

# TAMAR TALKS

A NEWSLETTER FROM

TAMAR'S VOICE

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."  
John 8:32

Summer 2011



*The following article was sent to me a few weeks ago from a survivor who contacted us through our website. Because the name of this ministry, Tamar's Voice, was founded upon the Bible passage in II Samuel 13, I felt this article was so pertinent to our ministry. I pray her words will give understanding and hope.*

## What About Me? Where Could I Ever Take This Shame?

### I. THE QUESTION

As the "family of God," the church functions—and often dysfunctions—accordingly. Perhaps even more than a traditional family, the church should provide its members with a positive environment of enlightenment and growth; a safe dwelling for those who are vulnerable and need to trust the father figures they know as pastors and church leaders in positions of authority and control. Unfortunately, scripture renders a tragic outcome when the humanness of those who carry the authority of God influences their commitment to protect and never harm those in their care. This scenario is no more vividly described than in its portrayal of Amnon and his obsession with Tamar, which

left her victimized, outcast and shamed. II Samuel describes a father's transgressions passed down to the next generation as King David's sin is reenacted through his son. Though David was devoted to God (I Kings 15:3), he observed Bathsheba from far away. Already the wife of another man, she was not available even to the king, yet he became obsessed with having her. David fell to his own temptations; he and Bathsheba suffered horrible consequences. David's actions had nothing to do with love, and everything to do with obsession and power; rather than to protect the wife of his soldier, David took her for his own pleasure (II Sam 12).

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Jan Tuin

## Personal Notes ~ Jan Talks

It has been awhile since we sent a mailing through the postal service. I have tried to keep in contact with those who have internet service via our e-newsletters. Although it is more economical to contact through the internet, it not always as efficient and personal. I want you to know I am alive and well and moving forward with the calling given me 14 years ago.

I was going through my files recently and was once again impressed with how many women have contacted us through the years. Some came to us as their first contact as they told their story for the first time, found the resources to help them, and then faded from us. Others stay in contact for some time until they are able to find the local help they need. Sometimes we hear from women from the past who continue to struggle and we try to encourage them that although it is long road, there is HOPE! We remind them that healing from clergy sexual abuse takes time and is hard work. Sometimes, something has triggered a setback and they

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*(Personal Notes continued from page 1)*

know we are here to listen and understand. Others have found healing and have moved on to a healthy place. Many who have come to us in crisis just disappear and I wonder how they are. I pray for them and ask God to be with them. Of course, it is always a joy to hear from those who contacted us many years ago to let us know how they are doing.

Regardless, if they reached out to us and moved on or they have stayed in contact for years, I pray for all of them—that God will protect, guide, and support them with His Love.

*(“What About Me?...” continued from page 1)*

No surprise that David’s first son and heir to the throne fell to the same temptation. As a priest of God (II Sam. 8:18), Amnon was keenly aware of the consequences of his choice. The lovely, young Tamar was not available to Amnon! She was a virgin daughter of the king and David’s household should have been a place of safety and protection for her.

Amnon “became sick” as his every thought was consumed with how to have her. “I’m in love with Tamar,” he told his friend. Yet everything about his scheme to get her alone was anything but love. In his father’s footsteps, Amnon used position and power to fulfill his own desire, with no thought of the tragic consequences for Tamar.

Amnon did not suddenly fall to an unexpected temptation. He clearly planned to have Tamar summoned to his side, setting the stage to have

sex with her. Pleading with him to consider that his actions would ruin her life and her very existence, Tamar wisely perceived the long-term consequences of his act. Foolishly, Amnon’s only concern was to satisfy his immediate need. “What about ME?” she pleaded. “Where could I ever take this shame?” Amnon was about to commit both incest and rape, an act mirrored in the church every time a pastor or church leader takes advantage of his role of authority and power by sexually and/or emotionally using any woman within the household of faith. He abuses his fiduciary responsibility and distorts his fatherly role so that his actions do in fact mimic Amnon’s obsession, rape and incest. Not only is a woman’s body violated, her trust is ravished, and her personhood is potentially compromised by the rape of her very spirit. Like Tamar, her existence and future feels fatally wounded. Where could she ever take this shame?

