

Hi,

My name is John, I am a grateful believer in Jesus who struggles with Anger, Control, Shame, Perfectionism, and Physical Pain.

My identity, however, is in Christ, not in my struggles.

You just heard Mary Lou's testimony about the marriage crisis we had almost 10 years ago. This is my rebuttal. In that testimony she claimed that I had been abusive through anger, rage, control, criticism, etc. Well, that part's true. In fact, I think everything she said was true. How's that for a rebuttal.

What I would like to do tonight is to share with you some insight that I have gained about why I became that way. And I hope in the process that you will gain some insight into yourselves, and be encouraged to keep working deeper into your recovery. It should never stop.

I was born with ADHD. In other words, I was a very hyperactive kid who was impulsive and didn't pay attention well. Back then, little was known about the disorder. My mom, a very good hearted and loving woman, tried very hard to control and fix me. She is a very controlling person who won't admit it, but she frequently talks about how controlling her mother was. So from the beginning, I was involved in a struggle for control. And of course control became an issue for me. Her controlling and nagging left me with deep resentments.

By the time I was 5, I had incurred several traumatic illnesses and injuries. I fell on my head from a height of about 6 feet. I had salmonella poisoning with a fever of 105 after biting into a turtle. I pulled the iron off the ironing board and took all the skin off one side of my face. Had my front tooth knocked out. And that's just the short list. My mom loves to tell the stories, and these were all, of course, my fault. I was hyperactive and uncontrollable. It's always nice to have embarrassing stories told about you again and again. But more importantly, early childhood traumas are never forgotten in our subconscious, and lay the foundation for more struggles in the future.

In the first grade I was bored, but intelligent. I would quickly do my work then wander around the class room and disrupt the other kids. In second grade, I wasn't doing my work in class, and was frequently held after school to complete it. This was embarrassing and displeasing to my mother. I think every report card I got in elementary school said that I was not living up to my potential. My mom would scold me and tell me I should try harder. She had difficulty accepting who I was.

So for third grade, my well meaning parents asked a teacher friend of theirs to accept me into her class. They asked her to take me on as a special project to "straighten me out". She was an excellent teacher. I can remember her going above and beyond having an extra reading class before school for myself and a few others. She made learning our times tables fun by having team competitions. But One day we were working after school on a science fair in the multipurpose room. I went back to the classroom for something. I noticed that the paint lids were still off the jars at the class easel, so I put them on so that the paint wouldn't dry out, and proudly went and told my teacher what I had done.

The next day when I got to school, my teacher grabbed me by the ear and dragged me over to the paint easel and asked me: “did you do this?”. The paints had been dumped out and splashed all over. I cried out “no, it wasn’t me”. Then she dragged me up to the front of the class room, grabbed me by the neck and squeezed. In front of the whole class, she told me that I was lying, that she knew I was lying, and to never do that again. I was embarrassed, humiliated, shamed, and angry. The class troublemaker had been with me in the room when I had done my good deed. But I was never allowed to defend myself. She meant well. My parents had asked her to do this. I am sure that she would not have otherwise, and I have forgiven her.

When I did my step 4 inventory though, I started to learn the tremendous impact that you can have on an 8 year old child. I have actually written out 30 resentments from that one incident in my inventory. I have struggled the rest of my life to be right, to know I am right, and to prove I am right. In our marriage, I had to win every fight, and after a while she just let me. I thought our marriage was getting better.

After leading an anger and control group at CR for 5 years, I didn’t feel very angry anymore. I realized that I needed to work on other issues like perfectionism, procrastination, shame, anxiety, and pain.

One day my councilor suggested that problems other than my “need to be right”, may have come out of this 3rd grade incident. That I may have made some kind of a vow to myself that I wouldn’t let something happen again. I have come to believe that for me, this has something to do with being embarrassed or shamed. Many of my strongest and recurring memories are of embarrassing moments. But I never really put together just how that affected me until recently.

I have been in some kind of physical pain most of my adult life. The pain varies in location and intensity, but often was bad enough to interfere with doing things that I wanted to do, and caused a lot of fear about the future. Depression has also been a part of my life. It was a period of high pain and depression that amplified my bad behavior toward Mary Lou. That was when things came to a head and we started our recovery and then Celebrate Recovery. I think like many of us, when going through my step 4 inventory I learned a good deal about myself, my resentments, and my character defects. And in completing the steps, gained a good degree of emotional peace and joy. I was also closer to and more surrendered to God than every before. And some of my pain seemed to ease a bit.

Lately I have been working through a workbook that teaches how to unlearn many types of pain. This has been a great augment to the work I have done in Celebrate Recovery, giving me new tools to deal with old hurts. As I read through the introduction, I was convinced that what they call the Mind-Body-Syndrome was what I had experienced for decades. My pain is being caused by my mind. It is not imagined, not psychosomatic, it is real pain. My brain learned to experience and to create this pain, and I am working hard to unlearn it, actually changing the way my brain is wired.

