



ASK THE
CHRISTIAN
COUNSELOR



AFTER SEXUAL TRAUMA

FINDING RENEWAL
IN CHRIST

CAMILLE CATES

“Camille Cates compassionately, vulnerably, and lovingly helps the person who has experienced sexual assault know the love, care, and life of Christ. This deeply honest book speaks into the struggles and questions people have, bringing wise, loving and biblical hope and life.”

Anne Dryburgh, Author; counselor; coordinator,
Biblical Counseling Coalition European Network

“This book is a compassionate, biblically grounded guide for healing from sexual trauma. Weaving personal experience with Scripture, Camille Cates affirms victims’ innocence and points to Christ’s redemptive hope. It’s a vital resource for counselors and survivors, upholding biblical counseling’s commitment to truth, care, and restoration.”

Julie Ganschow, Founder, Reigning Grace Counseling
Center, Kansas City, MO; certified biblical counselor

“Camille bravely addresses the deep pain of sexual abuse, offering hope and healing through Christ. With compassion and clarity, she connects the realities of sexual trauma to the redemptive power of the gospel. This book doesn’t shy away from hard truths but leads readers toward restoration and redemption in Jesus.”

Liz Beck, Founder, Hope for Addiction; certified
biblical counselor

“Camille offers tender truths grounded in Scripture to the deep wounds of sexual trauma with honesty, grace, truth, and hope. She compassionately affirms victims’ dignity and helps them understand they are not forgotten, but cherished by El-roi, the God who sees, hears, and restores. Camille wants those suffering from sexual trauma to see themselves not as victims or survivors but overcomers!”

Georgia Purdom, VP of Educational Content, Answers
in Genesis

“Whenever I read a book by Camille Cates, I am overwhelmed with the love of God and his plan for healing amid betrayal, helplessness, and disorienting suffering. In this

book, you will be confronted with Camille's humble transparency about sexual trauma. But as God rebuilt Camille's ruins through the precious blood of Christ, so she teaches us the way of the Savior with his daughters. Camille leads readers to lay hold of the gospel's promises through the inerrant Word so that healing emerges and overcomers live in the freedom of Christ. This book is pure gospel gold and must be read by all Christians seeking to help restore lives after sexual trauma."

Rosaria M. Butterfield, Author of *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* and *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*

"*After Sexual Trauma* is a gift to survivors and those who walk beside them. With personal vulnerability, researched wisdom, and biblical fidelity, Camille Cates addresses the hard questions sexual trauma raises. She consistently points to the person and work of Christ, reminding us of the gospel's power to redeem and transform us in every affliction."

Eric M. Schumacher, Author of *The Good Gift of Weakness*

"Camille engages readers with the kind of candor and hope that only comes through lived experience. She draws both from her own painful past and years of counseling conversations with sexual trauma survivors. If you're looking for a book to help you process what's happened to you in a redemptive way, know that this resource is written by a compassionate and trustworthy guide."

Christine M. Chappell, Author of *Midnight Mercies; Hope + Help* Podcast host, IBCD; certified biblical counselor

"*After Sexual Trauma* overflows with hope, healing, compassion, and grace. If you feel broken, defiled, or beyond repair, this book gently reminds you that you are not. Camille writes with the tenderness of a trusted counselor and the steady voice of an advocate. Her words deeply helped me, and I'm confident they will help you too."

Paul Tautges, Pastor; counselor; author of *A Small Book for the Hurting Heart*

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Camille Cates



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27401
newgrowthpress.com
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Cover Design: Studio Gearbox, studiogearbox.com
Interior Typesetting/eBook: Lisa Parnell, lparnellbookservices.com

ISBN: 978-1-64507-561-5 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-64507-562-2 (ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on file

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 1 2 3 4 5

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the women and men who have shared their stories of sexual trauma with me. For many, I was the first person you told, and I'm deeply grateful for your trust. Thank you for allowing me to walk alongside you as you found renewal in Christ and embraced the comfort and hope only he can provide. This book was written to honor the Lord and his amazing work in you and me with the belief that he will do the same in countless others. My prayer is that the seeds of our sorrows will bloom into shouts of joy in heaven.

*Those who plant in tears
will harvest with shouts of joy.*

*They weep as they go to plant their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.*

Psalm 126:5–6 (NLT)

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INTRODUCTION

Helpless. Confused. In denial. That's how I felt after experiencing sexual assault. It happened against my will, beyond my control. I was powerless to overcome it alone. I wanted to pretend it didn't really happen—to bury it deep and lock it away. But denying it didn't erase it.

As time went on, the trauma that I had suppressed disoriented me and distorted my thinking. I wrestled with who I was, and I didn't allow myself to wrestle out who God was amid my suffering. For several years, I ran from God, wandering in a spiritual wasteland—until my self-destructive path led me right back to him.

