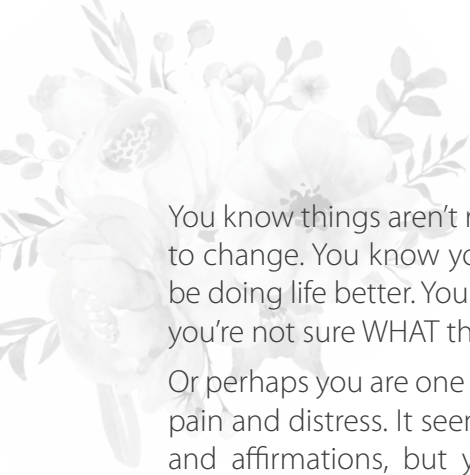


# Chapter One

WHAT DOES HEALING LOOK LIKE?





You know things aren't right in your soul. It may be a niggling, a nagging, or a screech. You know you need to change. You know you have unhealed hurts, but you have put those behind you. You feel you should be doing life better. You feel like you should be doing this Christian walk better. You've tried to change, but you're not sure WHAT that even looks like. How do you get there? What is "there"?

Or perhaps you are one of those women who often finds themselves listening to another woman's story of pain and distress. It seems that women just open up to you. You give them kind words, related scriptures, and affirmations, but you wonder WHAT healing looks like. How can you really help them beyond good advice?

This workbook both lays out the steps for healing and gives you the tools to shift your foundation. It is also an excellent tool for those innately gifted women who want to help others.

I would never suggest that going through a workbook once will be the end of a journey. But I do know that from years of experience, when women have the tools to name the lies in their lives, they find the Truth. They are able to define the errant thinking or behaviors and correct it, moving them further along in their journey of healing. As they continue on this journey, they replace the shifting foundation built on lies with a solid foundation built on Truth. At the end, I will recommend good books to help you continue your journey, but the work you do here will allow you to see what you read with a clear lens.

The steps for healing I list are written consecutively. However, they don't happen consecutively. You can't just check them off one at a time. You will bounce back and forth between them. Taking this journey with God will not be linear, but it will require flexibility. For instance, you may be working on number six when you will unearth a new memory that will bring you momentarily back to number one. It doesn't mean you are going backward. But at least you will know where you have been and where you are. As you mature through this process, you will be able to look back and laugh at your missteps. Learning to be patient and gentle with yourself is part of the gift of freedom!

## **1. EXPLORE THE PAST. YOU MUST BE HONEST ABOUT THE THINGS IN YOUR PAST IN ORDER TO RECOVER FROM THEM.**

Over the years I have taken so many women through this process. Often, I heard, "My childhood was hard, but lots of people have worse." Or, "Yeah, it was bad, but I have moved past it." Or, "It is in the past. It doesn't affect me anymore."

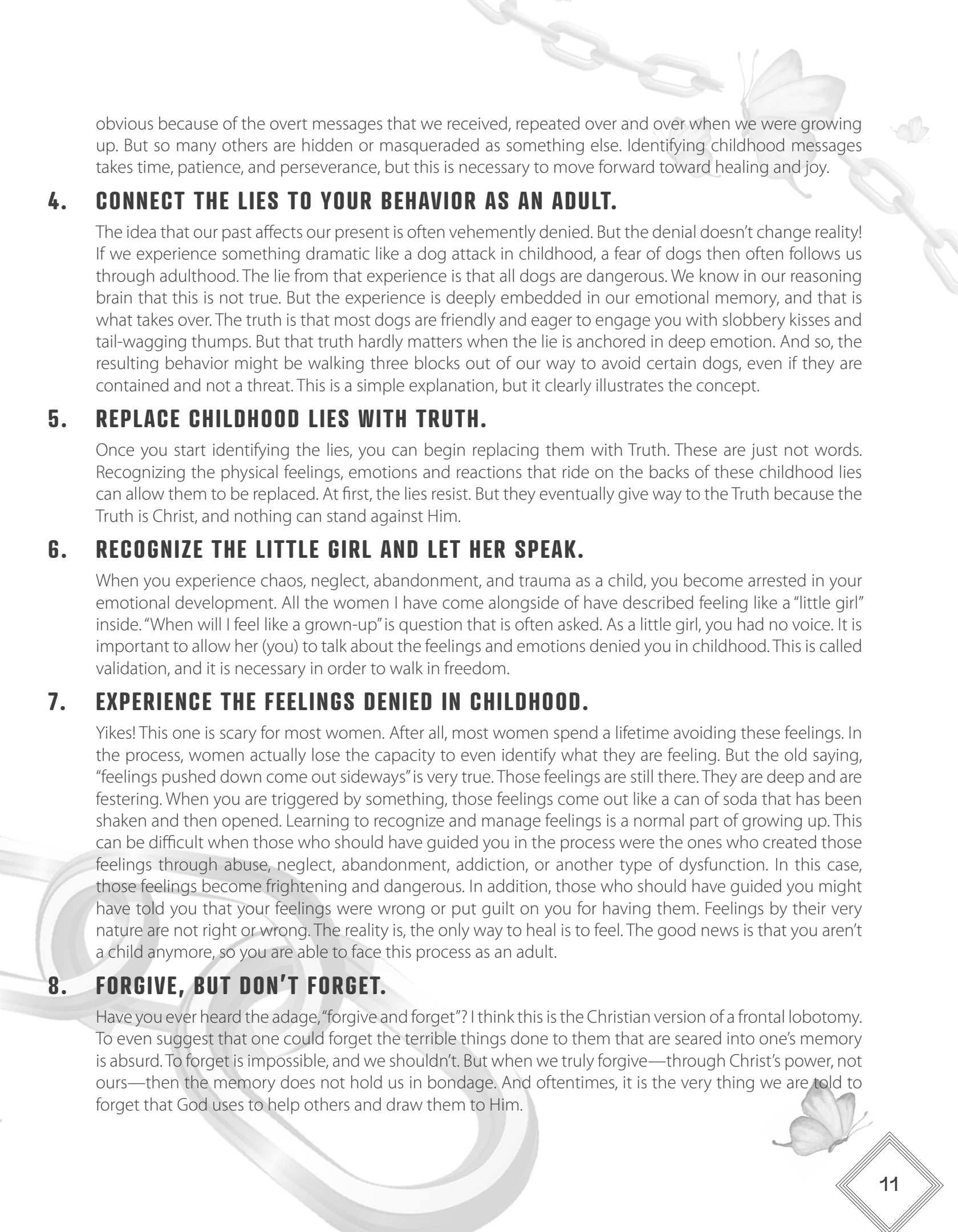
Yet, as we moved further into the process, it became very evident that their past was very much affecting their present—in ways they never realized. It has to be examined and held up against the standard of Truth before the healing can start. This doesn't mean you stay there or that you need to remember every painful detail. But you must be willing to go there for a while in order to move beyond it.

