

How to Enjoy the Bible

Again After Spiritual Abuse

(without feeling guilty
or getting triggered out of your mind)



Rebecca Davis

Lots of people are talking about “spiritual abuse” these days. When I use the term, here’s what I mean by it:



Spiritual abuse is the misuse of the Word of God and the character of God to manipulate and control and oppress others.

When God’s Word is twisted, God Himself can seem like the ultimate abuser, and the Bible can seem like an abuser’s handbook.

The Scripture twistings I’ve seen that have been done to accomplish spiritual abuse fall into a few basic categories. I warn you they might sound a little familiar . . . in a bad way.



Scripture Twisting

1. YOU are lowly and sinful and will never amount to anything, but you need to keep trying.
2. *I* am the authority, and you need to listen to and obey me, and if you don't you're in rebellion.
3. YOU must never talk about anything bad that is done to you or anyone else.
4. YOU are not allowed to have any feelings except peace and joy.
5. All sins are equal, except YOURS is the worst.

In order to promote these twisted teachings, many Scriptures are taken out of context and misused. That's what my [*Untwisting Scriptures series*](#) of books is all about.

So, when so much wickedness has been done using the Bible . . .

Why Should We Even Try to Read the Bible?

I'm convinced now, that there are (at least) two very important purposes in reading and studying the Scriptures:



1. We spend time with the Word of God in order to have God's perspective on life and death, on evil and good, and on many other things.
2. We spend time with Him in His written Word in order to have an intimate relationship with Him, to find Jesus and His life and His love. He has told us that we will find the treasure of HIM if we continue to seek Him.

Dr. Diane Langberg, a highly respected Christian psychologist, has been learning from her clients since 1972. She has sat with her clients as they have recalled the most horrific abuses.

Recently I was listening to Dr. Langberg speak about a time when she told the Lord that all the stories of abuse were too much for her and she wanted to quit. She wanted to be done.

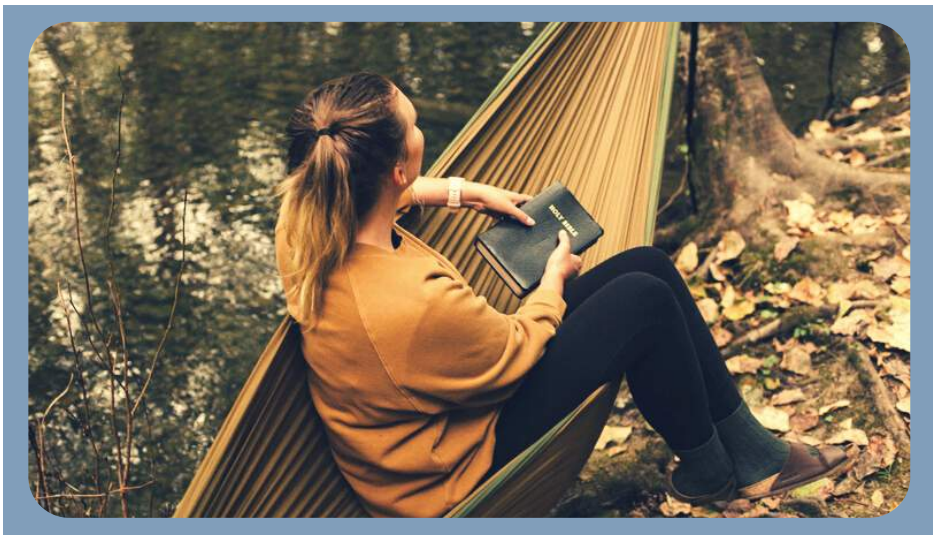
BUT at the time she was reading in Isaiah. The Lord used His Word to proceed to show her His heart for the suffering, through the Scriptures. The Christian world is the better for it because she did not quit but has continued to speak out, to show others the heart of God for His people.

It is worth it to continue to seek Him and His heart, through His written Word.

When You're Ready

If you're reading this Guide, then you want to get past the "abuser god" that was presented in the spiritual abuse you experienced. You're ready to turn away from the things you were taught He was and seek Him in *Truth*.

He wants to build up in your mind and heart who He truly, really is.



A Bit of a Warning . . .

Just to be clear, reading the Bible isn't something to check off a list. If we see it that way, as a thing to do so God will be pleased with us, then we're missing the heart of God who wants to connect with us as we read His Word.

