



FREEDOM
FROM
SOUL
PAIN

*Seeing the
presence of God
through pain*

E.R. HURTT

The following is a non-fiction work. Names, characters, places, and events, are solely the author's belief or imagination. Any resemblances to persons, living or dead are entirely coincidental.

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*The Pain Only
God Can
Heal*

A Calming Psalm That Nourishes the Soul

Psalms 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,

they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord

Forever.

New King James Version

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to God for giving me the wisdom to recognize He is my Heavenly Father and that He daily fills my life with His presence.

I dedicate this book to my grandmother, her loving and quiet spirit led me to accept and love Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior as a child.

I dedicate this book to my husband whose heart is continually being transformed by the power of Almighty God.

I dedicate this book to my children who are my precious gifts from God.

I dedicate this book to my classmate (Dedra Swimpson) for encouraging me to write this book. She saw something in me that I could not see.

Introduction

According to BrainsPotential.com research shows that, “Psychological trauma occurs as the result of an extraordinary stressful event that diminishes or destroys your sense of security and involves a threat to life or safety. Traumatic experiences exceed your ability to cope, and your ability to integrate emotions involved with the experience. Psychological trauma can cause you to feel helpless and leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety. It can also leave you feeling numb, disconnected, and unable to trust others. When bad things happen, it can take time to get over the pain and feel safe again. Whether the trauma happened years ago or yesterday, you CAN make healing changes and move forward with your life” (<https://brainspotential.com/healthfromtrauma>). The previous statement is a professional medical diagnosis of trauma and pain. Internal, and external forces are not the only forces that cause emotional traumas. *Soul pain* (spiritual pain) is the other force that can cause pain. *Soul pain* is a type of pain that is widely ignored in the world because its source is embedded in the spiritual heart of man.

Soul pain caused by life’s events can have a negative impact on an individual. Also, man’s sin nature can be the catalyst of *soul pain* which ignites abuse of others and ungodly acts against Almighty God. Sin causes all types of evil desires and wretchedness within the soul while creating an insatiable appetite for more sin. The Bible says, “The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8 NIV). Deliberate sinning obstructs our precious relationship with Almighty God. *Soul pain* capable of oppressing

an innocent victim is an incorporeal phenomenon that originates from Satan's assault on the soul. *Soul pain* causes heartache and agony in the soul and confusion or denial in the mind. There are many circumstances in life, both internal and external, that can effectuate *soul pain*. Regardless of the source, circumstances of *soul pain* cannot be resolved easily and are life-altering.

Soul pain is not cured through medication, traditional medical instrumentality, psychologic therapeutic approaches, holistic therapies, or psychic hotlines. No one is immune from *soul pain*. It does not discriminate based on race, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or status in life. *Soul pain* strikes in many ways with many different outcomes. Sadly, many believers will suffer from *soul pain* without the direction and support needed to overcome the debilitating physical, mental, spiritual, and unexplained incidents in life resulting from *soul pain*. Manifestations arise such as: self-injury (identity crisis, suicide, low-self-esteem, self-contempt); injury by others (betrayal, physical and mental abuse, cyberbullying, abandonment, divorce, humiliation); incidents beyond the sufferer's control (illness, death of a love one, and a plethora of other known and unknown conditions); a sufferer's injury toward others (projection of unprovoked anger toward a loved one) and loneliness. These hurtful conditions will leave the sufferer with emotional challenges if not addressed. Medical doctors professionally address and cure mental and physical pain. However, only Jesus Christ can heal and cure spiritual *soul pain*. Without His divine intervention, the sufferer may hopelessly become trapped in his or her pain as *soul pain* creates life-long strongholds.

This book is not being declared as a cure for all pain caused by mental, emotional, or physical illnesses. Nor does this book diminish the superb work performed by healthcare professionals

to assist people in pain. In fact, if an individual suffers *soul pain*, I strongly encourage him or her to seek any and all needed help. Additionally, I recommend he or she consider the vast benefits of suffering God's way. To suffer God's way is explained later in the book. Additionally, the book will examine both the many challenges caused by *soul pain* as well as the wonderful transformation Almighty God brings. Consequently, this book probes my personal experience with *soul pain*: what caused it, the effects, and steps I took in the removal of *soul pain*.