## **2. LEARN TO RECOGNIZE SHAME AND ITS OUTWORKING IN YOUR LIFE.**

Shame is something that so many women carry. Not shame for what you've done, but rather shame about who you are. It is something that you don't recognize is there. Once you understand shame, you will be able to recognize it in your actions, reactions, opinions, and behavior. And you will be able to call it out for the lie it is and replace it with the Truth.

## **3. IDENTIFY CHILDHOOD MESSAGES THAT ARE LIES.**

Thinking of our childhood may provoke horrible memories, or happy memories, or a mixture of both. In the circumstances that created the memories, the messages are ingrained in us. Messages are deep and are not easy to identify. They aren't highlighted in our memory with a fluorescent pink highlighter. Some are



obvious because of the overt messages that we received, repeated over and over when we were growing up. But so many others are hidden or masqueraded as something else. Identifying childhood messages takes time, patience, and perseverance, but this is necessary to move forward toward healing and joy.

#### **4. CONNECT THE LIES TO YOUR BEHAVIOR AS AN ADULT.**

The idea that our past affects our present is often vehemently denied. But the denial doesn't change reality! If we experience something dramatic like a dog attack in childhood, a fear of dogs then often follows us through adulthood. The lie from that experience is that all dogs are dangerous. We know in our reasoning brain that this is not true. But the experience is deeply embedded in our emotional memory, and that is what takes over. The truth is that most dogs are friendly and eager to engage you with slobbery kisses and tail-wagging thumps. But that truth hardly matters when the lie is anchored in deep emotion. And so, the resulting behavior might be walking three blocks out of our way to avoid certain dogs, even if they are contained and not a threat. This is a simple explanation, but it clearly illustrates the concept.

#### **5. REPLACE CHILDHOOD LIES WITH TRUTH.**

Once you start identifying the lies, you can begin replacing them with Truth. These are just not words. Recognizing the physical feelings, emotions and reactions that ride on the backs of these childhood lies can allow them to be replaced. At first, the lies resist. But they eventually give way to the Truth because the Truth is Christ, and nothing can stand against Him.

#### **6. RECOGNIZE THE LITTLE GIRL AND LET HER SPEAK.**

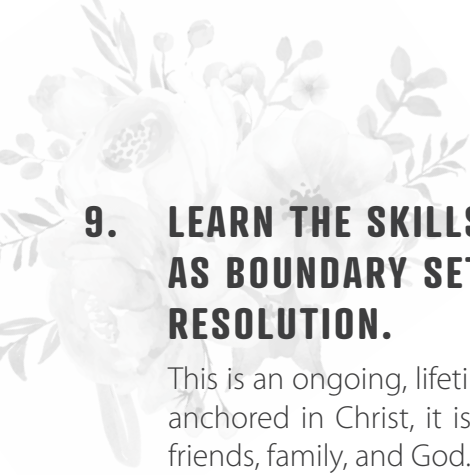
When you experience chaos, neglect, abandonment, and trauma as a child, you become arrested in your emotional development. All the women I have come alongside of have described feeling like a "little girl" inside. "When will I feel like a grown-up" is question that is often asked. As a little girl, you had no voice. It is important to allow her (you) to talk about the feelings and emotions denied you in childhood. This is called validation, and it is necessary in order to walk in freedom.

#### **7. EXPERIENCE THE FEELINGS DENIED IN CHILDHOOD.**

Yikes! This one is scary for most women. After all, most women spend a lifetime avoiding these feelings. In the process, women actually lose the capacity to even identify what they are feeling. But the old saying, "feelings pushed down come out sideways" is very true. Those feelings are still there. They are deep and are festering. When you are triggered by something, those feelings come out like a can of soda that has been shaken and then opened. Learning to recognize and manage feelings is a normal part of growing up. This can be difficult when those who should have guided you in the process were the ones who created those feelings through abuse, neglect, abandonment, addiction, or another type of dysfunction. In this case, those feelings become frightening and dangerous. In addition, those who should have guided you might have told you that your feelings were wrong or put guilt on you for having them. Feelings by their very nature are not right or wrong. The reality is, the only way to heal is to feel. The good news is that you aren't a child anymore, so you are able to face this process as an adult.

#### **8. FORGIVE, BUT DON'T FORGET.**

Have you ever heard the adage, "forgive and forget"? I think this is the Christian version of a frontal lobotomy. To even suggest that one could forget the terrible things done to them that are seared into one's memory is absurd. To forget is impossible, and we shouldn't. But when we truly forgive—through Christ's power, not ours—then the memory does not hold us in bondage. And oftentimes, it is the very thing we are told to forget that God uses to help others and draw them to Him.



**9. LEARN THE SKILLS THAT YOU DID NOT DEVELOP IN CHILDHOOD, SUCH AS BOUNDARY SETTING, IDENTIFYING FEELINGS, AND HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION.**

This is an ongoing, lifetime endeavor. But when you have a foundation of Truth and your identity is firmly anchored in Christ, it is a matter of exposure to new ideas you use to build healthy relationships with friends, family, and God.

**10. GRIEVE THE CHILDHOOD LOSSES.**

Everyone's childhood is different. But there are common elements that contribute to a happy childhood: family, stability, fun, wonder, and trust, just to name a few. When those necessary elements are absent, violated, or broken, a child loses a part of their childhood. We understand grief when someone we love dies, but there are other losses that are begging to be acknowledged and grieved—then put behind us.

**11. CHANGE YOUR FRIENDS, IF NECESSARY, TO REMOVE BAD INFLUENCES AND TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS FROM YOUR LIFE.**

This one is obvious, but also difficult. Yet, the healthier you become, the more uncomfortable these relationships become! Why did you start this journey of healing? Women have many different reasons. Perhaps it's a crisis, there's an accumulation of bad decisions, or you may just be sick of feeling the way you feel. Whatever the reason, you go into your healing process with one goal: TO FEEL BETTER.

So, I feel it is only fair to warn you, that isn't what happens. Or at least not in the beginning. Women often spend their lives avoiding looking at the painful events of their past. They come up with many defenses to keep people from seeing the "real them," and for that matter, to keep them from seeing it themselves. When you decide to get emotionally healthy, you must look at those painful parts of yourself, and that is uncomfortable. But it is worth it! Stay at it. Freedom awaits you!



**Healing Is In Your Hands**

Songs of Hope and Healing

Lauren Roman



## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT “EXPLORING YOUR PAST?”

Every one of us has a “story.” Occasionally, the story is mostly positive, with the normal negatives thrown in from a family experiencing the stresses of life. However, my experience in ministering to women for over forty years is that this is the exception not the rule. Most women look around and believe that most other women “have it together.” The truth is, most women in the church pews have a life story that has marred their sense of themselves, of God, and of the world around them. They put on a mask for the church to see, and internally they are in pain and turmoil.