Amnon’s first act was compounded by his resulting hatred for Tamar. He despised her and ordered her to get out, because what Amnon felt initially for Tamar was not about love, but selfishness; love does not demand its own way (I Co. 13:5); Amnon’s actions towards Tamar were not consensual but overpowering. Tamar pleaded once again with him. He had already ruined her future; no man would ever take her as his wife. She would bear no children, she had no future, no hope. Because he violated her, Amnon was required by law to marry her and never divorce her as long as he lived (Deut. 22:29). She begged him not to cast her out, for this would be an even greater crime than the one already committed. Yet Tamar’s

cries fell on Amnon’s ears like the seed Jesus described falling onto thorns (Luke 8:14). Amnon had his assistant cast Tamar out, barring the gate so that she would be unable to return. How many times has the church reenacted this event when a woman, already consumed by the shame of what has taken place with her pastor, has the courage to speak? When the act is no longer secret, too often the woman, violated and shamed, is cast out of the church with the doors slamming vehemently behind her.

To compound her shame even further, Tamar’s one hope, her brother Absalom, hides her and urges her into silence in the effort to protect the family name. “Don’t let it upset you so much. He is your half-brother, so don’t tell anyone about it” (II Samuel 13:20). Aren’t these words echoed over and over again as the church silences her victims for the sake of “the good name of the church” and the protection of the pastor and his family?

Amnon’s place in life appeared unchallenged. Disregarding the impact of his actions in every way, they eventually cost him his life. He had the power to act with distinction and to lift Tamar’s face in honor, or fully destroy both their futures. Tamar begged, “What about me? Where could I ever take this shame?” This question is echoed through the voice of every woman who has been disregarded in the same way. “What about me? Where could I ever take this shame?”

## **II. THE ANSWER**

Where does she carry the shame? Jesus came into the world not only to carry the burden of sin but also its effects—including shame, lifting it from her shoulders and erasing it

from the inside, out. As with Tamar, the victim of clergy sexual abuse often carries the burden of the offense in the form of shame and fear. True love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) and God lifted the burden of fear and shame upon the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus' own mother felt the fear and potential shame of being pregnant, knowing that her betrothed intended to quietly end the engagement. But Joseph—a descendant of King David—did not cast Mary away as Amnon had cast Tamar out. Instead, he listened to what was right. At the very time that Mary was big and pregnant she was not confined to hiding in shame, but was able to openly proclaim: "My soul magnifies the Lord! His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation! He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly!" (Luke 1:46-55)

This past Advent Season our pastor discussed reclaiming the innocence of a child in expectation of Christ's coming. He told of his daughter's innocence when she was very young and how easily she trusted; she delighted in people, he explained, and would joyfully trust anyone. But for her own protection, he and her mother had to instill within her a "healthy" amount of fear so that she might not be influenced or hurt by trusting the wrong person.

As I listened, I thought how true that analogy was for me upon entering seminary where I trusted the professors so deeply, much as a child—a child of faith. These pastors who would instruct me represented God. I, like my peers, held them up and allowed them to interpret God's will

not only through their words, but through their actions.

Perhaps this only increased my shame when later I tried to understand how it was that I, a faithful wife and mother who had never entertained a thought of being unfaithful to my marriage vows—a woman studying to be a member of the clergy—how this could have happened to me? How was I caught in a scenario that would aptly be defined as adultery, a consensual relationship, or even worse, as my having been the seductress? I had never been abused as a child—how was I vulnerable when I had never felt predisposed to fall? How could I have betrayed my marriage vows—of all times, as I prepared to be a pastor? These thoughts only compounded my sense of shame.

For years, I asked, "how could this have happened to me? Where do I take my shame?" You may be asking yourself the same questions. The answer lies in Christ, himself: Christ calls us to be childlike in our faith. I trusted. I trusted to the point of allowing that faith in my pastor/professor to override even my own better judgment. Deeply held trust can make a woman precariously vulnerable to her pastor. The very childlike faith that Jesus asks of us, which should be held sacred by the clergy, can create the vulnerability that a predator seeks. It is this vulnerability that allows the pastor to use his power and authority to overcome a woman's better judgment, to deceive those around him as Amnon misled Tamar into coming to him. Just as with King David and Bathsheba; just as with Amnon and Tamar; clergy sexual abuse is not based on love, but obsession and power.

