



Victim, Validated, Victorious

by Reverend Dr. Steve Hokana

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Introduction

It is truly awesome that you picked up this little book. Just thumbing through it indicates you're looking for change. As you read, ask yourself, "What is God trying to tell me to be a happier, more fulfilled person?" Stoke up the faith handed you long ago! Faith is a powerful instrument for positive change.

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Victims know what the deal is all about. It's ugly and it's tough. How did you get where you are? The reasons vary among individuals. Maybe it was an emotional meltdown or love may have been rejected after a previously thriving relationship. It can be physical: an auto accident, an assault, victim of cyber-theft. The cause is always a life-altering event. Time comes to a screeching halt. Many lose sight of God and trust in people. Everything is thrown into chaos. Every day is a challenge. A once healthy person becomes a victim due to a loved one's unexpected death, severe personal health issues or a drastic reduction in income. These events, coupled with an inability to cope, produce a very difficult situation.

Families are affected and loved ones suffer as well. God looks on you with special favor. You know the victim's story and understand. Compassionate engagement with those who are victimized requires kindness and patience. The healing of a victim takes time—*their time*. God empowers those who perform this loving and painstaking work. The book of James talks about trials, patience and helping others.

"Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:4).

Getting exasperated and angry with a loved one doesn't help the situation. Telling them to "Buck up!" or "Get over it!" doesn't help either. Rather, it's essential to remind victims they have resources to assist them back to wholeness and health. The primary source is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ground Rules: Stop and Please Read

1. If you are in a perilous situation, seek help; get out of the dangerous circumstance.
2. If at any time you feel depressed, suicidal or homicidal, contact your primary care manager, i.e. your healthcare provider or personal physician, or go to an emergency room for assistance.
3. If seeing a pastoral counselor, therapist or doctor, do not stop treatment. Tell them about your faith and its meaning for your life.
4. If you are self-medicating, drinking excessively, taking drugs in excess of their prescription dose amounts, then cease. Get help. You are undermining your own recovery.
5. If you know someone who has been victimized, please read through this booklet. Then ask if they would like a copy. Use the booklet as a positive bridge in building relationships.
6. If you feel additional resources are needed, check out the “Available Resources” at the end of this text.
7. Although this booklet is brief, it contains powerful ideas. Take them in small chunks. You don’t have to master them all in one sitting.
8. There is a distinction in this booklet between an act perpetrated on someone (victim) and one who is stuck in a horrible rut. As you read, notice the differences between these two.
9. Nightmares, feelings of unease, bouts of anger or melancholy are all normal responses to abnormal events. If these feelings persist or worsen, there is no need to suffer, get help.
10. Victims of horrific events naturally take time to recover. It is the intent of this booklet that through the gifts of God, you take time to pray, ponder and work toward building healthy relationships. Learn to value and respect life; it is precious and should be handled at such.

In your exasperation do you ever want to lift up something like the following to God?

“How long, LORD, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, Violence!” but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted” (Habakkuk 1:2-4).

Wow! This is some emotionally charged Scripture! We hear daily of exploited children, families ripped apart by criminal action or natural disasters, and others who have had their lives destroyed by vicious and cruel circumstances.

And what of those who are preyed upon, who scream for justice in a callous society? What of the honorable citizen swindled out of her hard-earned retirement? The brass ring is in sight, almost within arm’s reach. Good job! Well earned! A financial nest egg built up through sacrifice, honest labor and discipline is suddenly drained dry. Hard-earned money is cleaned out, and the retirement account emptied by gluttonous men and women fueled by avarice and narcissism.

And what of the mentally ill? Who will speak for them? Many of these individuals can’t hold a job or even find work. Often their families do all they can to keep them from being taken by the state and institutionalized. A victim of their own physiology, beaten down by a rough-running economy and maltreated by those who can’t empathize, they have no advocate to appeal to for their much needed medical care. Instead, in worse case scenarios, they languish in the streets or back alleys medicating themselves on highly addictive narcotics.

