

THIS BOOK IS FOR THE SILENT SUFFERERS WITHIN OUR CHURCHES (AND WITHOUT)

It is for the hundreds around the world who emailed me their own stories of painful abuse and trauma. It is for those who have hidden their guilty secrets, too scared to speak out. It is for those whose lives have spiralled into self-destructive chaos as they have been unable to process their emotions in adulthood. It is for the scared children cowering under tables and in cupboards as violence and terror surround them. It is for the untold victims struggling to find meaning, hope, and peace out of the wreckage of their lives. It is for the Christian wondering if God truly does love them. It is for the skeptic and the unbeliever who wonders if God exists and, if He does, why He would allow such things to happen. It's for the perpetrators of such vile acts who wonder if their dark deeds will ever be discovered. It's for the ones who've turned their backs on their evil sins and found the cure of forgiveness and peace in Jesus. And it's for the ones who are just not there yet; who wonder if they can ever forgive. Or if they can ever love. If they can ever rebuild their lives. This is a book for all of us.

Abused and abusers. The innocents and the monsters.

HOWEVER, THIS BOOK WON'T ANSWER ALL YOUR QUESTIONS

What book could ever do that? It won't eradicate your pain. It won't take away the nightmares. But, I hope that it will light a pathway to peace with God and release for your soul. I pray that it will open a window on the difficult path travelled by a fellow sufferer in the hope that you too, even though you may not believe it now, may find love, peace and even a measure of healing in the arms of Jesus Christ.

It's been said that we're all 'soaked with the sense of exile' and long for restored Eden. The hope for the abused and the abuser alike is in Jesus Christ who is indeed making all things new (Rev. 21:5). Borne of unimaginable pain, this book will surely be a gospel balm to many.

CHRIS LARSON

President & CEO, Ligonier Ministries

I really did not enjoy this book... but I am thankful for it. And I am convinced that it is vital reading for us. Mez points to the power of a loving, suffering Lord to save and heal even from the most harrowing abuse. Whether you've suffered abuse or grew up safe and loved, read it. It is an invaluable resource as we serve the abused and suffering in our midst with the love of Jesus. Simultaneously, gruelling and glorious.

STEVE TIMMIS

Director of Acts29

Raw. Real. Redemptive. The story of Mez McConnell's childhood abuse, interestingly, neither centres on himself or his tormentors, but rather on God's good and sovereign providence, and a suffering Saviour who gave himself for Mez, and all who trust in him. It could have been just crushing, but instead it is filled with hope. Mez could have been trapped in a vortex of bitterness and recrimination, but was set free by his Redeemer to a life of forgiveness and fullness. If you have experienced abuse that has led you away from Jesus, the church and the Gospel, Mez will show you the way back home. I'm deeply thankful for Mez, a trophy of Grace and a faithful shepherd.

LIGON DUNCAN

Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary

Painfully raw and profoundly helpful, this is a book that speaks into the depths of our darkness and offers extraordinary hope for both the abused and the abusers. If you feel ashamed, hopeless and bitter - or you know someone who does - you must read this.

MIKE REEVES

President & Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology, Wales

With vivid personal stories, well-stated research, and a storehouse of scripture, Mez takes the grievous and gut-wrenching reality of abuse and holds it up to the light of grace. While I wish this book didn't have to exist, I'm thankful it does. It's a powerful and redemptive resource.

EMILY JENSEN

Cofounder of Risen Motherhood,

Co-author of *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

If the 'problem of evil' exists in your mind as an abstract theoretical issue, this book will help you come face to face with it in a personal way. These stories will haunt you. If you have endured childhood abuse, Mez's terror-filled memories may uncover a pain deep within your own soul. Don't let that be a deterrent, take heart. Rather than leave you in the cold darkness of his experiences or your own memories, Mez points you to the warming light of the world. In this book, you will be drawn to the present comfort and promised hope of Jesus Christ. And, even if every question is not answered, you will finish this book knowing these things for sure: You are not alone, God loves you intimately, and Jesus will make all things new. The two-fold testimony of Mez's vulnerability and Christ's sufficiency will certainly aid in bringing healing to the broken.

