

Addressing Abuse in the Church 3



MEETING DATES

1. February 11
2. February 18
- 3. February 25**
4. March 3
5. March 10
6. March 17

RESOURCES

* Addressing Abuse, PCA Report 2022 <https://www.pcaac.org/aic-report-abuse/>

Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (1820s)

Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (2008)

Lindsey Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (2014)

Chris Moles, ed., *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse* (2015)

Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God* (2015); *Redeeming Power* (2020)

Scot McKnight, *A Church Called Tov* (2020)

Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit* (2022)

CASE STUDY

You meet with a close friend over coffee. She is a single female friend and both of you go to the same church. During your conversation, she opens up about a challenging situation involving the pastor, seeking your advice. A few months back, the pastor made a statement in a sermon, asserting that mental illness should only be treated through prayer, labeling the use of psychotropic medication as sinful. This deeply upset your friend, as she had found great comfort and encouragement in the pastor's sermons but had been on medication for anxiety and depression for many years. After prayerful consideration, and worried about the damage the pastor's message may do for others, she decided to confront the pastor. After all, she is a respected leader in the church, and she figured that she had earned the right to share her concerns.

Unfortunately, the conversation did not go as expected. Initially light and complimentary, it shifted when she shared her worries and criticisms. He never yelled but she felt dismissed and "spoken down to." He gave her all of the arguments for why he was right and she was wrong. Feeling confused, she struggled to counter his arguments. In the midst of her confusion, the pastor told her that she should stop taking medication. When she said that it was helping her, and that her psychiatrist believed it was best for her, he responded, "Who are you going to listen to: your drug-addled mind, a pagan doctor, or your pastor?"

She reluctantly believed him. He had always been so wise in his sermons, so why would he steer her wrong here? Leaving the meeting confused, she agreed to halt her medication. Now, after a couple of weeks, her anxiety and depression are resurfacing. Furthermore, she has heard others experiencing very similar experiences with the pastor. Faced with uncertainty, she seeks your guidance.

How would you advise her?

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: “Abuse is the treatment of any person that is callous, often cruel, for selfish reasons, and that has deeply detrimental effects on the person physically and/or sexually, emotionally, and spiritually. The image of God in the victim of such treatment is completely denied... (Abuse is) persistent maltreatment that causes lasting damage.”

1. **Damage** – real, sometime measurable, hurt is caused to victim
2. **Persistent** – it is not one-and-done, but consistent
3. **Power** – the abuser misuses power to his advantage
4. **Motivation** – the abuser does not see value in the victim as made in the image of God

Spiritual Abuse: “Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader – such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization – wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 24).

STUDY OF SPIRITUAL ABUSE

“Of all bad men religious bad men are the worst” (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (1958) 32).

“Christians damage Christ’s cause more than his enemies and foes” (Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, (4th century) 3.15).

“No one does more harm in the Church than he who has the title of rank of holiness and acts perversely” (Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, (6th century) 1.2).

“Abuse survivors routinely testify that the most devastating part of their experience is the way the abusive pastor used Scripture against them” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 27).

“(A) pastor’s words can be either disproportionately encouraging or disproportionately damaging. Pastors effectively have a ‘pulpit’ inside people’s heads. This is precisely why character matters so much when it comes to whether a person is qualified for the ministry” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 28).

BIBLE STUDY

Ezekiel 34:1-10

¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

⁷ “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Sinful methods of controlling and domineering others (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 28-33).

1. Hypercritical
2. Cruel
3. Threatening
4. Defensive
5. Manipulative

“Spiritual Abusers seem to be building God’s Kingdom, but are really building their own” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 33).

Reminder: Not Everything is Abuse

Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014).

“(O)ur society popularizes the language of therapy while eviscerating the substance of it” (Derek Thompson, “How Anxiety Became Content,” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 13, 2023)).

John 10:11

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

HOMEWORK

- How is your regular (daily?) prayer for those suffering abuse in the church going?
 - Thomas Watson wrote, “A humble Christian studies his own infirmities, and another’s excellencies.” Do you see an “infirmity” (sin) in your life? Repent and run from it. Do you see an “excellency” (praiseworthy trait or act) in someone else? Tell them!
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