



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

Dan B. Allender

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Sexual abuse knows no religious or social boundaries. The Wounded Heart is an intensely personal and specific look at this form of abuse. Dr. Allender explores the secret lament of the soul damaged by sexual abuse and lays hold of the hope buried there by the One whose unstained image we all bear. Includes information about false memory issues.

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

Date : Published February 1st 2014 by NavPress (first published May 1st 1990)

ISBN :

Author : Dan B. Allender

Format : Kindle Edition 273 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Psychology, Counselling, Self Help, Christian, Health, Mental Health, Sociology, Abuse, Religion, Faith, Relationships, Sexuality

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From Reader Review *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* for online ebook

Corinna says

I can't recommend this book enough. I can't warn the reader enough about this book.

I don't mind sharing at all: I am a victim of sexual abuse. The further I get through my recovery, the more important I find transparency to be on this topic. We need to make a safe environment for people to talk about this heinous occurrence. The dark can't hide if we shine a light directly on it. When I was 5 (or 6? not sure?), I was raped. For years, I struggled with the immediate after effects: anger, hurt, depression, night terrors, self-esteem issues, suicidality, throwing up walls, you name it. I finally hit a turning point in my teen years when I was told, "It wasn't your fault." This was dumbfounding. After years of conditioning that led me to believe otherwise, I had to work through a completely different (and freeing) mindset.

The Wounded Heart pulls no punches and, though I consider myself well-adjusted for the most part, this was a difficult book to read. I initially picked it up thinking it would give me insight into caring for my patients (I'm a psychiatric nurse now), but realized...it *was* for me. I literally had to walk away from it a couple times. The author gives examples, and let me tell you, they're revolting. I honestly think anyone who picks up this book will have difficulty with some of the chapters, let alone someone who has a personal experience. But it's a good thing. I can't tell you how many times I've sat back and thought, "What I went through could have been worse. At least _____ didn't happen. At least it wasn't perpetrated by _____." But the author, again, pulls no punches. It IS that bad, and to call it something other than what it truly is delays the healing process. Wow. Talk about conviction.

I think everyone should read this book. If you think for one minute you don't know a victim of sexual abuse, you're wrong. I can promise you do.

A couple things to be aware of going into this book:

- 1) Have a support system available. Depending on how advanced someone is in their healing process, this book could be very overwhelming. Allender is direct and calls black, black. Which is absolutely necessary. But be prepared to take some time away from the book if needed. I think I set the book down for at least a month after chapter 4. That's okay!
- 2) The author uses many female pronouns and typically refers to the victim as female which was disappointing to me. Please know this book is still immensely helpful to male readers, and the author does acknowledge the fact that he uses largely female pronouns. But I think knowing this going in would be good for male readers.
- 3) This is one of the most clinically sound books I've read on sexual abuse. It IS written from a Christian perspective. Do I think it's still helpful if this isn't your faith? Absolutely. Will it help to expect this going in? For sure.

I recommend this book to everyone. I didn't 100% agree with a few things (confronting the abuser was touchy for me, but I see the idea behind it); overall, I was beyond impressed with this book.

I'd probably rate this book an R for the direct, blatant approach the author takes. For someone who hasn't experienced sexual abuse, they may not rate it quite so high. For me, it was an R.

Linda says

No one and I mean NO ONE, has the intricate and clear insight and wisdom into the issue of abuse like Dr. Dan Allender. Coming through my own process of abuse was a dark and difficult journey, but I couldn't have done so without this book!

Dan Allender has a true picture of the human soul; it's longing, sinfulness and depravity, but also it's glory, beauty and heartprint of God's desire and intent.

EVERY person that has suffered at the hands of sexual abuse and those who know someone who has, must read this book!

Richard says

I had to read this book for a class at Ashland Seminary and I have to say it has been eye-opening. I believe it is a must read for anyone involved with ministry. 1 out of 3 women have been sexually abused and 1 out of 5 or 6 men have been abused so it is clear that it is an epidemic. Dr. Allender's book is a great introduction to the complex issues surrounding the horror of sexual abuse. He never gets too technical but he does share some hard to read stories. I believe it is an important book and after reading it I can't help but to raise awareness about this subject. The church has to be a safe place for victims of sexual abuse, and it all starts with knowing the information so please read it.

Ryan Jankowski says

This is a difficult topic, but I think this book would benefit everyone.

Kristin says

I had procrastinated reading this book for many years. The topic is not easy, but I learned so much about myself in reading it! Much of the Mending Hearts journey guides (by Open Hearts ministry) is similar to what is in this book.

page 8 - Forward by Larry Crabb

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.

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.

page 12 - The work of restoration cannot begin until a problem is fully faced.

page 13 - 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.

page 25 - The core problem, then, is not abuse itself, but the sinful energy to trust what is not worthy of her heart.

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Let me state an important observation: I have never worked with an abused man or woman who did not hate or mistrust the hunger for intimacy....

The abused woman has plenty of reasons to despise her own passion. Hating her longings starts a self-annihilating civil war that kills her soul. ...something is deadening the soul....

