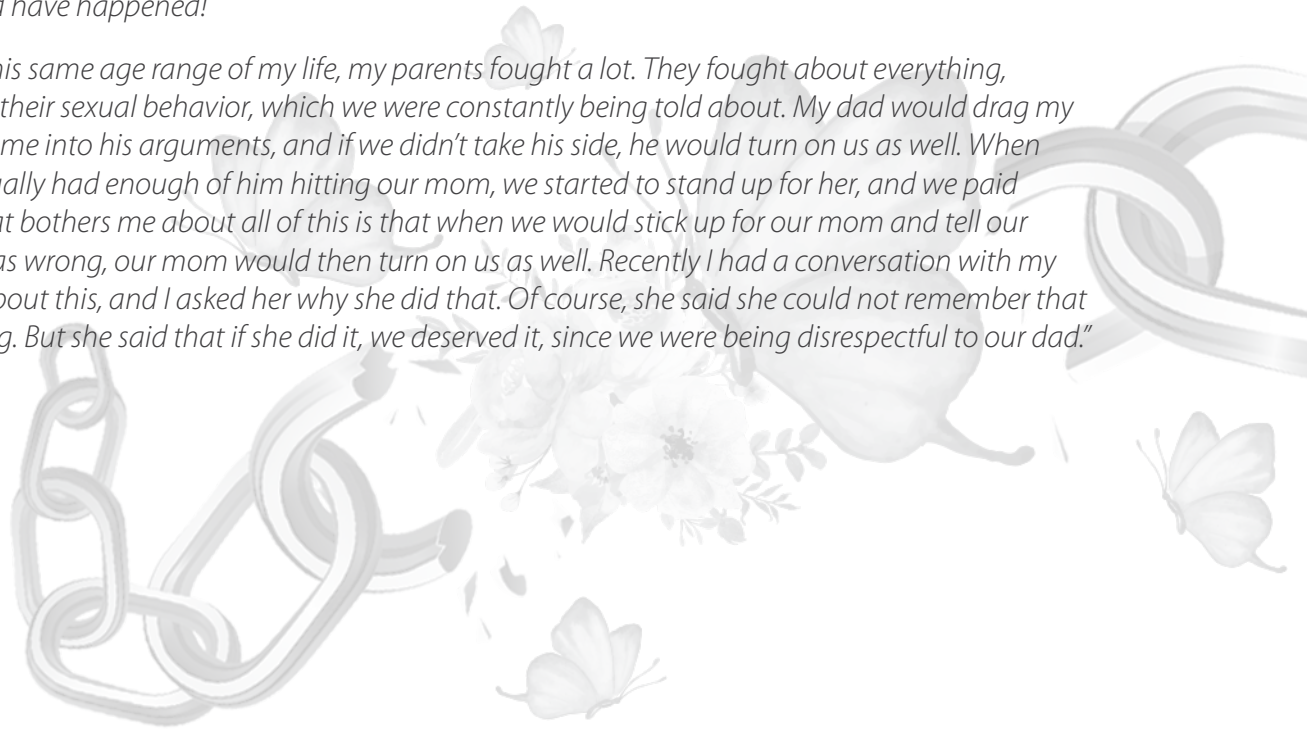
After she did her Lifeline, she wrote, "Notes from My Lifeline." Below is what she wrote.