MATTHEW Z. CAPPS

Senior Pastor, Fairview Baptist Church, Apex, North Carolina

Mez McConnell's abusive childhood left him mostly dead, but God's grace revived him. This book tells that sensational story and offers hope, because what happened to Mez can happen to others. *The Creaking on the Stairs* is especially important because the hero of the book is not Mez or some nice person or the social gospel: It's *doctrine*, including God's sovereignty and Christ's atonement. Church leaders with academic backgrounds can learn from Mez not to dumb down theology when preaching to poor congregations. Those who have hit bottom need not soothing words but the hard Gospel truths of sin and deliverance.

MARVIN OLASKY

Editor in chief, *World*

By writing, *The Creaking On The Stairs* Mez McConnell has provided a gift to the Church. The beauty of the book is that Mez tells the story of his own suffering and folds it into the bigger story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is heartbreaking, empathetic, accessible, and pastorally wise. Moreover, it presents the reader with the sovereign, holy and merciful God of the Bible who alone can bring lasting light and hope into darkness and despair. Anyone can read this. Everyone should.

GAVIN PEACOCK

Associate Pastor, Calvary Grace Church of Calgary;
Director of International Outreach for CBMW;
co- author of *The Grand Design: Male And Female He Made Them*

Mez writes with courage and compassion. The courage to tell his painful story. And compassion to point us to the place of healing. Read the book and expect to be shocked by depravity and deliverance.

ERIK RAYMOND

Pastor, Emmaus Bible Church, Omaha, Nebraska
Author of *Chasing Contentment, Gospel Shaped Outreach, and Is Hell for Real?*

Few things are more horrific than for a child to be tortured by someone who was supposed to love them. Scars of abuse go deeper than burn marks or lashes can leave. Somehow abuse scars the soul and tempts the heart to never risk letting people get close. Yet, in *The Creaking on the Stairs*, Mez bravely invites you into his painful past and gives hope through the grace of Jesus who entered into our pain-riddled world. Whether you are a believer in God or not, whether you have suffered abuse or not, I cannot more highly commend this work to you.

J. GARRETT KELL

Pastor, Del Ray Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia

Can victims of abuse find wholeness through the gospel of Christ? Are faith and forgiveness sufficient remedies for the soul-damage abusers inflict? Scripture says ‘yes’, emphatically. But as countless believers know, the wounds of abuse aren’t always healed instantly or automatically. In fact, those hurts are used by God in the testing of our faith that produces steadfastness (James 1:3). The injuries of our past thus become the instruments of our sanctification.

Mez McConnell explores this truth in a deeply personal, gut-wrenchingly candid account of his own struggle with bitter emotions and smouldering resentment. Writing with unvarnished honesty, he describes the conflict between righteous anger and forgiveness—and he points the way to liberty and triumph in the grace of God. If you’re seeking help for yourself or for others in the aftermath of abuse, this book is a wonderful resource. And no matter who you are or where you have come from, Mez will motivate you to love Christ and hate sin more than ever.

PHIL JOHNSON

Executive Director of *Grace to You*
Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California

Beaten with fists and broomsticks. Imprisoned, starved, and neglected. Physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. From a life of drugs, violence, and hatred to one of pastoring, church planting, and advocacy. With honesty and grace, Mez McConnell weaves together the scope of his abuse and recovery with the scope of Jesus' person and work. In short, accessible chapters he outlines the hope of the Gospel available to both survivors and abusers. Highly recommended.