If this is you, you are not alone. There is help and healing. It is hard work. It takes courage. Fortunately, Christ is our strength and our courage. His strength is perfected in our weakness.

The atmosphere in your original family, especially in your relationship with your parents, has had a tremendous effect on how your life is now. Yes, it is in your past. But oftentimes, our past is also very much part of our present! You learned your parenting skills, coping skills, sense of self, value, and life skills from the most important school of all—your family. Some of the things you learned were good. Some were not so good. If it was mostly good, life can be manageable, even with the ups and downs. If it was mostly bad, you will want to examine those messages and lies that were laid down in your young heart before you even had a chance to understand them. But whether it was good, bad, or a mixture of both, we all are profoundly affected by how we were brought up.



## YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN

The following will help you look back at how you were parented. Maybe you have never thought of these issues. Or maybe you do nothing but think of your childhood. By filling out these questions, you will get to know yourself a little better, and it will also help us to get to know you. This isn't a test.

If there are any questions you don't want to answer, just skip them. Because there are so many blended families, people have natural siblings, half siblings, step siblings, stepmothers, and stepfathers. If any of these people were involved in your childhood in a significant way, indicate them by putting a "S" or an "H" after them where appropriate. Everything you write here is confidential.

1. How many children were in the family? Brothers: \_\_\_\_\_ Sisters: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If there are step or half siblings, put "S" or "H" after the number.)
2. Where did you fall in your family of siblings that you grew up with? Were you the oldest, the middle child, the youngest, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Were your parents divorced? If so, how old were you when this happened?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Did your mom remarry? \_\_\_\_\_ How many times? \_\_\_\_\_  
How old were you? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did your dad remarry? \_\_\_\_\_ How many times? \_\_\_\_\_  
How old were you? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Whom did you live with? \_\_\_\_\_

Below are words that describe how a family might seem. While we know all families experience good and bad times simply because that's how life is, most people have a feeling that stands out about their childhood.

Circle the words that best describe your feelings when you were in grade school. If things changed in high school, go back and put a line under the words that apply while you were in high school.

Fun Happy Quiet Orderly Chaotic Close Angry Unhappy  
Confused Fearful Safe Religious Sheltered Judgmental Loving  
Secure Distant Sad Rigid Trusting Neglected Lonely \_\_\_\_\_ (other)

7. Read each statement below. Using a scale of 0-10—0 meaning it was never that way; 10 meaning it was always that way, or any number in between—rate how little or how much each statement is true.  
\_\_\_\_\_ In our family, we felt free to share our feelings, and knew we would be listened to.  
\_\_\_\_\_ As children, our parents both told us and showed us that they loved us, no matter what we did.

\_\_\_\_\_ I never felt I had to be good to be loved. I felt I was loved because of who I was inside.

\_\_\_\_\_ In our home, we felt accepted. The climate was positive, and basically nonjudgmental.

\_\_\_\_\_ As a child, I always felt my parents could take care of problems that the family faced.

\_\_\_\_\_ I was able to be a child. I never felt responsible for my parent(s)' happiness.

\_\_\_\_\_ When I had an emotional need, I could verbalize that need, and my parents would respond appropriately.

\_\_\_\_\_ We solved problems in our home by discussing them and working through them.

Continue, using a scale of 0 (never that way) to 10 (always that way) or any number in between to indicate how little or how much each statement is true.

\_\_\_\_\_ There was not much screaming or fighting in my home.

\_\_\_\_\_ I was treated with respect and understanding.

\_\_\_\_\_ Now that we are older, the family can get together without tension and without underlying anger and unresolved issues between family members.

8. Have you ever been to counseling? \_\_\_\_\_ How old were you? \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your experience? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Was there any physical abuse in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was the abuser? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were the abused? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Were you ever sexually molested? \_\_\_\_\_

11. When you were growing up, did alcohol or drugs ever affect your parent's parenting abilities?  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your relationship now with your family? Place a check mark behind the person who fits in that category. If you have two brothers who fall under "great" and a sister who falls under "neutral," put two check marks by brother under "great" and one by sister under "neutral." (Remember to indicate stepmothers, stepdads, siblings, and half siblings with the letter "S" or "H" next to the check marks). Natural siblings and parents do not need a letter.

**Great.** We've talked about the past as it really was, and worked through our feelings together. We can now talk about our feelings with honesty and openness. If a conflict comes up, we solve it. This is true with my...

Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_

**Good.** We never have discussed the problems of the past. We put them behind us and get along, but there are certain subjects that we cannot discuss.



Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_

**Neutral.** I do my thing he/she does his/hers. We touch base occasionally, but we don't really talk or emotionally connect.

Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_

**Not so good.** When we talk, there is lots of tension, and bad feelings. I have to be careful about what I say, and sometimes (but not all the time) our talks end in angry, hurtful words.

Mom \_\_\_\_\_ Dad \_\_\_\_\_ Brother \_\_\_\_\_ Sister \_\_\_\_\_

## YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Are you married? \_\_\_\_\_ Living with someone? \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced? \_\_\_\_\_ How Long? \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed? \_\_\_\_\_ How Long? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ Sex and Age(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have any miscarriages? \_\_\_\_\_ Abortions? \_\_\_\_\_

If "yes" for abortion(s), have you gone through a specific abortion healing program? \_\_\_\_\_

## YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

(There is **NO JUDGMENT OR EXPECTATIONS HERE!**)

1. When did your relationship with the Lord begin? \_\_\_\_\_

2. At this time in your life, how would you describe your walk with the Lord?

Close and consistent \_\_\_\_\_ Up and down \_\_\_\_\_ Distant \_\_\_\_\_ In crisis \_\_\_\_\_

3. How often do you read your Bible? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is your prayer life:

Daily talking to God? \_\_\_\_\_ Regular and disciplined? \_\_\_\_\_ On and off? \_\_\_\_\_

On the go? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who is Jesus to you? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you believe in absolute truth, that right and wrong are determined by God's Word, or do you believe right and wrong are relative, that is, determined by the situation?



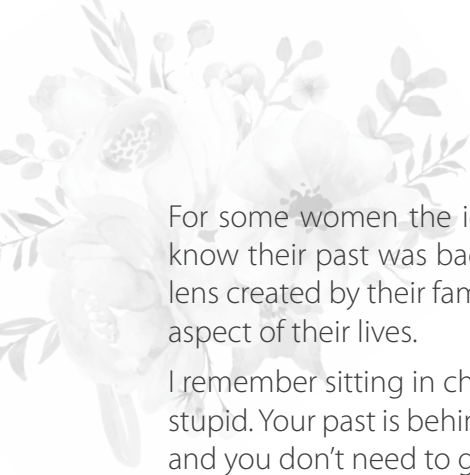
7. Write anything else you want me to know about your family of origin or immediate family.