The book is trifurcated, the first section focuses on my personal experience with *soul pain* early in life and its elimination by the power of Jesus Christ. The second section of the book focuses on my life from late adolescence to the present. The third and final section of this book focuses on the believing sufferer's broken spirit caused by *soul pain*, how *soul pain* can be eliminated, and how believers can be made whole by Almighty God. Further, the spiritually broken sufferer or willful rebellious sufferer who insists on going his or her own way is shown both the necessity of turning from sin and the importance of turning to Almighty God. Lovingly, the sufferer's soul, heart, and mind can be changed by God's agape love.

It is my prayer that by sharing my personal journey through *soul pain*, the remedy I employed to eliminate it, and my ability to see the presence of Almighty God through my pain, you will be encouraged and inspired to pursue purpose past your pain. Despite the many negative events in my life, God's divine healing made me spiritually whole. My faith and trust in Jesus Christ are based on the demonstration of His power through every nefarious experience. Accordingly, every chapter of the book evidences the lively and active character of God's Word in the lives of His children; Jesus Christ as the Savior who saves sinners; and God the Holy Spirit as the believer's helper to live righteously. This book

depicts God's Word as the fountain of spiritual knowledge and wisdom as well as the spiritual weapon against the consequences of *soul pain* and spiritual warfare. If God's Word is applied daily, life will become viable and complete.

The complete relief of *soul pain* begins and ends by the power of Almighty God. As a result, the Godhead is present throughout all facets of my life and in every story rehearsed in these pages. The stories also expose the sinful nature of fallen mankind, the effects of spiritual warfare, and the divine grace to overcome. Each chapter illustrates the devastating impact *soul pain* has on the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional areas of a sufferer's life as well as the deliverance that comes with the Almighty God's intervention. Finally, this book is also a love story - showing: 1) brokenness in all humanity; 2) the need for a Savior, Jesus Christ; 3) God's love toward His children; 4) the methods in which He redeems His children back to Himself; 5) His children's love towards their Heavenly Father; and 6) His children's love toward one another.

This book is intended to highlight *soul pain* experienced by sufferers and the misguided use of world's remedies to relieve *soul pain*. The words Christian, believer, sufferer, and believing sufferer are interchangeable synonyms throughout the book. Names of individuals have been changed for privacy. Each beginning chapter scripture is methodically explained in the workbook to demonstrate how God's Holy Word effects lives. The companion workbook prompts the readers to become cognizant of their current spiritual state of faith; desire to delve deeper into their spiritual lives; gain wisdom to see life from a spiritual perspective; and draw closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ. While reading this book, meditate on God's Word to examine if *soul pain* is affecting your life and allow God to eradicate *soul pain* His way.

Prologue

In her youth and while she was developing an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, *soul pain* frequently visited the author. Although her soul was broken, Jesus Christ was her anchor. The Bible says, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3). By surrendering her life to Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior, the author’s heart was changed forever. Over time, God the Holy Spirit convicted her of her own sinfulness, healed her heart, calmed her mind; and soothed her soul. The gift of God the Holy Spirit quietly spoke to her in her youth and still speaks to her today. God the Holy Spirit descended deep into crevices of the author’s soul to seek out *soul pain* that caused her so much pain. These crevices cannot be seen by the human eye nor can they be identified by medical devices. Eradication of *soul pain* occurs by the following: seeking and applying God’s Holy Word in every circumstance in life; acceding to Jesus Christ; and yielding to the power of God the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit equipped the author in ways to glorify Almighty God even at the lowest point in her life, deep in the valley of despair.