In the Bible, the story of Hagar is one of immense suffering. She was an Egyptian servant, brought into a foreign land where her sole purpose was to be at her mistress Sarai's beck and call. Her life was not her own. So, when Sarai—desperate after years of barrenness—devised a plan for her husband Abram to take Hagar as a second wife and conceive a child through her, Hagar

had no say. She was used for someone else's gain, her body treated as a means to an end (Genesis 16:1–4).

Imagine Hagar's world for a moment. In that time and culture, she had no choice, no voice—only the expectation to obey. Her life was one of “Do as you're told.” Eventually, she did become pregnant from this forced union, which, of course, caused friction between her and Sarai. That's when the abuse took another turn. First, she was used for someone else's gain, and then she was treated harshly, her value completely diminished. Rather than endure relentless abuse, Hagar chose to run away—into the wilderness.

Alone in the vast wilderness, Hagar had nowhere to go. She was far from her Egyptian homeland with no hope of returning. But it was in this desolate place that something extraordinary happened—God revealed himself to her. The angel of the Lord appeared to her and asked, “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” (Genesis 16:8). God wasn't asking about her geographical location. This was an invitation—an opportunity for Hagar to open her heart to him, to bring her confusion, pain, and fears to the One who knew all she had suffered. And she responded with raw honesty: “I'm running away from my mistress Sarai” (Genesis 16:8–10).

God didn't scold her or condemn her for running. Instead, he met her in her deepest anguish, with compassion, tenderness, and the promise of a son. God said, “You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress” (Genesis 16:11). But God didn't just hear Hagar's cries; he saw her. Moreover, God revealed that he had a future

planned for her—a future she could never have imagined possible. She would have more descendants than she could count (Genesis 16:10). Hagar would have a family of her own.

In that most vulnerable moment with God, Hagar did something remarkable—she gave God a name. She called him *El-roi*—the God who sees me (Genesis 16:13). For the first time, someone acknowledged her worth. Her Creator saw her in her pain, and in doing so, he gave her dignity, value, and the courage to face the future.

Hagar's encounter with God is a powerful reminder that no matter how deep your pain or how unseen you may feel, God does see you. And he sees what no one else does—the tears you shed in secret, the scars that linger in your heart and mind, the hidden battles you fight every day. He sees you, even in the spiritual wilderness you may be wandering through right now. But God doesn't just see your pain; he sees your future and wants to provide you with hope in the promise of a Son—his Son, Jesus.

When you look to Jesus, you meet with the One who knows you in your rawest, most fragile state. He sees every wound, every tear, every part of your story. He doesn't run from your pain. He enters it. He walks with you, offering comfort, understanding, and renewal in himself.

If you're unsure of who this God is—the God who sees you—I encourage you to keep reading. This journey toward healing and renewal after sexual trauma begins with seeking *El-roi*, the God who not only sees your past and present suffering but also holds your

future. You are not unseen. You are not alone. Like Hagar, God sees you and is ready to meet you where you are—to comfort you, restore you, and lead you into the future he has planned for you.

Chapter 1

DID THAT REALLY JUST HAPPEN?

I was a freshman in high school when it happened.

He looked so cool as he walked down the crowded hallway at school. He was a couple of years older than me and wore confidence along with his sleek black leather jacket—I was enamored. As he passed by, our eyes met, and I felt my heart skip a beat. He flashed a grin, and I was completely undone. With his striking green eyes and olive complexion, I couldn't shake the feeling that I had to find a way for him to notice me. Thankfully, my friend Annie knew him. She had a crush on his best friend, and they talked all the time. Before long, we came up with a plan—we'd casually meet up with the guys at the movies.

Friday night finally came, and I dressed to impress, secretly hoping for a chance to hold hands and maybe even get my first kiss. My mom dropped off Annie and me at the theater, and as soon as she drove away, we walked right back out. We were meeting the guys in the parking lot. Sure enough, there they were, leaning

against their motorcycles, the chrome gleaming under the streetlights. The excitement and thrill of the moment rushed over me. Everything felt so new, so exhilarating.

We chatted for a while, exchanging flirtatious banter. At one point, he put his arm around me, and before I knew it, he playfully scooped me up and threw me over his shoulder like it was nothing. He was tall and strong. I kicked and laughed, playfully yelling, “Put me down!” But he didn’t set me down until he’d carried me off, around to the back of the building.

At first, I was relieved to be somewhere private. I didn’t want my first kiss to happen in front of everyone—especially not in full view of peers from the local high schools who crowded the theater on Friday nights. That would’ve made me the center of Monday’s gossip. Once he put me down and I was back on my feet, he leaned me against the building and moved in close to kiss me. It all felt exciting and incredible—until suddenly, it didn’t.

