

Addressing Abuse in the Church 6



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)

COURSE OVERVIEW

To examine the issue of abuse found inside the church so that the church can repent, protect, and give glory to God.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

2 Kings 4:1-7

¹ Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” ² And Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?” And she said, “Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” ³ Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. ⁴ Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside.” ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. ⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.”

What was the wife’s problem?

How did Elisha help solve her problem?

What does this solution reveal about us or God?

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

ADULT SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual Harassment: “Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights 39 Act of 1964. It consists of inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s sense of well-being by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment from the viewpoint of the affected individual” (Justin S. Holcomb, “Abuse and the Church: Types of Abuse” (PowerPoint presentation, *Reformed Theological Seminary*, 2020; quoted in *PCA Report*, 249).

Sexual Assault: “Sexual assault is any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained. It is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority” (Holcomb, “Abuse and the Church,” *PCA Report*, 249).

1. **We need to have a better hamartiology.**

“Often victims of abuse encounter doubt regarding their credibility. One of the reasons for this misunderstanding is the lack of a solid, biblical understanding of the nature of evil and suffering. It is common for Christians to believe that sexual abuse does not happen in the church. What we think we know about other people, victims, and their families is inadequate when it comes to identifying abuse” (*PCA Report*, 147).

The only flaws that can enslave you are the ones that you are blind to.

"[Sexual abuse] is kept secret because many fear they will not be believed. Attention to the problem is not a priority, because the problem is believed to be rare... Again, knowing we live in a world ruled by the prince of the power of the air and knowing that human hearts are deceitful above all things, why are we surprised?" (*PCA Report*, 165).

"In many ways, the church seems to be structured to accommodate the whole and the healthy. Often activities are designed for intact couples and families... On one hand there is nothing wrong with that. However, that perspective does not account for sickness, suffering, trauma, dying, terror, and torment. To experience these things is to fail to fit into the structure. When that results in responses of judgment, humiliation, impatience, and denial, we have failed to be the church God has called us to be. According to the apostle Paul, the church should bestow more abundant honor on those members who lack it rather than applaud those who have no need of it (1 Cor. 12:23-24)" (*PCA Report*, 165).

Romans 7: 24-25

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

- Do you really think you are a wretched person? Or do you think you can manage your sin?

2. Sexual Abuse is a criminal act

"Churches are not qualified to conduct investigations of sexual abuse." (*PCA Report*, 155).

"Local authorities are specifically trained; therefore, if a victim desires the abuse be reported, it must be reported immediately. Delay can result in loss of evidence, victim tampering, tainting witness memory, or providing the perpetrator an opportunity to threaten or pressure their victims to remain silent or recant their testimony. Conducting an "in house" investigation prior to reporting not only jeopardizes the victim and the chain of evidence, it may also fail at detecting the actual abuser. Abusers often continue offending; therefore, a church that conducts an incompetent investigation may be held responsible. The church has a moral and legal obligation to report suspected abuse" (*PCA Report*, 155-56).

- Why might a church try to conduct an "in house" investigation?
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3. How to help adult survivors of sexual abuse

“The church should be a sanctuary for victims, a training ground to prevent assault, and a facilitator of emotional, spiritual, and physical healing” (*PCA Report*, 159).

Diane Langberg, *Counseling Survivors*, as quoted in *PCA Report*, 161-64:

1. A significant sense of belonging
2. To be pursued
3. To have physical and/or financial needs met
4. Hope without condemnation
5. A balance of ministry and fun
6. Others’ willingness to witness great pain and believe the “unbelievable”

“Yet we who believe sin is so hideous as to require the death of God Himself should of all people find evil believable” (*PCA Report*, 162).

7. A listener, not a fixer or a blamer

“When we don’t know what to say, it is usually best to say nothing rather than allow our discomfort with silence and pain to drive us to rattle off an answer.” (*PCA Report*, 162)

8. Resources
 9. Knowledgeable friends
 10. To resolve spiritual issues
 11. Time
 12. Intercession
- If one of your adult friends disclosed to you that he/she had been sexually abused, how would you respond? What would you say?

4. Being proactive to build a structure is caring.

“Those who have experienced any form of sexual abuse, assault, or harassment inside of or outside the church should have an easily accessible, empathetic, reliable, and formal means of reporting” (*PCA Report*, 148).

- Would you be interested in joining a WEPC Church Advocacy Team?
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CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse: harm or threatened harm to a child or youth's health or welfare which occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; through neglect or abandonment; failure to provide adequately; or committing or allowing to be committed any sexual act, molestation, exploitation, or disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying pornographic material to children. (Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title63.2/chapter1/section63.2-100/>, accessed March 12, 2024).

Matthew 19:13-15

¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.

Luke 17:2

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

If it is reported to you

"Resist the temptation to think about your own well-being. Stay present with the child and tend to his or her needs. Focus on their disclosure. After tending to the needs of the victim, consider how you will respond personally to the disclosure" (*PCA Report*, 184).

Mandated Reporters

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title63.2/chapter15/section63.2-1509/>

"11. Any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any public or private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children;"

The Virginia Child Abuse & Neglect: 1-800-552-7096

“All caregiving has potential for error. There is even the possibility of causing additional harm. One example for how this might happen in shepherding victims suffering from abuse is, when they come forward, it is common for those involved to consider the accused with “charitable judgment.” People are generally hesitant to violate the “innocent until proven guilty” standard. While God’s people are called to love one another and “believe all things” (1 Cor. 13:7), err on the side of safety when it comes to protecting the vulnerable.” (*PCA Report*, 197).

PREVENTION

“The protection of children should be a multi-pronged approach that reflects that we cherish and love the children God has gifted us (Ps. 127:3). A church should seek to be a safe environment for children where they can learn about the Lord (Prov. 22:6; Mark 9:42). We want to model for children how Christians are called to love God and one another (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 11:1) Further, we protect the reputation of Christ when we seek to protect children from abuse as it showcases our desire to live in a manner that is above reproach and in line with our faith (Matt. 18:6; Phil. 4:8-9).” (*PCA Report* 203).

HOMEWORK

- How is your regular (daily?) prayer for those suffering abuse in the church going?
- How can you make yourself available as a safe and trustworthy person to the weak around you?