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Surprised by the Healer

Our eyes scanned the delectable delights before us: pecan-crusted salmon, warm homemade rolls, and Mississippi mud brownies. No one would be dieting at this luncheon.

Twelve women encircled the table, talking as only women can about the enticing lunch that they didn't have to cook. No preparation, no cleanup—the meal was a cherished treat. But this special luncheon wasn't only about food but also an occasion to thank each woman for her work in bringing the Authentic Intimacy conference to Ohio.

As different women talked about their excitement for the conference, Ann's words caught our attention: "I want wives to see that it is a privilege to minister to their husbands sexually."

Perhaps you have an immediate idea of what kind of woman would make such a statement. Maybe you picture Ann as someone who lives in a fairy-tale land where everything looks picture perfect. Or maybe you assume she must have grown up in a nurturing and healthy home. In either case, you would be wrong. Ann's background is one of horrific sexual abuse and humiliation followed by promiscuity. She and her husband have struggled through three

decades of healing, taking steps to learn to love each other emotionally, spiritually, and sexually.

Yet, here she was, advocating for God's beautiful design for sex in marriage. Are you surprised? We certainly were.

We are continuously (sometimes daily) amazed by the stories and testimonies we hear about Jehovah Rapha, the Healer. God is always surprising us with His creativity, power, and grace when it comes to healing. We want you to be surprised too, not just by the healing He has done in the women whose stories you will soon read but also by the healing He brings into the most intimate aspect of your life.

Between the two of us, we have ministered to women in the arena of sexual issues for several decades. Yes, we have some training on how to address brokenness using the tools of counseling and psychology. However, we have witnessed that the deepest healing only occurs through the presence of the Healer. Sexual brokenness is the deepest form of brokenness, and as such it requires the greatest depths of healing and restoration.

Every Woman's Pain

Rarely do we meet a woman who has not been, in some manner, scarred or wounded in the area of sexuality. At our Authentic Intimacy events, after a few hours of teaching on God's perspective of sex, we take live questions from the audience via text message. Visualize for a moment, a room packed with women. Young and old, single and married, from all walks of life. They have just heard that God cares about their sexual questions, secrets, and pain. They are now free to ask any question they want, anonymously. Can you imagine what questions come in? In a group of fifteen hundred women, we may get six hundred questions. They come

pouring in, full of pain and desperation. Often, the women look “put together” and have grown up in church, but underneath is a rushing current of confusion and pain that they have never been given permission to reveal. Here are some of the questions women asked at our last event:

How can I enjoy my husband fully [sexually] when pornography and infidelity have come in and stolen so much from our marriage?

*Does God hate me when I have sex with my boyfriend?
Is He totally disconnected from me?*

I started having sex at age fifteen. I had multiple sex partners and was sexually an adventurer until I was twenty-nine. My pseudo Christian husband exposed me to porn and S&M. He divorced me. Now what do I do with all the thoughts and shame I feel? God help me!

My pain is DEEP because my husband hasn't had sex with me in seven YEARS. What do I do with that pain? I recently overcame a year's long porn habit, and I don't want to ever go back there. But the pain of rejection runs deep.

I've been through molestation, parental abuse, promiscuity, rape, and infidelity. In marriage I never say no to sex with my husband, but I feel like I just want to please him, but inside I'm junk. But no one knows this about me.

I have a long past of sexual sin. I know I'm forgiven, but I can't let go of some of the memories. Sometimes a word, a song, or a smell bring them up again. Is there anything I can do to erase them from my memory?

As we read and respond to questions like these, we are often struck by the level of pain that can exist in a room of women. We look at the faces in the audience, and see they are eager to hear our responses. Each leans in as if to say, “She’s not the only one who needs to know the answer. I could have written that question.”

Friend, it’s time we tear down the veneer and acknowledge that sexual brokenness is everywhere around us and within us. Just think of the ways that sex is creating deep pain and spiritual bondage within our churches and communities. Pornography, prostitution, sexual addictions, gender confusion, rape, incest, adultery, sexual harassment . . . the list of how sex has been distorted and twisted seems endless. This wonderful gift from God has become a source of profound pain for countless men and women. We believe that this is not just a random cultural phenomenon but is evidence of a vicious spiritual battle.