With the passage of time, the Godhead made the author’s life whole physically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally despite the trials and tribulations she endured. As a young child and a new believer in Jesus Christ, the author did not understand the many spiritual encounters that would occur early in her life nor the spiritual encounters that would come later in her life. She did

not understand just how extremely close Almighty God was with her in dark times of *soul pain*. She did not know how intimately God knew her. The Bible says, “You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.” (Psalm 139:2-4). God knows everything about the author’s life and ultimately, God’s gifts of forgiveness, grace, and mercy administered by God the Holy Spirit eradicated *soul pain* within the author permanently.

Instinctively people try to avoid pain at any cost. In a diligent search to gain comfort from *soul pain*, a sufferer may turn to the world’s abundant supply of counterfeit and sinful pain-relieving agents such as: abuse of alcohol, abuse of legal and illegal drugs, gluttony, sexual hedonism, pornography, and many other counterfeit options to relieve or eliminate the inconceivable pain deep within the soul. These counterfeit agents do not eliminate *soul pain*, they cause deeper pain. Many people wonder why they hurt so deeply, are depressed, confused, or why their lives are in such a disarray. Without them knowing, the sufferer may be experiencing *soul pain*. *Soul pain* can interfere with a sufferer’s ability to function normally or to have a fruitful life. Thankfully the sufferer can freely go boldly to the throne of grace to be healed. The Bible says, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). The Godhead is crucial in thoroughly curing *soul pain*, sinful behaviors, while dispensing divine love and grace.

Several divine mysteries in the author’s life are documented in this book. Her personal journey is written retrospectively describing her naïve youth, willful adolescence, young adulthood;

and her spiritual growth into a person fully surrendered to Jesus Christ. For years, the author was on an emotional roller coaster ride without being able to get off. Her spiritual life was out of control for a time, but God patiently waited for her to surrender her life to His Son, Jesus Christ and become His child.

Part One

God Will Never Leave You

Nor Forsake You

Chapter 1

The Silent Sufferer

*“Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me”.*

(Psalm 27:10)



My formative childhood years were the late 1950s and early 1960s. Life was quite different than it is today. People weren't so volatile and angry. Back then, most households consisted of both a father and mother and children obeyed their parents without hesitation. Children were able to play safely outside without parental supervision. Parents were not overly concerned about the moment harm could come to their children because neighbors watched over neighborhood children. They watched to both protect them and discipline them. Doing something wrong was an embarrassment, not just to the parents, but to the entire family. For bringing such shame on the family, the child would be disciplined twice for their wrongdoing: once by the neighbor and then by their parents.

Part of me wondered if it was because the Blue Law prevented businesses from opening on Sundays giving people a true

day of rest. In fact, we didn't even shop at the mall after church. Jesus Christ was respected by business owners and so fervently worshipped in the home that most of the stores were not even open. Instead, Sundays were set aside for religious observance and spending time with the family. Prayer and the pledge of allegiance were recited every morning in school before class began. It was as if people knew prayer was a heavenly salve for the weary soul and communication with Almighty God. As a result, praying to God was the first choice to solve obstacles in life . . . not the last choice. There was broad acceptance to love and worship the God of heaven.

My immediate family was small and included my father, my mother, and myself. My many cousins substituted for the brothers or sisters I never had. Unfortunately, my parents were a dysfunctional couple who created an unstable home setting. They were not the kind of people I would deem "good role models." My parents had secrets that I never uttered until much later in life. In 1960, I remember my family lived a short time in a public housing development called Flag House Court. Public Housing wasn't the dangerous blight on the community it is considered today. I remember playing in the grassy area outside and running along the long clean hallways with my little friends. The neighborhood wasn't perfect, but I felt safe there.

I was fortunate not to be a latchkey kid because my mother did not work outside the home and was always there when I returned from school. My mother was born in Durham, North Carolina and had eight siblings. She and five of her siblings eventually moved to Baltimore, MD. As I grew up, they all passed away and she was the last surviving sibling in Maryland (I never knew her other three siblings). After coming from such a large family, you would think my mother and I would be close. We were not.

We never did those cute mother-daughter activities. She was my mother, and I was her responsibility. That's where it began and ended.

