

Addressing Abuse in the Church 5



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 & Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov* (2020)

Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit* (2022)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What is something that has been **challenging** or **enlightening** to you in these first few classes on Abuse in the Church?

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).

BIBLE STUDY

Leviticus 4

¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD’s commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, ³ if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering...
... ¹³ “If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, ¹⁴ when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting...
... ²² “When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²³ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, ²⁴ and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat...
... ²⁷ “If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²⁸ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. ²⁹ And he shall lay his hand on the head...

Proverbs 29:12

¹² If a ruler listens to falsehood,
all his officials will be wicked.

What principles could be gleaned from these passages?

“Being invested with office, his sins are peculiarly aggravated, and peculiarly dangerous – their effect upon others may be incalculable” (Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus: Geneva Series of Commentaries* (1846), 66).

“The sins of those in authority are more heinous, causing more damage and deserving of greater punishment because of the position of authority” (*PCA Report*, 27).

3. What to do if you suspect it?

If you think you are potentially a victim of spiritual abuse, talk to someone: a friend, another pastor, a small group leader, an elder, someone from another church, anyone.

If someone reports to you something that they think might be spiritual abuse, the following should be kept in mind (*PCA Report*, 218-19):

1. Confidentiality
2. Put the victim at ease
3. Listen attentively
4. Resist critiquing
5. Believe the story
6. Be patient
7. Write down as many direct quotes as possible
8. Be supportive, compassionate, and affirm the victim's bravery in reporting
9. Give the victim as much information as you can about next steps
10. Follow up
11. Know your limits

Psalm 55:21

His speech was smooth as butter,
yet war was in his heart;

"Unfortunately, it is more common for a church to create further damage to the victim's spiritual and emotional health through the mishandling of reporting than it is to be a safe place to find justice and healing. Church split or splinters are more likely to occur when church leaders fail to hold abusers accountable" (*PCA Report*, 229).

Avoid mutualizing

"Abuse victims are not without sin. However, there is a significant inequality between their sin issues and the evil of abuse. Wrath is an appropriate response to evil. Victims must not sin in their response to the abuse, yet it is within reason that they are very angry about the sins committed against them. This doesn't excuse sin. It does mean church leaders and members should patiently shepherd the victim with care and understanding, and to never equate their anger with the sins of their abusers" (*PCA Report* 41).

4. Aftermath

“The consequences of abusive leadership are significant for a congregation and will require intensive grace and repair by the Holy Spirit. Sessions are called to shepherd the flock by lovingly and effectively bringing God’s comfort and restoration to redeem the horrendous sin of the misuse of spiritual authority. Ministering to the victim of abusive leadership is intended to provide opportunity for healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually” (*PCA Report 226*).

1. Victims/survivors, you need to forgive your abuser

Matt. 18:21-35

³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

According to this passage, what is one of the first steps to forgiving someone?

“By forgiving an abuser, a survivor lays aside bitterness, anger, and malice and they depend on the Lord for justice according to His righteousness (Eph. 4:31-32; Ps. 72:2)” (*PCA Report*, 280).

2. Victims/survivors, you DO NOT need to be reconciled with your abuser

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same.

“We cannot be ready to deal with the ‘relational’ side of forgiveness until we have come before God and worked through the legal side” (Bob Burns and Brissett, *The Adult Child of Divorce* (1991),139-140).

Reconciliation/restoration is NOT guaranteed

Reconciliation is dependent upon true repentance (Luke 17:3, Col. 1:21-23).

Deut. 22:25

²⁵ “But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die.

3. Should we seek reconciliation between an abusive pastor and their victim?

“An abuse case is not just a conflict” (Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 71-75).