When people are victimized they experience feelings of violation, vulnerability and insecurity. Just think about identity theft to know what I mean. An employee of an insurance company leaves a computer in his car. He returns and the window is busted and the computer is stolen. While that's bad, what really hurts is that hundreds of thousands of names and Social Security numbers are in the data base. What's worse—*yeah, it gets worse*—is that all of these individuals' sensitive medical information is now out there for anyone to use, see, sell and manipulate. The sense of personal violation is horrible. The most private and personal kinds of information—documents detailing a person's health history—have been swiped. You want to strike out; you want to do something with your anger, but who do you smack?

A Victim's Baggage

The circumstance of being victimized brings about a torrent of strong, negative feelings. This, of course, is natural and to be expected. Feeling this way is not a matter of failing in actions, thoughts or motivation, nor is it a case of inadequacy or weakness. Let's call it what it is: you've been body-slammed by life. It's been hard on you.

One basic definition of a victim is a person who is "betrayed" or "taken advantage of." It is one thing to be victimized; it's another thing to be a victim. You understand the difference: your identity, actions, attitude and approach to life have become clouded and jaded. Your ability to trust yourself and others is greatly diminished. Cynicism, a self-defeatist attitude, and the label, "loser," haunt your thoughts. Your personal life is sad and monotonous, attributable to a random act of violence, an abusive parent or spouse, an auto accident, poverty. You never intended to label yourself a victim; you don't want to, but find yourself repeating that in private. Or maybe you were hurt on the job. The healing process is painfully slow and your self-worth plummets. Insufficient employee compensation is compounded by your co-workers distancing themselves from you. Perhaps you've lost your job altogether—another victim of the faceless beast known as "the recession." Without a fresh cash infusion your bucks are running low, and the only way to keep what little money you have is to consider yourself a victim.

Victims are also those who have been assaulted or hurt deeply by a stranger or a trusted person. These situations can often be more destructive than some random act of violence because they can lead to a vicious cycle of confusion and self-condemnation. The Word of God says you are wonderful in His sight and He loves you with an unending love. Sadly, that's not the only input victims receive. Satan works overtime in these cases, and God's truth is often abandoned to the din of dissonant noise coming from unworthy and self-defeating thoughts.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

Being victimized is not only a passive thing either. Soon abusive behavior begins to surface. It seems logical to act out in frustration over your circumstances. After all, your life-plan for success didn't include being railroaded by an act of pain delivered by another; it didn't include a lousy turn of events sidelining you. You remember your former, worthwhile goals: you wanted to be a leader, a good friend, a role model to others. But now, a single circumstance or chain of events has altered you and the direction your life is headed. The idea of leading is gone; it's been replaced with apathy, anger and desperation. You see what's going on: job drifting, school failure, disrespect for authorities, attitude issues, substance abuse.

Are you tired of being angry at everyone? Are you fed up with your unwillingness to help resolve a problem? Are you always demanding, never giving? Little wonder you feel like a skunk at a picnic. The downward spiral isolates you and makes you feel detached from others—like being at a shopping mall or a sporting event or in church and feeling as lonely as a polar bear on an ice cap.

But then you remember ... the words of Jesus still apply and even more so to the victim:

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

God talks to us through His Holy Word. When you’re stuck in a rut, you don’t have to guess what God says. He cares very much for you. He desires to be a part of your life. The following is not an indictment of who you are, but what you are—*what we all are*—people in a fallen world. Many times you have heard the terms, “fallen world” or “fallen humanity.” It’s easy to hear those terms in the comfort of a classroom or from the pulpit. But the term is loaded and carries an understanding of what the score is between humanity and God. We fall short, and we’re way, way off the mark. Apart from Christ, humanity is hostile to God and branded an “enemy” of the Almighty. This, as you can imagine, is not a good place to be. We are corrupt and destined for death—temporal and eternal and, yes, it’s a pretty lousy deal. Don’t blame God. This goes back to our human ancestors, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are called to work, labor and die. When death occurs we return to dust. That’s where we stand with God. That is who we are. *While this may not take away the pain of being a victim, it is crucial to understand the condition in which we exist.* The state of humanity also helps us understand that bad things happen—they just do. Negative events occur due to humanity’s grave condition. This reality check is vital to understand. It explains that tough things will happen regardless. There are victims because the world is fallen. The world and everything in it is corrupt and in disparate need of help. Many people have been hurt, damaged and destroyed due to the *fallen state* of humanity. Is it a sad story? Indeed it is, but the retelling of this situation is still necessary. Understanding our deplorable condition helps us see the futility of the world’s self-help solutions and drives us to look elsewhere for assistance.

You Are Not Alone

Being a victim is not a stand-alone event. As others made you a victim, so too do others help you recover. You were pushed, shoved, assaulted and violated in such a way that your coping skills are woefully inadequate. Now you’re stuck. You don’t like being where you are, but you can’t remember anything else. Maybe you’ve accepted the role of being helpless and unable to control your life. Don’t give in. Don’t give up.

The term “victim” needs to be deleted from your self-defining vocabulary. At one time it may have been helpful in assessing your situation; now it’s a hindrance. Moving from the deep, dark hole of victim to the sunshine of hope requires some serious help. God, the center of the universe and the Lord of all, loves you and desires you to know His love. Because of the complexity of how individual humans cope, it would be shallow nonsense to offer any so-called “easy steps” to transition from being a victim to a better place. There is no easy recipe for feeling wonderful, fantastic and full of vim and vigor after what you’ve been through, but there is hope—the Living Hope. God does not abandon us when we’re victimized. Actually, the opposite occurs; He embraces the misery of humanity. The Lord sees your pain and reaches down to pull you up and out. Think of the apostle Peter who went out to Jesus, when He was walking on the water. Fear weighed Peter down. He panicked and began to sink. Jesus reached out, grabbed him, and pulled him up.

“But when he (Peter) saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him” (Matthew 14:30-31).

Jesus died for everyone—the rich, the successful, the mess up, the down and out and the victimized. He understands life’s disappointments. He fathoms the injured person’s loneliness, as one who Himself suffered as an innocent victim.

You read about Jesus in the midst of betrayal. In His journey to the cross, you watch events that resonate with victims. Judas’ kiss is a signal for betrayal, leading to a wrongful arrest (see Matthew 26:49). Christ is physically abused, beaten to a pulp. Think of Jesus as completely innocent, outrageously maltreated. A unique word is applied to the soldiers’ vicious cruelty: “scourged.” (The Latin for this word means to excoriate—that is “to

strip or flay” the corium, which is the “skin” or “hide.”) Jesus’ abuse—the whipping, belittling and torture—is sanctioned by the government. He had no hope, no recourse and no appeal. Jesus is thrashed within an inch of His life. Jesus journeyed the very road you’re traveling. His life, death and resurrection carry a powerful transformation of the world; you too are a welcome partaker in this joy. Even more, He sits beside you, as you languish in the pit of despair and depression. And because He does, you can hope in your situation.

Man’s Sin, God’s Promise

For reasons we will never understand, God loves us. This is demonstrated even as our parents Adam and Eve were being kicked out of the Garden. He made a promise, a very special pledge. From Eve comes a Savior who will defeat Satan.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

God the Father sent a Rescuer in His very own Son. We can’t do it on our own. God knows that and sent Jesus. Take a walk or a drive; find someplace where you can be quiet with your thoughts. Turn off the radio and the television and the music and sense God’s presence. Take a moment and understand what Jesus does for humanity. God shouldn’t care about us, but He does. We are priceless and beautiful in His sight.

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God loves us—even though we’re dirty, despised and filthy.

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Isaiah 64:6).