My father was born in Baltimore, Maryland and had two step-brothers, and one stepsister. My father was the youngest and only biological child of my grandparents. I was not close to my father, but I obeyed him because he was my father, and it was the right thing to do. My parents were not affectionate people. I don't remember my mother or father ever hugging me or telling me that they loved me. But I didn't miss out on those things. I had secret weapons: grandparents.

My father's parents lived on a small alley street in Baltimore City. They lived in a petite two-story end-of-row rowhome. If you looked out of my grandparent's dining room window, you could see rear yards of neighboring homes. Dogs ran along the fences and barked as people walked by. In the winter months, my grandfather kept the entire house warm with a black potbelly wood stove located in the dining room. When the stove got hot, it radiated a warm glow throughout the room. In the summer, Saturday mornings were routinely the days neighbors swept their front sidewalks, cleaned gutters of trash, and cleaned trash that collected in the backyards of their homes. With pride, neighbors meticulously cleaned their marble steps. Baltimore City was known for those gleaming white marble steps. The Afro Newspaper held a yearly Clean Block Campaign Competition and invited community leaders and residents to participate to win monetary prizes for keeping neighborhoods free of trash and garbage. The block leaders on my grandmother's street would join the competition yearly. I don't know if our block ever won an award, but it was fun seeing everyone outside on Saturdays.

The block on which my grandparents lived was a beautiful picture of who they were. My grandfather was a very nice man from Tennessee. I don't recall him ever working. He was always home when we visited. He would always give me big hugs when I came around. Those hugs more than compensated for the ones I wasn't receiving at home. My grandfather died on January 28, 1986. He loved me, but it was my sweet grandmother who had the most meaningful impact on my life. She was a domestic worker who worked until she was in her early 80s. At that point she was mostly a companion who swapped stories of times past with her employer.

I fully understand why her employer desired her company. She was a righteous woman of faith with a quiet and gentle spirit. I never heard her raise her voice, swear, or say a negative word about anyone. In fact, my earliest memory of God comes from the time I spent watching and learning from her. I still have visions of my grandmother reading her Bible. There was always an open Bible on my grandparents' kitchen table. It is because of my grandmother's influence that I submitted my life to Jesus Christ at an early age. She told me about Jesus Christ and that He would always love me. Believing her was easy because I always felt loved when I was with her. Even when her father, my great-grandfather, would visit from Virginia would be so loving and kind to me. You notice these things when they are missing from your home. That love and kindness may have been missing from my home but, because of my grandparents, it was never missing from my life. That beautiful soul found her rest February 13, 2000.

As a very young child, I vividly remember one warm spring evening during the Easter holiday, my mother and I visited my mother's sister. My aunt and young cousins were sitting in the

living room watching the movie, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* on a black and white floor model TV. There was a scene in the movie that impacted my life forever. The scene was when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross by his executioners. That scene overwhelmed me so dramatically it struck a chord in my soul. The image of Jesus Christ's hand being nailed to the wooden cross disturbed my spirit tremendously. I began to quietly cry and with every bang of the hammer, the harder and louder I cried. I saw Jesus Christ – the one my grandmother said would always love me – being placed between two men also on wooden crosses. Jesus Christ asked His father to forgive His executioners. "Father forgive them" Jesus said, "For they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). What love?

At that point, I was crying uncontrollably. My cousins were snickering at me because I was crying. My mother grabbed me and took me into the rear kitchen. She began shaking me and yelling at me to stop crying. I replied, "But Mom you don't understand. They are killing Jesus." My heart ached for Jesus Christ that evening. I was so heartbroken to see Him being nailed to the cross. I couldn't finish watching the movie. I didn't understand why the rest of my family did not feel the way I did. Jesus Christ was being nailed to the cross and he did nothing wrong. I felt confused, angry, hurt, and distraught. I wondered why people could be so cruel.

