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TRAINING MINISTRY LEADERS AT CHURCH ON THE  
WAY IN LAKE CITY, FLORIDA, TO RECOGNIZE AND  
RESPOND TO SEXUAL ABUSE BIBLICALLY

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the Faculty of  
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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Ronal Dale Tompkins Jr.  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

TRAINING MINISTRY LEADERS AT CHURCH ON THE  
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Ronal Dale Tompkins Jr.

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert D. Jones (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeremy P. Pierre

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To my wife, Amber, and our daughters, Grace and Emma.

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## PREFACE

Many instrumental people contributed to the completion of this project. First, I am grateful to God for my family, who I love more than anyone on earth. Of the twenty-three years Amber and I have been married, I have spent eleven of them in school. Although her name will not be on any of the diplomas, I know that I did not earn them alone. Thank you, Amber. This diploma belongs to you as much as to me. You have given up time and energy to care for me and our girls so that I could focus on ministry and school. Thank you for reading, rereading, and editing each chapter of this project and encouraging me every step of the way. Throughout our marriage you have spent countless hours bearing the burdens of ministry with me and counseling alongside me. I am also so thankful to be the father of Grace and Emma. I thank God for them every day and pray that God will keep them in his love.

I am grateful for my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Robert Jones, for his invaluable advice and direction throughout my project, which is exponentially better because of his wisdom and leadership.

There are several people that were instrumental in helping me get to this point in my life and ministry. First, I am thankful for my parents, Ronal and April Tompkins, for the many sacrifices they made for our family. Second, I thank God for George and Jeanette Tompkins, my grandparents, for living out the gospel in their marriage. Third, Buddy Goodman for being the best youth pastor and my first mentor in the gospel. Fourth, Hugh Dampier for giving me a chance and seeing something in me worth investing in. Fifth, James Roberts for being a mentor and a friend as I assumed the role of pastor. Finally, I am grateful for my family of faith at Church on The Way. They are truly a blessing and a true gift from God. I could not have done this without your support.

Dale Tompkins

Lake City, Florida

December 2021

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The motto of Church on the Way (COTW) is, “Retelling, Reconnecting, and Restoring: we only have one thing to offer, a relationship with God.” This motto expresses the desire of COTW to be a church that is faithful in sharing the gospel, connecting people to God through salvation, and seeing that their lives are restored through sanctification. The last goal of restoration has been particularly challenging at COTW. Approximately sixty percent, or seventy-five of the church’s attendees, are survivors of sexual abuse. Thirty-one of the churches fifty-nine members are survivors of sexual abuse. If restoration is to happen in the lives of these people, the church must be able to apply the Word of God compassionately and effectively to their abuse. This is not an issue isolated to COTW: every two minutes in the United States someone is sexually assaulted.<sup>1</sup> Who is going to minister the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ to them? One trained pastor or biblical counselor per church is not going to be sufficient. It will take a trained team of ministry leaders, from every level of leadership within the local church, to meet the needs of survivors of sexual abuse. Therefore, a sexual abuse training curriculum will benefit both the ministry leaders and COTW in fulfilling their mission of restoration for those that are survivors of sexual abuse. The COTW staff desired for the development of a sexual abuse training course to extend the impact beyond the local body into the greater community.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael R. Rand, “National Crime Victimization Survey: Criminal Victimization, 2007,” *US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin* (December 2008): 1-12, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv07.pdf>.

## **Context**

The context of this project is Church on The Way, located in a rural area of north Florida called Lake City. There are approximately twelve thousand residents in the city and almost seventy thousand in the county. The population of the community has doubled over the past fifteen years. During the past five years, the church has experienced a consistent increase in attendance at the Sunday morning worship services, growing from sixty to one hundred and thirty. Several factors have contributed to the rise in attendance. One of the key factors has been the counseling ministry of the church.

The consistent growth in attendance combined with a growing counseling ministry brought some definite benefits to the church. There are encouraging signs throughout the different areas of ministry. There is an overall optimistic feeling among the congregation and leadership. In general, COTW is a thriving, growing, and maturing body of believers. Until recently, COTW's membership has been younger adults just starting new families. This demographic is often struggling to start their own lives financially. Most attendees still have substantial student loans they are just beginning to pay off with their entry-level jobs. Financial instability has created inconsistencies in giving over the years. Due to this inconsistency, the pastors of the church are all bi-vocational.

The core guiding principle of COTW is making disciples. Each of COTW's pastors has served in other congregations and noted that business and program-heavy approaches create significant barriers to discipleship. Recognizing this challenge, COTW planted with an emphasis on two primary ministries. The first ministry is the Sunday Worship services; it includes the preaching of the Word, worship through the Word, prayer, and children's ministry. The second ministry was discipleship through small group ministry. These were the only official ministries of the church. Over the last thirteen years, counseling has been the only ministry added to this list of primary ministries. The counseling ministry grew out of a need to deal with sexual abuse in our

small group ministry.

Over the past six years, God has been building a foundation of theologically sound men and women. When the church started, there was not a plurality of qualified leaders who possessed a solid theological foundation. In addition to three pastors, the church now has a team of deacons managing various ministries within the church. Many of our ministry leaders have pursued The Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship's (IBCD) training program to be better equipped to assist the congregation's needs.

The target audience has always been the unchurched and those who had given up on the church. COTW invests considerable energy in reaching these two groups. This twin focus requires significant patience and a willingness to celebrate small signs of growth that might go unnoticed in larger congregations. This focus also requires transparency and a willingness to seek and grant forgiveness on the part of those in leadership. The leaders have shown significant maturity in learning to model grace and forgiveness, especially in their counseling ministry.

This grace also extended to young leaders, many of whom were leading for the first time. During the first six to ten years of the church, the pastor worked one-on-one with critical leaders helping to develop them into the lay leaders the church needed. This process was slow and often was set back when a person moved or had a change in employment that limited availability. Only in the past six years has the church seen consistency in its leadership team. The team grew together by failing together. It is in failing that leaders were reminded of how much they need the gospel. Leaders that confess and repent of their sin rather than try to hide when they make mistakes are the kind of leaders COTW seeks. This level of honesty requires COTW to have a profound culture of grace for everyone involved. This culture of honesty modeled by the leaders has been one of the reasons that people feel comfortable sharing about their abuse.

While the ministry leaders in the church regularly extend grace to those to

whom they minister, one area in which they need to grow is in how to minister to those who have experienced sexual abuse. The ministry leaders that have completed the IBCD training received very minimal direct teaching on how to counsel survivors of sexual abuse. The counseling ministry has been an area of growth in the church over the past five years. Because of this, the leadership of the church came to realize that almost sixty percent of the church had been survivors of child sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse affects every ministry of the church. In our children's ministry, the leaders must deal with hypervigilant parents that do not want to leave their child with volunteers. Sexual abuse also affects our small groups. Leaders are faced with complex emotional responses that are hard for them to comprehend from people that are survivors of abuse. This can lead to frustration with the people in small groups and cause leaders to stop extending grace. In some cases, the person becomes difficult to deal with. In response, the leader says or does something that alienates the person either intentionally or unintentionally, making it difficult to continue to attend church.

### **Rationale**

The greatest weakness in the current church ministry context is that there are not enough people who are trained or equipped to recognize and respond biblically to survivors of abuse, specifically sexual abuse. This challenge has created a strain on the church's leadership due to the number of referrals currently being received from within the church and from other churches. Recognizing the need for more counselors, the church began to put a training plan in place to develop more qualified biblical counselors.

These counselors will be trained to handle premarital counseling, couples counseling, and general discipleship issues. This process started six months prior to the beginning of this project by asking all the small group leaders to attend IBCD's video-based training on biblical counseling. This process of classes and exams will take at least a year to complete. While this will be helpful in a general way, it does not alleviate the

problem of counseling survivors of abuse. This process has helped to reduce the overall counseling load. However, cases of abuse have not been able to be delegated.

The counseling ministry of the church grew out of a need in the small group ministry to address the special issues of sexual abuse. The ministry began in response to a church leader sharing that he had been the victim of child sexual abuse. Desiring to be a part of the restoration process led the senior pastor to begin meeting regularly with him. The senior pastor started by educating himself on the subject and looking for ways to apply the gospel to the specific issues of sexual abuse. This led to more discussions with the church leaders about the topic, and this process exposed more survivors of child sexual abuse. The more the matter was discussed, more survivors began to come forward. The leadership of the church came to realize that almost sixty percent of the church had been victims of child sexual abuse.

Counseling survivors of child sexual abuse is a subject that intimidates many ministry leaders at COTW. This type of abuse does have unique challenges, but for the most part, it does not differ from other biblical counseling issues. Ministry leaders need to be aware of two main elements to help the counselee with abuse. The first element is that instead of the source of the counselee's problem being a sin they have committed, it is a sin committed against them. Counselors should seek to give those abused hope while also addressing the inappropriate shame and guilt that many survivors have placed upon themselves. Counselors not trained in how to address abuse survivors can inadvertently increase the guilt and shame a victim feels. Biblically, guilt and shame are normal responses a person experiences after committing sin. However, the victim of sexual abuse is not guilty of committing a sin by being abused.

The second element is addressing the victim's sinful responses to the sin committed against them. Counselees must address any sin issues for which they are responsible. Such sin would include those committed in response to the abuse in their lives. This second element deals with issues that biblical counselors are familiar with.

This training will provide some initial matters to address. However, the counselor's previous training will need to guide them through this stage of the process.

The issue of sexual abuse affects each church in our community. Evidence for this is seen in the number of people that are referred to COTW for counseling from other churches. Currently, there is only one other biblical counselor in our community willing to counsel survivors of child sexual abuse. This leaves most men and women to seek counseling from secular or integrationist counselors. Sexual abuse training for ministry leaders can help both COTW and the survivors of sexual abuse within the broader church community.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train ministry leaders of Church on The Way in Lake City, Florida, to recognize and respond biblically for the good of the survivors, the health of the local church, and the glory of God.

### **Goals**

Several fundamental goals were applicable for this ministry project. These goals reflected a progression of the steps to be taken to grow the ministry leaders in their ability to recognize survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically. The goals of the project were as follows:

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current level of competence to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically to their needs among the ministry leaders of COTW.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-hour introductory course on recognizing survivors of sexual abuse and responding biblically.
3. The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip the ministry leaders in a small group setting.
4. The fourth goal was to assess the level of change in the competence of ministry leaders who completed the sexual abuse counseling course.

## **Research Methodology**

Four goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the current level of competence regarding survivors of sexual abuse among the ministry leaders of COTW. Prior to the first session, the Ministry Leader Assessment (MLA)<sup>2</sup> was administered to the ministry leaders of COTW. Each participant was required to give basic demographic information. Participants had the option of giving their name or a four-digit pin code. This pre-course assessment gauged each ministry leader's ability to identify the signs of abuse, key issues of sexual abuse, and their ability to apply biblical truth to the issues of abuse. The goal was considered successful when at least eight ministry leaders completed the MLA and the results were compiled electronically for a fuller analysis of the ministry leader's competency at COTW.

The second goal was to develop an eight-session introductory course on identifying and responding biblically to survivors of sexual abuse biblically. The course primarily focused on developing awareness of sign and indicators of sexual abuse and how to respond to sexual abuse biblically. This goal was measured by one COTW elder, one member in the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), and two local church pastors. This panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the course material to ensure it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and applicable to ministry practice. This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the initial feedback yielded less than 90 percent, the curriculum was to be revised in accordance with the panel's evaluation until such time that the criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and train the ministry leaders in a small group setting. This training occurred over a two-day event at the church. Participants in this sexual abuse training course were selected from ministry leaders at

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.

COTW who had completed the MLA.<sup>3</sup> Success of this goal was measured by each participant attending 100 percent of the training.

The fourth goal was to assess the level of change in competence of ministry leaders who completed the sexual abuse awareness course. The content aspect of this goal was measured by re-administering the MLA after the participants finished the course, and was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-course results. A t-test for dependent samples “involves a comparison of the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

Technical terms are used throughout this project; they are defined below to aid the reader’s understanding of the subject.

*Biblical counseling.* This form of counseling is the concept of using the Scriptures alone as the authoritative means, by the working of the Holy Spirit, for a Christian to experience heart change through the sanctification process. Other books and helps may be incorporated, but the authority for direction and change is based within the Bible. Sufficiency is the “belief that the Scriptures comprehensively and sufficiently show how the power of Christ relevantly and powerfully speaks to all the issues that require counseling no matter how extreme or challenging.”<sup>5</sup> It is the distinguishing aspect which sets apart biblical counseling from every other forms of counseling. Biblical

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<sup>3</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>4</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 191.

<sup>5</sup> Heath Lambert, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” *Grace and Truth* (blog), June 18, 2012, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2012/06/18/the-sufficiency-of-scripture>.

counseling incorporates discernment of wrong doing, verbal confrontation of the problem, and doing so in a manner that benefits the counselee. This form of counseling seeks to incorporate a biblical standard and authority to confront and correct thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes of the counselee.<sup>6</sup>

*Ministry leaders.* For the purpose of this project the term ministry leader represents an active member of COTW who is involved in any leadership capacity. This included pastors, elders, deacons, small group leaders, and children's ministry leaders.

*Sexual abuse.* This project relied on Justin Holcomb's and Lindsey Holcomb's definition of sexual abuse: "Any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority."<sup>7</sup>

Several delimitations were placed on the project. Participants were required to be COTW members who completed the IBCD biblical counseling training. Membership at COTW ensured that they were baptized believers serving in a local church with pastoral supervision. The class size was delimited to at least eight adult members of COTW. Additionally, the class was delimited to covering the introductory issues of counseling sexual abuse. A limitation of the project was the availability of the ministry leaders to attend for a period of no more than ten weeks.

## **Conclusion**

God cares for those who have been sexually abused. The church should be a place of refuge and restoration for those who have endured the tragedy of sexual abuse. The following chapters show how the Bible addresses the needs and concerns of the survivors of sexual abuse. Chapter 2 provides the scriptural and theological basis for

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<sup>6</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 1970), 14, 16, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 28.

addressing three of the common problems of those who have experienced sexual abuse. Chapter 3 focuses on developing the practical application of the Scripture's approach to identifying and addressing sexual abuse biblically. Chapter 4 describes the project content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum, while chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR RESPONDING TO SEXUAL ABUSE BIBLICALLY

The term *sexual abuse* does not appear in the Bible. This fact, however, does not give ministry leaders the right to avoid the subject of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is increasing at an alarming rate in the United States. One in four women and one in six men report having been sexually abused.<sup>1</sup> While the Bible does not speak directly to adults who were sexually abused as a child, the Bible is sufficient to deal with the sin and its effects upon survivors. This chapter argues that the Bible provides a theological basis to minister to people who were or who had become the prey of sexual abusers.

First I will examine two psalms that speak directly to the deepest needs of survivors. Psalm 23 teaches two primary things that every survivor needs to know. First, this psalm introduces them to the Good Shepherd. Second, this psalm explains the benefits of having the Lord as their shepherd. Psalm 25 builds upon Psalm 23 and addresses the issue of shame, and shows the survivor why they should put their trust in the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.

Ephesians 4 will also be considered in this chapter. In this passage, Paul challenges believers to a new way of life. In this New Testament text, survivors are given a new way of walking through life with the Holy Spirit. In the Psalms, David saw only prophetically what the experience of having the Holy Spirit indwelling a believer would look like. Paul outlined a new path for survivors of sexual abuse to walk in God's

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<sup>1</sup> Michael R. Rand, "National Crime Victimization Survey: Criminal Victimization, 2007," *US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin* (December 2008): 1-12, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv07.pdf>.

righteousness for them. This is in no way an exhaustive list of passages that address the issues of sexual abuse. Instead, the hope is to give the reader a picture of how God's Word can be applied in the lives of survivors of sexual abuse by focusing on these three passages.

### **Psalm 23**

Ministry leaders seeking to minister to survivors of sexual abuse need first to instill hope. The Word of God has many passages to help sexual survivors find the hope they need to move forward in their discipleship process. One such passage that ministry leaders can use is one of the most famous Psalms that they are likely familiar with, even if they are new to the Christian faith. Psalm 23 can be used to point survivors to Jesus, the ultimate source of hope in life.

First, survivors need to learn that the Lord is their Good Shepherd, and they can trust him to care for them. Psalm 23 starts with the famous words, "The Lord is my shepherd." In these five simple words in the English Bible, David is making a powerful statement. In the Old Testament, it is not uncommon for the current king of Israel to be referred to as the Shepherd of Israel. As the author of this Psalm and the current king of Israel, David is declaring his dependence on the Lord as his Shepherd. David, in effect, is saying that he is both the shepherd of Israel and one of God's sheep. David is clear that he is not the ultimate authority in the world. This humility is remarkable for a man in his current position of power to acknowledge. David makes this clear when he uses the word "my" in this opening verse. God as David's shepherd should also be contrasted to the foolish person's shepherd, which is death (Ps 49:15).<sup>2</sup> Having the Lord as one's shepherd

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<sup>2</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 16 (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 146.

is like having life itself. While this was true in David's life, he was also a prophet, and here prophesied about his anticipated heir.

