

"A classic. I'm so glad  
its healing power is  
being updated and  
re-engaged."

JOHN ORTBERG

OVER 400,000 COPIES SOLD

# THE WOUNDED HEART

Hope for adult victims of  
childhood sexual abuse

DR. DAN B. ALLENDER

foreword by Dr. Larry Crabb



*The Wounded Heart* is outstanding! It is my conviction that this is definitely a much-needed book and one I now have on my shelf, along with copies to share whenever I meet people who are on the front lines of ministry with survivors of sexual abuse or survivors ready for the journey. Full of godly wisdom and instruction, I read slowly and did a lot of underlining and pondering. I know so many people who have been through sexual abuse, and this gave me a heart-wrenching look into the depths of difficulties they have. I've already recommended *The Wounded Heart* to several people in ministry and who are mentoring survivors of abuse. Dan has a way of seeing into the heart and soul of the problem and lighting the path for coming out of the darkness.

FRANCINE RIVERS, bestselling author

Dan Allender is a hero, and *The Wounded Heart* is a classic. I'm so glad its healing power is being updated and reengaged.

JOHN ORTBERG, senior pastor of Menlo Church and author of *I'd Like You More If You Were More Like Me*

This classic book on engaging sexual abuse is back and couldn't be more relevant for today. Dr. Allender's work has been pivotal in my own healing journey, and this book will be a trusted guide. Dr. Allender is wise, kind, and fierce as he stares life's deepest wounds in the face and calls the reader to do the same. I am confident this book will ripen your heart to a redemptive grief and the healing of your own wounded heart. Truly a masterpiece of courage!

ANDREW J. BAUMAN, author of *Stumbling toward Wholeness*

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I held my breath as I read *The Wounded Heart*, wondering if I'd find pages of platitudes, simplistic answers, or hyped-up guarantees of happily ever after. I needn't have worried. This book is raw and real—there is no sugarcoating of evil or glossing over the damage done to vulnerable bodies, emotions, and souls. But in a way that touches my heart, Dr. Dan Allender walks with us through the terrible, shattering darkness of childhood sexual abuse, yet gently . . . insistently . . . beckons us to keep walking toward the One who offers the healing love we crave more than anything on earth.

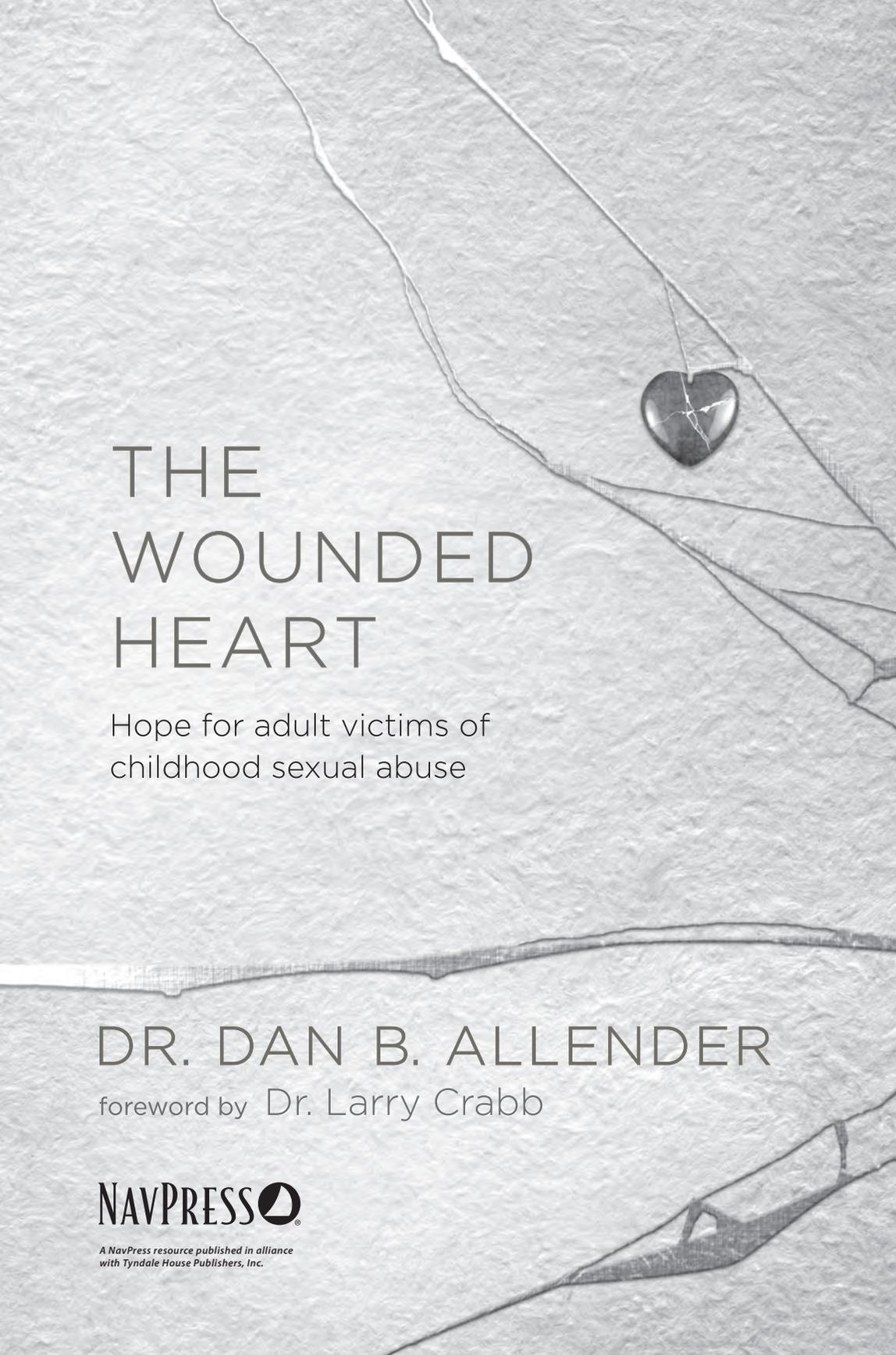
KAY WARREN, cofounder of Saddleback Church

This book became the classic on healing sexual trauma because it works. So hopeful, so powerful. I'm thrilled Dan has released an updated version. I recommend it to everyone I know!

JOHN ELDREDGE, bestselling author

Dan Allender's ability to walk through the painful and beautiful terrain of the human heart is unparalleled. As a therapist and minister, there is no greater influence on my work. I am so grateful this magisterial work exists.

JAY STRINGER, LMHC, author of *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing*

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a cracked heart pendant. The hand is positioned in the upper right quadrant, with fingers gently gripping a dark, heart-shaped pendant that has a prominent crack running through it. The background is a textured, light-colored surface, possibly paper or fabric, with some faint, dark lines or creases. The overall mood is somber and evocative.