1. Victims should not be asked to meet with an abusive pastor unless he has been held accountable.
 2. Victims should not meet with an abusive pastor unless he is genuinely repentant (Luke 17:3, Col. 1:21-23).
 3. Victims should not meet with an abusive pastor until they are emotionally and spiritually ready.
 4. If the victims of abuse refuse to meet, an unrepentant pastor will likely portray their victims as unforgiving and unwilling to reconcile.
- “You can love (forgive) someone and still be angry at them” (Dr. Joe Bauserman)

4. Avoid abandoning all authority

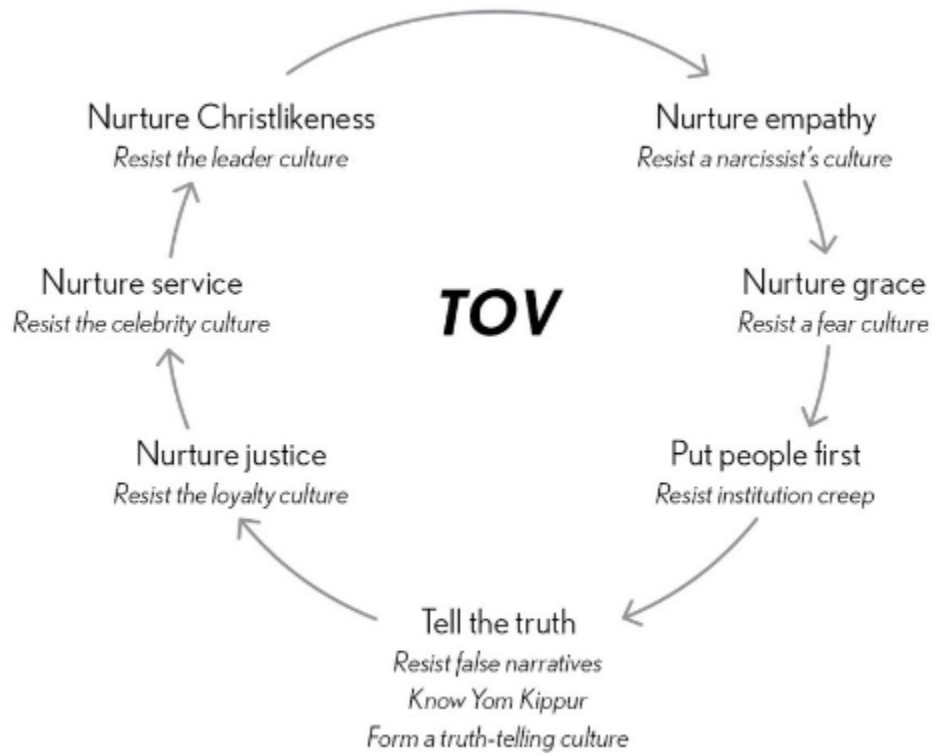
“Well! now you exaggerate again! You never preserve a moderate temper in anything; you never keep within reason's bounds, and always rush from one extreme to another. You see your error and realize that you have been imposed upon by a hypocritical zeal. But, in order to reform, what reason is there that you should be guilty of a worse mistake, and that you should make no difference between the heart of that perfidious rascal and those of all pious people? What! because a rascal has audaciously deceived you, under the pompous show of apparent austerity, will you insist that everyone is like him and that there is no really pious man to be found nowadays?” (Cleante to Orgon from Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664), trans. Renée Waldinger, Act V, Scene 1).

WLC 127. What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors?

The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.

5. Build a culture of *Tov*

“Never underestimate the power of the environment you work in to gradually transform who you are”
(David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (2019), 22).



(Scot McKnight & Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov* (2020), 212).

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

HOMEWORK

- How is your regular (daily?) prayer for those suffering abuse in the church going?
 - Read **Luke 7:36-50** (the story of Jesus and the “woman of the city” in the Pharisee’s house) and ask what is meant by Jesus’ injunction in verse 44, “**Do you see this woman?**” Are there people in your life you are overlooking? Especially people who are weaker or less powerful than you? In what ways can you SEE them better this week?
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