



THE
HOPE
OF SURVIVORS

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT
AMONG SPIRITUAL LEADERS

A ministry of compassion providing
SUPPORT, HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT
to victims of clergy sexual abuse

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CONTACT INFORMATION

The Hope of Survivors
www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.org
Call toll-free: (866) 260-8958

To reach any of The Hope of Survivors
International Divisions, please
visit the main website and select
the appropriate link.

Note: For the sake of space, the victim has been referred to as female and the offending clergy as male. We recognize males are also victims at times and female clergy can be offenders. There are also cases of male-male and female-female abuse. Please consider the pronouns interchangeable as you read this booklet.

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Perhaps you are reading this brochure because someone you know shared it with you. A friend or colleague thought you might find it useful. Regardless of how you received it, a careful read of the information contained within these pages may help you understand and come to terms with the tragedy of pastoral sexual abuse.

You may be wondering why we label this as abuse. After all, aren't we speaking of adult and teenage women and men who are able to choose between right and wrong?

The simple answer is yes—and no. Yes, because the varying circumstances that shape our lives and the many years that it takes to grow from childhood to adult give us a greater ability to make proper choices. Yet no, because what is often overlooked is the reduced ability for a person of any age to reject improper sexual advances from a trusted individual who is in a position of power over them, especially when that power imbalance is magnified by a role of spiritual authority.

Historically, the church has been widely thought of as a safe place. Within its walls we may find comfort, healing and the courage to face the difficult trials which confront each one of us. The church is intended to serve as a safe-haven where God appoints instructors to guide us in a right understanding of His Word and His plan for our lives. The individual who has the greatest spiritual authority, and often our automatic trust, is the pastor.

When that sacred trust is betrayed or violated through improper sexual contact, it can permanently destroy a victim's relationship with God. Such violations also bring reproach and disgrace to the church as a whole—causing undeserved damage to the



faithful ministries of the clergy who do maintain their allegiance to Christ.

Still, is this misconduct actually abuse? The dictionary describes abuse with terms such as, to "misuse, violate," or "deceive." The most noteworthy phrase as it relates to pastoral sexual abuse is, "to defile by improper sexual intercourse." (See *American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster, 1828.) There is a tremendous inequality of power, authority, and responsibility between a pastor and a congregant. Due to these imbalances, there can never be true equality or complete mutual consent. Under these circumstances, any such relationship that leads to sexual contact must always be considered as abuse.

IS THIS REALLY A PROBLEM? Present research and numerous studies indicate the incidence of sexual abuse by clergy has reached alarming proportions. Tens of thousands of victims of clergy sexual abuse have come forward in the United States alone. Clearly this is a tremendous problem that deserves immediate attention and awareness in order to stem the tide of its potential destruction.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE HOPE OF SURVIVORS? The organization's purpose is to provide encouragement, support, referral, seminars and resources to victims of pastoral sexual abuse and related misconduct; as well as to provide educational and informational materials and seminars to pastors and churches.

The organization seeks to:

1. Educate victims, the clergy, the church and the general public about pastoral sexual abuse and misconduct through national media (television, radio, etc.), print media, public appearances and an up-to-date, interactive website.
2. Restore victims and their loved ones to faith in our Creator and to judicious trust of their fellow beings through weekend retreats and seminars, and one-on-one correspondence.
3. Facilitate healing in the church families who have been affected by pastoral sexual abuse; teaching methods of prevention, as well as recovery from the aftereffects, of abuse.
4. Provide pastoral training/educational seminars to church leaders of all denominations; exhorting clergy who have violated their sacred trust to deeply repent, to make amends to their victims, and to receive counseling toward these outcomes.

HOW AND WHEN DID THIS MINISTRY BEGIN? In December 2002, Steve and Samantha Nelson felt led by the Holy Spirit to provide information that could help those who may find themselves in an abusive/exploitative situation with their pastor. With that goal in mind, they began writing about their experience and launched The Hope of Survivors website in April 2003. The



ministry became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in May 2004. In addition to providing information and resources, the website encourages individuals to contact the organization, to share their experiences, and to request help, support or referrals. Educational materials have been developed and disseminated worldwide and conferences for victims, as well as seminars for pastors, have been conducted in several countries.

WHO ARE THE FOUNDERS AND DOES ANY CHURCH OPERATE THE ORGANIZATION? The Hope of Survivors was co-founded by Steve and Samantha Nelson, who personally experienced the devastation of pastoral sexual abuse; and then, in turn, the incredible healing power of God.

Steve is an ordained minister and serves as President of The Hope of Survivors. He holds a Master's degree in Pastoral Ministry and a Doctoral degree in Ministry. He is the author of *Forever Free*, and of numerous articles and devotionals. Steve has also spoken throughout the U.S. and in several other countries on the topic of clergy sexual abuse, along with providing training

seminars to clergy and church leaders.

