

“There are healing words in these pages, words that will empower you and move you through pain to discover a new place of strength and self-confidence. For thirty years I have counseled men, and I know that recovery comes when issues are faced with wise tools. This book by Cecil Murphey will be part of that toolbox.”

—GREGORY L. JANTZ, founder of The Center: A Place of Hope,  
and author of *Healing the Scars of Childhood Abuse*

“Cecil Murphey and the other men whose testimonies fill this book have looked into the secret places of their lives and have pulled out a powerful resource for healing wounds men seldom talk about. Unfortunately, the accounts related in this book are more common than most would want to admit, yet hiding the hurts will not heal the hurts or make the repercussions of unspoken pain go away. With each meditation, this book peels back the layers and speaks with brutal honesty about the lasting effects of sexual abuse on boys or young men. . . . Ultimately, however, this book is not merely about reliving the pain but invites the reader to heal, move forward, and even forgive and find freedom from the bondage that comes from such abuse. . . . Men need to know they are not alone, and there is a way out of the long dark night.”

—MARK E. HARDGROVE, dean of Beulah Heights University,  
and senior pastor of Conyers Church of God

“During this unique historical moment of the #metoo movement, I can’t imagine a timelier book. Having been abused myself during childhood, this book helped me heal in a more profound way. This book does more than just identify with those who have been abused: it offers hope and healing. Cecil and his friends are brave to use their lives to bring healing to others. ‘Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms’ (1 Peter 4:10). This is deeply needed today not only in America but around the world.”

—MARK FINCANNON, motion picture casting director

“*More Than Surviving* calls men to step into a healing community and embrace change. Through these remarkable meditations, Cecil reveals his own candid account, as well as those of five other men abused as children. Each of these brave survivors have brought their childhood secrets to light,

pressed through incredible pain, uncovered lies, and learned to value themselves as individuals loved by God. The prayers at the end of each meditation may well transform your life and relationships.”

—KAREN CICCARONE, cofounder of the Oasis Healing Ministry  
for survivors of sexual abuse and assault

“Cecil Murphey’s *More Than Surviving* talks honestly about the emotions and struggles of men who battle with the aftermath of childhood abuse. With transparency and grace, Cec and the other contributing authors write about the identity confusion, grief, guilt, betrayal, loss, stolen opportunities, and shattered trust experienced by countless men. *More Than Surviving* is a voice for men who struggle to speak their pain, offers hope for their healing, and is a testament to God’s love and grace.”

—SHELLY BEACH, award-winning author of *Love Letters from the Edge: Meditations for Those Living with Brokenness, Trauma, and the Pain of Life*

“Honest. Open. Heart-wrenching. A reminder that if you or someone you love has suffered abuse, you are not alone. There is hope. There is help. Cec Murphey is more than an eloquent wordsmith; he knows that healing comes when we know someone will hear our stories and love us without reservation. When men are abused as children, masculinity suffers. Confusion reigns. Murphey reminds us that we don’t live in a neat and tidy world with explanations for everything: ‘Logical answers don’t satisfy emotional needs.’ He is living proof that God’s grace breaks through our wounded past and offers light in the midst of our darkness.”

—DON S. OTIS, author of *Whisker Rubs: Developing the Masculine Identity*, and president of Veritas Communications

“Are you a victim of childhood abuse or married to a survivor? Cecil Murphey courageously addresses the fears, frustrations, and fallout that frequently linger from childhood abuse. *More Than Surviving* provides specially crafted meditations that inspire healing, peace, and a more loving connection with God. If you want to move past merely surviving the trauma of your childhood, if you want to live in the fullness God desires—pick up a copy of this book! You won’t be disappointed.”

—JULIE GORMAN, co-owner of Gorman Leadership Group, and coauthor of *Married for a Purpose* and *Two Are Better Than One*

# MORE THAN SURVIVING

*Courageous Meditations for Men  
Hurting from Childhood Abuse*

CECIL MURPHEY

 Kregel  
Publications

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With the exception of the named contributors—Mark Cooper, Roger Mann, Gary Roe, Tom Scales, and Dann Youle—all other names and identifying details have been changed to protect individual privacy.

