

MARY ELLEN MANN, LCSW, MS

from PAIN
to
POWER

OVERCOMING SEXUAL TRAUMA
and RECLAIMING YOUR TRUE IDENTITY



Praise for
From Pain to Power

"From Pain to Power is a beautiful book that brings hope to those who have suffered from the darkness and devastation of sexual violation. Author and counselor Mary Ellen Mann does a masterful job in describing survivors as Princess Warriors who have suffered the battle against their royal birth and rightful femininity. I highly recommend this book to survivors of sexual violation and those who love and care for them."

—BOZ TCHIVIDJIAN, executive director of GRACE

"From Pain to Power is an informative and compassionate road map for those healing from the trauma of sexual abuse. The Christian perspective of this valuable resource will help many women heal, not just emotionally and physically but spiritually as well. Mary Ellen's vulnerable sharing of her own journey will encourage others toward the restoration and freedom she has found."

—MILAN AND KAY YERKOVICH, authors of *How We Love*
and *How We Love Our Kids*

"Mary Ellen Mann's *From Pain to Power* is an excellent resource for sexual abuse survivors. Told with candor, backed by clinical practice, and full of scriptural insight, this book will help anyone battling back to health after the devastation of rape."

—MARY DEMUTH, author of *Not Marked: Finding
Hope and Healing after Sexual Abuse*

“Mary Ellen Mann walks hand in hand with women overcoming sexual trauma. She exposes the lies of the world and reveals the truth God yearns to share with us—we are more precious than silver, more costly than gold, and more beautiful than diamonds. *From Pain to Power* journeys through the effects of sexual violation and leads to the reclamation of every woman’s worth as beloved daughters of God.”

—SHANNON ETHRIDGE, relationship coach, speaker, and author of numerous books including the million-copy, best-selling Every Woman’s Battle series

“Mary Ellen Mann has brilliantly taken a painful and often confusing topic and offered a solid path to move forward—beyond the scars and heartache. In a powerful weave of truth and reflection, she teaches readers how to not only understand abuse and pain but to aggressively fight against it. This is a ‘go-to’ book for years to come.”

—GARI MEACHAM, president of Truly Fed Ministries and The Vine Uganda, speaker, and author of *Truly Fed: Finding Freedom from Disordered Eating, Spirit Hunger, and Watershed Moments*

“In my twenty-three years as a journalist, I’ve encountered all kinds of cases of abuse and objectification. Mary Ellen has written a guide not only for those who’ve been victimized but for all of us. *From Pain to Power* is a step-by-step journey of self love, faith, and understanding. It speaks to anyone grappling with doubt and beautifully elevates those who have spent too long blaming the wrong person: themselves.”

—BROOKE WAGNER, anchor of *Good Day Colorado*

“*From Pain to Power* validates and gives hope that healing, love, and joy are possible after the humiliation and degradation of sexual violation.”

—MARILYN VAN DERBUR, advocate, speaker, and author
of *Miss America by Day*

“This powerful book truly validates victims of sexual trauma while empowering them to walk with God, using spirituality as a tool; also a helpful resource for therapists working with sexual trauma victims.”

—ROOPA KURSE, MD; adult, child, and adolescent
psychiatrist

“You are a hero! Read this book and you will be able to look in the mirror like a Navy Seal who says ‘I will never quit.’ Mary Ellen is personal, informative, and loving as she champions you to be a warrior in your story and to know that you are a gift from God. Read this book and the impact, growth, and change in you will be recognizable.”

—JOHN E. DAVIS, MA, author of *Extreme Pursuit*,
president and founder of 2xtreme

“Mary Ellen Mann uses her personal narrative and engrossing story to provide clear strategies for transformation. As a therapist who has seen men and women struggle with sexual violations for more than twenty-five years, I would recommend *From Pain to Power* to every church leader, counselor, and Christian parent.”

