

Forgiveness and Recovery

Robert: My name is Robert, I'm a 67-year-old US Navy Vietnam-era veteran, February 23rd, 1971 to December 27th, 1976.

Charles: I am Charles, Robert's pastor. I serve the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan. Robert is one of our most faithful and active members in the church.

Robert: The feelings that I dealt with when I got out of the military was the nightmares of the rape, and I'm not ashamed to stand tall and talk about it today. The day-to-day challenges was I became a workaholic. I would run to work, be very successful on the job, and at night I would get up after the nightmares and go find me some drugs or liquor. I would self-medicate to try to hide and keep the façade up. At age 27 in Virginia Beach I bought my first home and it was just one of the many homes that I lost on foreclosure. I would fall, get up, get another home, go to work, but I was still hiding the trauma and those demons, and I did it for basically all of my life, until—I'm 67 now—I did it until I was 57 years old when I moved here from Atlanta and started getting the much-needed VA therapy, and I'm a strong man of faith and, you know, being with my pastor and my church I didn't know that I was wounded, but they showed me that I was wounded, and they showed me how to start practicing the power of forgiveness.

Charles: Robert from day one struck me as someone who was very sincere and rigorously honest.

Robert: I felt authenticity from him, no narcissism, just total genuineness.

Charles: Church should provide a strong support system for everyone. Church should be a safe place.

Robert: I'm just glad that I had the courage on April 15th, 2008 to catch that taxicab to John Dingell VA Medical Center. The therapy started off with one-on-one and then group therapy, which was very hard for me to do to set in, not only with another group of men that was raped, but to start trusting.

Charles: He took advantage of the resources that were available to him and the spiritual counseling that we had at the church. Very few people take advantage of the many resources that are around them. We think that somehow we can internalize the trauma and the pain that we have experienced and think that there won't be any ill effect, but the fact of the matter is we have to work through it.

Robert: I just started diving in, getting the therapy from the VA and volunteering in the community, learning to give back, and it took the spotlight off of me. I still have the nightmares, I have maybe one to three a month as opposed to one to three every week. I had to start looking at myself again and say, "You know, I am somebody, and we're all in this together and we have a job to do, and that's to reach out and reach down and help and encourage." What I've learned, and I want to convey to other veterans, is that they're not alone. There is help out there.



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