

Chapter 1

THE BACKGROUND



PAUL'S STORY

When I was nine years old I accepted God's call to ministry. Six months later, I was sexually molested. I remember feeling dirty, damaged, and different. Surely Jesus could never use a "dirty" little boy like me to further His kingdom.

I tried to talk to my parents about what had happened to me, but in those days, "nice" people didn't talk about such things. I was reprimanded for even using the word *sex*.

Several weeks after my first attempt to discuss my molestation with my parents, I asked my mother a hypothetical question: "If my friend David was molested by an old man, what would happen to him?"

"Why, you would never be allowed to play with David again!" she replied.

"Why?"

"Because David would be ruined, he'd be damaged, and he'd know about things that children shouldn't know about. You just could never play with him again."

When I think back to my life as a child, I remember how I enjoyed my calm Christian home. My dad was a preacher, and although he was a great communicator in the pulpit, the one sad spot in my life at that time was that he didn't really know how to communicate with his family. Every morning as he left the house, he simply shook my hand. I wanted desperately for him to scoop me up in his arms for a big hug.

One of the privileges of being a preacher's kid was getting to meet the missionaries who came to our church. One of my favorites was Louise Chapman. She served in Africa for many years, and she told stories of witch doctors and black mamba

snakes. She shared how God had spared her life in many situations.

One night I asked her what it felt like when God calls you to ministry.

She explained in terms that a nine-year-old boy could understand, and tears filled my eyes. “That’s just what’s been happening to me!” I exclaimed to her. “I’m willing to do anything Jesus wants me to do.”

Mrs. Chapman put her hands on my forehead and prayed for me. I was so excited that God had chosen me to serve Him.

So when I was not allowed to deal with the truth of my molestation when it occurred, and since I was well aware of the “mark” that was on me through my hypothetical question about my friend David, I successfully banished that experience to my subconscious. For the next 31 years I had no memory of it.

I met my future wife, Judy, when my family moved to her hometown. She was 13, and I was 15. By the time we began dating, I had developed a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality—no doubt due to my early sexual awareness that resulted from being molested. I was considered exciting, funny, the town clown—but I had no interpersonal skills because my emotional development had been arrested at a tender age.

As we dated, I began to be abusive toward Judy. Because of my arrested development, I felt like a little boy with an older, good-looking girl who someone might try to steal away from me. Subconsciously I set out to destroy her self-esteem so that she wouldn’t dare leave me for someone else.

We married when I was 19 and Judy was 17—primarily because I needed to possess her. We were planning to elope, but when her mother discovered our plans, she said to me, “If we stop you now, you’ll just try again. Call your father and tell him to come perform the ceremony.”

We got married on Saturday, and by Sunday I was abusing Judy both physically and emotionally. It was the beginning of a miserable existence that lasted for 16 years.

I hated what I was. But I thought that maybe going into

the ministry would help me overcome my bad behavior. Not really a good reason for entering ministry.

Judy and I pastored a small church in Iowa. Even though I was a broken vessel myself, the church grew and people got saved. What a testament to the Word of God!

I had been able to stop my abusive behavior during the first six weeks of our pastorate. But since it was a small church, I had to work out of town to earn a living, and the stress began to take its toll. Eventually I developed a pattern of fighting with Judy when I arrived home. I knocked holes in the walls of the parsonage and battered Judy and our children. Sometimes she locked herself in the bathroom, but I could break right through the doorjamb. She had no safe place.

For three years we lived this kind of existence. I had no control over my life and was powerless to change. I knew I was wrong, and repeatedly I knelt at the altar and cried, *God, why can't I change? Why am I so driven in this relationship? Why am I like this?*

Since no answers were forthcoming, I developed the approach of, *Well, God, You called me to the ministry. If You will help Judy straighten up, I'll be OK.* I actually asked God to hit her in the head with a two-by-four to get her attention and make her obedient and submissive so I wouldn't behave so badly. I blamed her for my problem.

Finally I couldn't take the pressure of living a lie while I was trying to pastor, and I deserted the church and my family. My solution was to turn my back on God and everything I had believed.

Judy and I were separated for 3½ years and then divorced. During the following three years I lived with another woman in a relationship that was even more violent than my marriage to Judy. I hurt that woman so badly that she fled to a shelter and called the police. There, she learned her rights and what the results would be if she reported me to the police. I learned that what I had done could get me charged with attempted murder and that I could end up in prison for 15 to 22 years. She delivered an ultimatum: "Either get help

by checking into a program and having an intake done in the next 12 hours or I'll give the police your name and address."

She gave me the name of the program I was to attend and the name of the man I was to see.