Samantha (now retired) served for 20 years as Vice President and CEO of The Hope of Survivors. She continues her service as a member of our ministry's Advisory Panel. Samantha has also spoken widely on the topic of clergy sexual abuse. She holds an Associate degree in Biblical Counseling, and a Bachelor of Divinity degree, and has authored the very helpful *Reaching the Hurting: A Biblical Guide for Helping Abuse Victims*, as well as multiple articles, devotionals, and a training manual for peer support groups.

The Board of Directors typically includes church leaders, pastors, and other degreed professionals, as well as peer support specialists and former victims.

The ministry is not owned, operated or subsidized by any denomination.

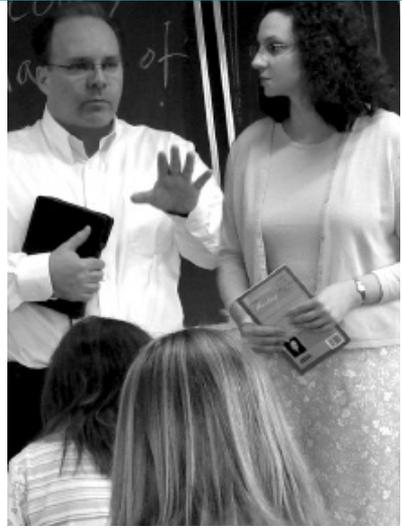
Although we are Seventh-day Adventist-led, we are an independent organization, offering support services and working cooperatively with other denominations in the larger Christian community.

WHY IS THIS MINISTRY NECESSARY?

The Hope of Survivors is necessary due to the large number of victims of pastoral misconduct and the small number of resources available to assist them. Typically, there are limited established resources for the victim within the local or corporate church. Few individuals in local congregations have a clear conception of this form of exploitation. This ministry exists to provide education and support for the victims, as well as for the church body and church leaders.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

Your donations will expand the ministry, spreading important truths to some who might not be reachable through



any other means. Your gifts can also help sponsor one of our many conferences for victims, pastors and churches. Donations are the primary source of funds that make it possible for The Hope of Survivors to maintain its ministry. Since The Hope of Survivors receives no denominational subsidies, your contributions are vitally important.

This form of abuse has devastated untold numbers of women. They have lost faith in God. Some have lost their family and friends. Most stop attending church. Many no longer even pray. The losses are devastating. Do we abandon them? No! We help them.

The Hope of Survivors is...

Reaching the HURTING...

Calling the FAITHFUL...

Bridging the GAP...

MY PASTOR SAYS HE CARES, LOVES AND CAN HELP ME! IS THIS WRONG? I'M SO CONFUSED!

At first glance, this scenario may seem contrived or possibly so extreme that some may think that there is little reason to bring up such a situation. Yet whether or not we can easily visualize it, far too many precious women will fall prey to the seductive manipulations of a seemingly caring and nurturing pastor or other spiritual leader.

Quite possibly one of the primary reasons that this problem is so prevalent can be found in the relationship between the clergy and the members of their congregation. One of the greatest vulnerabilities that congregants face when interacting with a spiritual leader is what can best be described as "automatic trust." This extraordinary trust, often given unreservedly, is based on the assumption that the pastor is a "godly man;" and, as such, will be honest and will do what is best for the members of his congregation. After all, he is a "shepherd," whom we expect will care for and protect his sheep.

Even when the lines of appropriate behavior are clearly crossed, it can be very difficult to accurately comprehend what has actually taken place. A woman's senses may be warning her, but she may be unable to equate the improper actions with the person of the pastor. Commonly, she will tell herself that she misunderstood what was actually going on. Surely she must be mistaken; certainly the pastor would not do or say what he did.

To complicate this even further: when a pastor begins to share his feelings and problems with other women, the natural feminine response will be of empathy; and for some who are caregivers, the overwhelming desire will be to help, comfort, or fix the pastor's broken life.



Once this inappropriate emotional bond is formed, the deviant pastor can then begin to subtly create divisions within the unsuspecting woman's personal life, often intentionally creating problems in her marriage, and twisting Scripture to encourage and to "justify" his evil acts.

DOESN'T GOD FORGIVE US WHEN WE MAKE MISTAKES? Amazingly, "justification" for a fallen pastor's actions may derive from the Bible! King David's sin against Bathsheba is often falsely romanticized and used to "justify" an immoral relationship. The pastor will infer that since God forgave David and called him a "man after His own heart," that God will overlook this relationship as well. And, "since I am also God's 'anointed,' He will 'bless' our union as He did for David."

Ironically, this distortion omits the most important part: David wholeheartedly repented of his murder and adultery. He pleaded with God to forgive him, and to not leave him to bear the full deadly consequences of his sin. (See Psalm 51.) Yet David lost four of his children and the respect of his people. The penalty of his actions reaped a terrible harvest, causing widespread destruction and heartache,

perhaps throughout his generations. The record of David's horrible sin is preserved as a warning to all who may be tempted to follow in his footsteps—not as any justification for such callous or abusive behavior!