# THE WOUNDED HEART

Hope for adult victims of  
childhood sexual abuse

DR. DAN B. ALLENDER

foreword by Dr. Larry Crabb

**NAVPRESS** 

A NavPress resource published in alliance  
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

**For more information, visit [www.NavPress.com](http://www.NavPress.com).**

*The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*

Copyright © 1990 by Dan B. Allender

Revised edition copyright © 1995, 2008

New introduction copyright © 2018

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAVPRESS and the NAVPRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team:

Don Pape, Publisher

David Zimmerman, Acquisitions Editor

Elizabeth Symm, Copy Editor

Jacqueline L. Nuñez, Designer

Cover and interior images are the property of their respective copyright holders, and all rights are reserved. Artwork of kintsugi heart created by A. Kintsugi Life and photograph copyright © Kenetha J. Stanton; gold texture copyright © kavunchik/Adobe Stock; paper texture copyright © stockcam/Getty Images.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-1-60006-307-7

Printed in Canada

24 23 22 21 20 19 18

16 15 14 13 12 11 10



# CONTENTS

Foreword *vii*

Introduction to the New Edition *xi*

PROLOGUE: The Quest for a Cure *xv*

PART ONE: **THE DYNAMICS OF ABUSE**

CHAPTER 1: The Reality of a War: Facing the Battle *3*

CHAPTER 2: Facing the Enemy: Shame, Brokenness, and  
Sanctification *17*

CHAPTER 3: Deflection: The Clash with Contempt *37*

CHAPTER 4: The War Zone: Strategies for Abuse *51*

PART TWO: **THE DAMAGE OF ABUSE**

CHAPTER 5: Powerlessness *73*

CHAPTER 6: Betrayal *89*

CHAPTER 7: Ambivalence *105*

CHAPTER 8: Secondary Symptoms *119*

CHAPTER 9: Style of Relating *133*

PART THREE: **PREREQUISITES FOR GROWTH**

CHAPTER 10: The Unlikely Route to Joy *153*

CHAPTER 11: Honesty *163*

CHAPTER 12: Repentance *179*

CHAPTER 13: Bold Love *199*

EPILOGUE: Words to the Wise *221*

Acknowledgments *229*

APPENDIX: *A Question of Memory* 231

Notes 251

Bibliography 269

About the Cover 273

About the Author 275



# FOREWORD

I WISH THINGS WERE SIMPLE. I wish that difficult problems could all be easily resolved through sincere determination to obey God, regular time in His Word, and fervent prayer.

In a sense, they can. The heart that is single-minded in its commitment to follow Christ will learn to unself-consciously love, to be so consumed with the wonder of God and promoting joy in others that personal concerns retreat to a well-deserved lower priority.

But our hearts are deceitful. A simple decision to surrender everything to Jesus may start a good process, but there are a host of hard, ugly things to deal with that we prefer to overlook as we keep on surrendering.

We sometimes manage to persuade ourselves that God is as pleased as we are with our developing maturity, while in fact His Spirit is gently pushing open doors into the darker regions of our hearts that we pretend don't exist.

Christians who have the courage to follow the Spirit into the unfriendly parts of their souls have a harder time pretending that the maturing process is coming along nicely. They face the fact that living in a fallen world sometimes exposes people to experiences that no bearer of God's image was ever meant to endure and that our reactions to those experiences are deeply stained with our own fallenness.

When people—through absolutely no fault of their own—are subjected

to terrible crimes against God and against their souls, like sexual abuse, powerful forces are set in motion within them that make it especially frightening to give themselves to others. Exhorting them to “just trust God” tends to generate frustration and provoke angry questions about the reality of Christian truth.

One of the great needs in the church today is to replace a model for simplistic sanctification with an understanding of the gospel that is both simple and penetrating, reaching with power into the realities of sinful, damaged souls. That shift requires pioneer work in thinking hard about tough problems like childhood sexual abuse. Problems that, because they do not yield easily to our current ideas about victory in Christ, tend to be ignored.

If that pioneering effort is to be biblical, it must insist that the image of God is central to developing a solid view of personality; that our sinfulness, not how we’ve been sinned against, is our biggest problem; that forgiveness, not wholeness, is our greatest need; that repentance, not insight, is the dynamic in all real change.

*The Wounded Heart* is a remarkable book. It goes far beyond shallow ideas about change but remains firmly fixed on biblical foundations as it explores the depths of damage inflicted by sexual abuse. I regard it as a truly pioneer work. It doesn’t offer the last word in defining a biblical approach to helping victims of abuse, but it offers far more than merely a first word. The carefully reasoned and extraordinarily poignant discussions of how sexual abuse damages the soul and what the victim must overcome in order to heal will bring first pain, then perhaps resistance, but always hope to the sincere reader, whether a victim or a caring person who wants to help victims.

Dr. Allender has managed to write graphically about an easily sensationalized topic without crossing the line of decency, and he keeps the focus on the gospel by passionately proclaiming his confidence in its power to restore victims of abuse to their dignity as forgiven people who can now forgive and boldly love from sad yet joyfully alive hearts.

Reading the book will perhaps give some hint of the price that its

author has paid in order to understand the problems of abuse with discerning passion. I've been with Dan during the several years while he has immersed himself in the details, sometimes unspeakably grotesque, of hundreds of instances of sexual abuse. I've seen him suffer. He has read widely, thought deeply, dialogued openly, cared passionately, and stayed involved when it required more than he had, in order to help victims of sexual abuse. This book represents his faithfulness to an unsolicited call from his God.

I make no effort to write an unbiased foreword. I can't. I love the man. I have been a part of his life since God began changing him from a bright seminary graduate with more natural boldness than restrained wisdom to a seasoned psychologist with the powerful combination of penetrating insight and gentle patience that comes from a rich awareness of being forgiven. Dan and I are knit together by a mutual loyalty, affection, and respect, developed through hard times and good, that defines the word *friendship*.

But don't assume for a moment that my strong endorsement of his book reflects only my bias. With as much objectivity as I can muster (and I'm a critical friend), I've concluded that *The Wounded Heart* not only is the most profoundly helpful book about childhood sexual abuse available, but also is a stimulating illustration of how to think biblically about topics not directly addressed in Scripture.

Nothing matters more than seeing clearly that the gospel of Christ speaks with heart-mending compassion and life-changing power to every struggle in life. This book has helped me to more clearly see that truth. And I believe it will do the same for you.

*Dr. Larry Crabb*





# INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EDITION

IT IS NOT MY CUSTOM to read my own books. Usually, I have spent so much time in the evolving text that by the time the book comes to my door, I gratefully bless its arrival, flip through a few sections, and shelve it. *The Wounded Heart* was different. It's nearly thirty years old now, and while its subject matter is still dear to me, I (and what we know about childhood sexual abuse and its treatment) have passed through decades of stories and research in the interim. So I reread *The Wounded Heart* in order to begin writing a twenty-five-year retrospective, to attempt to put words to what I have learned since the beginning of this journey. I had three reactions.

First, I cried. A lot. There are so many stories attached to this book that, in many ways, it encompasses a large percentage of my life's sorrow and joy. It compelled me to remember the faces related to the stories used to illustrate the concepts. It brought back the faces of friends, colleagues, and places that are no longer part of the topography of my life. It must be like coming back to one's homeland after being gone for a quarter of a century. Much has changed; much is the same, but the days of one's restless and expansive youth can't be restored. Those days can only be held with grief and wonder.

I also felt an immense sense of gratitude. I recall the first conversation I had about the book with another publisher and I was told pointedly: "There is no need for a book on sexual abuse for a Christian audience. And

even if there are a few who need the book, it would never be allowed in a Christian bookstore.” I knew the first comment was dung, but I suspected he was right about not being allowed into polite company. Gratefully, NavPress gave me a contract. I will forever be grateful for their willingness to take a risk.

About four years after *The Wounded Heart* was published, a powerful figure threatened the Navigators with a lawsuit due to a claim that I was fostering false memories. There was much consternation, and I was asked to add a new section on memory and its complications. Again, I am grateful to NavPress for not letting the book be snatched away due to fear.

