

Healing for the Victim of Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Mount Everest Passage

Ezek 18:18-19 As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live¹.

Introduction

This paper contains the pastoral care model for victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse (referred to as Victors In Process – VIPs in this paper). This model can also be used with other childhood trauma victims². This paper contains pastoral theology to address the theological concerns of VIPs, pastoral care guidelines for ministering to VIPs, the role of forgiveness and the stages in the healing process, a description of the team model, safe community and how pastors and therapists can work together to provide care and counseling for VIPs.

Most of this paper was drawn from course lecture notes from the course “Pastoral Care for Sexual Abuse in Families” by Dr. Leah Coulter, PhD. These materials are not always attributed specifically due to the high frequency of use.

¹ This is my “Mount Everest” passage on the subject. The sins of the father are not transferred to the sons. The victim can choose to not be bound by the behavior of his abuser. Not only that, but the abuser will be judged by God for the abuse that he has caused.

² The incidence of CSA is somewhere near 26% for women and 17% for men. In my experience since the start of this class, I believe that this number may be much larger.

Pastoral Theology

This section contains a pastoral theology for VIPs. This pastoral theology, above all else, must not re-victimize those who are already oppressed³.

Our Broken State

A practical, pastoral theology for the victims of CSA starts with a frank admission by the pastoral caregiver that we are all living in a broken world. The sin of Adam has separated us from God⁴ and the world will be in this condition for the near future. Man's inhumanity to man is only one of the sorts of evil that we face. Death, disease, needless suffering and calamity are a part of this world. We believe that God has created the best possible world in order to preserve free will and produce a people who will love Him from their hearts. Finally, we believe that the Gospel is greater than what we do or what has been done to us⁵.

God is on the Side of the Oppressed

The God of the Bible is on the side of the oppressed⁶ and He executes judgement against those who oppress others⁷. As the people of God, we are to be on the side of the oppressed. If there is any doubt about God's will in other situations, this is not one of them since this passion to protect the oppressed flows from the nature of God Himself.

³ This is one of the ultimate tests of the theology, i.e., that the victim not be re-victimized.

⁴ Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

⁵ Quote from class lecture.

⁶ Psa 9:9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

⁷ Psa 103:6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

Free Will Must be Preserved Even When Innocents Can Be Harmed

God wants His rule and reign to be extended to the hearts of all people⁸, but He won't do that by force in anyone. God wants people who love Him from their hearts and by their own free will⁹. This works to all our advantage and to our disadvantage. As sinners ourselves, we realize that if only those people who love God are allowed to live, where would we have been given the chance to repent and come to God¹⁰?

The Sins of the Father Do Not Need to be the Sins of the Son

My Mount Everest passage, Ezek 18:18-19 shows that the sins of the father do not need to become the sins of the son. For a male VIP with children, this issue is his greatest concern. He does not want to be an abuser like the male authority figure that abused him. He hears the message that most abusers were themselves abused. He wonders if it is possible to avoid the plague. Often this goes back many generations in his family. Once he starts the recovery process, and shares his past with others, the stories start coming by the dozens of uncles, grandfathers, parents who were victims of other family members. This passage provides great comfort to the VIP that he is not bound to the ancestral curse but that he is freed, in Christ, from to do what is right.

⁸ 1 Tim 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

⁹ Deu 6:5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

¹⁰ 2 Pet 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Pastoral Care Guidelines

The Pastoral Care Guidelines, above all else, must not re-victimize those who are already oppressed. The following are some sample guidelines that will be used as guidelines for the people who provide pastoral care to VIPs. Violation of any of these guidelines is taken seriously and anyone who violates them will be subject to the full extent of church discipline. This needs to be seen as a sacred trust. The church has pastoral care responsibility for all the people in its care. By sharing his or her problems, the VIP is not imposing on the pastoral caregiver and must be reinforced in this knowledge.

Authenticity of the caregiver is a key to healing care.

Bridging the Gap between the Abused and God

The pastoral counselor needs to first know that his or her function is to bridge the gap between the abused and God. This mediatorial role is essential to bring healing since healing only happens in community. We are called to walk alongside the oppressed and abused. The pastoral caregiver connects the hands of God and the hand of the VIP by bridging the gap until the VIP can grab the hand of God for himself or herself.

Knowing the World of the VIP

The caregiver shall demonstrate that he/she has significant understanding of the world of the VIP prior to being allowed to give care. This will be done at the end of appropriate reading and testing. No caregiver will be allowed to counsel alone until the caregiver has completed 80 hours of team counseling experience¹¹.

¹¹ I'd be interested in feedback on this point. Is this too long or short?

Training for Caregivers

Caregivers will be given appropriate training consisting of reading and additional classroom time. People will not be allowed to be caregivers until they have demonstrated a significant knowledge of the world of the VIP and the appropriate care needed.

Creating a safe environment

Confidentiality shall be maintained at all times. Only people that the VIP explicitly gives permission to know will be given information about the situation and then only the specific information that the VIP wants that person to know. Written releases are required for information disclosure to other health care professionals (see the Team Approach section of this paper for details.) All caregivers shall submit to a full criminal background check.

