

first
stone

newsletter

*"Let him who is without sin cast the First Stone"**And Jesus also said, "Go and sin no more." – John 8*

MINISTRIES

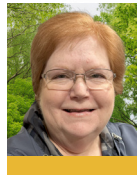
The Effects of Abuse on a Family

My Story Part One

My husband and I have eight children, three daughters and five sons. In 1999 we learned that our four oldest sons were being sexually abused by their paternal grandfather. My husband immediately confronted his father and rapidly stopped this activity. The children were never allowed to spend time alone with their grandparents again. We would later learn that the damage had been done. My husband's mother never believed that this abuse occurred. Until her death, she believed we were making this up just to hurt them. In 2010 Grandpa went to his grave without directly confessing or repenting, nor did he do anything to heal this gaping wound. In fact, until his death, he referred to what he had done as "a game". This angered my family, particularly my sons, who remain upset with their grandfather.

In 2013, the damage began to surface. One by one, the three youngest of our four sons confided that they experienced same-sex attraction. They were fearful and grieving, and we quickly realized that their needs were beyond what we confidently knew how to meet. Then, as now, we listen, offer hugs, and remind them they are family and are loved. My husband helps with car repairs, we affirm the positives in their lives, meet their friends, and avoid preaching or shaming. We have never tried to change them or play the role of the Holy Spirit.

That same year, we faced even more challenges. My mother, who was terminally ill, passed away in March. I had been her primary caretaker and was responsible for emptying her apartment. Amidst this, we were also being transferred from Kansas to Oklahoma City. Our household became a hotbed of emotion—from the surfacing abuse and its impact on the siblings to the grief of losing my mother and the stress of moving. I was overwhelmed. Every day, I told God

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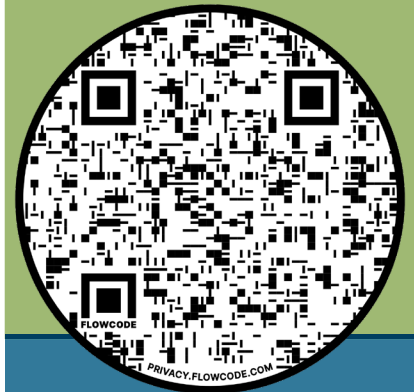
Bronwyn Welch,
Women's
Minister -
Intern

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that all of this was too hard for me, but not too hard for Him. I clung to that truth with every breath and just kept doing the next thing.

My Story Part Two

In approximately 1968, at the age of 10, my 17-year-old brother sexually abused me more than once while babysitting when my parents were away. I hated it when he babysat me. He was a star football player, strong, and easily overpowered me. I would fight back, but his strength was too much for me. Because I fought back, he would threaten to hurt me if I didn't cooperate or if I told anyone. I knew he could. I knew he would. For over 40 years I never told anyone except my husband. During this abuse, my father and brother were having a lot of verbal and physical conflict. I would hide behind a chair and my mother would be sobbing and begging them to stop and not kill one another. As a result, I was terrified that if I told my dad, he might kill my brother and end up in prison. Then, where would that leave my sister and me, with a mother who didn't drive and was paralyzed by fear? My sister and I have never been able to understand why Mom was such a fearful person. We just knew we didn't want to be like that. I had always envied my friends whose mothers were not like mine, wondering why I couldn't have a mother like theirs.

One would think I would have been terrified of my brother. In a way, I suppose I was, but the dominant emotion during and after the abuse was disgust. This feeling of disgust has stayed with me over the years, easily surfacing whenever I think of him. How did I cope with this disgust? During the abuse, I would close my eyes tightly, even turning my face away, trying to shut it out. I've dealt with my emotions

in much the same way—squeezing my eyes shut to the memories and physically turning my face away from them.

The verbal abuse from my brother has been the hardest to overcome, affecting my life in ways I didn't fully realize until I reached my 50s. Throughout my childhood and teenage years, he regularly told me three things: "You are disgusting," "No one will ever love you," and "You will never amount to anything." These words became ingrained in my mind, playing daily in one form or another. Because I grew up hearing them so often, I didn't even recognize them as toxic thoughts—they just became a part of me.

In my mid-30s, years after my father died, I muscled up the courage to tell my mother about the abuse. Her response was to ask, "Why are you trying to hurt your brother?" I sat there stunned. I never spoke of it to her again. All the 40 years between the abuse and her death, she repeatedly told me and others that he was a very loving and protective brother. Weirdly, I would try to convince myself too and try to make room for him in my life.

It became harder and harder to live this lie. After my mom's death, I was no longer being scolded for "trying to hurt my brother" even though I was not speaking of the abuse. I finally felt the freedom to face and process through it. The feelings of disgust and being repulsed are still strong memories.