—JOHN DEVRIES, executive director of development at
Shelterwood Academy

“What a powerful resource for sexual abuse survivors and those who care about them! Drawing from her own personal and professional experiences, as well as from her deep faith and heart of compassion, Mary Ellen Mann takes the reader on a hope-filled journey—from the dark tunnel of pain and trauma, onto paths of insight and truth, and ultimately to the high places of redemption and healing. You, or someone you love, can be whole again—this book will show you how.”

—SANDI BANKS, author of *Anchors of Hope*

“*From Pain to Power* is a must-read for women across the globe who bear the tumult of sexual violation. We must recognize the sacred value of survivors of abuse, while acknowledging and encouraging the power of their voices. This book is a great tool for those who work with survivors to help them stay the course in their healing. You, too, can step into her journey and help her reclaim her life as you learn to restore her value and purpose.”

—KIMBA LANGAS, executive director of Free the Girls

“*From Pain to Power* is a journey into the battle wounds and resulting scars of a survivor of sexual violation. You are also given a road map to help women find healing and wholeness again. Read this book to be part of the solution to this epidemic concern.”

—DALE INGRAHAM, co-founder of Speaking Truth in Love Ministries, president of MK Safety Net, and pastor in Campbell, NY

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*To my sister, Kathleen. Princess Warrior, you are
filled with the glory of the Trinity. Semper fi.*

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

—Isaiah 58:8

But for you who revere my name, the sun of
righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.
And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.
Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be
ashes under the soles of your feet.

—Malachi 4:2-3

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

—Isaiah 41:10

He will cover you with His feathers,
and under His wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and
rampart.

—Psalm 91:4

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Publisher's Note

This publication is designed to provide accurate, authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the author and publisher are not engaged in rendering psychological, financial, legal, or other professional services. If expert assistance or counseling is needed, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Acknowledgments

High praise is owed to those of you who have moved me forward when I could have collapsed, when I thought I was failing. You have known more confidently than I that my story and insights could play a part in the healing of others.

Special mention goes to those who have loved me through the awkward process of gluing the pieces of my broken trust into one whole person. I have been healed by your patience, passion, kindness, and enduring loyalty. Maybe you wrote me a card; baked me a cake; reached out to me through an e-mail, a text, or a call; or hugged me when I wanted to run away from this project. Some of you, remarkably, called on me to help you.

My husband has withstood the most wretched parts of my coming together. Through it all you saw my present beauty—ashes, blood, and all. You have shown me Jesus in your consistent, unflinching presence, as if the terror simply provided an opportunity to display the power of devoted, courageous love.

My heart is forever indebted to my children, whose innocent love has covered the many open wounds with a salve I never knew was available. Your pictures and cards of encouragement adorn the walls of my bedroom and closet because they are the high art of God, showing me what wholeness looks like. You have known how my abundant affection can mix too often with my strange anxieties, and you have

loved me patiently and sweetly despite it. God gave me your tender lives to show me what I could have never known I had in my heart—unmitigated, unrestrained love. God protect and make happy your golden lives.

My sister, every day you rise out of the ashes of severe emotional pain. You do this to fight for your future, your hope, and your children. You reach toward me, no matter how bloody your wounds, to make sure I know you are here for me. Hour after hour, whether late night or early morning, you have read through this book to offer insight and stability. Deep canyons of loneliness and fear have been filled by your friendship and reassurance. Gratitude and love to you forever for all you have given to this effort and for all that you represent.

I thank all Princess Warriors for your bravery and valor to overcome the lies perpetrated in the violation you suffered. You are unsung heroes for generations to come—never doubt that. Your lives are the nutrients in the soil of this effort. More importantly, I hope that as you find your story on these pages, you understand—confidently—how much I adore you, enjoy you, and respect you.

Ron Lee, my editor—you met me in my despair at a writer's conference in April 2014. By a stroke of mercy, you decided this project was worthy. You fought for this manuscript in meetings I'll never know about. You were my *hosanna* in the furnace of doubt and nearly giving up. Plucking me out of obscurity was a huge risk. Words will never do justice to describe my gratitude. Deep gratitude and prayers for total success as you venture into your new endeavors.

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Indeed, you live out one of my favorite quotes:

We are each other's harvest;

We are each other's business;

We are each other's magnitude and bond.

