

THE WOUNDED HEART

COMPANION WORKBOOK

Hope for adult victims of
childhood sexual abuse

DR. DAN B. ALLENDER
with Karen Lee-Thorp

NAV PRESS 

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

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To those who have the hunger and courage to seek God

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PREFACE



ONE WOMAN DESCRIBED the process of dealing with her abuse as a cure that at times seemed worse than the disease. The process of change is rarely easy; the decisions at important forks in the road are not quickly clear. Why would anyone choose to proceed on such a difficult journey? The truest answer—for the sake of the glory of God—assumes a more godly motivation than most abuse victims are ready to acknowledge.

The most readily offered answer for why someone might purchase this workbook and pursue change is the ache of unhappiness. We all desire a more stable, tranquil inner world and a less abusive, conflictive, and painful world of relationships. We want a better world. Any guide, be it book or person, that seems to offer a path to happiness will sell, but it might not really help—that is, help the pilgrim gain perspective and strength to journey to a far better end than mere happiness. If the motivation to pursue the difficult path is simply personal unhappiness, then the journey will become trapped in its own self-oriented vicious circle.

Let me try to explain. A woman I counseled put words to this dilemma when it became apparent that her growth was beginning to disrupt her disengaged husband: “I am alive in ways I never dreamed possible, but I am finding reality is more of a nightmare than it was when I lived in the deluded, distorted fog of self-hatred. I pursued counseling in order to find healing, and the change I’ve experienced has taken me into new regions of joy. But it has also opened more wounds, exposed more sins than I imagined, and propelled me into new struggles with people I used to get along with fine. What’s wrong with me?”

What she perceived to be the problem was in fact the fruit of repentant brokenness and the flowering change of new resurrected beauty. Her change, in certain ways, deepened her joy, strength, and passion. The change was lovely, but it was also highly threatening to her husband and friends. And that disruption of the status quo violated the main reason she came for counseling. She never felt as if she fit in any group or was enjoyed in any relationship. She wanted to be happy; and she came to counseling to be healed, free, alive. But the fruit of healing, freedom, and aliveness is not always happiness. Biblical change actually opens a new realm of service and worship that, at times, puts one at odds with relationships that were founded on our willingness to be sick, enslaved, and dead. If personal happiness is the sole reason you are considering this workbook, I believe you will be disappointed.

My client struggled with this question: “Why choose change?” Her increased aliveness led to new conflicts. She often handled the new struggles by growing detached and hard. She kept her growing joy imprisoned behind strong boundaries of independence and anger, and her beauty wilted in the ultraviolet light of self-centeredness. She seemed trapped. Change brought conflict; conflict intensified the desire to succumb to the old patterns. She was caught on the horns of both desiring deeper change and understanding what change requires.

The vicious cycle can be broken only when a deeper impetus for change joins the legitimate desire for happiness. Let me say it again: The desire to be happy is the reason all of us began our return to the Father. There is something honorable about recognizing our current status in the pigpen as dishonorable and beneath our dignity (see Luke 15:14-20). Change—true biblical healing—occurs when we are wholly dissatisfied with our condition of heart and soul. But more is required than merely the legitimate desire for happiness: We must comprehend that our deepest happiness will be found only in relationship with our Father. And relationship with Him is found through what appears to be the utter loss of our agenda (happiness) and the pursuit of His agenda (His own glory). At first, it sounds like a soul-destroying return to the experience of the past abuse: Give up your soul for the sake of someone else’s pleasure. Therefore, the central issue I hope to help you ponder is your relationship with God. Where was He when you were abused? Is He good? Is He trustworthy? If so, what can you ask of Him?

A core question must be asked: Is God like our abusers? What He seems to require—trust, brokenness, and love on His terms—feels like the requirements of an abuser. Or is our perception of God so confused by past abuse that it is difficult to know who He is? I believe the evil one cleverly has tried to mirror in the stages of

abuse God's relationship with us, so that intimacy, trust, pleasure, and desire would always seem tainted by the horrendous betrayal of abuse. I believe God is trustworthy and good, but the fact that I believe that will not help you until you have wrestled with God to discover His goodness and mercy.