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That got my attention! I went into the mandated program and got private therapy. The program was a thumb in my back that motivated me to change.

Six months later, though, I was still telling the guys in my group that if it weren't for my ex-wife, if it weren't for my girlfriend, if it weren't for my parents, if it weren't for this, or if it weren't for that, things would be different. I was still in denial.

I remember so clearly when one of the other group members looked at me and said, "When are you gonna learn that it's not about them—it's about you?" This guy hadn't even accepted his own responsibilities yet, but he could see through me. That made me so angry that I decided I would not go back to group anymore—even if I had to face attempted murder charges.

Three nights later, though, in desperation I threw myself on the floor and pounded it. For two hours I screamed at God. *David was a man after Your own heart, yet he broke every commandment! You said You aren't a respecter of persons. I've pleaded with You! Why don't You hear me?*

I listed for God all the great men of the Bible and their sins. Then I said, *In James You said that if I ask for wisdom, You'll give it to me abundantly.*

After my rage I fell into self-pity. I cried until there were no more tears and my throat hurt. I had screamed at God for so long that I couldn't even whisper—my voice was gone. But in my heart, I heard, *The Father has heard your plea for wisdom, Paul. But you don't have a teachable spirit.*

I wondered, *But why? Why can I not stand authority? Why am I not teachable?*

Again, I felt a response. *If you will become teachable, the Father will give you a program that will restore your family. When it's done, He wants you to take it to a nation and eventually to a world.*

God, I don't even know how to be teachable. Will You show me?

God taught me that I needed to come to Him as a child. Then I needed to grow up. And I came to realize that I alone was responsible for my abusive behavior. I returned to the group and completed the program.

Some months later I called Judy. "Judy, there are some things happening in my life."

Initially she wanted nothing to do with me. But I was finally able to persuade her to meet with me, and we talked for hours. For the first time, we became friends. We dated for 11 months. God worked in our hearts and brought me to a new maturity as I began to grow up. He gave us a new love for each other—unlike our first relationship.

After seven years of separation and divorce, Judy and I remarried. That was in 1984, and since then there has not been a single incident of physical or emotional abuse.

Our kids came home for Christmas that first year and so enjoyed their time with us that our 23-year-old daughter said, "Dad, can I come home to live again?" I agreed.

After living at home a few months, she told her 22-year-old sister, "If Dad will let you, come home. This is a real trip!" Two hours later, on that recommendation, our younger daughter asked if she could come home too. Our son, Jeff, came home when he was 20, and we had the privilege of re-parenting our three adult children. They are all married now, of course, and Judy and I are grandparents.

Judy and I certainly had our share of difficulties, but out of those difficulties has come the program "Learning to Live, Learning to Love—Life Skills."

JUDY'S STORY

The first time I laid eyes on Paul Hegstrom was my first

year at teen camp. During a class on dating and marriage, the leader asked us to think about the traits we would like in our spouses. When we were asked to share our thoughts, the only one to speak out was Paul. He made some crass comment, and the boys laughed. We girls thought he was a jerk. Two months later, Paul moved to my hometown in Iowa and started attending my church.

Before long, Paul and I were an item in youth group. Our dating relationship was up and down, and I was constantly on edge. Nevertheless, when Paul insisted we get married while I was still a senior in high school, I agreed. My parents were against it, but they finally gave us their blessing, and we had a simple ceremony with just family members in attendance.

The day after our wedding was a Sunday—our first full day as man and wife. My brother was with us, and somehow he and Paul ended up in an argument. I tried to intervene, but Paul yelled, “This is none of your business!” He shoved me out of the room, and I fell. Suddenly I felt afraid of the person I had just married. Of course, he apologized. But he also added that it was really my own fault for interfering. And thus I began to accept blame for the abuse.

A few days later Paul criticized my intelligence.

“Too bad we all can’t be as smart as you are,” I retaliated.

Paul backhanded me in the face, breaking my glasses. As the blood poured, my brother simply watched. Later Paul offered to take me to the hospital, but I was afraid of him and asked him just to take me to my parents’ house.

Paul dropped me off in the driveway so that he wouldn’t have to face my dad. I begged Dad not to hurt Paul—and thus I began to lay the foundation for excusing Paul’s behavior.

Paul and I moved four times in the first few months of our marriage—twice to other towns. I worked at hamburger stands, and that was the main reason I ever had anything to eat. Finally, one day I called my dad to tell him I was hungry and wanted to come home. I didn’t really *want* to go home—I just wanted Paul to get a job and take care of me.

