

Divine Reversal



Praise for Divine Reversal

"I cried when reading this book because it resonated so deeply with me. Susan's story will set so many free from shame and guilt to grace and hope. Her testimony is a living testament to the resurrection power available in Christ. I am forever changed after reading this book. You will be too."

—**REVEREND TERRI OFORI**
M.Div., Harvard University,
Th.M., Princeton University,
Chaplain and Director of Religious and
Spiritual Life, *Ursinus College*

"As a trauma therapist and Director of the Child Sexual Abuse Institute of Ohio for over four decades, I have counseled hundreds of survivors and heard countless stories of suffering. But seldom have I been so impacted by one person's journey. I have read specific portions of *Divine Reversal* out loud to clients knowing that what Susan had gone through and how she had come through it would minister to them...and minister it did...deeply and powerfully. *Divine Reversal* offers a way out for those emotionally crippled by abuse to stand on their own two feet again. It offers hope for victims to see themselves through God's eyes, not their own—or their offender's. Most of all, it is a story of not being silenced by fear or shame any longer and getting one's voice back. And what a powerful voice it is! To God be the glory."

—**VICTORIA KEPLER DIDATO, MA, LPC, LSW, DAPA**
Director, *Child Sexual Abuse Institute of Ohio*

“Divine Reversal had my heart from start to finish. It offers a front-row seat into how God moves lives from the deepest darkness to the warming rays of sunlight. No matter how broken your life may be, Susan’s story is living proof that the love and power of Christ can turn your mourning into dancing and ashes into beauty. An absolute inspiration! A must-read!”

—**PASTOR SHERREN V. MCKENZIE**
Unity Church of Jesus Christ

“Susan outlines a story of God's power, grace, and love that will bring hope and affirmation to so many. As the story unfolds, you'll find your heart aching for Susan, cheering her on, and finally rejoicing with her as she is able to fully accept and extend God's forgiveness and all that He has for her. For anyone struggling with strongholds in their life, this is a must read.”

—**GEORGINA MANAHAN, M.A.**
Grace & Hope in Loss, LLC

“What transparency and vulnerability! A must-read to ignite in you a desire for Father God to completely heal your heart. What an ending to come from the depths of depravity, pain, and abuse and to experience such a divine reversal! A movie should be made from this story.”

—**REVEREND JOYCE ROMACK**
Moving with the Spirit Ministries

“It has been my privilege to personally witness Susan’s life transformed by nothing more than the healing touch of Jesus. At times, her story will make you want to cover your eyes and cry but as it evolves, her words will build your faith and equip you to move from brokenness to wholeness through Christ.”

—**MARK OLIVER**
Director of Inner Healing and
Head of Staff and Ministry Development
Bow Down Church

“This is a story of redemption. What evil sought to destroy and drown in hopelessness was reborn in determination, tremendous growth, and achievement. God not only loved Susan more than she could imagine but her daughter as well. Yes, a tragic beginning, but what an amazing ending!”

—**PASTOR BRENDA STEPPO**
Assembly of Faith Church

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Susan Joy Simkins, Ph.D.



Growing the Gifts, LLC

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In memory of Pastor Fred, who was the real deal, an
instrument of redemption in my life.

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at her courage and wisdom in communicating that I had not yet begun to tell my story in the first draft. Nothing short of this feedback from my own daughter would have compelled me to divulge what I had no intention of sharing. Amber generously read through every new version despite the emotional toll it required of her. I am grateful as well to have two sisters who have been such stalwart supporters of writing about our family history. I relied on Birdie and Lisa to jog my memory of details we all wanted to forget.

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I thank **John**, the love of my life, for urging me to attend writer's conferences and for uplifting me with love and humor when I was discouraged. He has been nothing but patient and accepting of the long hours I spent in front of the computer, even when it came at the expense of our time together.