Over the years I have felt grief and loss because I wanted to have a close relationship with my brother. And it simply was not possible. I envied friends who would speak of their brother being their best friend. It would hurt and be hard to listen to because I desired that too. God would speak to my heart and tell me to pray for my brother, but I would

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Psalms 1:1-3

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

**Please consider including First Stone
in your year-end, and regular 2025 giving.**



Our clients heal and mature under our care.

Living Free Curriculum



As we wrote in our Winter 2023 newsletter, we let you know that since 2018, we had a vision of writing a support group curriculum that matched our ministry's vision and mission more closely.

We are super-excited to announce that we have a fully-fleshed out guidebook, complete with appendix articles, prayers and questions that engage minds to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

It is beautifully spiral bound and we are super happy with the outcome. We are also pleased that a bulk of the content came from teachings and insights of our staff and volunteer leaders. What a testimony of God's manifold wisdom, and pastoral heart shown through our own servant leaders!

Living Free begins yearly at the end of September and ends in May. For more information, please visit firststone.org/living-free.



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resist. Changes started happening when I began receiving counseling from First Stone Ministries.

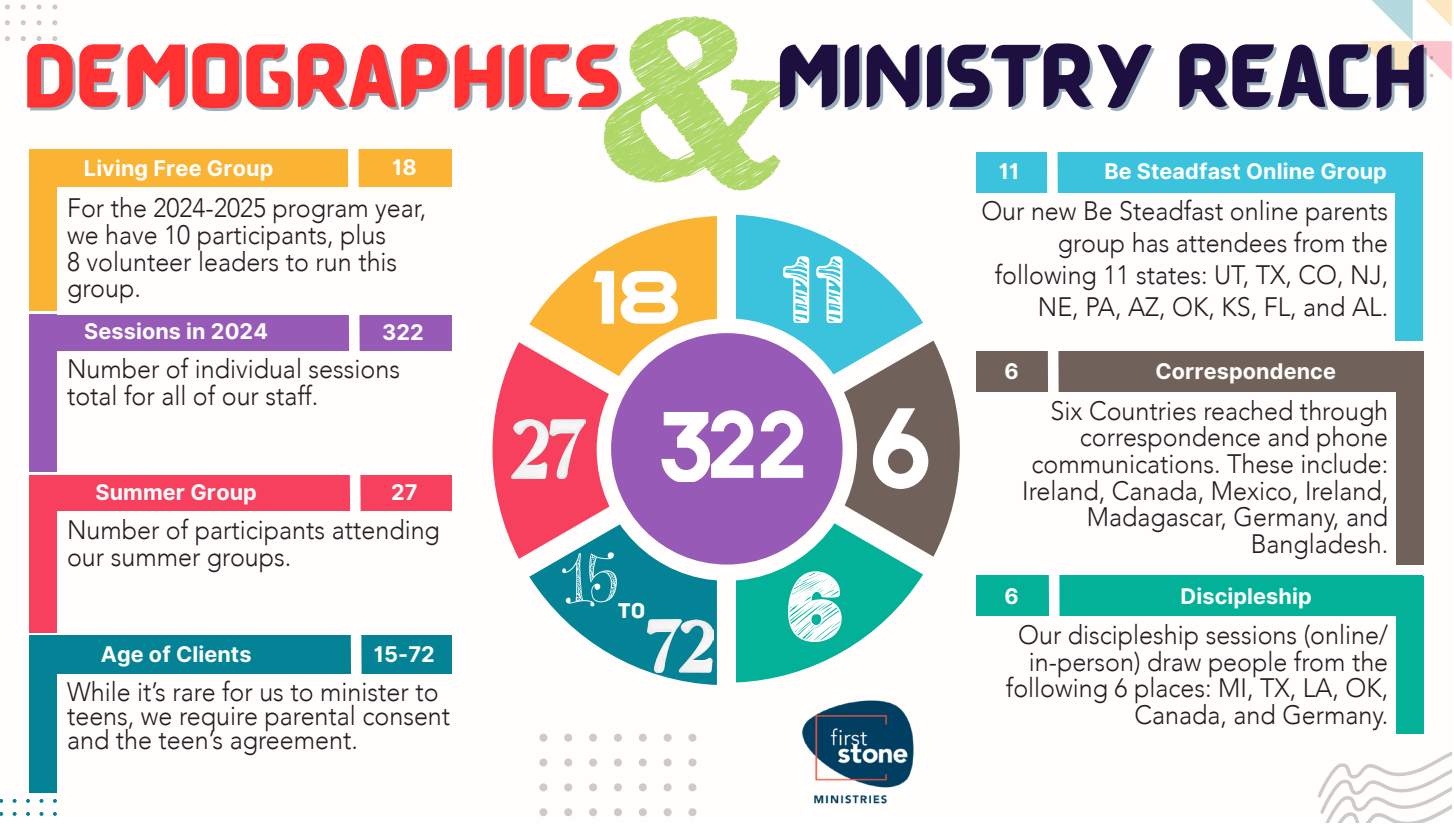
My Story Part Three

We started visiting churches after our move from Kansas to Oklahoma City in 2014. One of the churches we visited in the fall of 2015 spoke of a presentation by First Stone Ministries about sexual brokenness. I was intrigued and wanted to know more so I attended. Then my husband and I made an appointment with the director. He suggested the Parents' Group ministry and that I receive counseling from the Director of Women's Ministry to unpack my abuse since I had never done that. I received counseling, and we have attended the Parents' Group ever since. Two of the best decisions we have ever made! I was taught not to be