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*Dedicated to hurting men  
and the secondary survivors in their lives*



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I'm a survivor of childhood abuse—sexual, physical, and verbal. I don't know if one form was worse than the others.

Does it matter? What matters is that I hurt for a long, long time.

Like many other males, I never told anyone.

Whom would I tell? The people I should have been able to trust were the ones who violated me.

For a long time, I felt different from other men, as if something inside me hadn't been wired correctly. "What's wrong with me?" I must have asked myself that question thousands of times over the years.

Some days I felt as if I wanted to die; other days I didn't know if the struggle was worth it. I can now say it was worth the fight. I also believe the only way any of us can find healing from our stolen childhoods is to face our suffering and abuse.

I didn't face up to the reality of my abusive childhood until I hit fifty-one. The hurt and damage of the past finally broke through—slowly and with fragmented memories. Later I spoke with my three older sisters, who confirmed many of those painful memories.

I had been fondled regularly by a female relative until I was about four or five years old. When I was six or seven, an elderly man rented a room in our house. He sexually assaulted me and my sister, who was four years older. She told on him. Dad beat up the man, threw him out of the house, and threatened to kill him if he saw him again.

My father was also an alcoholic—a brutal one when he was drunk, which he was every weekend. Out of seven children, two of us became his primary targets for regular beatings. On the days he didn't beat me, he berated me by calling me useless and lazy.

With that kind of background, I sometimes wonder how I lived within the range of normalcy. I had almost no religious training as a child, so God wasn't part of my conscious life. My only response is that, even then, God was with me and took me through that horrendous time.

When I was ready to face my past, two people accepted my brokenness.

My late wife, Shirley, and my best friend, David, lovingly supported me, allowed me to cry, and reminded me that they loved me.

Later I met other men who had been victimized as children, and as I disclosed my pain, they entrusted me with their stories. Many of us found healing through talking with other survivors.

It took me years to be able to speak openly about the molestation. Since then I've been reaching out to hurting men, pointing them to inner healing. In 2010, I started a blog called *Shattering the Silence* ([www.menshatteringthesilence.blogspot.com](http://www.menshatteringthesilence.blogspot.com)). Many of those once-assaulted men have impacted me with their stories and candid responses. I give freely and receive gladly from their open hearts. We have become an online healing community. This book is a result of that community.



At the end of each chapter, you will read a short prayer. Each petition sums up the chapter. I urge you to repeat the words aloud. You may not *feel* the words, but they're true, so please say them anyway. Pause from time to time and repeat the words over again.

If you were an abused male (or a woman who loves a once-abused male), I wrote this book for you.

For healing.

For peace.

For a stronger, more loving connection to the God who created you and loves you.

God, help me know you love me and remind  
me that you want to heal my pain.

— *My Contributors* —

I asked eight men to contribute to this book. I made it clear that I wanted to use their names and that they were free to add any personal information they chose. My purpose was to publish what they said (with minor editing) to encourage other male survivors to speak up. I also wanted readers to see that this isn't only my personal experience.

Of the eight, three men turned me down and I understood and wasn't surprised. I respect their decisions, and I didn't use any of their material.

The five men who agreed are Mark Cooper, Roger Mann, Gary Roe, Tom Scales, and Dann Youle. They have allowed me to use their names as they tell their stories and share their ongoing agony. They're willing to let the world know about their painful molestation and their subsequent growth, and I applaud them.

Although they wrote the entries that bear their names, I wrote the prayers at the end of each meditation.



For all other names that appear in this book, the essential story is true, but I have changed the individual's name and sometimes a few details to protect the person's privacy.



## WHEN I WAS A BOY . . .

“When I was a boy . . .”

That’s where my story begins; that’s where many of *our stories* begin.

I was a child, and I was innocent. I trusted someone and that person stole my trust, my innocence, and my childhood. I’ve suffered because of the actions of another person. No matter how caring, kind, or warm the perpetrator may have appeared to be, he took advantage of me.

What I’ve written above is probably your story as well.

