



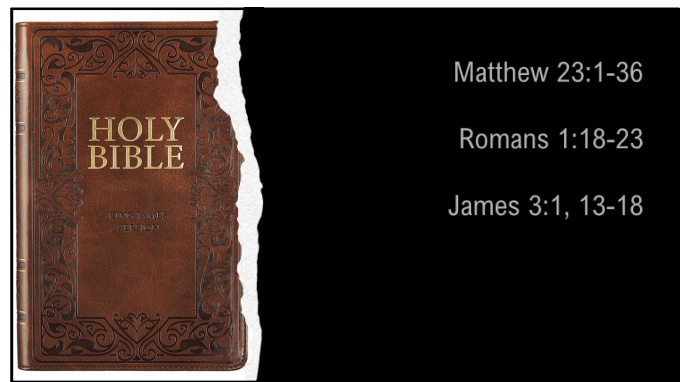
1



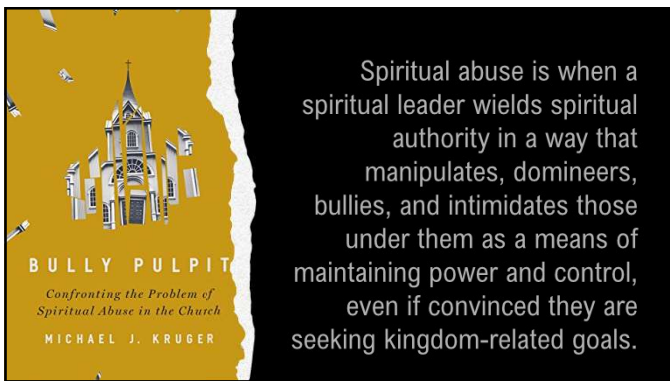
2



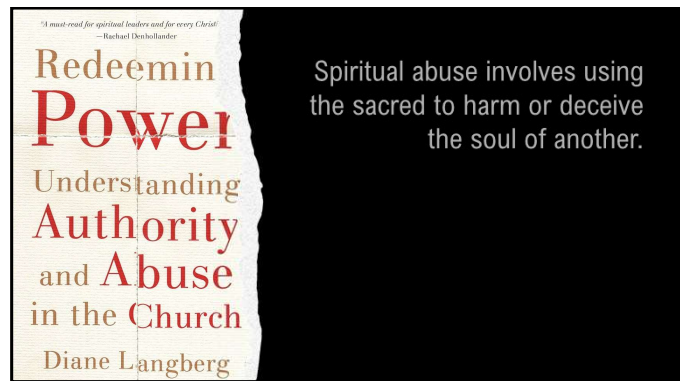
3



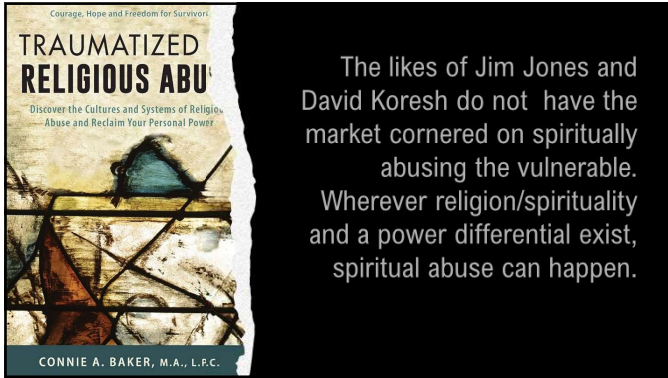
4



5

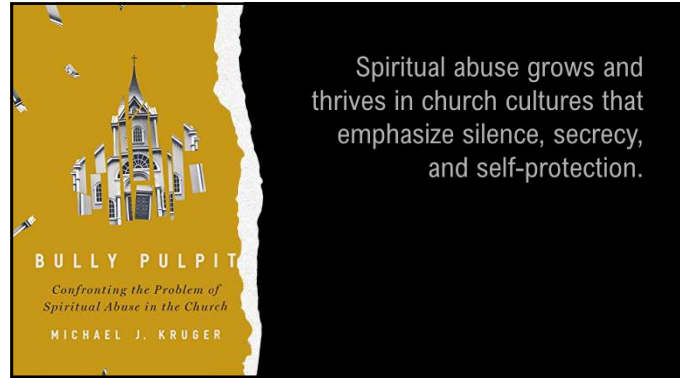


6



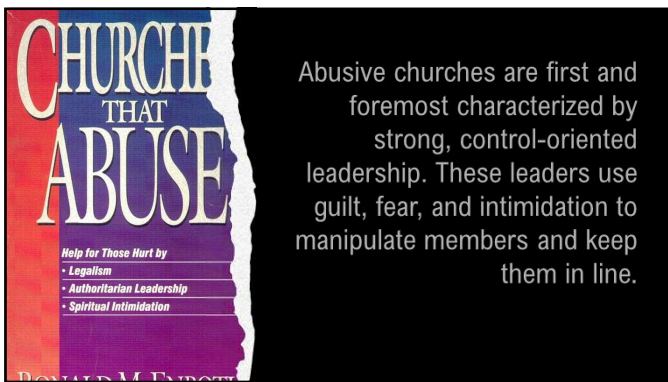
The likes of Jim Jones and David Koresh do not have the market cornered on spiritually abusing the vulnerable. Wherever religion/spirituality and a power differential exist, spiritual abuse can happen.

7



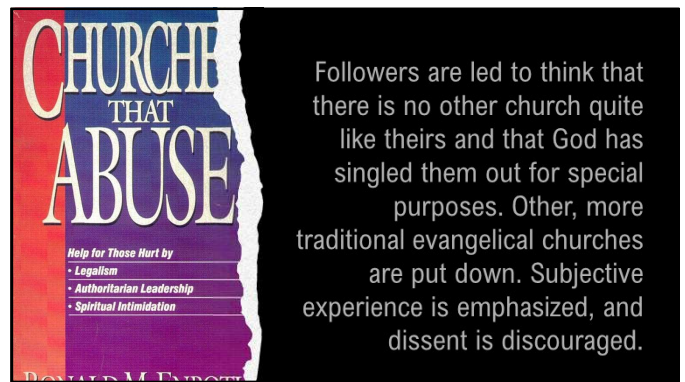
Spiritual abuse grows and thrives in church cultures that emphasize silence, secrecy, and self-protection.

8



Abusive churches are first and foremost characterized by strong, control-oriented leadership. These leaders use guilt, fear, and intimidation to manipulate members and keep them in line.

9



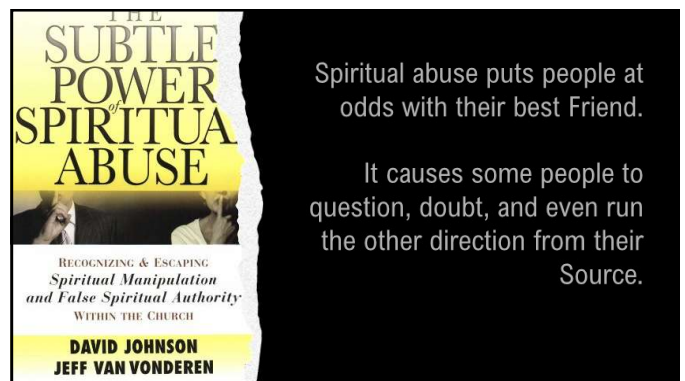
Followers are led to think that there is no other church quite like theirs and that God has singled them out for special purposes. Other, more traditional evangelical churches are put down. Subjective experience is emphasized, and dissent is discouraged.

10



Many areas of members' lives are subject to scrutiny. Rules and legalism abound. People who don't follow the rules or who threaten exposure are often dealt with harshly. Excommunication is common. For those who leave, the road back to normalcy is difficult

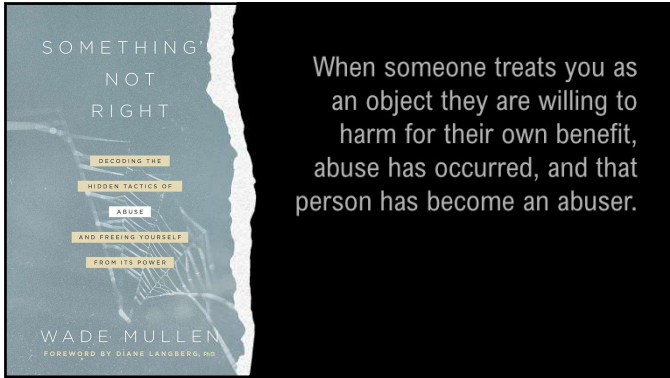
11



Spiritual abuse puts people at odds with their best Friend.

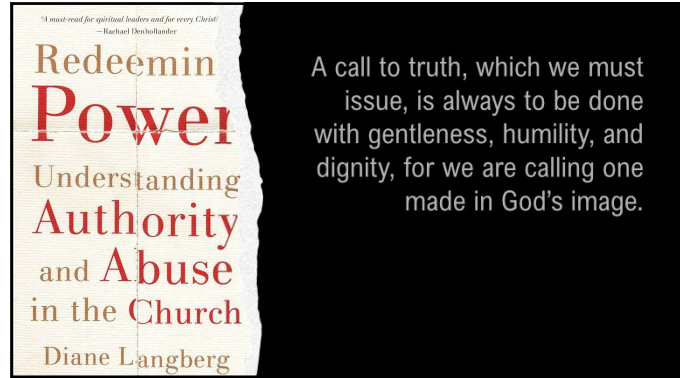
It causes some people to question, doubt, and even run the other direction from their Source.