Jesus, like David, was both the Lord's sheep and the ultimate good shepherd. Jesus entrusted his life to the Lord as the Lamb of God even unto death (1 Pet 2:23). Jesus is also the Shepherd that David prophesied about in the passage. Jesus was a much different shepherd than the shepherds described in Ezekial 34, who were described as harsh to their sheep and only used them for their own gain. When the flock scattered, these sheperds did not search for them to bring them back into the flock's safety. Jesus, by contrast, is the shepherd that seeks out his lost sheep that have strayed away from the flock.<sup>3</sup> When Jesus finds these sheep, he is not harsh with them but instead places them on his shoulders and carries them tenderly back to the flock (Luke 15:3-7). Jesus rejoices when one of his sheep is rescued from the evils of this world and returned to safety. This is the shepherd to whom survivors of sexual abuse need desperately to be introduced. As his sheep, they need to learn to trust Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to care for them. This leads to a natural question: what does it mean to be a sheep?

Augustine once wrote, "When you say, 'The Lord is my shepherd,' no proper grounds are left for you to trust in yourself."<sup>4</sup> To be a sheep means first that one stops trusting in themselves and instead entrusts their lives to the shepherd. For many, this is one of the most challenging steps in the process. For a survivor of sexual abuse, this may be especially difficult. The abuse has taught them not to trust others and to only rely upon themselves. This is especially true if the abuse was by a trusted family member or a trusted authority figure. God's design for the family is that children learn to trust him by trusting their parents. In Ephesians 6:1-4 Paul instructs both children and parents on how

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<sup>3</sup> Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *Psalms 1–72*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 188–89.

<sup>4</sup> Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 178.

they are to respond to each other. Paul references the fifth commandment to “honor your mother and father” because learning to honor one’s parents teaches the importance of submission to authority. This is important for a child to practice with their parents so that they can honor God through submission to him. Paul ends this section with a warning to fathers not to provoke their children to anger and instead to bring them up in the instruction of the Lord. This sound design of the family is perverted when a father sexually abuses his daughter, one of the worst ways of provoking a child to anger. Her trust is shattered in her earthly father, which in turn can make it more difficult to trust her Heavenly Father. Because of this dynamic, ministry leaders should be patient with this step in the process and not try to rush compliance. The survivor will continue to struggle if they never get to a place of trusting the Lord as their shepherd. Ministry leaders should seek to model trustworthiness at this phase in the discipleship process. As the survivor opens up and shares more of their past, ministry leaders need to show them that they can be trusted with their story. This will go a long way in helping them be able to trust the Good Shepherd and leads to the second thing they need to learn from this passage.

Second, once the survivor has learned that they can entrust their lives to the shepherd, Psalm 23 shows them what to expect from the shepherd. The first thing the survivor can expect is found at the end of verse 1: “I shall not want.” This is expounded on in verse 2. This passage promises peace and rest to those who entrust their lives to the shepherd. This peace and rest is pictured in the green pastures and still waters in verse 2. Philip Keller spent eight years working as a shepherd to help him understand from first-hand experience what David meant in this verse. Keller says that he observed that for sheep to lie down, they needed to be at complete peace, feeling both safe and satisfied. This peace he describes consisted of four requirements that must be met. First, sheep are known to be timid and fearful creatures, and they will refuse to lay down unless they are entirely free from fear. Second, sheep are social animals, and they will refuse to lay down if there is friction within the flock. Third, they must be free from pests, such as flies and

parasites, to lay down and rest. Finally, sheep will not lay down if they are hungry. So when David says that the Lord makes his sheep lie down in green pastures, he is saying that the Lord will provide for their emotional, social, medical, and physical needs.<sup>5</sup> Survivors of sexual abuse must see that the Lord will meet each of these four areas of need in their lives. In the Gospels, Jesus described it this way: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28–30). Jesus is a person’s only hope in moving forward with life after the abuse. Verse 3 explains how the Good Shepherd accomplishes this in the life of a survivor.

Third, the Good Shepherd will restore the soul of the survivor. Verse 3 begins with these words, “He restores my soul,” and then describes the effect of this restoration. No one would restore a brand new home that has never been occupied. When one restores a home, it is because either tenant, time, termites, or all three have caused damage to the house. This damaged home requires a complete restoration. This is what is pictured and promised in verse 3. The sheep standing before the shepherd is injured in some way. This damage is always the result of sin. This can be damage caused by the sheep’s sinfulness (i.e., wandering away from the flock and falling into a pit). The sinfulness of others can also cause this damage through sexual abuse. And finally, the damage can be caused by a combination of the sin committed against the sheep and sheep’s sinful response to that original sin. No matter how the injury occurred, the Good Shepherd promises to restore or make the sheep new. These words foreshadow the transformative power of the gospel. In both the Old and New Testament, God’s children are promised a new restored heart to replace the heart of stone that they were born with (Ezek 36:26; Heb 8:10). This is important for survivors to understand from this passage because they often report feeling

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<sup>5</sup> Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 35.

broken or damaged due to sexual abuse. The promise of restoration is what the soul of the survivor ultimately needs.

This restoration includes not just a new heart but a new direction in life. The Good Shepherd is now directing their paths in the ways of righteousness. Augustine reminds the reader that this guidance is not because of their own merit but because of God's glory.<sup>6</sup> The Good Shepherd has redeemed his sheep from the law, sin, death, the power of the devil, and eternal damnation so that they no longer have to wander aimlessly in the wilderness.<sup>7</sup> This is yet another way of imparting hope to survivors of sexual abuse. Many survivors feel trapped in an endless loop of bad decisions that have only led to more harm and heartbreak. The gospel gives them hope that their life choices moving forward can and will be different because of the power of the Holy Spirit working inside of them. In the gospel, they find a new identity. This new identity is one of a restored soul and membership into God's family. To some survivors of sexual abuse, this can all sound too good to be true and lead them to the following question: Where was God when I was sexually abused? The answer to this question can be found in verse 4 of Psalm 23.

The fourth truth that ministry leaders need to be able to teach to survivors from this Psalm is that the Good Shepherd was with them and never left their side when they were sexually abused. David uses the language of "the valley of the shadow of death" to picture those times in life that one goes through that in the moment one may feel fear even to the point of death. In the analogy of the shepherd and the sheep, it was not uncommon for the shepherd to have to move the sheep to find a fresh pasture for his flock. In the rocky terrain of the Israeli countryside, shepherds would have to take their flocks through valleys in between mountains to reach the next valley. Crossing through

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms: Psalms 1–150*, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, vol. 1 (London: F. and J. Rivington; John Henry Parker, 1847–1857), 166–67.

<sup>7</sup> Selderhuis, *Psalms 1–72*, 189.

these valleys can be terrifying to the sheep. The mountains can cast long shadows creating limited visibility. These valleys were often home to predators hiding inside caves along the sides of the mountains, waiting to devour their next meal. David recalls that even in those difficult and fearful times in his life, his shepherd never left his side. This truth is what enables David to say that he will fear no evil. This is a truth that survivors of abuse need to be taught how to apply in their own lives.

Fear is something that many survivors have internalized, thinking that they have learned to live with it. Yet this fear causes damage to their lives socially and emotionally. Fear leads many survivors to isolate themselves socially. Despite being married, many survivors try to isolate the abuse part of their life, even from their spouse. This social fear keeps them from developing deep and meaningful relationships and resists biblical community. Survivors need to be taught that they have never been alone. Even in the darkest moments of their life, the Good Shephard has never left them or forsaken them. This truth can begin to erode their desire to isolate and resist biblical community.

Emotional fear is another aspect of fear that survivors often struggle with that this verse addresses. Some survivors resist getting married because they are afraid of being emotionally hurt again by someone they trust. Many will turn their desire for community toward animals, developing deep attachments with them. They tell themselves that these animals would never hurt them and because they are always happy to see them, they convince themselves that they are loved and not alone. While animals have always played an essential role in human lives, they cannot replace the God-given need for community. People are made in the image of God, and in his very person exists a community of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humans were made by their creator with emotions, and they are good. The fall, however, has tainted every aspect of humanity, including human emotions. When survivors are sinned against, it can damage their emotional development. The only way to overcome fear is by having a greater fear. The

fear of the Lord is the only thing that can help survivors of sexual abuse overcome their fear. The fear of the Lord is growing in the sense of awe for who God is and what he has done for them. In this passage, the counselor needs to help survivors grow in their sense of awe by helping them understand that Jesus never for one moment left them even on their darkest day. The truth that the Good Shepherd walked through the valley of the shadow of death of sexual abuse with them should lead them to David's conclusion: "I will fear no evil because you are with me!"

Fifth, the Good Shepherd has prepared for them an eternal reprieve and rest from all their abusers. In the final two verses of Psalm 23, David explains what awaits those who trust the Good Shepherd. In verse 5, when David says "you prepare," those words are in the future tense, indicating a continued act of provision by the Good Shepherd.<sup>8</sup> This verse shows God setting the table before David providing for his every need. Notice that David says that this provision comes in the face of his enemies. While living this life, there will always be those that may be envious and try to remove the blessing of God. Survivors have experienced these enemies first hand and need to be reminded of God's provision for them. This verse continues to describe the provision of God by picturing a person being anointed with oil. This was a custom whenever a feast was celebrated. The host would make sure each of his guests would be anointed with oil before the beginning of the feast. The second display of God's provision is seen in the expression "my cup overflows." While the first example focuses on a lavish banquet, this second example focuses on the everyday necessities of life. Few readers of this text will have as much in terms of material wealth as King David when he wrote this psalm. Yet every Christian has been generously blessed by God far beyond what they deserve. God is under no obligation to anyone, yet he proves himself to be a kind and generous father.

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. James Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 396.

While God does display his generosity on earth, and the beginning of verse 6 confirms, God's ultimate display of generosity is in the life to come described in the final verse.

David declares, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (v. 6). David reminds readers in this verse that one should not confine their thoughts to this earthly life. Instead, one should fix their gaze on the life to come and the eternal blessings to come. This is important for every believer as they meet various trials in this life. This reality is essential to keep in front of the survivor of sexual abuse. They have seen first hand the most extreme forms of sinfulness one can do to another human being. Even when safety is secured, in this life, it does not always free them from the flashbacks of the trauma they have experienced. Yet, there is coming a time when they can look forward to never having a flashback again. There is coming a time in which they no longer have to live in fear. The final truth from this psalm that survivors need to apply to their lives is that God has prepared for their eternal rest and reprieve from all their abusers. This truth is echoed in Psalm 25, which directly addresses one of the major issues abuse survivors deal with daily.

### **Psalm 25**

Psalm 25 is a lament psalm. In the midst of both external and internal suffering, David calls upon the Lord to aid and sustain him in continuing to fear the Lord.<sup>9</sup> This psalm aims to increase one's focus on God, lessening the focus on the trials and tribulations of this world. Psalm 25 is written in the form of an acrostic, with each verse beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>10</sup> This helped readers to memorize the psalm and to be able to recall it in their time of need. This psalm can be taught to survivors of abuse to help them begin to address the shame they often feel.

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<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 413.

<sup>10</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in vol. 1 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 813.

In verse 1, the Psalmist teaches the reader to direct his or her focus on God alone. Charles Spurgeon, commenting on this verse, described this prayer as “the soul rising from earth to have fellowship with heaven; it is taking a journey upon Jacob’s ladder, leaving our cares and fears at the foot, and meeting with a covenant God at the top.”<sup>11</sup> The Psalmist no longer trusts in himself but instead places his trust solely in God in verse 2.<sup>12</sup> The Psalmist then makes his plea to the Lord: “Do not let me be ashamed and do not let my enemies overcome me.” This prayer is helpful for survivors of sexual abuse to read.

Psalms 25, like many psalms, does not give the reader enough specific detail to know the exact identity of the enemies that David is referring to. Without this immediate context leading to a more specific application, it leads the reader to see this psalm in a broader context. What is clear from reading this psalm is that David is facing an enemy that could lead to him being ashamed. God wanted his people to memorize this psalm to know how to deal with the situations in their life that would expose them to shame so that they would know how to address it. David lived in an honor and shame culture. In Israel honor referred to being esteemed by one’s peers and social groups because one embodied that which the culture deemed virtuous and desirable. Conversely one experienced shame when they did not live a virtuous life or produce desirable outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

Why would David be concerned with being put to shame? First, David knows the sinfulness of his own heart, as seen in verse 7. David knew that he had not lived a completely virtuous life. Specifically, in verse 7, David mentions the sins from his youth and his transgressions which—depending on when this psalm was written—could also

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<sup>11</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1-26* (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 391.

<sup>12</sup> Blaising and Hardin, *Psalms 1-50*, 192.

<sup>13</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vols. 15-16 (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2014), 143.

include the sin of adultery and murder committed later in life. David was keenly aware that he had had not lived a virtuous life and if exposed publicly would yield shame. Second, David knows that his enemies are real and hate him. If his enemies were to be victorious over him in battle, then David would have been seen by his people of losing honor in the defeat. This too would have led to shame.

The objective state of shame is common among victims of sexual abuse. Like David, shame is common because they know their sin and their abuser's sin against them. Shame is a common theme in the Bible and appears about ten times more than the theme of guilt.<sup>14</sup> Shame shows up in the Bible normally as one of three major themes: nakedness, uncleanness, and being made an outcast.<sup>15</sup> David in this psalm is focused on the latter two themes, uncleanness and being made an outcast. Psalm 25 provides a powerful promise about the shame a Christian that has been the victim of sexual abuse experiences.

In verse 3 the Psalmist says, “none of those who wait for You will be ashamed.” Reading this promise leads to the following question. What does it mean to wait upon the Lord? David answers this question in the remainder of the psalm. Waiting on the Lord includes four aspects—obedience, confession, awe, and prayer. The ministry leader needs to teach each of these aspects to the survivor to help them overcome the shame they are experiencing.

In verses 4 and 5, David starts with obedience, asking God to teach him in two ways. The first step of obedience David teaches the reader is turning to God and away from oneself to learn how to be obedient. David is not trusting in himself to know how to

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<sup>14</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 41.

<sup>15</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 91.

follow God; instead, he is asking for God's divine guidance, according to God's gracious faithfulness.<sup>16</sup> The ways of God are recorded in God's written Word, but the interpreter required for the correct understanding of that Word is God Himself.<sup>17</sup> David recognizes that without the Lord enlightening his mind and guiding him by his grace he will never attain the obedience necessary to wait upon the Lord. Many have tried to understand and follow God's Word without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would describe these people much like the Pharisees of his day as whitewashed tombs (Matt 23:27). These people may look good and moral on the outside, but inside there is nothing but death. Calvin points out that if "David, so distinguished a prophet and endued with so much wisdom, stood in need of divine instruction, what shall become of us if, in our afflictions."<sup>18</sup> One cannot trust their own heart to guide them into obedience. Psalm 14 makes clear that everyone's heart is corrupt and cannot be trusted. A proud man assumes he knows what God wants; a humble man or woman says, "Lord, teach me."<sup>19</sup>

David's second step is opening God's Word regularly and following the path the Holy Spirit illuminates. David is committed to following the "ways" and "paths" of God. To follow a path requires one to make a series of specific decisions. A person must choose to put one foot in front of the next to stay on the path. Each time a person decides to be obedient, these decisions become a habit. Over time the practice of obedience becomes a lifestyle of obedience. The same is true when one decides not to be obedient.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research, 1997), 355.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 217.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 417.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Johnston, *The Psalms: Rejoice, the Lord Is King*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1 to 41*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 263.

It is important to note that David is not asking God to lead him in the “way” or “path” singularly; instead, he states in the plural. That is important because if one is to be obedient, one must follow God in all areas of life. There is no distinction here between the sacred and the secular. How David worshiped in the temple was as important as how David was to rule the kingdom. This is an important thing to point out to survivors of sexual abuse. Many will come seeking help for the problems associated with their abuse wanting to know God's “way” to deal with those specific problems. They need to learn that being obedient means more than just being obedient in the areas they want to overcome. Instead, their whole way of life while needs to be transformed by God’s Word. God’s Word helps the reader learn what is acceptable to God and what is sinful in every aspect of life. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). David encourages the readers to choose a lifestyle of obedience shaped by the Word of God. Verse 5 is an excellent verse to teach survivors to pray before they begin to read God’s Word.

Confession, the second aspect of waiting on the Lord, can be found in verses 6 through 11. David wants the reader to see that obedience is just the first step in the process of waiting on the Lord. If David were to be able to be obedient moving forward in his life, that obedience would not address the sin of his youth. David had already committed many sins against a holy God and his obedience alone would not atone for the sin of his youth. David is also aware that despite his earnest desire to be obedient, there would be times in the future that he would fail to be obedient. So, David points the reader to the importance of confession when it comes to waiting on the Lord. Confession is a means of grace that is often neglected in the body of Christ.

David, in his confession, seeks God’s grace by asking God to do two things for him. The first thing David wants God to do is to remember how good God is. David is asking God to recall his mercy. Mercy is the quality in God that keeps his covenantal

promises with his chosen people despite their unfaithfulness.<sup>20</sup> Gerald Wilson points out that the Hebrew word for mercy is related to the Hebrew word for the womb.<sup>21</sup> The mercy David is calling for is like the gentle compassion a mother has for her child (Isa 49:15). Calvin states that David must have been so grievously afflicted and tried that he himself had lost all sense of God's mercy and therefore calls upon God to remember for him his favor.<sup>22</sup> In addition to God's mercy, he calls on God to remember his steadfast love for him. God had committed himself to the nation of Israel and sealed that commitment by a covenant. While Israel has been unfaithful to their side of the covenant, God never failed in his commitment. This is exactly what David is counting on by asking God to remember his steadfast love.