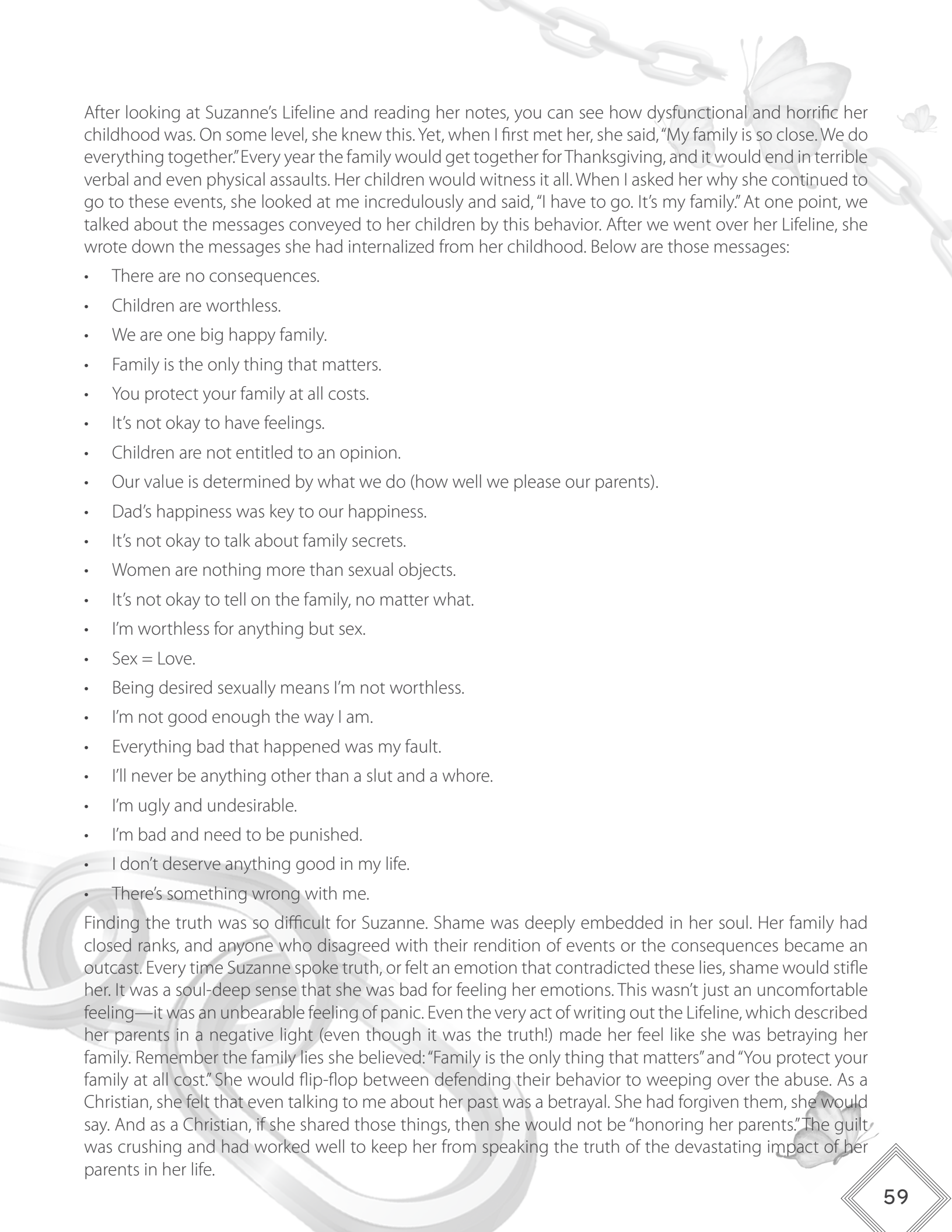
"I can't remember exactly how old I was when my father first started molesting me, but I do remember that I was little. My dad was a terrible drunk when we were little, and he would frequently come home from the bar drunk as a skunk. When he was drunk, he was extremely mean and cruel. I remember thinking that I had to be so quiet, and so still, and pretend to be asleep, and hope that my dad would not want to 'play' because he always hurt me.

"Before running away, but after meeting Jerry, Easter came. We went as a family to camp at a lake. My uncle brought Jerry as he knew it would not make my dad happy, and it didn't. Well, as young men will, Jerry made a stupid comment about me to a friend of my uncle's, and he repeated it to my dad. A fight ensued, following them back from the bar to camp where my uncle knocked my dad's front teeth out with the butt of his rifle. We left in the middle of the night, with my dad raging drunk and driving. He called me every disgusting name in the book and blamed me for everything that had happened.