My gratitude is primarily for those who have told me on countless occasions how they destroyed their first copy. I have heard hundreds of times of reading a chapter or two and then the book was thrown out a car window, burned, or tossed in the trash. The record is a woman who said she took fourteen years to read *The Wounded Heart*, and it took nineteen copies before she finished.

A cynical mind would assume I am grateful for the additional sales. And indeed, I am. But far more, I am grateful that the book demands and invites engagement. You can't read what I wrote with a mere academic veneer unless your heart is tepid or hard. The topic of sexual abuse demands your heart grieve, scream, doubt, suffer, and dream. Especially dream. Dream redemption. Dream life. Dream that the Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. It is this intersection of past and future that invites the heart to read with the allure of a different present. No wonder the book has been thrown across many rooms. It is more than any of us can easily bear.

I wanted to write for others, but I also wrote for myself. I was about 60 percent done with my first draft when I finally named the reality that I myself had been sexually abused. When I reread *The Wounded Heart*, I found the struggle of what I have faced about my heart—and what is still to be healed—difficult to hold. I read not as the author, but as someone who still needs deep and profound healing. I wanted to feel what it was like to throw the book against the wall. I did. It felt good, but I also felt

compelled to finish. I am beyond grateful to those who have read and finished, no matter how many copies or the time it took.

Finally, I feel the urgency to say: This is a book worth reading and rereading. I have published a new book entitled *Healing the Wounded Heart* with another publisher. If there are two things I'd like to shout, they are: No, the new book is not a revision of *The Wounded Heart*. It is a brand-new book. And no, it most definitively doesn't replace *The Wounded Heart*.

I would not even argue that *The Wounded Heart* is like an introductory class that is followed up by the new, 201 version. Instead, the new book assumes the reader has first read the previous book. The person who reads *Healing the Wounded Heart* without first reading and reviewing *The Wounded Heart* is rushing the process and missing a vital part of the journey. *The Wounded Heart* gives a wider lens to the internal and external war that comes with a story of sexual abuse. It is a broad view that gives orientation to the complex terrain that must be passed to know freedom.

I am immensely proud of this book. That sounds similar to saying that I feel pride for writing the book. It is not what I am saying or what I feel. *The Wounded Heart* is the only book I have ever written that felt like it wrote itself. It flew off my fingertips, and often I was utterly surprised by what I wrote. Or what was written. In fact, without claiming anything close to divine authorship, I'd say that I was a transmitter of thoughts I had no clue that I knew. The book still feels like a gift for me. I pray this book—no matter how it flies or travels in your life, or how long it takes to finish, or how many copies you purchase—will be a gift to you as well.

Dan Allender  
2017





# PROLOGUE

## The Quest for a Cure

ANYONE WHO PICKS UP A BOOK on sexual abuse has a definite purpose in mind. Few would bother picking up a painful, deeply distressing book for recreational reading. In most cases this book will be read by those who are struggling to understand their own abuse. Others may read for the purpose of understanding their abused parishioner, client, or spouse. Whatever the reason may be for reading on this subject, I think that it is fair for the reader to ask a central question: Why another book on this topic?

An obvious answer is to offer hope to those who have experienced sexual abuse and guidance to those who work with abuse victims. One of the central messages of most books on abuse, this one included, is freedom from the guilt of the past abuse. What occurred is not your fault!

Unfortunately, that message is at first heard as good news but often does not endure over time. I've heard many victims of sexual abuse argue, "Others are excused, but not me. My abuse is different. If you knew the facts, you would understand that I am at least partially at fault. I led him on. I didn't tell anyone, and I know I should have found a way to stop his advances." For some reason, the blanket amnesty offered to sexual abuse victims fades after the initial relief. This fading does not invalidate the good news. It simply implies that more must be done than affirm abused people and implore them to forgive themselves.

What is the enemy? What are the factors that make past sexual abuse so shameful and the basis of such grievous self-contempt? What must be done to lift the shroud of shame and contempt? The answer involves a strategy that seems to intensify the problem: *peer deeply into the wounded heart*. The first great enemy to lasting change is the propensity to turn our eyes away from the wound and pretend things are fine. The work of restoration cannot begin until a problem is fully faced.

This is a book about damage, the damage done to the soul by sexual abuse. It is also a book about hope, but hope that loves only after the harm of abuse has been faced. If there is a central reason for this book, it is found in the need to face what is true about the damage done to the soul and the damage done to others related to the past abuse.

There is a natural reluctance to face the problem. Christians seem to despise reality.<sup>1</sup> We tend to be squeamish when looking at the destructive effects of sin. It is unpleasant to face the consequences of sin—our own and others'. To do so seems to discount the finished and sufficient work of our Savior. And so, we pretend we're fine, when, in fact, we know that something is troubling our soul. A dull ache occasionally floats to the surface, or stalking memories return in dreams or in odd thoughts during the day. But why bother about such strange feelings when our salvation is guaranteed and life's task is clear: trust and obey?

The unbelieving culture is not so dishonest. Our society faces realities that other eras chose to avoid. Unfortunately, however, it offers solutions that lead to even greater denial. The secular path for change seems to involve some form of self-assertion, setting one's own boundaries and choosing to act on the basis of one's own personal value system. Invariably, the result is a stronger, more self-centered humanist who lives less for the sake of loving others than for his perceived advantage and benefits.

The solution the secular path offers is in fact filling a leaky cup with lukewarm water. It leaves the soul empty and unsatisfied. It never admits that the deepest damage is never what someone has done to me but what I have done regarding the Creator of the universe. The damage done through abuse is awful and heinous, but minor compared to the dynamics

that distort the victim's relationship with God and rob her of the joy of loving and being loved by others.

This process is the end of secular solutions, but many so-called Christian alternatives are even worse. Several paths offered to the abuse victim often increase the burden and lead to revictimization: denial-based forgiveness, pressured demands to love, and quick relief from pain through dramatic spiritual interventions.

## DENIAL-BASED FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness built on “forgetfulness” is a Christian version of a frontal lobotomy.<sup>2</sup> An abused woman was told by her pastor that she was to forget the past and stop pitying herself, because many people have had a lot worse things happen to them than being abused by their father. This advice made any reflection on the effects of the abuse selfish and illegitimate. His comment felt as painful to her as the original abuse.

To be told, “The past is the past and we are new creatures in Christ, so don't worry about what you can't change,” at first relieves the need to face the unsightly reality of the destructive past. After a time, however, the unclaimed pain of the past presses for resolution, and the only solution is to continue to deny.<sup>3</sup> The result is either a sense of deep personal contempt for one's inability to forgive and forget or a deepened sense of betrayal toward those who desired to silence the pain of the abuse in a way that feels similar to the perpetrator's desire to mute the victim. *Hiding the past always involves denial; denial of the past is always a denial of God.* To forget your personal history is tantamount to trying to forget yourself and the journey that God has called you to live.

What might be the motivation of the forgive-and-forgetters? The answer may be found in a deep and legitimate desire to protect the honor of God. A central question in the mind of the abused person—“Where was God?”—compels many to answer by denying the influence of past events on present-day functioning. If the past is insignificant, then I don't need to ponder the question, “Why did God not intervene?” The unbelieving

world is willing to see the damage of abuse because it feels no need to defend the God who could have intervened to stop it. The Christian community, however, feels disposed to deny any data that casts doubt on God's presence or willingness to act for the sake of His children.