12



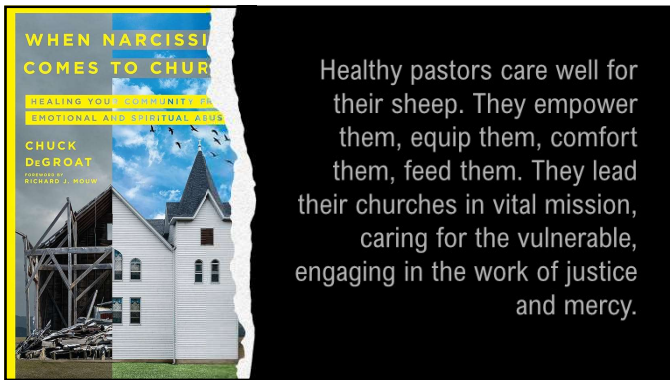
When someone treats you as an object they are willing to harm for their own benefit, abuse has occurred, and that person has become an abuser.

13



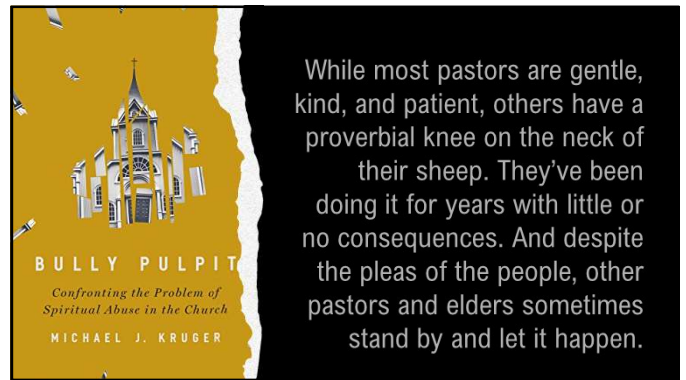
A call to truth, which we must issue, is always to be done with gentleness, humility, and dignity, for we are calling one made in God's image.

14



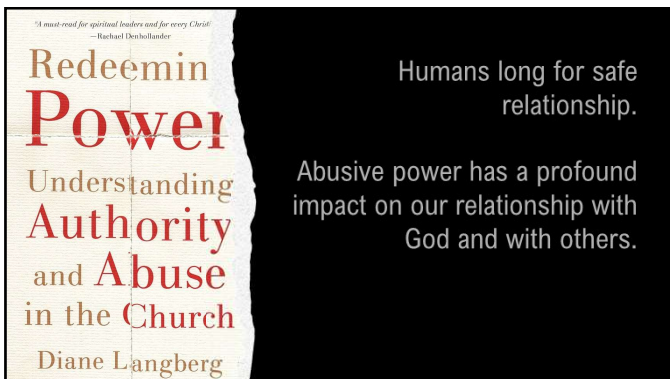
Healthy pastors care well for their sheep. They empower them, equip them, comfort them, feed them. They lead their churches in vital mission, caring for the vulnerable, engaging in the work of justice and mercy.

15



While most pastors are gentle, kind, and patient, others have a proverbial knee on the neck of their sheep. They've been doing it for years with little or no consequences. And despite the pleas of the people, other pastors and elders sometimes stand by and let it happen.

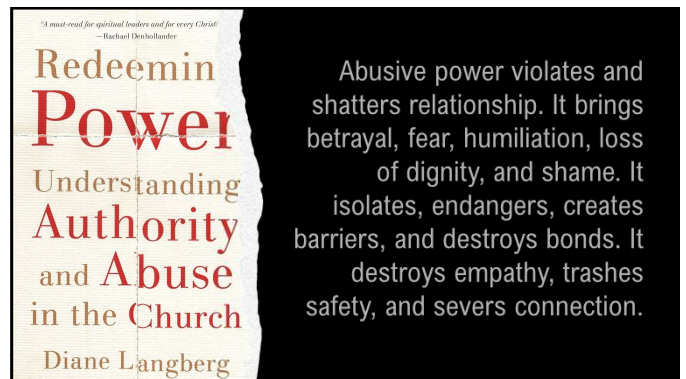
16



Humans long for safe relationship.

Abusive power has a profound impact on our relationship with God and with others.

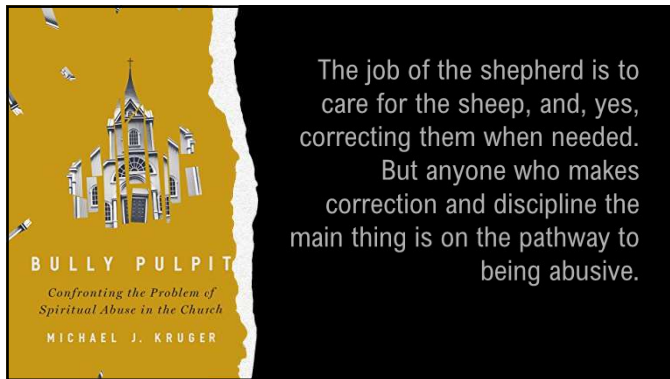
17



Abusive power violates and shatters relationship. It brings betrayal, fear, humiliation, loss of dignity, and shame. It isolates, endangers, creates barriers, and destroys bonds. It destroys empathy, trashes safety, and severs connection.

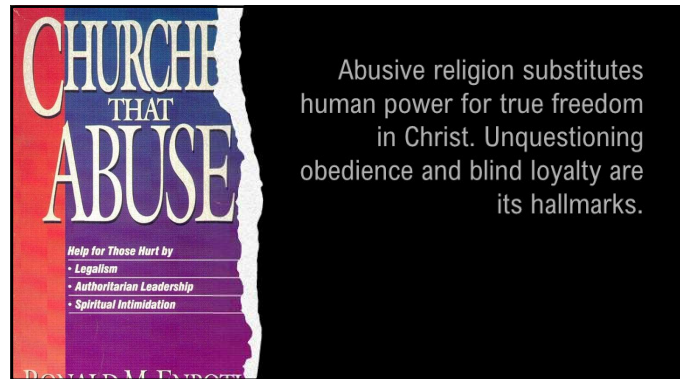
18





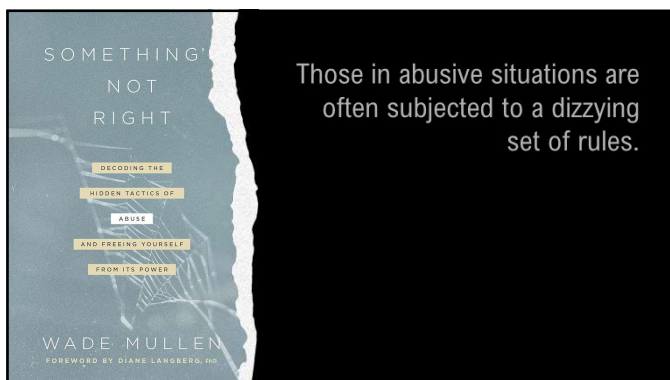
The job of the shepherd is to care for the sheep, and, yes, correcting them when needed. But anyone who makes correction and discipline the main thing is on the pathway to being abusive.

19



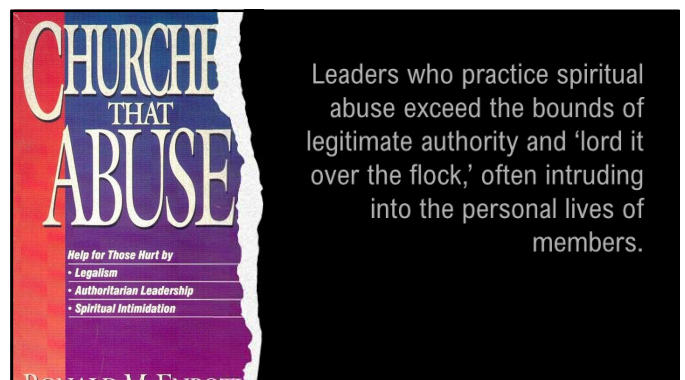
Abusive religion substitutes human power for true freedom in Christ. Unquestioning obedience and blind loyalty are its hallmarks.

20



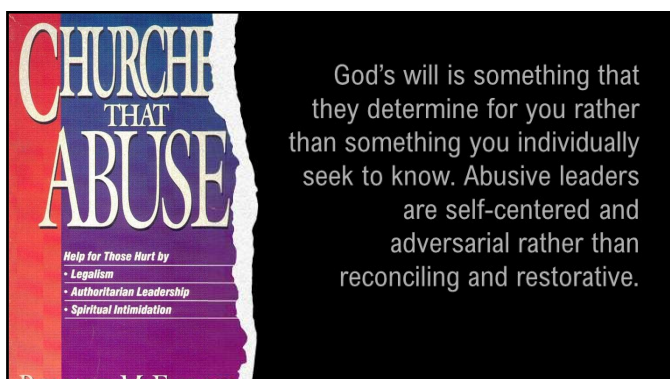
Those in abusive situations are often subjected to a dizzying set of rules.

