

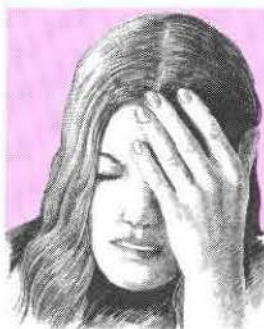
Help for the Victims of Incest

"FOR most of her life Rachel has been ridden with guilt, convinced of her own worthlessness, and trapped in a sense of hopeless isolation." What could so blemish the life of a British housewife and mother?

A 16-year-old girl from California said: "I now have a pain deep in my heart that will never go away, and it hurts, truly hurts." What could cause her such anguish?

The answer in both cases is the same: incest. Both of these women were sexually abused by their fathers when they were children. Unhappily, there are many like them. Studies in the United States suggest that one in five girls and one in ten boys suffer sexual molestation before they grow up. In most cases, the crime is committed by someone the young victim knows, and in many cases it is incestuous. Reports from other countries tell a similar story.

As the world becomes more degenerate, this problem will likely get worse. Even now, many women coming into the Christian congregation have emotional difficulties because of incest committed against them when they were children. Some have gone to professional counselors and psychologists for help, but many turn to the



congregation, looking to their Christian brothers and sisters for support. Is there any way mature ones in the congregation, even if they are not professionals in the field of mental health, can help them? Often there is.—1 Thessalonians 5:11.

If you have any doubt about the harm incest does, consider the expressions of some of its victims many years after the crime: "For 15 years I kept all those things in, so I was engulfed by years of guilt . . . How I hated men!"

"Almost worse than the actual molesting is the guilt."

"I can truly say I think I would have killed myself by now because of the memories."

"I don't want to get married because of the memory of sex. And I surely don't want any children."

A study prepared by Doctors Bruce A. Woodling (of the University of Southern California School of Medicine) and

Peter D. Kossoris (a deputy district attorney) confirms the above, stating: "Older women who were incestuously molested as children or adolescents are commonly depressed and neurotically anxious." A University of Washington study published in *Medical Times* adds: "Problems reported

Incestuous child abuse is sexual abuse of children by an older relative. Usually, it is by a male relative—such as a father, stepfather, uncle or older brother. Sometimes, but much more rarely, it is by a female relative. According to the book *The Silent Children*, incestuous abuse can range from improper fondling to oral-genital contact to intercourse. Of course, affectionate physical contact between children and older people is proper. But when the older person finds these contacts arousing, or when he does things alone with the child that he would not do if the child's mother were present, this will likely lead to sexual abuse of the child.

include: feelings of guilt and depression; negative self-image; difficulties in interpersonal relationships associated with an underlying mistrust of men, inadequate social skills, and sexual dysfunction."

Why is incest so shattering? The magazine *Child Welfare* draws attention to the situation of a daughter molested by her father: "The daughter who has been molested is dependent on her father for protection and care. . . . She dares not express or even feel the depths of her anger at being used. She must comply with her father's demands or risk losing the parental love that she needs."

A former victim rightly insists that incest "is selfish and reprehensible . . . and a grotesque violation of a child's trust and dependency."

Some little girls who were victims of incest thought that the only way men would love them was sexually, so they behaved precociously toward other men besides the one victimizing them. Other victims, when they grew to be teenagers, were overly interested in sex, even promiscuous. Many have feelings of deep anger, worthlessness and, especially, guilt. They feel guilty because of what happened, guilty because they did not stop it, guilty because of the harmful emotions, guilty if they had any pleasurable feelings during the experience, and, if the incest affected the parents' marriage, guilty because of that.

Is there any way they can be helped to handle such emotional turmoil?

It Does Not Help to Say . . .

One woman who was having problems because she had been a victim of incest over many years went to the elders in the congregation to discuss her problem. "They told me to forget about it," she reports. The well-intentioned reasoning behind that advice was doubtless that

since the bad experiences were all in the past and nothing could be done about them now the best thing to do was to put them out of her mind and think good thoughts. (Philippians 4:8) Unhappily, it is not as simple as that.

Why not? Well, think of someone who has had an arm severely disabled in an accident. His friends visit him to help him. Would it help for them to say to him: 'Oh, forget about it!' Of course not. There is no way he can forget about it.

Similarly, many women who have been incestuously abused are unable just to forget about it. For some, it is stamped on their consciousness like an emotional scar. One victim wrote: "My grandfather assaulted me when I was seven years old, not just once but on a number of occasions. My naiveté left me defenseless. Now I feel the repercussions constantly. It's been a living nightmare ever since. The memory can be pushed back for a while only to resurface and make me sick to my stomach. I feel ashamed and dirty, and I wasn't even to blame."