"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."—1 John 2:4 (NKJV)

WHAT MADE ME SO VULNERABLE?

A woman who has previously suffered abuse or other devastating events in her life can have extreme emotional vulnerabilities. If left unhealed and unguarded, she may become an easy target for an offending pastor. While not all pastors who become involved in misconduct are purposefully looking for potential victims, many repeat offenders have learned to identify and to exploit the most susceptible women. He may appear to understand her better than anyone else, or to share many things in common with her. This is not necessarily that he is truly so "in tune" with her; but rather, because vulnerable women often share a common set of behaviors that can be easily recognized and targeted.

MY PASTOR SAYS HE LOVES ME.

Even if he tells you that he's never felt love like this before and that he can't live without you, an emotional connection is not love. Love is a decision, a choice, and a principle. Coming from him, those words in a romantic sense can never be right. True love comes from God alone, and is not based on confused emotions that tempt us to violate His Word. If the pastor genuinely wants to help you, he'll never hurt you by wanting to become physically involved. No true love relationship is ever founded on lies, adultery, immorality, or deceit.

Remember, you counseled with him because you believed he could help. You did not go to him for a "relationship."



In addition to your own difficulties, you now bear the weight of his problems, too. This is part of what makes clergy sexual abuse so damaging. Remember, he is responsible, not you!

HOW DO I START OVER?

Begin by praying and asking God for forgiveness of your sins and for His aid in recognizing what is the truth. Ask Jesus to heal you emotionally, spiritually and physically, and to help you overcome your pain. God's Word promises, *"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."* (Matthew 21:22, NKJV) He will gladly give you all that you ask (in accordance with His will) and more! God is willing and able to renew your heart and to give you a fresh new start. Find a Christian counselor and/or peer support resource, confide in your spouse, report it to the church, talk with a trusted friend.

HE THREATENS SUICIDE IF I END THE "RELATIONSHIP." WHAT DO I DO?

This trap is just another form of his manipulation. Tell him that you are not responsible for his actions—no matter what he may decide to do. Remember, you did not do this to him; he is doing it to you. It's time to know the truth!

For the husband, the reality of the abuse can have devastating effects. The betrayal of sacred trust, the loss of marital fidelity, compounded by the spiritual malpractice perpetrated by one whose very position lays claim to purity and holiness, goes beyond what most victims are initially able to comprehend.

While not the primary target, the husband becomes a secondary victim of the abuse against his wife. The consequences of the compounded abuse can lead to devastating emotional and spiritual struggles. If unresolved, these issues can persist for years. Only through God's abundant grace can their broken lives ultimately be healed.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? There are many reasons why husbands find it difficult to deal with this type of exploitation. As essential as it may be to understand the underlying dynamics that take place within the context of clergy sexual abuse, it is equally important to realize that abuse is never logical. Someone who purposefully chooses to hurt another person can have a plethora of excuses for their actions, but nothing can adequately justify the damage that has been done. The first and most important step a husband needs to take to facilitate healing begins with seeing his wife's actions in a correct light. The relationship between his wife and the offending pastor should not be considered consensual. Almost without exception, the wife had an emotional vulnerability which, exploited, became the access point for her to be abused. Add to this the implicit trust she placed in the pastor and it only makes the damage far more destructive.

In her mind, she was not seeking to find a replacement for her husband, with the



most attractive option presented to her being a relationship with the pastor.

To the contrary, she was simply looking for hope and healing and was exploited by someone cloaked in a clever disguise of godliness, who while professing a desire to help, instead abused his sacred trust. How tragic that truth really is!

Unfortunately, the longer the abuse continues, the greater the level of control that must be exercised over the victim in order to maintain secrecy and her compliance. For the victim, the outrageous price extorted from her for her anticipated emotional healing is paid with the intimate physical contact, callously manipulated and coerced by the offending pastor. Often the victim cannot see a way to disentangle from his controlling influence; and in hopelessness, resigns herself to give in to his cleverly calculated demands.

HOW CAN I TRUST HER? Once the abusive contact has ended, an essential component for restoring a healthy relationship between the husband and wife is found in the process of rebuilding trust. However, trust is more easily first given, than restored after its loss.

For you, as the husband, there may be things your wife does which can act as reminders or triggers, in some way mirroring events which took place during the abuse. As difficult as it may be, it is vital to attempt to deal with these areas in an objective manner. Inform your wife when this occurs, explaining that it makes you feel uneasy and suspicious. Although you now realize you may be reacting from previous experiences, it is reasonable to ask her to help you find a positive solution to the triggering situation.

Some abuse connection mechanisms you will be able to change, others may need to be eliminated altogether. An example would be that if the abuser maintained contact with the victim through e-mail or the telephone, then these contact points should be changed in order to send a clear signal to the abuser that no further contact will be permitted. Over time, any remaining areas of potential concern can be worked through as your love and trust rebuild.