Not long after that I found out that I was pregnant, and

Paul and I moved to California. We would move continuously during our first years together. After our second daughter was born I remember asking Paul if we would ever settle down and have a home of our own. He angrily informed me that we would have to sacrifice so he could return to college.

He did pursue a degree in theology in Oklahoma around that time, but I became pregnant again, and he dropped out of school. He tried to be a family man, but his old ways returned. He spent money frivolously and didn't pay our utility bills or buy food with what little money we did have. Our neighbors ran an extension cord from their garage into our home so that I could care for our children after dark. Paul was not the slightest bit embarrassed that others were providing for his family; he was just glad he didn't have to be responsible for us.

Paul was called to a church in a small community, and I hoped our lives would change. As our children grew up, I tried to protect them from his behavior, but, of course, they were aware of what was going on.

Instead of blaming Paul for his bad behavior, I blamed myself and tried to look perfect and perform perfectly. But nothing I did made him happy. The physical abuse continued to escalate. Once, while our children cried outside our locked bedroom door, Paul hit me so hard he knocked the wind out of me. The kids were screaming, asking if I was all right. I finally was able to tell them that I was fine, but they knew better. My children were not stupid—they were just helpless.

Eventually it became clear that Paul was seeing other women. He sometimes dressed up and left the house on holidays and Sundays to go see "clients." I found pornography, and he said it belonged to a friend who had hidden it in our house.

My children and I barely survived. Sometimes Paul would be gone for long periods of time, and we were desperate for food. Social Services would not provide food stamps because

It was humiliating that Paul was making good money but refused to take care of his family.

Paul was earning money. A lady from our church was kind enough to bring us groceries. It was so humiliating that Paul was supposedly making good money but wouldn't take care of his family.

Paul continued to bounce in and out of our lives, but I was happiest when it was just me and the kids. Even when he lived away from us, though, he continued to control our lives. At one point our telephone was turned off because he hadn't paid the bill, but he still expected to talk to me every day and demanded that I go to a telephone two blocks away and wait for him to call.

We finally moved back together as a family, and as I was unpacking boxes, I opened one that I thought contained household items. I found in it a folded paper, and when I unfolded it, I read, "Hegstrom vs. Hegstrom." Unable to comprehend what I held in my hand, I called the attorney listed on the letterhead. He told me, "I'm sorry, Ma'am, but you're divorced."

The attorney explained that Paul had said he didn't know where I lived or how to contact me, so he had been awarded an uncontested divorce from me.

The children and I found a new apartment of our own and began to enjoy newfound freedom. I grappled spiritually with why God hadn't changed Paul and why I had suffered so in my relationship with Paul. Then one night the Lord spoke to me: *Don't pray for Paul to return. Pray for his soul.*

After weeks of praying for Paul and giving him to God, I realized I no longer had feelings for him. I was able to continue with my life alone. I began to see myself as a valuable person, capable of using my brain and acceptable to myself and others. The years passed smoothly.

When our younger daughter was ready to leave for college, I was afraid my car wouldn't make the 500-mile trip. I swallowed my pride and asked Paul if he would let me borrow his car to take her. He told me he and his girlfriend had broken up for good, although I didn't believe him and didn't really care. He said he didn't want me to drive that far alone and that he

would take Heidi to school. I knew she wouldn't feel comfortable alone with him, so I said I would go along too.

On the drive home from taking her to college, Paul and I talked like normal human beings. There were no put-downs, no blaming. I wondered what in the world had happened to him. He told me he had been in therapy and that his attitudes were changing and that he was beginning to accept responsibility for his past behavior.

He started inviting me to meet him for coffee occasionally. We weren't dating—just talking. I left our talks feeling like a normal person. I could discuss things with him without him becoming angry. It didn't seem to affect him adversely when I didn't share his opinions on everything.

Eventually we were seeing each other regularly, but I was still cautious. One day he asked me if I had ever thought about getting back together. I told him I had thought about how different things might have been if he had been like this when we were married. I told him I could tell he had been working on himself and that I really liked the new guy. He seemed to be proud when I said that—but humble at the same time.

I asked God for direction. Soon I began having feelings of love for Paul that I had never felt during our marriage. Paul told me that he was having the same feelings, and that even though he was afraid, God had shown him that our family would be restored.

The weeks following our second wedding were wonderful. He was truly a changed man. The years of our second marriage have been happy ones. Although I've had to face some unresolved feelings and insecurities left over from our first marriage, I now live a happy, abuse-free existence with my husband.

Paul and I have learned so much, and it is our desire to share what the Lord has taught us on our journey. God provides help for us through the Bible and through His people. If you're an angry man, or a woman who loves an angry man, it is our prayer that you will benefit from our story.