21



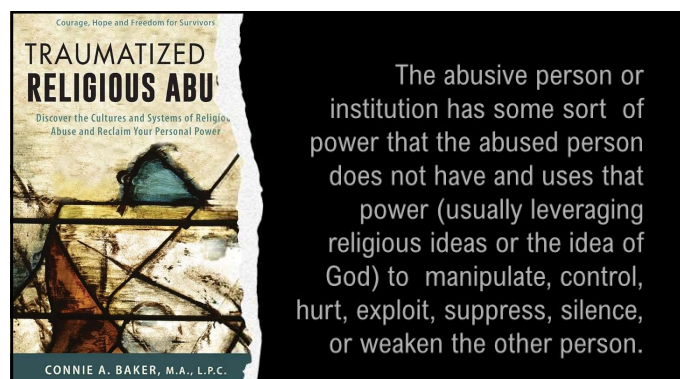
Leaders who practice spiritual abuse exceed the bounds of legitimate authority and 'lord it over the flock,' often intruding into the personal lives of members.

22



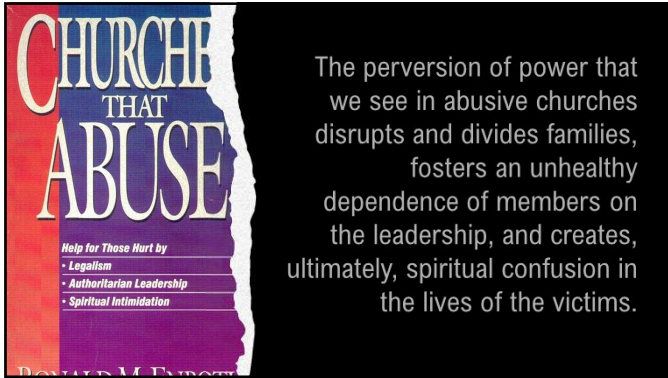
God's will is something that they determine for you rather than something you individually seek to know. Abusive leaders are self-centered and adversarial rather than reconciling and restorative.

23



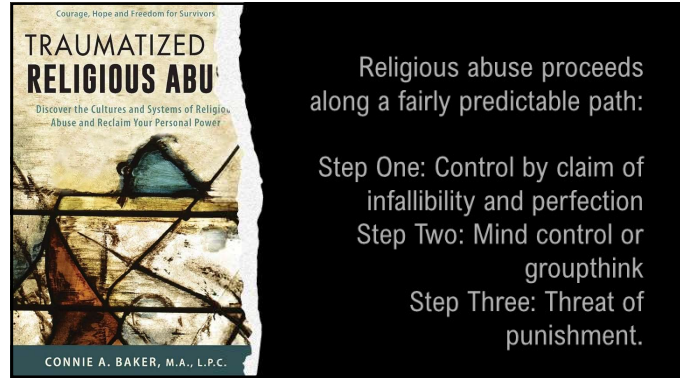
The abusive person or institution has some sort of power that the abused person does not have and uses that power (usually leveraging religious ideas or the idea of God) to manipulate, control, hurt, exploit, suppress, silence, or weaken the other person.

24



The perversion of power that we see in abusive churches disrupts and divides families, fosters an unhealthy dependence of members on the leadership, and creates, ultimately, spiritual confusion in the lives of the victims.

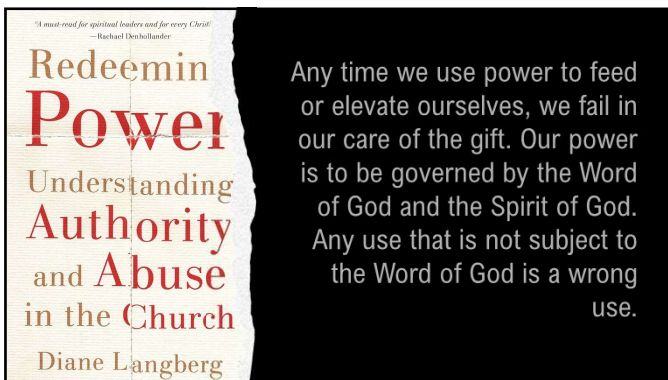
25



Religious abuse proceeds along a fairly predictable path:

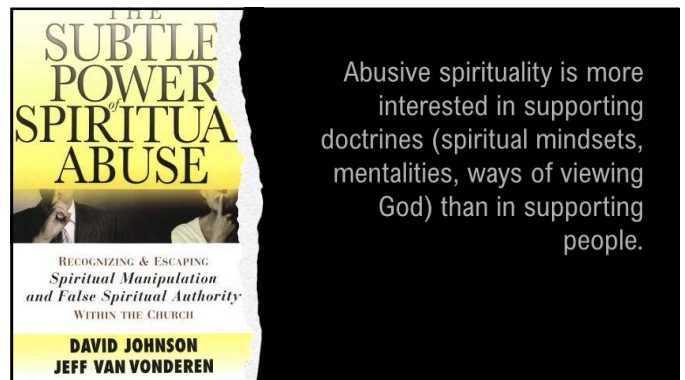
- Step One: Control by claim of infallibility and perfection
- Step Two: Mind control or groupthink
- Step Three: Threat of punishment.

26



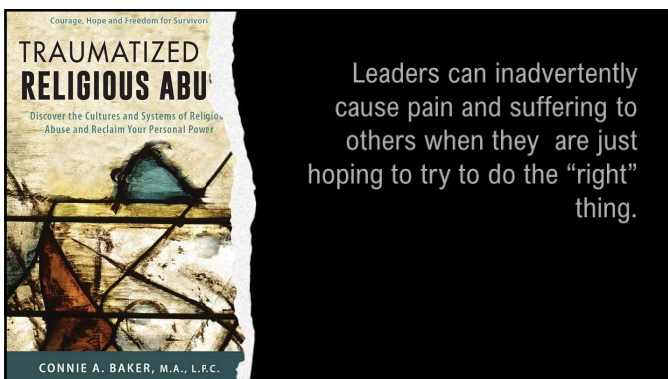
Any time we use power to feed or elevate ourselves, we fail in our care of the gift. Our power is to be governed by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Any use that is not subject to the Word of God is a wrong use.

27



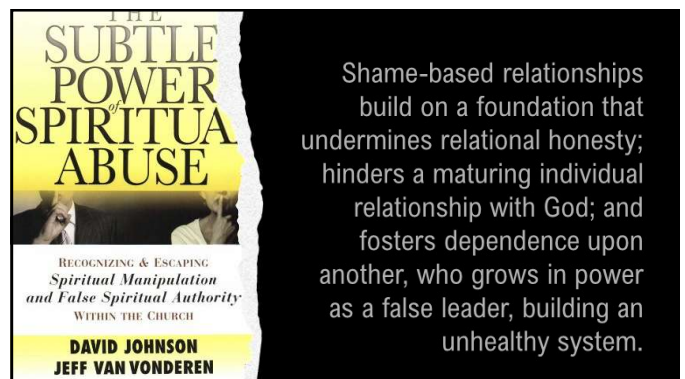
Abusive spirituality is more interested in supporting doctrines (spiritual mindsets, mentalities, ways of viewing God) than in supporting people.

28



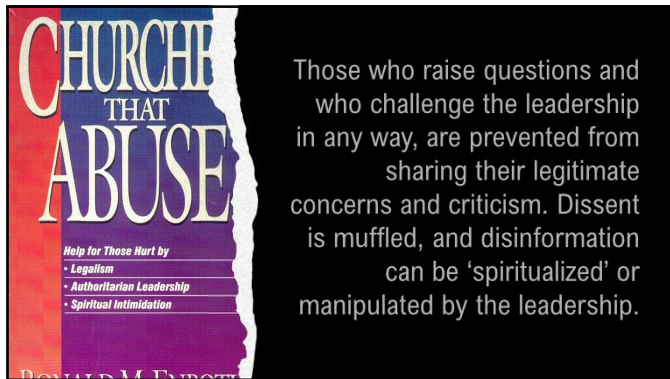
Leaders can inadvertently cause pain and suffering to others when they are just hoping to try to do the "right" thing.

29



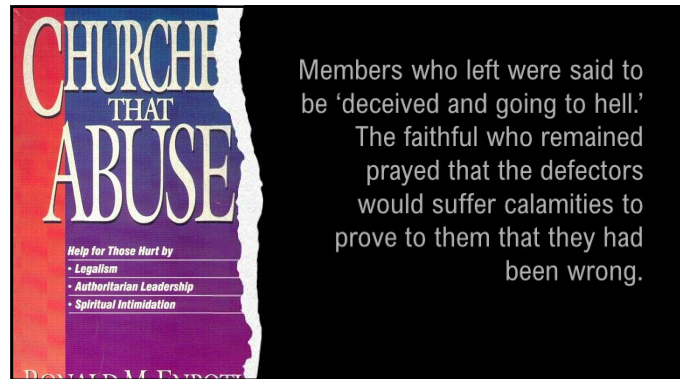
Shame-based relationships build on a foundation that undermines relational honesty; hinders a maturing individual relationship with God; and fosters dependence upon another, who grows in power as a false leader, building an unhealthy system.

30



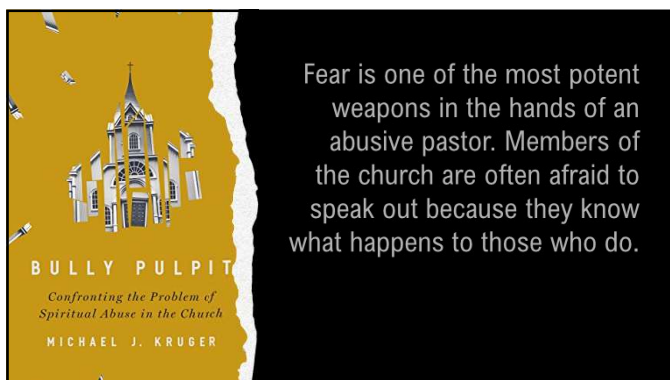
Those who raise questions and who challenge the leadership in any way, are prevented from sharing their legitimate concerns and criticism. Dissent is muffled, and disinformation can be 'spiritualized' or manipulated by the leadership.

