Does a crisis from your past still affect you? Is it hard to dismiss demoralizing experiences such as the embarrassment over having an alcoholic parent, or the moneymaking scheme that bankrupted you, or the lingering effect of a spouse's infidelity? Such experiences can leave lasting scars, can devour self-worth, and can ultimately leave you feeling isolated and inferior.

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO . . .
• Identify emotional, physical, and mental side effects of victimization
• Recognize codependent tendencies of a victim
• Know your true self-worth
• Conquer irrational fear
• Establish and maintain good boundaries

If left unchecked, the victim mentality can paralyze your heart and mind for a lifetime. For lasting change to occur, you must rely on the truth of God’s Word—truth about His mercy, and truth about your worth. He wants to set you free from the past with His transforming power to become all He created you to be!

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VICTIMIZATION
Victory Over the Victim Mentality

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ear Friend,


Do these words describe you and the way you’ve always felt deep down inside? If your truthful answer is yes, then this study is for you. Each of these words portray how a victim feels, and rightfully so. But did you know that those feelings can continue long after the abuse has stopped? They can creep into every relationship, encouraging you to forfeit your true feelings for the sake of being a “people pleaser.” They can shackle you like chains on a prisoner, making you feel trapped—like a victim—when in fact, you are free. You are a former victim. You have overcome ... or at least you can.

I’m going to be very candid with you right from the start. I’ve been a victim of abuse and I’ve been a victim of the victim mentality. It took a long time for me to accept the fact that I was still living like a victim, but once I did, I was able to find true freedom that no victimizer can steal—a freedom that lasts forever.

How clearly I remember the day I realized that I, a grown adult, was still living like a helpless child. It was a number of years ago when a friend of mine called unexpectedly. “June,” she said. “I’ve been reading a new book, and I would like for you to listen to this list of characteristics. Think about yourself as I read.” She went down the list and, one by one, the characteristics matched me. The author was painting an almost perfect portrait of me—my relationships, my working style, even my innermost feelings!
Then my friend revealed the purpose of the list. “I didn’t want to tell you this at the beginning, but the list has to do with adult children of alcoholics.” Though I’m not from an alcoholic home, I did fit many of the characteristics. In truth, I was amazed by how many described me to a T. Having had a counseling ministry for years, I knew why. Children with alcoholic parents feel powerless, especially if the drinking leads to abuse.

Even though I did not grow up with an alcoholic parent, I did grow up with someone who made me feel powerless. I felt incredibly helpless around my father, who ran our family like a dictator—and not even a benevolent one! He was an abusive man who caused my family to rally together just to survive against him. Harsh and brutal, my father devastated my sense of self-worth. Even his “minor offenses” burned deep in my heart.

I recall one time when my sister Helen and I were playing chess on the living room floor. Then my father entered. “Quit playing chess!” he roared. “It’s not as scientific as checkers!” I knew it wasn’t a major thing, but to see him towering over us, making ridiculous demands, made me boil inside. My first thought was: What do you mean checkers is more scientific than chess? Who cares? I was extremely angry, but I couldn’t say anything. I knew that whatever he said was “right.” I felt powerless.

By the time I was a teenager, my father’s verbal and emotional abuse had warped my entire worldview. All my girlfriends were boy crazy, but I wasn’t. I
remember the day we learned that Ricky Nelson was coming to Dallas to perform at the Cotton Bowl. The announcement aired on the radio when we were all piled in the car. “Let’s go! Let’s go!” they cried. I had to work just to put a smile on my face.

Although we didn’t end up going, I’ll never forget how I felt driving down the road that afternoon. I couldn’t understand: Don’t you realize how heavy things are in the world? How serious things are? How can you even think about going to a concert? I didn’t understand how they could be so happy over something that I thought was so silly. Happiness was not a frame of reference for me. But I never told a soul. For years, I didn’t tell anyone about the things that went on in my home.

I found other ways to cope, including avoiding my father. If he came through a door, I hid in the closet. If there wasn’t a closet, I hid behind the door. I became a peace-at-all-costs person, even lying to keep my father from getting upset. I worked hard at the things I knew would please him, hoping, just once, to hear, “I love you.” But I never heard those words ... not from him.

I grew up being fearful—and that fear penetrated my adult life. I was even afraid of friendships. Although I had precious friends who were nothing like my father, I still felt and thought like a victim. I lied about things without reason. I kept my loved ones at arm’s length. My victim mentality continued to plague me, even when it came to my relationship with God—my heavenly Father, who had shown His love for me so many, many times before.
Something changed in me that day on the phone with my friend. I realized that I had been trapped, no longer by my father, but by my own refusal to stop living like a victim. I decided then to let God set within me a new perspective, to allow Him to change my victim mentality and ultimately to change my heart and my life.

My prayer for you is that through the pages of this study, you too will allow God to make that kind of liberating change in you. Today is God’s day of freedom for you. He has a path for you—a good and perfect plan for your life—that no amount of abuse or mistreatment can destroy. I pray that as you look at the truth of His Word, you will find in Him the power to stop living as a victim and to start living as the person God made you to be: His precious child—forgiven, redeemed, and set free.

Yours in the Lord’s hope,

June Hunt

“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God ... who remains faithful forever. ... The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.”