If we can focus on our childhood and realize how immature and innocent we were, we can also remind ourselves that we couldn’t reason the way we do today as adults. We may also have taken the guilt on ourselves for what happened. If so, we need to remind ourselves: *I was a child and the abuser was a perpetrator. He (or she) took advantage of my innocence and youth.*

If we’re typical, we’ve already gone through (or are now going through) a period of questioning and doubting. And while vague, often-terrifying memories occasionally intrude, deep inside something nags at us. In our most vulnerable moments, we know the truth that someone stole our innocence.

One of the reasons for writing this book is to remind myself and others that we’re not the only ones. I knew I wasn’t the only victimized kid, but I *felt* as if I were.

Many of us have been where you have been or where you are now. We’ve felt the same kinds of pain you have. More than just having been there, we have survived and are still overcoming the trauma.

In the early days of healing, many of us need to remind ourselves a hundred times a day that someone victimized us. Or it might be easier to say, “Someone older and more powerful took advantage of my innocence and youth.”

We need to do it because we want to convince ourselves that we didn’t make up the stories. It did happen to us. And we need to tell ourselves that we won’t start a sentence with the words, “I should have . . .”

Let's go back to the beginning and start with, "When I was a boy . . ." That beginning can help us learn to become kind and compassionate to ourselves.

We need to remind ourselves that we didn't know how to cope with such seductive assaults—especially when it was someone we trusted and one who whispered, "I love you and I won't hurt you."

Now we may choose to say, "When I was a boy, he lied to me." Or "When I was a boy, she bribed me, called me special." Or "He made me feel loved and wanted—temporarily."

We were wanted, but for his needs and not ours. Today we hurt because in childhood we were victimized.

You might say, "When I was a boy, I was molested. Now I'm an adult, and I'm healing from my childhood trauma."

God, I'm tired of hurting. Help me to accept  
the truth about my painful childhood.

## IT REALLY ISN'T TRUE

Dann Youle wrote something for my blog that I've savored because he said it well and the message echoed words I could have spoken. Most of this is the way he sent it to me in 2010.

♦ ♦ ♦

When I first discovered (uncovered or whatever you want to call it) that I had been sexually abused as a boy, in my head I heard myself saying, "But it really isn't true!"

Denial was *such* a defense in those early days. For twenty-eight years I had been able to deny I'd been abused, so because I thought I recalled something now, did that suddenly make it true?

This was the beginning of what I thought was my going crazy. I felt split off from myself: I didn't know who I was and the denial was the only way I could survive. I sometimes wondered if I would or could take my next breath. It was the wildest, weirdest feeling.

One day these thoughts raced through my head:

It really isn't true.

*It* really isn't true.

It *really* isn't true.

It really *isn't* true.

It really isn't *true!*

God, you *can't* expect me to believe this and you *can't* expect me to live if it *is* true!

At that moment, I felt God say to me, "You don't believe it can be true, I wish it weren't—but do you believe you can breathe? I give you breath, Dann; I will breathe *for* you."

Even though it was so hard, at that moment I realized I was more alive than ever. I felt *such* intense pain, but all the same it was glorious. Jesus was letting me know that I didn't have to be afraid. I might be scared to death in that moment that I was going to die, but I didn't have to fear anything, even if I *did*.

I have found that this phenomenon is generally true of men who have been abused. Until we can come out of that denial and get to the pain, the healing never begins.

When I was trying to convince myself that it wasn't true, there was something I needed to be in touch with even if it was painful. It was like a gentle but persistent wake-up call that God used to point me to himself.

The it-really-isn't-true response is rare for me these days. If I have to feel the pain, there's a good reason for it. It's not that I enjoy the pain, but I find that I can find Jesus in the middle of it. He feels my pain and understands pain himself. When I think of where my sin put him, I know that he has felt my pain in ways that I can't even begin to imagine. To know the depths of pain, he has allowed me to trust him more and more in the depths of my pain.

So yes, it really *is* true! I *was* abused—horribly, terribly, but not unredeemingly. The pain my past abuse causes at times seems unbearable, but the healing is sweet and real.