# Chapter Two

EXPLORE THE PAST





For some women the idea alone of exploring the past can strike terror in their hearts. For others, they know their past was bad, but they don't remember much of it. Others see their past through a distorted lens created by their families. Everyone has a past, and whether they acknowledge it or not, it affects every aspect of their lives.

I remember sitting in church, and the pastor said these words, "This business of going back to your past is stupid. Your past is behind you. It has nothing to do with who you are now. You are a 'new creature in Christ,' and you don't need to go back and dig up the past. Forget the past and move forward in Christ."

Not only is this statement unbiblical, but it is also shaming. I cringed as I thought of all the women in church that day who wondered, What's wrong with me? I can't forget the past. I can't even do this Christian thing right! The truth is, for so many women sitting in our churches today, their past isn't in the past—it is their present.

Does our past affect our present? Anyone who understands basic child development knows this is true. Why else would we discipline our children? Why would we teach them and shape them? The Bible is full of passages proving this point. Here are just a few examples of the impact of a parent's influence on a child's future as an adult has through what is put in the child during the formative years.

*"You shall also teach them (God's laws) to your sons, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up."*

—Deuteronomy 11:19

*"It is the living who give thanks to You, as I do today; a father tells his sons about Your faithfulness."*

—Isaiah 38:19

*"Tell your sons about it, and have your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation."*

—Joel 1:3

*"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he grows older he will not abandon it."*

—Proverbs 22:6

Why would God tell His people to tell their children about His faithfulness, His laws, and His love? So that when they are adults, this will be their truth. Why train a child up in God's ways? The obvious reason is so that when the child is old, he will walk in the Truth he learned at his parents' knees. These are just a few examples of God telling His followers to shape their children's adulthood by teaching them about the Truth. The opposite is also found. There are many examples in scripture that show the negative results of parents' teaching and upbringing that caused pain and destruction for the child's later personal relationships and for the entire nation of Israel.

*"He did evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who misled Israel into sin."*

—1 Kings 22:52

*"He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor to act wickedly."*

—2 Chronicles 22:3

*"But (they) have followed the stubbornness of their heart and the Baals, as their fathers taught them."*

—Jeremiah 9:14

*"After being prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter."*

—Matthew 14:8

Put simply, we learn what we live, and then we live what we learn. I am not saying that everything bad in your life is your parents' fault. Or that everything bad in your grown child's life is your fault. No one "parents" perfectly (since perfection is exclusive only to God). Most parents have deep regrets for some of their behavior and decisions. I certainly do. However, the premise that parents profoundly influence their children's attitudes, their emotional health in life, and their subsequent behavior as adults is clearly found throughout scripture.

If you look back at these Bible quotes, you will see that God didn't instruct the Israelites to tell their children these things once. It is inferred or openly stated that parents are to consistently share with their children these truths. Look at the Bible quotes. Most of these scriptures speak to an ongoing, consistent input in a child's life. And all of them speak to the incredible influence a parent has in the outcome.

To place the past in the past, we have to go back and look at it in light of Truth. We have to acknowledge the pain; we have to be honest about the effects. I wish there was another way, but God created us in a way that requires it. The good news is, we don't have to stay there. We only visit that place for a while. And we will not do this alone. This workbook is intended for you to go through with a mentor to challenge, validate, discuss issue with, and support you in this journey.

In my many decades as a lay counselor to Christian women, I have heard some deeply disturbing stories of children's treatment at the hands of adults. There were some that were just evil, cruelty at its worst. But many times, that wasn't the case, yet there was still a great deal of damage done to the child.

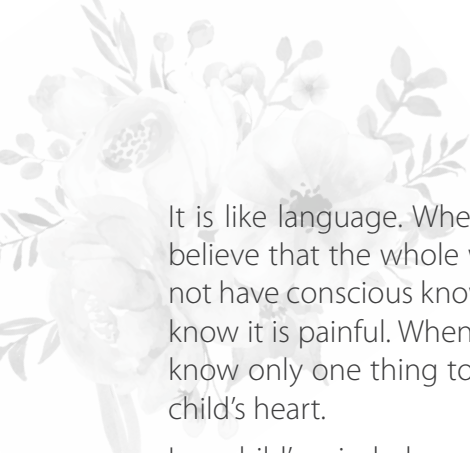
It is like a father who is mowing the lawn with his small child running around nearby. Dad is preoccupied and hurried, so he doesn't take the proper precautions to protect his two-year-old. Then the unthinkable happens. And because of it, the little boy will suffer for the rest of his life with pain and a limp. Did the father mean to hurt his son? No. But the pain and the effect it has on the child's life into adulthood cannot be minimized or dismissed, either. It must be treated. The same is true of the spiritual and emotional damage done to children by well-meaning, but dysfunctional parents. The "unthinkable" comes in many forms:

- A controlling nature
- Being hypercritical
- Being emotionally unavailable
- Being manipulative
- Preferential treatment
- Unpredictability
- Meanness
- Being overly rigid
- Religion without grace
- A lack of boundaries
- Addictions
- Narcissism
- Chaos

And then there is evil, situations in which parents are **NOT** well-meaning, but they intentionally do harm to their children!

## **THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES**

Every person on earth has one thing in common: We were all children once. Yet so very few adults remember how, as children, they saw the world and the events around them. Children have nothing to compare their experiences to. They don't know what is healthy or acceptable; they only know their life circumstances.



It is like language. When children are little, they don't know they speak English. They just do. And they believe that the whole world speaks their language. When it comes to mistreatment and abuse, they do not have conscious knowledge that this is wrong. Yet they feel the effects of their parent's dysfunction and know it is painful. When they feel pain from neglect, caustic words, blows, and other forms of abuse, they know only one thing to do: blame themselves. And this is the beginning of shame being laid down in a child's heart.

In a child's mind, she reasons that if she were prettier, smarter, kinder, quieter (translate "perfect"), or any number of other virtues, her parent(s) would change their behavior toward her. However, the problem is not with the child. It is with the adults. And no matter how the child changes, the parents don't. The only conclusion the child can come to is that there is something flawed in her. If she could be perfect, then she could change their attitudes and behaviors, and they would then love her. This is called "magical thinking."

This is a devastating message to a child that plays out in adulthood with disastrous consequences. As the girl grows into a woman, she still employs magical thinking in her relationships. With this lie firmly planted in her heart, she continually chooses people who treat her the badly. And she believes that if she could only be perfect, they would change. This is one of the foundational lies in an abused woman's heart. Truly her past is her present!

Dr. Sandra Wilson, in her book *Released from Shame*, puts it this way: "The reality is that children are totally vulnerable to the whims of imperfect and impaired adults. Therefore, children feel safer being the 'bad' ones rather than facing the terror of acknowledging that their parents could choose to be 'bad' no matter what the children did or didn't do. This illusory protection exacts a costly toll as children from troubled families stumble into adulthood bearing the wounds of binding shame."