An open line of communication between you and your spouse will remain a necessity in order to discover the vulnerabilities exploited by the abuser which enabled him to gain access. A qualified Christian counselor should be able to assist you through this difficult journey. Honesty is often very tough to handle, but both of you will need to prayerfully seek God for His wisdom and guidance to see what aspects of your lives may need to change in order to protect your wife and your marriage, from future attacks.

HOW DO I FORGIVE? You may not be able to recover all the losses sustained to your marriage; yet in Christ there is much hope, and you can heal. While recognizing that forgiveness is a Biblical directive, the ability to forgive is an act

of Divine grace. Pray for God's pardoning love to be placed within your heart and to see your spouse through His eyes. Your role as a husband is to now follow in the footsteps of the One whose example has gone before us: who, when He was abused, prayed, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

In order for your forgiveness to be complete, you must also readily accept that tomorrow you may once again be reminded of the pain and suffering you have gone through. If you truly forgive, you cannot retract your forgiveness when painful memories resurface. You will always need to leave those wounds where God's forgiving grace placed them—in the depths of the sea.

Most importantly, keep in mind that your role as the spiritual leader of your family was usurped from you. And, unless you heal spiritually, you will not be able to flourish and become the leader God designed you to be. During the healing process it is imperative that you maintain, or reestablish, a firm connection with God. As you do this, you will continue to heal and grow into the leader God has ordained you to be.

You may be tempted to blame God for all of the evil that has befallen you, but doing so only follows the same path of lies used to perpetrate such evils against you and your wife in the first place.

It is quite natural to harbor thoughts of anger or resentment toward the abusive pastor. Although anger is self-defeating and destructive, forgiveness provides a wonderful boost to healing! Ask God to bless you with His grace to forgive the one who tried to destroy you, and to place His love in your heart.

Tragically for the abuser, if he remains unrepentant, the just payment for his misconduct will be eternal loss and ruin.

I LIKE THE ATTENTION MY YOUTH PASTOR GIVES ME. HE SAYS I'M SPECIAL AND THAT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD.

Everyone wants to feel special and loved. Sometimes, when we don't receive healthy love and affection at home, we're more likely to seek it elsewhere. While a youth pastor or Bible teacher should be loving and kind, there are times and types of hugging and touching which are wrong outside of marriage.

If you are being hugged when or how you don't want to be, or being touched in a way that makes you uncomfortable, tell him to stop or ask your parents to talk with him about it. It's OK for you to say no to something that hurts you or makes you feel awkward, even when it's the pastor who is wanting to do it.

I FEEL LIKE WHAT HE'S DOING IS WRONG AND I'M TO BLAME. EVERYONE LOOKS UP TO HIM.

It may seem like everyone respects him; but, if he is doing something wrong, it is not your fault. If he is isolating you from others, trying to get you alone to spend "special time" with him, trying to hold you, kiss you or touch you in some way (especially in a sexual way), you need to know that it is not your fault. His wrong behaviors need to be stopped!

HE SAID THIS WAS "OUR LITTLE SECRET." I DON'T WANT TO BE A TATTLETALE. BESIDES, WHO WOULD BELIEVE ME?

No adult should ask you to keep a secret, unless it is a nice surprise like a birthday gift or something like that. If you are being asked to keep your meetings, or what takes place during those times, a secret; then something is wrong—very wrong.

Tell someone. Tell your parents, tell a close friend, but do tell. There will be someone who will believe you and will help you. You do not need to face this



alone. Other adults can manage his anger. You don't need to be concerned about that.

HE THREATENED TO HURT MY FAMILY AND ME IF I TOLD. I CAN'T TELL!

If you have a close relationship with your parents, tell them what's happening and how it makes you feel. You **MUST** tell. This is abuse and it needs to be stopped. Your family can protect you and make sure that the person who is abusing you is stopped and held accountable for his misconduct.

HE SAYS GOD MADE ME FOR HIM. IS THIS WHAT GOD WANTS OF ME?

No, it is not. God would never want any harm to come to you and He would never want someone to abuse you or hurt you in this way. This man's feelings are not your concern. You may care about him, but this is not true love. God loves you and He wants to protect and heal you. Jesus wants someone honorable for you who will truly love you with His love.

HE SAYS HE LOVES ME IN A SPECIAL WAY, LIKE GOD LOVES HIS CHILDREN.

He may tell you that you're special to him—that you make him happy in a way no one else ever has.

These words are very manipulative and are often used to control unsuspecting victims. A spiritual leader who makes such statements and tries to engage you in a sexual relationship is not showing you God's love at all.

God loves each of us, but God would never do anything that is wrong; and no one who teaches God's Word should ever do anything to hurt someone else.

This may be confusing and you might not wish to talk about it, but there is help and hope for you. Your feelings are greatly confused right now; and perhaps you don't want to hurt the person doing this to you.

However, no one has the right to expect you to keep quiet about being abused—whether by your youth pastor, Bible worker, school dean, elder or deacon, or by anyone in any position of spiritual leadership or authority.