The enemy is the same for the abused person as it is for those who have not been sexually abused: a determined, reliable inclination to pursue false gods, to find life apart from dynamic, moment-by-moment relationship with the Lord of life. For the abused person, however, the past grievous violation of trust and intimacy even more dramatically inflames her determination to live without the pain of unmet longings - and thus without the raging thirst of a soul that pants for God alone.

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Sexual abuse exacts a terrible price in the victim's life in terms of shame, contempt, and denial. The sins of the perpetrator continue to color the victim's life through an inability to enjoy relationship, intimacy, and hope. The victim's soul feels bound to denial; the heart feels wounded and alone. Longing for more or delighting in what is available equally stir and endanger the soul; therefore, the person feels it is better to live without awareness of passion, hunger, or pain.

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The process of coming alive will be different for every man or woman who has been abused. The common elements of the process, however, will be honesty, repentance, and bold love.

My heart's desire is to relieve the unnecessary shame and contempt near the core of the awful struggle. Even more, I invite the victim to shed the harmful strategies of self-protection that rob her of joy and passion. I fear that she will contemptuously ingest the discussion of sin and self-protection and feel a greater burden on her heavy-laden soul. Instead, I pray she will taste God's compassion.

Dee Dee Smith says

As a survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse, The Wounded Heart struck a such a resounding cords of the

familiar that I had to put the book down. I would not pick it up again for months, haunted because the exercises represented re-living the shame and guilt.

Yet, once I pushed through I finally get that in order to get through such an awful thing in your life you really must endure for a time some serious pain. You have to do the work to "have a life". And no, you will never be normal but I learned this is okay. In a way it makes you better at loving others and forgiving; because you've seen the worst of human nature and choices you can love the best.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who has/is suffering the shame of past child abuse and for those who love someone that endured such an awful experience so young.

Jeremy Manuel says

Before getting into my thoughts about the book I feel I need to make a couple things clear. First, this is a book geared towards those who have experienced sexual abuse, and that is something that I have never experienced. I have also never known anyone who has divulged such abuse to me. So I'm coming at this book from a very outside perspective.

The second is that this book is geared towards Christians. The title doesn't really indicate that in the least, but it views belief in God as the ultimate way to have hope. I am a Christian so this doesn't bother me, but I simply think this needs to be made clear at the beginning. With these out of the way let's proceed.

To be honest, I had very mixed feelings about *The Wounded Heart*. I found some of it useful, but other aspects of it troubling. I'll start with what I found helpful and move to some of the things I disliked.

First, I give him kudos for tackling such a difficult topic. Reading some sexual abuse stories over the past few years, Christians tend to be pegged as people who avoid the reality of sexual abuse and offer few resources to help those who have experienced it. Yet, here was a work that was originally published in 1990. So I give Allender a good deal of respect for offering this resource, even if the execution didn't set well with me for the most part.

The other aspect of the book I found helpful were the sections where he was focused on the psychological and very little of his theology was evident. I found learning about the dynamics of abuse and also the damage that sexual abuse could do enlightening even while difficult to read and comprehend that such abuse and damage to others happens. When he focused on the psychology side of things, I found him to be more professional in tone. That said, these positives give way to the negatives rather quickly.

The major problem I have with the book is the way he injects Christianity into this process. It seems that his major goal is to make the victim of abuse realize that they are sinners who need God. While admittedly we are all sinners and I understood where he was coming from, the way it was presented troubled me. I could see people who have experienced abuse recoiling from the way it was presented as more burden being placed on them. I also questioned some of the things that he was labeling as sin.

One such example was regarding a woman who was waiting for her father at an airport. They had agreed to meet during a two hour layover she had at the airport. She was looking forward to this meeting and was disappointed that he didn't show up. This led her to be ashamed of getting her hopes up in the first place, because it appeared this was not new behavior for her father.

Dr. Allender declares this exchange idolatry. That the woman's worth was being tied up too much to her father's appearance. I found this very troubling. To simply look forward to a meeting with a parent is idolatry? To feel bad and silly for looking forward to it when it falls through is idolatry? This seems dubious to me. Yet so often this is the way he handles the theological side of the book, with questionable connections like these and a heavy hand. As I said it is not that I always disagree with his theology. Often I either disagree with some of his theological conclusions, or question the way that he is presenting it in a work like this.

I think his work would be much more helpful if it focused on the positive aspects of God's love for us, his grace, his mercy even for those who have experienced abuse. He seems to focus on the victim understanding their sin as the only path towards receiving God's healing. I don't find that in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus healed, but you don't see him requiring a confession of sin before he acts. That doesn't mean that our sin never needs addressed, it means that God can heal us before our sins are realized. It may even be from that healing that we are able to then confront our sins.

All this to say, that while I found *The Wounded Heart* helpful in understanding some of the dynamics and damage from abuse, I wonder if it is really that helpful of a book. You may find healing in the pages, but you could also find more pain. I probably wouldn't really recommend it, but unfortunately I have no other books on the subject I can offer in its place.