I've come to realize that the only valid and lasting reason to change is to know God, to embrace His purposes for my life, and to deepen my loving anticipation of His coming. In Him, and only in Him, is happiness to be found. But don't for a minute read these words as an ascetic denial of or a pious discouragement against human pleasure. A pursuit of God's glory is the only route for comprehending the deepest possible human pleasure. True hedonism and true humanism are available only to those who know the One who made all pleasure and who chose to become human Himself.

The reason to pursue change is so that I can look at a sunset, read a novel, hold my daughters or son, drink deep from a friendship, sit quietly in prayer, or ponder heaven and simultaneously weep, laugh, and marvel. I want to know God, to experience what it means to be alive in His presence, and then return to Him the praise of my grateful heart. If that is your desire—even if it is small and other motives apparently weigh larger in your heart—join me on a path I continue to travel. It will be an honor for me to walk with you for a time.

We are pilgrims and outcasts, but we pursue a city where we will find rest and be welcomed as faithful servants. Come walk with me awhile if your heart yearns to be captured by God's glory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



MY CHILDREN WERE INCENSED when dinnertime came and food was not on the table. My wife was gone for the weekend, and my children were rightfully terrified at the prospect of starvation. Of course, I knew dinner was on my shoulders, but I forgot that dinner does not waltz out of the refrigerator all prepared and warm to the serving plate for our benefit. Someone must labor behind the scenes long before the final product is presented to the expectant family.

For this workbook to be served to you piping hot and with life-giving potential, it needed better hands than mine to prepare it. It has passed through the hands of many fine cooks who have labored well for the sake of serving a good meal. Al and Nita Andrews read the material and offered countless important suggestions, worked on the issues related to running groups, and helped me formulate the “For Men Only” questions. Their help was invaluable.

My wife, Rebecca, listened to me mutter and talk out loud as I read through each question. Her patience and perceptive remarks are interwoven throughout the finished product.

Also scattered throughout this workbook in unshaded boxes are the personal reflections of former clients and friends. If you can imagine how it would feel to write down your shame in black and white, then mail it to a publisher to be printed—even anonymously—then perhaps you will join me in applauding their courage and their desire to do anything they can for fellow strugglers.

The NavPress staff—particularly Traci Mullins, Nancy Burke, and Bruce Nygren—were instrumental in encouraging and supporting this project. The real

thanks, however, goes to the gourmet chef who conceived, wrote, and edited the project in its entirety: Karen Lee-Thorp. She engaged her excellent mind and sensitive soul in a task that required enormous personal and professional energy. Her depth of understanding of *The Wounded Heart* helped me better understand what I was trying to accomplish in the book. To whatever degree this workbook is helpful to your growth in grace, she is to be richly thanked.

Finally, I would like to thank the countless men and women I have been privileged to work with in counseling, sexual abuse recovery groups, and interactions at seminars. Your lives continue to marvel, confront, and haunt me with your courage and passion to grapple with a dark, fallen world. Even more, your passion to wrestle with God to comprehend the blessing of forgiveness compels me to weather the sea of heartache with hope that the sun of righteousness will again dawn with splendor and power.

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED



YOU'VE DONE WHAT MANY PEOPLE never find the courage to do: You've picked up a workbook on sexual abuse. Chances are that you know or suspect that this topic is relevant to you. This workbook is designed for use by women and men who know or suspect that they have been sexually abused. If you are considering this workbook for a friend or relative, you might want to read through it before you give it to your loved one. The more knowledgeable you are about what your friend is going through, the more able you will be to support him or her in the process. And perhaps you may find some of the issues touching your own heart.

