

**Why, God? A  
Memoir for  
Those Who've  
Suffered**

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# Chapter 7 - The Weight of Shame

**C**REAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP IS SO MUCH WORSE on the way up.

But that's what Ricky's mom was serving, so I ate it.

As a good Midwestern boy, I was raised to be polite and gracious when visiting a friend's house. One didn't question or refuse the entree being offered. I choked down the thick, fungal brew with the strongest smile I could muster, yet mere minutes after the stuff hit my stomach, I felt the rumbling begin.

*Just make it to bedtime,* I told myself.

We played a few more games with Ricky's older brother and sister, John and Dawn, and my stomach seemed to settle down as the night wore on.

"Why don't you sleep in John's bed?" their mother offered.

"That's okay," I said.

"Go ahead," John said. "I'll just put a movie on and crash on the couch."

“No movies, young man!” his mother chided him, but he just laughed and headed off, leaving his bed to me.

It was a nice-sized bed, super comfortable with soft sheets. I loved it, and within minutes of turning out the lights, I was asleep.

But the cream of mushroom soup wasn't going down so easily.

I slept for a few hours before waking to the sensation of barbed wire looping through my stomach.

*I'm gonna throw up.*

I threw John's bedsheets off and scrambled down the hall, groping in the dark along the walls to find the bathroom.

*Hurry, Chris, hurry—*

The first wave erupted out of my system, hot and sour like a witch's brew. I tried to cover my mouth but the vomit spewed between my fingers all over my friends' hallway floor and further into the bathroom.

Immediately lights began to click on.

*No, no!*

I scurried up off the floor and grabbed a towel from the rack.

“Chris?” a voice called. “Is that you?”

It was Ricky.

“Yeah, no...” I said. “I'm... I'm fine—”

*Blech!*

Another surge of stomach fluid rushed out of me and splattered on the bathroom tile, missing the commode. It was so gross! The filthy scarlet and gold miasma was all over the floor with little splotches on the cupboards and walls. My shirt was amess with it, too, and my pajama bottoms—

I gaped at my thin trousers. They, too, were soaking wet.

But not with mushroom puke.

“Oh, man!” I heard a voice say, back in John’s room. “It’s all over the bed!”

“God, no...” I whispered.

*Run.*

I looked out to the hall then back in the bathroom. Maybe I could shower it off? I had to do something to cover this up, to hide the fact that I had just—

“Chris?” Ricky called. “Are you okay?”

*Hide.*

“I’m... I’m good!” I shouted, turning on the hot water. “I got sick. I need a shower, okay?”

My friend appeared in the door, took one look at the mess of vomit and winced. “Yikes... you vomited all over the hallway, too.”

“Sorry,” I moaned. I climbed into the bathtub in full clothing, hoping to rinse it off somehow.

“Hey buddy,” Ricky said, raising his voice above the sound of the spraying water. “Did you puke in John’s bed?”

“I... um... maybe,” I stammered.

*My pants were soaked. It was like I had unleashed Niagara in the middle of the night—*

“It doesn’t look like puke,” Ricky said. “Or smell like it.”

I froze, the water streaming over my face. I didn’t answer.

“Chris?”

“Yeah?”

“What’s in John’s bed?”

I swallowed.

*Don’t tell the truth don’t tell the truth don’t you DARE tell the truth—*

“I... I don’t know.”

“It smells like pee, man.”

I wanted to drop dead.

“No it doesn’t,” I lied.

“Um, yeah it does,” Ricky answered.

Then he said nothing more, walking back to his brother’s room to clean the sheets I had soiled with buckets of urine.

I stood with my pajamas on in that shower for a seeming eternity. I never wanted to leave it. I never wanted to face Ricky, John, or his family again.

But I would have to. And when I did, my years-long secret would be out in the open, never to be hidden again.

~

#### IT ALL STARTED WITH MY ABUSE.

My parents didn’t know it, but the timing was unmistakable. My body, and the part of God’s Spirit that lived inside me, was crying out against the evils done to me by my abuser. Mom and Dad assumed it was because I was a heavy sleeper and couldn’t make it to the bathroom in time. From age four all the way until college, I was a serial bedwetter, prohibiting me from enjoying many of the pleasures of boyhood.