ERIC SCHUMACHER

Shepherd, Songwriter, Storyteller at emschumacher.com.
Co-author with Elyse Fitzpatrick of *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women* (forthcoming)

Mez McConnell is bold and brash, he is a powerful preacher and he leads an exciting work among the under-served peoples in the hard places of our cities and communities. He is theologically astute, and one would be well advised not to underestimate his wisdom. He is also brutally honest – honest about his own past and honest about his present nightmares. That he has become the man he is today is a tribute to the grace of God at work in him. This book not only tells his story, it gives us clear strategies for identifying abuse when it happens and what steps to take to intervene. All of us will learn from the deep life lessons found here. I am profoundly grateful to know him and for his courage to speak out. To God be the glory.

LIAM GOLIGHER

Author, Bible teacher, and conference speaker
Senior Minister of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania

Both within the church and without, more and more people are talking about their experiences with childhood abuse. Whether we are the ones who have suffered abuse or whether we are attempting to walk alongside friends or family members, *The Creaking On The Stairs* will prove a helpful resource. I finished it with the sober but thankful realisation that in its pages Mez has given us something incredibly valuable: truth and hope. He has given us truth that can be applied to even the most broken situations, and hope for that day when there will be no more weeping and no more tears. For that reason and many more, I can't recommend this book enough.

AILEEN CHALLIES

Pastor's Wife

Reading about the reality of child abuse in the life of someone you know is gut wrenching. Realising the prevalence of abuse in our world is overwhelmingly distressing. Mez's personal account of his life is a hard read, but as the grace and mercy of God is put on display in his life, it proves also to be a hopeful read. On the bleak and dark canvas of abuse, the gospel can shine. It shines brightly on these pages as Mez wonderfully notes hope for the abused and the abuser, as well as for ministers seeking to shepherd both.

ANTHONY MATHENIA

Pastor, Christchurch, Radford, Virginia

This book is heart-wrenching but necessary. It applies the gospel in the worst of contexts and demonstrates its power to save and restore. It is written for those who are hurting and for those who long to minister to them. These pages are void of whitewash, trite answers and cliché, but full of the gospel!

PAUL WASHER

President, Heart Cry Ministry, Radford, Virginia

Mez McConnell has one of the most powerful testimonies I've ever heard. And he's never gotten over the Author's grace. In this searching and timely memoir, my friend recounts the horror of being abused as a child, the painful repercussions ever since, and the unexpected hope he's found. *The Creaking On The Stairs* is a relentlessly evangelistic book. If you struggle to imagine a good God due to past abuse, Mez wants you to know you are not alone. You are not forgotten. You are deeply loved. He can testify to that firsthand.

MATT SMETHURST

Managing editor of The Gospel Coalition
and author of *Before You Open Your Bible: Nine Heart Postures for
Approaching God's Word*

The Creaking On The Stairs will reach out and grasp your soul. Your heart will be provoked in a multiplicity of directions and draw out of you a depth of emotions. For those who have been acquainted with abuse, a new song of freedom and healing will resonate as you hear the message of Jesus' work on the cross. Mez has carefully crafted a theologically rich, pastorally gentle, Christ-exalting tool. This is much needed in Christ's global church. Get it, read it, teach it, and heed it.

DOUG LOGAN

Director of the Diversity Initiative, Acts 29
Co-director of Church in Hard Places

The book you hold in your hands is unlike anything I have ever read. Mez McConnell shares his story of the horrific child abuse he endured with a raw and honest transparency that made me weep through most of the book. But he doesn't stop there. He weaves a rich, biblical theology and gospel clarity throughout it in such a moving manner that brings the truth of God's steadfast

love for sinners unmistakably alive. Never have I experienced a book that is for the abused and abuser; the victimised and the tormentor. And the power of the gospel being the answer for all. Stunningly accessible and beautifully written, this book is sure to be a healing balm to the soul of many abuse survivors and a defining book for a generation.