That I was capable of superseding

my own judgments and boundaries produced a shame that corrupted my view of the world and my ability to trust anyone, including myself. Perhaps, like me, the sense of shame has completely distorted your view of life and your ability to trust your better judgment, for you recognize that your sense of right and wrong became skewed by your own faith. The shame is overwhelming and you fear there is no place to release it. But there is. The answer is so simple as to appear complex. If I had read these words five years ago, I would likely have tossed them aside, slamming them down in anger, proclaiming that they were far too simplistic, that my situation was different and that no one would ever understand! I vacillated between anger and shame, compounded by confusion and isolation, yet when I reached out to Tamar's Voice, I received a response that reflected compassion and understanding.

Jesus truly is the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us in our times of deepest shame that we are to fix our eyes on Jesus, who was the "pioneer and perfecter of faith." Listen closely: he endured the cross, scorning its shame only to be exalted to the place of honor at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus entered this world as the product of a woman initially shamed, but lifted up by none other than the Lord God; his advent into the world of our shame was not only to announce the Good News that we are free from the burden of shame, his life demonstrated the liberation of its humiliation so that when his life ended, he took with him its burden, which



## How Donations to Tamar’s Voice are used:

- Newsletters and E-Newsletter
- Website
- Travel when necessary
- Materials sent free of charge to new survivor contacts
- Office equipment and supplies – Includes computer expenses, telephone calls, miscellaneous supplies
- Annual Board of Directors Meeting

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*(“What About Me?...” continued from page 3)*

was neither ours to bear nor his to claim. Out of his love for the victim and the sinner, he lived out the most shameful experience of crucifixion—the very act of crucifixion was intended to shame its victim and his family—like a criminal, his clothes were torn from his body. Jesus hung on the cross, the symbol of shame; he died for the forgiveness of sin, to release the burden of shame and to enable you and me, my sister, to reclaim the innocence of a child of faith. What about you and what about me when those whom we trusted silence us and try to bar us from the family of God?

Where can we take our shame? To the cross. To the cross, dear faithful child of the most high God. To the cross. Release the shame and reclaim your innocence!

✠ A Survivor

Please cut out and return to Tamar’s Voice Ministry.

- Enclosed is a \$\_\_\_\_\_ contribution to Tamar’s Voice Ministry.
- I would like to make a monthly contribution to Tamar’s Voice Ministry for \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- I want to support Tamar’s Voice Ministry with my prayers.
- Please change my address or email for the Tamar’s Voice Ministry mailing list.
- I want to receive the e-newsletters. My email address is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Please remove my name from the Tamar’s Voice Ministry mailing list.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## TAMAR TALKS



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*From Survivors and Supporters...*

"Thanks for your prayers. Women like me need you so much!!"

"I enjoyed your letter via email today. Yes, I was abused by a clergy about 15-20 years ago. Your book, etc. helped me process that alot."

"It is good to be able to correspond with someone who has been through some of the same things."

"Thank you for your compassion and concern.... I am so glad that you made that website and wrote the book."

"So how do I survive this?...Thank you so much for the books. I think they will help! Thanks for being there."

"I do not know how to find my way out of this darkness. Just when I think I see a glimmer of sunshine breaking through, the cloud cover closes in again. It's so deep and so dark."

"I just wanted to write to you to tell you - I have come a long way in my healing. Thanks and may God continue to build you up in this work."

"Thank you again for all your help. I can't tell you how much it has meant for me to have a real-time prayer partner as I journeyed through the last two years. Thank you again."

"Thanks again for your prayers for me, and your encouragement. I am so thankful for you and Lon. Your calmness really helps my anxiety over the things I'm going through."



## Hope for Restoration

Even the wilderness will **rejoice** in those days.

The desert will **blossom** with flowers.

Yes, there will be **an abundance of flowers and singing and joy!**

The deserts will become as **green** as the mountains of Lebanon,

As lovely as Mount Carmel's pastures and the plain of Sharon.

There the LORD will **display his glory**, the splendor of our God.

With this news, **strengthen** those who have tired hands,

And **encourage** those who have weak knees.

Say to those who are afraid, "**Be strong, and do not fear,**  
For your God is coming to **destroy your enemies.**

He is coming to **save** you."

(Isaiah 35:1-4)

New Living Translation

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