From that day on, Jesus Christ was real to me. The vision of the executioners nailing Jesus Christ to the cross was permanently etched into my memory. Thinking back, I wondered if I was too young to have watched that part of the movie. Or maybe my grandmother's influence, which had already resulted in me accepting Jesus Christ as my savior, was the linchpin for my emotional response. After all, I was watching someone who I loved

and who loved me succumb to the vile experience of crucifixion. Only God knows the answer. What I did know for sure was that what I saw was horrific.

When I was nine years old, my father lost his job and our family moved in with his parents. We lived with my grandparents for one year. The memories of living with my grandparents were the happiest times of my childhood. Grandparents' love is a special type of love. The love I felt from my grandparents will never be forgotten. While living there, on summer afternoons, girls and boys rode their bikes, roller skated, and played hopscotch in the street where we lived. Neighboring adults watched children play while they sat on their marble steps.

One day my grandmother took me to the neighborhood public market to do some shopping. As we walked inside, I noticed an elderly woman with gray hair sitting at the counter drinking beer and smoking a cigarette. I was shocked to see a woman of her age doing such a horrible thing. I turned to my grandmother and said, "Grandma that old lady is drinking and smoking." My grandmother looked down at me with a smile and said in her soft voice, "Honey she can drink and smoke if she wants to." I rebutted her by saying "You don't drink, or smoke and you are old." My grandmother just laughed, but I felt misunderstood. My nine years of wisdom was very much shaken that an elderly woman would drink and smoke, it just was not right. Thinking about that encounter reminded me of the cartoon called *Bobby's World*. The cartoon character portrayed a little boy with an overzealous imagination that interpreted situations in life and figurative speech with literal childlike understanding. That's how I felt in the situation with my grandmother. From my vantage point, all elderly gray-haired women should never drink nor smoke because my grandmother didn't. My grandmother was my role

model, and her Christian values impacted my life greatly. They still do today.

My grandmother understood the importance of prayer and having a Savior. Early Sunday mornings, she would wake me for Sunday School. I would run to and from church for Sunday School. No one in my family went to church with me. They didn't have to because in my heart, I knew I needed Jesus Christ in my life. The stories I heard at church about Jesus Christ were very interesting. The crafts we made brought the Bible stories to life for me. The more I went to Sunday School the more I believed Jesus Christ was my Savior. My faith in Jesus Christ heightened and allowed me to fear, revere, and have a relationship with Almighty God. I did not know my heart was being transformed at that time. In fact, it wasn't until later in life that I would fully surrender my life completely to Jesus Christ by confessing, "Jesus is Lord," and believing in my heart that God raised him from the dead according to Romans 10:9. Committing my life to Jesus Christ would become the joy of my life; joy I didn't know I would desperately need.

While I was at church, my grandparents cooked Sunday brunch. Their menu was homemade applesauce, biscuits, fried chicken, and different types of vegetables. I looked forward to those meals after Sunday School. One Sunday after church I overheard my grandmother talking to my father about his alcohol problem. He would always deny it, but the truth was both of my parents drank alcohol while we lived at my grandparent's home, but never in their home. When my mother drank alcohol, she would become verbally and physically abusive towards me. Late one night, as my mother and I were returning home from visiting a family member, my mother's alcoholic rage was on full display. As we were walking down the street toward my grandparents'

house, I could see the dining room window I would fondly look out of to see the neighbors' dogs. I don't know why we stopped just before we reached my grandparents' house, but suddenly my mother grabbed me and began banging my body violently against the chain link fence. The force of each impact was very hard and very painful. I was scared and I began to cry.

My grandfather must have seen us or heard my cry because he ran out of the house and stopped my mother from attacking me. He took me into the house, but refused to let my mother enter. I don't know where she went that night, but when she returned home the next day nothing was said about the incident. . . at least not in front of me. The bruises I had from the attack took a while to heal. My mother never apologized for her terrible treatment towards me. She was drunk when it happened, so she may not have remembered, and I was simply too afraid to mention it.