—Gwendolyn Brooks

I am forever indebted and utterly grateful.

Introduction

YOUR PERSONAL INVITATION

I invite you to join me and others in reclaiming things we fear we have lost: purpose, vision, personal value, and power, among others. The journey will build, starting from a place of having faced sexual violation in its many forms. It will continue on to deal with the ways that violation has affected us. And finally, we will reclaim ourselves, our lives, our power, and our worth as daughters of God.

I am a trained therapist, having worked in private practice for more than fifteen years. Much of my practice involves working with girls and women who struggle with who they are following episodes of sexual trauma. We work together, using the best practices developed from years of experience with women who have overcome the effects of violation.

I also work with clients at a very personal level. For more than twenty-five years, starting at an early age, I had to deal with the trauma of being the target of inappropriate sexual behavior. As I write this book, and as you and I journey together, I represent a fellow overcomer.

Together, we will start from where we are today. We will move toward living out the legacy God has given to us by his Spirit and through his Son, Jesus Christ.

FACING THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

In God's eyes you are royalty, a daughter of the King. Nothing can change that, but the systems of the world seek to destroy what God has named you, and me, and all of his daughters. We have to hear and trust what he says to us. God looks at us and says, "You are beloved. You are more valuable than anything you can imagine. You are my daughter, and nothing will ever change that." That is a glimpse of what is true about you.

However, sexual violation is a weapon that brings harm, attacking all that God says about you. Beyond the trauma of being targeted, there is the fallout that we have to face afterward. We will address these questions one by one in the chapters that follow. You already know them well:

- Am I a bad person who deserved this?
- Did I somehow invite this?
- Was I singled out due to a flaw in my character, or my lack of faith, or some other personal weakness?
- If I didn't deserve this, why am I so destroyed by it?
- Why did violation come at the hands of someone I trusted: a family member, friend, boyfriend, teacher, husband, coach, or church leader?
- Will I ever reclaim the person I used to be?
- How can I protect myself from ever having to go through this again?
- How can I regain the power I feel was taken from me?
- What does it mean to be royalty, a daughter of God, when I have been the target of violation?

You know already that the work will not be easy, but we will labor together to find the answers to these questions and others. You can live in the reality that you are more valuable in God's eyes than all other things. You can live the life that God wants for you, regardless of what happened in the past. You can learn new habits of living and thinking; you can practice new ways of being. And by the end of the journey, you will have grown in insight, understanding, identity, and power. You will regain who you are, and the wisdom you acquire will help reset your life.

We will walk through your past, opening doors in your memory where you were sexualized and brutalized. Know that Jesus goes there with you, and I will be there as well. We will turn on the lights in every room, and we will work through the issues until every scared and lonely place is restored.

God, through Jesus, redeems what has been broken. God will restore to you what has been taken, and you will be made whole. You will get your real girl back—whether that girl is social or quiet, whimsical or analytical, artistic or scientific. There is so much more *for* you and so much more *about* you beyond the trauma in your past.

REJECTING BLAME

No matter where you are today, know this: The violation was not your fault. No matter what the person told you or accused you of. No matter if you didn't fight him, if you never told anyone, or if someone implied that you invited overtures due to your looks, manner, or way of dress. Sexual violation is *never* a woman's fault.

You are made by holy and respectful Hands, the Hands of a holy

and respectful Father. Your life is fully known by your Father. He knows you to be unique, unmatched, the first and last of your kind.

You survived sexual violation. That is one true fact about you. But it is not a fact that identifies you. Yes, you are a Princess Warrior who bears scars from past battles. You know the piercing of wounds against your femininity. But what *identifies* you is the unchanging truth that you are the daughter of the King of kings. You are a member of the royal family of God. You are worth more to your Father than you can ever imagine.

Those are things that define you for eternity. They will never change; they always will be true about who you are. Meanwhile, there are other things that describe details of your past. They don't describe you, but they do recall what has happened to you. For instance, you were singled out for sexual violation. That doesn't mean that you are alone in this, but it does mean that many women around you were not targeted at that time. Why you?