Sexuality is a powerful force. It draws us into relationships, compels us to risk being vulnerable, and is a key component of our identities as men and women. Within marriage sexual intimacy is the most sacred experience two people can share. However, sexuality can also be a devastating force for harm. There is no betrayal like an intimate betrayal. No shame as deep as sexual shame. And no sin that seems to stick to us like sexual sin.

Let’s be honest. We are losing the battle over sexuality. Not just the battle “out there” in the culture but the battle in our own hearts and in our own homes. Why have so few Christian women experienced the healing and redemption that Ann’s life displays? Why are

so many Christian marriages destroyed because of infidelity, and so many of God's children walking with a dark cloud of sexual shame?

Tragically, many, many Christians believe that we are doomed to lose the battle of sexuality. They reason that some wounds are too deep, some people just too broken. After all, why would God care about sex? They may never say it, but the vast majority believe this lie: *When you give your life to Christ, He is able to redeem and clean up a lot of areas. However, there is one area that is beyond His redemptive healing power—your sexuality. You may be forgiven, but you can never be whole.*

We want to declare that this is a bold-face lie from the enemy. There is nothing too broken for God to heal.

Can God Really Heal Sexual Wounds?

Some of you, like many of the women we meet, are having a hard time believing this to be true. Perhaps you have bought into the lie that some wounds (particularly invisible sexual wounds) can never be healed. You believe that Jesus walked the earth and performed miracles and that He occasionally grants a miracle today; you also believe that God doesn't care about sex or that your sexuality is damaged beyond repair. So you put on a pretty face and limp through life with your deepest wounds compartmentalized so that the shame and pain don't bleed into the "real you."

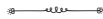
We've got news for you. God offers more than life in silos. He wants to bring the power of His Word and His Spirit, making you a new creation in *all* areas of your being, including your sexuality. He desires to restore and redeem your sexual brokenness. Why? Because sexuality represents a powerful piece of the gospel. There is no greater picture of God's love than the covenant of marriage and the sacredness of sexuality.¹ When you invite God to heal your

sexual brokenness, you're partnering with Him to restore His holy picture.

Our Lord God Almighty has many names, each declaring WHO He is. His name Jehovah Rapha boldly declares He is the Lord, our Healer. While at times we may need physical healing, our greater need is for spiritual healing. The most common use of *Rapha* in the Old Testament refers to spiritual healing.

Rapha means quite literally “to heal, make healthy.”² *Rapha* is used more than sixty times in the Old Testament in reference to physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. Here are a few examples:

- In Genesis 20:17 God physically heals (*rapha*) a man, his wife, and his slave girls so that they can have children.
- In 1 Kings 18:30 Elijah repairs (*rapha*) the altar of Jehovah, which had been torn down. Here *rapha* clearly conveys the idea of physically restoring something to its “normal” or useful state.
- In Psalm 147:3 the psalmist refers to God as the healer of emotions. The psalm shows the tenderness and compassion of Jehovah Rapha, who heals (*rapha*) the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
- In Psalm 41:4 David cries out to Jehovah Rapha for spiritual healing. He pleads, “Lord [Jehovah], be merciful to me. Heal (*rapha*) my soul, for I have sinned against you.”



Our God heals! *Rapha* clearly conveys the idea of restoring something to its “normal” state. We long for you to grasp that the Healer heals and restores sexual wounds.

Jehovah Rapha heals the brokenhearted. He lovingly lifts up His broken women and tenderly applies the salve of His healing presence to wounds caused by sinful choices, unhealthy beliefs, betrayal, pornography, and abuse. No evil done to you is so great that God cannot redeem it! God is for you in this! He longs for you to believe that He comes to you personally as Jehovah Rapha.

What Does God Promise to Heal?

Are you afraid to hope? Maybe you've hoped for healing before, only to experience bitter disappointment. Perhaps you've even had people say hurtful things to you like, "You're not healed because you don't have enough faith." Before we go any further, we want to clarify what we believe God promises about healing.