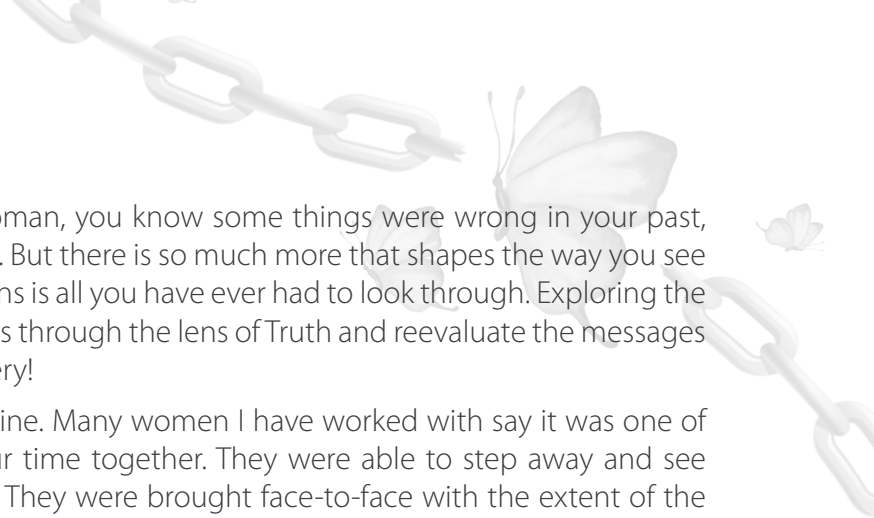
The worse and more deliberate the abuse, the deeper this sense of shame, and the feeling of being disgustingly, irreparably flawed and different from everyone else in the world.

## **THE LENS OF LIES AND TRUTH**

Imagine you were born with lenses over your eyes that are the "lens of lies and truth." You don't know the difference; you just look through the lens at the world around you and your value and significance **IN THAT WORLD.**

Your parents color the lenses at a very young age through their words, actions, and responses, and so do a million different messages in your childhood. As the lenses get colored, the baby grows into a toddler, and then as a preteen, they don't even know to question the color of the lens. For instance, if a baby is born with purple lenses and she grows up with them, she can't ever define the color purple. And remember, parents are the ones who "color" the lenses, either with truth or with lies. If her lens has been colored mostly with truth, it will be clear, and a child will see the world around her, and her value and significance in it, through the truth of God's Word. It doesn't mean she won't have problems in life. But she will have a point of reference to go back to that is grounded in truth, and she can figure out what is wrong. If there have been addictions, abuse, neglect, harsh or critical treatment, or so many more human sins, the lens will be deeply colored in a way that distorts truth, especially the truth of a child's value as a person. All the child has to go back to are lies, which cause more pain, confusion, and shame.

The problem is, when you are raised looking through a distorted lens, you don't know that it is distorted. You think your lens is normal, and that everyone else looks through the same lens. It's like asking a fish to describe water. They know no difference, so they can't describe what they don't know. Not only do they not know it, but they don't know they don't know it!



Exploring the past can be painful. As an adult woman, you know some things were wrong in your past, even terrible. You can remember some bad events. But there is so much more that shapes the way you see yourself and the world around you because that lens is all you have ever had to look through. Exploring the past means you look at your childhood experiences through the lens of Truth and reevaluate the messages you received as a child. Discovery precedes recovery!

One of the best ways to do this is by doing a Lifeline. Many women I have worked with say it was one of the most enlightening things they did during our time together. They were able to step away and see the cause and effect of their treatment as a child. They were brought face-to-face with the extent of the mistreatment they received, and they then have some compassion for themselves as a little girl. They were able to bring order and manageability to their memories instead of being overwhelmed by them. You don't have to do your Lifeline in one sitting, but it is important that you finish it.

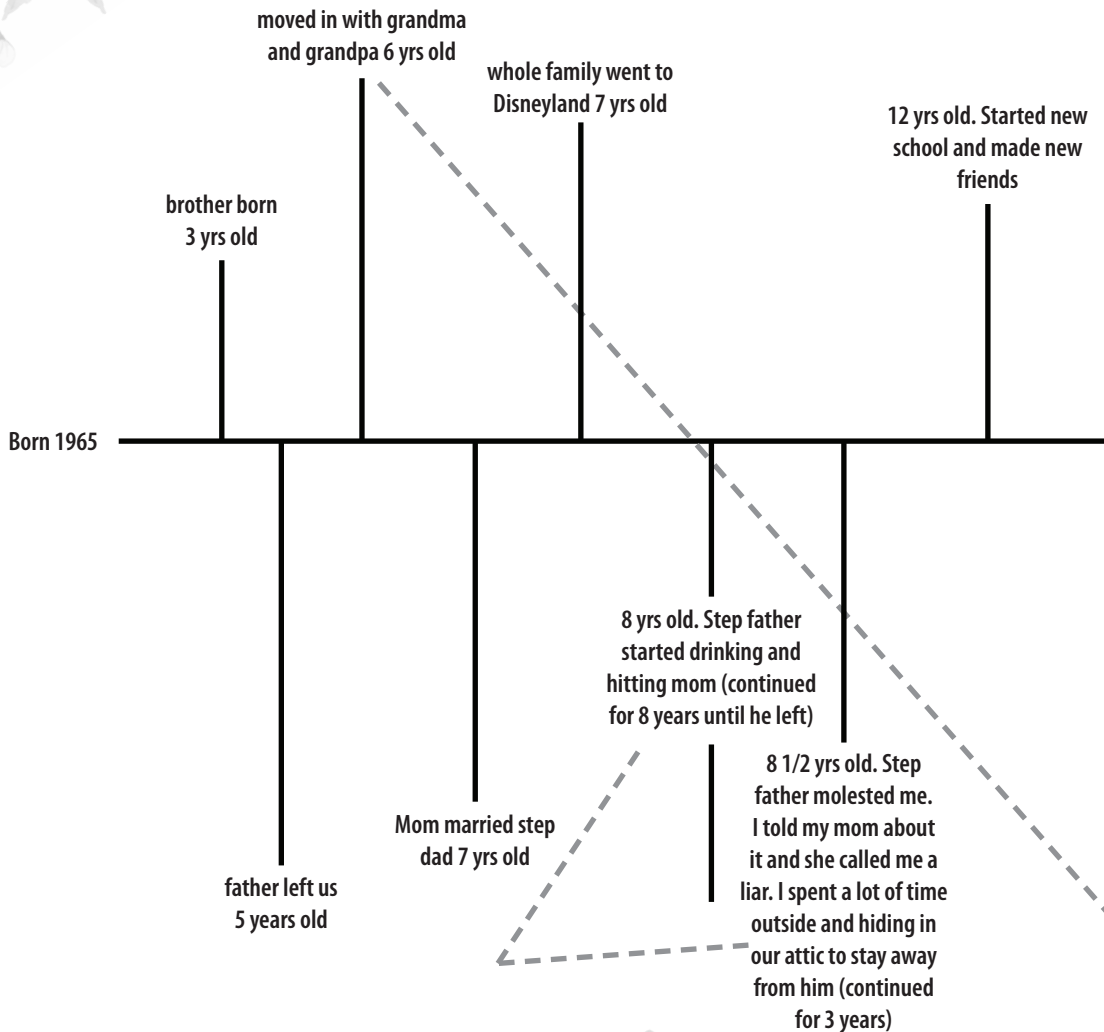
Doing a Lifeline is hard. It is deliberately looking at what you have avoided much of your life. But in the end, it will help you make sense of thinking patterns, attitudes, and behaviors in your life and help you move toward healing. If you find it hard to remember, you can talk to sympathetic relatives with whom you feel emotionally safe. If you have photos of your childhood, they, too, help to "jog" your memory. Keep in mind, though, that sometimes siblings have different memories based on their roles in the family.