We will explore that question in a later chapter. For now, know that you are part of a huge number of girls and women who have suffered something similar. As many as one in four females alive today has been the target of some form of sexual violation.

If you have talked about this in the past, it is possible that you were not believed. Or perhaps the person you talked to tried to minimize your experience: "It couldn't have been as bad as you're saying. He must not have meant it. Maybe you did something to send the wrong signal. Even if it did happen, you need to forgive it, forget it, and move on."

Accusations and false assumptions don't apply here. You need to

know that I believe you, and together we will explore the whys. We *will* get to the other side of this.

Marilyn Van Derbur wrote a memoir, *Miss America by Day*, about her recovery from thirteen years of incest committed by her father. She wrote about a confrontation in which she revealed to her mother just a small portion of what she had suffered. Her mother turned away from her and said,

“All I want is peace. I will do anything for peace.” That did it. I found myself doubling my fist and ramming it into the table as I rose to my full height and raged, “That’s what got us here in the first place. You were willing to do anything for peace. Don’t rock the boat. Don’t open the door. Don’t raise your voice. *Sometimes you have to go to war to have peace, Mother.* Sometimes you have to stand right up to someone and cry out, *‘No more. Stop!’* Sometimes there’s fighting and bleeding in order to have peace.”¹

You might identify with Van Derbur’s experience. Many of us do. Along with one in four women who have faced similar trauma, I stand with you. God, your Father, stands with you. He will walk beside you as you experience his restoration of your life. Those who do not look away, those who stand with you and fight for you, are the new family and friends who matter most.

Reading a book like this can be daunting, maybe even a bit lonely and embarrassing. But remember, one of every four women you know, meet, or interact with has endured sexual trauma. You are very much *not* alone.

TRUTH FROM GOD THAT EXPRESSES WHO YOU REALLY ARE

Ask God to open your eyes and heart so you can start seeing yourself as God sees you. Scripture provides sweet truths that identify how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit care for you, what they see when they look at you, and who you are as an adopted coheir to the throne with Christ. Ponder these truths from Scripture, and meditate on them until you are convinced they describe you as God sees you.

Because I, [insert your name here], am in Christ, I am *secure*.

- I am a child of God (see John 1:12).
- I am free forever from condemnation (see Romans 8:1).
- I am assured that in all things God will work for my good (see Romans 8:28–29).
- I am free from any condemning charges against me (see Romans 8:33).
- I cannot be separated from the love of Christ (see Romans 8:35).
- I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God (see 2 Corinthians 1:21–22).
- I have been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come (see Ephesians 1:13–14).
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (see Philippians 4:13).
- I have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ (see Colossians 1:13).
- I am hidden with Christ in God (see Colossians 3:3).

- I have not been given a spirit of timidity but of power, love, and self-discipline (see 2 Timothy 1:7).
- I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me (see 1 John 5:18).

Because I, [insert your name here], am in Christ, I am *significant*.

- I am the salt of the earth (see Matthew 5:13).
- I am the light of the world (see Matthew 5:14).
- I am God's child (see John 1:12).
- I have been chosen to bear fruit that will last (see John 15:16).
- I am Christ's personal witness (see Acts 1:8).
- I am God's temple (see 1 Corinthians 3:16).
- I am a part of Christ's body (see 1 Corinthians 12:27).
- I am a minister of reconciliation for God (see 2 Corinthians 5:18).
- I am God's fellow worker (see 2 Corinthians 6:1).
- I am a saint (see Ephesians 1:1).
- I have been raised up and am now seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (see Ephesians 2:6).
- I am a citizen of heaven (see Philippians 3:20).

Because I, [insert your name here], am in Christ, I am *accepted*.

- I am Christ's friend (see John 15:15).
- I have been justified (see Romans 5:1).
- I am united to the Lord, and I am one with him in spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:17).
- I have been bought with a price and belong to God (see 1 Corinthians 6:20).
- I am a member of Christ's body (see 1 Corinthians 12:27).