"Where was God?" is a legitimate cry of the soul to understand what it means to trust God. Irrespective of the answers, the question is not to be avoided. If God is trustworthy, He can be trusted without our efforts to distort and deny the past.

Another factor may be involved in the desire to "forget" the past. Christians believe in the possibility of healing or deep personal change. Change—or better said, the fruit of the Spirit—is the result of God's working in the person. This work enables us to love as Christ loved, to serve as He served, and to be of one mind with others as He is with the Father. These are high claims. The results are seldom, if ever, close to the ideal. One need only to observe our penchant for easy believism, materialism, superficiality, and hypercriticalness toward those who differ with our favorite doctrinal positions to call into question the work of the Holy Spirit in the change process. A secularist could easily sue us for false claims in advertising. Does the gospel really work to transform lives? The data is at times questionable. Therefore, the Christian community feels disposed to deny any data that points to the thorns and thistles in the lives of those who claim to be filled with the power of God.

The unbelieving world acknowledges the effects of sin but offers incomplete solutions; the believing world is, at times, unwilling to face the current effects of sin but has solutions that can provide substantial healing. The answer is quite simple. Let us as Christians acknowledge without shame that regeneration does not alleviate, or in fact diminish, the effects of sin quickly or permanently in this life. If we accept that, we are free to face the parts of our souls that remain scarred and damaged by the effects of sexual abuse without feeling that we are denying the gospel. Facing the reality of the Fall and beginning the process of reclaiming the land covered with weeds is the marvelous work of the God-ordained Kingdom gardener. It is labor eminently worthy of every believer to reclaim the parts

of one's soul that remain untilled and unproductive for bearing fruit. And the denial of the past hinders this work of reclamation.

## PRESSURED DEMANDS TO LOVE

A woman was told by her friends that she was tempting the judgment of God because she was taking her abuser to court. She was told that her desire to bring him to justice was unloving and vengeful. She wryly remarked that a friend had recently received a sizable out-of-court settlement for an accident, and no one batted an eye. It appeared to be acceptable to use the court system for a damaged car, but not for a damaged soul.

Another man refuses to visit, receive phone calls, or open mail from the father who raped him from age seven to ten. His father, an upstanding church member, is irritated by his son's unwillingness to interact, but flatly denies his son's abuse and has gone so far as to question his son's sanity and salvation.

What does it mean to love one's enemies? Does it mean to simply do good, regardless of what you feel? If the answer is yes, then what in the world does it mean to do good to a father whose unwillingness to face the past abuse is tantamount to living an evil-hearted lie? How is one to hate what is evil and cling to what is good while at the same time loving one's enemy?

There are answers to these questions, but the typical pressured-love solution involves being nice, not causing conflict, and pretending relationships are fine as the evil charade unfolds. Under this version of Christianity, the abused person feels secure and dead. There is safety in soul-numbing rigidity that does not require thought, reflection, or risk. But the honest person knows that *soulless conformity never leads to life-giving change*.

Love is not easily defined, nor is it quickly executed with a slight twist of the will. Loving one's enemy in particular requires that the heart be caught up in the freedom and power that God instills in the one who is willing to extend grace to an enemy. Love can be commanded, but is its

fulfillment the exercise of right-doing—in spite of the absence of passion, desire, or authenticity toward the person who did harm?

Far too often, the abused person is commanded to do good or to love their abuser without exploring the complexities of what it means to love or what may be blocking the God-given desire to love. The result is often a greater deadening of the soul in order to accomplish the burdensome task or a backlash of rage toward God or anyone who would so insensitively encourage such a painful path.

The assumption taught in many Christian groups is that emotions will follow in accord with your choice of will. If you feel angry, then do good, because in doing good you will eventually not be angry. Even better, if you do good long enough, then you will actually feel loving emotions toward the person who did you harm. This is not the place to debate the interlacing intricacies of choice, thought, emotion, and longing, but an obvious point can be made. All the effort in the world expended to arrive at the “right” location will be of little avail if the traveler is moving in the wrong direction or has known or unknown reasons for not wanting to arrive at the destination. More must be done than shouting commands to love.

Love is at the core of change. But as love is defined by some, it lacks purpose, passion, and strength. In reaction to a culture that sees love as whim based on the unpredictability of emotion, some Christians have opted for a decision-based, emotionless act of the will to be nice and inoffensive. *Love is many things, but it is never weak or lacking in passion.* Simply telling an abused person to love his or her abuser is unhelpful, even if love is an essential component of the change process.

## DRAMATIC SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS

I recently worked with a woman who was part of a charismatic church connected to a national healing and miracle ministry that makes the assumption that sexually abused persons are demon oppressed. The memories may be the concoction of the demons, thus discounting the validity of

the past abuse; or the memories may be actual events that are kept in the mind by the evil host that inhabit the victim. In either case, the strategy is to cast out the demons through the ritual of exorcism.

The woman I worked with had learned through years of abuse to keep her mouth shut. If she disagreed with anyone, she assumed she must be wrong. The abused person often looks for someone who is strong, authoritative, and convinced that the damage can be quickly and painlessly resolved. This church provided that hope. She eventually endured several exorcisms where she experienced her handlers as abusive and demeaning, though for a time she felt relief and rest. That period ended when she required constant assurance and drug-like jolts of emotional enthusiasm to keep her wavering and transient faith stable.

Quick cures never resolve the deep damage. Instead, they offer change that requires little more than lying on a gurney before surgery: Be still and let the experts do their work. Trust is defined as allowing the process to occur without creating obstacles that would hinder the work. Holy passivity is the key to most quick-cure solutions. The woman had enough integrity to acknowledge that the healing had not occurred, and that the healers were abusive and blind to the real damage in her soul. Once a “magical cure” has occurred, few are willing to admit that much is left to be dealt with.

Quick cures are not unique to any one group. Many offer healing from damaged emotions or memories by attempting to place a “positive” perspective around the painful event in the midst of a deep, flowing expression of pent-up emotions. The result is often a refreshing reclamation of lost parts of the past. It’s as if the painful events can be safely looked at without fearing retribution or destruction.

My fear is that many stop at the point of deep initial relief without delving further into the damage. The initial washing of the wound will not be sufficient if the infection is not treated by even stronger medicine. The hunger for a quick cure is as deep as the desire for heaven. The tragedy is that many take the cheap cure and miss the path to a lasting taste of heaven.

## THE BETTER PATH

There are many options available to the Christian for dealing with past abuse, but the outcome is unappealing: forgive and forget—denial; pressured love—passionless conformity; quick cures—irresponsible passivity. It is not difficult to understand why the Christian who has been abused often chooses either to seek help outside the church or to learn to handle the damage by pretending it does not exist. I strongly believe the Scriptures offer better ways of hope and change.

What is the better path? The argument of this book is that *the best path is through the valley of the shadow of death*. The crags of doubt and the valleys of despair offer a proving ground of God that no other terrain can provide. God does show Himself faithful; but the geography is often desert-dry and mountainous-demanding, to the point that the path seems too dangerous to face the journey ahead. Who wants to travel with the paltry amount of supplies that we possess or the outdated map we seem to be following when so many more modern guides are readily available?