IMPROPER CLERGY BEHAVIORS

- Close front-facing hugs, or hugging too often
- Kissing you
- Constantly looking at you
- Having you sit close to him or on his lap
- Asking you to touch him
- Telling or asking you to keep his secrets
- Inappropriate talk about sex
- Sexual touching or caressing
- Passing you notes, calling you a lot, texting or e-mailing you often, sending you pictures of him or asking you for pictures of yourself.

If your youth pastor or someone else who is a leader in the church is acting in any of these ways, please tell someone. Contact us. We can help you.

YOU MAY BE THINKING OR FEELING...

- I must be misunderstanding his actions. Maybe he didn't really mean to kiss me on the lips.
- I feel bad for thinking he is doing something wrong.
- Even though it feels wrong to me, it must not be; because he is my pastor and he wouldn't do wrong.
- I like feeling special and enjoy the attention he gives me. I like him.
- He makes me feel so grown-up and important.

REASONS WHY YOU MAY BE AFRAID TO TELL...

- I don't want to get him in trouble.
- I don't want for me to be in trouble.
- I don't want him to be mad at me.
- He told me not to tell.
- I don't want to hurt his feelings. After all, I think I love him.
- Everybody likes him. They will be mad at me for telling on him.
- I am embarrassed and don't want people to know.

We want you to know that we are here to help you. You are right to tell. The person who wronged you may get in trouble; but that is because what he has done is harmful, not because you did anything bad to him, and certainly not just because you told on him. Pastors and others who teach us about God and His Word are supposed to be kind and caring. They are not to touch us in inappropriate ways, nor to encourage us to keep secrets from our family and friends. Truly good pastors are important because they can help us grow in our relationship with Jesus; but if a pastor is doing something wrong toward you, he is definitely not being a good pastor!

THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT HER. IS THIS WRONG? CAN IT BE RIGHT?

During the course of your ministry, you will be called to lead, guide, and help point many hurting souls to the Source of all healing. Some will be women who will respect you and consider you to be a kind, godly man who cares for, and can help them through their most difficult problems. Because they trust you, they will naturally begin to open up, and may share their deepest thoughts and feelings with you. Once this happens, the relationship takes on a new dimension, one that creates an emotional connection to you which never could have taken place outside of this professional association. It is your responsibility to never abuse that trust.

The difficulty can arise if you find yourself attracted to your parishioner/counselee. She is in need of guidance and, as your understanding of her problems and unique personality increases, you will begin to believe that you can truly help her. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the road to healing will indeed begin, but beware to keep safe boundaries around this relationship so this healing journey does not become a path to mutual destruction.

If your respect for her gives way to an admiration of her physical beauty, then you are treading into dangerous territory. Once your feelings transcend from caregiver to a desire for intimacy, you need to step back and look carefully where you are heading. Even if positive steps toward healing have begun, to continue this relationship and risk the greater damage of abusing her and violating your sacred trust is too great a risk. Stop immediately and refer her to a qualified counselor before it's too late.



If you cross that line and do abuse her, she will never be able to trust you again.

No matter how much you may admire or desire her, she is not your wife. She is not meant to be with you. Never share your feelings for her, nor try to convince her that it is somehow God's will for you to be together. For if you do that, you are willfully sinning under the guise of being a "man of God." You are peddling a distorted perversion of His holy Truth.

When clergy turn away from God onto this slippery path, rarely do they ever return. Do you really want to take such a perilous step? Will you callously cause a vulnerable sister in Christ to stumble?

As a minister of God, you have the sacred responsibility to uphold the highest standards of integrity. *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."*—James 3:1 (NKJV)

Some pastors feel that they are the exception to the rule. Their ministry may appear very successful and they equate that "success" and God's mercies to a "specialness," about themselves. They vainly deceive themselves into thinking

that God will overlook their seemingly “small” indiscretions, convincing themselves the “good” they are doing “for His kingdom” far outweighs the potential loss if their “minor failures” become known. Blinded by sin, they arrogantly plunge forward on the path of no return.

God holds you to a greater level of accountability because you profess to represent Him to His church. Our Almighty Creator does not regard lightly this grave sin—and neither dare you!

I’VE NEVER FELT LOVED LIKE THIS. It is exceedingly unwise to say such things, even if you feel this way. In this situation, such words become a form of emotional control and manipulation, by which you will only confuse her. She needs help; please do not further betray her trust. No matter how you may feel, speaking these words to her can never be right!

BUT I’M SO HAPPY. God wants you to be happy, but an immoral relationship is not according to His Word, or His will. By sinning in this manner, you will destroy a lifetime of respect and the sacred trust God has called you to uphold. You are a shepherd of His flock and, as a shepherd, you are to guard all of His sheep. Don’t allow Satan to turn you into his puppet wolf in sheep’s clothing!

HER HUSBAND DOESN’T TREAT HER LIKE SHE DESERVES. I CAN.

Even if this seems true, does that make it right? How can you ever have a true love relationship with anyone, when it is built on lies, adultery and deceit?

