



An open letter to people who have been raped or trafficked:

Dear Survivor:

Something terrible has happened to you, something that should never happen to anyone. Some people go through a traumatic experience like yours knowing it is not their fault. Unfortunately, many other people feel shame and self-hatred, and some even hold the false belief that their suffering is a punishment from God. That's why we would like to answer some of the following important questions:

Why do people blame themselves?

It is a way some try to feel in control of a terrible situation. For example, they may think if they are very good, or very sorry, nothing bad will happen again. But it is unfair to blame yourself. It also saps the energy you need to figure out how to cope with your suffering.

But what if I did something stupid or bad that led to rape or trafficking?

No matter what you did, it does not excuse someone raping you or holding you in bondage. The person who hurt you committed a crime and would go to jail in many countries for this. You are the victim of a criminal act. If you are going to be angry, be angry at the situation or the criminal, not yourself. The ONLY people to blame are those who made you suffer.

What if my friends and family blame me?

That is one of the saddest things: when friends or family blame the victim instead of the person who rapes or holds people in bondage. If they read this, they may begin to understand it is NOT your fault. But even if friends and family never stop blaming you, you must stop blaming yourself, so you can begin to heal.

Did this happen because God was punishing me?

No! Most of us grow up thinking that God is all-wise and all-powerful, like a good father who will reward us if we are good and punish us if we are bad. So if something bad happens, many of us assume we have been punished by God. But you probably know bad people who are not punished for their sins and good people who have gotten terrible illnesses or suffered tragedies. So you know God does not always hand out justice in this life. Besides, nothing anybody does could justify being raped or trafficked, because no one deserves that.

Why does God allow people to be raped or trafficked?

God created a world where people have free choice, and some people choose to be evil – to rape or traffic others.

I was sold into bondage to pay debts caused by an “act of God.” Didn’t God cause that?

God created a world governed by the laws of nature, which means that there are “natural disasters” like floods or droughts that cause poverty and debt. But God doesn’t create disasters or poverty to punish people.

But doesn’t the Bible talk about God punishing people with floods or droughts?

Yes, but the Bible was written before scientists learned about the laws of nature. When there are floods, for example, good people suffer as well as bad ones. Why would God punish so many innocent people just to teach a few bad ones a lesson?

And doesn’t the Bible talk about protecting those who “walk through the valley of the shadow of death?”

If you prayed for a protection and didn’t get it, it does not mean that God ignored or punished you. In dangerous situations like war, for example, many good civilians and soldiers get hurt along with the evil ones. God walks with us through frightening places to give us strength.

What can I do to feel better?

- Start by forgiving yourself. You have been hurt enough: don’t keep hurting yourself.

- Try not to let your anger and pain make you bitter or hopeless. Use healthy ways to release anger like hitting a pillow or screaming out your frustration when you are alone. Or use the anger as psychological energy to overcome your situation.
- Pray to be relieved of the pain, shame and guilt. Pray for positive strength, determination and willpower to cope with what has happened and to make a better future. Allow God to help you through this.
- Many victims are helped by finding other people who have gone through the same thing. They form a support group to help each other find the strength and courage to go on.
- Rebuild your life and help others to do the same.
- Tell yourself the truth: that you are loved by God no matter what has happened.

Many people around the world are trying to stop the crimes of rape and trafficking, and praying for you and others who have suffered. They, like us, see you as a courageous survivor and totally without blame. We write this with loving prayers for your recovery,

Your sisters at Anglican Women's Empowerment

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