The second thing that David asks is that God would forget his sin. The "sins of my youth" could refer to the sins committed by David before becoming an adult. Many adults look back on their teenage years and wish that they could erase days, months, or even years from their lives because of their sin. The "sins of my youth" could also refer to life-dominating sins David had battled since childhood. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse often must fight sexual sin for the rest of their life. Confession brings about grace in one's life by calling on God to forget their sin. Unlike humans who are prone to passively forget things, God actively chooses to forget. God is omnipotent, meaning that God knows everything there is to know; therefore, he cannot stop knowing something. Instead, David is asking God to actively not recall his sin and hold it against him any longer. Psalm 103:12 puts it this way: "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." The second part of this verse shows the active nature

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<sup>20</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Mercy," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 1440.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 418.

of God removing our sin from us. For those that are Christians, they have already experienced God's forgetfulness through the gospel. The more one confesses to God the depravity of their sin, the more they discover the depth of His love for them and the grace of his forgetfulness. Waiting on the Lord means being obedient and living a life of confession that upon finding forgiveness of sin leads to greater awe of the Lord.

In verses 12-15, David interrupts his prayer and addresses the reader in this section. David starts with a question about what it means to fear the Lord in the first half of verse 12 and then uses the remaining verses to provide the answer to his question. When one hears the word *fear* in a modern English context, they often equate this word to feeling scared or afraid of someone or something. This, however, is not how this word is used in this context. David is not describing a fearful person that needs to run in terror or hide from the Lord.

David, in verse 14, describes the opposite of terror with the word *friendship*. David's picture of fear of the Lord is of a person being instructed by God himself and being counted as a friend of God. Friendship implies intimate and personal knowledge of each party involved. It is enough of a blessing to have God teach people the path they should choose, but it is almost inconceivable to think that a holy and just God would ever become the friend of a sinner. Yet this is exactly what David is teaching in Psalm 25. This is also what Jesus taught: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant, does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). Likewise, the apostle Paul taught the Roman believers, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15). David is teaching the reader that the fear of the Lord transforms their relationship with God into one that leads to a deeper, more intimate relationship. Two parties cannot grow in this kind of intimacy without regularly talking to one another, leading to David's final way of waiting on the Lord through prayer.

David, in verses 16-22, turns again to God as he makes his final plea. David, in these verses, is expressing his heart-felt desire for God to save him as he waits upon the Lord. David describes this through several petitions to God. First, David asks God to “turn to me” or look upon me. David is seeking the Lord’s face by requesting that God turn his gaze upon David. David does this in hopes that God will see his condition and show him favor. This favor is fulfilled when God shows graciousness to David. David then describes how he feels in this moment. David expresses the way so many victims of sexual abuse feel, namely lonely and afflicted. David wants God to see his affliction and the trouble that he is experiencing. David, in this verse, is teaching the survivor of sexual abuse exactly where they need to take their affliction and pain from the abuse they have experienced.

David then turns God’s attention away from himself and onto his enemies. David wants the Lord to see how many people are against him and their hatred for him. Calvin points out, “Now, as the rage of David’s enemies was so great, that nothing short of his death would satisfy them.”<sup>23</sup> David in verse 20 is calling upon God to be the guardian of his soul amid so many enemies and to bring deliverance. David then restates the promise from verse 4 back to God, “Let me not be put to shame”—because he claims that he is taking refuge in the Lord and waiting upon him. In verse 21, “integrity and uprightness” are personified as two messengers sent by God to accompany and protect the psalmist.<sup>24</sup> Finally, in verse 22, David reminds the reader that this psalm is not just for himself but is true for all of God’s people that wait upon the Lord. When God’s people wait upon the Lord through obedience, confession, fear, and prayer, God will ultimately redeem them from all their troubles. David is not alone in the Scriptures in calling on God’s people to wait on the Lord and walk the path of righteousness. Yet for David like

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<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 434.

<sup>24</sup> Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, 159.

all Old Testament saints, they lived in a time in which the Messiah had not yet come to bring the victory over sin and death. In the New Testament, Paul was writing after the resurrection, and the gift of the Holy Spirit describes what it looks like for believers to walk the path of righteousness in Ephesians 4.

### **Ephesians 4:17-24**

In Ephesians 4:17-24 Paul helps the survivor of sexual abuse learn a new way of relating to the world. This section of Scripture is the second of five sections, each marked by the term *περιπατέω* translated “walk.”<sup>25</sup> Paul is calling Christians to walk in a way that is noticeably different from the world around them. Paul invokes this language to demonstrate the way a Christian, with their mind renewed, should respond to the world. The gospel fundamentally changes a person on every level of their being, including their mind. The more a Christian focuses on the truth of God, the more the Holy Spirit conforms the mind to their new identity.

Paul begins in verse 17 by insisting that a Christian should no longer think the way a Gentile thinks. This insisting is not on account of Paul's authority but on the authority of the Lord.<sup>26</sup> Paul reminds the reader what he also says in Romans about the nature of one that suppresses the truth about God. He begins this section about the Gentiles by reminding the reader that they live their lives based off meaningless views and theories. Paul's use of the word *νοῦς* translated “mind” has a few different meanings.<sup>27</sup> The most basic understanding of *νοῦς* refers to understanding, perceiving, or thinking ability. *νοῦς* can also mean one's disposition or moral attitude. *νοῦς* is sometimes used to express a person's opinion, plan, or resolve. Arnold argues that the way Paul is

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<sup>25</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 581.

<sup>26</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 281.

<sup>27</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 583.

using this word is to mean the set of worldview assumptions that guide the Gentiles' thoughts about life and their behavior in light of these convictions.<sup>28</sup>

Paul then goes on to say that this debased mind serves only to harden their hearts from God. In Scripture, the hardening of the heart can refer to a stubborn refusal to accept the things of God.<sup>29</sup> The Pharisees during the life of Jesus are an excellent example of those who stubbornly refuse to believe despite the miracles performed before their eyes. The Gentiles' hardness is connected more with numbness to the things of God.<sup>30</sup> Their lives are lived without a view of eternity, and therefore, they live in futility for the day at hand. The believer, in contrast, is to always live with eternity in mind, which gives his life purpose and meaning.<sup>31</sup> Paul uses the idea of a darkened heart in the following verse to help the reader understand the futility in which the Gentiles lived. Believers are called to live in the light of the gospel (1:18) and are called to be a light in a dark world (Matt 5:18).

Paul shows in verse 19 the resulting behavior of this darkened mind. Paul uses a metaphor of a callous growing over the Gentile heart. They become insensitive to the things of God and his ways. Hoehner points out that "the perfect participle expresses the continued effects of callousness."<sup>32</sup> The dulling for numbness can be understood as acting without a conscious or as one with no hope. Thielman shows that this callousness can lead to "violent public policy or suicide."<sup>33</sup> Without hope beyond this life, Paul says that

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 281.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 299.

<sup>30</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 298.

<sup>31</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 584.

<sup>32</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 589.

<sup>33</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 299.

they live for unrestrained debauchery. They seek to indulge in twisted sexual behavior such as the sexual abuse of children.<sup>34</sup> The Gentiles choose to have their pleasure no matter the cost to others, especially their victims. Paul says they hand themselves over voluntarily to the destructive forces of their desires.

Paul has presented the nature of the old self, and now he turns to show the reader what the new life in the Spirit looks like. Paul is emphatic that these ways the Gentiles live are not the ways of a Christian. Paul uses the phrase interpreted “learn Christ” to mean more than just learning about Jesus but learning to be in a relationship with him.<sup>35</sup> For Paul, Jesus is a living person. Jesus was not just some historical figure one should simply study. Instead, with Jesus, it is possible to develop a deep relationship. When one believes the gospel, Christ comes to live within the heart. There is no closer relationship than that, and the longer one walks with Christ, the closer he becomes in relationship with him. This relationship should be the case if one has, in fact, believed the gospel of Jesus. If not, then it is possible that one has not truly begun a relationship with Jesus. Paul seems to leave open the possibility that not all the people in the Ephesian church were regenerate church members. Those who have begun a relationship with Jesus are being taught about him and led into his truth.

Paul, in this final section, demonstrates what a believer’s life should look like. First, Christians are to lay aside their old life in the flesh. This old life is what Paul has described previously in the negative as the Gentile way of life. Paul has shown how the old way of life was once centered around greed, lust, sexual sin, and a hardening of the heart toward God. Paul now wants to explain how this new life can be lived. This new

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<sup>34</sup> A non-Roman citizen had no legal right to bring a charge of rape or sexual abuse. So, slaves, children of slaves, and non-citizens could be treated as sexual objects for the pleasure of their master or other Roman citizens. There were even some accounts of masters forcing their slaves into the sexual service of their guests. For a brief description of this, see Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 104-5.

<sup>35</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 300.

life begins by taking off the old one like one takes off a piece of clothing. Conversion marked the beginning of being able to take off the old self.<sup>36</sup> This was not something they could do on their own, but they needed God's help to begin the process at the moment of conversion.

The moment of conversion is marked by confession and repentance. Paul, in this passage, is merely calling the believer into an ongoing process of continuing repentance.<sup>37</sup> Paul's theology is marked by a tension between the "already" and the "not yet" concerning the fulfillment of the believer's sanctification. Paul wants his readers to know that the way to progress in their sanctification is the same process that began at salvation. The old self is more than just a way of thinking and behaving.<sup>38</sup> Christians are called to put off their old identity with Adam and to now put on their new identity in Christ. They are to no longer see themselves as slaves to their flesh bound by its sinful desires destined to become calloused toward the things of God.

Paul uses the analogy of "put off" and "put on" to call to mind the image of daily changing one's clothes. Paul wants believers to know that this process he is calling them to is a daily one. This daily reality can be seen partly in Paul's choice of using the present tense for the second infinitive clause to emphasize the regularity of the process of the present infinitive. Paul repeats this language in verse 25 once again using the aorist tense. The process of confession and repentance will be an ongoing part of the Christian's daily routine. Paul assumes that those who are in Christ have been taught this reality from the beginning of their conversion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 603.

<sup>37</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 281.

<sup>38</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 287.

<sup>39</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 305.

The second thing Paul assumes they have learned is that they continually need to be renewed in their thinking. The verb ἀνανεοῦσθαι is in the present tense, which means it is referring to an ongoing process in the Christian's life. Paul is here contrasting the difference between the old way of living and the new way of living.<sup>40</sup> The old way of living was in a constant state of decay. The new life, by contrast, is daily being renewed by the truth of Christ. Paul uses the passive voice for "being renewed" so that the reader understands that this action is happening because of God's Spirit at work within the believer.<sup>41</sup> The more a person learns to yield to the Spirit's work in his/her life, the more renewal will take place in the person's spirit.

The final thing Paul assumes they have been taught is to "put on the new person." Having put off their old self and having their mind continually renewed, believers are now free to live out their new identity in Christ. This new identity is not one in which they must earn since they already have full possession of this new identity at the moment of their salvation. It was at this time that they were also sealed with the Spirit (Eph 1:13). Paul again is pointing the reader back to the daily aspect of sanctification. Each day one must yield to the work of the Spirit, having their thinking transformed, and bringing their life into conformity with their new identity.<sup>42</sup>

This new identity is marked by two distinguishing features: "righteousness" and "holiness." These two virtues are often found paired in ancient literature.<sup>43</sup> Paul intends to speak in a general way in this verse as an introduction to the next set of verses that get more specific about how righteousness and holiness look in the life of a believer. Paul wants the reader to see a general contrast between the way one should live and the

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<sup>40</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 305.

<sup>41</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 607.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold, *Ephesians*, 290.

<sup>43</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 306.

old way of life. Whereas the old life is marked by deceit and decay, the new life is marked by holiness and righteousness. This is where the concept of God's cleansing work through the blood of Jesus can further help the survivor of sexual abuse to understand how they can be both righteous and holy before God. Survivors need to see that their holiness is a direct result of the renewing of the spirit made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

### **Conclusion**

God's Word is sufficient for meeting every human need. Sexual abuse is not an exception to this truth. This chapter briefly covered three passages that speak to the needs of sexual abuse. Psalm 23 introduces the survivor of sexual abuse to the Good Shepherd and teaches them four essential truths about God. First, it teaches that the Lord is their shepherd and that they can trust him. Second, it assures that the Good Shepherd will lead them into peace and rest. Third, it promises that the Good Shepherd will restore their soul. Finally, it declares that the Lord was with them and never left their side while they walked through the valley of the shadow of death of their abuse. This psalm helps to begin to combat the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and abandonment that survivors often feel.

Psalm 25 teaches believers why they can ultimately trust this Good Shepherd they are introduced to in Psalm 23. God's Word promises that those who wait upon the Lord will never be put to shame. This truth is a revolutionary concept to a survivor of sexual abuse that has lived a life marked by shame. Shame and often its confusion with guilt is an issue that plagues many survivors of sexual abuse. Psalm 25 speaks to this need and offers the survivors a path forward out of the shame that they have been experiencing. The topic of shame and its relation to guilt will be addressed in more detail in chapter 3.

Finally, texts like Ephesians 4:17-24 remind survivors that they no longer must walk as one with a darkened mind in Christ. They can find freedom from their old lives in the new identity that comes at salvation. Fellowship with God is grounded not in themselves but the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The truths offered through these verses breathe encouragement into the lives of survivors of sexual abuse. When the Spirit of Christ applies the work of salvation in their heart, they will experience freedom from the guilt and shame that belongs to their abuser. The next chapter will help ministry leaders identify victims of sexual abuse and apply these truths of Scripture to their lives to help survivors see their new identity and change their outlook on their future forever.

## CHAPTER 3

### TRAINING MINISTRY LEADERS TO RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND TO SEXUAL ABUSE

Many churches do not respond well to sexual abuse because most church leaders do not know how to define it accurately. The church cannot effectively respond to sexual abuse without accurate recognition. A church's sexual abuse plan must define sexual abuse, so that ministry leaders and church staff know how to determine when it is occurring or has previously occurred in someone's life. As mentioned in chapter 1, this project defines sexual abuse as "any type of sexual behavior or contact where consent is not freely given or obtained and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority."<sup>1</sup>

This definition first requires ministry leaders to understand what qualifies as sexual abuse. "Any type of sexual behavior or contact" can include the obvious sexual sins of molestation, incest, or pedophilia. However, this definition can also include exposing a person to sexually explicit material such as pornography.<sup>2</sup> People often limit their understanding of what qualifies as sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup> Understandably, this is not a pleasant subject that people want to dwell on for an extended period. If the church is going to become a sanctuary for those who have been assaulted, leaders need to spend time defining sexual abuse properly.

This chapter argues that the church needs to help leaders recognize sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 59.

abuse and respond to it helpfully, without causing further harm. In so doing, I will first discuss the importance of raising awareness of sexual abuse for ministry leaders. This section also includes the signs and indicators that ministry leaders should be made aware of in the lives of those they serve. The second section demonstrates how the ministry leaders should respond when they discover someone in their care has been the victim of sexual abuse. This section includes instruction for the direct care by the ministry leader, and seeking outside counseling when appropriate.

### **Raising Awareness of Signs and Indicators of Sexual Abuse**

The difficulty with survivors of sexual abuse is that they will rarely come out and tell someone they have been sexually abused. There are certain sins that people feel more comfortable sharing in a small group setting than others. Sexual abuse, by its very nature, usually is a secret sin that many seek to hide from the world.<sup>4</sup> Yet sexual sin, like all sin, leaves its mark upon a person. The impact of sexual abuse is often severe, deep-seated, and long-lasting in the victim's life.<sup>5</sup>

A word of caution about the following sections: the presence of one or more of the indicators does not automatically mean the person is a survivor of sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup> Ministry leaders need to learn about the various indicators to begin to look for patterns of behavior that might indicate sexual abuse is happening or has happened in this person's life. Unfortunately, this is more of an art than a science and will take time and practice on the part of ministry leaders. When abuse is suspected, one should always ask a person directly, no matter how many of the following behavioral, emotional, or physical

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<sup>4</sup> Carla van Dam, *Identifying Child Molester: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse by Recognizing the Patterns of the Offenders* (New York: Haworth Press, 2006), 49.

<sup>5</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Besharov, *Recognizing Child Abuse: A Guide for the Concerned* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 95.

indicators are present. Ministry leaders should accept the answer given as, again, many will seek to hide their abuse. The fact that someone cared enough to ask will often lead the victim to watch the leader to see if they are trustworthy to share the secret. It is not uncommon for a person to deny being abused and then come back later and admit that they had lied to cover up the abuse because they were ashamed. By learning the behavioral, spiritual-emotional, and physical signs and indicators of abuse, ministry leaders can help survivors identify the effects that the sin of sexual abuse has had on their lives.

### **Behavioral Signs of Sexual Abuse**

Ministry leaders will often notice behavioral signs first when dealing with someone that is actively being abused. The following behavioral indicators can normally be seen the easiest in children and teenagers. Ministry leaders, though, should be paying attention when someone is sharing their testimony or story and if they speak of similar behaviors in their childhood. This may provide ministry leaders with clues to sexual abuse in their past that has never been dealt with or even acknowledged.

The first sign to look for is any sudden changes in behavior, such as when a child's teacher notices that a normally happy and outgoing child suddenly becomes withdrawn and quiet, for instance. Another example would be when a teenager goes from wearing typical summer attire to wearing sweatshirts and baggy clothing during the warm summer months. One of the most common ways sexual abuse has been discovered in schools is by gym teachers that notice a child's unwillingness to change clothes for gym class.<sup>7</sup> These sudden behavior shifts should always be investigated when possible by asking open-ended questions.<sup>8</sup> Children and teenagers may not immediately want to open

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<sup>7</sup> Besharov, *Recognizing Child Abuse*, 97.

