

Hope for Women Sexually Assaulted as Minors

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

Psalm 147:3

Why Did this Happen to Me?

- Be assured that God is El Roi, the God Who Sees injustice and hears your cries for help and has the power to heal your heart (Gen 16:6,13; Ps. 68:19; Ps 69:33; Ps 109:22 Ps. 147:3; Luke 4:16-21). Because we live in a sinful, fallen world, ungodly people often take advantage and commit crimes against children because they are vulnerable and innocent. God saw and heard what your offender did to you and he holds that offender responsible for his sin until he repents (Ps 10)
- Be assured that you are innocent of wrongdoing. Often the victim suffers from feelings of false guilt and shame. God is your ultimate Defender (Ps 68:5). The person who violated you is guilty of a crime and needs to repent to God and to you.
- One in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18.¹

How Does Sexual Abuse Affect Women Survivors?

- Substance Abuse: 74% of women who excessively use alcohol experienced sexual abuse. 50% of women treated for substance abuse were sexually abused as children.²
- Emotional Effects: Sexual abuse in childhood commonly creates emotional problems that persist through adulthood: depression, anxiety, interpersonal problems, self-destructiveness, promiscuity, eating disorders, etc.

What Can I Do Now, as an Adult?

- It's very common for sexual assault child victims to bury their pain for many years. Sometimes it takes 10-20 years before adults finally deal with pain from their childhood because they can no longer deny their pain from the past.
- **Talk about it** with a trusted family member, friend, biblical counselor, pastor. Communicating and processing the offense against you is a vital part of the healing process. Journaling may also be very helpful.
- The Bible says that **God established the legal authorities** and they are His servants to do you good and to bring punishment on the wrongdoer (**Rom. 13:1-5**; Ps 106:3). Whenever a sin crosses the line into criminal activity, you have the right to take legal action. Again, the legal system was designed by God to bring justice for victims. The Hawaii statute of limitations for prosecuting sexual assault in the first degree is 6 years from its commission. Sexual assault in the second and third degrees is prosecutable within 3 years of its commission. Depending on the circumstances, a case may still be prosecutable (eg. the offender's continued pattern of violating children/women, the severity and duration of the crime). You could speak to a lawyer

to determine what you can do legally. If you proceed with legal action, it will be very helpful to have the support of your family/friends.

- If it's not possible to use the legal authorities due to the statute of limitations, you can still pursue healing by **biblically confronting the offender**. In Matt. 18:15-20, Jesus instructed that when someone sins against you, you can confront them with their sin. If the offender has not yet repented of his sin/crime, he is still carrying a burden of guilt. Many Christians believe that one can simply forgive from their heart and move on with life. It's important to know that God established the pattern of reconciliation and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. God doesn't automatically forgive unrepentant sinners but He is always ready to forgive, when they choose to repent and ask God for forgiveness. By biblically confronting the offender, you are giving the offender a unique, wonderful opportunity to be reconciled to God and to you (2 Cor. 5:11-21).
- Due to the fact that the offender committed a crime against you that may no longer be prosecutable, you may wish to **ask your husband, pastor or a male biblical counselor to walk with you through this process**. One option is write a letter to the offender confronting him with the sin/crime against you and express that you are willing to forgive him should he choose to repent. Your pastor could also attach a letter to him or follow up with a phone call. If the offender confesses his crime and repents to you and God, that is absolutely wonderful. Your pastor could speak to him further about the biblical need to make restitution (paying for counseling, going for counseling himself, etc.) Even if the offender does not respond properly, you can rest assured that you did everything in your power to confront him with his need for forgiveness and you can continue to move towards wholeness in Christ.
- Some women choose not to deal with the offenses in their past and that certainly is a woman's prerogative. If you choose to not deal with issues in the past, you may continue to struggle with sporadic depression, anxiety, & temptation to use substances to heal that inner, unresolved pain.
- **God's heart for you** is found in **Isaiah 61:1-4**: the Lord desires *"to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives & release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor & the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn & provide for those who grieve in Zion--to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."* You will be called *"oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor"*!

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

Romans 8:37

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¹ Russell, Diana 1988. Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children, Springer Publishing Co.

² Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Roads to Recovery. 2003