

Sexual Assault

Healing Steps for Victims

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Sexual assault is an invasive event of traumatic evil. You were victimized, and now you are suffering.

Before we talk about anything else, you need to know that God is extremely tender toward victims. Many psalms are the heart cries of those who suffer at the hands of others. The broken, the needy, the poor, the afflicted, the helpless, and the innocent pour forth words describing their experiences. You, too, can pour out your heart. God hears. The God and Father of Jesus Christ cares. You too are on his heart.

He cares about your experience of grave stress and evil. His own Son, although he didn't experience violence in a sexual form, was a victim of violent assault. No matter how awful your attack, no matter how long and slow your recovery, God is your Redeemer. He is able to redeem terrible wrongs and make them right. "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). He is willing and able to make broken things whole. He is able to help you.

What Is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is a crime of power, domination, and control that uses sex. If you haven't already reported your

assault to the police and sought medical help, please do so. If your assault happened a long time ago and you are not sure how to handle that, find a trusted friend, counselor, or pastor to talk through what your next steps should be. This minibook is written to help you rebuild. Getting appropriate legal and medical help is one step to getting the practical care you need.

Sexual assault is not only a crime in the legal sense, it is an evil before the face of God. It is an act of extreme violence and aggression. The strong overpower the weak.

Sexual assault is a life-changing event. A violent assault awakens some of the most painful, horrifying emotions that humans are capable of. Terror, shock, unbearable pain, overwhelming helplessness, and vulnerability are just some of the feelings you may experience. Such powerful feelings don't just go away. They affect every area of your life. Here are some ways that sexual assault victims typically suffer and struggle:

- **Numbness.** Life can feel unreal. “Normal” doesn't feel natural when something so wrong has happened.

- **Fear.** Most likely you are haunted by fears—of your memories, of people, of being alone, of dating, of intimacy.
- **Worry.** You might have some concrete worries—sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy are two possible ones.
- **Anger.** This is an entirely appropriate response to the great evil you suffered. But when anger gets infected, then bitterness and hatred can become all-consuming and destructive.
- **Relationships.** Your relationships are affected. Perhaps you are having a hard time trusting anyone. Who do you tell? How much do you tell? Who can help?
- **Shame.** Even though you were the one who was victimized, it's common to feel a deep sense of shame and uncleanness. You feel dirtied by the evil of another.
- **Regret and Self Blame.** You might be thinking, *If only...* (If only I hadn't done this...If only I hadn't been in that place) and *Why did I...?* (Why did I do that? Why didn't I do this?)

- **Nightmares and Flashbacks.** Specific places and events might trigger a flashback to the sexual assault. You might relive what happened in terrifying dreams.
- **Depression.** You might experience sadness that just doesn't go away. Life can seem meaningless after you have suffered traumatic evil.
- **Escapism.** You might try to forget what happened to you by using different forms of self-medication—drugs, alcohol, food, television.
- **Helplessness and Powerlessness.** No one intervened to help you. You can't rewind the tape and press erase.
- **Pain.** You hurt on many levels. The pain can feel unbearable.

The Scope of the Problem

Sexual assault has been a grievous part of human experience throughout history. For example, the Bible records a number of sexual assaults, both heterosexual and homosexual (Genesis 19; Genesis 34; Judges 19;