<sup>8</sup> Besharov, *Recognizing Child Abuse*, 97.

up and talk about what has happened because they themselves still do not understand it.

Second, listen for changes in sleeping habits.<sup>9</sup> For instance, abuse may be suspected when a teenager suddenly has trouble sleeping after a camping trip. Another example might be a child suddenly having nightmares after staying with an extended family member or family friend. Parents may also report a child who has not had a bed-wetting problem suddenly revert to regularly wetting the bed. Ministry leaders should pay attention, especially if anyone mentions these changes in their sleeping patterns.

Self-harm is a third area of behavioral signs of sexual abuse. Self-harm is often one of the most challenging areas to discover. Survivors of sexual abuse often go to great lengths to hide any evidence of self-harm. Therefore, it is crucial to notice behavioral changes, like wearing long sleeves in summer or wearing an excessive number of bracelets that entirely cover the wrists. Paying attention to the physical signs can help ministry leaders discover the emotional signs that are harder to see.

Self-harm can come in two broad forms. First, there are direct methods of self-harm. Cutting is an example of a direct method of self-harm. In cutting, the person seeks to inflict pain upon the body, in many cases to either punish or stimulate the adrenaline rush one feels after being injured.<sup>10</sup> The less extreme version of this is an individual that purposefully encourages hangnails on their fingers so they can press them to feel pain. The second form of self-harm involves indirect methods. These forms can include limiting food as a form of punishment to the body. Excessive exercise can be another way a person can inflict self-harm. In our current culture, both of these behaviors are often seen as positive behaviors and even encouraged without realizing that the individual is actually punishing themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Diane Lanberg, *Suffering and Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015), 214.

<sup>10</sup> Lanberg, *Suffering and Heart of God*, 275.

The fourth behavioral sign that ministry leaders should be aware of is inappropriate sexual behavior. Victims of sexual abuse can confuse sexual activity with love. If an individual was abused by a family member, family friend, or significant other, he or she might have confused the physical act of sex with the emotion of love. Therefore, the way he or she shows love toward someone is primarily through physical intimacy.<sup>11</sup> If a person in a small group consistently keeps having inappropriate sexual relationships in short-term relationships, this can be a sign of sexual abuse. Another form of this unacceptable behavior is when someone is attracted to a much older or younger person than themselves. If the abuse occurred during childhood, someone's ideas of sexuality could skew toward a more senior partner.

Sexual behavior can also be affected within the confines of marriage.<sup>12</sup> Husbands or wives that struggle with having consistent physical intimacy may signify that one or both have been a victim of sexual abuse. Sex can be seen as dirty or inappropriate, even inside of marriage. Some women will allow sexual relations for the purpose of procreation only. Once children have been acquired, their desire to continue the sexual activity stops. The spouse can justify the sexual act when it has a practical purpose but the idea that sex can be for enjoyment and mutual pleasure is not understood. This level of discipleship assumes ministry leaders are moving beyond surface-level conversations and dealing with deeper heart issues in their disciples' lives.

Ministry leaders who hear someone share details like these when sharing their past should always consider that they were a potential victim of sexual abuse. While these signs may point to sexual abuse, they may also point to physical abuse or neglect from a parent. Ministry leaders should never assume it is sexual abuse without getting more

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<sup>11</sup> McFadyen, *Bound to Sin*, 73-74.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Michelle Greenburg, *Not Forsaken: A Story of Life After Abuse* (Surrey, England: Good Book Company, 2019), 202.

information. Ministry leaders should be trained to recognize these behaviors as possible signs of abuse at this point and look for more evidence from emotional and physical indicators.

### **Spiritual-Emotional Signs of Sexual Abuse**

While behavioral indicators can be seen quickly, spiritual-emotional indicators may not be as apparent to ministry leaders. Culturally this is changing when it comes to the first two indicators of sexual abuse. Depression and anxiety are two areas that people are more likely to discuss than they were twenty years ago. People who tend to suffer chronically from these two conditions without any clear reason may suffer from sexual abuse earlier in life.

Depression from a biblical counseling perspective is prolonged sadness that results in hopelessness and in some way debilitates or immobilizes a person from proper functioning. The person has lost hope that things will change in his or her life. Hopelessness is often a deeply held belief. People in the church that have been sad or depressed for an extended period, or as long as they can remember, are displaying another warning sign. Not all sad and depressed people have been sexually abused, but chronic sadness without an exact cause should be explored.

Fear and anxiety are also spiritual-emotional symptoms often seen in victims of sexual abuse.<sup>13</sup> People struggling with anxiety often feel that their life is out of control. From a biblical counseling perspective, the anxious person is trying to control something in which they are not designed to control. Sexual abuse victims often feel as though they have lost control over their lives because of the abuse and therefore seek to find control in other areas of life. However, when these areas of life prove to be uncontrollable as well, it

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<sup>13</sup> P. A. Resick, "The Psychological Impact of Rape," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 8, no. 2 (June 1993): 224.

creates a state of anxiety. To be clear, everyone that suffers from anxiety or fear has not been a victim of sexual abuse. However, these should be seen as another indicator that a person may have been abused.

The third area of spiritual-emotional indicators a ministry leader should be aware of is eating disorders.<sup>14</sup> These disorders are a form of pride, biblically speaking.<sup>15</sup> Pride specifically in the form of control, when the individual feels out of control in other areas of life, they seek to control their diet.<sup>16</sup> For some, this means restricting the amount of food that they eat. For others, it may be indulging and overeating as a form of defense to make themselves unattractive and, therefore, less likely to be the target of future sexual abuse. Due to the stigma still attached to eating disorders, most people will not disclose they have an eating disorder. However, you may hear an individual mention they had an eating disorder when they were a younger child or teenager. This gives ministry leaders another further evidence of potential sexual abuse in their past.

Victims will sometimes present with emotional numbness.<sup>17</sup> Numbness is another defense mechanism of the body to get relief from a particular situation. Emotional numbness is most often seen in victims of repeated abuse by either the same person or multiple abusers. One victim reported feeling unable to understand the love and acceptance that everyone else in their small group seemed to experience through the gospel. She felt as though she was defective because she only felt numb when others seemed to be encouraged by learning the truths of the gospel. The survivor learns to mute

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<sup>14</sup> Eating disorders are both emotional and behavioral in nature. I chose to place this under emotional indicators because of its commonality with anxiety.

<sup>15</sup> Marie Notcheva, *Redeemed from the Pit: Biblical Repentance and Restoration from the Bondage of Eating Disorders* (New York: Calvary Press, 2011), 124.

<sup>16</sup> Ed Welch, *Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Addiction* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Lanberg, *Suffering and Heart of God*, 274.

negative emotions like fear and sadness. Emotions, however, cannot be selectively muted, and the result is a numbness toward all emotions.<sup>18</sup> Ministry leaders should pay attention when a believer says they struggle to ever feel joy.

The final spiritual-emotional sign ministry leaders should be looking for is a person that struggles to trust.<sup>19</sup> This can be seen in a woman that struggles to trust her husband even though the husband has never done anything to warrant her mistrust. Mistrust can also be seen in people who struggle to trust church leadership. Sadly, these people are seen as unruly because they fail to comply with and trust the leaders in their lives. Well-meaning ministry leaders will focus on the need for submission without understanding the underlying struggle that is greater than the normal struggle to submit to another human being because of the violation of trust.

### **Physical Signs of Sexual Abuse**

Physical signs are often the hardest to recognize of the three kinds of indicators of possible sexual abuse. These may be disclosed in the form of prayer requests in a group setting. In more personal discipleship relationships, these may be disclosed, but without the other pieces of evidence, they can seem to be normal physical ailments. The effects of abuse can cause long term reactions in the physical body. Survivors of abuse may have unexplained pain, which may be diagnosed as another condition. Listening for the behavioral and emotional signs will help the ministry leader classify the physical indicators they discover correctly.

The most obvious physical signs are sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). This is especially true if the person is a child or teenager. If a person is sharing a story and dealing with STDs is a part of that story, this can be a clue to past sexual abuse.

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<sup>18</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Besharov, *Recognizing Child Abuse*, 2.

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are another physical sign that a child or teenager is potentially being abused. This can sometimes be discovered by parents continually asking for prayer for their daughter. While there may be other causes for UTIs, if any of the behavioral changes or emotional symptoms are also present, ministry leaders should take note.

A second broad category of physical symptoms is gastrointestinal disorders. Victims of sexual abuse can present with chronic gastrointestinal conditions. While this is often attributed to stress or poor diet, it can also be a physical sign of sexual abuse. Non-ulcer dyspepsia is another gastrointestinal disorder that may signify abuse. The person will present with all the same symptoms as someone with an ulcer, yet no ulcer can be found upon examination. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is characterized by chronic abdominal bloating, cramping, and altered bowel habits.<sup>20</sup> Chronic abdominal pain is a final gastrointestinal condition that victims of sexual abuse may suffer from in their lives. The stomach will often express the way a person feels on the inside. If they are suffering in silence, the body will find ways to express that suffering. The gastrointestinal system is often the first place affected when someone has internalized sexual abuse.

The third category of physical signs is gynecological disorders. Women who have been victims of sexual abuse often suffer from various gynecological conditions. Survivors of sexual abuse often complain of chronic pelvic pain. This pelvic pain can come in many forms, such as dysmenorrhea and menstrual irregularities. Endometriosis is another gynecological disorder that can develop in survivors of sexual abuse. Each of these conditions may have another root cause, so it is essential to listen and look for other abuse signs before making any assumptions.

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<sup>20</sup> Randy A. Sansone and Lori A. Sansone, "Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Relationships with Abuse in Childhood," *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience* 12, nos. 5-6 (May-June 2015): 34-37.

## **Other Signs of Sexual Abuse**

There are a couple of other vital signs that are important to mention that do not fall into our three general categories above. The first is called somatization. According to the Mayo Clinic, Somatic symptom disorder is characterized by an extreme focus on physical symptoms—such as pain or fatigue—that cause significant emotional distress and problems functioning.<sup>21</sup> The survivor of sexual abuse may or may not have another diagnosed medical condition associated with these symptoms, but this reaction to the symptoms is not normal. Pain is the most common symptom the survivor experiences. The abnormal reaction includes excessive thoughts, feelings and/or behaviors related to their symptoms. The excessive behavior becomes the issue, not the actual physical symptoms. These excessive concerns cause significant problems for the abuse victim. The obsessions can make it difficult to function and sometimes can be debilitating. These thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can include the following: obsessive worry about possible illness, misinterpreting normal physical sensations as a potential severe physical illness, fear that symptoms are serious even with no factual basis, or believing that physical sensations are a threat. Furthermore, victims may feel that medical diagnosis and care have not been correct or enough, fear injury from physical activity, or constantly check the body for abnormalities. They might make frequent doctor visits which do not alleviate concerns but instead deepen them, be unresponsive to medical treatment or be abnormally sensitive to side effects from medication, or have a more severe impairment than is usually expected from a medical condition. Finally, they might suffer from IBS, non-ulcer dyspepsia, or chronic abdominal pain.<sup>22</sup>

The final sign that is important for ministry leaders to recognize is related to

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<sup>21</sup> Mayo Clinic, “Somatic Symptom Disorder,” accessed November 15, 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/somatic-symptom-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20377776>.

<sup>22</sup> Mayo Clinic, “Somatic Symptom Disorder.”

the victim's age at the time of their abuse. When victims have a child, who has reached the same age as when their abuse took place, they can have a destabilizing reaction. Victims of childhood abuse will often block out memories of abuse. Once their child reaches the same age as their abuse, memories start to return. In addition, as the parent of the child, they begin to see their abuse from a different perspective. A victim may see the innocence that an eight to ten-year-old has from a sexual perspective and begin to understand their abuse as an act of violation against a child. This could be a traumatic time for the victim and their spouse if they were unaware of the prior abuse. Ministry leaders should pay close attention to a spouse asking for prayer for his wife, who is crying at night and withdrawing from the family. Ministry leaders working with young parents should pay attention to parents as their children move through various development stages.

This section was not meant to be an exhaustive list of the signs that a person may present with as a possible victim of sexual abuse. For the purpose of this project, it gives ministry leaders a framework of the three major areas of symptoms a survivor might present within the local church. Each of these symptoms can have another cause, so ministry leaders need to learn to look for multiple indicators over time. Ministry leaders that care for their people should be looking and watching for opportunities to apply the gospel to every area of a disciple's life. Ministry leaders aware of these behavioral, emotional, physical, and other signs are positioned better to respond to any sexual abuse they discover. The next section outlines a framework for ministry leaders to be able to respond to and apply the gospel in a victim's life.

### **Responding to Sexual Abuse**

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse is an essential first step in ministering to people who have been victims of abuse. However, it is not enough for ministry leaders to recognize the abuse. They must also respond appropriately to minister

to the victim of abuse. Responding appropriately to sexual abuse requires having a procedure in place for ministry leaders to follow. The ministry leader's response should always begin by caring for the victim. Survivor care involves several steps that will typically be in the following order.

First, ministry leaders need to recognize the signs mentioned above and symptoms of sexual abuse and then ask, when appropriate, the person if they have been or are currently the victim of sexual abuse. Second, the ministry leader will need to listen and believe what the person says about the abuse. Third, the ministry leader should ascertain if the person is in any immediate danger of experiencing more abuse and work with church leaders to get the individual into a place of safety if the abuse is still occurring. Fourth, the ministry leader will need to report the abuse to the proper authorities as legally required by state law. Fifth, the ministry leader will need to begin to instill hope in the victim that the sexual abuse is not his or her fault and that Christ forgives both the sins they have committed, and the sins committed against them. Finally, if possible, leaders should help connect the person with a biblical counselor and offer to go with them if that will make them more comfortable.

### **Recognize and Ask**

Before beginning this section, ministry leaders need to remember that the existence of just one of the signs or symptoms listed above should not be enough for them to assume sexual abuse. Instead, recognizing requires spending time getting to know the person in their care and looking for a behavior pattern that might suggest sexual abuse. Rarely will a person volunteer that they have been sexually abused unless they have already received counseling for the abuse. So, it is crucial not only to recognize the signs and symptoms but also to ask. Ministry leaders should never assume sexual abuse without asking and verifying.

Ministry leaders should not be surprised upon asking to hear the person say

that they have never been abused. Many victims feel shame for what has occurred and, over time, will either minimize the abuse or convince themselves that it was their fault or that it was consensual. Some victims will not yet feel safe enough to share their experience for fear of judgment or disbelief with the ministry leader. Those victims that did speak up during the abuse were often silenced by family members when the abuse is familial.

When it comes time to ask, the ministry leader should also be intentional about creating a safe environment. They should make sure there is plenty of time set aside to allow the person to share their story and not feel rushed. Ministry leaders that are asking someone from the opposite sex should always have another person of the victim's gender available to sit in on the meeting. Some victims will have difficulty sharing their experiences with someone of the opposite sex. Occasionally the person may have experienced sexual abuse from someone in leadership in the church, so having the second person can help create a sense of safety. Ideally, this second person needs to be trained and knowledgeable on how to respond to someone sharing that they have been a victim of abuse.

### **Listen and Believe**

Once the question has been asked, it is now time to listen and believe. Victims often struggle with the idea that anyone will believe them. Their abusers will often tell them that no one will believe them and over time, they become convinced this is true. Sadly, many abusers are prominent people or people in authority, and they use their reputation to silence their victims. One example is a woman who was sexually abused by her father, a sheriff's deputy, and well respected in the community. Any time she threatened to report her abuse, he would remind her that no one would believe her over

him.<sup>23</sup> This is why it is essential to listen and believe the victim's story.<sup>24</sup>

Ministry leaders must resist the temptation to race in at this point and share the gospel before hearing the victim's story. Many well-meaning ministry leaders have inadvertently turned victims away by trying to fix them before hearing the full problem. Patiently listening can be difficult if the ministry leader has limited experience dealing with sexual abuse. It is challenging to listen to the atrocities that one human being will do to another. It is tough when the abuser is familial. Robert Kellemen points out correctly that "we earn the right to interact about God's eternal story by first listening to our friend's earthly story."<sup>25</sup>

## **Safety**

Once someone has shared that they are or have been victims of sexual abuse, the ministry leader should determine if the victim is currently living in a safe place. Safety is most important when the abuse is ongoing. Choosing a plan to provide emergency housing is of the utmost importance to prevent future abuse. Once the abuser discovers that their sin has been revealed, they can turn violent, so the victim's safety must be the most significant concern. Protection may involve the ministry leader working with church leadership or an abuse shelter in their area to provide emergency housing.<sup>26</sup> It is important for ministry leaders to familiarize themselves with the various community shelter options as well as resources the church can provide for temporary housing. In addition, ministry leaders should also ask about other family members that may be in

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<sup>23</sup> Thankfully in this case after seeking counseling she did report the abuse and he was stripped of his position with the sheriff's department. Sadly, because there was no physical evidence he was never convicted.

<sup>24</sup> Besharov, *Recognizing Child Abuse*, 89. At this point in the process, one should suspend doubt until things can be investigated by the authorities.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Kellemen, *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2013), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 160-61.

danger of sexual abuse. For instance, younger siblings may also need to be included in an effective safety plan if abuse is ongoing.