Creating an open, honest environment

The pastoral caregiver will work to encourage an open and honest dialog. The caregiver will avoid monologue at all times. The pastoral caregiver will encourage the VIP to ask hard questions and let the VIP know that the questions will probably not be answered by the pastoral caregiver, but by God. Only God can answer the “why” questions. The pastoral caregiver shall guard against trying to find good in what happened¹². There was no good in what happened and no redemptive purpose(s) need be identified. In the church services, there shall be a way out provided for people who are feeling closed in.

¹² Avoid using the “God works all things for good for them that love God...” passage since it’s not applicable to this situation.

Don't Push the Healing Process

There is no timetable in healing the VIP. Healing is a process much more than an event. Sometimes God will intervene, but most often this process is very time-consuming. Be patient with the VIP. Don't push for premature healing. People need to live life while they are in the healing process. Pray for God to work at His own pace. Let the person pronounce his or her own stage in the healing process. Build trust over time and know that the VIP will test their caregiver's authenticity. The caregiver needs to overcompensate for this testing by recognizing the particular needs of the VIP.

Sensitivity of VIPs to Touch/Hugging

Often churches have official greeters who hug everyone coming through the door. These greeters need to be trained to read non-verbal cues to not injure VIPs by unwanted physical contact¹³.

Same Gender Counseling/Care

Men will counsel men. Women will counsel women. CSA is a very sensitive subject and an intense bond between the pastoral care provider and the VIP is inevitable. This can lead to inappropriate situations in different gender counseling. This places a particular burden on the church pastoral staff since it requires that women be trained in counseling VIPs. This is counter-cultural to the practice in many denominations, but is time tested wisdom.

¹³ VIPs are hyper-vigilant.

Triggering Events, Words, Songs

Songs about “the blood” and other subjects may be triggering to VIPs. Relating to God as Father may also be difficult for VIPs. These triggers may go so far as to cause a VIP to disassociate. A story from the Old Testament, such as the rape of Tamar, will likely be triggering to VIPs. An example of a song that might be triggering for VIPs is “Fall on Me”. There are many other such examples. Remove them from the song list. Communion (the blood) may be triggering for some people. Provide a way out (cultural and physical access) for the VIP that feels cornered.

Mandatory Reporting of All Violations of Law

Violations of law will be reported to the proper authorities under all circumstances – even in confidential counseling situations¹⁴. This is a requirement of the current California Penal Code¹⁵.

We will Support Confrontation of the Perpetrator by the VIP

The church will support confrontation of the perpetrator by the VIP. This is the Matt 18 process. This is to happen only when the VIP requests it.

Avoid Anecdotal Scriptures

These sorts of scriptures tend to re-victimize the VIP. Examples include, “We are new creatures in Christ...” “Forget what went behind...” Don’t revictimize the VIP by placing blame back on the VIP.

¹⁴ Our church does not view counseling as a sacramental rite.

¹⁵ This varies by state and municipality. This statement is not to be construed as legal advice beyond the context indicated.

Role of Forgiveness

Our theology of forgiveness, above all else, must not re-victimize those who are already oppressed. Achieving forgiveness is an important part of the healing process for the VIP and may even bring some degree of reconciliation between the VIP and the perpetrator. Telling the VIP who was the victim that he/she needs to forgive the perpetrator without any repentance on the part of the perpetrator re-victimizes the VIP¹⁶. Forgiveness without repentance on the part of the perpetrator is not Biblical. God Himself does not forgive someone who does not repent¹⁷. To put this burden on the VIP is totally wrong and un-Biblical.

Biblical Teaching on Forgiveness

To summarize the Biblical teaching on forgiveness¹⁸:

- We need to forgive people who are truly ignorant of their sins¹⁹.
- If someone repents we are obligated to forgive them²⁰.
- Repentance includes sorrow, restoration, recompense²¹.
- If someone does not repent, we are obliged to confront and rebuke them²².

¹⁶ This is quite common in practice and actually provides some temporary psychic release, but there is no healing and reconciliation at the end of the process.

¹⁷ John 20:23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

¹⁸ This theology is based on Augsburg, p 18. Additionally, I went through every Biblical passage on forgiveness and placed them into these summary points. My conclusion is that there is no Biblical requirement to forgive someone who has not repented.

¹⁹ Augsburg p. 18, point 1.

²⁰ Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

²¹ Augsburg. P. 16. Repentance has, in Christian tradition, consisted of three dimensions-remorse, restitution and renewal. First, a genuine sorrow is necessary; second, an attempt to restore what was destroyed as far as us possible; third, a change in life direction.

²² Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

- If someone refuses to repent after confrontation, there is a process that needs to be followed through until the end²³.
- If someone does not repent at the end of the process, they are handed over to God²⁴. for vengeance, we are forbidden to take vengeance ourselves on the unrepentant.
- God stands with the victim, not the perpetrator of the offense²⁵.
- God's goal is reconciliation of persons but this reconciliation can not happen without repentance²⁶.