31



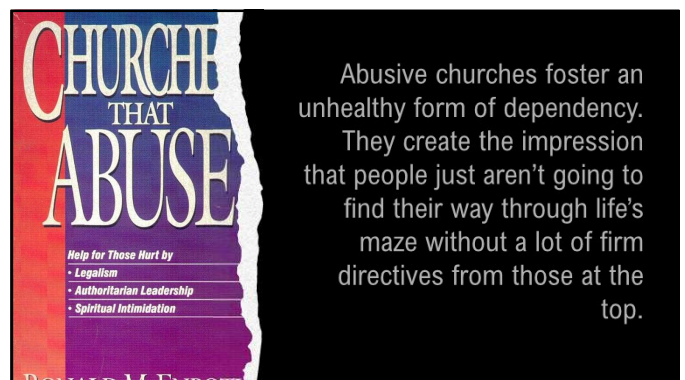
Members who left were said to be 'deceived and going to hell.' The faithful who remained prayed that the defectors would suffer calamities to prove to them that they had been wrong.

32



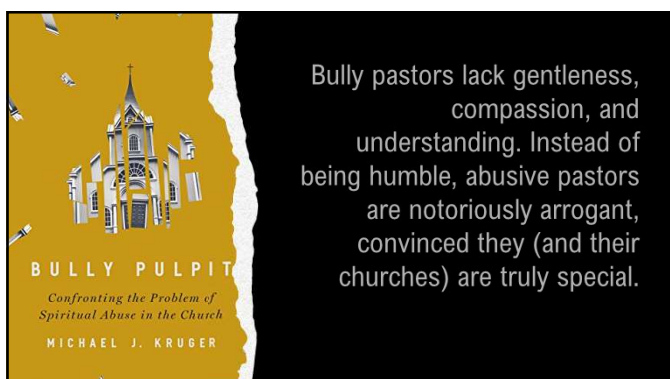
Fear is one of the most potent weapons in the hands of an abusive pastor. Members of the church are often afraid to speak out because they know what happens to those who do.

33



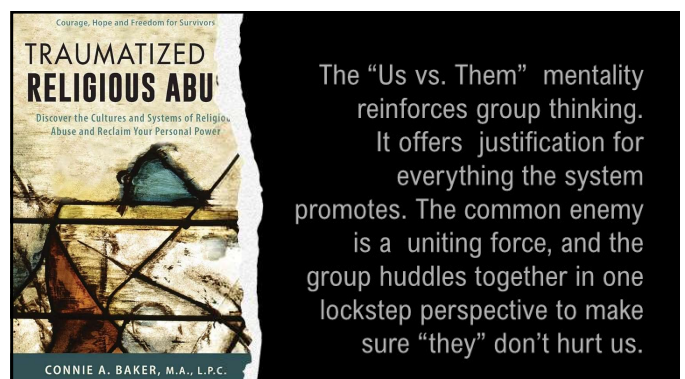
Abusive churches foster an unhealthy form of dependency. They create the impression that people just aren't going to find their way through life's maze without a lot of firm directives from those at the top.

34



Bully pastors lack gentleness, compassion, and understanding. Instead of being humble, abusive pastors are notoriously arrogant, convinced they (and their churches) are truly special.

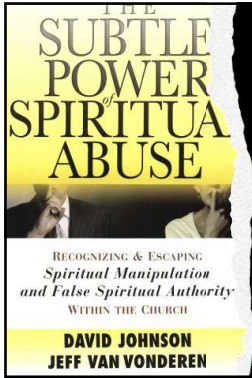
35



The "Us vs. Them" mentality reinforces group thinking. It offers justification for everything the system promotes. The common enemy is a uniting force, and the group huddles together in one lockstep perspective to make sure "they" don't hurt us.

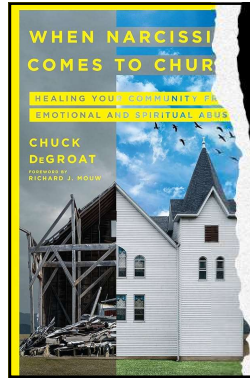
36





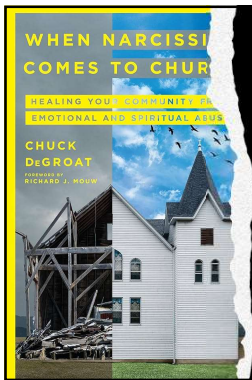
The subtle danger in a system like this is that it becomes more important to look spiritual than to be spiritual. It's more important to look happy than it is to experience happiness.

37



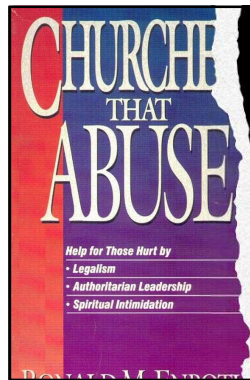
The status quo is much easier than the work of becoming self-aware, evaluating, naming reality, letting go, grieving losses, and embracing new pathways.

38



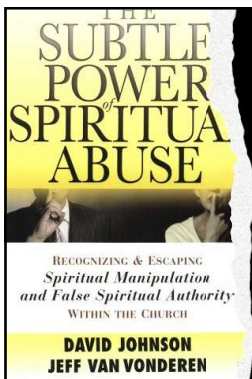
Add to this the toxic groupthink that resists divergent voices or conflicting visions and you have a recipe for a resistant and perpetually septic system.

39



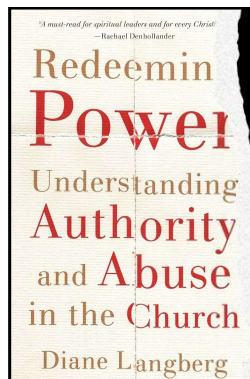
Another effective control mechanism employed by abusive churches is fear; fear of not measuring up, fear of losing out with God if one leaves the group, and fear of spiritual failure.

40



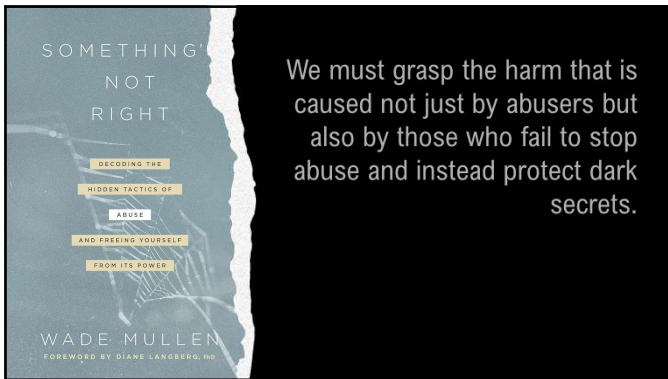
The goal of spiritually abusive systems is primarily to call people in and keep them in, regardless of whether or not they are finding life there.

41



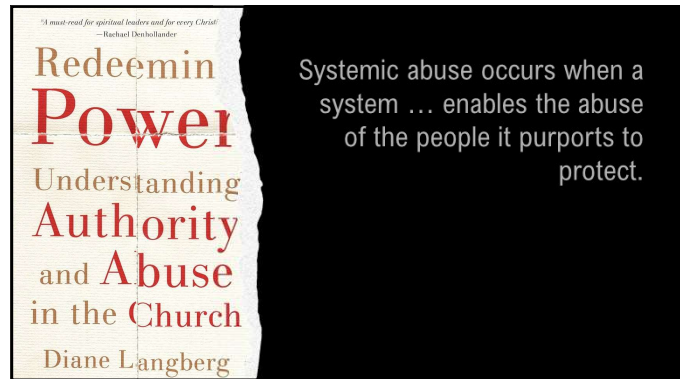
We thwart God's redemptive work in his people and in this world when we protect our institutions and titles and positions rather than the vulnerable.

42



We must grasp the harm that is caused not just by abusers but also by those who fail to stop abuse and instead protect dark secrets.

43



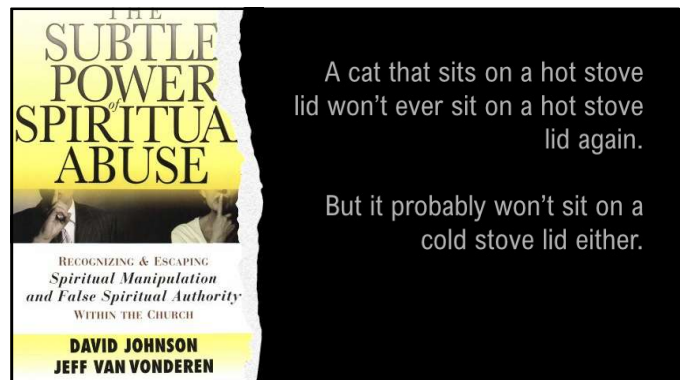
Systemic abuse occurs when a system ... enables the abuse of the people it purports to protect.

44



Spiritual and pastoral abuse leaves scars on the psyche and soul.