What began as thrilling quickly turned into something that felt wrong and scary. His hands started going places I didn’t want them to. “Hey, let’s stop and go back. I need to get back to Annie,” I pleaded. But before I knew it, he had put his hand down my jeans. I didn’t know what to do at that moment. He put his whole body weight against me, making me even more uncomfortable as he gratified himself at my expense. I just froze until it was over.

Even though I was upset over what had happened, I was still captivated by his swagger and charm. I felt a confusing mix of emotions—unease over his sexual

aggression, but also excitement at the thought of being his girlfriend. We held hands as we walked back to our friends. Then, with his arms firmly around my waist, he kissed my neck and cheek. The movie was ending soon, so Annie and I headed back inside. The night was over.

I don't remember much after that. I think I was in shock, asking myself, *Did that really just happen?* It all unfolded so quickly. At the time, I wasn't sure how to process it. Even though we hadn't had sex, I knew something had changed. I didn't feel quite so innocent anymore.

By Monday, I was eager to see him at school. In my mind, we were a couple now. But I had no idea I'd made an unexpected enemy. Another girl had a crush on him, and she despised me because he never gave her the time of day. As if that wasn't awkward enough, we shared the same desk. She sat there for biology in the morning, and I had the same seat during homeroom in the afternoon.

Later that week, to my complete horror and utter embarrassment, I sat down at my desk and saw something written across the corner of the laminated top. It wasn't a note addressed to me; it was about me. She had detailed everything my crush had done to me behind the movie theater, with the word "SLUT" written in all caps next to my name. Anyone who had previously sat at my desk would have read the cruel gossip this mean girl had spitefully scribbled before I could erase it with my pencil. I was mortified and furious. My innocence had been stolen, and yet I was being labeled with this derogatory term for women.

I was devastated. But it would be years before I realized that I had experienced sexual assault and how deeply it had affected my life. Looking back, the assault had a profound impact on my choice to be sexually promiscuous as a teen. It skewed my understanding of love, and I began seeking affection in exchange for sexual acts from subsequential romantic partners. This only piled on more guilt and shame.

That incident, along with the damage to my reputation at school, led me down a dark road. I devalued myself. I no longer believed I had worth or value before God or anyone else. At the time, I was a professing Christian, believing with all my heart that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. But after the assault, I felt buried under guilt and shame because of what I had endured.

In time, God brought a wonderful man into my life, using him to help me grow as a follower of Christ. He had just graduated from seminary and accepted a position as a youth pastor at a small church in West Texas, not far from our hometown. We married, and I moved there, eager to serve in ministry with him.

In that little West Texas town, there weren't many young couples our age. Most had gone away to college and moved on. For some reason, as a young couple without children, we attracted a great deal of attention from the congregants. Reflecting on those early years in ministry, I remember one unsettling incident that made me again question, *Did that really just happen?*

On Sundays, we often enjoyed church potlucks, which provided a wonderful opportunity for getting to know people and eating some fabulous homemade dishes. On one occasion, we sat at a table with a deacon

and his family. As we shared stories, laughed together, and listened to them recount the church's history, we developed a friendly rapport.

As it was time to leave, we stood between the tightly arranged rows of tables and began to file out of the fellowship hall. Suddenly, I felt a squeeze on my behind and froze. A whirlwind of thoughts raced through my mind: *That couldn't be what I think it is. Right? Surely not?* I turned to see the man smiling nonchalantly, as if nothing had happened.

Later, I confided in my husband, who was at a loss for how to respond. We both tried to brush off the incident, feeling powerless to act due to our fear of potential repercussions from this deacon who had close ties to our pastor. As outsiders in this community, we worried that my husband might lose his first church job. We decided to try to avoid this man as much as possible to prevent a repeat of that uncomfortable situation—or worse. Ultimately, we left the church to serve elsewhere.

QUESTIONING YOUR EXPERIENCE

It's natural to question whether you were sexually abused or assaulted, as confusion and doubt can often cloud your understanding of what transpired. Deuteronomy 22:25–27 offers a poignant perspective on this issue, providing both clarity and comfort. It establishes a theological framework that emphasizes the innocence of the one who has been wronged and holds the perpetrator personally accountable for their actions.

But if the man encounters an engaged woman
in the open country, and he seizes and rapes

her, only the man who raped her must die. Do nothing to the young woman, because she is not guilty of an offense deserving death. This case is just like one in which a man attacks his neighbor and murders him. When he found her in the field, the engaged woman cried out, but there was no one to rescue her.

This passage from the Old Testament addresses the scenario of a woman being assaulted in a field, far from any help. What are the key points? First, there is the recognition of the victim's innocence; second, an understanding of her helplessness; and third, a clear condemnation of the assailant.