The last point that God stands on the side of the victim is particularly compelling to the VIP. That's exactly what he/she needs to know and it's the easiest thing to prove from the Bible of all.

²³ Matt 18:15-17 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

²⁴ Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

²⁵ Deu 26:7 And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression:

²⁶ Mat 5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Stages of the Healing Process

Healing is both horizontal (between the VIP and the perpetrator) and vertical (between the VIP and God).

Five Stages of the Vertical Healing Process

Expression of the five stages of vertical healing, above all else, must not re-victimize those who are already oppressed. Three to five years is typical with the current therapeutic techniques²⁷. People don't move cleanly between these five phases. They often move back and forth between these phases.

Phase One: Safety

Psychological safety²⁸ is the primary sort of safety needed. Safe small groups, a safe pastor caregiver, and a safe therapist are needed. Find out what situations have made people feel unsafe in the past – such as unwanted physical contact²⁹. Building trust is the key here. The presenting problem is the test case for growing the sense of safety, but it's not probably the core issue.

Phase Two: Remembering and Mourning

In remembering, the VIP gives voice to his/her own memory. Mourning assesses damages in relationship and helps the person to come to terms with what happened to

²⁷ This needs to be accelerated.

²⁸ Bloom, *Creating Safety*, 115. "Safe within one's self."

²⁹ VIPs are hyper-vigilant.

them³⁰. Often body memories, visual images, triggers, sensation and intrusion come to light at this point. There is a need for ritual in the losses.

Phase Three: Holding the Offender Responsible

In this phase, the person moves from blaming himself or herself to holding the abuser responsible. The perpetrator will often try to redirect the blame back and attempt to re-injure the VIP. The VIP needs to know about this typical response by perpetrators so that he or she is not again revictimized.

Phase Four: Revoking Revenge

God is pressing the perpetrator to repent. This is a cry for justice from inside the heart of the VIP. Revoking revenge transfers the debt owned from the VIP to God³¹. This does not happen in a single prayer, but is executed in an on-going process.

Phase Five: Reconnecting with God and Self

In this phase, the VIP begins to develop a more personal relationship with God and a healthy self-image. This is a continual process of transformation and freedom.

Two Stages of the Horizontal Healing Process

Most of the time the horizontal side is incomplete. This section shows the ideal situation and is based on Allender's book. Without all of these present there is no relationship

³⁰ From class lecture notes. Subject of Mourning. Hall & Lloyd, Surviving Child Sexual Abuse. "Assess Damage in childhood" pp. 197-200. Herman, "reconstruction of trauma" 195. Augsburger, "Foregrieving Process" 70-71.

³¹ Rom 12:17 **Recompense** to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves**, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.**

present. The horizontal phases can stay incomplete and this is OK with God. A person is not required to be re-victimized.

Phase One: Confronting the Wounders of the Past

Victims need to confront since perpetrators usually don't repent on their own. See the section on forgiveness for the details of this confrontation and the conditions of genuine repentance. The church has an obligation to get the perpetrator to repent. Perpetrator needs to have the ground rules explained. Herman says that the VIP needs to let the myth of the perfect family go. In some cases, this is impossible since the perpetrator is no longer living or mentally competent.

Phase Two: Reconnecting with Others

Find safe people in a safe church community. The church is speaking new stories and memories into their lives.

The Team Model – Four Sided Approach

A main goal of the Team Model is to not re-victimize those who are already oppressed.

Bringing healing to the VIP is what this is all about.

The problem of CSA has four aspects and there are four parts to the Team Model approach. These sides/parts are:

- Spiritual – VIP receives Pastoral care
- Psychological – VIP receives Psychological care
- Social – VIP receives peer group care
- Physical – VIP receives medical care

Cooperation Between Team members

The relationship between the four team is one of cooperation and information sharing. All of the team members have signed information sharing legal agreements³² with the VIP and each other. Information flows freely between the different groups and within a particular group. The goal is the same: healing of the VIP. Each group has a clearly defined scope of responsibility and doesn't try to overlap with the other group.

Appropriate care is given by the appropriate caregivers. The Pastor realizes that he or she is not a therapist, for instance, and refers psychological issues such as episodes of DID to the therapist.

³² This is to protect the integrity of the process and the legal requirements for confidentiality.

Spiritual Care from Pastoral Counselor

The pastoral caregiver uses the guidelines in this paper to effectively counsel VIPs.

Therapist/Psychiatrist

The Therapist is a Christian and counsels VIPs from a Christian worldview.

Support team of family and friends

The support team of family and friends is completely necessary for the healing of the VIP.

The break in relationship was social and the healing happens in a social context. The VIP learns to trust again by connecting with trustworthy people.

Healing community of church

Healing happens in worship, teaching and fellowship. This happens in both small and larger group contexts of the church. The VIP needs to be in fellowship in the church.

Physician, gynecologist, urologist, dentist, etc.

The VIP may have serious lasting physical effects such as Venereal Diseases, etc. These need to be treated as well as any physical issues that are related to the abuse.

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