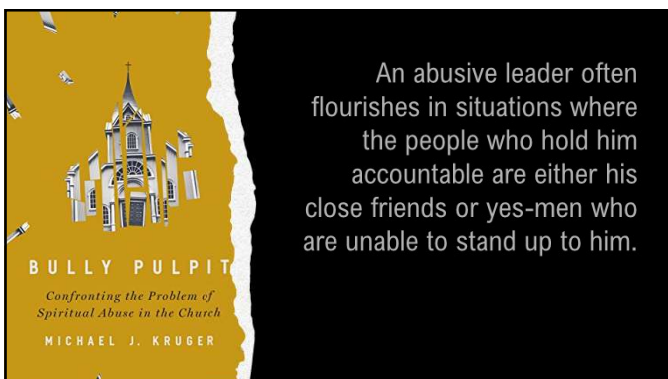
45



A cat that sits on a hot stove lid won't ever sit on a hot stove lid again.

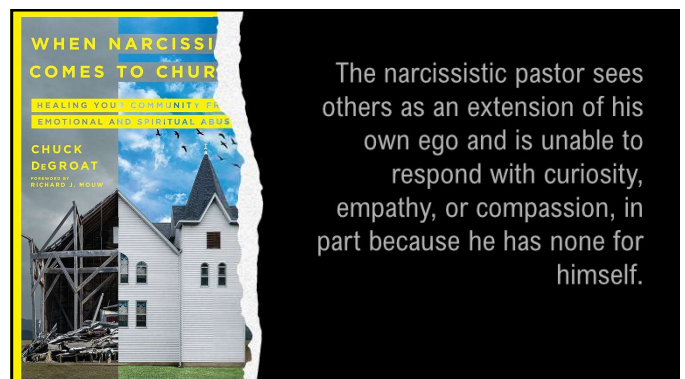
But it probably won't sit on a cold stove lid either.

46



An abusive leader often flourishes in situations where the people who hold him accountable are either his close friends or yes-men who are unable to stand up to him.

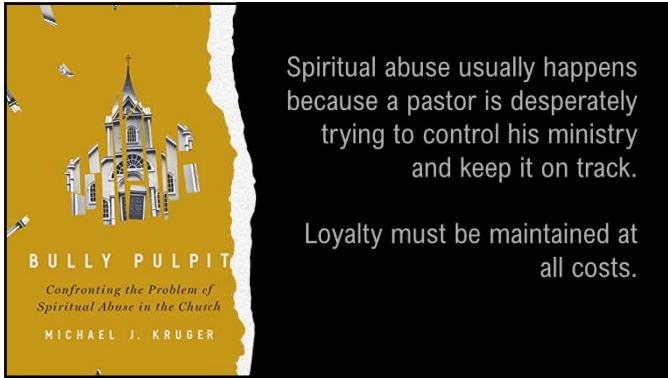
47



The narcissistic pastor sees others as an extension of his own ego and is unable to respond with curiosity, empathy, or compassion, in part because he has none for himself.

48

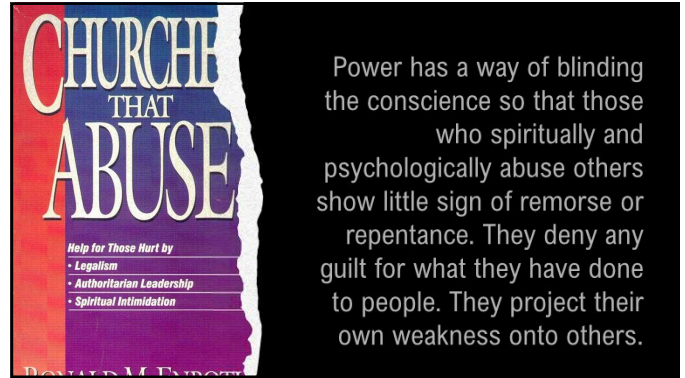




Spiritual abuse usually happens because a pastor is desperately trying to control his ministry and keep it on track.

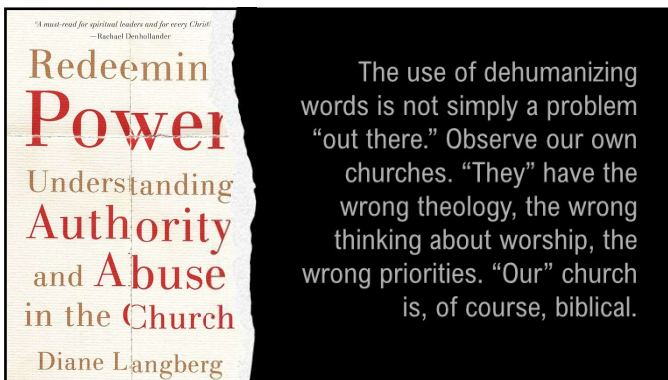
Loyalty must be maintained at all costs.

49



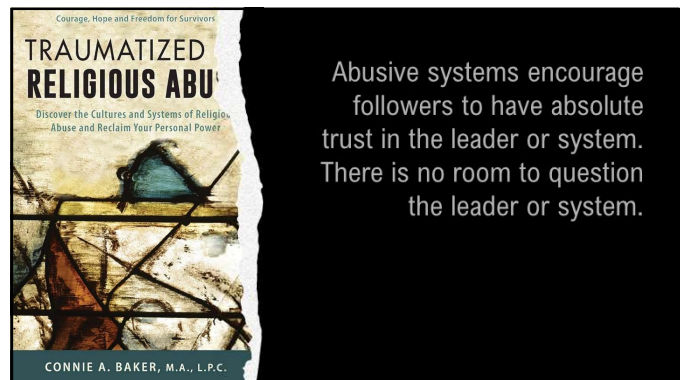
Power has a way of blinding the conscience so that those who spiritually and psychologically abuse others show little sign of remorse or repentance. They deny any guilt for what they have done to people. They project their own weakness onto others.

50



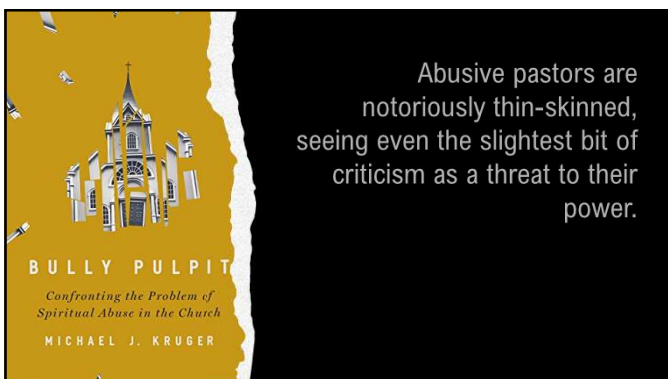
The use of dehumanizing words is not simply a problem "out there." Observe our own churches. "They" have the wrong theology, the wrong thinking about worship, the wrong priorities. "Our" church is, of course, biblical.

51



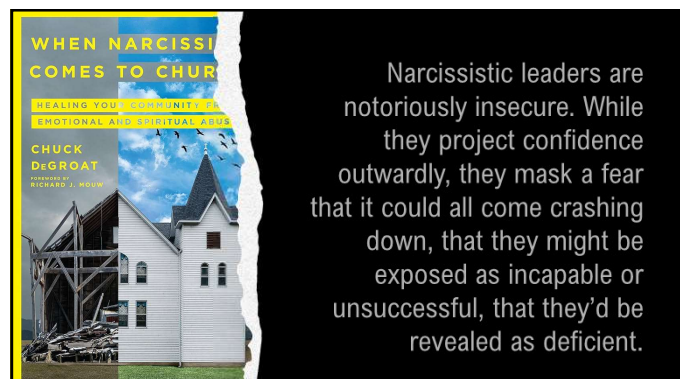
Abusive systems encourage followers to have absolute trust in the leader or system. There is no room to question the leader or system.

52



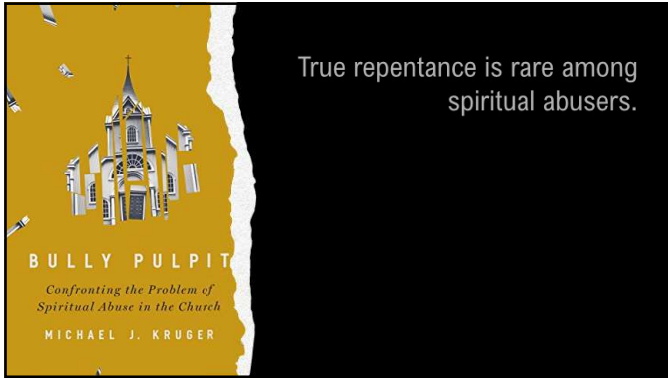
Abusive pastors are notoriously thin-skinned, seeing even the slightest bit of criticism as a threat to their power.

53



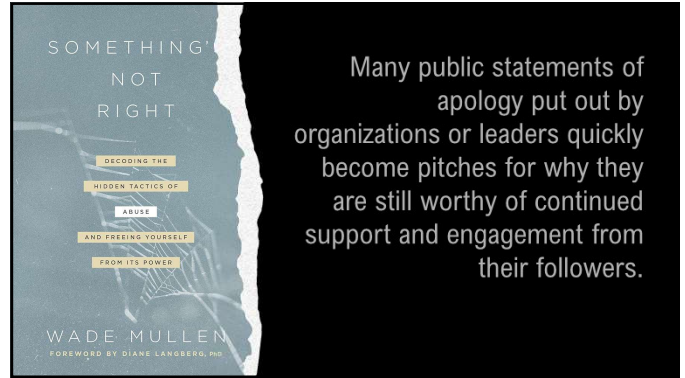
Narcissistic leaders are notoriously insecure. While they project confidence outwardly, they mask a fear that it could all come crashing down, that they might be exposed as incapable or unsuccessful, that they'd be revealed as deficient.