Also, the Bible isn't a set of daily vitamin pills. If we see it that way, looking for a "nugget for the day," we can miss the big picture God wants to give us.

And another warning — when we read the Bible with our intellect only, it's like eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, just learning facts. When we read with our spirits engaged, asking the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes, it can be like eating from the Tree of Life.

The Bible, the written Word of God, facilitates our connection with the LIVING WORD of God—the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus is Spirit and Truth, and we know Him through Holy Spirit connection with our own spirit.

The Scriptures act as a plumbline to help us discern His truth. They are vital for us as His people.

So when you're ready to go back to the Scriptures, here are six ideas to help you.

Ideas for Approaching the Scriptures in Heart Attunement with God

First, it's important to know that it's good to have desires.

The Bible has a lot to say about desires—it's one of the subject studies I did years ago. One of the ridiculous notions taught by spiritual abusers is that it's sinful to have desires. But the TRUTH is that it's actually good to have them.

It's okay to ASK God for things, but not to ask for a wrong goal, so we can consume it on our pleasures, the way James 4:3 talks about. For example, if someone says, "I want to heal so I can get off this crazy train so I can just enjoy my life," then that would be an example of what James 4:3 is referring to.

But it's good to want to heal so that you can know who God really is and can enjoy His presence rather than being afraid of Him. He wants that for you.

You can express spiritual "wants" like this to God and know that He is willing to meet them.

So, with that foundational truth...





It's good to ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the truth He reveals in His Word.

That's the fundamental foundation for understanding the Scriptures. If you're a believer, then you have the Holy Spirit, and you can study the Bible yourself. We can cry out to Him for understanding.

Even a cry like, "I want to know that You're not really like what the abuser said You were like, Lord! Show me, please!" And then to go to the Word with anticipation that either little by little or all at once, He WILL do that.

Many Christians have been told that it's sinful to have expectations, but this is also unbiblical. It's right to expect, even anticipate, that God will do what He has promised.

Then . . .

I recommend starting with the Psalms.

When David wrote the Psalms, he expressed the range of emotions. Grief, that complicated ball of many emotions, is very evident in many of them.

As you read, you can allow your own emotions to come forward. Seeing David express his emotions can in a way give you permission to experience emotions that have been squelched through abuse.



It's okay to be angry about what has happened to you and ones you love. But anger can be tricky—it can become a stewpot, and you and ones you love can be the ones who can cook in it. You don't want that to happen.

Instead, you can let your anger turn you back to the Lord, the way David and other Bible writers did, again and again. Cry out to HIM.



For another example, you can look at the description of destruction and devastation in the book of Joel.

“Lord, do You see this devastation! It’s like what You talked about in the book of Joel! What one kind of locust left, the other kind of locust has eaten!”

“Lord, I **want** to be like the land you talk about in Joel 2:25 where you say, ‘I will restore to you the years the swarming locust has eaten.’ Restore these years to me, for Your glory!”

You see how I expressed desire there?

Wrestle with HIM. And **EXPECT** Him to come through. Not necessarily right away. Not necessarily with material blessings. And not necessarily with restoration of relationships that seem like they ought to be restored.

BUT with the nearness of His presence, and even with finding others who are seeking Him after abuse, as you are.

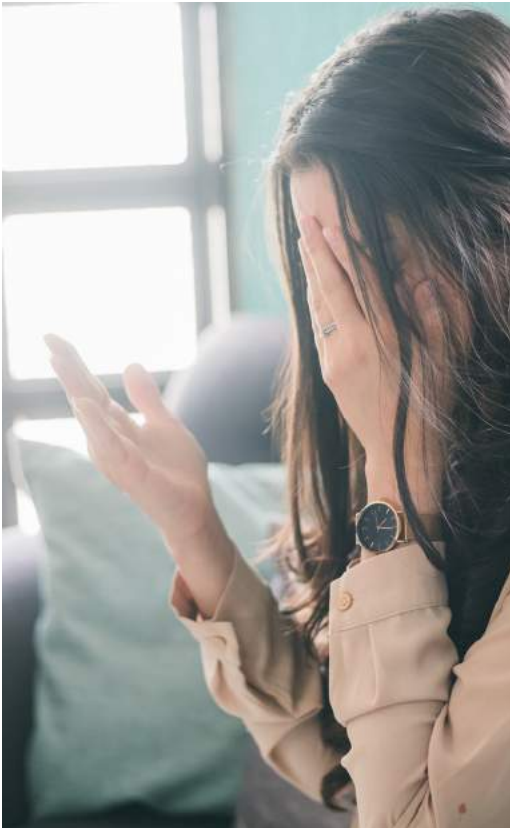


It's okay to skip psalms without feeling guilty.