BRIAN CROFT

Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church,
Founder, Practical Shepherding,
Senior Fellow, Revitalization Center, Southern Baptist Theological
Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Gripping from the very first page, Mez McConnell's *The Creaking On The Stairs* is a painfully raw, sweetly pastoral, and deeply theological word to those who have suffered abuse. Mez's own heart-breaking story pulses through these pages, but even that pales in comparison to the good news that Jesus - though He himself suffered abuse, rejection, and shame - now offers love and compassion to broken, sinful people. This is a book that will speak to the hearts of many, and that will also open the hearts of many to understand the ravages of abuse and the healing power of the Saviour. You don't just read this book; you experience it.

GREG GILBERT

Senior Pastor, Third Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

THE
CREAKING
ON THE
STAIRS

FINDING FAITH IN GOD
THROUGH CHILDHOOD ABUSE

MEZ MCCONNELL

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS

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This book is dedicated to Jesus Christ, my Lord & Saviour.

My wife, Miriam, who has shared my life for the past 25 years.

My daughters, Keziah & Lydia, because they wanted to see their names in this book. Well, here they are!

My fellow elders & church members, for allowing me the time off to write this thing.

Matthew Spandler Davison, my Co-Director of 20schemes, international travel companion, champion of Acts 29 Church In Hard Places, fellow abuse sufferer & friend.

A special mention to Katie Johnson, my favourite-ever person, who worked long and hard on the design and edits with me.

FOREWORD

This is the most disturbing book that I have ever read, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

This book will offend and challenge and upset you in all the right ways.

After reading this book, you will shudder at the thought of using the gospel as a pep talk or a clean-up job. And you will cover your mouth with your hand and repent of every time you have done this.

This book is unusual and vital and risky.

It will expose the polite fakery of our cleaned-up evangelicalism.

But like all good books, this book isn't about you or me.

It is about the resurrected Jesus Christ and the unimaginable suffering of millions of abused children who cry out to a God that they have never met, only to be left in deafening silence.

This book unmask the questions we rarely dare to whisper: If God is so loving, why does He allow innocent children to suffer horrific abuse by the hands of their parents? If God is so sovereign, why does He allow parents to neglect and abandon their children? If God loves you and has a perfect plan for your

life, then why do teenagers kill one another? If God won't give you more than you can handle, then why do people kill themselves?

Mez's answer to these questions did not come easily. He bears the marks on his body and mind. He knows the secret shame. The adults who silently observed his hell and torment and cast their gaze away are frozen in a mirror of memories. He still hears the cries of his sister. And the rage and anger from never having the chance to defend himself or his sister from his tormentor consumed him for decades. Mez tried to stop the dam of these monstrous memories with all of the things he could control: drugs and knives and grit and women.

And then Jesus, in the form of a prison sentence, broke into his world. The resurrected Christ who knows no barriers and respects no persons came to Mez in prison, working through ordinary Christians. They compelled Mez to do one simple and dangerous thing: 'Consider him, who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary and faint-hearted' (**Hebrews 12:3**). But they did not come at once. And they did not come only with words. They came often and with a house key and an invitation to live with them upon his release.

Consider Jesus. Mez's first response was to defend himself against such hard-hearted counsel. His years in foster care assembled social worker after social worker who told him that his problems were his parents, his abusive childhood, the starvation and the violation and the diabolic infamy of the words of the stepmother whose voice only got louder in his mind after she left. These well-intended social workers preached the gospel of social justice: People are born good, but their environment and the adults around them make them bad. Mez—like all of us—

had to choose. We simply can't believe that our environment is both problem and solution and 'consider Jesus' at the same time.

The story of the resurrected Christ is not for the faint of heart. And this book's author, resurrected by Christ, bears scars from a lifetime of childhood abuse. But what happens to those scars when they are covered by the blood of Christ? That answer is the jewel of this book.

This is a book written for multiple audiences. One, the most precious one, are the adult survivors of childhood abuse. The men and women and children whose lives are shipwrecked and who are living in a shell of pain and unanswered questions. Mez talks directly to abuse survivors on the pages that you hold in your hand. He articulates the questions that haunt and hurt and slowly teases out the grace of listening and the gospel that does not move quickly to answers. Gospel grace holds suffering and sufferers dear, and the answers that come from grace are neither easy nor safe nor quick. There is so much potential healing on the pages of this book. Mez has blazed a trail of tears for others to follow to the foot of the Cross.