54



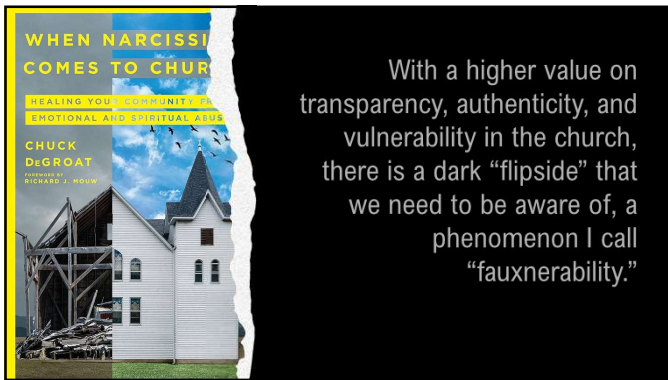
True repentance is rare among spiritual abusers.

55



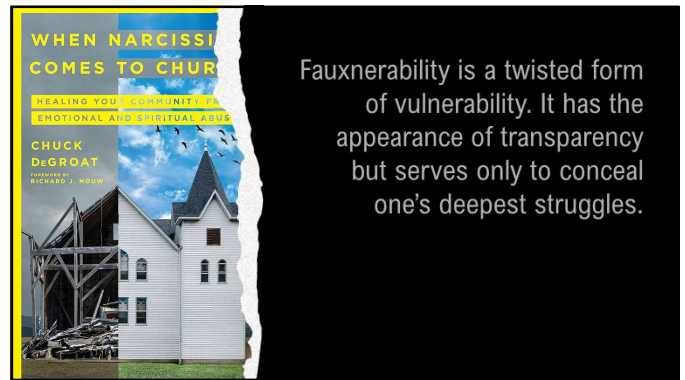
Many public statements of apology put out by organizations or leaders quickly become pitches for why they are still worthy of continued support and engagement from their followers.

56



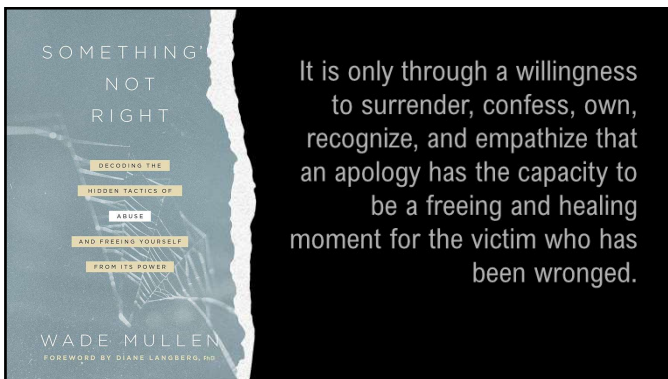
With a higher value on transparency, authenticity, and vulnerability in the church, there is a dark “flipside” that we need to be aware of, a phenomenon I call “fauxnerability.”

57



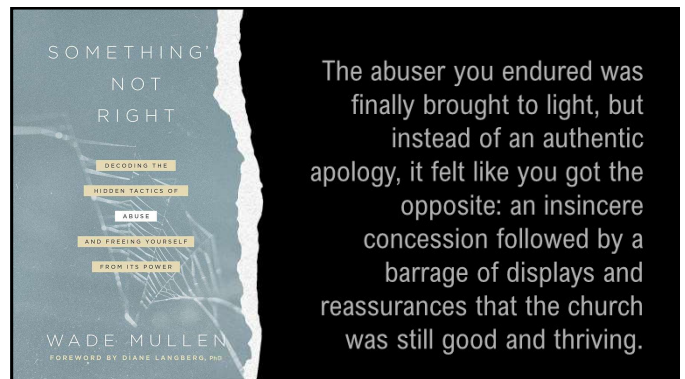
Fauxnerability is a twisted form of vulnerability. It has the appearance of transparency but serves only to conceal one’s deepest struggles.

58



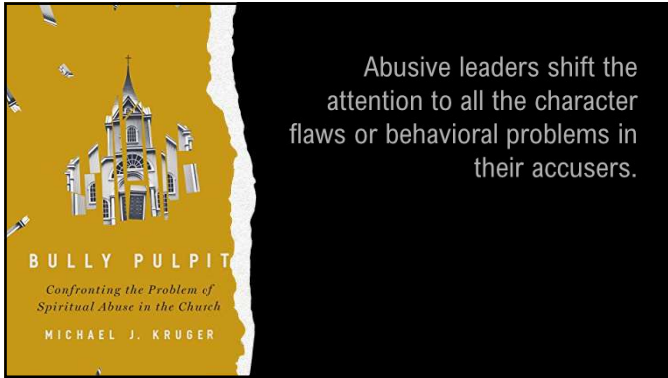
It is only through a willingness to surrender, confess, own, recognize, and empathize that an apology has the capacity to be a freeing and healing moment for the victim who has been wronged.

59



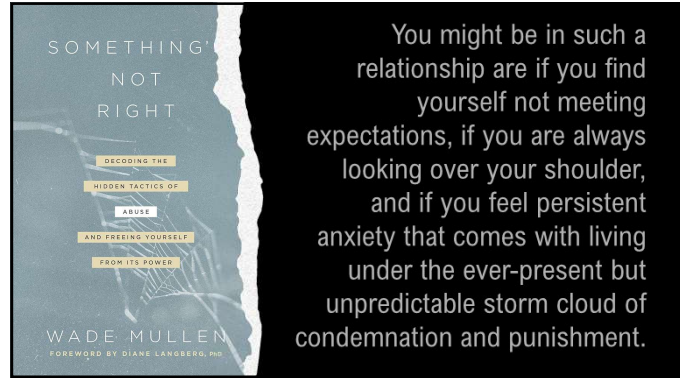
The abuser you endured was finally brought to light, but instead of an authentic apology, it felt like you got the opposite: an insincere concession followed by a barrage of displays and reassurances that the church was still good and thriving.

60



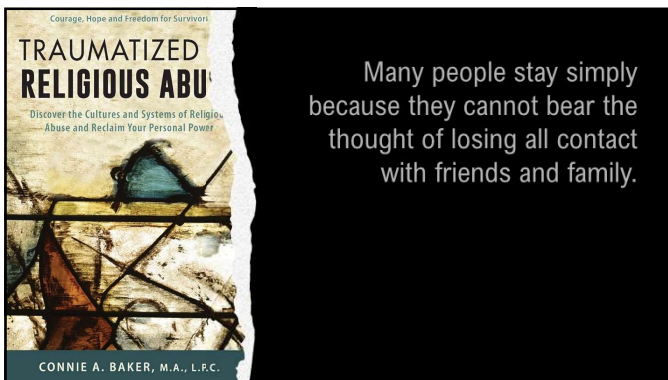
Abusive leaders shift the attention to all the character flaws or behavioral problems in their accusers.

61



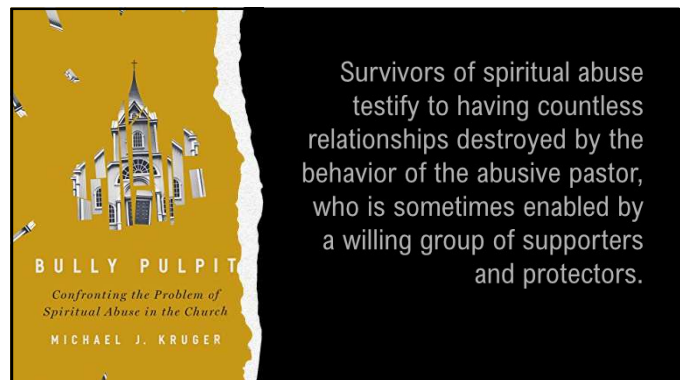
You might be in such a relationship are if you find yourself not meeting expectations, if you are always looking over your shoulder, and if you feel persistent anxiety that comes with living under the ever-present but unpredictable storm cloud of condemnation and punishment.

62



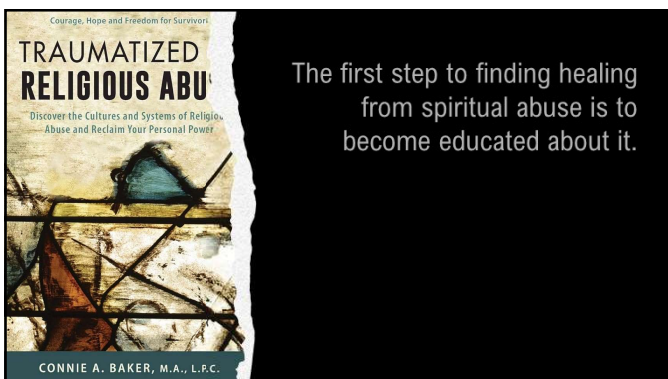
Many people stay simply because they cannot bear the thought of losing all contact with friends and family.