Safety will look different when the abuse happened in the victim's past. Abuse victims will sometimes continue to put themselves in dangerous or abusive relationships because this is relationally familiar. Ministry leaders should take some time to ask questions about the victim's current living situation. If they are living with a boyfriend or family members who is continuing to abuse them, a plan should be put in place to get them to a place of safety as soon as possible.

These initial steps to provide a safe environment are essential. Next, the ministry leader needs to develop a secure relationship with the victim. Ministry leaders must keep in mind that the person that abused them was often in a position of trust. The abuser could have been a family member, babysitter, or even a pastor. It will be necessary for ministry leaders to establish a relationship of trust with the victim. Trust is developed in the context of relational experiences. If the victim has been in the ministry leader's care for a while, the hope is that this trust has been developed. If not, the ministry leader should work to build that trust. Trust will be important in the next step of encouraging them to report. It may also be beneficial for the ministry leader to attend the final stage of biblical counseling with the victim until they have developed a secure relationship with the counselor.

## **Report**

Once safety is established, ministry leaders should then determine what legal obligations they may have to report the abuse. The laws vary from state to state. For this project's context, the following is an overview of what reporting should look like in the state of Florida. In addition to legal requirements, ministry leaders should also familiarize themselves with the internal reporting procedures that church leaders have put into place. The church should use the law as only the minimum requirement and should hold itself to

even higher standards. The church is called to care for those who have been taken advantage of and go above and beyond, as the example set by the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

The Florida statutes do not specifically enumerate clergy or other ministry leaders as mandatory reporters of sexual abuse as it does for physicians and teachers. However, ministry leaders may be listed as mandated reporters because of the “any person” designation in the mandatory reporting statute.<sup>27</sup> It is safer for ministry leaders to assume they are mandatory reporters and report the abuse.

It is also important to note that only two broad kinds of sexual abuse have laws regarding reporting in the state of Florida. The first is any case of abuse perpetrated on someone under the age of eighteen. Florida law provides detailed explanations of how abuse is defined and who is required to report such abuse. Second, Florida law requires the reporting of sexual (or any kind of) abuse of those they define as vulnerable adults. Sexual abuse may include an elderly person abused in a nursing home, or it may include a mentally impaired person over the age of eighteen who is incapable of giving consent.

This definition of sexual abuse legally means that for anyone over the age of eighteen who is a mentally capable adult that has been sexually abused, it is not mandatory that a ministry leader report the abuse to law enforcement. While the law does not explicitly require the sexual abuse to be reported, it is still a good idea to encourage the victim to report the abuse or for the ministry leader to offer to sit with them while they call and report.

In addition to being called to be people of justice, history has shown two good reasons for encouraging the victim to report the abuse. The first reason is that perpetrators

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<sup>27</sup> State of Florida, “Mandatory Reporting,” *2020 Florida Statutes*, accessed November 15, 2020, [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=0400-0499/0415/Sections/0415.1034.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0400-0499/0415/Sections/0415.1034.html).

of sexual abuse rarely have only one victim. This is especially true of those who sexually abuse children. The ministry leader may be working with a thirty-year-old whose abuse took place at the age of fourteen. Since over fifteen years have passed, some would question why to report at this point. That abuser may still have access to fourteen-year-olds, and if that is the case, this report could potentially prevent the creation of other victims by this abuser.

The second reason is that there will be a record on file in case another victim speaks up and reports the abuser. The report may not be acted upon due to the length of time from when the abuse happened or due to a lack of law enforcement resources to pursue an investigation. Sadly, many abusers escape the first couple of attempts at prosecution because of a lack of physical evidence. Some abusers make it a pattern to move every few years so that the same law enforcement agency is not notified so that they can escape the appearance of a pattern of abuse. Having multiple victim's testimonies makes it more difficult for abusers to win the "he said, she said" argument. This also helps law enforcement to establish a pattern of behavior that can lead to an arrest and successful prosecution.

For these reasons, it is always best, as a rule, to encourage the victim to report sexual abuse whether required by law or not. If the abuse is ongoing, it should be reported as soon as everyone involved can be placed in a position of safety. If the abuse was in the past, there is no rush to report though a report should be made unless the perpetrator is no longer alive. The process of reporting sexual abuse in Florida is simple for ministry leaders. There are two primary ways to report the abuse by telephone or the internet.<sup>28</sup> Upon completion of these initial steps, it is essential to instill hope and assure the victim of the truths found in God's Word.

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<sup>28</sup> The abuse hotline is available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and can be reached at 1-800-962-2873. The report can also be filed at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us/> online.

## **Assurance**

Once the ministry leader has listened to the victim's story and taken the appropriate steps to get him or her into a place of safety, they should next point the victim to the truths of the gospel. Instilling hope can be done in a variety of ways. The first would be walking the victim through relevant passages of Scripture. Second, there are several books and booklets available about sexual abuse. Finally, it is crucial to help the victim understand the various means of grace that God has ordained for them to receive grace in their lives. This section gives a brief overview of each of these areas and some of the resources available to assist the ministry leader.

**Bible studies.** There are many Scripture passages one can turn to instill hope in victims of sexual abuse. The first example would be walking the victim through a text like Psalm 23. Victims can identify with walking through the “valley of the shadow of death” based on their own life experiences post-abuse. The ministry leader can help the victim identify with the sheep and see the kind and compassionate shepherd that can restore their soul. However, this text may cause the victim to ask where this shepherd was when the abuse was taking place.

To answer this question, the ministry leader should take the victim to Genesis 39. Ministry leaders should start by giving the victim some background of the details leading up to this chapter about Joseph's life. Joseph had been human trafficked by his own brothers (Gen 37:12-36 ESV). Then, the person that he had been sold into slavery to attempts to force him into committing adultery (Gen 39). When Joseph refused, he was accused falsely and sent to prison because he was not believed. Unbelief is a second place that many victims can identify with Joseph. When they tried to share their story, they were not believed either. The ministry leader should point out that from the beginning of his story to the end, God was with Joseph. God's presence makes the difference in how Joseph responds to his abuse. Helping the victim see that God was with them through the abuse can help the victim see Jesus as the good shepherd in their lives and instill hope.

Victims that were abused by those close to them such as a family friend or relative may find the Psalms offer particular help and comfort. Leading them in a study of Psalm 55 will help the victim see that they are not alone in their mistreatment. Psalm 55 also helps the victim put words to their suffering. Yet amid the suffering this Psalm also points the victim back to putting their trust in God and his ultimate justice. This theme of trusting in God is carried over into Psalm 56. The victim is reminded that God has stored up their tears in a bottle and that God is for the victim. Trusting God will be a difficult but vital element in moving forward.

Finally, for victims that think that no one can understand their pain and humiliation, ministry leaders can walk them through the crucifixion accounts in the Gospels. They might point out that Jesus was beaten and stripped of all his clothing multiple times while on the way to the cross (Matt 27:27-30 ESV). Ministry leaders should help victims see that they have a Savior that can identify with their pain. Jesus was beaten, spat upon, and mocked by the religious leaders and Roman soldiers. Jesus understands what it means to be humiliated. This same Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand, continually making intercession for the victim. Ministry leaders need to help the victim see that they have a High Priest who can identify with their suffering (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25 ESV). These passages are just a small sample of the biblical truths ministry leaders can use to assure victims and begin to instill hope their lives.

**Books and booklets.** In addition to the many biblical passages which offer hope and encouragement to victims, other resources fall into the two categories of books and booklets. *Not Forsaken* by Jennifer Greenberg speaks to the issue of abuse by an individual who claims to be a Christian. Abuse perpetrated within the church brings up many specific problems for victims. Greenberg can offer particular insights and hope for those abused by someone within the church. *Rid of My Disgrace* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb gives survivors and those who are assisting survivors' useful information about

the prevalence of abuse and a sound theological approach to counseling victims. *Rid of My Disgrace* also gives valuable insight into victims' thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a wide range of situations. The Holcombs can help victims feel understood, and ministry leaders understand what those in their care may be dealing with in their lives. *Treasure in the Ashes* by Sue Nicewander and Maria Brookins is an interactive book that can help an ongoing discipleship relationship. The authors promote Christ-centered discipleship and allow for the many difficult questions that victims often have in the aftermath of abuse.

In addition to books on abuse, many smaller booklets are available for quick and repeated reference for ministry leaders and abuse victims. In *Sexual Abuse: Beauty for Ashes*, Bob Kelleman uses Amnon and Tamar's biblical story to address the aftermath and damage of sexual abuse. Kelleman shows that the Bible addresses abuse and is a valuable resource for victims during their recovery. Jim Newheiser offers support to those counseling an individual who has been sexually abused in *Help! Someone I Love Has Been Abused*. Newheiser helps the reader to be able to offer compassion as well as scriptural support to someone who is dealing with abuse. David Powlison teaches about the importance and value of the biblical practice of lament in his booklet *Recovering from Child Abuse: Healing and Hope for Victims*. Powlison encourages the readers to communicate their experiences and feelings to God while moving toward restoration and healing that can only be found in him. In *Sexual Assault: Healing Steps for Victims*, Powlison helps victims deal with the lingering aftereffects of abuse, namely shame, fear, worry, and anger. Powlison also points the reader toward their identity in Christ and not as a victim.

**Means of grace.** Ministry leaders need to make sure the victim of sexual abuse is aware of the means of grace offered to them from God. Once the victim shares about their abusive past, they will need all the grace available to them. The five means of grace

outlined by Brad Bigney are Bible reading, Scripture memory, prayer, worship, and biblical community.<sup>29</sup> It is crucial to get the victim involved in each of these means of grace as soon as possible.

Acts 20:32 says, “I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.” The victim of sexual abuse often feels as though their abuse has made them low. This Scripture promises to help build them back up in grace through reading the Word. The emphasis on Bible reading should not be one of legalism but instead of knowing more about God. Bible reading helps the victim to grow in their relationship with God. In addition to reading the Word, the victim should also be encouraged to start memorizing the Scripture they are reading. Ministry leaders should suggest a series of verses for the victim to start committing to memory, and offer accountability. Scripture memory will help the victim recall the truths of God’s Word instantly in those moments when flashbacks come.

Prayer is the next means of grace that ministry leaders should help the victim practice. Hebrews 4:16 reminds the victim to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” God speaks to the victim through his Word. Prayer is the way the victim can talk to God. He or she should be encouraged to be honest with God in prayer. God is not looking for certain religious words but wants to hear the heart’s honest confessions. Ministry leaders should encourage the victim to read and pray through the Psalms. The Psalms offer the victim several examples of how to pray.

The final two means of grace are worship and biblical community. These two means of grace are often the hardest for the victim. It is difficult to praise God when one feels defeated and discouraged. Yet God encourages believers to practice singing and worshipping even in their darkest hours. The victim will find grace when they faithfully

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<sup>29</sup> Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2012), 186-90.

praise God. While singing and worship can and should be done in homes, it should always be a part of the biblical community. Like worship, the community can feel unnatural to the victim used to living in isolation. The thought of being in a community with others can be debilitating. While the ministry leader should be patient with the victim as they acclimate to living in the biblical community, they should continue to encourage them to strengthen their relationships with other believers. If the victim is still struggling after studying through biblical passages, reading books and booklets with the ministry leader, and practicing the five means of grace, they should then be referred to a biblical counselor.

### **Biblical Counseling**

The final step in the process is to get the person being cared for into biblical counseling. Depending on the age of the person and the involvement of the state and the judicial system, they may be required to get secular counseling. The church should not assume this secular counseling is adequate for the victim's needs. Instead, they should also insist on the person being seen by a biblical counselor, preferably within their local church body. If this is not possible, then the ministry leader should reach out to the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) for a referral nearby or through online counseling. The ministry leader should also offer to participate with the victim of abuse in the counseling process if possible. By having someone with them who believes them sitting in on sessions, the victim may be more at ease while with the counselor.

It is beyond the scope of this project to describe the full process of biblical counseling for a person who has been the victim of sexual abuse. Each person that experiences abuse is different, and there is no one way of counseling sexual abuse that works with all people. It is essential for this project to highlight two crucial areas for the victim to understand. Ministry leaders need to understand the advantages the victim of sexual abuse receives through biblical counseling. These benefits would not be obtained

in a secular counseling setting. The remaining part of this chapter discusses the two areas of shame and guilt that all victims of sexual abuse experience, and why they need to receive biblical counseling on these particular subjects.

**Shame.** Victims of sexual abuse wrestle with two distinct but sometimes confused feelings of shame and guilt. It is essential to help victims understand the difference between shame and guilt. Shame tells the victim that they are bad.<sup>30</sup> Guilt tells the victim that they have done something wrong. Shame is associated with a focus on the self and its identity. Shame, like guilt, from a Christian perspective, is a good thing.<sup>31</sup> God uses shame to help the survivor see that their identity as a Christian is being challenged. Secular counseling will often encourage the victim to move past their shame by owning it and letting it dissipate over time.<sup>32</sup> Instead, the biblical counselor will help the victim use their shame to grow in their true identity.

Shame was not part of the original design of humanity. When God made humans, he made them without shame. Humans were created to live in a state in which they identified with and were fully known by God and each other and fully accepted. Sadly, this shameless living did not last long. The Bible has a great deal to say about the subject of shame. Ed Welch even argues that the entire Bible is about shame and its remedy.<sup>33</sup> Before getting to the remedy, the victim must first understand what the Bible teaches them about shame. Shame is pictured in the Bible in three significant ways:

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<sup>30</sup> June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt: Emotions and Social Behavior* (New York: Guilford, 2003), 12.

<sup>31</sup> Triston Collins and Jonathan Collins, *Why Emotions Matter: Recognize Your Body Signals, Grow in Emotional Intelligence, Discover an Embodied Spirituality* (Leicester, England: Beaumont Press, 2019), 42.

<sup>32</sup> Micheal Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 127.

<sup>33</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 41.

nakedness, uncleanness, and being made an outcast.<sup>34</sup>

The theme of nakedness can be seen in the first recorded feeling of shame. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden, they realized their nakedness and hid from God. Their identification with the serpent instead of God transformed their shameless lives into ones filled with shame. This began physically with the realization that they were naked. Their first instinct was to cover themselves and “hide” parts of their body from each other. Rather than turning to God for help, they took it upon themselves to try to cover their shame.<sup>35</sup> Second, upon hearing God entering the garden, they tried to hide their whole selves from him, fearing the fig leaves would not be enough to cover their shame. The person experiencing shame will naturally seek to hide that which makes them feel shameful.

Survivors will often spend much of their lives hiding the abuse that has been perpetrated against them in hopes of covering the shame they feel. They convince themselves if they do not talk about it, then no one will be able to see their shame. The feeling of nakedness is one that is familiar to victims of sexual abuse by the very nature of the sin committed against them. Sexual abuse requires the literal nakedness of one or both parties. This exposure leads to the second way in which the Bible speaks about shame—uncleanness.

Uncleanness is the second picture of shame that is seen throughout the Old Testament, but especially in the book of Leviticus.<sup>36</sup> When a clean white garment is taken through the mud, it becomes unclean. What once was clean and perfect is now soiled and defiled, becoming unclean. This is the effect of humanity’s sin condition on the human

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<sup>34</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 191.

<sup>36</sup> G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 161-84.

heart. This basic concept that even a child can understand is what the Bible teaches about humans and their righteousness. Humanity's identification with Adam has tainted everyone with his sin, therefore rendering humanity unclean from the moment they are born. Sexual abuse victims will often say that they feel unclean or defiled because of the abuse. This dirty feeling is shame manifested in their lives. It is essential to help the victim distinguish between the shame they experience because of their identification with Adam and their shame because of their association with their abuser.

The final way the Bible pictures shame is by becoming an outcast. Biblically this can be seen most evident in the lives of lepers. Because of their skin condition, lepers were identified as unclean and made to live outside the city, separated from everyday social life.<sup>37</sup> Shame has the same effect on people by making them feel like they are outcasts in their own skin. Shame will often lead them to isolate themselves from others because they think they do not measure up. They live in fear that if others discover their past, they will be outcasts; so to avoid this, they avoid meaningful relationships.

The victim of sexual abuse will not be taught the biblical reason for shame or its effects on the person if they are referred to secular counseling. Biblical counseling offers a better solution to all three aspects of shame than secular counseling. Biblical counselor's base their understanding of shame and its origin in the Bible. When one starts with the wrong presuppositions, they are often doomed to reach false solutions. The gospel addresses each of the three aspects of shame and offers victims of sexual abuse a way to overcome the shame they feel.

First, through the gospel, Jesus permanently covers the believer's nakedness (Isa 61:10; 1 Pet 2:24 ESV). The new identity they receive through the gospel means they no longer have to feel as though they need to hide from God because of their sin. Jesus has made them righteous, allowing them to stand before a holy God. God foreshadowed

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<sup>37</sup> Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, 118.

this work of Jesus in the garden when he made the humans a covering from animal skins to cover their nakedness. Now contrast that with secular counseling that would encourage the victim to distance themselves from the trauma and let the shame dissipate with time.<sup>38</sup> The victim is not offered any real solution to the shame; instead, they are to just live with it until enough time has passed that they forget about the shame. Working with victims of childhood abuse, many victims report feeling shame thirty to forty years after the sexual abuse occurred. If the secular psychology solution was correct, this shame should have dissipated decades ago. Biblical counseling offers the victims the good news of the gospel that one has been sacrificed to cover their nakedness once and for all.