(Psalm 146:5–8)
Here they come again—those painful memories that permeate your heart and pummel your thoughts and emotions. You feel caught like a frightened bird in a cage with no way to freedom. Yet it happened so long ago.

Do you live your life coping with a crippling crisis from your past, hoping to somehow get beyond it, to forget it? Well, the good news is that God wants so much more for you than just to cope. He wants to help you overcome your painful past and conquer the destructive patterns that have developed in your life as a result of your past victimization. He wants you to grow in maturity through His grace and to reach out and help others in similar pain.

Feeling powerless doesn’t have to be permanent. God wants to set you free from the cage that has far too long held you captive and robbed you of peace! He offers you His power for healing and for changing. And when you experience true healing and personal transformation, you also receive true freedom. Like a bird out of a cage, you can experience freedom today and have bright hope for tomorrow! All because of the fact that ...

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

(Galatians 5:1)
DEFINITIONS

She is the daughter of a king, but she becomes a desolate woman. Her position guarantees a lifetime of honor and recognition, but instead she spends most of her life in seclusion and disgrace.

Tamar’s earlier years are characterized by beauty and innocence, which both captivate and torture a certain young man, her half brother, Amnon. “Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her” (2 Samuel 13:2).

But Amnon’s shrewd cousin comes up with a plan that makes the impossible possible.

“For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly.” (Proverbs 5:21–23)
WHAT IS a Victim?

Jonadab counsels Amnon, “Go to bed and pretend to be ill. When your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand’” (2 Samuel 13:5). Amnon has no trouble figuring out the rest of the plan.

King David attends to his “sickly” son Amnon and dutifully honors his request to beckon Tamar to his bedside. Tamar prepares cakes and brings them to Amnon, but instead of grabbing hold of the cakes, he grabs hold of Tamar. “‘No, my brother!’ she said to him. ‘Don’t force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don’t do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you’” (2 Samuel 13:12–13).

Tamar’s voice of reason goes unheeded, and Amnon, determined to satisfy his fleshly appetite, proceeds to forcibly rape his half sister. “He refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her” (2 Samuel 13:14). In so doing, Amnon proved himself to be “one of the wicked fools in Israel!”

“In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.”
(Psalm 10:2)
A victim is a person who experiences adversity, who is powerless to change the situation.¹

**Examples:** A victim of neglect as a result of alcoholic parents, an unwanted divorce, infidelity, spiritual abuse, suicide, elder abuse, stalking, or sexual harassment.

- Tamar was clearly the victim of Amnon. And as his victim, she experienced all three of the following definitions of a victim:

- A victim is a person who is tricked or duped.
  
  **Example:** A victim of robbery, identity theft, fraud, kidnapping, cult entrapment, and other dishonest schemes

- A victim is a person who is injured, destroyed, or sacrificed.
  
  **Example:** A victim of incest, domestic violence, rape, satanic ritual abuse, drunk driver, homicide, natural disaster

- A victim is a person who is subjected to oppression, hardship, or mistreatment.
  
  **Example:** A victim of any verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, racial, or economic abuse

  “People cry out under a load of oppression; they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful.”

  (Job 35:9)
Victims in the Bible

Tamar’s tragic loss of innocence would be but the first in a string of abuses committed by Amnon, who after maliciously victimizing Tamar, “hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her” (2 Samuel 13:15). He commands her to get out and has a servant put her out when she refuses to leave. He repudiates the notion of taking her as his bride, which the Law required, and tells the servant to bolt the door behind her.

► A Hebrew word in the Old Testament that refers to a victim is chelekah, which means “hapless, unfortunate, the unlucky.”

“He [the wicked man] lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims ... ” (Psalm 10:8).

► Old Testament translations of the word victim are ...

- The slain
- The dead
- The killed
- The wounded
- The victim
- The defiled
- The casualties
- The slaughtered

According to these translations, Jesus was a willing victim of our sins, the innocent laying down His life for the guilty. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).
WHAT IS the Victim Mentality?

Tamar was devastated by Amnon’s heartless disregard for her feelings and wishes, her plans and her dreams. And the deep disdain he felt toward her after forcing himself on her was more than she could bear.

To express her deep sorrow and shame, Tamar tore her richly ornamented robe, which symbolized her status as a virgin daughter of the king, and placed ashes on her head. And...

“She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.”
(2 Samuel 13:19)

The victim mentality is a mind-set in which a person who was once a victim continues in old thought patterns that foster feelings of powerlessness, even when the victimization has ended.

The victim mentality causes individuals to see others as powerful but themselves as weak and powerless.

The victim mentality leads those who were genuinely powerless to stop abuse in the past to assume the same powerless state in the present. In order to fully embrace the future that the Lord has planned for them, this faulty assumption needs to be replaced with God’s truth.

The victim mentality can consciously or subconsciously be used to deny responsibility.
for a person’s present actions. The individual continues in self-destructive attitudes and actions while blaming others for the undesirable results. Victory requires a new mind-set.

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”
(2 Corinthians 10:5)

**QUESTION:** “What will help me overcome a victim mentality?”

**ANSWER:** You can overcome a victim mentality by changing the way you see God and the way you see yourself in relationship to Him. This will then result in changing the way you see yourself in relationship to others and to events in your life. As a past victim, you may have been defenseless, but now you are no longer without power.

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”
(Romans 8:37)