- I have become righteous (see 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- I have been adopted as God's child (see Ephesians 1:5).
- I have direct access to the Father through the Spirit (see Ephesians 2:18).
- Since I am God's daughter and because God sent the Spirit of his Son into my heart, I can call out, "Abba, Father." I am no longer a slave, but God's child; and since I am his child, God has made me also an heir (see Galatians 4:6–7).
- I am invited to approach God with freedom and confidence (see Ephesians 3:12).
- I have been redeemed and am forgiven of all my sins (see Colossians 1:14).
- I am complete in Christ (see Colossians 2:10).

God placed his Spirit into your life not to give you restraints and fear, but to give you power, love, and a sound mind (see 2 Timothy 1:7). Like a loving parent, the Triune God wants you to integrate his power, love, and sound mind into *your body*.

May the Lord bring miracles of insight, strength, protection, and promise to you. Let the victorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, meet you here. Say to him out loud: "Meet me here. Show me you are here. Show me you know me. Show me as soon as possible. Give me the senses to detect you. Amen."

As we move forward together, I want you to claim this truth about yourself: you are anointed for a special purpose only you can fulfill—a purpose that can be further defined by your battle scars.

Chapter 1

I HAVE WALKED WHERE YOU WALK

Because most of us have been persuaded to see sexual violation as *our* secret, many of us may remain silent, revealing it (if ever) only to a select few. But shame grows in silence. My dream is that it becomes commonplace to discuss this reality rather than hiding it.

It is only fair that I let you know about my experiences. I have braided my own story throughout this book to remind you that you are not alone. I recovered my voice, and you can too.

For thirty years, I normalized my brokenness. Since I denied the destruction in my life, I never asked God to glue me together. Breaches of trust had become routine to me, where being lost, lonely, and scared was simply life as I knew it.

I had been led to believe that love was about sex, sexiness, and physical attraction, starting when I was only five years old. Threaded into countless conversations were dirty jokes, ongoing sexualized commentaries on my body and looks, abuses of power through solicitation for emotional comfort, and inappropriate touch that ranged from long full-frontal hugs to uncomfortable kisses on the mouth. In my childhood, the violations were paired with verbal and physical abuse.

Because of a lot of influences in my early life, I believed I was responsible for everyone. I was a compassionate person by God's design, so I became a perfect target for outlandish boundary violations. I was voted "most gullible" in high school, not an award I was proud of. I was bullied at a Christian elementary school for being a snob because my family had a large income and a fancy address. To avoid the bullying, I started spending recess in the classroom to avoid everyone. I felt responsible for everyone's interpretation of me.

My body developed early. Of course, I had no choice in the matter. If I could have unzipped myself from my body and traded it for a thin, undeveloped one, I would have. My home life was filled with running commentary that often involved sexual innuendo and critical accusation. I was told lewd things and given feel-up hugs. But if I gained any weight or looked in any way less than I "should have," I was told my face and arms were looking "too full" and to close the refrigerator door.

When I attended a Christian junior high, I was well liked by some girls in my grade, but I was constantly sexualized by boys. They would rate my quickly developing body during lunch. They would make up songs and chants about sexual favors I should do for them. Because of this attention, I was hated by the girls in eighth grade. The girls would scream across the field during breaks, "We hate you, 44DD!" One girl lit into me about my bra size. Her tirade lasted the entire bus ride from the junior high to the elementary school, where we were dropped off.

The day I was chastised on the school bus, I cried and ate a box of chocolate thin mints. One of my parents saw the wrappers and said, "You can't do this kind of eating, so just get over it." My heart started to seal up in sugar and silence. This began my binge eating and over-exercise routine for the next fifteen years.

While still in junior high, all the girls were ogled by the high-school boys. Word got out that a senior student thought I was an attractive eighth grader. When I entered high school as a freshman, I was targeted by older girls who made me clean up their lunch trash. Girls on the yearbook staff put unattractive candid pictures of me in the school annual. Since I never considered myself anything but mediocre at best, I felt utterly confused by the attacks.