All of this is a basic truth *prior* to any traumatic event in our lives. The negative event in our lives did not alter God’s relationship with us. Out of God’s unfathomable mystery, He reaches down and rescues you, me and the whole world through the gift of His Son. There are no preconditions and no qualifications. Out of His pure and complete love, Jesus gave Himself up and was nailed to the cross.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

He became the victim, so we would be victorious. His death frees all from guilt, frees us from anything that hinders. When you look in a mirror, see yourself as God sees you: beautiful, wonderful—a child of His, who is completely loved and completely forgiven—and all this because of Jesus.

The truth is clear. God did not bring about the lost relationship that hurts so deeply, or the mugging, thieving, assault, the drunk driver, the death or the mayhem. *It’s part of our fallen condition.* This is why bad stuff happens to people. Understanding this is essential for true, lasting change in one’s life. It may not be pretty, but it is what it is. The ultimate truth is found in the cross, which reveals the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. By God’s grace, you are redeemed and made His child. If by chance you falter in this thought, remember that your faith—“more precious than gold” (see 1 Peter 1:7)—is given you by God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the Trinity.

When Someone You Love is Victimized

Not long ago I was with a group of folks going through some difficult times in their lives. I asked them to list what *not* to say when trying to relate to someone who had been victimized. They gave the following phrases to avoid using:

1. "I know how you feel."
2. "God needed an angel in heaven, so He took your loved one away."
3. "It's going to be okay."
4. "The Lord won't give us more than we can handle. You can handle it."
5. "It was their time."
6. "Try looking on the bright side."
7. "It's God's will."
8. "Time heals all wounds."
9. "Be grateful you had him/her for this long."
10. "Just calm down and try not to get so worked up."
11. "It's better not to talk about it."
12. "It could have been worse."
13. "You know, you *should* really _____."

Remember that everything you say and do with a victimized person must be rooted in a spirit of sincerity. Here are a few suggestions when responding that take the other person's interests to heart:

1. "I cannot imagine what you're going through, but I'm here for you."
2. "If you like, I can stay a while."
3. "What can I do for you?" (Wait for the answer.)
4. Give a victim space to breathe, but do not disengage.
5. A victim is in profound grief. Be prepared to listen quietly, as they express uncomfortable emotions of anger, sadness and despair. Although painful to hear, such feelings are absolutely normal. Do not be afraid of the raw emotions the person may convey.
6. Do not attempt to explain why the terrible event occurred.
7. Always encourage; do not push.
8. Pray for their healing.
9. Be patient; recovery is slow. You want your loved one back; they want to be normal, but it takes time. It cannot be rushed.
10. If the violated person exhibits dangerous characteristics or risk-taking activities, talk with them about it.
11. If criminal activity was the source of the traumatic event, patiently encourage prosecution.
12. Check out a support group.
13. Sometimes saying little and just being present is sufficient to let them know you care.

Coming Back Against All Odds

Can anyone forget the horrific kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart? She was a 12-year-old girl awakened by an intruder in her bedroom. Kidnapped from a loving home at knifepoint, she experienced the darkest side of humanity. After a nine-month saga of sadistic treatment, which included torture and rape she won her freedom and was restored to her family. This event is similar to a kidnapping in Austria. There a young girl named Natascha Kampusch was going to school, abducted and imprisoned by her kidnapper. After years of isolation, she too escapes. But the most notorious case of abduction is the crime against Jaycee Dugard. Accosted at a bus stop by a convicted rapist, she is held captive for 18 years. During this time Dugard is sexually molested and deprived the most basic human freedoms. During this criminal enslavement, she gives birth to two children. Eventually, the crime was discovered and her freedom restored. This immoral offense is considered so heinous—coupled by the legal and welfare system that let her down—she is awarded a settlement of \$20 million by the government.