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOING A LIFELINE

The **higher** the line is above the center line, the more **positive** the experience.

The **lower** the line is below the center line, the more **negative** the experience.



*To put your lines closer you may write in the middle of them, continuing your line below or above. This way you can stagger your writing which can fit more in.*

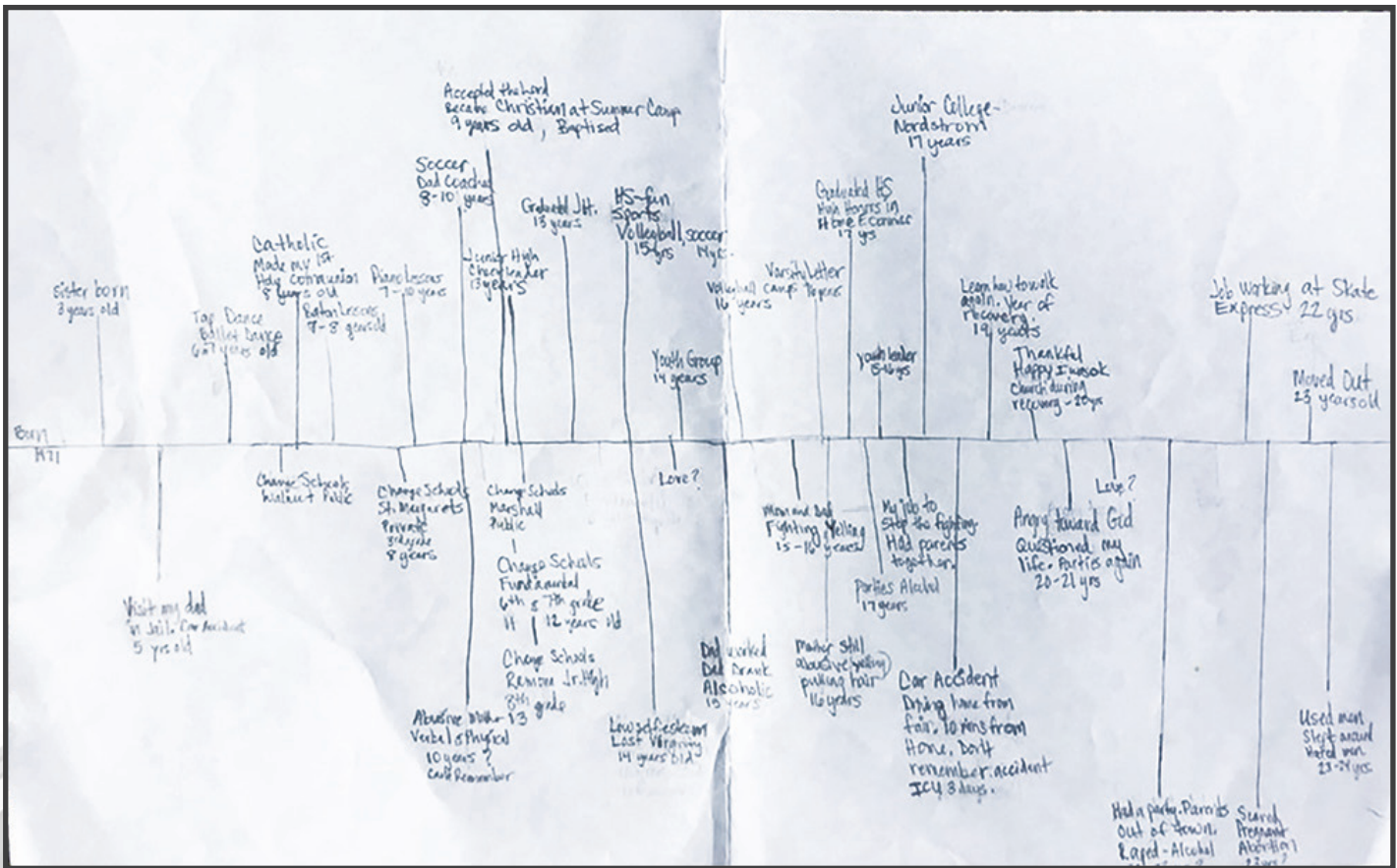
On a long piece of paper or a roll, mark major events in your life by drawing a line vertically from the center line. Start with your birth on the left side. As you remember ages and significant events in your life, write them down. If they were positive, draw a line above the center line. The more positive the event was, the higher the vertical line ABOVE the center line should be. The same goes for negative events.

The worse they events were, the lower the vertical line BELOW the center line should be. Write your age and/or the date above the event. Move from childhood to adulthood along the center line. You can tape 8.5 X 11 pieces of paper together or get a roll of paper. Over the years, I have had Lifelines turned in on one piece of paper or on multiple pages of papers taped together. I even had one on a roll of paper, that when unrolled, went from one end of the room to the other. Some were sloppy; others had ruled straight lines and precision writing, and one was beautifully typed.

The point of this exercise is to bring some order and sequence to your past, not to create a masterpiece! One suggestion: Don't worry about not remembering everything at once. The memories come slowly and often are hinged one on another. Give yourself room to go back and add things as you remember them.

Below are two examples of clients' lifelines. They will give you an idea of what lifelines look like. The goal in this exercise is not perfection. If you don't remember exact ages or dates, it is fine. Just write down what you do remember. The most important thing is to get started on it. Just doing this exercise will bring back memories.