afraid of my emotions, that they were not wrong, and how to talk and listen to God. Generally, when I talk with God, I begin telling him how I am feeling about the subject, often ask a question, and then get quiet and wait/listen for what he impresses on my heart. Sometimes I don't know what I am feeling, so I ask God to show me so I can talk with him about it.

How did I endure, even suffer through all of this? I became a Christian at ten, and God provided excellent teachers. Through the years God reinforced this excellent teaching, and First Stone Ministries emphasized the same teaching giving me spiritual stability. What was taught and emphasized? Colossians 3:2 "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Romans 12:2 "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." 1 Peter

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Staff

For more information about each staff member, including links to any blogs, please visit firststone.org/staff.



Laura Leigh Stanlake
Ministry Director



Jim Farrington
Men's Minister



Joseph Thiessen
Office Administrator



Bronwyn Welch
Women's Minister - Intern

We Can Trust God



**Jim
Farrington,
Men's
Minister**

Recently, I was reflecting on Isaiah 26:3 which says, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." I wasn't aware (though I have heard it said before) that Isaiah 26 is called "a song of salvation". So, for a little context, let's read vs 1-3:

¹ *"We have a strong city;
God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.*

² *Open the gates,
That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.*

³ *You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You."*

From time to time, I like to use the Blue Letter Bible app because it has so many ways to study the Word. One of the tools it offers is commentaries, of which Matthew Henry is one. Over the years, Matthew Henry has been a great resource for me. He made a powerful statement that encouraged me about the passage in verse one. He said, "The church is a strong city, for it has walls and bulwarks, or counterscarps, and those of God's own appointing; for he has, in his promise, appointed salvation itself to be its defense. Those that are designed for salvation will find that to be their protection." He then referenced 1 Peter 1:4, "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..."

And all this is before we get to the faith-building Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep him in perfect peace/Whose mind is stayed on You/ Because he trusts in You." This is such a powerful promise and highlights the necessity of fully placing our trust in God, in what we can't see, but believe is true because He is.

I've read this verse many times, but this time it struck me differently. At first, I thought it might be because I was reflecting more deeply on the passage, but as I lingered on it, I realized something that many of us often do. We

tend to focus on a portion of scripture, emphasizing its significance and divine inspiration—which is certainly valuable—but we only quote part of the passage. It's become clear to me that when we do this, we might miss out on a deeper experience with the Word. By engaging with the entire passage, we open ourselves to so much more than what a single verse can offer.

For some, there may be an internal question: what does it truly mean to "keep our minds stayed on Him"? Being someone who values the depth of words, I often find myself digging into their meanings, beyond what I initially understand. The word "stayed" is one of those words that intrigued me. At first, it reminded me of trying to train a pet to stay in one place—when we use the word "stay," we mean to remain in a specific spot. That seemed to align with what Isaiah might be saying, right? However, the Hebrew word for "stayed" is saw-mak', which carries a deeper meaning: to lean, lay, or rest upon, or to lean against. It also means to support, uphold, or sustain. So, the true idea here is that if our minds are stayed on Him, we are leaning on Him, resting in Him, relying on His support, and

trusting Him to uphold us in the present moment. Suddenly, the word blossoms into something far more profound and powerful. It's in this "staying" that we experience the peace—the Shalom—of God.

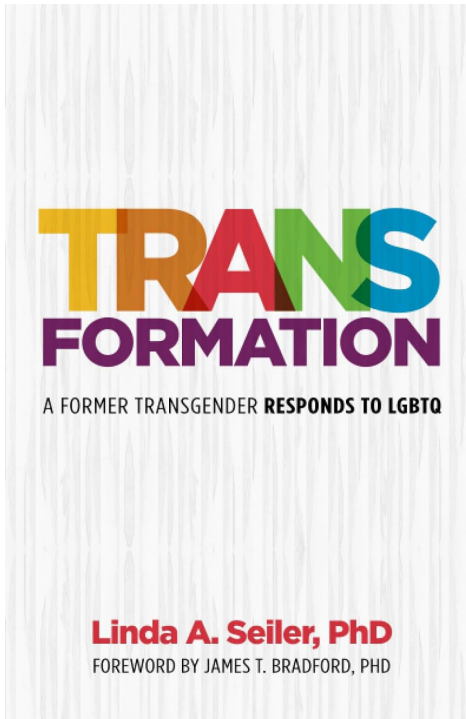
Now that I see this passage more fully, it reveals a more powerful truth about Father God. Ephesians 2:14 tells us that He, Jesus, Himself is our peace. The promise here is HUGE. When we are in Him, in Christ, we gain tremendous benefits by keeping our minds stayed—fixed upon and leaning on Him. We allow Him to carry the weight of our lives, the weight of our burdens, our sorrows. Because we place our full confidence in Christ Jesus, because we trust Him