Second, through the gospel, Jesus transforms the unclean sinner. Ephesians 5 pictures this work beautifully, speaking of Jesus cleansing the church through the water and the Word. In this picture, the church, which is made up of individual sinners, is being restored to a clean state through his sacrifice, allowing them to identify with his work of salvation. Secular psychology would instead encourage the victim to alter the standards or rules to help them alleviate shame. They would argue that if no law has been broken, then there is no shame. So rather than dealing with the fact that standards had been violated in their abuse, they should simply change the standard to fit their experience.<sup>39</sup> Rather than dealing with the abuser's sin that has made them unclean, they should simply declare themselves to be clean. Biblical counseling offers a way to deal with the sin that has made them unclean and offers them the ability to be made "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

Finally, through the gospel, the victim comes to see that they no longer have to have the identity of the outcast. Jesus suffered and died on a cross that was hung "outside the camp" (Heb 13:12-13 ESV), taking upon himself the shame of those who put their

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis, *Shame*, 127.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, *Shame*, 129.

trust in him. Hebrews 13 teaches the victim that Jesus's death on the cross represents the definitive sin offering. The biblical counselor will help the victim see that they are no longer seen as an outcast by God through Jesus's sacrifice. They have been given a new identity in Christ that welcomes them into God's presence. Secular psychology would try to get the victim to avoid their shame by blaming an outside source.<sup>40</sup> Shame is the result of an internal judgment about one's identity. Blaming outside sources will not address the more profound struggle with the survivor's identity. The more the survivor can blame an outside source, secularists argue, the less likely the victim will feel shame. Blaming outside sources would be like the outcast leper blaming those in the city for having clear skin. The unafflicted are the ones that should bear the shame, not himself. However, blame-shifting does not change the fact that the leper is still an outsider. This blame-shifting method does not change the abuse survivor's position in society. However, the gospel brings everyone to the foot of the cross where they are equal. They are no longer outcasts, but brothers and sisters in Christ.

Victims will not get exposed to the biblical view of shame in secular counseling. Therefore, ministry leaders must connect victims with a biblical counselor to help them find their identity in Christ. In addition to shame, another common emotion the victim will struggle with is guilt. Guilt is what the victim feels when they do something wrong. The problem with guilt and sexual abuse is that victims often feel guilt for the abuse itself. With the help of a biblical counselor, the victim will begin to see how the abuse has affected and, in some cases, distorted their understanding of guilt.

**Guilt.** Shame is God's way of letting the victim know there is something wrong with their identity. Guilt is God's way of letting the victim know there is something wrong with their behavior. The guilt that one feels for one's sin is not merely a

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<sup>40</sup> Lewis, *Shame*, 102.

feeling but is the reality of the human condition.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, when victims share their stories, they are often met with disbelief and less than gracious responses from friends and family. Doubt often leads the victim to blame themselves more for the abuse. Many victims feel guilt over sharing their stories and embarrassing their families or themselves. Some family members will encourage them to keep their abuse a secret for the sake of family unity. Secrecy only serves to confuse the guilt the victim feels. These sentiments are often echoed in the church. Dealing with sexual abuse can be a time-consuming and messy process. For these reasons, victims are told they need to simply move on with their lives and let go of the past.

Guilt, like shame, needs to be handled with the victim biblically. To illustrate this, a portion of Alice's story is helpful. Alice grew up in a single-parent home. Her mom had to work two jobs, so she often relied on grandparents to watch Alice after school and over the summer. Alice was six years old when her grandfather, James, began to groom her for his own sexual pleasure. The grandparents had a farm outside of town. James would plan his trips out to the farm to coincide with the end of Alice's school day. Alice loved the animals, so she was always excited to go the farm. James would encourage her to sit next to him in the truck on the way to the farm. Alice never knew her father, so she welcomed and appreciated this one-on-one time with her grandfather.

Over a few months of visits to the farm alone with Alice, James began touching her more in inappropriate ways. Alice, without the true love from a father, interpreted this as his way of loving her. James reinforced this belief by telling her that he was touching her this way because he loved her and that it was special only to be shared between them. James would also buy her little presents and give them to her on the way to the farm. James warned if anyone found out, he would no longer be able to give her gifts.

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<sup>41</sup> Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 111.

Alice was seven years old the first time James raped her. She was so confused and did not know how to respond. James stopped at an ice cream shop on the way home and let her pick out whatever flavor of ice cream she wanted. Alice, while still confused, loved ice cream, which was a rare treat for her considering her mom rarely had the money to take her out to eat. Each time from this point on, James would ask Alice if she wanted to go with him. Being so young, she enjoyed the animals and the ice cream. Longing for a father's love, she accepted this counterfeit expression of love because she had never experienced genuine love.

This pattern would repeat itself over the next seven years until her grandfather died suddenly from cancer. The older Alice became, the more James began to remind Alice that she was choosing to come with him. This subtle reinforcement of the lie that Alice was actively choosing the abuse as a seven-year had a long-lasting effect. The older she became, the more he would blame her for his behavior. Alice, he said, was just too beautiful, and he began to remind her how much she enjoyed her time with him. The fact that she enjoyed her trips to the farm was partially true. She loved the animals on the farm, she loved the ice cream, and strangely she loved the approval of the closest thing she had to a father figure.

After James's death, she realized what had been happening to her when one of her teachers talked about sexual abuse in class. Alice thought that the sexual abuse was her fault, and she immediately felt guilty. Alice shared with her mom what she had learned about sexual abuse and what James had done to her. Her mom did not believe her and said that if she cared about her family, she would not repeat those horrible lies. Alice was left feeling even more confused. Alice, at this point, was often left at home alone because her mom thought she was old enough to take care of herself. She began dating and having boys come over after school. Alice only knew one way to show a boy that she loved him. She began a long string of broken relationships filled with various kinds of sexual immorality. After becoming convinced that no man would ever genuinely love her,

she began dating women.

Alice was raised in the church and knew that certain aspects of her life went against the Bible's teaching. Yet, she also viewed herself as someone that was already damaged by her grandfather's abuse. She reasoned that there was no way to undo her past. After multiple failed suicide attempts, her friend invited her to church. Alice slowly began to believe that Jesus loved her, and she put her faith in his finished work. Alice is now twenty-eight years old and sitting in a small group, still struggling with her past guilt. How should one help Alice deal with all the guilt that she feels?

Proverbs 20:5 says, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." Alice needs help getting below the surface level to get to the deeper waters of her heart if she is going to find freedom from her guilt. It would be unfair and insensitive to brush off her guilt as false guilt. Alice is experiencing something deep in her heart that needs to be addressed. Guilt is God's way of letting Alice know there is something wrong with her behavior. Biblical counseling can help her distinguish between two different kinds of guilt, confused and clear guilt.

Confused guilt arises when a person has placed themselves under a law of their own making.<sup>42</sup> Then, when they break this created law, they feel a sense of guilt. For Alice, the guilt she experienced was based on James's actions. Alice believed that she was guilty of the sexual abuse because she chose to visit the farm. James was abusing Alice not just sexually but mentally as well. Alice looked to James to help her learn how to interpret the world in the same way children look to their parents to help them understand the world. Children have an unconscious faith that allows them to believe information from trusted sources like parents. When a person is told repeatedly that something is their fault by a trusted source, they begin to think it is their fault. In Alice's

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Jones, "Distinguishing Between Guilt and Guilt," Biblical Counseling Coalition, July 18, 2017, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2017/07/18/distinguishing-between-guilt-and-guilt>.

case, she first needs to learn what God will hold her accountable for and what she will not be held responsible for. When a bank hires a new teller, one of the first things they do is to train that teller on what genuine money looks like and all the security features in each bill. They help the teller recognize a counterfeit bill by teaching them what the genuine bill looks and feels like. Like the teller, Alice first needs to learn what God's Word genuinely says about guilt. With the biblical standard understood, she will be able to differentiate between confused and genuine guilt.

It is important to stress to the victim that they are not guilty for the abuse that was committed against them. To tell Alice, who had been molested by her grandfather for years, that the guilt she feels for the abuse is because of the abuse is, in effect, revictimization. Ministry leaders and counselors need to avoid any indication that the victim is guilty and therefore responsible for the abuse. Yet, Alice still needs to deal with the guilt that she feels. These thoughts, along with James's voice reminding her each time it was her choice to go with him, produce confused guilt. Once she sees that God is not holding her accountable for James's sin, she can begin to see how she has believed a lie.

Jeremy Pierre points out that a person's thinking leads to how they feel in his dynamic heart model.<sup>43</sup> If Alice thinks and believes that she is guilty, then feelings of guilt will follow. Alice needs to confess and repent for believing the lie that the abuse was her fault. Believing this lie that the abuse was her fault is the behavior that is producing Alice's guilt. Alice has placed herself under a law that is not biblical. She is, in effect, trying to hold herself responsible for something that God does not hold her accountable for. This will be a process that may take weeks or months, depending on the level of abuse that occurred. Once she confesses to believing this lie, her repentance is daily choosing to live the truth.

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<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014).

Second, Alice needs to stop viewing her seven-year-old self through her twenty-eight-year-old self. Alice now understands what was happening to her and is trying to hold her eight-year-old self to the same standard as a twenty-eight-year-old. She is holding herself to a standard that God is not holding her to, in effect creating her own law, a law that says a seven-year-old should have been able to avoid her grandfather's sins against her. Because she feels as though she should have done more or said more to prevent the abuse, she feels guilty. Again, she needs to confess that she is trying to hold herself to a standard that God is not holding her to that is producing her guilt.

In addition, she will need to see that she believed in a confused sense of family unity and of what it meant to honor her mother. Alice wrongly believed that she had to remain quiet to honor her mother, and that she must not disrupt family unity even if it meant covering up the abuse. These lies need to be challenged and corrected with a biblical view of honoring parents and family unity. Alice needs to confess and repent of believing in these lies to remove these feelings of guilt. Alice's confession and repentance can then free her to begin to deal with the second kind of guilt that she is feeling.

The second category of guilt—clear guilt—will then need to be addressed. While the abuse itself is not the victim's fault, her responses to that abuse will often be sinful, creating genuine guilt for her behavior that she will need to address. Many victims will confuse sex with love, especially when the abuser is familial. This response can tempt them toward sexual promiscuity as they seek to find someone to love them. After being abused, some victims decide to put themselves in a position of power sexually. A sexual aggressor's role leads to a life of sexual immorality with multiple partners.

In addition, some victims see all sexual acts as dirty and will refuse to engage their spouse sexually. The lack of sexual intimacy may lead to divorce and multiple marriages. This confused guilt needs to be addressed by teaching the victim what a healthy view of biblical intimacy should look like in marriage. Both responses to their abuse in the opposite extremes need to be confessed and repented of before God. In some

cases, the victim may themselves become the abuser of others. If this is true, they will need to work through it, and not only confess to God but to those whom they have taken advantage of in the past.

The biblical counselor should explain what God expects from the victim and then encourage them to confess and repent of their sin to absolve them of their guilt. It can take some time to work through all the confused and genuine guilt from a victim's past. Often this process feels as though one is constantly peeling back layers of guilt. The problem and remedy are straightforward and the same with each new layer. Counseling victims of sexual abuse will take patience on the part of the counselor or ministry leader. Depending on how complicated and extensive the abuse, the victim may be believing lies about multiple areas of their life in addition to the abuse.

### **Conclusion**

Sexual abuse is widespread in today's culture, and statistics provide little reason to believe it is less prevalent in the church. Sexual abuse is a desecration of the image of God in the abused. This chapter argued that ministry leaders need to be trained to be able to identify the signs and indications of a person being the victim of sexual abuse. Church leaders must know how to recognize the physical, emotional, and relational signs and indicators, and learn to identify patterns that point to potential abuse. Ministry leaders also need to learn how to respond to victims without causing further harm, while instilling hope. The church should also have a plan and policy in place for what to do once someone shares that they are or have been the victim of sexual abuse. This policy should be communicated to the church so that those inclined to sexually abuse others know that the church is not a safe place for them to abuse and so that those vulnerable to sexual abuse know that the church is a safe place for them.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTING THE SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING

With the biblical, theological, and practical foundations in place for establishing a Sexual Abuse Response Plan, the purpose of this chapter is to describe the process of implementing this ministry project. The concern for this project grew out of the needs within the fellowship of believers in my church. This need presented itself over the first five years of planting the church. The more the subject was brought up and discussed among the leaders, the more the need grew. While I had received a seminary education, I was not prepared for the amount of counseling I found myself doing weekly. At that time, I was unaware of the biblical counseling movement. The more I read on the subject of sexual abuse, the more I realized what was being offered in secular psychiatry was not helpful when dealing with the theological matters of the human soul.

The purpose of this project was to develop a sexual abuse awareness and response training that could be used by ministry leaders within the church. This project was guided by four progressive goals. The first goal of this project was to assess the current level of competence to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically to their needs among the ministry leaders of COTW. The second goal of this project was to develop an eight-hour introductory course on recognizing survivors of sexual abuse and responding biblically. The third goal was to implement the curriculum and equip the ministry leaders in a small group setting. The fourth goal was to assess the level of change in the competence of ministry leaders that completed the sexual abuse counseling course.

These goals were carried out by executing a plan, which can be divided into four phases. Phase 1 included developing a curriculum that was designed to help attendees identify potential victims of abuse and how to respond biblically to the victims. Phase 2 included selection of training participants who were qualified and willing to attend the required training sessions. I developed the Ministry Leader Assessment (MLA),<sup>1</sup> designed to measure participants' understanding of sexual abuse and the theological issues surrounding abuse. Phase 3 was the execution of the ministry leaders training. During Phase 4, the MLA post-test was administered, and the results were recorded for evaluation.

### **Phase 1: Preparation of Curriculum**

On January 1, 2021, I began to develop the sexual abuse awareness curriculum for this project from the previous two years of research on the topic. My plan was to develop curriculum for an in-person, two-day workshop, with about eight to ten attendees in a small group setting that would include lectures, case studies, and small group discussions. The training was scheduled to take place March 26-27. Friday evening sessions would have been from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Saturday sessions would have taken place from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Given the small group setting of the seminar, I planned to devote a significant portion of time to the application of seminar principles through case study discussions. Attendees were going to be given a variety of reading assignments to complete before the scheduled seminar times. I planned to provide catered meals due to the lengthy time commitment and compact nature of the training to keep attendees onsite.

The first step in this process was to develop a schedule and training outline for the seminar. Each session was intended to last about sixty minutes. During week 1, I

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

developed an outline for the overall seminar and developed a goal and learning objectives for each session. During week 2, I wrote the content for session 1. Session 1 was designed to reinforce the truth that God expects ministry leaders to care for those who have been sexually abused. This session defined sexual abuse and shared its prevalence both inside and outside of the church. This session also included a survey of biblical texts that deal with sexual abuse. In addition, during week 2, I developed an outline for session 2. Session 2 would begin by educating ministry leaders on the behavioral and spiritual-emotional signs and indicators that a victim of sexual abuse may present with in small group settings.

During week 3, I developed an outline for session 3, where I introduced the physical signs and indicators that a victim of sexual abuse may present within small group settings. In session 3, I planned to present a case study from *Rid of My Disgrace* to help the ministry leaders see how these signs and indicators affect victims' lives. During week 3, I also developed an outline for session 4. Session 4 marked a turn in the seminar as it moved from recognizing abuse victims to responding to the abuse. I planned to present the COTW Sexual Abuse Response Plan, then explain the leaders' roles in the process. The session would conclude with a discussion of the biblical concept of *hesed*, and how this plan promotes the concept within the church.

During week 4, I developed an outline for session 5. During session 5, I planned to teach the hope found in the gospel. I developed the importance and need to communicate hope to victims of sexual abuse. I intended to accomplish this by introducing a counseling case study and discuss ways that they would instill hope. I also intended to introduce the concept of active listening to enable the ministry leaders to be able to identify how to apply the hope found in the gospel.

In week 5, I developed an outline for session 6. Session 6 was designed to introduce ministry leaders to the concept of data gathering. My plan was to introduce the

concept of the dynamic heart by Jeremy Pierre.<sup>2</sup> I intend to use the previous session's case study to illustrate how the dynamic heart model works based off the data gathered. I also developed the outline for session 7, which was designed to teach ministry leaders about the biblical concept of shame and how it relates to abuse victims. This session included three biblical themes of nakedness, uncleanness, and the outcast. This session concluded by reviewing a case study, demonstrating how the gospel addresses each of the three aspects of shame, and offers victims of sexual abuse a way to overcome the shame they feel.

During week 6, I developed an outline for session 8 on guilt. Participants would be introduced to a definition of guilt using Romans 1 as an example. Next, we would cover the difference between genuine and confused guilt. In this session, ministry leaders would learn the importance of helping victims deal biblically with their abuse. I focused on the importance of engaging a biblical counselor to help assist victims. This session would conclude by reviewing biblical resources that can be used in helping victims of sexual abuse.

## **Phase 2: Selection of Class Participants**

The first goal in this project was to assess the current level of competence to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically to their needs among the ministry leaders of COTW. Recruiting ministry leaders for assessment began by word-of-mouth several months before the seminar date was set. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I am the lead pastor of COTW. One of my roles within the church is the direct supervision of the small group coaches. These small group coaches oversee the ministry leaders that lead our small group ministries at COTW. A critical part of my recruitment strategy was to leverage the ministry leaders that lead our small groups as volunteers for the training.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2014).