RECOGNIZING INNOCENCE

Scripture emphatically declares in Deuteronomy 22:25, "But if the man encounters an engaged woman in the open country, and he seizes and rapes her, only the man who raped her must die." This powerful assertion affirms the victim's innocence. It affirms your innocence. It affirms mine. Often, those who have been sexually abused or assaulted grapple with feelings of guilt and self-blame, questioning their actions and wondering if they somehow invited or deserved the assault. However, this passage offers reassurance: They are blameless, and the responsibility for the sin and the guilt lay entirely with the perpetrator.

The comparison of assault to murder in this passage is significant. It states, "This case is just like one in which a man attacks his neighbor and murders him." God's deliberate analogy between rape and murder

underscores the violence and violation inherent in sexual abuse and assault, emphasizing the victim's powerlessness in such situations. Just as a person who is attacked and murdered is helpless to prevent their death, a victim of sexual assault is similarly powerless to stop it. The phrase "in the field" symbolizes isolation and vulnerability, reinforcing the inability to escape or find assistance, and it does not indicate compliance or consent.

Deuteronomy 22:25 is clear-cut in its condemnation of the assailant: "Only the man who raped her must die." The severity of this Old Testament penalty reflects the gravity of the crime and places the culpability solely on the perpetrator. It leaves no room for doubt about who is at fault. Knowing God's law regarding cases of rape can help you understand that the perpetrator of your abuse is entirely responsible for the crime committed against you.

OVERCOMING SELF-BLAME

When questioning whether you were sexually abused or assaulted, it is vital to combat feelings of self-blame. Anchor yourself to this biblical affirmation of your innocence as a foundational truth. Reflect on God's perspective of your suffering, and remember that being in a vulnerable situation did not mean you were complicit. Your actions—or lack thereof—during the incident did not justify what happened in any way.

Sexual assault or abuse often involves coercion, manipulation, or physical force, leading to a sense of helplessness like that experienced by the woman described in the biblical field. It can help to reflect on

your own situation and recognize the power dynamics at play. Did a youth pastor persuade you to go to a room out of sight from the group under the pretense of “talking,” only to grope you and then tell you not to say anything? Perhaps a boss asked you to stay late to work on a project. Even though you never consented to what happened in his office behind closed doors, you wrestle with feelings of guilt. Or maybe, as a child, an older cousin organized a “game” of playing doctor. He was physically stronger and threatened to make you look bad to the rest of the family if you didn’t comply with his demands.

Recognizing that you were in a vulnerable position—whether isolated or overpowered—can help clarify the reality of your experience. This understanding begins to dismantle any deeply held belief that you could have done something differently to prevent what happened. Acknowledging your vulnerability or helplessness is essential for renewal and healing.

ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR INNOCENCE AND SEEKING HEALING

Embracing the truth of your innocence is a critical step on the journey to healing. Like the woman in the field, you found yourself in a situation beyond your control. You suffered through it until you could escape, possibly having to regain coherence or consciousness first. Accepting that you didn’t cause your assault will help to lift the burden of false guilt and allow you to embrace God’s comfort and healing.

Understanding your experience through the lens of Deuteronomy 22:25–27 can be transformational.

However, it's also helpful to seek support from others who have walked through abuse or assault and found renewal in Christ. As you process your trauma, exercise wisdom in choosing whom to trust with your story.

Be discerning about sharing with individuals who may have ties to both you and the abuser, as they could feel pressured to “stay neutral.” Ultimately, God desires to be your refuge—a safe place where you can express your thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. Those you confide in should reflect these Christ-like qualities, providing a space of compassion and understanding.

If you haven't spoken much (or at all) about the abuse, seek out a trusted Christian friend or mentor who can offer comfort and guidance. Spending time reflecting on Scripture, praying, or even reading this book with someone who shares a similar journey can provide deep healing. This shared experience can also help reaffirm your innocence and provide you with much encouragement. Remember, you are not alone. With God and the help of others you trust, there is always a path forward toward healing and restoration.

FOR REFLECTION

1. What has caused you to question whether your experience was sexual abuse or assault?
2. How does understanding your innocence through the lens of Deuteronomy 22:25–27 bring you hope or comfort, and how will you embrace this truth?

Read the following passages about God being a place of safety, refuge, and trust. Write out one or two truths you learn from them and how you will apply those truths to your life.

- Psalm 71:1–4
- Psalm 91:1–2

FURTHER READING*

- Pamela Gannon and Beverly Moore, *In the Aftermath: Past the Pain of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Focus Publishing), 2017.
- David Powlison, *Sexual Assault: Healing Steps for Victims* (New Growth Press), 2010.

* While the author believes the resources suggested here (and at the end of each chapter) uphold biblical truth and adhere to the integrity of God's Word, their inclusion is not meant to endorse any particular author or ministry.