completely, it is through this trust that we are kept in the Shalom of God, regardless of our circumstances. Can you feel the strength of this truth? Just as He is, so too is this truth unwavering.

May the peace of God guard your hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7).



Book Recommendation



Transformation: A Former Transgender Responds to LGBTQ

by Linda A Seiler, PhD

Review by Bronwyn Welch

For those looking for a user-friendly and easy-to-read book on this topic, this is an excellent choice. I simply couldn't put it down. The author, Dr. Seiler, offers hope-filled and Scripture-based advice, approaching LGBTQ matters with sensitivity and practicality. Her personal journey, as someone who struggled with these issues and found freedom in Christ, truly reflects her compassionate heart.

Many of us either have children, family members, or friends facing these struggles. We all need guidance, both for ourselves and for supporting others. Seiler addresses crucial topics such as sexual orientation and gender identity, the Bible's perspective on homosexuality, the development of same-sex and transgender desires, how transformation happens, and building redemptive relationships with LGBTQ-identified loved ones.

It's a tremendous relief to have a trusted resource that helps us navigate this challenging path that many of us find ourselves walking.

FSM

Continued from page 4 | The Effects of Abuse on a Family

1:13 "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Hebrews 3:1 "Holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus."

My Story Part Four

In February 2024 I was encouraged to have a conversation with my brother about the abuse that occurred 55 years ago. Before this conversation, fear ruled the day. I just could not bring myself to initiate this conversation. God brought it about after several years of praying about the when, where, how, and what of a conversation. It had angered me over the years that my brother had not made any attempt to talk to me about what took place so long ago though he had become a Christian and even a pastor. That February, during a conversation about another matter, I surprised myself when I asked if he had time for a conversation about the elephant in the room. He was willing to have the conversation. He stated that he did not remember the abuse but that he believed me because he knew who he was back then. I could hear the humility in his tone of voice and his choice of words. He asked if I would forgive him, and if we could develop a relationship. It was clear

that he was a changed man. Regarding the three things that he regularly said to me, he said that he hasn't believed any of them through our adult years because he has been watching my walk with Jesus. In fact, he said that I have been and continue to be his hero, the number one person he admires. At first, I could not believe what he was saying because I did not expect any of this from him. It's amazing how God can change a life! It reinforces my hope that God is at work in the lives of my three sons. Praise be to God our redeemer!

My three sons have not turned their lives back to Jesus. We continue to have a strong, loving relationship with each one and will continue to pray that they will respond to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Early on God revealed that each person has a name, a face, a personality, a story, skills, and abilities that he has given them, including my sons. So, that is where my husband and I put our focus with our three sons, which allows them to feel valued, loved, and part of the family, and to maintain our relationship with them. We do not try to fix or try change them for we cannot. We listen, love, serve, and walk with Jesus. We want them to see Jesus in us.

FSM

Administrator's Corner



**Joseph
Thiessen,**
Office
Admin

First Stone Ministries has undergone many changes in the past couple of years. We have long desired to have a more robust method of managing our client records but software prices have kept us from this. Until now. The parent company for our online donations, [Ministry Brands](#), has a service that fits our budget and allows us to move all of our databases into one system. *I have maintained at least 4 databases these past 25 years, and I'm more than ready for this change!*

Many larger churches have similar software allowing their members to maintain their own records, especially when they are giving and need to ensure receipt of their annual contribution statement. We realize that many of you do not or cannot give (May I nudge you to change your mind?), but for those who do, we hope this will be a welcome improvement.

The amount of details in our newsletter database varies. For many of you, we only have your mailing address. If for some reason your mail comes back to us, having another means of contacting you would help us ensure our connection.

If you don't mind, would you please visit <https://bit.ly/fsm-newsletter> or scan the QR code to provide us with more of your contact information? This will greatly help me in maintaining a robust database for, Lord willing, the next 25 years!



We plan to have another newsletter in your hands by the end of 2024; however, if for some reason we are unable to, please note that in order for donations to qualify for the 2024 tax season, they must be postmarked on or before December 31, 2024.

FSM

Support Groups

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1 Cor 15:58

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PARENTS GROUP



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