63



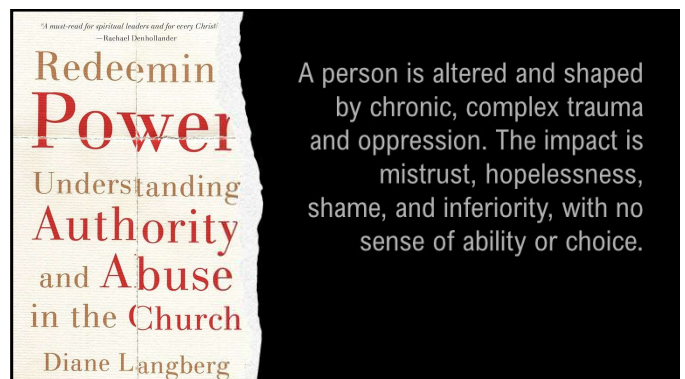
Survivors of spiritual abuse testify to having countless relationships destroyed by the behavior of the abusive pastor, who is sometimes enabled by a willing group of supporters and protectors.

64



The first step to finding healing from spiritual abuse is to become educated about it.

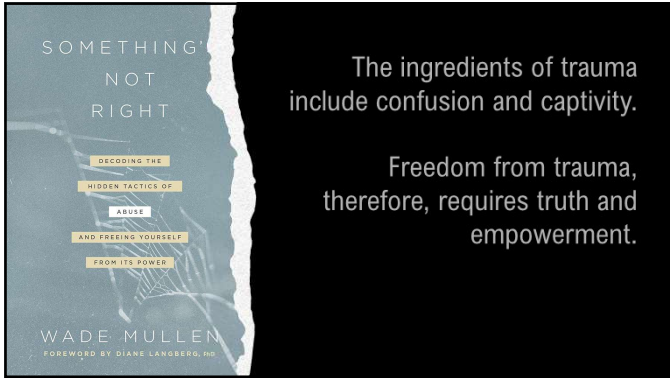
65



A person is altered and shaped by chronic, complex trauma and oppression. The impact is mistrust, hopelessness, shame, and inferiority, with no sense of ability or choice.

66

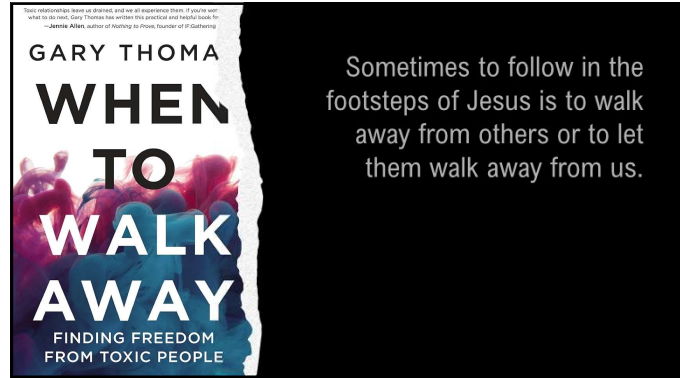




The ingredients of trauma include confusion and captivity.

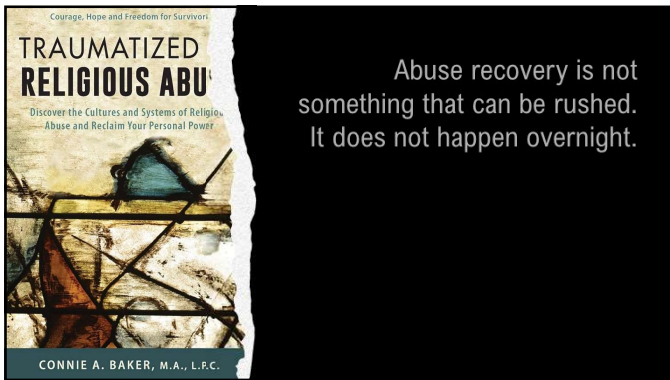
Freedom from trauma, therefore, requires truth and empowerment.

67



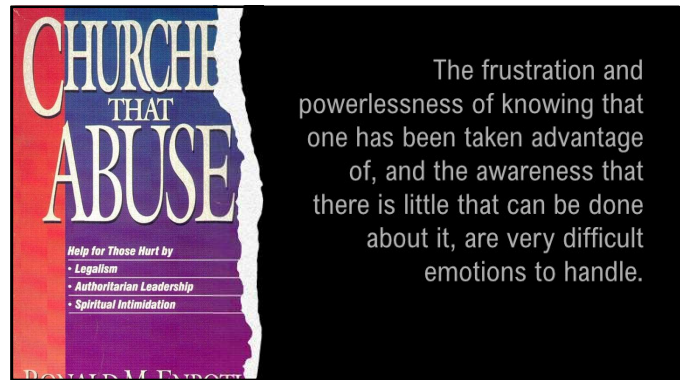
Sometimes to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk away from others or to let them walk away from us.

68



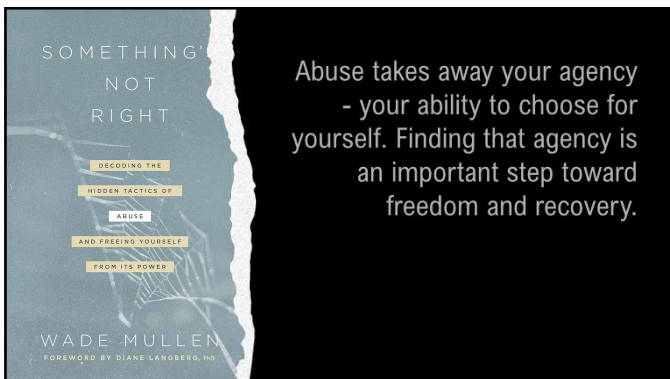
Abuse recovery is not something that can be rushed. It does not happen overnight.

69



The frustration and powerlessness of knowing that one has been taken advantage of, and the awareness that there is little that can be done about it, are very difficult emotions to handle.

70



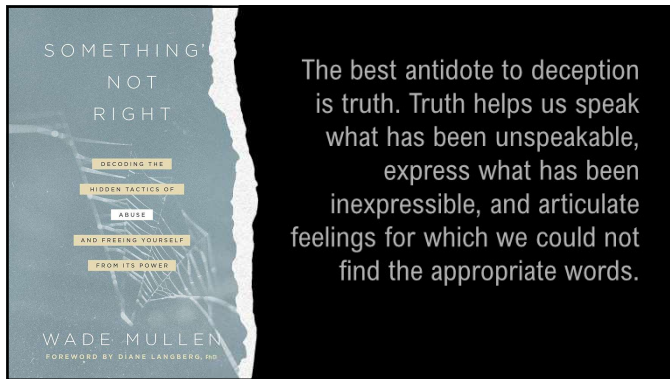
Abuse takes away your agency - your ability to choose for yourself. Finding that agency is an important step toward freedom and recovery.

71



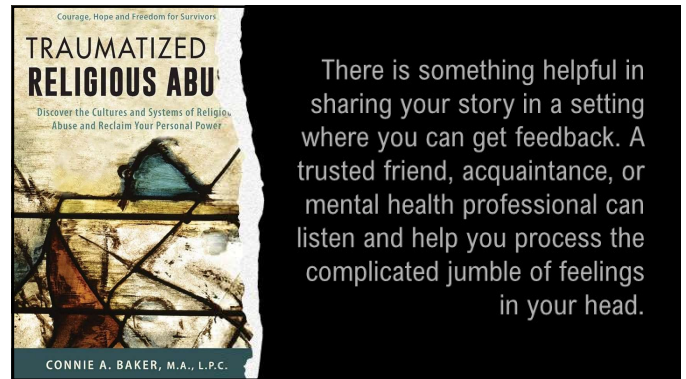
Sometimes health begins with the prophetic act of truth-telling.

72



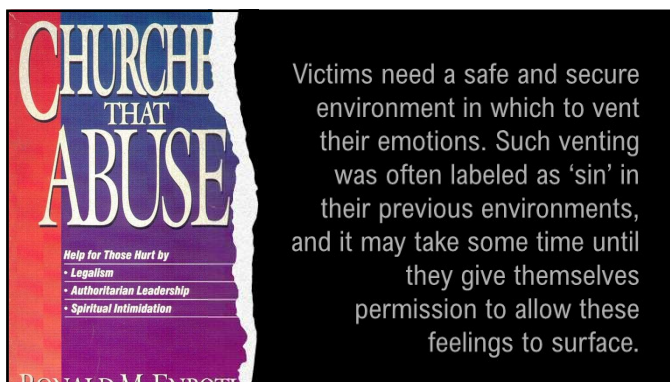
The best antidote to deception is truth. Truth helps us speak what has been unspeakable, express what has been inexpressible, and articulate feelings for which we could not find the appropriate words.

73



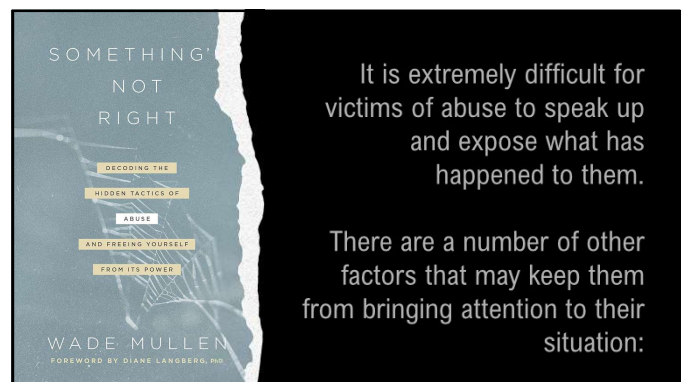
There is something helpful in sharing your story in a setting where you can get feedback. A trusted friend, acquaintance, or mental health professional can listen and help you process the complicated jumble of feelings in your head.