Writing my story has been a humbling reminder of how indebted I am to so many who have come to my spiritual, financial, parenting, emotional, academic, and social rescue over the years (e.g., **Mick and Elaine, Iyun and Sylvester, Michele, Megan and Ken**). My heart wells with gratitude to be the beneficiary of such an overflow of blessing and generosity by the hands of so many throughout my life. I do not know how to even identify, much less begin to credit, all who have paid the price of intercession on my behalf.

Most important of all, I give glory to **God** for being the Author and the Finisher of my faith and everything in between. In Him I live and move and have my being. No one pens a story with as grand a culmination like the Storyteller Extraordinaire, and my life is but one example of His *Divine Reversal*.

Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story--those He
redeemed from the hand of the foe.

—Psalm 107:2 NIV

Introduction



“Your greatest life messages and your most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts. The things you’re most embarrassed about, most ashamed of, and most reluctant to share are the very tools God can use most powerfully to heal others.”

—Rick Warren*

The Purpose-Driven Life

Let me begin with a confession. I did not want to tell you my story. I did not want to write my story. I did not want to publish my story. Truth be told, I arrived at this point kicking and screaming, rebelling and debating, fighting and questioning. I’ve spent most of my life deeply ashamed of my story. I’ve run from it. I’ve sanitized it. I’ve tried to bury it.

And still, here it is.

In my family, we never talked openly about traumatic events. Our dysfunctional family dynamic facilitated my lifestyle of hiding.

Many years elapsed before I could divulge selective parts of my story and then only with close friends in hushed whispers behind closed doors. When as a child, my daughter asked who her daddy was, her inquiries were met with silence until she stopped asking. She was twenty-four before I mustered the courage to explain about her father and the details leading to her birth.

I started writing about my life experiences reluctantly as a form of self-processing and catharsis. Since I had no intention of disseminating my writing, I resisted calling it a book. My initial draft communicated as little as possible about the father of my child. Ironically, it was my daughter who forthrightly conveyed that I was misrepresenting my story by not divulging the ugly, horrifying truth. What a reversal! If I'd ever thought I would pen my full story, I would likely never have written the first word.

Writing the whole story was a wrenching emotional, spiritual, and cognitive extraction. It demanded all the courage I had and some I did not have to re-enter the haunted castle housing the ghosts of my past. Yet staring down shame, fear, and secrecy brought a new level of healing, freedom, and release. Shining light on dark places allowed me to move from being held captive by what happened to owning and divulging my story.

Distributing draft copies to family members opened doors of communication sealed shut for decades between myself and my sisters, between my daughter and her aunts. Reminded of buried memories, we collectively mourned for the first time. This story I'd initially refused to write was uniting our family in ways I never thought possible. My daughter's feedback to the significantly

expanded draft was, “Everything makes so much more sense. I can process this now.”

I had planned to share my story with a select few, banking on my family’s discomfort with revealing too much about the dark underbelly of our past. I didn’t expect close friends and family to be such passionate, vocal advocates of further distribution.

Doors opened for me to share my story with women’s groups and at church services. I was overwhelmed by the consistent positive reception. Women approached me to share similarities from their own dysfunctional pasts. Many expressed a desire to read about my experiences.

These positive results expanded my vision beyond a personal writing project. But the familiar nemesis of fear still paralyzed me. Having been violated and robbed of childhood innocence, I fought to preserve the only thing I felt I had left—privacy. Being vulnerable and open on printed page felt like disrobing before a clothed, unknown audience. I was panic-stricken of making an irreversible decision, never to return to my comfort zones of invisibility and secrecy.

Then I realized that my worries had become all about me. My privacy. My fear. My comfort zones. But the glory of my story is about Him. A God who rescued me in my brokenness and restored me to wholeness. A God who transformed ashes into beauty and shame into dignity. A God who is enlarging my principal preoccupation beyond protecting myself from being abused again to helping others who are at risk for abuse, currently being abused, or recovering from abuse.

In the end, I concluded it would be selfish to let fear prevent publication of my story if this book could help even one person. One person lost in the deception and shame that allows cycles of abuse to perpetuate. One person doubting if God can do what seems impossible. One person needing hope that healing and restoration are indeed available through Jesus Christ. Because truth is what empowers the next generation to walk in greater freedom, this book is my offering of authenticity and transparency.