THE FALLOUT

While I have never been raped, the crimes against me were psycho-emotional, subtle, and slimy physical moments that left me feeling that the enemy was *me*. I couldn't escape the feeling that I was deeply flawed. The evidence was that by nearly everyone I looked up to and nearly everywhere I went, I was sexualized and humiliated. Added to this was the abandonment of people who were supposed to protect and lead me. I was alone, rejected, ridiculed, and made the target of inappropriate sexual comments and advances.

I felt that my path was littered with insurmountable obstacles, and I was motivated by dread and fear. Dread and fear gave me a deep energy to avoid the truth of my broken heart. In high school, my soul sought protection inside a stone battlement.

I gave up trying to feel any expectation, thought, or need. As I rejected normal thoughts and feelings, I was energized by terror and a never-ending cycle of self-loathing. I loathed myself because I perceived that what I was experiencing was my fault, my weakness. My only "victory" was maintaining perfection—just a thin, crusty layer of external perfection. I added in high grades, extreme activity, and

busyness. I tried to soothe the abiding terror with compulsive secretive overeating, compulsive overexercise, and starvation.

I had no protective boundaries. Men continued to take shots at me, and they found their mark. I was repeatedly injured by words, inappropriate touch, meanness, and the invasion of privacy. As I grew more and more devastated, I resorted more and more to hiding. Along with that came a loss of appetite and suicidal depression.

In addition, there was grabbing, groping, and voyeurism, especially when I was in high school and college. Such breaches occurred at the hands of those I once trusted as Christian leaders, friends, and family members.

Once I left home at age eighteen, I endured still more years of sexual harassment, stalking, and emotionally incestuous disclosures by those in authority. These things were done by church and youth-group leaders, college professors, and men in leadership in my work environment. Meanwhile, my family fell apart in the wake of a scandal, and my first marriage crumbled under verbal and emotional abuse.

While nearly all the unwanted attention came from men who claimed either to be Christian and/or were part of my family and social system, some of the childhood violation occurred at the hands of older girls who also were in my family and social system.

Back then, I doubted that what happened really mattered, rationalizing that “it could have been so much worse.” Yet if you looked at my anxiety and inability to really trust that *I* was safe, that *love* was safe, you would see the cancer created by my just-survive mind-set.

When I became a therapist, I did so reluctantly. I had been to a lot of therapy, and it didn’t really seem to help. When I attended graduate school, I planned to work in lobbying and policy—that’s where “real”

change took place, I believed. But it turned out I wasn't meant to go that route. Through a series of events, I backed into a primary-therapist position and then stumbled into a private counseling practice that continued to grow. I kept thinking, *I'll just do this therapy thing until my policy job comes along.*

After nearly three years of working as a therapist, it hit me. The counseling I had undergone hadn't helped because I never talked about my sexual violation. I kept shelving it.

But until I could talk about it and be loved in the midst of it, all the pain would be woven into my present life. My self-doubt, self-criticism, and distrust of everyone around me would continue to sicken me psychologically and spiritually.

My experience of recovery was filled with tension, wariness, and loneliness. I was tense with the pressure of threat and dread that had worked itself into every cell in my body. I was wary of whether I should place my wounded expectations into the hands of another. I was deeply lonely, believing I made people do these things to me because they had happened in every segment of my life, year after year. The repetition of the sexual violation taught me that it was *my* shame and, thus, it was *my* problem to bear alone.

Although the details of my story are sure to differ from yours, perhaps you will relate to the ways my personality and view of God had formed like scar tissue around my injuries. I will weave throughout this book my process of distinguishing God's *truth* for who he designed me to be from the *fiction* of what the violations had tried to convince me I was.

I want you to know that I resonate and empathize with you because I am a therapist. But far more than that, I walk with you as a

restored and redeemed Princess Warrior—a woman who has waged battle against the assault on her life, a woman fighting against the forces that have persuaded both you and me to question hope, security, and our sense of meaning.

You are a princess because you are made by the King of kings, Jesus Christ. He formed you and knew you before you were born. And he died to offer you a way into his royal family. Through Jesus's victory over death, you are under grace and can cry out, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). You are made a coheir to the throne of Christ (see verse 17). By choosing Jesus, you inherit his royal identity.