True, the emotional scars of incest (and other traumatic experiences) are not visi-

"The memory can be pushed back for a while only to resurface and make me sick"

ble. But they are just as real as physical scars. So how can those be helped who have them? One way is to listen to the victim and encourage her to "talk it out."

It Might Help to Say . . .

The counselor should be helpful, not judgmental. The apostle Paul encouraged Christians: "Become kind to one another

er, tenderly compassionate." (Ephesians 4:32) In counseling situations, these qualities are vital.

Thus, a woman who was victimized over many years by her father when she was a girl says: "Elders (or whoever else is approached) should be superkind." Another who was also abused by her father says: "The main thing is not to be shocked. Be calm and understanding, not pushing for every detail but being willing to listen to whatever you are told. Try to understand the victim's emotions."

Being calm and understanding is not always easy. One woman admitted that she often spoke excitedly, even belligerently, when discussing her problem. Is such conduct disrespectful? Perhaps. But a "tenderly compassionate," mature Christian will quickly realize that it is not meant personally. It is an expression of inner turmoil.—Philippians 2:1-4.

Additionally, those counseling incest victims need to listen, just as Jehovah God listens. (Psalm 69:33) They should not be quick to make comments or judgments. (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19) Does listening and giving comfort really help? Yes, indeed. One victim reports: "I was able to talk it over with a sister older than I, and what a relief I felt! I . . . wept with her." Another said: "I think just having somebody to talk to was the thing that helped me most."

If the victim is suffering from severe emotional turmoil, a more experienced counselor may be able to help her determine the reason for that turmoil and how she can deal with it. Questions such as the following may help to draw out hidden feelings: "Do you want to discuss what happened? How do you feel about yourself? How do you feel about your father [or uncle, or whoever the abuser was]? Do you blame yourself for what

happened? Do you think it makes you worse than other people?" A loving counselor will show that he is not shocked by the answers. Rather, he will explain that such feelings are not uncommon. Some have felt better when they learned this.

What if the victim reveals that she feels worthless because of the experience? A young woman who was abused by her grandfather, father and stepfather, says: "They [the counselors] could help her realize she is worth a lot. I used to feel different from my friends at school. I felt dirty compared with them. Then as a teenager I got into trouble a few times. But now I know that Jehovah does not hold this experience against me. He views me as a worthwhile person." —Psalm 25:8; 1 John 4:18, 19.

Victims often feel anger too. In her book *The Silent Children* Linda T. Sanford explains why, saying: "As the child grows older, she learns the real meaning of the sexual activity and becomes aware of the adult's gross inappropriateness. Therefore she feels betrayed. She had looked up to and trusted this older

'Just having somebody to talk to helped me the most'

person. She learns that his reassurances were monumental lies."

Some of this anger—and some of the guilt feelings victims experience—may be defused if the abuser straightforwardly admits what he did and apologizes. One victim, whose father was arrested after the incest was exposed, said: "About three years ago, my father gave me a nice present and said: 'I just want you to know I am really sorry for a lot of the things that happened between us.' I knew what he meant and accepted his

apology. Now I have a good relationship with him."

Unhappily, however, many abusers flatly deny everything or admit to only a fraction of what they did. By the time a disturbed woman seeks help, the abuser may even be dead. But the anger may still be there. Those counseling may, nonetheless, be able to help her. They can kindly point out that her anger is completely understandable. Even Jehovah remains angry at sinners who do not repent.—John 3:36.

However, they may tactfully point out the dangers of letting anger overwhelm a person. (Ephesians 4:26) They may help her to reason on this by gently asking questions such as, "Is your anger helping you or is it harming you? By letting anger affect you so much, are you still letting him influence your life? Do you *really* think he has got away with something? Is not Jehovah the Judge even of those who commit crimes in secret?" —Psalm 69:5; Luke 8:17; Romans 12:19.

Reasoning, but not in a lecturing tone, on Romans 12:21 may help. The purpose of the counsel is to help, not to discipline or apply pressure. Rather than telling the victim how she *should* feel, it is far more beneficial to listen and find out how she *does* feel, and, by gently probing with questions, to help her to see for herself why she feels that way.

If discussions reveal a deep feeling of guilt, it should be pointed out that incest committed against a young child is *never* the child's fault. True, young children often act affectionately toward adults. But they have no idea about adult sex. As the book *The Silent Children* points out: "The child never intended the closeness and warmth to become sexual. Incest is an adult's interpretation of the child's wishes—an interpretation greatly colored by the adult's own needs."