True and loving God, please help me face the truth,  
and accept your power in moving forward.



## SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH ME

It remains one of the saddest, most painful meetings where I was invited to speak. A group of men who had been sexually assaulted and physically abused had recently formed and they asked me to speak to the group. I gleaned as much from them as they could have from me.

They had a check-in time and Ron said, “Something is wrong with me, and it torments me.”

In the past, I had said those words to myself many times. I had finally figured out that such a statement wasn’t true, and I didn’t want another man to repeat such a self-indictment.

“No, you aren’t wrong or bad!” I probably shouted those words. “Something wrong and bad was done to you!”

The others nodded but Ron shook his head. The tears began to fall as he said, “I liked what he did. I hated it, but I liked it.”

George, the leader of the group and the one who invited me, leaned toward Ron. “You mean it was pleasurable? That you responded with an erection or that it felt good when you were abused?”

Ron nodded and more tears flowed.

Slowly and softly George explained, “That’s an automatic, physiological response. Whenever you stimulate the penis, you get an erection. That doesn’t make you a pervert.”

I marveled at the compassion in his voice as he tried to make Ron realize that his reaction had been normal. And he spoke healing words for several of the men who nodded and smiled. One of them said, “Thank you for saying that. I didn’t have the courage to say those words.”

George wasn’t saying we were perfect or flawless. He meant that the men had problems, but that didn’t make them blemished or worthless.

Loving God, you created me lovable. Remind me of that today. And tomorrow. And all my days afterward.

## IT'S NOT FAIR

When I was a member of a recovery group sponsored by the State of Georgia, one man cried out during the second meeting, "It's not fair!" He went on to compare himself with his older and younger brothers who, seemingly, were not molested and had no serious problems.

After allowing him to rant for several minutes, the therapist said, "You're right. It's not fair, but it is real."

Dean, the quietest man in the group, pulled up his left pants leg and showed his prosthesis from just below the knee. "And this isn't fair either. It's not fair that I'm alive and my dad died in the accident."

We were stunned and hardly knew how to respond but Dean added, "You can groan all you want about the unfairness, but nothing will change. If you're willing to grow up, you'll accept the reality and ask, 'Now how do I live the rest of my life?'"

I can't remember how the exchange went after that, except the it's-not-fair complainer yelled and groaned. He never came back to the group, and he was our first dropout.

Maybe the poor man couldn't face the reality of his situation. Storming against the unfairness of life does no good. If anything, it makes it worse because we can't accept life as it is.

It took me a long time, but I finally began to say, "What is, is what is." That's my shorthand way of saying, "That's the situation and I can't change it. But now I can make decisions on what to do next."

Lord Jesus, life wasn't fair to you. It's not fair to me. Help me accept what is and triumph over the injustices.

## WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?

I don't like it when men ask what wrong thing they did to deserve abuse. Do you catch the implication? They imply two things. First, they sinned or did something wrong and, second, the molestation was divine punishment.

That hardly makes sense to me. In the gospel of John, the disciple encountered a man born blind and asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus responds, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" (John 9:1–3).

They lived in a world that believed the "curse causeless shall not come" (Prov. 26:2 KJV) and they seemed intent on finding who was the wrongdoer. Jesus dismisses their question. He reaches out to heal the man and says this will bring glory to God.

We may need to remind ourselves that we serve a compassionate and caring God—one who doesn't punish children because of the sin or evil doings of someone else. I don't serve a God who constantly throws terrible punishment on me and forces me to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to figure which of my many sins God is punishing me for or if I have to keep searching until I can blame an ancestor.

I like to keep it simple: evil people do evil things. The perpetrators may not consider their actions evil, but when they harm someone else, that's evil.

Another point is that Jesus, in defending children, said that whoever welcomes a child welcomes him (see Matt. 18:5) and then adds, "As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake" (v. 6 CEB).

I can't explain why God doesn't strike dead those who hurt children—that's beyond my grasp—but I can say, "If you were molested, this is one time you were not the problem or the cause."

Despite any shame you and I feel, we need to acknowledge and never

forget that we were the innocents. Or as I sometimes say, "I did nothing bad; something bad was done to me."

