

Mandy's Story

By the time I was twenty-one it seemed like sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual addiction would always somehow be a part of my life. But by that age I had found comfort knowing that I was the one in control of sex; it wouldn't be used against me, but rather I would use it to manipulate and toy with men the way I had been "toyed" with for years. But that sense of control was exposed as a lie the week before my twenty-second birthday. I was out dancing at a night club and after the bar closed I was invited into the VIP room. It was in that room where four or five men raped me and left me in tears on the floor. I was never in control.

For the next three years I remained emotionally disconnected from the event, numbing the pain with various types of escape like drugs, alcohol, and extreme behaviors. I became cold toward men. I left my childhood faith in Jesus, allowing my heart to become hardened and bitter against life and against God. After all, it seemed as though I had been abandoned by God anyway, so I relied on myself for comfort, protection, and direction.

But God had not abandoned me. In fact, he pursued me in a number of different ways. Eventually I was brought to my knees, crying out for him to explain himself! If it was true that he loved me, how could he let such harm befall me? I don't remember waiting for him to actually answer me. It was in Christian counseling that I found some solace in this idea: God did not want me to be raped, but he will use it to bring about something good. At the time, I accepted that as truth, and as I grieved over the rape and all the pain I endured, God was softening my heart, changing my desires, and redeeming many areas of my life. I figured that I had "gotten over it" and was healed.

But if I was to be truly honest, something seemed forced. When I would tell my story, there was still a disconnect between my head and my heart in acknowledging God in the midst of that horrific crime.

Even though it seemed my life was full of joy, there was still a lingering resentment toward the men who raped me. I did not feel angry toward them, but I refused to see them in my mind. They were the bad guys, my enemies. I wanted nothing to do with them. As time passed I believed that was where God wanted me, and I thought he even agreed with me. It was “us” against “them.”

Then, seven years after the rape had passed, God said through some life circumstances that there was more to be done. I was reminded of the rape and God plunged me back into the pain, asking me to go deeper than I had gone before. I was terrified yet willing. The first time I asked him what he wanted to show me, he led me to Psalm 54 and told me that he is my vindication, that he knows my suffering, and that someday I will look upon my enemies in triumph. I felt comforted and validated. But he didn't leave it at that. He was also reminding me of his goodness, reminding me that he upholds my life, and that even in the midst of being raped he loved me and had good in mind for me. That's when I realized my greatest fear—could I really enter into the deepest part of this pain and still believe that God is good? Is it really possible to taste the searing agony of intense destruction and at the same time taste and see that the Lord is good? Would I trust him to find out? With apprehension and fear I slowly said, “Yes.”

As I walked through each moment of that night, acknowledging the many ways I was harmed by those men, bringing into present reality what I had kept in a distant past, I cried out and God comforted me, showing me that even then I was in his hands. He held me in that deepest darkest moment, just as he holds me now. As he taught me to stop minimizing the pain associated with the rape, I began to see the fullness of the evil done against me. Progressively, as the magnitude of the evil grew in my awareness, it was amazing for me to realize that God is even bigger. His love encompassed that whole night. Following him through that dark valley and resting in his real promises rather than my own ideas became the true healing that I needed. I came to know the true God, sovereign over all, who is ultimately good. And I was his daughter, cherished and loved by him even in the midst of being raped.

When I reached that point, my heart was soft toward God, and I asked him what else he had for me. I remember driving to work saying, “Is there more, here?” And that's when it hit me. I saw their faces. I saw

the men who raped me and felt a surprising compassion towards them. I began to cry out for them, "God save them." Just as I was an enemy of God in need of reconciliation, so they need to be reconciled by the blood of Christ. I wept for them for quite a while and still often find myself tearing up on their behalf, wishing that I could see them face-to-face and tell them of a great God who is bigger than their harmful acts of violence, who loves them to the point of crushing his own Son to deliver them from death. This forgiveness was a miracle. I have found freedom in loving them with the love of Christ. My anger, bitterness, resentment, escape, numbness, denial, self-pity, or any other response is not capable of removing their sin. Nothing but the blood of Christ will pay their debt.

And so I can look back on that night, recognizing the fullness of the pain God counted me worthy to suffer, and also look on it with the joy of knowing my God in a more intimate and magnificent way. It has become a mark of God's help in my life, a place where he ordained healing for me . . . and possibly even for those men. I would be overjoyed to someday raise our hands together in worship of the God who brings life out of darkness.

"Careful research, lots of Scripture, and a demonstration that the work of Christ says 'you are washed clean' to those who feel like outcasts: *Rid of My Disgrace* will speak to victims of sexual abuse."

Ed Welch, *Counselor and Faculty, The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation*

"Gives sexual assault victims, and those who love and serve them, the freedom to grieve the violence against them and the tools to experience healing and hope in Jesus."

Grace Driscoll, *pastor's wife, mother of five, conference speaker, author*

"I praise God for the gospel that can heal and restore and for the Holcombs who had the courage and wisdom to write this book for us."

Matt Chandler, *Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, TX*

"Reminds victims of sexual assault that they are not alone and it is not the end of the story. From King David's daughter Tamar to the courageous survivors telling their stories today, the Holcombs take sexual assault out of the shadows of shame and isolation and into the light of the gospel."

Monica Taffinder, *cofounder and counselor, Grace Clinic Christian Counseling*

"In my interaction with teens and young adults, I have heard many stories of sexual abuse. I am so thrilled that there is a resource like this book that offers relevant, practical, and biblical hope."

Rebecca St. James, *singer, author, actress*

JUSTIN S. HOLCOMB (PhD, Emory University) is a pastor at Mars Hill Church (Seattle) and director of the Resurgence. He is also adjunct professor of theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.

LINDSEY A. HOLCOMB is a deacon at Mars Hill Church (Seattle), where she counsels victims of sexual assault and trains leaders to care for them.

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