In this book you will read stories from women who have experienced dramatic, supernatural healing. You will also read stories from women whose healing appears to be incomplete. They still carry scars and wounds from traumatic events or betrayal. Why the difference?

While God promises to redeem us, to work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called by Him (Romans 8:28), His healing looks different from person to person. Each healing is unique to that individual. In some cases, God takes away the physical impact of illness or the emotional pain of a traumatic memory. In others, He gives His wisdom and the strength to endure.

At times God heals the "temporal" temporarily, but He heals the eternal eternally. Let's put it this way. When Jesus walked on the earth, He chose to heal some physical ailments, such as leprosy, blindness, and other disabilities. In rare cases, He even raised the dead. However, those physical miracles were temporary for the sake of displaying the healing and redemption that is eternal.

When Jesus heard that His friend Lazarus had died, He was filled with sadness. It hurt Him to see His friends Mary and Martha grieve their brother. Jesus said something strange to His disciples: “For your sake I am glad that I was not there [to heal Lazarus], so that you may believe” (John 11:15).

Jesus didn’t just raise Lazarus from the dead simply so he could live a couple more decades. That healing was temporary; His friend’s body eventually decayed; Lazarus died a physical death, just as all humans do. Jesus raised Lazarus to impact people for eternity: that they might believe.

When Jesus healed, He did so for the purpose of pointing us to the eternal truth that He is the Son of God, able to forgive sin and set us free from spiritual bondage. In other words, God doesn’t heal a woman of the pain of sexual abuse simply so that she can enjoy sex (although this is a wonderful gift!). His ultimate purpose in her healing, whether she is single or married, is that she will know that He is Lord, that He is her Healer, and that He has the power to redeem our lives from the pit.

In Matthew 9:1–8 we read about a man who was paralyzed. Everyone assumed the man has asked his friends to bring him to Jesus for physical healing. Jesus’ surprising response reveals the man’s deeper wound: “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” When on-lookers doubted that Jesus could forgive sins, He said, “I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and healed him physically. Note that Jesus first healed the man’s spiritual wound, which was hidden, and then He healed his physical condition.

God has not promised to heal our temporary brokenness, although He can and sometimes does. What He does promise is to redeem completely those things that are everlasting: our hearts,

souls, and spirits. Isaiah beautifully summarized our Healer's intention with these prophetic words about the Redeemer:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and to provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor. (61:1–3)

Jesus quoted this passage early in His ministry (see Luke 4:18), declaring that He is the fulfillment of this prophecy. Oh yes, He made the blind see and the lame walk. But greater still were His unseen miracles.

When Jesus forgives our sins, He also heals our soul wounds, which are intricately intertwined with guilt and shame. No one can see this healing physically but they can see a changed life, a different outlook, a different demeanor. Precious friend, the Healer wants to meet you in this way!

Do you long for sexual healing? God's Word declares that there is healing for your deepest pains and disappointments. There is victory over your addictions, your past hurts, your past failures. Physical and spiritual healing are available to you when you run to the strong tower of Jesus, your Jehovah Rapha. If you are stuck in your sexual brokenness, run to Jehovah Rapha, the God Who Heals!

In these pages, you will meet nine courageous women who

have agreed to tell you their stories, to share with you how they moved from no hope and brokenness to hope and healing. They will tell you how the Healer invited them on a unique journey to redemption in the midst of brokenness. Some of their stories will amaze you. Some will bring you to tears.

When you meet Marian, you may be shocked that a pastor's wife has such a sordid past. But keep reading.

When you meet Ann, you may cringe, wondering, *How did she live through that horror? How can it be possible that she enjoys sex today?* But keep reading.

When you meet Amy, you may think, *No way! This kind of healing isn't possible. Does she live in a La La Land?* But keep reading.

Surprised by the Healer is not just about these women and how they came to know God as Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals. It is a personal invitation for you to know His healing too. Together the chorus of these nine testimonies extends to you this invitation:

Please, please don't stay in your brokenness. Jehovah Rapha invites you to heal. He is waiting to surprise you.

Are you ready to be surprised?