Let's say you're reading a psalm that expresses your grieving emotions, and then you get to a part where he says, "I will hope in the Lord my God."

If you're not there yet, you don't need to feel guilty about it. You can talk to God about it without feeling guilty that you're not there. Maybe like this:

"I'm not there yet, God. But I **want** to get there."
That's expressing your **desires**.



And yes, I know it's radical, but if you come to a psalm that is full of praise for God, but your heart is heavy with grief, you can say, "Lord, I want to read this [expressing your desire], but later. Not today. I look forward to when I'll be able to read this with my whole heart [expressing your expectation]."

“

You can make a note of it in your journal.

“Circle back around to this one.”

And skip it.

”

The Psalms weren't written in this order anyway. It is not an offense to God for you to skip one of them and come back to it later. You still know it's inspired, you're not demeaning it. You're acknowledging that you want to get there.

You can tell yourself, “Self, there is nothing wrong with doing this. It's okay. The Lord loves me and is glad to be with me when I skip parts I can't read just yet.”



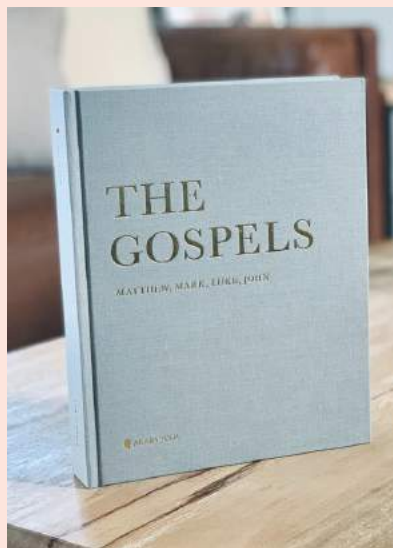
After the Psalms, I recommend the gospels, starting with Luke.

The full, complete presentations of the gospels are where we can see Jesus as He really is, unfiltered.

A friend expressed a strong opinion that Luke is the best one to start with, because that's where we see Jesus interacting with people the most, especially women.

(Mark is good if you want the shortest one. Matthew emphasizes the parables more than the others do. John has some really amazing sermons that spring-board off of miracles.)

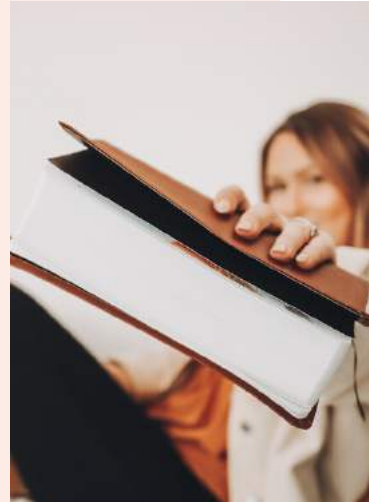
As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see who Jesus really is, beyond any Sunday school lessons you may have learned, and certainly beyond any abusive presentations of Him. Then EXPECT to see who He really is.



Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, and EXPECT for your eyes to be opened. Expect to see who Jesus really is. Then take that into your spirit.

Encountering Scriptures that “Trigger”

When I say they “trigger,” I mean when you hear them or read them, you might be sent back into a bad memory of a time when these very Scriptures were twisted to be used against you. Maybe you even hear them being read in your abuser’s voice.



When this happens, the most important thing to do first is not to feel guilty about this response. It isn't sinful, so you don't need to apologize to the Lord about it.

NOT, “I'm so sorry I'm hearing that in an abusive way, God!”

Rather, you could pray something like, “You know what's happened to me, Lord. This Scripture still isn't untwisted for me; it's still triggering. I want it to be unhooked from the abuse, and I trust You to help me get there in time. [You're expressing desire and anticipation.] Thank You that You're glad to be with me even when I struggle in this way.”