Let me end with another confession. Despite all my wrestling and wrangling with the telling, writing, and publishing of this book, I have not been able to shake the sense that I am doing what I was meant to do.

So here goes!

* Quote from *The Purpose-Driven Life* by Rick Warren. Copyright © 2002 by Rick Warren. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com.

Chapter One



It was the wee hours of the morning when I was awakened from the serenity of sleep by Dad banging loudly on our front door, cursing at Mom to let him in. I knew what to expect next because it had happened before. I shivered and tensed in anticipation of coming doom as Mom shuffled resignedly from her bedroom to unlock the door.

Then began the familiar sounds of violence with Dad accusing, tongue-lashing, threatening, yelling, pounding, bashing, and pummeling. In the bedroom we shared, my younger sister and I listened in frozen silence from our twin beds, too paralyzed with our own fear to extend comfort to the other. My teenaged older sister's bedroom was adjacent to ours, and I knew she too must have been awakened by the cacophony.

Was that sound Mom's body being hurled against the wall? Shaken from my paralysis, I started to scream. Dad immediately stormed into our bedroom, threatening to strangle me if I did not

shut the %@#&!!# up. I did so, my six-year-old brain needing no convincing that he would make good on his threat.

As Dad stormed back out to resume beating Mom, I resumed my screaming as well, but this time inwardly. With each thump and bang, my imagination envisioned the worst. Maybe this time Dad would kill Mom, leaving my two sisters and me with only a madman for a parent.

In the aftermath of such horrible domestic violence, no permission was granted to weep, vent, process pain, or acknowledge the terrible truth. Instead, we silently conspired to maintain a pretense of normalcy. Mom busied herself with morning household duties and made up an excuse for her black eye. My sisters and I prepared for an ordinary day at school. Dad remained in bed to sleep off his rage.

We could never pinpoint what sparked Dad's vicious outbursts. Even when he seemed to be in a decent state of mind, one wrong word or facial expression could trigger shouting, cursing, smashing, punching, battering. Alcoholism provided the most obvious explanation. Dad seemed to spend more time in bars than anywhere else. But that was only part of the story. His ramblings reflected bizarre thought patterns. He constantly ranted that the government was spying on him or that some relative or so-called friend was plotting against him. Decades later, we discovered medical paperwork confirming a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.

Ironically, we endured this hellish existence on the beautiful Caribbean island of St. Thomas, territorial capital of the United States Virgin Islands, which includes St. Croix, St. John, Water

Island, and smaller islets. Roughly a thousand miles from Miami and a hundred miles from Puerto Rico, this thirty-two-square-mile island is a tropical paradise of seaside cliffs, mountains, and gorgeous white sand beaches. Thanks to a large natural harbor, St. Thomas is also a popular cruise ship destination.

While tourists basked in the tranquility of sunlit seas, a melting pot of Afro-Caribbean, Latino, and East Indian locals endured domestic violence common enough to be accepted as part of the culture. Many men considered wife-beating as a disciplinary right. I once overheard Mom commiserating with another woman in the grocery store about how severely their husbands had struck them.

Calling the police was not a viable option. In the 1970s, St. Thomian (as residents of St. Thomas are called) officers were untrained to handle family conflict and likely would not have made an arrest. Given its pervasiveness, it is probable that many Saint Thomian police officers were themselves perpetrators of domestic violence.

Beyond mere ineffectiveness, calling 911 would have almost guaranteed escalated assaults on Mom by supporting Dad's paranoia that she was traitorous. As it was, he regularly accused her of such unfounded claims as cheating and plotting to harm him. The nonexistence of shelters for battered women on the island solidified the reality of being trapped in an intractable situation with little hope of resolution. My earliest memories included a sense of learned helplessness and constant fear. We were imprisoned in purgatory, no one was coming to our rescue, and any attempts to break free would only worsen our situation.