***Choosing to See Beauty: My Story of Moving Past Trauma and Mental Illness***

([CatholicPsych Press](https://bookshop.catholicpsych.com/products/choosing-to-see-beauty), 2021) by Maura Preszler

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There’s a critical and self-reflective difference between being a victim and being a survivor. A victim remains stuck in trauma and grief, the wounds from the past festering rather than healing, unable or unwilling to move forward. A survivor, on the other hand, has made the conscious choice to heal, forgive, cultivate self-acceptance and renewal, and move forward stronger than they had been before.

That’s what Maura Preszler’s memoir, *Choosing to See Beauty: My Story of Moving Past Trauma and Mental Illness* is all about—triumph over tragedy, the transformation from victim to glorious survivor, and the healing power of the love of our heavenly Father. Maura takes us on her journey of depression, anxiety, inner confusion and turmoil, and shows readers how to move beyond suffering into a God-graced world of wholesome healing.

Maura Preszler has turned the trauma of childhood abuse into healing not only for herself, but for others. In 2011 she founded [Made in His Image](https://madeinhisimage.org/), a non-profit organization that breaks through the stigma so often associated with mental health issues, therapy, and abuse. Through her site she empowers women to seek help as they travel along their path toward inner peace and restoration. Now, in *Choosing to See Beauty,* we can read about her personal journey and how, when we all begin to fully grasp what it means to be *made in His image,* God’s healing graces naturally begin to flow through us.

Maura begins her memoir with glowing, positive memories of her father, clearly showing the Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality of an abuser. Maura’s dad initially appears to be normal—a regular and even caring guy. This is important because it’s so easy to think of abusers as constant monsters, when in truth some of the most insidious psychological damage caused by domestic violence is due to the confusion of trying to balance the beloved “nice guy” with the frightening, abusive side of him. “Why did he hate me so?” Maura recalls wondering as an adolescent. “His words sliced my heart wide open. The emotional pain hurt more than the time he threw me through a door so hard it broke and my body pounded into a cement block.”

*Choosing to See Beauty* starkly shows how childhood abuse leads to potentially lifelong damage unless the trauma is faced and consciously healed. The devastating swirl of mixed messages an abuse victim endures as she struggles to reconcile love and violence is emotionally and psychologically destructive, causing repercussions that vibrate well into the future of a victim’s life. In the 8th grade, Maura developed anorexia as an unconscious way to gain control over her life. Already petite, her weight dropped to a frightening low, requiring medical intervention. Through great struggle and resilience, she managed to overcome her unhealthy relationship with food and regain a normal body weight, but her inner struggles were far from over.

Those struggles are brought to vivid life in *Choosing to See Beauty.* Maura is candid about her mental health issues, even going to far as to include excerpts from the psychological evaluation given to her by the Institute for the Psychological Sciences as well as from her journal. The braveness Maura shows in sharing these vulnerable entries is one of the major strengths of her memoir, allowing readers an insider’s glimpse into the process of recovery.

What’s perhaps the most prominent feature of the memoir is Maura’s faith journey. Often those who have suffered through childhood abuse end up unconsciously perpetuating the cycle by re-victimizing themselves in future intimate partnerships, becoming the victim once again by marrying an abusive spouse. Through her maturity and deep Catholic convictions, Maura was able to see that she needed to heal before she could ever think about entering into a serious relationship. (She’s now joyfully married and the mother of three young boys). “I knew I couldn’t be in a relationship with the intention to *fix* a man,” she insightfully recounts.

Instead, she had to first develop a solid relationship with God the Father in order to find the truth about love and deep spiritual healing. During her college years she spent an incredible summer ministering to the terminally ill at Mother Teresa’s Kalighat Home for the Dying. It was there that she learned many lessons about humanity, charity, and God’s healing graces. “The profound love that I experienced that summer from God the Father would change the rest of my existence.”

*Choosing to See Beauty* takes readers on a fruitful and insightful journey into the insidious nature of domestic violence, with the ultimate message that complete healing is possible and glorious. If Maura Preszler’s memoir had to be summed up in a Scripture quote it would be 2 Corinthians 4:8-9: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Maura’s healing journey is no longer her own—it’s now out there, in book form, to provide hope and inspiration for anyone struggling to overcome trauma and to find the healing love of God the Father.

I’d like to close this review with a prayer request. In *Choosing to See Beauty,* Maura tells a beautiful story about a dying woman she ministered to in India, and the miracle of love God gave to them both. I won’t spoil anything in the book by going into detail, but I do want to invite all readers to pray for the repose of the soul of Mary, as well as others in Kalighat who have led a life of suffering, that they may finally find peace in Jesus’ arms.