

Personal Testimony: Tammy Brown

Story by Margot Bass

God's Healing and Restoration

First as a child, then as a new Christian, and later as a pastor's wife, a young woman tried to forget the pain too deep for words ... until she turned it over to God.

Tammy Brown, wife of Pastor Rick Brown, CC Idaho Falls, ID, sobbed uncontrollably at the kitchen table as Rick wrapped his arms around her. This was the first time that she had unlocked 20 years' worth of memories from her secret past.

"Every night for years I would watch passing car lights creep past my window. I would lie there and wonder if my uncle was coming to get me, or even kill me," Tammy said. "I lay in bed at the age of seven, scared to fall asleep, and planned over and over how I would tell my mom about my secret.

"But my planning was always stopped by the haunting words of my uncle: 'I'll kill your parents if you ever tell. If they find out what a dirty little girl you are they'll be so ashamed of you.' I was silenced by shame and fear. Each time my uncle would come near me I would run as fast as I could from him thinking, *Get away from me!*

"From that moment, I tried to forget those unspeakable memories. First as a child, then as a new Christian, and later as a pastor's wife, I tried to forget the pain, but the memories kept me angry and bitter. As I recalled the repeated sexual abuse by my uncle and his sons, and later being date-raped as a teenager, I was kept prisoner to my past. I was good at keeping the memories a secret."

But abuses and secrets left deposits on her heart which were not easily removed. Tammy's future husband, Rick, led her to Christ during her senior year of high school. She hoped that becoming a Christian, and later being involved in her husband's ministry, would take away her crippling insecurities, bitterness, and shame. It didn't work.

"I would sing songs about how God heals, but they were empty words because I'd never experienced it," she said.

Now 42 years old, Tammy is thankful that those ugly deposits are gone after God tenderly led her on a journey of healing and forgiveness. Tammy described herself as "a self-destructive woman going nowhere in life."

Frustration led her to God's Word, which showed that before she could forget the abuse and forgive her abusers, she first had to see the condition of her embittered heart so she wouldn't remain defiled (Hebrews 12:15). However, Tammy warned, "simply reading God's Word is not enough—you have to purposely obey, then you experience true healing." She admitted, "There were times I didn't want to obey. I wrestled, wept, and questioned, 'How could the sin of hatred be equal to the sin of abuse in God's eyes?' I thought I was justified. Surely God hated [my abusers] too."

When she realized her bitterness, she wondered, "Now what am I supposed to do?" The answer was to give it to Christ in repentance. She had to be deeply sorrowful about her bitter response, enough to change her thinking (2 Corinthians 7:10).

"It's completely opposite of how we think humanly," she noted. "Repentance cleans out the sin in our hearts." Tammy was quick to add that taking this step did not justify the abuse or betrayal. We live in a fallen world where sin abounds and hurts from others can affect our lives. Satan continually tries to get us to hate, not forgive. But God's Word helps us grow and move away from the destruction Satan desires to do.

Forgiveness was finally possible, but she needed the Lord to show her how. Again the Word showed her that when we pray, we must forgive others (Mark 11:25). By choosing forgiveness, we are choosing God's way and showing that we trust Him. Forgiveness releases you from the past and opens the door for His healing and restoration.



Pastor Rick and Tammy Brown

The final step to healing was to forget, now possible by her repentance and forgiveness. In Philippians 3:13, Paul tells us to fully forget those things that are behind and put our minds on the higher calling of Jesus. "We live in a world where hurt is part of

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life. We can become bitter and offended in a split second even by other Christians," Tammy said. "I'm so thankful those things in the past don't define us. It's not what happens to you that matters most, it's what happens in you.

"It's an amazing opportunity when unfair things happen in our lives," Tammy added "because the Lord can be glorified. He is a good God who wants to heal the world, and He is the only true Healer." ❧

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