The process of pain recovery is very involved, but starts out exploring why your brain might create and learn such pain. Most of the emphasis is on repressed anger and shame, but also events that were particularly stressful or traumatic. One of the primary reasons for these can be abuse. As I read and pondered through it, some things began to become clear. In addition to my 3rd grade teacher, there was a sequence of events that added to my internal pain, multiplying the effect on my character and my pain. These aligned well with the onset and progression of my pain. I will just highlight a couple here.

Leaving College, Mary Lou and I worked for the DuPont Company in a plant that made carpet fibers. The process I had developed suddenly had a problem that restricted production. It was caused by a change made by a mechanic, but we didn't know that for a few weeks. The business was sold out, so we were losing money. I also had a very oppressive supervisor. The stress was overwhelming. I developed a neck spasm that lasted many months and would come and go after that for another 20 years.

The other event actually occurred over a period of 20 years. This involved my mother-in-law. She would frequently criticize me, or lash out at me with embarrassing questions. I was never good enough and was continually shamed for it. This would happen in front of all nature of family, including my own children. I now understand that for me this was abuse. It was abuse because it was personal, it was repeated again and again, and I couldn't escape it. We were 4 hours from home, I couldn't just walk out. I would argue with her, but didn't help anything. Embarrassment and shame were already a deep issue for me, and for 20 years I had to endure more from her.

After 15 years of increasing pain, I was finally diagnosed with fibromyalgia, a very painful and debilitating syndrome. I still suffer from it today. It is one of the worst forms of the mind-body-syndrome. So today, with God's help, I am working on dealing with unconscious rage and shame, as well as learning to love and accept myself. I don't know how much of the pain can be overcome, but I live with less fear and more hope. And when I feel down, I often go back to an important life verse:

Psalm 91 starts out: "He who dwells in the shelter of the most high, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

So: poor me. Wah-wah! Whats the point of this testimony?
Why am I telling you all this?

Hurt People Hurt People.

This is the cycle of abuse. We see many abuse victims in Celebrate Recovery. Find a sex offender and you may find someone who was sexually abused themselves. A physical abuser who was physically abused. A verbal abuser who was verbally abused. My mother was very controlling and I became very controlling. And that became part of my abusiveness.

My abusiveness came from my own abuse. Pain is probably always involved in abuse, but most often it is emotional rather than physical pain. In fact most, if not all, of our issues have some kind of emotional pain factor.

Don't get me wrong, **I am not making excuses**. What I did was **inexcusable**. When it was finally made clear to me, I was horrified and once again shamed. It is only by God's grace and through Celebrate Recovery that Mary Lou and I have a great marriage today and look forward to spending the rest of our lives together. And I look forward to continuing work on my recovery. I want to grow closer to, and more dependent on God, and I want to treat Mary Lou, my family, and others with more respect, more kindness and more love.

The abuse from my mother-in-law didn't come out of nowhere. She had experienced trauma of her own. She herself was in physical and emotional pain for most of her life. Ironically, the more pain I developed, the more I understood and could empathize with her. So I don't really blame her, I don't believe that it was her desire to hurt me, she just couldn't control herself.

So yes, I was verbally and emotionally abusive to Mary Lou. I was also abusive to my children and other family members. But Mary Lou and I have worked hard on our recoveries, and have shared openly our own struggles with our children. And I don't for a minute believe that they will ever pass on a cycle of abuse. And that is something to Celebrate!

Giving this testimony, admitting that I abused my wife and family, I once again dredge up some of the feeling of embarrassment and shame, and doesn't help my physical pain recovery. So why do it? I do it because it is part of recovery. It keeps me out of denial. When I do it, I always learn something new about myself and move forward in my recovery. And I do it to help others like you with their own recovery. Right now, I want you to understand that recovery is hard, and it is hard work. But we must do it. There is no quick fix, I have been working my recovery for almost 10 years, peeling away my onion. And with each layer, part of me feels and gets better. So we can't work for a little while, feel a little better and then quit. Issues in our past have lead to pain and addiction in our present. Our issues affect others, and we owe it to them to get better, to feel better, and to STAY BETTER. We can have a better future. In order to feel better, no matter what our issue is: physical pain, emotional pain, codependency, addiction, depression, sexual integrity, anxiety, abuse... we need to do the hard work of recovery. We need to work the steps, and often we need additional counseling as well.

I recently came to realize that Jesus's sacrifice took away my sin, but also the guilt that goes with it. I am no longer guilty of my sin. And where there no guilt, there should be no shame. So what right do I have to continue to feel pain?

So that is my rebuttal. It is neither a denial or an excuse. But it is a nice embarrassing story about myself.

God bless you all, and thank you for letting me share.

