

Living the Heart of Jesus without Weaponizing the Truth

Spiritual Abuse- an Abuse of Power

When those in a spiritual position of authority exploit the God's authority & use their position of power manipulate, to coerce, shame or bring harm, to control bodies, relationships, autonomy and personhood.

Caution! Spiritual By-passing- we can use truths/ realities as a foundation upon to stand. This can give us stability/ confidence on which to stand as we dig deeper and strive to understand more fully a situation or what others are experiencing- or ourselves.

OR- we can use these same truths/ realities as a cover to keep us from being aware of what is churning below the surface.

Religious Trauma can look like:

Global Research for Religious Research and some of my own observations

- Deep or chronic shame about being personally responsible for Christ's death, being a sinner, or not living up to expectations
- Feelings of unworthiness, being unlovable, or bad in some way
- Fear of rejection by God or the faith community
- Lack of self-compassion
- Lack of personal autonomy - an engrained belief that one's life is for God's sole purpose, leading to challenges making decisions, creating personal boundaries and providing intentional consent
- Feeling that they can't trust themselves, their body or their emotions
- Growing up with chronic fear or anxiety around salvation, rapture, Hell, Satan, or demons
- Superstitious beliefs about what will lead to positive and negative outcomes in life
- Perfectionism or hypervigilance - fear of making mistakes
- Extreme dualistic thinking - judging every individual thought and action as "good" or "bad"

- Spiritual bypassing - denying the presence and validity of mental health issues due to a belief that those feelings come from Satan or a lack of faith and if they pray enough or are favored then God will take it away
- Difficulty with experiencing pleasure
- Feeling bad or wrong for having sexual thoughts or feelings, or having physical reactions to sexual situations such as crying or feeling a disconnection from the body
- Being Uncomfortable/ Confused with or Denying sexuality

‘Dogmas’: a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.

Obedience

Repentance

Confessing our sins

Punitive vs. Restorative Justice

Confessing our sins and the sins of our Fathers

Forgiveness

A Jewish Understanding of Repentance – (Bema Discipleship Podcast) not an apology, which is insufficient

Includes 5 ingredients:

1. Confess the sin (to God and the relevant parties)
2. Repentance- acknowledge the impact of the sin on others
3. Make any possible amends and reparations
(Jewish perspective from the Torah is that there needs to be another 20% to the amend as a way to pursue true justice and making the world a better place)
4. Outline and communicate what I will do differently in order to never do this again.
5. Follow through.

Repentance is not considered to have happened until all 5 ingredients are met.

Confession-

Justice- Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to **love mercy** and to walk humbly with your God.

Justice is the ethical, philosophical idea that people are to be treated impartially, fairly, properly, and reasonably by the law and by arbiters of the law, that laws are to ensure that no harm befalls another, and that, where harm is alleged, a remedial action is taken.

Restoration/ Repair-

Forgiveness-

Forgiveness is an important topic. Tricky!

My responsibility is not to get others to forgive! As captured in the Serenity Prayer, my responsibility is *what is happening in me* and how I am living. How well do I do with 'weeping with those who weep? Does my energy go more into getting others to stop feeling what they feel (because I feel uncomfortable) or to join the one who has been wounded and is experiencing 'a death'? How can I grow my emotional capacity? Job's friends did well for a couple days or so in 'sitting shiva'... and then were uncomfortable to the point they 'needed' Job to be different and stop sinning or... Jesus did not focus on getting all of us sinners to change when He took all our sin into His own experience and owned them! How well do I do in experiencing the fullness of the evil and losses that others are living?

Caution- often people put a spin on forgiveness in a way that the perpetrator is 'off the hook' by being offered forgiveness, mercy and grace. The generosity in offering forgiveness, mercy and grace is out of balance.

The one wounded is again shamed for not being able to 'freely give' these things. The wounded are often held to a different standard by those in authority who hold the power. (We can give what we have received and have. Often the wounded have not been given grace and dignity and honor or forgiven for not being able to forgive. Instead, they are 'blamed/ shamed' for not giving grace and mercy and forgiveness.)

Is it 'good' to ask for forgiveness? Again, this is tricky! It can put the wounded in a position of being shamed again. It can be similar to being forced again to perform for the one who has already harmed them- for the sake of the abuser at their expense.. The perpetrator has already taken so much from the ones they wounded! It might be more appropriate to pursue personal repentance without asking for forgiveness from the one they have wounded. Maybe the forgiveness they need is forgiveness from God. If they receive forgiveness from the ones they have harmed, that is a freely given gift they can be amazed for and full of humble gratitude!

The pursuit of having the wounded person offer forgiveness is sometimes coming from a subtle, lurking blind spot- of wanting the problem and conflict to go away so that we can be more comfortable. It can become our agenda coming out of our discomfort of being in conflict. Thus, we want to 'fix it' out of our own lack of emotional maturity and fears and add another burden onto the one struggling due to our wrong.

Dr. Andrew J. Bauman on Forgiveness

What does it mean to WEAPONIZE FORGIVENESS?

- 1) Pressuring to forgive quickly without proper grief, and/or repentance for the pain that was inflicted.
- 2) Misquoting Bible verses on forgiveness to manipulate into bypassing the harm.
- 3) Getting you to forgive them is more important to them, than actually sitting in the harm and the suffering that they have caused. They want to make it about them not about you.

4) It's not about feeling, it's about doing. Checking off the box and doing what's so-called "right" in front of others. Think Pharisees in Jesus's day.

5) It's about getting on with it. That is the highest priority. It's not about actually being present with you in your heartache. It's about getting over it as quickly as possible so they no longer need to feel obligated.

6) Getting their friends and religious leaders to also pressure you into moving on. The thinking is if the community pressures you, that will fix you, ie. "you are the real problem".

In closing, forgiveness is important for one's own mental health, but forgiveness comes in waves, and should not be coerced or pressured. Forgiveness takes time and that's OK. Forgiveness also doesn't mean reconciliation or lack of boundaries but quite the opposite. Sometimes, I love my father and forgive him, other times I hate him and I want vengeance. Both are fine, we must not judge our forgiveness journey. I must make peace with the fact that sometimes I love my father and forgive him, other times I hate him, and I don't forgive him. Both positions make sense. I am to make peace with my story so that I can once and for all say yes to the full complexities of love.

Resources and Credits:

- ▶ **Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You**- E. James Wilder, James Friesen, Anne Bierling, Rick Koepke, Maribeth Poole
- ▶ **Narcissism Among Us**- Maribeth Poole
- ▶ **Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church**- Diane Langburg
- ▶ **What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing**
Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey
- ▶ Dallas Willard - I recommend all of his books. He also has many of his trainings free on Youtube. I would recommend his series on Divine Conspiracy to get a sense of who he is and what he teaches.
- ▶ Geoff Holzclaw - grassrootschristianity+podcast@substack.com
- ▶ John Ortberg - connect@becomenew.com
- ▶ Peter Scazzero – Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, <https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org>
- ▶ Maribethpoole.com
- ▶ A few 'leaders in the field': Daniel Siegel, Bessel van der Kolk, Diane Poole Heller, Steven Porges, Deb Dana, Gabor Mate, Pat Ogden, Ruth Lanis,