The journey involves bringing our wounded heart before God, a heart that is full of rage, overwhelmed with doubt, bloodied but unbroken, rebellious, stained, and lonely. It does not seem possible that anyone can handle, let alone embrace, our wounded and sinful heart. But the path involves the risk of putting into words the condition of our inner being and placing those words before God for His response. The Lord has promised He will not put out the smoldering flax or break the broken reed (see Isaiah 42:3). But promises have been made before by a supposedly trustworthy person, and we swore the betrayal was the last we would ever allow our soul to experience. *The obstacle to life is the conviction that God will damage us and destroy us*. The problem is that the path does involve His hurting us but only in order to heal us.

Why does abuse make it so hard to come to the Lord for the succor and life that our souls crave? What is the enemy to the healing process? In brief, the answer is shame and contempt. The damage of past abuse sets in motion a complex scheme of self-protective defenses that operate

largely outside of our awareness, guiding our interactions with others, determining the spouse we select, the jobs we pursue, the theologies we embrace, and the fabric of our entire lives. This book takes a look at the inner workings of these dynamics with the hope that a clearer picture of the damage will enable us to make more conscious, godly decisions in dealing with others and with ourselves.

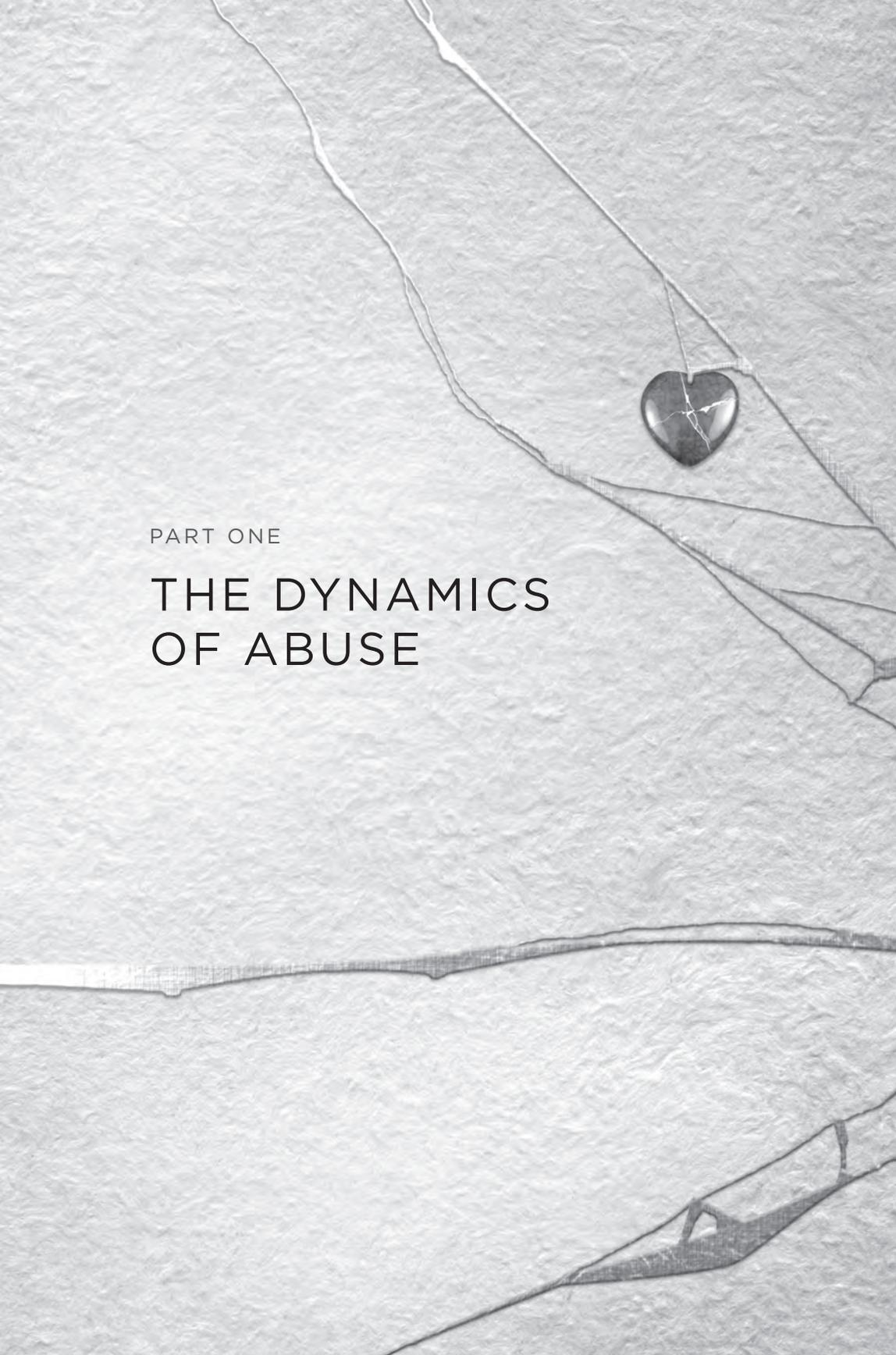
There are limits to what can be addressed in one book. The reader will quickly note the focus is not on how to deal with children or adolescents who have been abused. There is application of the material to children and adolescents, but I have not focused on those issues. Equally, the majority of my illustrations involve women. By inference it could be assumed that abuse of boys is either limited in extent or limited in its damaging consequences; neither conclusion is accurate or represents my view. There are two reasons for my focus on female abuse victims. One, at this point, women are far more likely than men to pursue counseling and education on the issues of abuse; therefore, my focus represents the audience that is most likely to read this book. Two, the focus of the book is on the damage that every victim will experience, regardless of gender and nature of the abuse; therefore, the illustrations reveal the core issues common to all victims, laying a theoretical framework that I hope will offer guidance for specific applications in individual lives.

There is another reason for writing this book. Every book is an odyssey. Some are theoretical; others are personal quests for the answers that elude our grasp. This odyssey is both. First, it is a theoretical quest that attempts to put words to the experiences of many friends who have entrusted their lives and stories to my care. A counselor is a memorial to the past suffering and future hope of his friends, a memorial—like the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem—that calls others to face the damage of living in a fallen, often diabolical world. The stories of my friends cry out for healing, for justice, for the day when all tears will be wiped away and all wrongs avenged. My prayer is that I will do justice to the words that have been spoken.

This book is also an intensely personal discussion of sexual abuse. Both my wife and I share histories of past abuse. The fact that I have a personal

history with sexual abuse, and therefore a bias, does not ensure the validity of my reflections or the helpfulness of the material. It does require, however, that I take the journey of understanding sexual abuse for those whose stories I am telling and for myself. My prayer is to not only do justice to their words, but to offer a perspective on the One whose story is the central word of life, the One whose abuse on the cross gives perspective and direction for dealing with all the lesser abuses that each of us face in a fallen world. Then, indeed, I will have done well in telling the stories of us all.

With sadness and joy, I invite you to join this quest for perspective.



PART ONE

THE DYNAMICS  
OF ABUSE





CHAPTER 1

# THE REALITY OF A WAR

## Facing the Battle

AT TIMES, I WONDER if every person in the world, male and female, young and old, has been sexually abused. No doubt the nature of my work biases my perspective, perhaps severely. As a psychologist and a counselor trainer, I'm invited to enter into the lives of countless individuals: people who are your next-door neighbor, your kid's Sunday school teacher, your pastor, your physician, and—this one will hurt—your wife or husband. For so many of them, a history of sexual abuse lingers like a chronic toothache, so familiar that it is no longer recognized, dulling the senses but not interfering with the capacity to perform the routine tasks of life. In most cases, you would never suspect who has been abused. If asked directly, many would not recall past abuse; others would lie to avoid the shame of admitting that they were victims of one of the few crimes where the victim feels more shunned and rejected than the criminal.