To encourage division in her marriage in the place of her healing violates a sacred vow that you, as a minister, have promised to uphold. Your responsibility is to help healing, and to protect marriages. Even if she were to leave her husband for you, how could she ever trust you, already knowing your deceptive ways?

STEPS TO AVOID FALLING INTO SIN:

1. Have an accountability partner and honestly share your vulnerabilities.
2. Leave the office door open and the office window in it uncovered.
3. Keep your desk between you and your counselee at all times as a protective barrier.
4. Avoid even casual physical contacts.
5. Counsel only with couples, or with members of the same sex.
6. Never assume that you are invincible. Given the wrong circumstances, every pastor is vulnerable to temptation, and to abuse of power.

To bring this into perspective, consider this: suppose a medical doctor would decide it is in his best financial interest to prescribe medicine to a sick patient to keep the patient sick, rather than to heal the patient. It’s immediately obvious how utterly malicious that would be!

A pastor/congregant situation, however, can become more difficult to objectively evaluate, given that it involves emotions, as well as a spiritual component. When a woman seeks spiritual advice from her pastor, and he instead distorts the truth in order to emotionally and physically take advantage of her, how can this be anything but abuse?

It’s sometimes perceived that a woman may “go after” a pastor. She appears to be drawn to him because of his power, and to seduce him, thereby supposedly causing him to “fall.” However, that is quite rarely the case. It is almost always the pastor who targets the woman, often “grooming” her, by his own choice.

Even if a woman may be attracted to power, or to a certain pastor, an important question to ask is this: Would she be “after him” if he were not the pastor? Evidence seems mixed on this

question. However, the pastor needs to recognize that his position of spiritual authority might sometimes be a significant factor in any given woman being drawn to him. Thus, outside of his spiritual role, he might be less likely to be “targeted.” Regardless of this rare special set of circumstances, the fact still remains that the spiritual leader is *always* responsible for maintaining healthy, safe, and appropriate boundaries—under all circumstances—and with all of his congregants.

THE PASTOR IS, AFTER ALL, JUST A MAN. We all make mistakes. Why is this different?

If a licensed counselor or therapist became sexually involved with one of his clients, it would be a criminal act. He would lose his license and possibly serve time in prison. The same is true of a physician-patient or teacher-student relationship. It goes against the professional code of ethics and, in some situations, against state laws.

How much greater the magnitude of such an offense for a pastor—one who has spiritual authority and power, and has accepted a calling to maintain an even higher accountability to Almighty God, who he claims to represent!

Clergy sexual abuse is a spiritual crime of the highest degree. This grievous exploitation by men representing the Savior of the world cannot be equated with the same sin of those without that calling or position. God requires that His representatives attain to a higher and holier standard. A pastor is not “just a man.” He is appointed by God to stand in Christ’s stead to His flock. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Many people mistakenly believe that when a clergy member becomes physically involved with a member of his congregation that it is an “affair.”



Nothing is farther from the truth!

“When ministers thus take advantage of the confidence the people place in them and lead souls to ruin, they make themselves as much more guilty than the common sinner as their profession is higher.”—*Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5*

DO YOU KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS?

1. Do you, as a pastor, look forward to a session with a particular counselee more than others? Why?
2. Do you fantasize about a given counselee, asking “what if” questions about her availability?
3. Do you meet with a certain counselee at other than regularly scheduled times? In unusual places?
4. Do you end your sessions on time or do you give some counselees more time? Or do you make your appointments “open-ended”?
5. Do you share your counseling or visitation schedule with your wife and/or secretary (of course, not breaking appropriate confidences)?

Clergy integrity, transparency, and accountability are far more than just valuable; they endure as indispensable.

AM I CRAZY? IS IT JUST ME? You're a pastor's wife. That means your life is perfect and you have no problems, right? Wrong! While your stress or trials may be light compared to some, you face unique challenges in your role. Those challenges are difficult enough when you and your husband serve alongside one another, and when your pastor-husband is a truly converted, dedicated, loving and Christlike man—a genuine shepherd to you, to your family and to the flock of God.

Yet sometimes pastors' wives may find themselves in a vastly different reality. How do you reconcile your lived experience with what you hear?

YOU MAY HEAR THINGS LIKE:

- The pastor is so funny, witty and charming.
- He's such a caring, Godly man.
- He's so knowledgeable.
- He works so hard and sacrifices so much.
- He's an upstanding man in the community, well liked and respected by all in our town.

Sometimes comments about your pastor-husband are hurtful and humiliating. They may even be frustrating and maddening. You seem to be the only person (other than perhaps your children) who sees your husband as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—showing his good side to the congregation and community, but revealing another side to those who are closest to him.

OTHERS MAY BE UNAWARE THAT:

- He may be neglectful or abusive to you and the children at home.
- He may force you to keep his "dirty little secrets" and to discuss nothing that goes on in your home with anyone else.