The other audience Mez graciously includes on these pages are believers who want to help but who know that easy answers end up as hollow daggers in someone's heart. As we read this pastoral tome, we watch Mez build a bridge from the abuse survivor, who hurts all over, to Jesus, the only One who understands the depth of this hurt. The bridge that Mez builds does not reduce its theology to anemic blather about worldview or apologetic bombs. Christian, your worldview and your apologetics will not help a soul without the compassion and the victory of the resurrected Christ. In putting the hand of the sufferer into the hand of the Savior, Mez reveals how a reformed

understanding of sin and grace allows the survivor of abuse to ask and answer the hardest of all questions: *why?*

Indeed.

This is the most disturbing book that I have ever read.
And I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Rosaria Butterfield

Durham, North Carolina, 2019

Author of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (2012),
Openness Unhindered (2015), and *The Gospel Comes with a House
Key* (2018).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In 1987, my father married a wonderful woman, Maureen, who was nothing but loving and kind to me (and my sister). They have remained married for the past 32 years and have been extremely happy together. In no way do the events described in this book reflect on her. Also, my father never raised a hand against me in my life and is, for the most part, completely unaware of many of the events I describe in the pages of this book. The abuse I talk about within this book happened to me between the ages of two and thirteen, long before my father met and married Maureen.

The only person who could truly understand what happened during those early years would be my sister, Tracy, although we were sometimes separated. Indeed, I am sure she has her own memories of events and her own experiences could fill a book all on its own.

We have never really talked about what happened to us as children, but I can tell you that she was a great big sister and stood up for me, often at a painful cost to herself.

I am also extremely proud of the life she has gone on to make for herself, despite the trauma of our early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

A couple of years ago, I was lying in bed when a message popped up on social media. A name flashed across the screen. The name of the woman who had been my tormentor for most of my early childhood.

She had died.

I could scarcely believe it. All the old feelings, dormant for nearly three decades, rose to the surface. Anger, guilt and shame. They all came calling that night. And so I did what I always do when trying to process my emotions.

I wrote.

I wrote a blog in the early hours of the morning and posted it, hoping that it would be helpful to some. Forty-eight hours and half a million hits later, I realised that I was not alone in my secret shame. There was a world of childhood pain and suffering out there in the church.

And if this is true for God's people, then I can only imagine the extent of the torment and suffering for millions outside of the church of Jesus Christ.

Here's what I wrote that night...

DING DONG THE WICKED WITCH IS DEAD!

In a recent obituary, some of the children of a newly deceased mother wrote this startling piece for their local press. This is not my stepmother's obituary, but it definitely could be.

Marianne Theresa Johnson-Reddick born Jan 4, 1935 and died alone on Sept. 30, 2013. She is survived by 6 of her 8 children whom she spent her lifetime torturing in every way possible. While she neglected and abused her small children, she refused to allow anyone else to care or show compassion towards them. When they became adults, she stalked and tortured anyone they dared to love. Everyone she met, adult or child, was tortured by her cruelty and exposure to violence, criminal activity, vulgarity, and hatred of the gentle or kind human spirit.

On behalf of her children whom she so abrasively exposed to her evil and violent life, we celebrate her passing from this earth and hope she lives in the afterlife reliving each gesture of violence, cruelty and shame that she delivered on her children. Her surviving children will now live the rest of their lives with the peace of knowing their nightmare finally has some form of closure.¹

¹ A report on the obituary can be found here: <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/death-penalty/>

I just heard several hours ago that my stepmother of almost 13 years is dead. Of what and how I do not know. **She** was young. I know that. So painful is it even to think of her name I refer to her as '**she**' throughout my autobiography.²

It's 1:30am and I can't sleep. I don't know what to think or to feel.