At ten years old, my life took a drastic turn for the worse. My father got a job and my family moved from my grandparents' house into our own home. I was incredibly sad to leave the love, comfort, and safety of my grandparents' home. When we moved, I no longer attended Sunday School. I reiterate, my mother and father were a dysfunctional couple. There were times when my mother was drinking, she would attack my father for no reason and vice versa. When they violently fought each other, I would run to my bedroom, shut my door, and put my pillow over my head. I tried to block out the yelling, screaming, and cursing, as bodies hit furniture or the floor. Her drunken wrath was not only directed towards my father. When intoxicated, my mother would beat me, pull out my hair, curse at me, and sometimes lock me out of the house for no reason. She spewed out many hurtful and damaging words when she was drunk.

Compared to the bliss of my grandparents' home, life for me was repugnant for a very long time. From the age of ten until I was thirteen years old, my father sexually molested me. At first, it seemed to be a symptom of his alcoholism, but he eventually started doing it when he was sober as well. My mother would be passed out in a drunken stupor or inexplicably not home when my father would come into my room, take me into his bedroom, or at times to the janitor's office where he worked to sexually molest me. He did things to me that are unspeakable. His ugly, coarse, big hands were rough against my skin. He made me touch places on him that I knew that I shouldn't. I will not be explicit in describing every painful and sordid moment in detail of the molestation. The word "molestation" says it all. My parents' depraved hearts had become so full of sin, they acted out their despicable sinful thoughts to my detriment.

Beyond the sexual and physical abuse I suffered at the hands of my parents was the sheer embarrassment associated with being their child. I can't count the number of times our gas and electric was turned off. My father would give my mother money to pay the utility bills, but she would spend the money on something else. I never understood why my father didn't just pay the bill himself. It was so embarrassing to approach our dark house at night. Our neighbors' lights were on, but our house stood dark and cavernous. It was especially embarrassing in the summer months when people were outside late at night sitting on their front porch. Other houses were brightly lit, and our house was dark . . . completely dark. During school months when the gas and electric was turned off, I had to go to school with wrinkled clothes because there was no electricity to press them. Every day I would buy ice from the corner store to fill the ice chests used to keep our food cold until our gas and electric was restored. People

knew what was going on, they knew why my clothes were wrinkled and why I bought ice every day and it completely embarrassed me.

As if to add insult to injury, my mother would wake me up on Saturday mornings to go to the neighbor's house to borrow cigarettes for her. This was something that I hated to do. Saturday mornings were the times I did not have to go to school, and I should have been able to sleep late or watch cartoons, but I had to go beg for cigarettes for my mother. In hindsight, it was a blessing in disguise. Because of what my mother made me do, I never developed a desire to smoke cigarettes.

There were times when my parents' dysfunction surfaced outside the home. On several occasions, my father would send my mother by taxi to her mother's house when she was drinking. She stayed there until she got sober. A few times, he sent me along with her. My maternal grandmother's home was a small two-bedroom house which always seemed to be crowded with family members. If my mother became abusive toward me while we were there, my older cousins would step in to stop her from hitting me. This happened on many occasions and sometimes my mother and other family members would have physical altercations with each other.

Another embarrassing moment of public dysfunction occurred when I was walking to the store in the middle of the day for ice. There, drunk and passed out on the sidewalk, I was shocked to find my father. We were only a block away from our house, yet there he was, on the sidewalk asleep in a seated position with his back leaning against the wall of someone's home. He was so drunk he could not make it a block to his home. As people walked by, they shook their heads at the sight. While I was trying

to wake my father, a neighbor drove by and stopped his car. He picked up my father's heavy body, put him in the back seat of his car, told me to get in, drove us down the street, and parked the car in front of his house. We lived three doors away from him. I opened the back door of the car to try to wake my father, but the neighbor told me, "Leave him there, when he sobers up, he will find his way home." I went to my house and, later that afternoon, my father indeed found his way home. Once again nothing was ever said about the incident, at least not in front of me.