Sexual abuse is a difficult subject. More than most subjects, it provokes a horribly uncomfortable sense of shame, in both speaker and listener. In

many groups, the person who admits to a history of past abuse becomes a lightning rod for the fear and rage of those with similar but unadmitted struggles. It is really easier for abused persons to deny the past, ignoring the memories, the pain, and the current struggles that may be related to the abuse.

I recall the plaintive words of a young woman who was facing memories of abuse perpetrated by her father, a respected pastor: “I’d rather be dead than face the truth of the memories. If I admit the memories are true, I’ll be totally abandoned by my parents, family, and church. If I continue to live a lie, I’ll slowly rot from the inside out, pretending all is well when I know I’m a zombie.” Her choices were clear: Lie, and die slowly; or talk, and be immediately cut off. It sounds tragic to put it this way, but in her mind, living (that is, admitting all that was true) required that she forget her only hope of life: the support of family and friends.

Her plight is not uncommon. It seems that whenever a woman or man who has been abused enters into the horror of his or her past, a terrible price must be paid. This situation is like that of a friend of mine whose wrist was broken when he was a young child. Due to the neglect of his parents, the bone never properly healed, but it did mend. The bone attached itself in a manner that allows him to function adequately until he attempts to bend his wrist. It is healed, but at the cost of his never being able to play any racquet sport in the way it was intended to be played. He copes well, but the effects of his parents’ neglect are ever with him. If he wanted to restore his wrist, he would need to have the bone rebroken and endure a lengthy recuperative process, putting a sizable burden on his family for a time. *Why bother when he has learned so effectively to cope with the wound?* A similar question rages in the minds of many abuse victims.

The process of entering the past will disrupt life—or, at least, the existence that masquerades as life. The ease of quiet denial that allows the person to be a pleasant but vacuous doormat or an articulate but driven Bible study leader will be replaced by tumult, fear, confusion, anger, and change. Marriages will need to be reshaped; sexual relations may be postponed while the partners devote themselves to prayer and fasting. The fabric

of life will need to be unraveled piece by piece as the Master reweaves the cloth to His design. The process would be difficult even in an ideal world with supportive partners, friends, and churches. In many cases, the external battle is dramatically difficult because others would prefer the nice woman remain sweet, the competent woman remain in control, and the happy-go-lucky woman remain the life of the party. When change is bumpy and messy, particularly if it impels others to change, it is viewed with suspicion and rancor usually reserved for the worst heretics. But what is viewed as the greatest heresy is usually the thing that calls those committed to comfort to deepest change.

One might wish that the process of sanctification was merely a stroll down a gentle country lane. In fact, the path is through the dark valleys and into the seemingly impenetrable darkness that eclipses the light of the Son of God. The horror of change is that it appears to involve a death that resurrection cannot restore. Therefore, the only apparent hope is to live in denial and to believe that God wants us to be complacent, spiritualized automatons. I view this as a diabolical cover-up, a lie of such proportion and feasibility that it seems eminently reasonable. After all, what can be done about a pain of titanic dimension that seems to only get worse to the degree it is touched on, let alone plumbed to its depths? The litany of voices that clamor to sing “leave well enough alone” are legion, and their degrees, life experience, and cautious reason serve as a numbing influence that dulls the throb in the soul and the pounding of the heart.

What is the point in pursuing firm hope and lively joy? The answer is simple: to live out the gospel. The reason for entering the struggle is *a desire for more, a taste of what life and love could be if freed from the dark memories and deep shame*. No one leaves the lethargy of denial unless there is a spark of discontent that pierces the darkness of daily numbness. To live significantly less than what one was made to be is as severe a betrayal of the soul as the original abuse.

Our motivation to change, however, is more than just dissatisfaction with an empty life; we are motivated by the goal that draws all believers. The apostle Paul talked about the endpoint as a crown of righteousness (see

2 Timothy 4:8). Paul was willing to be poured out like a drink offering, to fight the good fight, and to finish the race, because he knew his hunger for the Lord's appearing would be rewarded with the prize of the Lord's commendation. To be greeted by the Lord with the prize of His "well done" embrace was a reward that supplanted the ordinary concerns for comfort.

The person who desires to deal with the wounds of past abuse will not feel courageous, nor will there be the immediate exaltation of starting out on a new journey; the bonds on the soul will not be quickly freed or broken. What, then, is the reason for moving toward the goal of God's embrace? Again, the answer is *a hunger for more*. God has made us with a natural desire to be as He is: alive, righteous, pure, passionate, loving. *To honor what God has called us to be is the reason a man or woman chooses the path of change.*

The tragedy is that the adult who wants to deal with his or her past sexual abuse must be willing to confront an internally and externally fierce battle fought by Christians against other Christians.<sup>1</sup> This sad state of affairs makes change, when it occurs, a supernatural victory of no small proportion. It is imperative that the man or woman who has been abused enters into the battle armed with both *an awareness of the cost* and *a deep conviction that life lived in the mire of denial is not life at all*. If the Lord Jesus came to give life, and life abundant, then a life of pretense involves a clear denial of the gospel, no matter how moral, virtuous, or appealing that life may seem.

What needs to be faced, if one is to enter the fray with the hope of change? In simple terms, one must face that there is a war, one must recognize the enemy, and one needs to know why the battle is to be fought. There is a war. One enters it when one acknowledges the reality of the past abuse.

## THE REALITY OF A WAR

A problem cannot be resolved until it has been faced. A major shift occurs when words are given to what is known to be true: *I have been sexually abused*.<sup>2</sup> The enormous battle in labeling the truth is difficult to imagine.

A woman I worked with for over a year recently joined an incest survivors' group. She was reluctant to do so even though our work had concentrated on the effects of the abuse. She confessed that the difficulty was in admitting to herself that her only reason for joining the group was because she had been abused. Even though our conversations over the past year were largely about her past abuse, and even though she had always had clear memories of the events, she had avoided fully acknowledging that she had been abused.

I had always been amazed at the reluctance to face the data head on until I had an encounter with a good friend. I had been involved in working with abused people for over a year when I conducted a seminar on the topic. At the seminar, I was asked by several people if I had ever been abused. My answer was always *no*. The good friend who heard me teach asked the same question. I answered in the same manner. He probed and asked if I had ever been in a situation where I felt sexually uncomfortable, awkward, or debased. My answer was so quick it surprised me: "Well, of course." He asked me the details, and in moments, I recalled forced masturbation at a camp I had attended as an adolescent, a homosexual invitation I turned down in Boy Scouts, and a sexual assault that occurred at a football camp. He looked at me with stunned sorrow and said, "Doesn't that fit your definition of sexual abuse?" I was dumbfounded. It was not that I had entirely forgotten those events, but I would never have allowed them to be labeled with a word that might open the door to further exploration. *There is a deep reluctance to begin the process of change by admitting that damage has occurred.*

A woman recently came to see me for the sole purpose of determining whether she had been sexually abused. She was well-educated, bright, and competent. Many knew her as a no-nonsense, reasonable woman. She shyly informed me, after explaining her purpose in seeking help, that for fourteen years she had been taken to a nudist colony by her parents. Each summer the clothed community was invited to attend a nude beauty pageant. During the pageant, she was forced to pose in various positions, some pornographic, for an entire evening. Her soul died. She was

mortified in being associated with her parents' nudity at home and at the colony, but even worse, she despised that annual evening when hundreds of men would gawk and slobber over the sight of her developing body. Again, I was stunned. Could she really be asking if she had been abused? Was the record not a thousand percent clear?