If you are considering using this workbook for yourself, your decision is even more courageous. You're considering not just reading about abuse but actually grappling with the ways abuse has affected you personally. For many people, the most difficult step toward recovery is deciding to label that suffocating shadow that looms over your past as "sexual abuse" or even "incest." Why is that step so hard? We'll explore that in chapter 2.

If you decide to use this workbook, you'll need to locate a copy of the latest edition of *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender, if you have not obtained one already. The exercises in this workbook will refer to ideas explained in the book, and you'll

probably want to refer to the book frequently as you move through the workbook. Either before or after completing this chapter of the workbook, you should read pages xv–xxiv and 231–49 of *The Wounded Heart*.

WHAT'S YOUR AGENDA?

Before you decide to use this workbook, you should know where we are coming from. If you disagree with the assumptions that underlie this workbook, then naturally you won't want to waste further time on it. If you aren't willing to make the commitments that we think will make the workbook most helpful to you, then we'd advise you to put it away for a while. (But, of course, we know you'll do whatever you want.)

Basic Assumptions

1. Our goal in this workbook is to help you grow more loving toward God and others, not to help you alleviate pain. We assume that your ultimate goal is love, not pain relief.
2. Growth always involves time and struggle. Strong commitment and plenty of knowledge are valuable, but they won't make time and struggle unnecessary.
3. The time frame for growth is a lifetime. We speak of growth, not recovery, because strictly speaking, recovery suggests that it is possible to fully recover from the effects of evil on our lives.¹ But we sadly acknowledge that our disease is incurable and terminal. We will die of it. Yet in Francis Schaeffer's words, we can hope for "substantial healing" in this life and total recovery in heaven.
4. The struggle we face is threefold: (1) We struggle with ourselves: Who am I? Why am I here? Why do I do the things I do? How can I change? (2) We struggle with others: Given that people hurt us, how should we deal with them? (3) We struggle with God, for if God did not exist, we would be attached to nobody, responsible to nobody, limited by nobody's rules. We would be free to do whatever we like, and we would like that freedom very much.
5. Change is inevitable if our hearts are willing to struggle with self, others, and God. We have confident hope of becoming like the priceless woman: "She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come" (Proverbs 31:25).

Basic Commitments

1. I will go at the speed that is suited for me. I realize that will be slower than I would prefer. I am even willing to go through this workbook several times, each time facing the issues by asking tougher and deeper questions of myself.
2. I will not use this workbook to damage or judge myself. If I find myself doing that, I will put this workbook away until I can use it for good.
3. I will move in whatever direction seems consistent with God's plan for me. If that means putting this workbook away for a time or going very slowly, I will do that, rather than gutting it through to the end. I don't get points for finishing the workbook.
4. At some point, I will open the door to community to help me in my struggle. I will allow another person to see my struggle, and I won't make myself do it all alone.

HOW DOES THIS WORKBOOK WORK?

This workbook is designed to be used by individuals and groups who want to grow freer from the effects of sexual abuse. If you are thinking about meeting with others to discuss the exercises, watch for the gray boxes later in this chapter. Gray boxes contain help for groups.

You'll also notice unshaded boxes off to one side of the exercises. An unshaded box contains the thoughts of another victim² on one of the issues discussed in an exercise near it. Sometimes reading how someone else puts his or her experiences into words can help you see a way to put your own thoughts into words.

This workbook is for both men and women who want to address the issues of sexual abuse. The questions are written for both genders, but there are times when a question is better suited for a woman than a man. We encourage men to ponder the statements that are written for women. A better understanding of women is not only worthwhile for dealing with women but will also shed light on issues that are similar for a man.

At other times, we found it helpful to focus some of the questions more directly on the male experience. Those questions are labeled "For Men Only."