I longed to go on outings like camping trips with my schoolmates, or to stay over at a friend’s house. Despite my yearning to join in many overnight adventures, my parents were too afraid that I would have an accident in the middle of the night and opted to keep me home. It was simply too risky.

The one time they loosened this protective net—the only time, in fact—was the time I begged to go to Ricky’s house. It ended horribly and crushed any chances of participating in overnight activities for the foreseeable future.

I was particularly heartbroken when my school conducted a raffle, the winner of which received a free week-long camping excursion with the school. It was over in the mountains of North Carolina, a place I have always been fond of, and it wasn't cheap. Mom and Dad always opted out of the annual affair, claiming it was too expensive. But this year the school held a raffle and my name was drawn. I was ecstatic, and hurried home to tell my parents the news.

Holding the winning certificate in her hands, my mother sat down and placed her fingers over her mouth, perhaps stifling a small burst of emotion.

"We can't go, baby," she muttered.

"What?" I cried. "Of course we can. I won!"

My mother turned to me and shook her head. "Chris. It's a week of camping."

"Yeah?" I said.

"A week with your classmates. *Many* of them."

It was beginning to sink in. I'd never make it a week without peeing the bed. Heck, getting through a single night was still considered a monumental achievement in my household. What were we supposed to do, bring seven sleeping bags just for me?

I burst into tears, yelled something about it not being fair, and ran to my room and slammed the door. I wanted to stay mad at her, to make it her fault, but I knew the truth. I couldn't go. The bullying would be relentless. I'd be an outcast. No longer would a limited group of people like Ricky and his family know; *everyone* would know. I had to keep trying to hide my secret.

I hadn't yet made the connection between the bedwetting and the abuse I suffered as a young child. From my point of view, the bedwetting was my fault.

Something was wrong *with me*.

So it was that all through my adolescence, I was constantly yoked with terrible shame.

It's difficult to speak about how hard this was for me. There were so many nights I would lie in my bed crying, unwilling to go to sleep for fear of the embarrassment that was to come.

Many of those nights I was alone. My brother always got to spend nights with his friends without any worries or objections from Mom and Dad. He got to attend overnight trips to Kings Island; he got to participate in school and church trips. I never got to do these things, all because of the relentless brokenness my body had suffered.

I can't fully express the pain I would feel. I used to pray to God and ask, "Why am I wetting the bed?" Every morning I'd be so embarrassed because my mother had to wash the sheets *and* the waterproof pads she'd cover the bed with. Especially as I grew into a teenager, the mess wasn't just a spot or section of my pajamas. It was *everywhere*.

If I was embarrassed to have to face my poor mother each morning, it destroyed me to see the look on my dad's face each morning. I don't know if he intended it, but I perceived nothing but pure disappointment from him.

My parents didn't just try to hide the problem. We went to lots of doctors hoping to get answers. The medical people had me use various pads and take pills. When that didn't work, they told my parents not to let me have any water to drink after 8:00. When that wasn't early enough, the doctors pushed it back to 7:00, then 6:00. Like any active kid, I got thirsty, but my parents refused. I'd have to sneak just to get a sip of water.

The one time we did an overnight and I *didn't* pee was a camping trip with some friends. We stayed in a RV and my mother took it upon herself to make sure I didn't pee that night. I didn't have a drop of water after 6:00 and Mom kept me up all the way until 11:00, just

to make sure my bladder was a desert. I went to bed, praying tonight would be different.

Yet I woke, hardly an hour or two later, to her stroking my cheek.

“Sweetheart,” she whispered, “it’s time to get up.”

I blinked and looked around. The RV was still pitch black.

“Is... is it morning?” I mumbled.

“No, no,” she said. “It’s time to get up and go to the bathroom.”

I sighed, the heaviness of my awful problem landing on me again. Without a word, I rose and trudged to the tiny RV bathroom and forced out whatever liquid was left inside me. Mom marched me back to bed, kissed me on the forehead, and promised to wake me again in an hour or so.

I didn’t pee that night only because of my mother. I didn’t sleep much either, but then again, neither did she.

Such was the price a single night of dry sheets cost her.