Surely one who was sexually abused as a child can be certain of God's understanding and loving acceptance. Why, Jehovah forgives even those who, unlike the abused child, commit gross sins—if they repent and change their course of action!—1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

A Realistic View

Helping victims of emotional trauma is not easy. It cannot be handled in a few minutes in a crowded Kingdom Hall. It takes patience, love, kindness, repeated efforts and, especially, time. There are no miracle cures. It takes a lot of talking—and praying—before a disturbed victim achieves emotional stability. The bad experience is never forgotten. But the victim can learn to live with the memory.

Thus one victim said: "I still get feelings of worthlessness. But I tell myself it is not true. And in about a day, the feeling goes." Another victim said: "I've learned from the Scriptures to be forgiving, to help others and not to feel sorry for myself." Another added: "They helped me to see that Jehovah loves me still . . . I'm going to overcome all my problems with the help of Jehovah."—Psalm 55:22.

The Permanent Solution

While Jesus was on earth, he miraculously healed those who were physically scarred, the 'lame and maimed.' (Matthew 15:30) In the approaching New Order, that miracle will be repeated many times over as all physical sickness is removed.—Isaiah 33:24.

In the case of those suffering emotional scars, often the loving, patient help of mature Christian men and women applying the soothing influence of God's Word can help them to handle their problems and still find joy in Jehovah's service. (James 5:13-15) However, in the New Order, we are promised: "The former dis-

tresses will actually be forgotten." (Isaiah 65:16) Thus, all servants of God look forward with confidence to the time when God "will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither

will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4) This will be the final healing of all sicknesses, including emotional ones.

Questions From Readers

■ Does Jesus' promise of everlasting life, as given at John 11:25, 26, apply only to the anointed, or do these words embrace also the "great crowd," who look forward to life in the Paradise earth?

At certain times in the past *The Watchtower* has suggested that the application of this scripture is limited to those Christians who gain heavenly life. Evidently this view was taken because Jesus was there speaking to persons who later would be given that hope. But a careful examination of these scriptures shows that Jesus was not making such a limitation. As the articles for study in this issue of *The Watchtower* confirm, our viewpoint on John 11:25, 26 must be the broader one that includes those persons whose hope is to live forever in the Paradise earth. Why do we make this statement?

Note what Martha says about the dead Lazarus at John 11:24: "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." Which resurrection did she there have in mind? Why, the resurrection that Abraham, and other integrity-keeping Jews looked forward to in faith—an earthly resurrection! How, then, would Jesus' following words appeal to Martha? They would convey to her the situation with regard to the earthly resurrection.

Jesus next identified himself as the one who would raise the dead.

But he did not say that he was talking only about *some* of the dead who exercised faith in him. He is "the resurrection and the life" for all who attain to everlasting life, whether in heaven or on earth. All of what Jesus goes on to say, in verses 25 and 26, may be applied to both groups, though in different ways. Anointed Christians "come to life" in that they are raised to immortal heavenly life. Those of the dead who will live forever on earth are resurrected and then are gradually brought to perfection.—Compare Revelation 20:4.

It is certainly true of the anointed, as stated in verse 26, that they will "never die at all" after being resurrected. They then "see God just as he is," so that they are no longer "walking by faith." (1 John 3:2; 2 Corinthians 5:7) So when Jesus says, "Everyone that is living and exercises faith in me," he introduces a factor that is especially significant with regard to those today whose hope is to attain to everlasting life on earth. Righteousness is already imputed to the "great crowd" because "they have washed their robes

and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They are already living in the flesh with the hope of surviving the great tribulation, and their lives are considered righteous lives, like that of Abraham of old. They, together with resurrected mankind, must continue to exercise faith during Christ's millennial reign in order to attain to everlasting life in human perfection.—Revelation 7:9, 10, 14, 15; 21:3, 4.

Actually, this is not an entirely new viewpoint. From time to time through the years, the Watch Tower Society's publications have suggested a broader application of John 11:24-26. For example, *The Watchtower* of June 1, 1959, page 337, said of the witnesses of Jehovah gathered out of all nations: "Those who expect to live on this earth hope also to survive the end of this world, and to live on into the new world without ever dying." It cited Hebrews 11:1, 6 and John 11:26 in support. And *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1976, page 243, likewise included resurrected mankind along with the "great crowd" of Armageddon survivors in those same words of Jesus: "Everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all. Do you believe this?"

Do you?