74



Victims need a safe and secure environment in which to vent their emotions. Such venting was often labeled as 'sin' in their previous environments, and it may take some time until they give themselves permission to allow these feelings to surface.

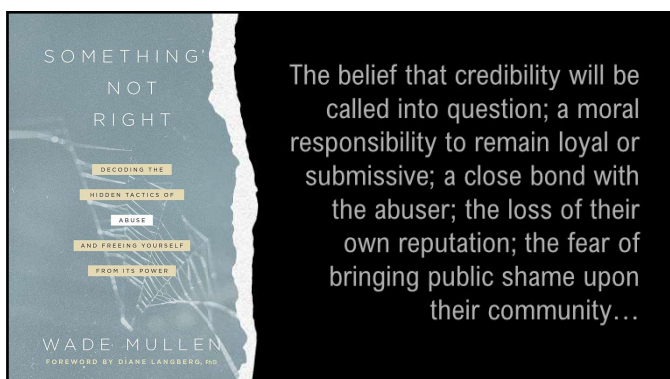
75



It is extremely difficult for victims of abuse to speak up and expose what has happened to them.

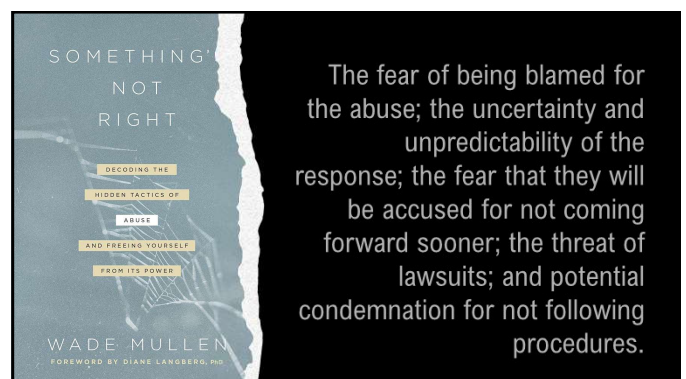
There are a number of other factors that may keep them from bringing attention to their situation:

76



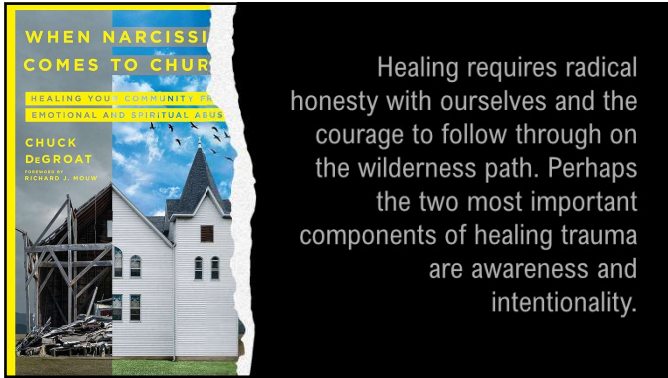
The belief that credibility will be called into question; a moral responsibility to remain loyal or submissive; a close bond with the abuser; the loss of their own reputation; the fear of bringing public shame upon their community...

77



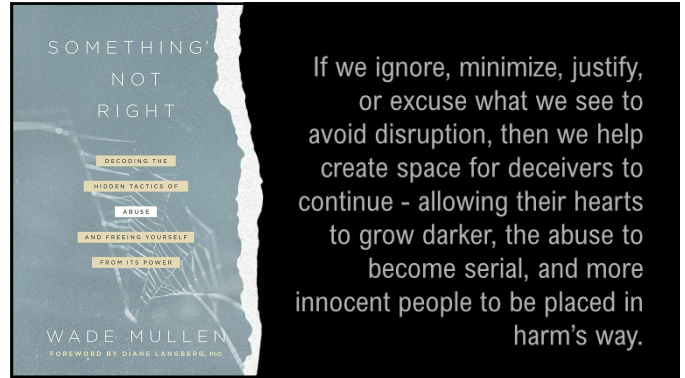
The fear of being blamed for the abuse; the uncertainty and unpredictability of the response; the fear that they will be accused for not coming forward sooner; the threat of lawsuits; and potential condemnation for not following procedures.

78



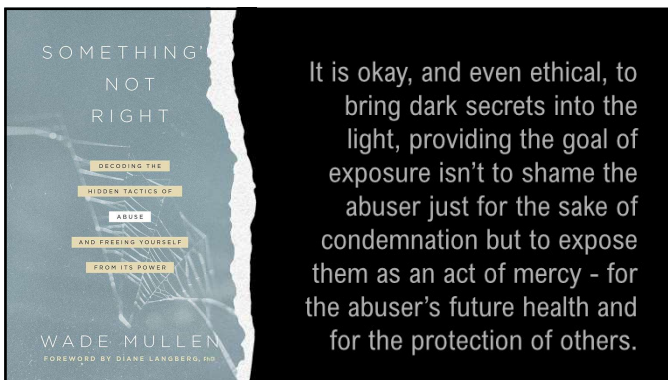
Healing requires radical honesty with ourselves and the courage to follow through on the wilderness path. Perhaps the two most important components of healing trauma are awareness and intentionality.

79



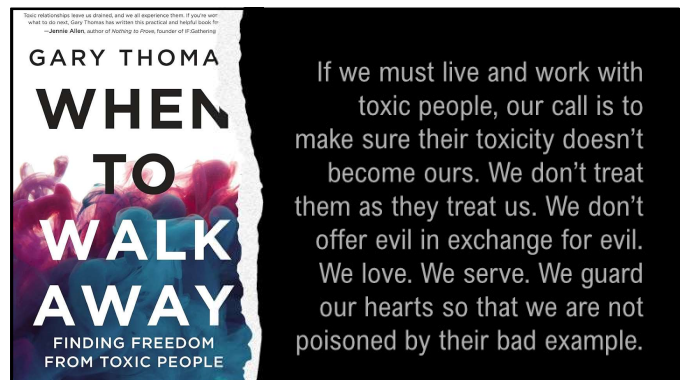
If we ignore, minimize, justify, or excuse what we see to avoid disruption, then we help create space for deceivers to continue - allowing their hearts to grow darker, the abuse to become serial, and more innocent people to be placed in harm's way.

80



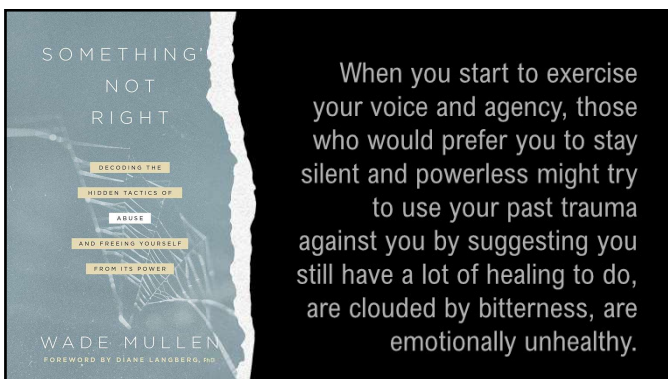
It is okay, and even ethical, to bring dark secrets into the light, providing the goal of exposure isn't to shame the abuser just for the sake of condemnation but to expose them as an act of mercy - for the abuser's future health and for the protection of others.

81



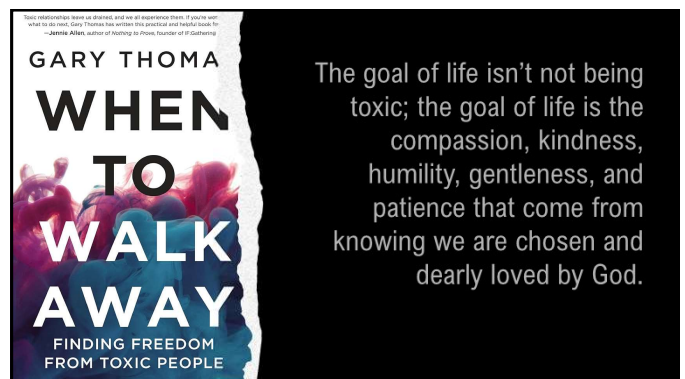
If we must live and work with toxic people, our call is to make sure their toxicity doesn't become ours. We don't treat them as they treat us. We don't offer evil in exchange for evil. We love. We serve. We guard our hearts so that we are not poisoned by their bad example.

82



When you start to exercise your voice and agency, those who would prefer you to stay silent and powerless might try to use your past trauma against you by suggesting you still have a lot of healing to do, are clouded by bitterness, are emotionally unhealthy.

83



The goal of life isn't not being toxic; the goal of life is the compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience that come from knowing we are chosen and dearly loved by God.

84



*"A must read for spiritual leaders and for every Christian"*  
—Richard Doehlinger

# Redeem Power

## Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church

Diane Langberg

Every time we treat someone with dignity rather than shame, respect rather than disregard, concern rather than exploitation, kindness rather than brutality, and careful attention rather than turning away, we are doing things that are the reverse of trauma and evil.

85

*"A must read for spiritual leaders and for every Christian"*  
—Richard Doehlinger

# Redeem Power

## Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church

Diane Langberg

God will restore a place of safety and laughter and blessing. In the meantime, he has called us to do the same for one another.

86



87

**DR. ANDREW GRAHAM**  
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

88