The words above are pretty much what I would like to express to the world. I would like to go to her funeral, stand and let everybody know what this person was truly like and how much damage **she** did while alive. I want her to get her just desserts even though I know, thanks to Christ, I will never get my own.

I am a pastor. I should know better. I do know better.

I know, deep in my soul, that Jesus experienced every form of suffering when He was in the world. *'He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'* (**Isaiah 53:3**). Jesus was betrayed and tortured. He is well acquainted with my grief, and I know that the Bible teaches that He will never leave me (**John 14:18**). I know, therefore, that perceived wisdom (my own included) demands that I forgive this woman who caused me so much pain as a child. I know it's the Christian thing to do. I know, according to what the Bible teaches, that *he who has been forgiven much ought to forgive much in return*.

I know. I really do.

And yet...

2 McConnell, M *Is There Anybody Out There? A Journey From Despair To Hope* (Ross-Shire: CFP, 2011).

...I want to make public my frustration at crimes **she** never paid for. I want to scream it out loud for all to hear.

And yet...

...I want to be magnanimous in my forgiveness to her as Christ has been to me in forgiving my sin.

I just feel so conflicted.

I thought I might dance a little jig or at least feel a sense of release and elation at news I'd dreamed about and ached for as a child. This was a woman who drove me to such despair that I attempted to set her on fire in her (drunken) sleep when I was no more than 10 years old.

But there is no jig. There is no elation. There is no sense of release.

There is just a heaviness of heart and the nagging itch of my suffering and her evil never admitted in this life. The problem is that I want to feel joy at her passing. I want to rejoice in the belief that **she** will face the judge of all the earth for her crimes against me. I want to revel in the thought that **she** is having her own spiritual Nuremburg moment before Almighty God right now. That Father Time has caught up with her, and her sins are about to be found out and brought into that terrible, perfect light. That the angels in glory will see just what a monster **she** truly was.

But I just don't feel the joy that I want to. Instead, I feel sad. Sad for a woman who wasted her life in bitter anger and expressed it through the mental and physical torture of children. Sad for the trail of devastation **she** left behind. Sad for the family members **she** hurt and betrayed. Sad that, despite these things, people will mourn her passing. There will be tears at her funeral.

There will be stories of her good side or of things well done and said. Things I never experienced. Things I can scarcely believe are true about her.

I am conflicted even further when I think about my own family today, almost three decades after **she** beat me for the last time. My wife of 20 years lies next to me soundly sleeping. My teenage girls are in their rooms. Because of the scars of my childhood, they have never known violence in our home. Because of the horrors of my pain, they have never known cigarette burns on pale, skinny arms. Because of the nightmare of systematic abuse I faced, they have never spent endless lonely nights in locked cupboards without food and clothing. Because of my shame, they have never known the horrors of being stripped and mocked in front of drunken strangers. Because of my humiliations, they have never known hunger so deep they've been forced to eat their own faeces. Because of the extreme violence of my upbringing, they've never been beaten with poles and sticks. Because of the trauma of my childhood, they've never been knocked unconscious for failing to wash a dish properly.

Ironically, because of **'her'**, my own children have never known the horrors of deeply psychological and traumatic abuse.

Of course, there is another reason they have never known and experienced these things. They've never known these things because I know Jesus. I know the bittersweet truth of Genesis in my own life. *'As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today'* (**Genesis 50:20 ESV**).

I am conflicted because I realise that my own family lie peaceably unmolested because of God's goodness in my life and, perversely, her evil in it too. God has used her evil for good. The thought that my pain has been used for good comforts me as I

grapple with why these things were permitted to happen to me. The thought that **she** should get any credit is abhorrent.

Even now, at 2:30am as I trawl through online press cuttings and see familiar faces all over the court's pages and the obituaries, I feel a deep gratitude for Jesus. Old family and friends imprisoned and/or dead at criminally young ages. And I find her photo. **She** looks like an old woman even though **she** was not. A lifetime of self-abuse has ravaged her features.