~

IMAGINE THE LONELINESS I FELT. Imagine the embarrassment, the constant humiliation, the ongoing sense that something in me was broken unlike with anyone else. The constant voice telling you to run and hide, to just protect yourself from drowning.

Perhaps you have endured suffering like this. Perhaps you’ve experienced ridicule and scorn. Heck, we all go through middle school, so it’s safe to assume you were picked on for something. Adolescence can be a gauntlet of teasing and mockery. Bullies will find any reason to target you and hurl insults at you. When we are teased, it’s easy to feel deep shame based on what they say.

Unfortunately, at the age when teasing is most prevalent, we know little of psychology. Few eleven and twelve year-olds have the where-

withal to call a bully out for what they truly are, a coward. Almost no young person realizes that bullies are acting out of their own insecurities and shame, and will do practically anything to move those negative feelings elsewhere.

I wasn't teased for bedwetting too often. Miraculously, few people knew about it. One person, however, knew about it.

My dear, wonderful grandfather.

As the bedwetting persisted into high school, it became my custom to wear adult diapers each night to prevent soiling the bed sheets. It was a humiliating experience, as each morning I had to dispose of the wet diaper in the bathroom trash can before taking a shower. It was a constant reminder of my inability to control something that most people take for granted.

My grandparents were up visiting us for a week in Columbus staying in our house. My grandfather possessed a most gentle and kind temperament and was someone I always looked up to and admired. He normally was a soft spoken and gracious man, but one day he couldn't hold it in any longer when he saw me dispose of the wet diaper one morning. He came over, retrieved the thick wad from the wastebbin, and thrust it in my face.

"What's wrong with you?" he growled. "Why don't you just get up and pee in the toilet like a normal boy?"

I didn't know what to say. This was so out of character for him. Hot shock paralyzed me from feet to forehead, so I just stared blankly at him.

Apparently my silence did nothing to soften his anger, and he hurled the diaper back in the trash and walked away.

As he departed, overwhelming shame fell on me like a lead coat. I wanted to curl up on the ground and sob.

What was wrong with me? Why was I broken? Why couldn't I control this thing, this gross and childish and embarrassing thing?

And why would God let it go on for so long? Didn't He love me and want me to live a normal life?

~

THANKFULLY THE BEDWETTING STOPPED. At the perfect time, too, I might add.

When I moved into my college dormitory as a freshman, my body suddenly stopped peeing at night. I don't know why, but I have a guess: I was no longer near the reminders of my abuser.

I was a man, a free adult with agency over my life. Something inside me no longer needed to cope with the trauma and I was finally able to enjoy the fruits of a vibrant social life.

Several years later while still in my college studies, I discovered the underlying cause of my bedwetting as I came to realize what my abuser had done to me. This was a startling yet liberating experience for me. Previously I had held myself responsible for my bedwetting, believing it to be a personal failure. Now I understood that it was a symptom of a much larger issue that was not my fault. Despite the difficulties and frustrations I experienced, I am grateful for the clarity and insight that it brought me. I believe that my exclusion from many childhood activities was a way for God to draw me closer to Him. Perhaps this is why, as a child, I yearned to know God as a friend more than most teenagers do.

On a final note, I want to make sure the following is clear: persistent bedwetting is a sign of sexual abuse. It's one of the easiest signs to see and should cause parents to take a closer look at who is around their children.

With that in mind, I do wish my parents had recognized the warning signs of sexual abuse and sought help earlier on. However, I don't fault them one bit. Predators are very good at manipulating trust for their evil exploits.

I am thankful for the unwavering patience and support both my parents gave me, even though they were unable to fully comprehend the underlying problem. It's always tempting to assign blame, but as I wrote before: Assigning blame is the easy part. It never brings healing. It may bring clarity, but never closure.

Thankfully, I've been walking with the Lord to heal from the trauma of my abuse and the numerous embarrassing situations that abuse spawned. I hope that you come to Jesus with whatever trauma you've endured; I hope you can silence Satan's voice and trust Jesus enough not to run, hide, and avoid the healing process.

You can rest on the courage of Jesus Christ. No man has ever endured so much with such strength. No one has ever transformed worldly shame into eternal glory so beautifully.

He offers that power to us if we trust in Him and depend on Him fully.

You can trust Him.