During this period, I began to refine the pre-course assessment to meet goal 1, which would allow me to assess the current level of competence to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically to their needs.<sup>3</sup> This initial pre-test draft included forty Likert-scale statements which were organized according to the content of each seminar session. The MLA was originally developed as part of Dr. Danny Bowen's class on Applied Empirical Research. As part of that course, we developed our instrument and had the benefit of testing them on 25 of our peers. This provided valuable feedback that allowed for this instrument to be improved for greater accuracy. One of the biggest changes was reducing the number of questions in the MLA to only include items directly covered in the training. In addition, the demographic section was reduced to only include the data necessary for this project.

During this time, when the eight-part lesson plans were completed, I submitted them to an expert panel for review. The expert panel members were asked to fill out an evaluation rubric and returned them to me upon completion. For this goal to be accomplished, I needed to have one COTW deacon or elder, one member in the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), and two local church pastors complete the rubric. Once the panel was recruited, this goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

Each of these men have pastoral and counseling experience, and two of the three have been trained in Southern Baptist seminaries. Each of them responded to my request for feedback and these men were used as an expert panel to provide evaluation and critique of this ministry project. The expert panel consisted of Dr. Charles Oden, Dr. Dax Summerhill, and Dr. Nathan Moore.

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<sup>3</sup> This Ministry Leader Assessment was originally designed in my Applied Empirical Research class. The initial MLA was tested on 25 of my classmates. Their feedback was recorded and used to refine the MLA during this time.

Dr. Charles Oden has served as a deacon for more than a decade at COTW. He is a retired U.S. Naval Officer and an Assistant Professor of Business at Saint Leo University's Donald R. Tapia School of Business-Management Department. He is a Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP) and certified in Lean Six Sigma. His education includes a DBA Management from Nova Southeastern University, an MA Human Resource Management from Troy University, and a BA in Christian Ministry from Atlanta Christian College. In addition, he has completed phase 1 of the ACBC training and is currently in phase 2. He currently serves as a professor in the MBA and DBA programs at Saint Leo University. In this role, his responsibilities include developing curriculum for new courses for the business program.

Dr. Dax Summerhill is the senior pastor of Providence Village Baptist Church in Providence, Florida. His education includes a PhD from the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a BS in Educational Psychology from Mississippi State University. He has more than twenty years of pastoral experience and has a special interest in biblical theology.

Dr. Nathan Moore has more than ten years of experience as a pastor and biblical counselor. His education includes a DMin from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Master of Divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a BA from Samford University. He is an ACBC certified counselor and currently serves on staff at Trinity Baptist Church in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

Each of these men offered helpful feedback on my training curriculum using the evaluation rubric provided. The last evaluation was received on March 1. During the week of March 6, I made final revisions to my curriculum. Their feedback helped me refine the sessions to include more interactions with case studies. Based on their feedback, the curriculum met and exceeded 90 percent of the sufficient score. This concluded the end of phase 2.

### **Phase 3: Implementation of the Training Weekend**

The third goal was to implement the curriculum and train the ministry leaders in a small group setting. This goal was achieved through the teaching of a live counseling seminar. This seminar was executed over two days, which began on Friday, March 26, at 6:00 p.m., and concluded on Saturday, March 27, at 5:00 p.m. The training sessions included eight hours of structured instruction. Attendees were sent a link to the MLA and asked to fill them out before coming to the training event. To verify that each attendee had filled out the MLA, I provided two laptops for them in case they forgot to submit the MLA. Once everyone had submitted the MLA, the training began.

#### **Overview of Sexual Abuse Awareness Training**

**Lesson 1: “Overview of sexual abuse awareness.”** The goal of this session was to reinforce the truth that God expects ministry leaders to care for those who have been sexually abused. This goal would first be achieved by studying Ezekiel 34:1-16. This passage demonstrates what happens to the leaders that are appointed to care for the abused when they neglect their duty. Examining this passage ministry leaders learned of the importance of caring for those who are abused in the church.

Second, this session provided a definition of what constitutes sexual abuse. Establishing a clear definition is important for ministry leaders to know what to look for in their small groups. In addition, the attendees learned how prevalent sexual abuse is both inside and outside of the church. This was accomplished by sharing statistics of abuse within America, in addition to sharing statistics and stories from within the church.

Third, this session also surveyed a sampling of biblical texts that deal with the issue of sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup> This provided a biblical foundation for how ministry leaders

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<sup>4</sup> See 2 Sam 13:1-39; Gen 34; Eccl 4:1, Ps 72:4; Isa 1:17, Rom 1:26-2:1.

should think about and respond to abuse. Finally, the ministry leaders would come to see that the Bible is sufficient to meet the needs of sexual abuse victims within their care. The lecture ended with a brief overview of the content of the following seven sessions. This session ended with a question and answer time.

**Lesson 2: “Behavioral and spiritual-emotional signs.”** The goal of this session was designed to educate ministry leaders on the behavioral and spiritual-emotional signs and indicators that a victim of sexual abuse may present with in small group settings. This session began by a brief study of 1 Thessalonians 5:14. This Bible study was followed by a short time of discussion involving how leaders tell the difference between the idle, disruptive, disheartened, and the weak.

Three categories (behavioral, spiritual-emotional, and physical) were offered as a framework for identifying the weak. I stressed the importance of looking for patterns of behavior that would point to abuse. Leaders should never assume just because one of the following issues are present that abuse has occurred. It will take patience on the part of ministry leaders when seeking to help someone whom they suspect of being abused.

This was followed by giving the attendees an overview of the various behavioral and spiritual-emotional signs and indicators of abuse. The following examples of behavioral signs and indicators were covered: sudden changes in behavior, disrupted sleep habits, self-harm, and inappropriate sexual behavior. The following examples of spiritual-emotional signs and indicators were covered: depression, hopelessness, anxiety, controlling behaviors, eating-disorders, emotional numbness, and lack of trust. This session ended with a brief question and answer time.

**Session 3: “Physical signs and indicators of abuse.”** The goal of this session was designed to educate ministry leaders on the physical signs and indicators that a victim of sexual abuse may present with in small group settings. This session began with a study of the sexual abuse of Tamar recorded in 2 Samuel 13. After reading the chapter

together, the attendees were asked to identify the behavioral and spiritual indicators of her abuse they learned about from the previous session.

Second, the concept of behavioral indicators and symptoms was introduced as the third category in the framework for identifying abuse. These physical signs included sexually transmitted diseases, gastrointestinal disorders, and gynecological disorders, and somatization (recurrent and multiple medical symptoms with no discernible organic cause). The class was then asked to review 2 Samuel 13 and identify any physical signs that Tamar exhibited. This section of session 3 was concluded with the group discussing the various indicators found in Tamar's life.

The class was reminded that the existence of one or two of these signs or indicators did not automatically mean that they should assume abuse. Only after careful observation of a pattern of multiple indicators should a ministry leader consider the possibility that they may be a victim of abuse. Finally, we reviewed a case study in *Rid of My Disgrace* as a group, before breaking into pairs to create a list of the three kinds of signs and indicators that they could identify. We concluded by having each group share their lists and discussing them as a class.

**Session 4: “Survivor care plan.”** The goal of this session was to help ministry leaders understand the Sexual Abuse Response Plan and what is expected of them throughout the process. This class began by having trainees write down any previous ideas of what they thought the words *shalom* and *hesed* mean, as well as reading Genesis 1-2 and Leviticus 26:6. We then discussed God's original plan of *shalom* for humanity. The trainees were asked to give practical examples of how sin threatens that plan of *shalom*.

Next the idea of a Sexual Abuse Response Plan was introduced. First, ministry leaders need to recognize the signs mentioned in the previous sessions of sexual abuse and then ask, when appropriate, the person if they have been or are currently the victim of

sexual abuse. Second, the ministry leader will need to listen and believe what the person says about the abuse. Third, the ministry leader should ascertain if the person is in any immediate danger of experiencing more abuse, and work with church leaders to get the individual into a place of safety if the abuse is still occurring. Fourth, the ministry leader will need to encourage the victim to report the abuse to the proper authorities where legally required by state law. Laws on reporting sexual abuse differ from state to state. It is important that ministry leaders are aware of the reporting laws in their state. Fifth, the ministry leader will need to begin to instill hope in the victim through the gospel that the sexual abuse is not his or her fault and that Christ forgives both the sins they have committed, and the sins committed against them. Finally, if possible, ministry leaders should help connect the person with a biblical counselor and offer to go with them if that will make them more comfortable, and continue to love, serve, and minister to the person in appropriate ways.

Participants were asked to explain why a Sexual Abuse Response Plan is needed in the church. We walked through the COTW sexual abuse plan together as a group. The trainees were explained each ministry leader's responsibility in the COTW plan. We broke up into pairs to role play different scenarios of discovering abuse and what the ministry leader should do in each case according to the Sexual Abuse Response Plan. As the class closed, we discussed the meaning of *hesed*. Trainees were asked to show how their plans helped promote *hesed* within the church.

**Session 5: “Responding to sexual abuse: hope in the gospel.”** The goal of this session was to help ministry leaders understand the hope the gospel can bring to someone who has suffered sexual abuse. It was also designed to reinforce the truth that the Bible offers this hope through the gospel. Participants were given specific examples of the biblical counseling responses versus the secular counseling responses. Trainees

were asked to point out how the Biblical counseling approach offers hope and to identify what solution the secular response promoted.

We discussed sin and our culture's need for hope. We also discussed how these ways lead away from the actual hope that is found in Scripture. As a group, we read the Scriptures for this lesson: Psalm 23, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Ephesians 1:9-14, and then discussed the hope and comfort represented in these passages. We discussed the importance of memorizing several relevant Scriptures for hope. As a group we read through those Scriptures and marked them or bookmarked in our Bibles.

We discussed listening to the victim and discerning how to best offer them hope in Jesus. We discussed the role of Scripture in combating thoughts, behaviors, and habits. Trainees were asked to give examples of Scriptures to combat different scenarios. Lastly, trainees were asked to give examples of practical solutions to offer to victims to help them apply Scripture that encourages hope.

**Session 6: “Responding to sexual abuse: understanding the heart of the problem.”** The goal of this session was to help ministry leaders understand the importance of knowing the important information in a victim's past. Trainees were asked to read Pierre's dynamic heart model contained in the first five chapters of *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*. We discussed the importance of understanding the difference between the cognitive, volitional, and affective aspects of the human heart, as well as how they each interrelated to one another. Trainees discussed some of their initial thoughts on the reading.

Next, we went through a series of Scriptures to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in working with victims of abuse. We discussed how to skillfully listen, take notes, and keep the counselee on track when they are giving information about their past. We discussed record keeping and data gathering. The trainees looked at several examples of how to keep a system of notes. The importance of privacy was reiterated, but some

guidelines were also given for when and how to involve other people. The trainees were shown how to probe for information using questions, non-verbal communication and listening skills. The group then split up into pairs and practiced these techniques together. In concluding, we began the discussion on the need to focus on heart issues. The trainees were given a few minutes to find some examples of how they could apply the dynamic heart model in their own lives.

**Session 7: “Responding to sexual abuse: shame.”** The goal of this session was to help ministry leaders understand what the Bible teaches on shame and how to apply God’s Word to the issue of shame. The group was encouraged to share any examples from the previous session’s activity on understanding their own heart issues. Trainees were also given the lesson Scripture to read ahead of time. We discussed what the biblical theme of nakedness looks like and how it relates to victims of abuse. We then discussed how it could be applied in the victim’s life to help them understand their abuse from a biblical perspective.

Next, we built on that idea and discussed the biblical view of uncleanness and how it relates to victims. We discussed how many victims will report having a general sense of uncleanness about their body. We then looked at how passages like 1 John 1 speak to Jesus’ work to cleanse the unclean. Thirdly, we brought in the biblical concept of being an outcast and how it relates to victims of abuse. The group was then asked to draw parallels between these three ideas and how they can affect a victim of abuse and keep them from the gospel.

Lastly, we discussed how the gospel addresses each one of these three aspects, and how it offers victims a way to overcome the shame they feel. The group shared some real-life examples of how the gospel has been used to combat shame, uncleanness, and being an outcast in their own lives. This session ended by reading the “Barbara” story

from *Rid of My Disgrace*. Trainees were asked how they would apply these three concepts to Barbara's life.

**Session 8: "Responding to sexual abuse: guilt."** The goal of this session was to help ministry leaders understand and effectively apply the Bible's teaching on the issue of guilt. The group read the lesson Scriptures together and shared any initial thoughts on guilt and its effects, both positive and negative. We discussed the biblical view of guilt and how it may differ from secular views.

We then worked through the "Alice" case study and noted the group's initial observations. The group then went through a comparison to understand the difference between genuine and confused guilt. The group was encouraged to share examples from their own lives. We discussed the importance of helping victims to deal biblically with their abuse rather than relying on secular sources for guidance. The group was asked to give reasons why it is important for themselves and victims to engage a biblical counselor for assistance. We then went through the additional resources available to aid victims.

#### **Phase 4: Post-Test**

On Saturday, March 27, a post-course survey was distributed electronically to the ten class participants. This survey contained the same questions as was asked of the trainees in the Pre-Course Assessment.<sup>5</sup> This survey was designed to measure the student's knowledge and competence in addressing issues specific to ministering to sexual abuse victims after participating in the training program. This survey contained a twenty-five-question survey with a five-point Likert scale.

After the post-course surveys were completed, numeric values were assigned to the values of the Likert scale. The values 1 to 5 were assigned in ascending order from

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1.

1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), in the same way as the pre-course survey. The mean score per question was 4.54.<sup>6</sup> This score indicated that general comprehension across all twenty-five questions and all ten trainees was rated somewhere between “agree” and “strongly agree.” Additional analysis of the data will be provided in chapter 5.

### **Conclusion**

This project was completed through nineteen weeks of preparation and implementation. The initial feedback from the sexual abuse training was positive. Ministry leaders expressed that they had a clearer understanding of their role in responding to sexual abuse within the church. As feedback from the participants began to come in, it became apparent that they enjoyed and perceived the training to be useful. The research data in chapter 5 demonstrates this project met the project goals and was an overall successful. I pray the content of this training will continue to evolve, and that it will bear fruit in the years to come in the lives of the ministry leaders at COTW.

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 2 for full post-test results. As with the pre-course survey, the scores were added up across twelve surveys, then divided by the number of questions (25) and then further divided by the number of surveys (10).

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter serves as an evaluation of the ministry project, evaluating its purpose and goals. A portion of this chapter also addresses how the project might be changed for more significant benefit in future use at COTW and other institutions. This chapter includes an assortment of project reflections. This chapter reflects upon the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and upon some of the ways it might have been improved during its development and implementation phases. This chapter concludes with theological and personal reflections and a call for additional research.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train ministry leaders of COTW to recognize victims of sexual abuse and respond biblically for the good of the survivors, the health of the local church, and the glory of God. This purpose was achieved by developing and implementing an eight-hour training program taught live at the church during the weekend of March 26-27, 2021. The class curriculum addressed the common issues when dealing with a victim of sexual abuse. Each session of the seminar included teaching from God's Word, interaction with relevant information on the subject of sexual abuse, and interactions with case studies. Ministry leaders were also introduced to the Sexual Abuse Response Plan for COTW and learned their role in executing the plan. I assess that the purpose of the ministry project was fulfilled. Further substantiation can be found by evaluating the project's specific goals using a clearly defined research methodology.

## **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

In keeping with the project's purpose, the goals of this project were both relevant and practical. To accomplish its stated purpose, this project focused on four related goals: (1) assess the current level of competence to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically to their needs among the ministry leaders of COTW; (2) develop an eight-hour introductory course on recognizing survivors of sexual abuse and responding biblically; (3) implement the curriculum and equip the ministry leaders in a small group setting; and (4) assess the level of change in the competence of ministry leaders that complete the sexual abuse counseling course.

### **Goal 1: Assessment of Knowledge in Sexual Abuse**

To assess the student's ability to identify survivors of sexual abuse and respond biblically, the Ministry Leaders Assessment (MLA) was created and administered electronically to the ten attendees from COTW.<sup>1</sup> The objective under this goal was to identify areas of the curriculum that would need to be addressed before completing the curriculum. Even though my goal was to administer the survey to at least eight ministry leaders, I exceeded that goal by receiving responses from ten participants.

As I reviewed the assessments, I expected to find deficiencies in identifying victims of sexual abuse and a lack of healthy self-confidence in their ability to respond biblically to the survivor's needs. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that many ministry leaders scored higher than I initially thought they would.<sup>2</sup> This, however, is probably due to the level of emphasis in the teaching about sexual abuse at COTW. Despite the higher-than-expected scores, there was still room for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.

## **Goal 2: Development of Course Curriculum**

The second goal concerned the development of an eight-week curriculum designed to introduce ministry leaders to the subject of sexual abuse. This curriculum had two key components. The first was helping ministry leaders to be able to recognize victims of sexual abuse, and the second how to respond biblically. The first portion of the curriculum was designed to train ministry leaders how to look for patterns of behavior of various signs and indicators of sexual abuse. Once a victim was identified and confirmed by the victim, the ministry leaders were trained in how to respond through the Sexual Abuse Response Plan.