- He may be addicted to internet adultery—pornography (or worse).
- He may already have committed interpersonal adultery (perhaps repeatedly).
- He may control your time, finances, clothing, friendships, or everything about you and your family.

You know he is not who he professes to be. You know he has no business being a pastor or church leader in his sin-filled unrepentant condition.

Yet he may tell you that God appointed him and is blessing his efforts; thus you need to keep quiet and "touch not God's anointed." He may even claim that you are "the problem" because you're not more supportive of him, or you don't understand him or his needs, or you don't do enough to help out at home, the church, etc. This likely makes you feel uneasy and distressed.

You need to tell. You want to tell, but...

- You may fear his temper and violent behavior.
- You don't want him (or you, or the family) to bear the shame of it all.

- You don't want him to lose his job, because it would wreak financial havoc in your lives.
- You don't think anyone will believe you. After all, he's a popular pastor.
- You're afraid he will likely blame and divorce you if you expose him.
- You're afraid he might take the children from you.
- You keep hoping and praying that things will get better, that he will finally make lasting changes.

It is normal to be fearful of confronting and exposing abusive behavior, especially when the abusive person is your husband—and the pastor. God does not want you to be afraid, nor does He want you to continue to suffer abuse of any kind. By telling, by seeking help, by making necessary changes in your life, you could save yourself, your children and perhaps even someone else who may be harmed by the pastor.

If your husband has a secret life or a dark side which places you in a situation that is more a nightmare than a dream come true, what should you do?

Perhaps you can start by reflecting on your life as a pastoral couple.

DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR PASTOR-HUSBAND?

- Verbally, emotionally, spiritually or physically abusive (name-calling, twisting Scripture, hitting, etc.)?
- Sexually demanding, degrading or demeaning?
- Strangely aloof and reluctant to confide his burdens, and he often neglects you?
- Doesn't spend quality time with you or the children?
- Very secretive and private about his work?

- Different (more friendly, outgoing, sociable, pleasant) when he's around others, than when he's at home with you and the children?

If so, take courage! God sees all. He recognizes your pain and He is there to help and to guide you. You may wish to read Malachi 2:14-16 for further comfort.

Perhaps your husband does seem to treat you and the children fairly well. What clues might you have if he were committing adultery via porn; or interpersonally, with a congregant?

POTENTIAL TELLTALE SIGNS:

- Dresses differently (style, color)
- New woman at church (maybe he focuses on, compliments, or tries to be alone with her)
- Brushing teeth more (hygiene becomes very important, especially if it wasn't before)
- Listening to "love" songs (romantic music, poetry)
- Irritable or short-tempered with you
- More controlling (ensures your schedule is full, knows where you are)
- Restlessness (heightened desire for variety in various situations)

What can you do? First, be aware of what's going on in your own heart and mind. Then, if you can safely do so, discuss your feelings with your pastor-husband. Talk with a trusted friend, counselor, or peer support resource. Importantly, have the heart of a shepherdess: do not allow fear to keep you from reporting your husband's misconduct to the proper entities.

If this situation doesn't describe you or someone you know, praise God! But please save this information. Education

THOUGHTS FROM THOSE IN THE PEW

"How could this happen?"

"Pastor so-and-so is such a godly man!"

"She must have seduced him."

"Maybe she sued for money?"

These are some of the comments we often hear when the news of pastoral misconduct has reached the congregation. The church members as a whole, are generally shocked and unable to comprehend how something like this could have happened within their midst. Disbelief typically abounds, compounded by gossip. Unfortunately, these immediate responses are seldom comforting to anyone, especially to a victim. When a congregation misplaces the blame for pastoral misconduct onto the victim, they are—often in ignorance—re-victimizing her.

It is vital for the congregation to love and emotionally support the victim and her family, as well as loving the pastor and his family. In this situation, love does not at all mean turning a blind eye, leaving the pastor in the pulpit, or softening or eliminating consequences for the pastor's sin against God, his sin against the victim, his sin against his family, and his sin against the congregation. Love—genuine love—seeks eternal wellbeing rather than any temporary escape from accountability.

HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND TO A VICTIM? She deserves your love, compassion and genuine concern for what has happened to her. Listen...and listen some more. She will need your understanding and compassion, even if you really can't begin to understand how this could have happened. Let her know you believe her and you will be praying for her. Keep the conversation confidential. Her trust has already been betrayed by the pastor, don't betray her



again. Just as important as knowing what to say and do is knowing what not to say or do.

AVOID SAYING OR DOING THINGS SUCH AS:

- "You must have known what he wanted."
- "How could you have been so stupid?"
- "You shouldn't have been dressing that way."
- "You're just unforgiving."
- Claiming the victim is being evil because she is telling people about the abuse.
- Telling the victim to keep quiet.
- Accusing the victim of hatred, jealousy, revenge, or wanting to destroy the church.

Many victims have suffered prior abuse or some other trauma earlier in their lives. This may at times affect their judgment in different areas of life (such as dress, or in gauging another's character and/or intentions). Abuse has nothing to do with intelligence.