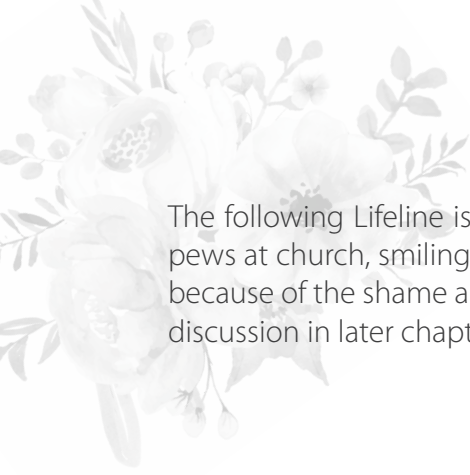
Below is an example of a one-page handwritten Lifeline.



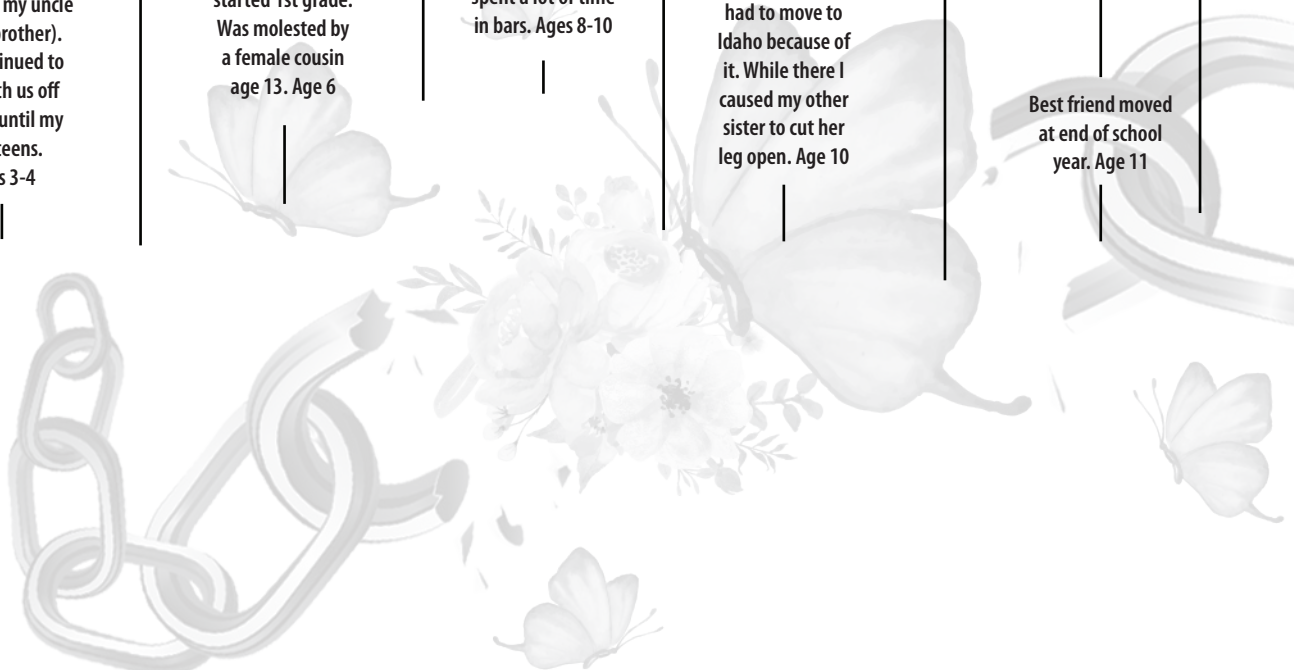
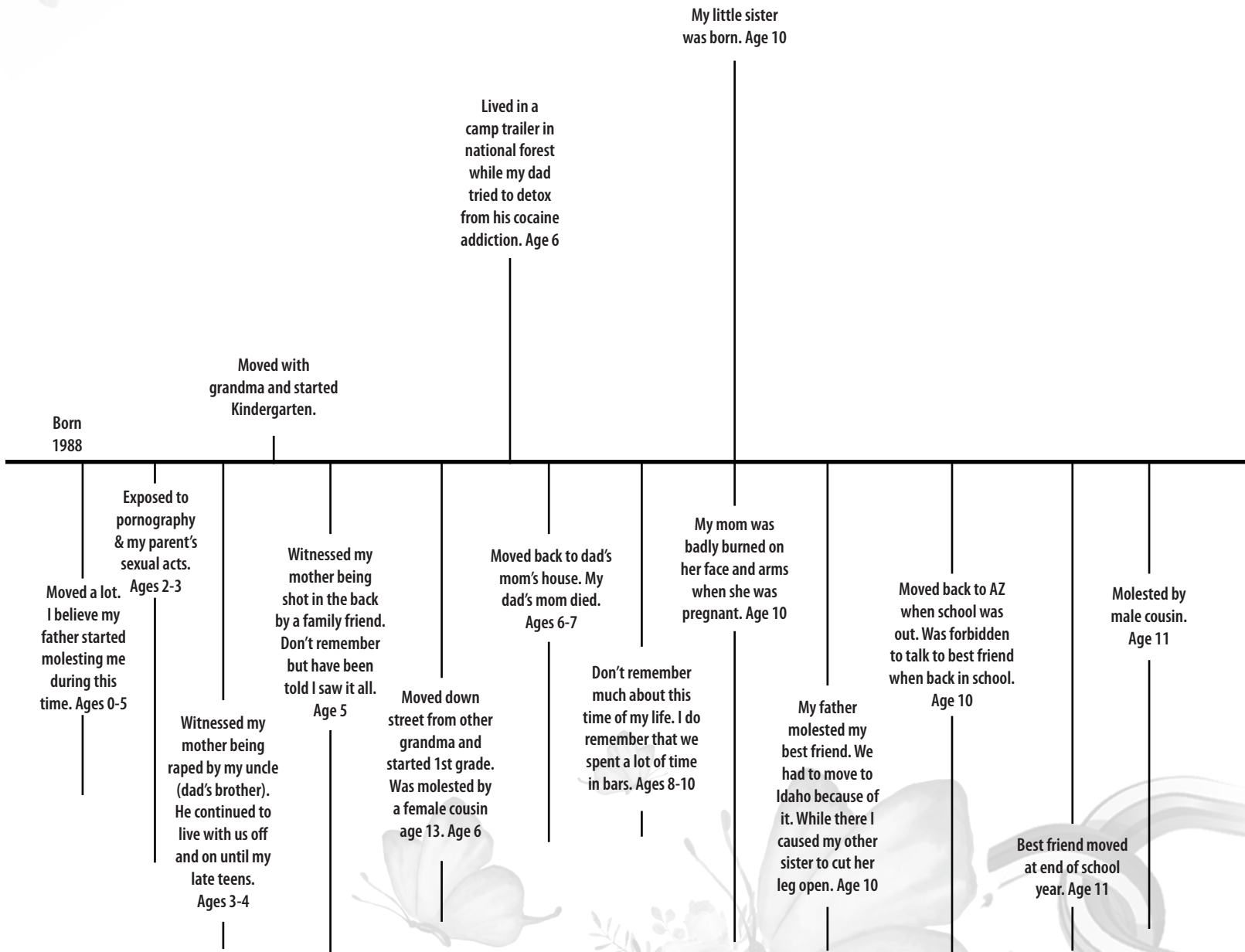
  