God, please don't let me blame myself for my childhood abuse. Help me recover through your grace and love.

## WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH?

Early in my healing process, I asked that question repeatedly. I was hurting and I couldn't understand the reason for the intense pain. I wanted to face the reality of my traumatic childhood, learn from the experience, and move on with my life. I didn't want the pain, or at least I wanted less of it.

My real question didn't involve *why* as much as it did *how*. How do I get rid of the torment, the painful memories, and reexperiencing my childhood trauma? Like thousands of other survivors, I learned to say those now-clichéd words, *I had to feel the pain to move beyond the pain*. As memories trickled back (some exploded), I faced each one. In private, I cried often in those early days; I raged, and I yelled at my perpetrators.

In the midst of those rants and tears, I wanted relief. It did help to vent, but it helped even more to talk to the two people who loved me enough to stay with me in my pain—my wife and my friend David.

What worked for me may not be the path for everyone. We have different temperaments and see life through our personal, unique experiences. If we want healing, each of us needs to find our own way.

One suggestion—and it's advice I firmly believe—is to share our pain.

When we open up to at least one other person, someone who cares for us, healing begins to take place. We need to choose someone who will listen to us pour out our agony. We tell them, "I'm not asking for advice, only that you listen and hear my struggle."

Try it.

God, I don't want to feel the pain; I remind myself that it won't last. Help me to remember that the more I heal, the less intensely the pain lingers.

## DEFINED BY ABUSE

Sexual abuse doesn't define me, but it does define what happened to me.

I hope you'll ponder that statement. Too many have suffered and built their lives around being abused.

Some run from the thought of it or try to deny that it happened. Others put themselves in situations where they're victimized repeatedly (or they might say taken advantage of). Or they go out of their way to protect other boys from sexual assault. Although they may not say it in words, their message is, I want to be there for other boys because no one was there for me.

And some victims of abuse become perpetrators themselves. The reasons it happens are as complicated and as varied as the individuals.

But ultimately, abuse can never excuse our behavior. It is simply an explanation for how we arrived where we are.

Loving God, remind me that sexual abuse doesn't define me. It does define what happened *to me*.

## TOTALLY NUMB

My wife was seriously ill and I loved her very much. We had been involved in a serious car crash, and the doctor didn't expect her to survive the night. (Shirley survived, but that's another story.)

As I sat by her bedside in the hospital and stared at her pain-streaked face, I felt nothing. *I was totally numb.* What's wrong with me? I asked myself. This is the person I love most and I can't feel anything.

That wasn't the first time I had numbed out; it wasn't the last time. Over the years, I encountered extremely difficult situations and yet felt nothing. I was sure that something was defective in me. To make it worse, occasionally I cried, but it was always about someone with whom I had no strong emotional ties. I didn't understand how I could be sad over small things and yet feel nothing about the hurt of those I loved most.

Here's how I finally understood what happened. While I was doing my usual predawn run, a car made a U-turn in front of me and knocked me down. I felt no pain, but three days later I sensed what I called a little discomfort in my left hip. It didn't hurt, but it was a nuisance. A week later, and at my wife's urging, I went to a chiropractor and he did a number of tests.

He kept asking, "Does this hurt?" He kept probing, but nothing he did caused me to say yes. "You have a very high tolerance for pain," he finally said.

On the phone a few days later, I related that incident to my younger brother Chuck. He laughed and said, "Don't you remember how Dad beat us and we didn't cry? *We didn't feel it.*"

Just then the numbness made sense. Whenever powerful emotions overwhelmed me, I numbed out. Because I couldn't cope with the crushing impact, I had no feelings. Every day for weeks, I prayed, "Lord, help me feel my emotions. Let me experience anguish and pain."

Slowly I began to feel. I've since learned to reclaim my emotions. To

some it may sound strange, but I've learned to praise God because I felt sad when my wife hurts or one of my children has a serious problem. Or when pain strikes my body.

Lord, remind me that I no longer need to numb out.  
It's all right to hurt and I want to feel my emotions.