

CFC EQUIP – Human Sexuality
March 8, 2020 – Caring Well: A Christian Response to Sexual Abuse

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” Matt 14:14-16

Sexual Abuse comes in many forms, and the way a person is affected by sexual abuse manifests itself in ways too numerous to count. There is no “one-size-fits-all” pattern.

I’ve been asked to address the topic by answering a few very important questions:

1. How do we reconcile and convey to a person who’s been sexually abused the goodness of God against the painful reality of specific instances of sexual abuse?
2. How do we give gospel based-care for someone who has been abused, and what does care look like?
3. How does the Lord redeem and the gospel bring renewal to the person who’s been sexually abused
How does the gospel strengthen me as I enter into that person’s world minister to them?

Dr. Diane Langberg (author of *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*) talks very well about Trauma having capacity to both Shape and Shatter one’s sense of personal meaning in life

Why is it difficult to hear about how a person has been abused? – because it makes it uncomfortable to sustain our current beliefs.

- “When someone’s pre-trauma beliefs are strong in a resilient way and have a capacity to include things like suffering and evil, then the ability to go through trauma without being destroyed is much higher. Beliefs that are elastic and allow for terrible suffering you are more likely to hold on to meaning if you go through trauma, than if you have rigid set creeds or beliefs and go through suffering. People with rigid set beliefs are more vulnerable to getting PTSD as a result of going through suffering.” – Dr. Diane Langberg,

Question #1 How Do we reconcile the goodness of God against the reality of a person’s experience and convey this to someone who’d been sexually abused?

1. First of all, we have to be initially willing to accept the specific doubts, fears, disappointment ,aversion in someone who’s been traumatized through sexual abuse, and resist teaching and/or correcting

It’s just a “Blue Dot” – where you encounter the person on the journey (like the dot on the “Find My” app)

Examples

- God is not present, He doesn’t care, He’s cruel, he doesn’t hear, keep His Word, etc.
 - That we are insignificant, my life is expendable
 - Trust is out of the question, and don’t Hope anything good
2. For people who’ve been sexually abused, If you begin by quoting verses or making statements about God’s love, you’re likely to miss them (it doesn’t mean it’s not true; it’s a timing issue)

3. Jesus models the acceptance of doubt when people experienced loss. That means we can too

“Lord if you had been here my brother wouldn’t have died” Jn 11:21, 32 (Martha, Mary)

“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” Matt 11:2-3

“When people are broken by sin, full of shame, feeling weak, conscious of failure, ashamed of themselves, and in need of counsel, they do not want to listen to preaching that expounds the truth of the discrete doctrines of their church’s confession of faith but fails to connect them with the marrow of gospel grace and the Father of infinite love for sinners. It is a gracious and loving Father they need to know. Such alas were precisely the kind of pastors who gathered round poor Job and assaulted him with their doctrine God was against him. From their mouths issue some of the most sublime discrete theological statements anywhere to be found in the pages of the Bible. But they had disconnected them from the life-giving love of God for his needy and broken child Job . . . this will not do in gospel ministry. Like the Savior (we) need to handle bruised reeds without breaking them and dimly burning wicks without quenching them.” Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*

4. Our role is to model in the “seen” world what is true in the “unseen” world (Langberg)

Our words, tone of voice, actions, body movements, our responses to the traumatized persons rage, their fear, their doubt, their anger, their failure all become ways they learn about who God really is

Trauma and evil teach lies about God. But our actions and words also teach about truth in a fallen world

Question # 2 How do I give gospel based-care for someone who has been abused, and what does it look like?

1. Become a **Safe Person** and as a Church Become a **Safe Community**

I don’t mean “safe” in the sense of:

- We’re never going say the wrong thing to you or make you feel uncomfortable. We’re human we’ll make mistakes. We’ll misunderstand.
- Or we’re never going to challenge a person or never address sin. People who’ve been sexually abused need to be challenged and need to be pointed to the gospel of Christ when they sin.