"Sometime when I was between the ages of fourteen and fifteen, our family went on a camping trip during the summer, which is something we did frequently. It was our family along with my uncle and his family. On the third of July, my mom and dad drove into town to go to the bar and drink. While there, my dad flirted with some other women with no regard to my mother's presence. A fight ensued, and they left the bar drunk and fighting and my dad wrecked his pickup on the way back. When he finally got back to camp around 3 or 4 a.m., he demanded I get up and fix him something to eat. I was tired and angry, so I refused. My dad became furious, and he started rampaging around the camp. He then woke my uncle to get a ride out to the highway, and my uncle refused, so my dad became belligerent toward him and threatened him. My uncle, having the same propensity toward anger, got out of bed and threatened to run over my dad's family with his car. Then he got his rifle out and began aiming it at my dad, who took off barefoot into the forest. Mind you, it was the 4th of July, and there were people camped all around us, so close you could literally hear them breathing. My uncle decided to discharge the gun into the ground. People started packing up and leaving immediately. It wasn't even daylight yet. My uncle eventually put the gun down in his car and stepped away from it. I grabbed the gun and took off running, my uncle following close behind. Shortly after that, federal marshals arrived and told us we had to pack up and leave. I am surprised no one was arrested. Of course, everything was my fault again. If I had just behaved and made my dad some food, none of this would have happened!

"During this same age range of my life, my parents fought a lot. They fought about everything, including their sexual behavior, which we were constantly being told about. My dad would drag my sister and me into his arguments, and if we didn't take his side, he would turn on us as well. When we eventually had enough of him hitting our mom, we started to stand up for her, and we paid for it. What bothers me about all of this is that when we would stick up for our mom and tell our dad he was wrong, our mom would then turn on us as well. Recently I had a conversation with my mother about this, and I asked her why she did that. Of course, she said she could not remember that happening. But she said that if she did it, we deserved it, since we were being disrespectful to our dad."

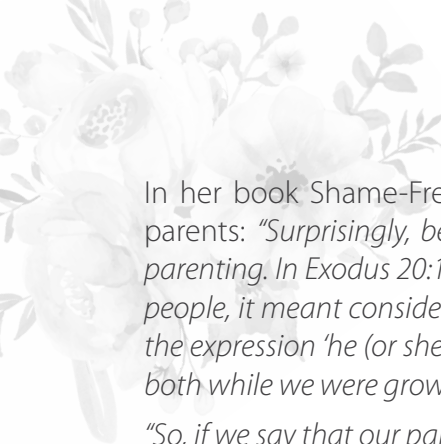




After looking at Suzanne's Lifeline and reading her notes, you can see how dysfunctional and horrific her childhood was. On some level, she knew this. Yet, when I first met her, she said, "My family is so close. We do everything together." Every year the family would get together for Thanksgiving, and it would end in terrible verbal and even physical assaults. Her children would witness it all. When I asked her why she continued to go to these events, she looked at me incredulously and said, "I have to go. It's my family." At one point, we talked about the messages conveyed to her children by this behavior. After we went over her Lifeline, she wrote down the messages she had internalized from her childhood. Below are those messages:

- There are no consequences.
- Children are worthless.
- We are one big happy family.
- Family is the only thing that matters.
- You protect your family at all costs.
- It's not okay to have feelings.
- Children are not entitled to an opinion.
- Our value is determined by what we do (how well we please our parents).
- Dad's happiness was key to our happiness.
- It's not okay to talk about family secrets.
- Women are nothing more than sexual objects.
- It's not okay to tell on the family, no matter what.
- I'm worthless for anything but sex.
- Sex = Love.
- Being desired sexually means I'm not worthless.
- I'm not good enough the way I am.
- Everything bad that happened was my fault.
- I'll never be anything other than a slut and a whore.
- I'm ugly and undesirable.
- I'm bad and need to be punished.
- I don't deserve anything good in my life.
- There's something wrong with me.