Some of the exercises ask you to answer a question or fill out a checklist. You can take as long as you need on those. Don't feel compelled to choose one of the items

“I have been fortunate to find a friend. . . . She and I have talked through hours and hours of experiences. She acts as my mirror; she has been impactful and accepts me as much as anyone I have known. She has the integrity to deal with our relationship and how we relate to one another. . . . I do not believe I would be this far if it were not for this relationship. It has given me the experience of being known and accepted anyway.”

in a list as being true for you. Maybe nothing in a given list applies to you. We haven’t included “Other” or “None of the above” as possible responses in every case, but if “None of the above” is true for you, write in what’s true! Also, checking items in a list is not necessarily “proof” that you have been sexually abused. Persons who have not been abused could check several of the items listed under question 1 in this section, for example.

In addition, many chapters include at least one chance to do journal writing. In journal writing, you set a timer, and during that block of time you write everything that comes into your mind. You don’t stop writing until the timer sounds, and you don’t censor what you write. You forget about grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You

don’t cross out words and change them, but you can write the new thought as well. If you run out of thoughts, you can write “I’m blank. I can’t think of anything to say. This is frustrating.” until you have more to write.

If you are a perfectionist or critical of yourself, this kind of journal writing will be a healthy challenge for you. It will give you a chance to find out what is really going on inside your head underneath your filters of “I should think this” and “It would be more godly to feel that.” Free journal writing is great for surfacing thoughts you weren’t aware of. It’s no news to God what you are really thinking, so you might as well know too.

Setting a time limit should make it easier to throw yourself into the writing. You can survive twenty minutes if you know you can quit then.

If you are visual, artistic, or prefer pictures to words, you can replace journal writing with some kind of picture-making or you can do both. You can draw a picture, paint, or make a collage. You can use crayons on newsprint to write your journal exercises and vary the colors as your feelings change. We’ve provided space in this workbook for journaling, but you can do those exercises in a separate notebook, on canvas—wherever you like.

If you crave control, isn’t it good that you have so much control over how you use this workbook? You can skip over exercises that are side issues for you and focus

on the ones currently surfacing in your life. You can determine the time, place, and circumstances in which you will do exercises.

WHERE AM I TODAY?

Before you set out into unknown territory, it's worthwhile to find on a map the place you are starting from. Change is a process, and nobody goes through it in the same order, at the same speed, or in the same way as anybody else.

We bring all of our beliefs and experiences, good and bad, to the table when we read any book. Those are the lenses through which we read. You now know the assumptions and biases behind the shaping of this workbook. Now, what are your assumptions and biases? This section will help you become aware of them.

1. Put a check mark beside any of these statements that are true of you.

- Someone gave me this workbook, and I'm checking it out.
- Someone recommended this workbook to me, so I'm checking it out.
- I've joined or started a group for abuse victims, and we're going to use this workbook.
- I'm not sure if I've been sexually abused, but I know something is wrong.³
- I'm sure I've been sexually abused, but I don't know who did it.
- I'm sure I've been abused, but I don't have any clear memories.
- I'm just beginning to have memories of having been abused.
- I've had memories for a long time, but I'm just starting to label them "sexual abuse."
- I've had memories for a long time, but I'm just starting to think the abuse has damaged me.
- I don't think sexual abuse has affected me very much. I'm not convinced I need this workbook.
- I'm not sure if what happened to me counts as sexual abuse.

I'm feeling . . .

- skeptical
- sad
- hopeful
- fearful

- ___ hopeless
- ___ confused
- ___ angry
- ___ desperate
- ___ proud of myself for even looking at this workbook
- ___ other (name it):

- ___ I don't know what I'm feeling.
- ___ I've been working on the issues of abuse for quite a while. I want to know how far I've come and what's next.
- ___ I've dealt with a number of abuse issues, but there are some specific areas I want to work on.
- ___ I don't know how to begin to deal with sexual abuse.
- ___ I don't want _____ to know I have this workbook.
- ___ I don't think my past is my problem. I think I just need to believe God more.
- ___ I don't think God works through workbooks.
- ___ I'm hoping this workbook will take away my pain if I work hard enough.
- ___ I'm approaching this workbook cynically and critically. I'm looking for the flaws.
- ___ This workbook had better not make me hurt. If it does, I won't use it.
- ___ I expect to be done with my struggles over abuse when I'm finished with this workbook.