You are a princess, and you are a warrior. On this side of heaven, we women are too often devoured for our beauty and influence. We are subjugated by insults and assaults. According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women report in 2013, one in three women across the globe will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.¹ We have sixty million survivors of childhood sexual abuse in the United States alone, according to ParentsforMegansLaw.org.²

And rape is the fastest-growing violent crime in the United States.³ Annually, rape costs the country more than any other crime, \$127 billion.⁴

The worst part is that this act of violation overwhelmingly occurs at the hands of people either in the family or integrated into the family social system. In fact, 34.2 percent of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members, and 58.7 percent are sexually abused by someone known to the family.⁵

It is a battle to break free from sexual trauma, and we will prepare for that battle. Though the original plan for humanity was not to live under siege, it is indeed the case today.

Sexual violation creates a riptide in the soul because one's fundamental capacity to trust her body and her instincts is stolen from her. To have the lines of dignity crossed in the psychological and sexual realm is an event that stuns the nervous system. A person's sense of confidence twists into questions: "Am I real?" or "Am I okay?" We feel broken and silenced. While there are differences among us, such as how intense the violation was, the trauma registers the same in your mind and in every organ and system within you.

LEARNING THAT GOD IS NOT FRAGILE

God can handle all of our pain, our anger, our confusion, and our brokenness. He won't be put off by repeated questions or desperate pleas for help. He is not fragile; he won't lose patience and start tuning out our requests. His willingness to listen and to respond will not run out.

I had to learn to trust God. It involved not trying to appease him but instead telling him what I really needed. My unconscious mind kept lying to me: *God is fragile and will shatter if you upset him.* I had been treating God like I learned to operate with everyone around me. *Be careful not to upset anyone, and everyone will care about you,* I reasoned.

I knew Christ died for me, but I didn't know he really *enjoyed* me or *wanted* me in his family as his coheir, as a daughter of the Father. Not only was God not fragile, but he was willing to lose everything to be on the hunt for me—his lost, lonely sheep.

I let God know I wasn't protecting him anymore from what I really thought, felt, and needed. I wanted God to be my Defender—

strong and resilient—or I didn't want God at all. I needed proof that he was who he claimed to be, and eventually I became a believer again.

WHAT CREATED YOUR BATTLE SCARS?

When we hear the term *sexual violation*, we may think of something extremely violent that would show up on the evening news. If you endured sexual trauma that involved less violence, you might conclude that the violation was of less consequence. I used to tell myself, *It could have been so much worse*, and so do the countless women I meet. In my counseling practice, I hear all sorts of minimizations: "He only touched my breasts, so it wasn't a big deal." "My stepdad was always gross. At least it wasn't my dad or someone related to me." "It happened so long ago, and he wasn't mean about it."

If we refuse to look at our experiences squarely, our injuries can slowly infect our thinking and expectations, thus influencing our habits and choices.

When an injured athlete starts to compensate for unhealed injuries, what started as a knee problem, for example, can evolve into a back and neck issue. The athlete's pain spreads to other joints, just as it does in the personality of the Princess Warrior. On the other hand, when the athlete takes the injury seriously and seeks immediate help, the protocol of physical therapy or even surgery will keep the injury localized and health will be regained more quickly.

If you try to minimize the injury of sexual violation, it is likely to spread to other areas of your life. But take the story of your sexual violation seriously, seek help, and understand that a team of people are normally needed to help bring healing, and you are likely to navigate

through the distress without it controlling your choices and attitude in the future.

I join Oprah's indignation about minimizing sexual abuse based on the severity of the physical acts:

What really upsets me and what you don't seem to get, America, is there aren't varying degrees of abuse. It's about the abuse of power and trust. So whether you physically penetrate a child with your penis or your finger or an object, whether you *just* touch their breasts, whether you *just* fondle them or you *just* kiss them, it doesn't matter. It's an issue of trust and power. . . . America doesn't understand that it is the raping of the spirit and the soul.⁶

Any breach of trust that involved unwanted sexual advances, especially when the aggressor has more power over you, is a *raping of the spirit and the soul*. Since any unwanted sexual encounter constitutes abuse, I urge you not to minimize what happened.