Avoid Initially :

- a. Quoting scripture or making doctrinal statements about God’s love
- b. Ask them if they’ve seen a therapist – reinforces their belief that they are too complicate, broken, or time-consuming for you to care about them
- c. Restate for them how horrible their suffering is to them – reinforces their belief that they are too broken and difficult to be loved
- d. Not reacting at all – reinforces to them the belief that there situation is hopeless and that they ultimately don’t matter or count

1 John 1:5-10 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

- Our part is bringing it to the light
- His part is to give us forgiving freedom and cleanses us
- And our benefit is we experience fellowship with one another

A safe community talks about this up front, which strikes a blow against shame – which always hides

At an individual level Push Past your aversion/fears/frustrations. God’s “Questions” to Dr. Langberg:

- you want me to learn how much I love her? You go back in that room and love her like I would
- You want her to know I understand her rage? You go back there and sit with her in her rage, even though you can’t stand it.
- She wrote Langberg 20 years later. “when you initially told me that God loves me, you might as well have described the color green to someone who has been blind from birth. But after I sat with you for years, I understood what love was. And now I know God loves me.”

Heb. 12:3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted

You can say something like, “Parts of your story sounds very painful, and I may not know the right words to say, but I’d like to honor you by listening with you because matter to me.”

Question #3 How does the Lord redeem and the gospel bring renewal to the person who’s been sexually abused. How does it build me up to enter into that person’s world and minister to them?

Jesus redeems people by meeting people where they are at (e.g. the woman caught in adultery in John 8 or the “Rich Young Ruler” in Matt. 19), and that’s what we want to work to do.

Dr. Dan Allender (wrote *Healing the Wounded Heart*) discusses 3 common characteristics of those who’ve been sexually abused:

1. Powerlessness

- E.g. Example: “A mom She says, “I guess I always feel apologetic for almost everything I do. I hate myself when anything is out of kilter.” She expresses the inner battle of someone who can’t relax. There is often a constant pressure to be perfect, to not fail, to avoid disappointing others. Failure to live up to such expectations, in turn, leads to exhaustion and self-hatred. Efforts to be in control eventually lead to being even more out of control. This inability often results in hopelessness. The terrible experience of being powerless often leads to the “why bother” attitude of depression. Many abuse victims assume that they were to blame, and they suffer with periodic bouts of depression and chronic self-contempt” *When Trust is Lost* by Dan Allender

2. Betrayal

This affects victims in a few ways

- Learn to hate the God-given desire for intimacy, because over time they learn their way too early entrance into intimacy was betrayal. Darkness always wants us to loathe and turn upon ourselves.
- They can become suspicious of anyone trying to offer love. "What is he up to?"
- to distance self from fear of intimacy may enter into legitimate sexual encounters in a detached and mechanical way.
- A person who's been abused might gravitate toward uncaring men who use them. A kind loving person might call forth desires and longings, which are confusing and threatening.
- Or the hurt from betrayal results in them being mad at everyone and pushing people away

3. Confusion

Help Them put words to their life story and fight the manifestations of darkness (world, flesh, Satan)

Rom 1:18 says that For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth

This is not a coarse "stop living in denial and admit it" which is more punishing than restoring.

But we gently walk alongside encouraging with our words that it the work of darkness to keep us in deception and keep evil deeds hidden.

Perhaps suggest they record and name memories in a journal

As you push into the uncomfortableness you are repenting of your fear and/or indifference and helping the sexually abused repent by exposing the evil and turning away of strategies and coping mechanisms that have kept God and others out.

Help them Admit ways they've tried to protect themselves from further harm and pain. For Example

- Hovering over children to regain control (God you weren't vigilant enough to protect me, I certainly can't trust you with my children)
- Numbing through food, alcohol – (God if you can't make me feel good, I'll have to do it myself)
- Using anger to keep people at a distance (God somebody I trusted got close and did my great harm and you did nothing. Now anyone who harms me will get payback)
- Keeping people at a safe distance (God . . . now nobody gets close)

1 Cor 12:21-26 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.