This list should encourage you; you've probably already made some progress. Even getting this far in this workbook is more than a great many people do.

2. Write what you have already done to pursue recovery from sexual abuse. An example is given for you.

I've admitted to myself that I was abused. I've started reading this workbook.

5. As you pursue these goals, what do you expect will be your struggles with each of these? Examples are given for each.

- Yourself

I'll have to work against being impatient and rushing myself.

- Others

I'll have to keep this workbook in my desk at the office so that my wife won't see it before I'm ready to talk with her about it.

- God

It will be hard to trust another powerful authority figure while I'm thinking about how authority figures have betrayed me in the past.

It will be hard for me to let myself be angry with God.

HOW CAN I FEEL SAFE?

This workbook will raise painful memories and issues. You may experience feelings you've never had before or feelings you think are bad or scary. You may feel unfamiliar sensations in your body. Something that happens to you may trigger a memory, and you may react in ways that aren't typical for you. You may feel overwhelmed, sleepless, scatterbrained, or overly sensitive. If so, you're not losing your mind (at least not permanently). If you've been trying to bury memories and feelings in locked trunks in the basement of your soul, there may be chaos while the locks break and the contents of the trunks come pouring out.

We'd like to exhort you not to flee from this process, though we know you will. However, you might flee less if you take some steps to make the process survivable.

Many abuse victims don't know how to say no. We feel we can't set limits for others ("I want to keep that private for now"; "I can't do that for you") or for ourselves ("I should be able to get through at least a chapter of this workbook every week, so I'll be done by . . ."); "Why am I still struggling with this? Why can't I just give it to God and get on with life?"). But the reality is *we are limited*. We can't do everything everybody wants us to do as quickly as we and they think we should do it.

Furthermore, many of us have never felt safe. Or we've felt safe for a while until that safety was betrayed. So we invest a lot of energy into keeping ourselves safe or being anxious when we don't feel safe.

Limits and safety aren't necessarily wrong. Some limits are selfish, and many ways of protecting ourselves are unloving. But sometimes setting a limit is merely humbly facing the fact that you are not superhuman. You are entering a process that will demand time and energy. At this raw and uncertain outset, you can set some legitimate boundaries, some ground rules. As you gain courage in the upward climb, you may change some of those rules, but for now you should not feel guilty about being weak and imperfect.

"I've been a Christian for years, and I used to get along with God fine. Since I've started dealing with abuse, though, I've flipped out. Sometimes I'm afraid to pray with my eyes closed. When I try to pray, I usually roll up into a tight ball, hugging my knees, as though I'm bracing myself against attack. I know what the Bible says about God, but I can't get my body to believe it."

USING THIS GUIDE IN A GROUP

The exercises in this guide are designed first of all to be done on your own. You and God will be the only ones who know what you've written. However, you can gain a lot by discussing what you've written with others: a friend, a counselor, or a group of victims who are all using this guide. To help you do that, gray boxes like this one will be scattered throughout the workbook. They provide questions that will enable you to discuss the issues without having to reveal anything you want to keep private.

Whether you are using this guide with one person or many, you can go about it in two ways. You could agree at the end of each meeting, "When we come to our next session, we'll have already written answers to these certain exercises." In that case, you can each take all the time you want to write your thoughts. Or you can plan to write answers while you are gathered as a group and stop after each exercise or after several to discuss what you've written. In that case, your meetings will be longer or you'll cover less ground per meeting, but you'll have your feelings about each exercise fresh in your mind, and you won't have to be alone while you're working on the exercises. Would you be more comfortable being alone or having someone else there while you write?