Before you put down this booklet and fall into a dark funk, please read on. Today Elizabeth Smart is a beautiful, self-confident woman, who is moving on with her life. Natascha Kampusch, now an adult, is a television host in her native Austria. She demonstrated compassion by attending the funeral of her captor. Kampusch bristles at those who accuse her of “Stockholm Syndrome”—the paradoxical reaction where hostages show positive feelings and a sense of empathy for their captors. She makes it clear that the man stole her freedom and is a criminal. As a free woman, Jaycee Dugard continues to reacquaint herself and her children with her family. All three women speak with passion about moving forward with their lives. They do all they can to make up for lost time. The experiences of these three women will be with them for the rest of their lives. That’s for certain. The important thing to see, however, is that their past traumas do not define their present and future lives. These women refuse to remain victims of their previous situations. Their experiences are what they are, and they’re in the past. All three women are in the process of perseverance and pushing forward.

The Victim Solution: A Strategy to Break Out and Break Free

There is a powerful, negative dynamic that descends on victims. At first everyone wants to help. Friends and family want to rescue and save you—the person harmed. Early on, you want and need their help, especially when a return to normalcy seems impossible. Before very long the intensity passes, but not until a habit of receiving assistance has been established. Over time it gets easy letting others do even the simplest activities on your behalf. So what’s going on here? If not careful, a person who has been deeply wronged *abdicates* everything to someone else. It becomes easier to just give up. The problem is it’s neither healthy nor enjoyable to do this, and it eventually drives the victim to despair. In the end, freedom is lost, personal empowerment is weakened and joy is drained from life. For those going through this roller-coaster, you know it’s time for a change. You’ve had enough charity, enough freebies, enough of everybody doing for you what you can do on your own. You realize it’s time to move forward and move one—one foot in front of the other. Whatever excuses are offered for dodging the issue with excessive eating or drinking just don’t hold up anymore. It’s time for a positive change. God Bless You in your effort and attempt!

Acknowledge the Spite - “Oh, those Powerful Emotions!”

We are all created in the image of God. Though a full appreciation of this truth may elude us, some of the characteristics God chooses to reveal to us are reflected in our thoughts and actions. God created us as emotional beings. We laugh, cry and rejoice in the good; we grieve when in sorrow. These same emotions are present, regardless of life’s circumstances or our victimization. We also have the capacity for a profound anger, where we entertain, perhaps, even shadowy thoughts of revenge. We have permission to be angry at God.

“Job says, ‘I am innocent, but God denies me justice. Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, His arrow inflicts an incurable wound.’ Is there anyone like Job, who drinks scorn like water?” (Job 34:5-7).

You have a right to your feelings and emotions. They are part of who you are as God’s creative work. Human emotions are to be understood and appreciated. When you shove strong feelings down deep, they’ll erupt in uncontrolled, negative and inappropriate ways. They manifest themselves in bursts of anger, overindulgence, self-harm or actions that may endanger you or others. This negative path often follows an accelerated descent into a kind of personal hell. One’s feelings, especially when he or she has been traumatized, require exploration, not denial. Emotions are important to healing and are neither good nor bad. It is what you do with your emotions that makes the difference. The challenging balance when dealing with emotions is that people are given permission to express some (joy, love, happiness), yet often denied permission to express others (anger, depression and hatred). The traumatized survivor struggles to understand and come to terms with his or her emotions. This is not an easy thing to do.

How often do you desire 100-percent revenge—and *then some*? Do you feel a real hunger, an almost unapologetic desire for retribution in some circumstances? A rape victim's malicious thoughts may turn to castration of the criminal. A family member living through the murder of a child or loved one has graphic images of the death of the perpetrator. The list of vengeful reprisals can go on, but the point is clear: the victim's spiteful feelings are a troubling reminder that something precious has been stripped away. It hurts and payback is required. God completely understands the innermost feelings and thoughts of His children. Have you heard this passage?

“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19).

God wants to hear the hurt person's desire for revenge, no matter how gloomy and horrific. He doesn't want us to act on our thoughts. Instead, He wants us to remember that vengeance is His. He knows we *must* express what's hidden or we can't move on. Check out this passage from the Psalms. It speaks of a man held hostage. After his nation is destroyed, he picks up an instrument and strums a tune. Far from a lullaby, he sings about the settling of scores and punishing his captors in a graphic way.

“Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks” (Psalm 137:9).

The God of love gives you permission to express your feelings of revenge. Go ahead. Talk to Him about your repressed thoughts concerning your loss. Write a prayer, a poem or a song. As a child of God who is redeemed in Christ, you have the right and privilege. Keeping powerfully negative thoughts to yourself is not healthy, nor does it benefit your forward progress. Stuffing these feelings is a roadblock to recovery. Acting on thoughts of revenge is not helpful, but giving them up to God is. He can handle the rawness and horror of your innermost thoughts. Through Christ He takes our curses and turns them into blessings.

So, in the end, what is the sweetest revenge you can put on someone who robbed you of family, health, savings, self-worth or identity? The answer here is to *learn how to live a happy life*. And how do we live a happy life? *We dwell in the presence of God*. Vindictive thoughts when lifted up in prayer, bring healing. Think of what you want most. A tragedy has occurred; the crime was committed; the situation cannot be undone. Killing the wrongdoer or destroying the attacker will not do. You must take your spite and vindictiveness and through God's grace and healing love make something positive out of it.

Let the love that was lost live on in *your* act. There are many things you can do: join a rape crisis support team; give generously to victim advocate groups; write your legislator for stiffer fines and/or penalties; support elections where local law enforcement adheres to the laws of the land; help others navigate through the bureaucratic hassle of care and support. The list is endless. Put your personal demand for punishment to work in a healthy and life-affirming way.

A Few Words to Keep You on Track

Some simple *self-talk* can be very helpful in recovery. Try to come up with a theme, motto or phrase. Make it something uncomplicated. What you want is a catchphrase and some helpful ideas you can carry with you as you progress toward healing and wholeness. Here are a few suggestions:

1. “This is the new normal.”
2. “Today's a good day. God made it.”
3. “God, we can do this.”
4. “Breathe.” (Then pause and take a deep breath.)
5. “Slow down.”
6. “I can do this.”
7. Use humor.
8. Think of family members who have persevered.
9. “I'm a survivor.”
10. “Jesus, help me see this through.”

Realize at the core you are a unique, redeemed child of God. It may be hard to see that now, but over time positive change will occur. This self-discovery is your own, and no one can pressure you. Always remember this is a considerable trip—a marathon with lots of potholes and detours. Thoughtfully and patiently develop a strategy rooted in your faith in Christ. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you when things are challenging and go to Him for comfort when things are tough. Expect great things. God will deliver.

Available Resources:

- Government sites. Do an online search of your city, county and state, and then input “victim assistance.”
- Lutheran Social Services. (Type “LSS” and the abbreviation of your state/region.)
- Search online through the city where you live and add the phrase, “victim assistance.” (Be alert here though; call around and check out the organization. Be as thorough as possible.)
- Search online with “community resources.” A number of entities and organizations should come up where you live.
- National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) - <http://www.trynova.org/victiminfo/>
- Salvation Army - www.salvationarmyusa.org/
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) - <http://www.madd.org/local-offices/co/services.html>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline - <http://www.thehotline.org/>
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center - www.nsvrc.org/
- Alcoholics Anonymous - <http://www.aa.org/>
- Adult Children of Alcoholics - <http://www.adultchildren.org/>
- Contact your local police, using a non-911 number. Ask for available resources or contact persons.
- Talk to your physician. Doctors are required to maintain a list of pertinent agencies.

Notes:

*Check out LHM's online store
for a variety of ministry resources*

If you would like to get hard-copy booklets
of this item, you can do so by going to

<http://www.lhmgift.org/storefront/products.asp?by=topic&id=7>.

There you will find this and other **Project Connect** booklets,
with many titles in Spanish as well. Subjects like peace,
divorce, forgiveness, cancer, gambling, post-traumatic
stress disorder and loneliness are only a few of the topics
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