A woman who was sexually abused by her father, uncle, and grandfather agreed she was harmed by their behavior but was reluctant to call it sexual abuse. Her father and uncle forced her to have oral sex with them. Her grandfather would exhibit himself in front of her. She said with great sincerity, "If I had been raped, I would call it abuse, but all they did was what a dozen other men have done to me over the years, so why should I call it abuse?"

*What is sexual abuse?* It seems that many people operate on the principle that whatever happened to them is not abuse, but if it had happened to someone else or if it had been a bit more extreme, then it would have been abusive. One man literally said, "My mother was always parading around the house without any clothes. She would often ask me to fasten her bra or check her legs for bruises. I know it was inappropriate, but how could that be abuse?" Because of this kind of confusion about what constitutes sexual abuse, it is imperative to have a clear definition:

Sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person.

Sexual abuse may be committed by a person under the age of eighteen when that person is either significantly older than the victim or when the perpetrator is in a position of power or control over the victimized child/adolescent. When the sexual abuse is perpetrated by an adult or older child who is a blood or legal relative, it constitutes incest, or intrafamilial sexual abuse.

There are two broad categories of abuse: sexual contact and sexual interactions. *Sexual contact* involves any type of physical touch that is

designed to arouse sexual desire (physical or psychological) in the victim and/or the perpetrator. Physical touch can include at the most severe level forced or nonforced intercourse, oral or anal sex (24 percent of victims<sup>3</sup>); at the severe level forced or nonforced manual vaginal stimulation or penetration, breast fondling, or any form of simulated intercourse (40 percent); and at the least severe level forced or nonforced sexual kissing, touch of clothed breasts, buttocks, thighs, or genitals (36 percent). The categories imply a continuum of severity, but *all inappropriate sexual contact is damaging and soul-distorting*. Significantly, 73 percent of the least severely abused victims report some damage, and 39 percent report considerable to extreme trauma as a result of the past abuse.<sup>4</sup>

*Sexual interactions* are far harder to acknowledge because they do not involve physical touch and therefore do not seem as severe. Many times they involve a subtle sexual invasion that leaves the victim wondering if it occurred or if it is a by-product of her own distorted imagination. Interactions can be categorized as visual, verbal, or psychological. Visual sexual abuse involves interactions where the child is forced or invited to watch sexually arousing scenes or pictures or is observed by the perpetrator in a state of undress that is arousing to the adult.

One client's father used to leave pornographic literature in the bathroom before she would take a shower. After she had begun to bathe, he would enter the room and retrieve his magazine, lingering for a moment to observe his daughter's teenage form silhouetted behind the shower door. This was not an inadvertent mistake; the pattern was confirmed in other visual intrusions.

One young teenage boy returned home each day with a mixture of trepidation and excitement, wondering if his alcoholic mother would be drunk and naked or partially unclothed, lying on the living room couch. Each time he swore he would not look, but his teenage curiosity and growing sexual responsiveness to visual cues betrayed him.

A parent or adult who finds arousal in watching a naked child or introducing a child to sexual stimuli (through pornography or exhibitionistic sexual exposure) has without a doubt sexually victimized that child.

Sexual verbal interactions can be equally abusive. A good friend of mine casually discussed her father's lifelong habit of talking about her body as if he were expressing interest in her grades. Every day he visually scanned her developing body as if he were looking for evidence of head lice. He measured her skirt, checked out her hair, evaluated and judged her boyfriends, and most embarrassingly, commented on her body in front of her dates. His vilely endearing term for her was T.T. No one knew what it meant for years, but she knew he was referring to her breasts. Such repeated verbal degrading obviously constitutes emotional abuse, and it should not be ignored, as it also violates the young girl's sexual identity.

Verbal sexual abuse can also come in the form of suggestive or seductive interactions. A woman recalled her disgust in being around her grandfather. Every time he saw her, he would wink and chuckle. Her internal discomfort was viewed as disrespectful by her parents and as a symptom of craziness in the young girl. That lasted for thirty years, until I probed for other interactions with her grandfather. It finally came to light that he would wait until no one else was around and then say, "You are so sweet I could eat you. Come here, honey, and let me taste your lips." Was he a silly old man, innocent but slightly inappropriate? Or was he a sexually suggestive abuser who used words as the stimulant that increased his perverse sexual arousal? One indication is that he spoke like that only when he was alone with his granddaughter. His other grandfatherly embraces went unnoticed because they were innocent enough apart from his suggestive remarks that highlighted his lengthy hugs or kisses. Nevertheless, every time he touched her, she felt disgust and tightness.

Actual seductive verbal interactions are easier, in most cases, to discern. To be invited to take a shower with dad, or go down in the cellar with your brother, or take a long walk in the woods with your uncle when sexual cues are emitted or past sexual abuse has occurred clearly are abusive encounters. Verbal abuse is a powerful and deep wound. *Sexually abusive words produce the same damage as sexually abusive contact.* Yet the potential

for minimization or feeling weird for being damaged makes the potential for change even more difficult for those more subtly abused than for those more severely abused.

A final category of interaction is psychological sexual abuse.<sup>5</sup> There is an obvious overlap between visual and verbal sexual abuse and psychological abuse. Psychological sexual abuse will occur through verbal or visual means (usually both) but will involve more subtle (nonspecific, more mood-generating) communication that erodes the appropriate role boundaries between a child and an adult. For example, a mother who seeks advice or solace from a teenage son about her sexual struggles with his father has stepped across the line between honest sharing and pandering. To pander is to act as a go-between in love intrigues, to act as a pimp. A pimp solicits sexual involvement for his own benefit. A father who uses his daughter as a surrogate wife or confidante has bound his daughter's heart to him in a subtly sexual way.

The damage may not be overt, and in fact, the daughter may feel so special that she would defend to her death the appropriateness of her father's interactions. It is nevertheless abusive. In the same way, a mother who talks about her son as being her "man," her "companion," or her surrogate "husband" has set up a dynamic of competition with her adult husband and a sense of sexually bonded uniqueness for the son that violates the natural boundaries between mother and son.

Whenever a parent or caregiver uses a child to fulfill overt sexual desires or more subtle longings related to the adult's sexual identity, abusive dynamics will be unleashed in that child's soul. *The fact that sexual abuse can be subtle ought not cloud our perspective that it is equally abusive and damaging.* The very nature of satanic harm is that it is perpetrated by the father of lies who masquerades as an angel of light. Whether the perpetrator is acting under direct satanic sway or indirectly in the way that all sin can be ultimately tied to Satan's province, a certain degree of deceit and subtlety can be assumed in all sexual abuse.