The Hope of Survivors has assisted victims from every class of society, including licensed therapists, nurses, etc. Intelligence, knowledge, education—or lack thereof—are not indicators of vulnerability to abuse. One's emotional state primarily creates the vulnerability.

Sometimes, when there is no resolution within the church itself, cases of abuse are taken to criminal or civil court. When this occurs, it was likely not the victim's first choice; but perhaps her only perceived option after failing to secure justice or resolution through her beloved church. If this has happened, please keep in mind that the main concern is NOT asking how the court ruled in the case. Most cases are settled out of court and, even if a case does go to court, the verdict doesn't necessarily reflect the abuser's innocence or guilt. The main concern should always be the spiritual restoration of both the victim and the offender.

Other Church members will also have to learn to cope with the pain and stress caused by the pastor's sin. They, too, have been betrayed and deceived by their pastor. It will take time to heal as a body of believers. Some may be so disillusioned by what the pastor has done they may even leave the church—or turn away from God—for good. The consequences of a pastor betraying his sacred trust affect not only the congregation, but the community.

Congregations that experience pastoral sexual abuse will face many challenges. There will be some who will support the pastor and want to keep him in the pulpit. Others will support the victim. What really matters is following God's will in the matter, and this can only happen by following His Word. The Bible makes it clear that the consequences for a leader's sin are serious. A pastor who



has had a moral fall has shown that he is unfit to represent Christ to the people. For his own eternal wellbeing, he needs to be removed, or to step down, to focus on restoring his walk with the Lord.

HOW COULD THIS HAVE BEGUN?

During a counseling session, or when working together, the pastor may begin by sharing his feelings with another woman, often subtly twisting Scripture to encourage or “justify” his sinful lusts, and creating problems in her marriage.

HOW COULD WE HAVE KNOWN?

No one can truly know the mind or heart of another, but usually there are indicators in the pastor's life that something is off course. Outwardly, he might be overly friendly or flirtatious. Or perhaps he is very controlling or manipulative, indicating a focus on the self, which can easily lead to an abuse of power. He may make inappropriate comments toward, or about, women. And if he counsels with women alone, that often opens the door to inappropriate sexual advances, and to abusing those in his care. His sermon content or preaching style may have gradually or suddenly changed, and he may no longer possess the Spirit-

filled power he had previously shown. All of these outward indicators can be signs of an inward struggle, one that may be the result of a neglected prayer and devotional life.

Satan is constantly seeking to destroy God's messengers and His children. Because of this, we need to continually lift up each other in prayer for God's guidance and protection.

WHO CAN WE TRUST? In order to be trustworthy, the pastor must have Jesus dwelling in his heart. Such a relationship will reveal itself in the pastor's outward behavior. He'll have a consecrated desire to serve others, not himself. As a true servant of God, he will be honest, faithful, and loyal to his high calling.

HOW CAN WE HEAL FROM THIS? Only God can bring true healing from such pain and devastation. We must pray for each other, pray for the pastor, and pray for the victim and their families. Ask God to forgive and to heal, and to rebuild the damaged marriages. Honestly discuss your feelings, hurt and pain. Reach out to others around you who are hurting and offer them support and encouragement. Ultimately, spiritual wholeness comes from looking at God, not man.

HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH HANDLE THIS? The church should first seek God's direction through prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Then it can carefully and tactfully inform the congregation there has been a moral fall and the pastor has not upheld the high standards required by his position as a leader, which the Bible and the church demand. In such a crisis, the church must never go into denial or shift blame onto a victim of clergy sexual abuse.

Explain to the congregation that this was not an "affair," but rather a situation where, because of the power imbalance, the pastor has misused his authority.

Because he violated the sacred trust of his office, the pastor (or church leader) must step down from his position.

The church should offer to assist the clergyman, the victim(s), and their families in getting proper counseling, providing the opportunity for all to heal spiritually and emotionally. But while the church should continue to extend a redemptive hand of support and forgiveness to the offending pastor, it must be clearly understood that in order for the pastor to remain in fellowship with the local church body, he will need to take decided and appropriate steps that demonstrate genuine repentance.

Perhaps you're still wondering whether a pastor who has experienced a moral fall should be brought to accountability. This question must be asked: How will the world view the exalted character of God, and His power to use the church as a tool to rescue people from sin? And what does it say to the community if a church fails to take action against a spiritual leader who has defiled himself? Confronting and removing corrupt leadership may initially bring shame upon the church; yet, ultimately, such decisive action will preserve the church's witness to the community as a beacon of light and of hope in our sin-sick world.

Clergy sexual abuse is a spiritual and emotional crisis for the entire congregation, not just the victim. The church cannot escape its responsibility to confront offending clergymen and relieve them from leadership. Then the church can fulfill its responsibility of ministering with Christ's healing love to victims of clergy sexual abuse, helping them become survivors. Only then can the church have a credible Christian witness to the community and become a safe place for vulnerable people to find shelter from an evil and hurtful world.

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