

# **Trading Fathers: Forgiving Dad, Embracing God**

## **Interview Questions with Answer Notes**

### **1. Why did you write Trading Fathers and what did you hope to accomplish?**

I wanted to encourage Christians to understand how our own experience with our fathers affects our ability to trust God. God is a true father who suffers with us. Also, in twenty years as a psychotherapist, I saw many people who did not know God loved them. I wanted to share my own story so people can see how I worked through anger, depression, and anxiety. I could show them, not just tell them, how to get free.

### **2. How would you define a dysfunctional family?**

We could define dysfunction a number of ways. An emotionally healthy family can give affection and resolve conflict. An unhealthy family, a dysfunctional family, lives with lots of unresolved conflict and isn't very affectionate. The three rules of dysfunctional families are: don't talk; don't trust; don't feel. Don't talk about what's really going on, don't trust anyone to have your best interests at heart, and don't feel your anger and sadness.

### **3. How does the relationship with our parents affect our view of God?**

Our experiences with our parents set up automatic assumptions about how authority figures will treat us. If our fathers were firm but kind, we'll automatically, unconsciously, expect other authority figures, including God, to act the same way. If a parent is abusive, we will, mostly without realizing it, expect God to act in the same way.

### **4. What was the worst consequence of sexual abuse from your father?**

The inability to trust. Sexual abuse is a gross violation of trust. If you can't trust your father, who can you trust? This is especially true of God, who calls himself our father.

### **5. How were you able to forgive your father?**

Forgiveness is both a choice and a process. We begin by being willing or praying to be made willing. Find a Dozen Helps to Forgive on my website: [www.tradingfathers.com](http://www.tradingfathers.com). I have also purposely and specifically prayed to better understand myself. The more we understand and heal from our own hurts, the more we have to give. I would never have been twenty years a psychotherapist or written this book if I hadn't prayed those prayers. I'd still be mired in the muck.

### **6. What is shame and how can we heal from it?**

Shame is that sense that something is irremediably wrong with me. Not with what I've done--that's guilt--but with my core self. The subtlety here is that something really is wrong with all of us--that's what it means to live in a fallen world and to be fallen, ourselves. But nothing is especially wrong with you or me. If we feel ashamed, we have learned to feel that. We can unlearn it. Jesus takes our shame. Think about how your life would be different if Jesus had raised you. If he had put you to bed, greeted you after school, and eaten dinner with you.

### **7. What is trauma and what are the three keys to healing from the trauma of abuse?**

Trauma is a shocking, painful, or distressing experience that overwhelms our ability to cope with it. If trauma is the result of another's sin, such as abuse, we need to first, call sin, sin. Choose forgiveness. Then, grieve the losses. We forgive the sin; we grieve the losses the sin creates.

## **8. What are some common reactions to the trauma of sexual abuse?**

Reactions vary widely and other kinds of abuse can have the same consequences. Victims also may not realize the connection to the abuse.

Typical emotional reactions include fears, depression, panic attacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and being easily startled. Also, victims display little self-respect and may engage in self-destructive behaviors, including drug abuse and sexual promiscuity. Most prostitutes have been sexually abused.

If abused by an authority figure—e.g., father, mother, pastor, teacher, older brother or sister, shopkeeper—will often expect other authority figures to hurt them, too. Especially applies to God, the Father—a key theme in *Trading Fathers*.

Socially, victims distrust others and fear loss of control.

Sexually, lovemaking is often problematic, especially because of flashbacks—intrusive memories of the abuse that are triggered by elements of lovemaking.

Physical complaints, often inexplicable, are common. Eating disorders can occur. Victims may have a sense of a “foreshortened future.” (I had little expectation of a life beyond college.) Various levels of denial are a common reaction. e.g. “What happened to me wasn’t abuse.”

## **9. How do we develop self-awareness regarding our own reactions to abuse?**

Look for overreactions. Those times when you realize your reaction was out of proportion to what happened. For example, your child spilled milk and you slapped her face. Ask God for insight. Let him be your counselor. Ask others for feedback.

## **10. Where is God when we suffer?**

Suffering with us. Isaiah 63:9 says, “In all their distress he too was distressed...”

Matthew 25:40 says “The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'” (NASB) This suggests God’s closeness to those who are the least. Sometimes we are the “least of them.”

Jesus wept with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus. He shared their suffering.

How can he truly love us and not suffer with us?