Finding the truth was so difficult for Suzanne. Shame was deeply embedded in her soul. Her family had closed ranks, and anyone who disagreed with their rendition of events or the consequences became an outcast. Every time Suzanne spoke truth, or felt an emotion that contradicted these lies, shame would stifle her. It was a soul-deep sense that she was bad for feeling her emotions. This wasn't just an uncomfortable feeling—it was an unbearable feeling of panic. Even the very act of writing out the Lifeline, which described her parents in a negative light (even though it was the truth!) made her feel like she was betraying her family. Remember the family lies she believed: "Family is the only thing that matters" and "You protect your family at all cost." She would flip-flop between defending their behavior to weeping over the abuse. As a Christian, she felt that even talking to me about her past was a betrayal. She had forgiven them, she would say. And as a Christian, if she shared those things, then she would not be "honoring her parents." The guilt was crushing and had worked well to keep her from speaking the truth of the devastating impact of her parents in her life.



In her book *Shame-Free Parenting*, Dr. Sandra Wilson addresses the biblical concept of honoring your parents: *"Surprisingly, because we are told to honor parents, we must acknowledge on our lives and on our parenting. In Exodus 20:12 the original Hebrew word for 'honor' referred to a very heavy object. When applied to people, it meant considering a person influential, important or weighty. We still describe influential people with the expression 'he (or she) carries a lot of weight.' And our parents' influence on us carries a lot of weight with us, both while we were growing up and in our adult lives.*

"So, if we say that our parents' behavior toward us has had little or no effect on us or on our behavior toward our children, we are in a sense dishonoring our parents."

What Suzanne (and so many others) had done was to forgive before she had acknowledged her parents' effect on her life. She skipped the Truth part, and glossed over the hurt part, then went right to offering them grace. In reality, grace without **TRUTH** becomes patronization or denial. You can't offer grace when you haven't acknowledged what you are offering it for. But **TRUTH** without grace becomes contempt and bitterness and is anchored in the soul as shame. You must first tell the truth about the effects of your parents' behavior before you can really forgive them!

You can see how childhood messages, solidified as lies, can affect an adult's behavior and the parenting of their children. The good news is that it can be stopped. Lies are from Satan. Truth is Jesus Christ. The lies, while deeply embedded, cannot stand when faced with the Truth.

Suzanne's experiences are extreme. The negative messages of her upbringing are deeply embedded. But even in families without extreme dysfunction, there are messages. Here are some common ones:

- My needs are not important.
- I am (disloyal) bad if I speak about anything that goes on in our family.
- Our family is perfect.
- I am responsible for my parent's behavior.
- I am the problem in our otherwise-perfect family.
- If I am not good (perfect), my family will fall apart.
- My mother can't cope, so I am responsible to make sure she is not upset.
- If I were _____, my father/mother would love me.
- Feelings are bad—I am bad for feeling.
- I am bad for having an opinion that is different than my parents'.
- I have value only when I perform to their expectations.
- I have no right to have a voice or be heard.
- Compared to my other sibling(s), I am lacking in intellect, looks, talent, etc.

By now your Lifeline should be done. Look at your Lifeline. As you did for Suzanne's, look for the messages (lies) that came from those occurrences in your childhood. Write them down.

Truth is woven throughout the Bible. Truth is Christ. It is what we walk in. It is the nature of God. Consider the scriptures below. Choose one and write it on a card, then put it where it can be easily seen to remind you daily of God's desire for you.

"I could have no greater joy than to hear that my children live in the truth."

—3 John 1:4

"For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth."

—Psalm 33:4 NKJV

"And the truth of the LORD endures forever."

—Psalm 117:2 NKJV

"Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed."

—Psalm 85:10–11 NKJV

"I have chosen the way of truth."

—Psalm 119:30 NKJV