## TYPES OF SEXUAL ABUSE: CONTACT AND INTERACTION

### Contact

- **VERY SEVERE:** Genital intercourse (forcible or nonforcible); oral or anal sex (forcible or nonforcible)
- **SEVERE:** Unclothed genital contact, including manual touching or penetration (forcible or nonforcible); unclothed breast contact (forcible or nonforcible); simulated intercourse
- **LEAST SEVERE:** Sexual kissing (forcible or nonforcible); sexual touching of buttocks, thighs, legs, or clothed breasts or genitals

### Interactions

- **VERBAL:** Direct solicitation for sexual purposes; seductive (subtle) solicitation or innuendo; description of sexual practices; repeated use of sexual language and sexual terms as personal names
- **VISUAL:** Exposure to or use for pornography; intentional (repeated) exposure to sexual acts, sexual organs, and/or sexually provocative attire (bra, nighties, slip, underwear); inappropriate attention (scrutiny) directed toward body (clothed or unclothed) or clothing for purpose of sexual stimulation
- **PSYCHOLOGICAL:** Physical/sexual boundary violation: Intrusive interest in menstruation, clothing, pubic development; repeated use of enemas. Sexual/relational boundary violation: Intrusive interest in child's sexual activity, use of child as a spouse surrogate (confidant, intimate companion, protector, or counselor)

## WHO ARE ABUSERS?

The abuser can be anyone. He can be your father, your pastor, your brother, your seventy-year-old next-door neighbor. Often, a victim has had so many abusers that it seems as if he or she sent a serial letter inviting them to join in the debauchery of abuse. It is not unusual to see a client who has been abused by several family members, a neighbor, boyfriends, a teacher, a counselor, or an employer.<sup>6</sup>

The abuser may be a man or a woman. It is far more common for a young girl to be abused by an adolescent or adult male, but it is inaccurate to presume that men do not abuse boys or women do not abuse girls and boys.<sup>7</sup>

The abuser may be decades older or the same age. He or she may have an honored role in your family or may not be known to you or anyone in your family. In any case, the perpetrator will have a face, a voice, a smell. Even if you cannot recall any details about him, he will be like a faded picture you carry in your wallet. Though you may not have seen him in thirty years or you may have eaten lunch with him yesterday, he still plays a significant part in your daily life, and likely an even greater role in every dream and nightmare.

A great deal of research has been done about the perpetrator and the effects of his abuse.<sup>8</sup> The focus of this book is not on the abuser, nor on the variance in damage caused by different kinds of perpetrators. This book explores the nature of the damage done to the soul of the victim by any kind of sexual abuse, irrespective of the perpetrator. The abuse victim, however, often defends or ignores the perpetrator, especially if the abuser was a family member. It is important to understand how this is done.

Many people who have been sexually abused tend to make excuses for the perpetrator or minimize the damage. The most typical way is to find comfort in the fact that at least the perpetrator was not one's closest, most intimate caregiver or friend. Betrayal by an intimate, deeply trusted companion is almost too much for the soul to endure. The victim does not want to face that the perpetrator may have been a person with access to the deepest recesses of his or her soul, a bearer of a key that no one else possessed. For this reason, many who have been abused by an uncle will say, "At least it was not my brother, or, even worse, my father." Or if the abuse was perpetrated by someone outside the family, the relief centers around the fact that it was not a relative. The fearful and fallen heart does not want to anguish over the loss of safety and nurturance; therefore, the damage is seemingly diminished in the relief that the perpetrator was not someone closer or that the damage could have been more severe.

The second tendency is to put the abuser in a category that explains away the harm.<sup>9</sup> The damage will be faced to the extent the abuser is seen as the perpetrator of a crime—if not of a civil infraction, then certainly

of a violation of God's law. The battle will not be entered if one makes excuses for the abuser and his or her crime.

The excuses are legion. The abuser was abused as a child. He had a hard background that would have made anyone a little crazy. He was going through a terrible time with his wife and was so lonely. He drank to the point that he just didn't know what he was doing, so how could he be held accountable? He did so many wonderful things for people; how can I be angry for just one failure? All excuses should be silenced; the perpetrator committed a crime against the abused person's body and soul.

A central point needs to be highlighted again: Sexual abuse is damaging no matter how the victim's body is violated. At first, many will doubt the veracity of that claim; it does not immediately stand to reason that being violently raped by one's father can be compared to being lightly touched through the clothing by a gentle, grandfatherly next-door neighbor. No one would question that being raped by one's father will be far more difficult to deal with than handling the nuisance of a pawing dirty old man. The degree of trauma associated with abuse will be related to many factors, including the relationship with the perpetrator, the severity of the intrusion, the use of violence, the age of the perpetrator, and the duration of abuse. But in every case of abuse, the dignity and beauty of the soul have been violated. Therefore, damage will be present whether one has been struck by a Mack truck traveling fifty miles per hour or "merely" hit by a tricycle rolling at the same speed.

Obviously, there are certain abusive relationships that are more damaging than others. An assumption can be made about sexual abuse: With all other factors being equal, damage will be *in direct proportion to the degree that it disrupts the protection and nurturance of the parental bond*.<sup>10</sup> There are two issues related to the potential disruption: the abuse and the revelation of the abuse. When abuse is perpetrated, it sets into motion the tremors of an internal earthquake that requires a strong and nurturant environment to quell. If that environment is unavailable, or worse yet, if the environment is hostile, cold, and/or insensitive to the resultant

damage, then a victim will set aside the internal process of healing to ensure his or her own survival.

For this reason, incest is usually more devastating than extrafamilial abuse. A sexual relationship with an older cousin will not be as traumatic as the same sexual experience with one's father. A father is called to be a secure, trustworthy, and life-generating surrogate for God until the child develops the capacity to see his or her heavenly Father as the only perfectly trustworthy Source of life. *The victim's struggle to trust will be proportionately related to the extent her parent(s) failed to protect and nurture her as a child.*

Intrafamilial abuse will almost always be more devastating except when the revelation of extrafamilial abuse threatens to damage the relationship with the victim's parents or other family members. If a child were to report to his parents that a neighbor was fondling him several times a week, he might fear being doubted or, worse, blamed for the abuse. He might have a hundred other reasons to fear his parents' response, therefore he fears the repercussions of the revelation. To the degree that confidence in the love and respect of one's parents is disturbed, the damage of intra- or extrafamilial abuse will be more traumatic.

To summarize, the first task in entering the battle is facing the fact that a battle exists. There are many who will read this chapter and label for the first time the awful experiences at home, school, or church as sexual abuse. Facing the reality of past abuse is a process. It does not happen quickly or in one climactic moment of honesty. It usually occurs over a lengthy time, during which the past abuse is seen in light of current choices of fight or flight. Often the memories of the past abuse are accompanied with little emotion other than disbelief or incredulity. It is not unusual for the memories to be separated from emotion—often it is as if they are frozen in ice, seen but not able to be touched. At other times, the memories will be recalled in small details that seem to have lost context, specificity, or meaning. To open one's heart to a truth that is deeply devastating seems, at first, foolish; however, the hard, cold parts of our soul are continually tempted to thaw by the warmth of the longings of our soul. Every pleasant

interchange is an invitation to life; every deep sorrow stirs the passion of grief. Those daily temptations to life are viewed by the person who has been sexually abused, at best, as a two-day vacation to a warm climate and, at worst, as the melting of the polar ice cap. A total meltdown spells disaster; therefore, the icy soul must remain frozen and hidden.

The sexually abused person often denies the abuse, mislabels it, or at least minimizes the damage. The enemy goes unrecognized or misunderstood, so the victim cannot fight the battle. Once the war is avoided, then something must be done with the wounded heart that cries out for solace and hope. The cry must be heard or squelched. Sadly, the choice is usually to stifle the groan. What normally mutes the cry is the internal dynamic that promotes denial, mislabeling, or minimization. The dynamic involves the subtle workings of shame and contempt that serve to keep the soul frozen and the warmth of life at a distance. The next two chapters will explain the internal dynamic that unnecessarily deepens the wound.