Dr. Dan Allender provides a good description of what constitutes sexual abuse in his book *The Wounded Heart*. Take a deep breath, and ask yourself if anything below speaks to an experience you had at any age.

- 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. Sexually abusive words produce the same damage as sexually abusive contact.

Types of Sexual Abuse: Contact and Interaction

- **Contact**—genital intercourse; oral or anal sex; unclothed genital contact, including manual touching or penetration; unclothed breast contact; simulated intercourse; sexual kissing; 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 terms

Visual—exposure to or use of 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)⁷

These definitions point out the wide range of behaviors, words, actions, and inferences that, singly and together, constitute sexual abuse. It is not helpful to say a child was “*only* exposed to pornography” but not sexually touched. The mind-body connection hardly sees the difference. There is no good, better, or best in terms of how the trauma plays out. It isn’t what was done to you; it’s how it makes you feel. The effect of the abuse has the deeper power and hooks the individual into beliefs and behaviors that increase his or her sense of pain and insignificance.

Sexual harassment can have elements of touching and nontouching, as Allender points out. Princess Warriors who are hurt “only” through sexual harassment have no reason to feel they are not engaged in the battle at the same level as another daughter of God who was raped. Those who have been stalked and sexually harassed need a legion of people to bring hope and comfort, to rise on their behalf and cover them in sympathy and advocacy.

Some of you who are reading this book are being sexually violated in your marriages. You may have been cheated on, and while it was not a violation against your body personally, it is an enormous betrayal. If something has happened to you that makes you doubt that sexuality is safe, you have been hurt in this way.⁸

SCAR TISSUE

The deeper the injury, the more severe the scar tissue. Sexual violation leaves us injured, and one of the hardest aspects of restoration is not caving in to the injuries. We have to exercise and do the equivalent of physical therapy to make sure scar tissue doesn’t develop.

In later chapters, I will share in greater detail my personal journey with sexual harassment and the touching and nontouching violation I endured. In many ways, being targeted for purposes of stalking and sexual harassment was like grabbing a snake by the tail. I couldn't keep the serpent far enough away to avoid repeated bites and injury. It would take years to understand how the messages from previous violation influenced my ongoing unrest, nightmares, severe anxiety, social withdrawal, nihilistic thinking, and insidious distrust of everyone around me.

My journey of restoration began with a person in authority who finally took me seriously and, unlike others, believed me. I mention this because none of us can do the work of healing and being restored alone. You and I need others who show us they can be trusted, and we need helpers with expertise in a variety of areas to come alongside us in the healing journey. To assist your restoration, I want you to know I stand with you. I don't promise a quick or easy solution, but I do commit to helping straighten out the question marks that surround you. I want to help rebuild your confidence, your sense of personal worth, and a clear view of the power you possess as a daughter of God.

You can awaken from the numbness that follows violation. You can be reintroduced to God and his desire to bring about your regeneration. He wants to restore you to the person he made you to be. (It is understandable, if not expected, that you may vacillate in your confidence in God. That is an area we will look at during the journey.)

Having gone through my own dread of trusting someone to care about me and having witnessed the doubt and faith cycles of my family, friends, and clients, I know it is natural to question and doubt. You are invited to think, feel, and express to God what you are really going

through. No one here will judge you, and God will not disown one of his children.

Later in the book we will work through concepts, homework, prayers, guided imagery for picturing Christ's healing, and other practical measures you can use to honor and grow into the person God made you to be. Keep your questions close while you open your mind and heart in the safety and privacy of your reading. Be who you are, doubts and all.

Let's step into this together, just one foot in front of the other. My daily prayer is that God richly and abundantly blesses you with his restorative comfort and provision.



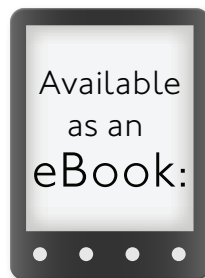
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