The section for group leaders (starting on page 183) includes some ground rules you will probably want to establish for your meetings. Here are a few to consider:

- The group is meeting to discuss sexual abuse issues. Issues not related to abuse should be discussed outside group time.
- Nothing said in the group by or about someone else will be repeated outside the group. The conversations are confidential.
- There will be no sexual interaction between group members.
- Crying is okay. Laughing is okay. Getting angry is okay. Being abusive to another group member is not okay.
- No one has to participate in a discussion or answer a question aloud unless he or she wants to do so.

If you are using this workbook on your own, set your own ground rules. If you are using it with a group, come to an agreement about rules that cover what happens in the group. You don't need to make ground rules for issues that don't bother you.

6. Look at the list of basic commitments we suggested earlier (see page 3). What basic commitments are you willing to make while you are using this guide? Will you commit yourself to any we listed? Do you want to make some other commitments? Examples are given for you.

I will not commit suicide while I am using this guide.

I will keep myself from being victimized again while using this guide by . . .

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

In your next group meeting, plan to devote most of the time to telling your stories. You may want to write something down to organize your thoughts, but try to tell the story without reading it to the group. If you feel you will be distant, like a news reporter in some parts, feel free to omit those parts. The group will be far more honored if you are present while you speak. It harms our souls to give the facts and nothing but the facts. It soils beauty and even resembles abuse to feel compelled by others to report your soul from a detached corner of the room.

If you can't recall details or events as you think of your story, feel free to give a verbal sketch of what your home life was like. What was it like with your parents and other relatives? Include what you wish your family had been like. How does this home life affect you on a day-to-day basis as an adult? The rationale for giving your story to the group is not that you remember everything. The agenda is simply: Will you invite the group to enter your story? Will you be present emotionally? The group will feel invited, not by the level of your articulation or the clarity of your memories, but by the offering of your heart.

Hence, don't feel pressured to tell your whole story to people you hardly know. Tell what you can. Perhaps in a few weeks your group will want to set another span of time aside to tell your stories at a deeper level. Or your stories may unfold as you discuss the workbook questions.

7. Reread the guidelines for journal writing on page 4 of this workbook. Set a timer or alarm clock for twenty minutes. From now until the timer sounds, write in the space that follows. Try to keep writing, even if you go blank for a minute. (Or typing can provide a great way to prevent writer's cramp in your hands. But don't type if you'll have to think about the typing.) If you choose to write in the workbook, use the open space around the poem on pages 12–13 and the blank page 14 as needed.

The topic for this first journal exercise is how you're feeling about this guide. What are you encouraged about? Discouraged? What scares you? What are you hoping for? What are you afraid to hope for? What are you still uncertain about? What do you feel like doing after going through this chapter? What do you intend to do? You don't have to answer all of these questions. They are intended to spark your thinking.

MIXED MESSAGES

by Aimee Rae Ellington

MIXED MESSAGES

MIXED MESSAGES

MIXED MESSAGES

Dinner is served.

“All is well.”

All is not well!

“Stop whimpering! You are fine!”

I am NOT fine.

NO, I’M IN PAIN!!!

“Sit down and eat your supper!”

It hurts to sit down

can’t you tell

didn’t you hear my screams

can’t you feel my PAIN???

“Clean up your plate.

Don’t you appreciate how hard your mother worked,
how good she is to fix such a nice meal for you?”

I can’t eat.

I think I’m going to throw up!!!

“Shame on you,
you naughty little girl,
not showing appreciation
for all your mother does for you!”

APPRECIATION

Mother, where are you?
Where are you when I need you?
Don't you hear my cries?
I need YOU
I want YOU
I want love,
not food.

Food wins out.
Fat sets in.
Perhaps food and fat
will numb the PAIN.
Perhaps food and fat
will calm the FEAR.
All is not well.
But who will hear my cries?
Who will respond to my pain?