Kyna says

I would give this book 10 stars if I could. It is an amazing masterpiece on the subject of surviving sexual abuse. I have read other books by Allender, and they are not the masterpiece that *The Wounded Heart* is. The workbook is equally good. I have every client who comes to me for this reason read this book. It is thorough, gracious, relentless, bold, challenging, Biblical, and necessary. If you or someone you know has been abused...THIS is the book they MUST read and work through. Visit me at KynaMoore.com for more counseling info.

Annette Gale says

Great book, but really hard to read as a victim of sexual abuse and rape, brings up many memories, so if a victim like me, read the book slowly and at your own pace. It is really easy to read and understand, and also even if you are not Christian, I would still recommend this book to you because it isn't full on about God and everything else, it has a lot about sexual abuse that even a non-Christian person could find this book of help.

Eric says

This is understandably a difficult topic, but an important one to study for people who have either experienced abuse themselves, or know someone who has. Many things about this book were quite good. First of all, it gets people to start considering the topic instead of hiding away in shame or denial, a huge step, particularly in the target "faith" market. The book tackles many of the defense mechanisms abuse victims typically erect to ward off future pain. The author then tries to direct the abuse victim onto a path that will lead to more openness and trust, and consequently a more fulfilling life. While the goal is admirable, and in fact

necessary, I have some issues with the way this is approached. Particularly, I do not agree with the author's frequent references to the victim's behavior as "sinful". Though the defense mechanisms in place have mostly become unhealthy, I don't believe "sinful" is any more appropriate a description for this natural inclination of the victim than calling an irregular heartbeat "sinful". These habits of relating are simply learned behaviors that need to be redirected to more healthy and constructive alternatives. The pressure to "forgive" through "radical love" is also troubling to me, particularly since there seemed to be little or no focus on bringing the abuser to justice, (i.e. jail time). Though many things the author says are helpful, I think there are toxic, faith-informed opinions in the book that could derail a true liberating transformation in the life of a victim.

Joe says

You might have the same reaction as Anita did when she first saw me pull out this book on a recent vacation. She was wondering if I was trying to subtly tell her something about my past. Thankfully, that isn't the case.

Rather, the pastor I have recently begun seeing for weekly private confession and absolution recommended it to me as something that's helpful for those dealing with issues of shame and the need for restoration.

The opening chapters on shame and contempt are incredible, and really help the reader to see how techniques originally developed as survival skills are, in the larger picture, sinful and causing great harm in life today.

As a means to dealing with these issues, Allender prescribes a diet of honesty, repentance, and bold love.

This is an incredible book and I've already ordered two others by Allender ("The Cry of the Soul" and "Breaking the Idols of Your Heart").

Dru says

A very good book on sexual abuse. While very difficult to read due to its sensitive nature, it is a valuable asset to anybody who has experienced sexual abuse, wants to help somebody recover or understand it better. Allender did a very good job describing how much sexual abuse violates our human rights AND God's creation. It is devastating in so many more ways than just physical, but also psychologically, emotionally and even mentally.

As a counselor, it will be a book I refer to when needed.

Mikayla Gardner says

"The wonder of the gospel that ultimately captures the wounded heart is that in spite of our hatred and rebellion towards God, Christ died for us, and His Spirit pursues us to the ends of the earth. His faithful pursuit is not stymied by our hatred or ambivalence, our lack of faith, or our refusal to trust. In fact, His steps doggedly pursue even when we assume we are most incapable of receiving or even desiring grace. At times His penchant to pursue in the present invokes even greater hatred than did His silence or inactivity in the midst of the past abuse: "Why won't He just leave me alone?"

But He won't leave us alone--for our sake. The only thing that will ultimately produce change and joy in our lives is recognizing our sin and receiving God's grace. For the person who has not yet begun to deeply trust God (or even deem Him worthy of trust) the rest of this book may be quite difficult to read, embrace, and apply. But a new day can come for even the most fearful. God will faithfully work in a willing heart and bring it to repentance and surrender. As humble, dependent children of a merciful and powerful Father, we will find the courage to enter the darkness and peril of the valley, and we will emerge blazing with His redemptive light." (p. 176)

Teresa says

The trouble with most books for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse is they focus on a very specific victim profile (women whose traumatic experiences led straight to poor school performance, substance abuse or eating disorders, depression, running away, revictimization, etc). If that doesn't reflect your experience you may be left to conclude like I did that you don't need/deserve help. This book helped change my mind. Dan Allender goes beyond soothing platitudes (sometimes, "it wasn't your fault" just isn't enough) and helps the reader understand the context in which sexual abuse happens and the kinds of damage it does to individuals. Traumatic experiences break us all in different ways but this book helped me identify what was whole and what was cracked within myself and gave me a place to start on my journey from just surviving to healing. I highly recommend it.

Alissa says

Read it - even if you don't think the topic applies to you. You probably know someone who has experienced childhood sexual abuse, even if you haven't experienced it yourself. And even if you don't know anyone who has experienced this terrible form of abuse, you've probably been betrayed in some way, right? This book still contains the powerful message of the gospel applied to the mess and pain of broken relationships, and as such, still has the power to change lives. I haven't been abused - this book changed my life. It wasn't an easy read, even for me, but it was well worth it.