That could have been me. That was my own road to self-destruction until Jesus intervened. I live today only because Jesus found me and turned my life around. He gave me hope. He gave me a spiritual family. Brothers and sisters who have loved and cared for me. He used godly people to teach me personal responsibility for my own sins. He used godly people to teach me how to be a real man, a faithful husband, a loving father and an (average) pastor.

He is teaching me still.

Yet, still I feel conflicted. I am angry with myself. I feel like my *to-ing and fro-ing* over forgiveness and the rationalisation of my suffering is somehow betraying my childhood self. A spiritual battle rages on. The old man berates the new while the latter fights for peace. The old man wants to take me on a trip down (painful) memory lane, trawling up old wounds and savage rage long since soothed with the balm of the gospel. Of course, he's popped by from time to time in my Christian life, but it seems like he's pulled an armchair up tonight and he's here for an extended visit.

The new man is winning.

Just.

Two decades of living for Jesus have evened the odds against two decades of self-loathing, shame, anger and destruction. It seems that even the sovereign control over her death means that I am able to be conflicted without complete self-implosion. The same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is helping me to draw on my decades of biblical knowledge and personal experience with which to vanquish the poisonous darts of the devil.

It's 4am and I am suddenly reminded that I am not the person I was 30 years ago. Maybe **she** did change at the end? An awful thought crosses my mind. What if **she**, like me, found the true forgiveness and peace of Jesus Christ? No. There was no evidence to suggest it. How would I know? I haven't seen her for 30 years. No! Surely not? God wouldn't do that to me? He's on my side, right? He wouldn't let me down by saving my chief tormentor, would He?

Imagine that.

That would be the ultimate cheat, wouldn't it? Pardoned, at the death, for her heinous crimes against me and who knows how many others? I don't like that thought.

I realise that, if it were true, then I'd be like the angry brother in the Parable of the Prodigal.

I want God to overlook my sins. I like it when He does that. But hers? That's a stretch. I tell myself I'm a better person than **she** was. Is that true? Maybe now. But any good in me belongs to the Holy Spirit. I hurt people. I abused people. I stole. I lied. I murdered in my heart. I too have done awful things.

I think about **Romans 12:17-21**:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I don't like that very much. I want to be her judge and jury.

Do I trust God to be hard enough on her? Will He let her off on a technicality? Will He forgive her? Maybe He doesn't know the full story, and I need to fill him in on the details.

Pathetic, I know.

Sinful.

Arrogant.

I want to comfort myself by comparing my innocent suffering to his. Jesus understands me because we have suffered together. But, tragic though it is, it doesn't really compare to His cosmic distress. My pain, though real, is not even a pinprick on the little finger of His nail-pierced hand. My suffering is infinitesimal in light of the cross of Calvary. He died for awful human beings like my stepmother.

Like me.

I roll over and try to sleep, chewing on that awful truth.

She doesn't need my forgiveness any more than I need her repentance. We both need the former from Him, and He requires the latter from us.

Thankfully, in Jesus He grants both to all who come.

It doesn't tie it all up in a neat little bow, but at least sleep comes knowing that, ultimately, the judge of all the earth will do right and act justly.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CHILDHOOD ABUSE'?

We can't begin to get to grips with a topic like this unless we work on a few definitions. Here's what I know for certain as I write this book. *I am not going to be able to cover every single type of abuse.* Let me make that clear from the start. It just isn't possible, let alone feasible. So, let me set some parameters and, hopefully, we can work forward from there.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines **child abuse** and **child maltreatment** as *'all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.'*¹

J. D. Vance, in his memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy*², refers to the *Adverse Childhood Experiences*³ test as a barometer for gauging the

1 'Child abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers' (PDF). World Health Organisation. Chapter 3.

2 *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (NY: HarperCollins, 2016)

3 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/>