This goal was considered successful when a panel of three experts reviewed the material and scored it at a sufficient level or above, according to the categories on the assessment rubric.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, the reviewers gave the curriculum exemplary scores. Each rubric contained seven items to score. With three reviewers on the expert panel, the total items to score were twenty-one. Of those, fourteen were scored with the highest mark of exemplary. The other six were scored as sufficient. The panel suggested several revisions, and those revisions were incorporated into the curriculum, including adding more case studies and clarifying lesson objectives by beginning each with a verb.

The knowledge gained from the exegesis in chapter 2, and the literature reviews and research for chapter 3, served me well in developing the curriculum. The subject of sexual abuse does not yet have a sufficient amount of scholarly work written from the biblical counseling perspective. While some authors wrote from the biblical counseling perspective, a variety of integrationist perspectives had to be considered. The curriculum sought to synthesize the most biblically accurate material from both groups of authors.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3.

The panel proved to be highly beneficial in preparing the final draft of the curriculum. Each reviewer received the curriculum lesson plans via email, and the reviewer was given two weeks to return it with any suggested revisions. The reviewer offered recommended changes and scored the curriculum as a whole in four categories, including understandability, methodology, scope, and practicality. The understandability section of the rubric dealt with the theological soundness of the curriculum and whether the material was taught on a level that most participants could comprehend. The methodology section covered the course sufficiently addressing counseling methodology. The scope section of the rubric made sure that the material sufficiently covered the subject of the course. The final section, practicality, made sure the course offered an opportunity to practice the counseling applications. Once I received the completed rubrics, I incorporated the recommend changes before teaching the curriculum.

The main critique of the curriculum had to do with the methodology. One reviewer mentioned that they did not see any room for role play. Another reviewer said that it could include more case studies for students to interact with during the sessions. Once I incorporated these changes, the reviewers all agreed that the depth was sufficient based on the nature of the class and what it intended to do.

The course curriculum was developed primarily through the preparation done for chapters 2 and 3. The training was strengthened even more because of the expert panel and their suggested changes. The curriculum was taught, and feedback from class participants has been positive. The curriculum achieved its purpose, and I hope to continue to refine and strengthen it in preparation to teach it in the future.

### **Goal 3: Implement Curriculum**

The third goal was to implement the curriculum as a weekend training seminar. The training was executed on the weekends of March 26-27. As detailed in Chapter 4, the training weekend contained eight sessions. The projected number of minimum

participants for the class was eight, but ten individuals enrolled in the class. Participants were encouraged to attend all sessions, and attendance was checked at the beginning of each session. This goal was considered successfully met when all ten participants had participated in 100 percent of the training sessions.

#### **Goal 4: Assess the Level of Change**

The fourth goal was to assess the level of change in the competence of ministry leaders that complete the sexual abuse awareness course. The content aspect of this goal was measured by re-administering the MLA after the participants had finished the course, and was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-course results. The mean score increased 18.1 points from the pre-test to the post-test (out of 125 possible points).<sup>4</sup> The absolute value of the t-statistic was 6.01, and the p-value of 0.0001 is less than  $p=.01$ . Consequently, it can be concluded that the increase in the students' knowledge of recognizing and responding to sexual abuse is a result of the instruction received during the eight-session training.

My evaluation is that the implementation of the ministry project achieved each of the project goals and that this assessment can be supported using a clearly defined research methodology. The project fulfilled its purpose to train ministry leaders at COTW to address sexual abuse in our congregation. The project aided in the fulfillment of the church's motto to help restore our members through sanctification and will hopefully continue to help for years to come.

#### **Strengths of the Project**

The first strength was the interest from an adequate number of ministry leaders to conduct this training seminar. The implementation of the sexual abuse training course

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 2.

was met with excitement both by the students and myself as the instructor. Overall, the ministry leaders were eager to engage in the sessions. They also enjoyed the opportunity to be a part of the role play and case studies at the end of each class time.

The second strength of this project was that it was successful in resourcing participants for further study. The sexual abuse training's design was meant to be an introduction to the subject of sexual abuse. Considerable time was spent producing a resource list for each session so that students could continue learning about the different areas of study. While students left feeling like they had increased their understanding of the effects of sexual abuse, they also left knowing where to find more about the subject. This was accomplished through providing reading lists and biblical counseling training seminars on the subject of sexual abuse.

Another strength was the teaching methodology, which utilized a small group setting. The teaching included a lecture followed by small group discussion and role-play from case studies. Given the nature of sexual abuse, I do not feel this training would have been as successful in a large group setting based purely on a lecture. Breaking out into smaller groups of two at the end allowed for participants to connect not only with the material, but with each other. These break-out times allowed them to share their previous experiences with abuse in meaningful ways.

The strengthened unity among the small group leaders was also a strong point of the project. This was an unexpected benefit of the training weekend. I was concerned that people would be in a rush to leave after the sessions ended. However, after both evening sessions, the ministry leaders spent time talking to one another. This group of ministry leaders are rarely in a group setting together. Many of them lead small groups each week and are focused on serving the members in their groups. They rarely get to spend time with other leaders for a prolonged time. This experience has made me rethink the importance of having regular training on various subjects to allow the ministry leaders time to fellowship together.

## **Weaknesses of the Project**

The first area of weakness was that there was too much material covered in the time allotment for the sessions. This class served as an introduction to the subject of sexual abuse. However, I found myself trying to include more advanced information in the sessions than required. This often left the ministry leaders with more questions than answers. Refining the material ahead of time and staying on track will help this training in the future.

The amount of information in the class led to the second weakness, that there were not enough opportunities to practice the role-play exercises. In talking with attendees, this was the criticism voiced most often. Even though part of the class schedule was to look at case studies and to engage in role-play scenarios, I did not allow enough time for this portion. I did not anticipate the amount of quality questions the ministry leaders asked. To compensate for this in the future, it will require breaking down some of the subjects into multiple sessions. It will also force me to expand the training to a two-weekend event. Hopefully, this will allow the role-play scenarios not to seem rushed and impersonal.

Third, there was insufficient preparation for the teaching itself. I typically teach and preach from an outline or lesson plan and not from a manuscript. This allows for freedom to modify the material and illustrations if I feel as though the audience is not connecting with the content. While this method has served me well in preaching, I feel it caused the first two weaknesses mentioned above. A more detailed manuscript could have kept me on track for this type of training and stopped me from deviating into more advanced material. After completing each session, it seemed there was more that I could have done to prepare better. During the months leading up to the preparation and teaching of this class, many aspects of my role as pastor prohibited me from devoting as much time and attention to preparation as I would have liked. Covid-19 forced new challenges upon the church that required a new level of attention than in previous years.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

It was a rewarding experience to conduct the sexual abuse training seminar at COTW. I look forward to opportunities to teach the workshop in the future. There are several things to improve on the experience I shared with the ten participants. First, as mentioned in the weaknesses section, I would seek to organize the content in a more detailed way as it pertains to curriculum development. Developing a more detailed manuscript of each session would have allowed me to focus on the necessary content for each session. This would have kept me more focused on each session's content, allowing for more time for role-playing and case studies. This would have improved the amount of time for there to be engagement with the material in a practical way.

Second, I would have given the expert panel a more detailed curriculum four weeks earlier than I did the first time. The extra time would be helpful both to the panel as well as to me. Given the more complicated nature of a manuscript versus a lesson plan, the panel would have the necessary time to review all of the material and provide even more specific feedback. The extra time would also allow me more time to make the changes suggested and allow for the panel to have one more opportunity to review the material before it was taught.

The final thing I would change would be the order of classes I took during the doctoral program. Though I remain convinced that my MLA instrument was adequate, I believe it could have been strengthened and improved. Though I piloted the survey and received feedback from classmates, I still feel the instrument needs to be improved. While Dr. Bowen's Applied Empirical Research class was a difficult class, and I understand why it is often scheduled last, I feel that taking that class sooner in the process would not only have led to a better instrument but also a better project overall. There were so many things I was originally trying to do in this project that simply could not be measured effectively. With the goal of an intervention to create a measurable change, it is essential that the change one seeks to make is measurable.

## **Theological Reflections**

As I think through and reflect upon how God used the doctoral project, I am reminded of several important doctoral truths. The first being that God's Word is sufficient (2 Pet 1:3-21). The subject of sexual abuse is as complicated as one can get from a counseling perspective. It was reassuring to see how God's Word addressed each aspect of sexual abuse. It was also rewarding seeing the impact God's Word had on each of the participants as they applied his Word to the subject of sexual abuse. This course became much more than just an exercise needed for graduation. God used the development of this curriculum to grow and refine both ministry leaders and myself.

Second, I am more convinced of the necessity of good theology combined with a practical methodology. One of the consistent comments I received from this course was the helpfulness of being able to apply God's Word better to sexual abuse situations. Sexual abuse is an area where many in the church will refer victims to what they consider professionals. These secular counselors, however, do not address the core issues of the soul. Only God's Word, when properly applied can bring the restoration the victim needs from the sin that was committed against them. In addition, through the confession and repentance of their sinful responses to the abuse, the victim can begin to live in the light of the gospel.

Third, I found the passage in Ezekiel 34 to be particularly challenging to my vocation of pastoral ministry. God is serious about having his shepherds care for those in their midst that have been abused. The consequences for ignoring their needs are disastrous. The church, in general, has not done a good job of serving those who have been victims of abuse. It is not uncommon for a victim to share about experiences of revictimization from churches they have sought help from in their past. Sadly, seminaries have not historically placed enough focus on biblical counseling in their Master of Divinity programs to prepare pastors for these issues. Thankfully, this is beginning to

change. Finally, despite the harsh words from this passage, it is also comforting to both victims of sexual abuse and pastors that Jesus is the good and perfect shepherd of Israel.

### **Personal Reflections**

This project has provided many ways for me to grow in my understanding about God, his Word, and his Church. It has also challenged me to reflect upon myself as a pastor and a biblical counselor. The first realization has been the importance of being a lifelong learner. When I was in my late teens and early twenties, I managed to squeeze a four-year bachelor's degree into eight years. While learning came easy to me, school was never a passion and the thought of an advanced degree never crossed my mind.

This all changed in my life when God called me into ministry. My inadequacy drove my determination to learn how to become first a better pastor, and later, a biblical counselor. God has graciously allowed me to pursue multiple advanced degrees, culminating in this doctoral program. While in this program, I was blessed to be surrounded and to learn from some of the best pastors and counselors available. Seeing godly men pursuing learning at this level was personally encouraging. In addition, seeing the students excited to learn and grow as ministry leaders was also personally encouraging. One reflection is that I must be a lifelong learner. The more I study the Bible, the more inadequate I feel in my knowledge and understanding.

The second realization was the importance of thinking more carefully about the counseling process. The majority of my training in counseling has been on-the-job training. While God was gracious and sent victims that were gracious with me as I learned, this form of informal education comes with a weakness of being able to communicate the steps of the counseling process to others. This project and pursuing this degree have challenged me to learn how to communicate the counseling process to our ministry leaders.

This project has also affirmed something I have learned through this process: I enjoy teaching. Equipping other leaders to enter into the pain and suffering of others requires patience and preparation. This is what I have learned that excites me about the process of teaching. In addition, there is no better way to learn a subject than to have to teach it to others. This process has left me with more questions than answers on the subject of sexual abuse. I am sure, however, that the process learned during the implementation of this project will serve me for years to come in answering these questions.

### **Further Study**

Sexual abuse is a topic that is, unfortunately, becoming more prevalent in our society. The culture continues to lower the sexual standards for sexual conduct. As Jeremiah 6:13 states, “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush.” More cities and states are pushing for prostitution to be legalized and called sex work. The result of this will undoubtedly be an increase in human trafficking and sexual abuse. The church needs to be on the front line defending against sexual immorality and caring for those who have been sinned against. The primary reason for picking this topic for the subject of my project was my local congregation and learning how to serve it better. The second was that a search through the Southern library database of dissertations and projects returned only one dissertation written in 2005 about sexual abuse.

The church needs more training programs and scholarly books written on the subject from a biblical counseling perspective. It would be my hope that over the next five years, more students would take on this complex subject. This will serve not only to help victims of abuse but the church. Given the number of phone calls and emails I received from my fellow students in the program asking for help dealing with sexual abuse issues during my time in the program, the need is great.

## **Conclusion**

This project has been a humbling experience in my life. When I started this journey almost four years ago, my life and ministry were in such a different place. God has graciously guided me through this process despite the many setbacks, including sudden staffing changes in our church, having to shut down our church due to a global pandemic, and moving our church to a new facility that was generously donated. Through it all, he has drawn me closer to himself and shown his goodness in my life in more ways than I have words to express. Developing this curriculum and teaching it also humbled me by exposing my inadequacies as a teacher. This I count as one of the many blessings God has taught me through this process. Each time I have graduated with an advanced degree, I am reminded once again of just how much I do not know. This, I believe, is one of the greatest gifts of education. This project has left me wanting to continue to grow as a teacher and a counselor. I now feel I have the tools to create and evaluate learning interventions in our local church and perhaps in more formal education settings. I also leave excited to see what the next chapter of God's plan holds for my ministry. I pray the content of this project will continue to evolve, and it will bear fruit in the years to come at COTW.

## APPENDIX 1

### MINISTRY LEADER ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Ministry Leader Assessment (MLA). Some general questions were followed by a thirty-question survey with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose was to assess each participant's present level of theological understanding of sexual abuse.

#### Ministry Leader Assessment

##### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to determine your understanding of the issues related to sexual abuse. This research is being conducted by Dale Tompkins for purposes of evaluating the efficacy of this class as part of a doctoral project. In this research, you will be asked to complete the Ministry Leader's Assessment. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

##### Demographic Information

Name (or 4 digit pin): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_ 18-24 \_\_\_ 25-35 \_\_\_ 45 +

Gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female

Number of years you have been a Christian: \_\_\_ 0-5 \_\_\_ 6-10 \_\_\_ 10+

Section 1: Knowledge about Sexual Abuse: The following questions will focus on the knowledge you may have about sexual abuse. Please choose the best that best reflects your response to each statement.

1. Most sexual abuse perpetrators are mentally ill.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Sexual abuse only happens in low socio-economic classes.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Very few children are victims of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Only girls are victims of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

Section 2: Awareness of Sexual Abuse: The following questions will focus on your awareness of the sexual abuse of children. Please choose the answer that best reflects your response to each statement.

5. In the United States, sexual abuse is a minor problem.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. The rate of childhood sexual abuse in the United States is lower than two decades ago.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. There is a new case of sexual abuse reported every five minutes in the United States each year?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Depression is a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. Suicidal thoughts are a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. Sleeping disorders are a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

11. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. Anxiety is a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. Substance abuse is a secondary symptom associated with a history of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. The church should not be counseling survivors of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. The Church should be more involved in counseling survivors of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. The church is actively involved in counseling survivors of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. The bible is sufficient to counsel survivors of sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

Section 3: Perception of Sexual Abuse of Children: The following questions will focus on your perceptions about sexual abuse of children. Please choose the answer that best reflects your response to each statement.

18. Most of the time, children are sexually abused when they are outside their homes.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

19. Children who are sexually abused are more likely to abuse children sexually.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

20. Most perpetrators of child sexual abuse do not belong to the child's family.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

21. Strangers are the most common/frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

22. Family members are the most common/frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

23. Family friends are the most common/frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

24. Male Adults are the most common/frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

25. Female Adults are the most common/frequent perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

## APPENDIX 2

### MINISTRY LEADER ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Table A1. Pre- and post-counseling assessment results

Ministry Leader	MLA Pre-test	MLA Post-test
1	98	117
2	94	120
3	101	121
4	88	104
5	96	107
6	108	119
7	79	101
8	98	120
9	86	104
10	105	121
Mean Total Score	95	113
Mean Score per Question	3.81	4.54

### APPENDIX 3

#### EVALUATION OF SEXUAL ABUSE COURSE

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of one COTW elder, one professor in biblical counseling, one ACBC member, and two local church pastors. This panel evaluated the course material to ensure that it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Name of evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Introduction to Counseling Sexual Abuse Course Evaluation</b>					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<b>Understandability</b>					
The content of the course is biblically and theologically sound.					
The course is presented at a level appropriate for most participants.					
<b>Methodology</b>					
The course sufficiently addresses counseling methodology.					
The course makes use of various learning approaches such as lecture, case studies, role play and homework.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers the basics of biblical counseling sexual abuse.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The curriculum includes opportunities to practice counseling applications.					

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING MINISTRY LEADERS AT CHURCH ON THE WAY IN LAKE CITY, FLORIDA, TO RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND TO SEXUAL ABUSE BIBLICALLY

Ronal Dale Tompkins Jr., DEdMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert D. Jones

This project seeks to equip members of Church on The Way in Lake City, Florida, to counsel sexual abuse survivors biblically. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Church on The Way and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of three passages of Scripture: Psalm 23, Psalm 25, and Ephesians 4:17-32; these show that the Bible is sufficient to answer each of the primary concerns of survivors of sexual abuse. Chapter 3 presents the practical resources available to counsel survivors of sexual abuse. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to equip ministry leaders to recognize and respond to victims of sexual abuse biblically.

## VITA

Ronal Dale Tompkins Jr.

### EDUCATION

BS, Saint Leo University, 2000  
MA, Liberty University, 2008  
MRE, Liberty University 2009  
MDiv, Liberty University, 2011

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Campus Pastor, Baptist Campus Ministries, Florida Gateway College, Lake  
City, Florida, 2000-2004  
Church Planting Director, North Florida Baptist Network, Lake City, Florida  
2003-2005  
Lead Pastor, Church on The Way, Lake City, Florida, 2005-