Early on in your healing journey, when you're very fragile, you may feel like you need to avoid triggers, in every area of life, because they can throw you into flashbacks or panic attacks.

But trying to avoid triggers all the time can make for a challenging existence, and it usually doesn't work that well anyway. So there comes a time when the desire for healing overcomes the desire to avoid triggers. Then you'll want to do two things:

First, learn tools and coping mechanisms to help you understand what's happening when you're triggered, and to help you stay grounded and present when you're triggered.

Second, when you're ready, there's a way you can walk into your triggers, usually with the assistance of someone who understands and knows how to help. The goal will be to get those experiences "unhooked" from the abuse, so they don't trigger you anymore. One of the key elements involved here would be allowing the feelings to come while you're safe and connected, knowing that they will pass and will not drown you.

As an example, let's say someone is triggered when she sees a red truck because her abuser used to drive a red truck. It's important for her to get past being thrown into flashbacks every time she sees a red truck.

But this is vital: Red trucks are not designed by God to be a significant part of your healing. But the Scriptures are.

In the Scriptures, you get to know the true Lord Jesus, who He really is, Your Good Shepherd, the Healer of your Heart, your Savior and Friend.

Taking the Scriptures deep into your heart to help you know God is part of what you NEED for healing.

So you can face Scripture triggers with **desire** and **expectation**. You can know that our God understands about triggers and doesn't condemn you when you have trouble reading the Scriptures due to spiritual abuse. He is patient and kind toward us and glad to meet us where we are.



Here's my suggestion for dealing with the Trigger Scriptures—in two parts.

FIRST, you read the Scriptures, and when you come to an unresolved trigger verse, you refrain from feeling guilty and apologizing to God. You make a note of it in your Bible journal.

Then you get up, get yourself your hot tea, pace for a while, and let the feelings come. You cry out to God about those feelings the way you've learned about in the Psalms.

You talk to your compassionate witness about those feelings. You journal about them. And, like the psalms that you skipped, it will be okay to put these passages on the shelf for now, so to speak.

Later in your healing journey, when you're stronger, you come back to that Scripture. "Lord, I **WANT** to understand this, and I **EXPECT** You to show me."

You can cry out to the Holy Spirit. Maybe you do some research about it or reach out to someone to help you understand it.

You don't have to resolve all of it at once. It can happen bit by bit, step by step. He is with you in your journey, and He is kind and patient.



SECOND, in some cases, Scriptures weren't just used to excuse the abuse, but they were actually used as part of the abuse. This would be true in cases of extreme abuse like satanic ritual abuse. The "living sacrifice" of Romans 12:2 is an example here.

In this case, learning what the Scripture really means will most likely not be enough. You would also need to actually bring that traumatic memory forward, usually with the help of someone who is trained in such things, to find resolution for that trauma.

It can be a long road, but once you and those inward parts of yourself meet the Good Shepherd, that will make all the difference.

And the best way to get to know who that Good Shepherd really is, is through His Word, the Bible.

We Walk by Faith



Colossians 2 says, *“As you received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk in Him.”* How did we receive Him as our Savior? We received Him by FAITH, so we will walk in Him by FAITH.

For many spiritual abuse survivors, your faith was kept in a simplistic child state. For all those years you simply followed the “grownups,” the “authorities,” who, as it turned out, were leading you astray and harming you.

There comes a time, when you're ready, to have a more mature faith, facilitated by the written Word of God.

As we do, we will follow Him as He leads us, from lying down in green pastures and resting beside still waters (Psalm 23) to taking up the armor of God and standing in truth against the enemy (Ephesians 6). As we look to Him, He will guide us.

Think about the faith expressed in Hebrews 11: the way faith was walked out in those Hall of Faith Heroes looked different for each person. This person built a basket of bulrushes. That person left his home without knowing where he was going. Those people marched around a huge walled city. It was different for everyone.

Each one of us needs to listen to the voice of the Spirit, following the way He wants to lead us.

But His way will always be aligned with His written Word. As we *long for* this good work (expressing our desires), we can *expect* that He will accomplish it, according to His Word.

God bless you as you seek Him.



Rebecca



You can find much more about untwisting the Christian Scriptures in my *Untwisting Scriptures* series of books and on my website: heresthejoy.com.

I would love to hear from you as you follow the Lord on your journey. You can write to me at:

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