I have a vague memory of my elementary school years. However, I clearly remember my junior and high school years. My outlet was going to school. I enjoyed reading, walking to school with my friends and just being at school. Even though I suffered abuse at home, I was blessed to be able complete my assignments and make good grades. I lived in two worlds at the time. I hid my *soul pain* from my teachers, classmates, family, and friends. Amid times of abuse, I went to school with bruises and even a black eye. In junior high school, if anyone would ask about my bruises, my excuse would be that "*I fell or walked into something.*" I portrayed myself to be very clumsy to cover the abuse. My family was very poor and sometimes I had to make sugar or mayonnaise sandwiches for lunch at school. I did not feel awkward because there were other classmates that had the same type of sandwiches. I was just thankful to have something to eat.

There were bright times between the periods of abuse. I have fond memories of my grandmother's Sunday visits to my home. She would ride the public transit bus with two large shopping bags full of my favorite homemade foods: her biscuits, apple-sauce, and fried chicken. She traveled by bus to come to our house until she was no longer physically able to do so. She was a selfless woman who always thought of others before herself.

Confused, embarrassed, and abused, I lost my innocence early. When innocence is lost so early, it is often replaced with something else – anger, bitterness, identity issues. My innocence was replaced with pain, *soul pain*. I did not know how to articulate it then. I knew the way my parents were treating me was wrong. Many times, I felt dirty and disgusting. The two people who were supposed to love me the most, *my parents*, were the ones abusing and hurting me the most. Who could defend me from the people assigned to protect me? I did not call the police to report the abuse. I was too afraid to run away. I had no place to go and I could not tell anyone. There was no social media to blog about my abuse. I could never tell a living soul what my mother and father were doing to me. I believed if my grandmother found out what I was going through, it would break her heart. All I knew was when my mother cursed at me, physically attacked me, or my father sexually abused me, the pain was excruciating. The pain I experienced was real. It affected me mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but I was not able to name the pain, identify what I was experiencing, or explain why it was necessary for me to endure it. I had no way of understanding the type of pain I was dealing with, but the pain was deep in my soul.

There was something else deep in my soul too . . . a knowledge of God. Thankfully, the trials I went through brought me closer to Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). No matter what trials I went through in life, I called on God and He heard me. Even in times when there was no response or I was too weak to believe He cared, I still believed in Him. Deep in my heart I knew there was nothing hidden from God. I knew He was aware of my plight, so I prayed incessantly for Jesus Christ to deliver me from my afflictions. Even with innocence lost and pain my constant companion, I pursued God.

I lost my innocence in my youth, but that's when my spiritual journey as a Christian began – during the darkest and most devastating times of my life. The troubles in my life were a secret between me and Jesus Christ. I would be lying if I did not admit, at times, *soul pain* was so overwhelming it overshadowed the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. My heart ached and I wondered did Almighty God's heart ache as well. The cruel words, physical beatings, inappropriate touching, and sexual molestation caused invisible scars in my heart. There was nothing I could do to prevent what was happening to me. My reality was a cesspool of sin. What I experienced by the hands of my parents was intolerable. Later in life I would read, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) and know these choices were my parents' alone. They were the guilty party – not me, not God. However, I was left with the scars. I was left with the pain.

Fortunately, I was able to deal with the pain without displeasing God. As I've gotten older and wiser I can identify what it is – *soul pain*. For years, I held my *soul pain* in my secret closet. It was a pain the world could not know about. In this way, Satan tried to use my *soul pain* to destroy me. Thankfully, this is the type of pain only Almighty God can cure. I had to remember that God would fight my battles. The Bible says, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:14).

Soul pain continued to be difficult pain to bear for many years of my life, but because of it I gained a priceless relationship with Jesus Christ. My divine blessing of faith blossomed and grew. As I got older, I realized other people experienced *soul pain* as well. To my surprise God would use my *soul pain* for my good. The Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to

his purpose” (Romans 8:28). For a long time, I suffered *soul pain* in silence. I was a silent sufferer. But I will be no longer because I realize sharing my deliverance has the potential to bring about someone else’s freedom.