 Your Gonna Be OK  
 Brian & Jen Johnson

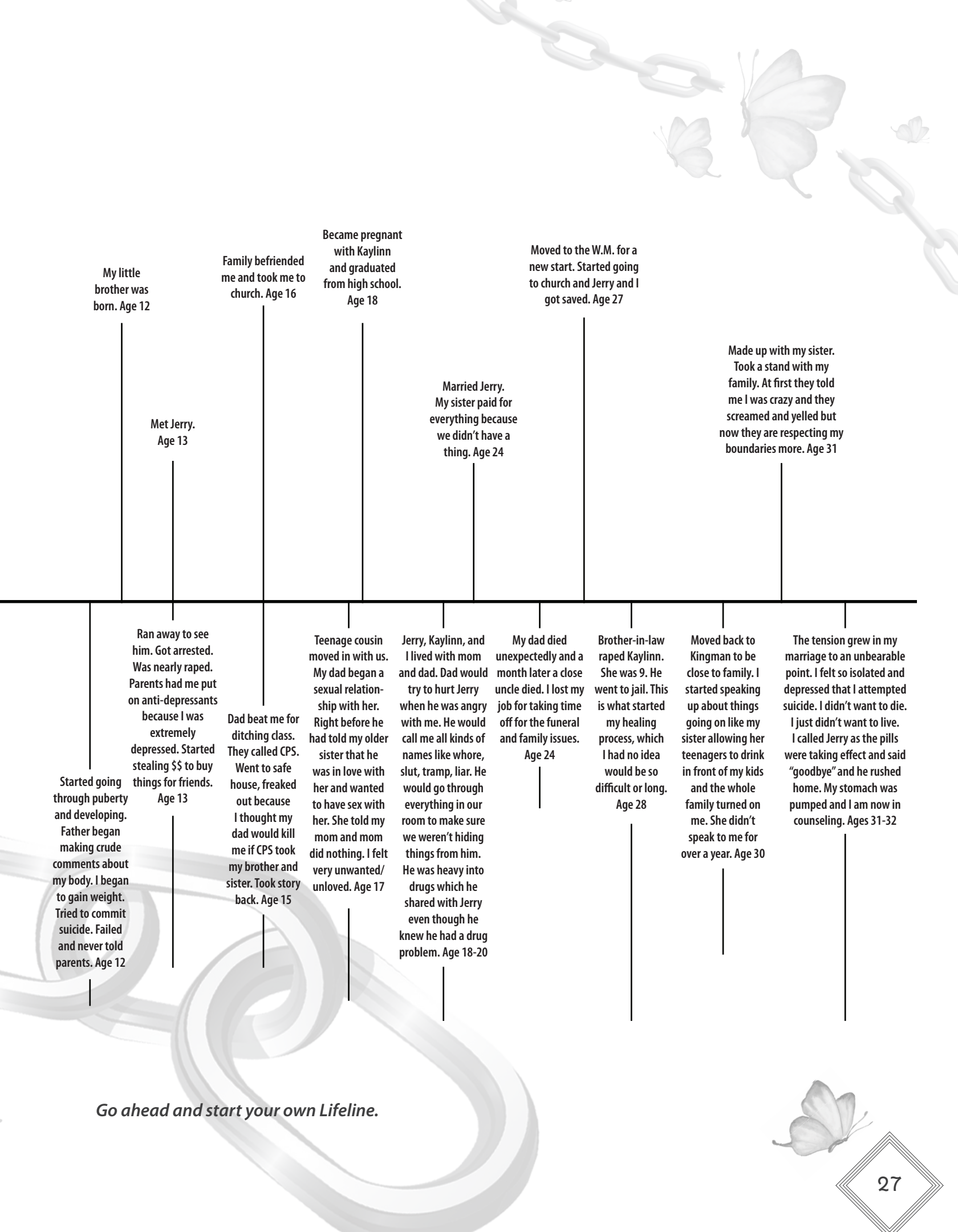






The following Lifeline is disturbing to read. Yet it is a snapshot of the life of a young lady who sat in our pews at church, smiling, trying to act like a “good” Christian woman week after week. Who knew? No one, because of the shame and lies that kept her silent and hurting. This particular Lifeline will be the subject of discussion in later chapters.





My little brother was born. Age 12

Family befriended me and took me to church. Age 16

Became pregnant with Kaylinn and graduated from high school. Age 18

Moved to the W.M. for a new start. Started going to church and Jerry and I got saved. Age 27

Met Jerry. Age 13

Married Jerry. My sister paid for everything because we didn't have a thing. Age 24

Made up with my sister. Took a stand with my family. At first they told me I was crazy and they screamed and yelled but now they are respecting my boundaries more. Age 31

Ran away to see him. Got arrested. Was nearly raped. Parents had me put on anti-depressants because I was extremely depressed. Started stealing \$\$ to buy things for friends. Age 13

Dad beat me for ditching class. They called CPS. Went to safe house, freaked out because I thought my dad would kill me if CPS took my brother and sister. Took story back. Age 15

Teenage cousin moved in with us. My dad began a sexual relationship with her. Right before he had told my older sister that he was in love with her and wanted to have sex with her. She told my mom and mom did nothing. I felt very unwanted/unloved. Age 17

Jerry, Kaylinn, and I lived with mom and dad. Dad would try to hurt Jerry when he was angry with me. He would call me all kinds of names like whore, slut, tramp, liar. He would go through everything in our room to make sure we weren't hiding things from him. He was heavy into drugs which he shared with Jerry even though he knew he had a drug problem. Age 18-20

My dad died unexpectedly and a month later a close uncle died. I lost my job for taking time off for the funeral and family issues. Age 24

Brother-in-law raped Kaylinn. She was 9. He went to jail. This is what started my healing process, which I had no idea would be so difficult or long. Age 28

Moved back to Kingman to be close to family. I started speaking up about things going on like my sister allowing her teenagers to drink in front of my kids and the whole family turned on me. She didn't speak to me for over a year. Age 30

The tension grew in my marriage to an unbearable point. I felt so isolated and depressed that I attempted suicide. I didn't want to die. I just didn't want to live. I called Jerry as the pills were taking effect and said "goodbye" and he rushed home. My stomach was pumped and I am now in counseling. Ages 31-32

Started going through puberty and developing. Father began making crude comments about my body. I began to gain weight. Tried to commit suicide. Failed and never told parents. Age 12

*Go ahead and start your own Lifeline.*

