



THE  
**HOPE**  
OF SURVIVORS

[www.TheHopeofSurvivors.com](http://www.TheHopeofSurvivors.com)  
Call toll-free: (866) 260-8958

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**HOPE**  
OF SURVIVORS

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UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT  
AMONG SPIRITUAL LEADERS

A ministry of compassion providing

## SUPPORT, HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

to victims of pastoral sexual abuse

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CONTACT INFORMATION / 1	YOUTH / 9
INTRODUCTION / 2	PASTOR / 11
MINISTRY / 3	PASTOR'S WIFE / 14
VICTIM / 5	PARISHIONER'S PERSPECTIVE AND CHURCH /16
HUSBAND / 7	

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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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 pastor as male. We recognize males are also victims at times and female pastors 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 and complexity of pastoral sexual abuse.

You may be wondering why we have chosen to 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 of the varying circumstances that shape our lives and the many years it takes to grow from childhood to adult give us a greater ability to make proper choices; but no, because what is often overlooked is the ability for anyone, adult or adolescent, to reject improper sexual advances from someone who is in a position of power, especially when that power imbalance comes from one who is in a role of spiritual authority.

The church is almost universally thought of as a safe place. Within its walls we find comfort, healing and the courage to face the difficult trials that confront each one of us. It is a safe-haven where God appoints others to instruct us in a right understanding of His Word and plan for our lives. The individual who has the greatest spiritual authority, and often our automatic trust, is the pastor. If this sacred trust is ever betrayed or violated through improper sexual contact, it can destroy a person's relationship with God. With this violation comes reproach and disgrace to the church, and it is counterproductive to the ministry of those who faithfully maintain their allegiance to Christ.



But, is this form of behavior really abuse? The dictionary describes abuse with terms such as, to "misuse, violate," or "deceive." The most noteworthy term 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, knowledge, experience and responsibility between a pastor and a congregant. Due to these imbalances, there can never be equality or mutual consent. Under these circumstances, any 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 pastoral 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 misconduct; as well as provide educational and informational materials and seminars to pastors and churches worldwide.

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.), printed media, public appearances and an up-to-date, interactive website.
2. Restore victims and their loved ones to faith in their Creator and trust of their fellow beings through weekend retreats and seminars, and one-on-one correspondence.
3. Facilitate healing in the church families that have been affected by pastoral sexual abuse; teach methods of prevention as well as recovery from the aftereffects of abuse.
4. Provide pastoral training/educational seminars to church leaders of all denominations; and work with clergy who have violated their sacred trust, encouraging them to make amends to their victims and to receive counseling.

### HOW AND WHEN DID THIS MINISTRY BEGIN?

In December 2002, Steve and Samantha felt led by the Holy Spirit to provide information that could help others 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 for pastors, have been conducted in several countries.

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

**Steve is a pastor and serves as President of The Hope of Survivors ministry.** He is a Board Certified Biblical Counselor (BCBC) through the International Board of Christian Counselors and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC). Steve is also an international speaker on pastoral sexual abuse and a member of the Adventist

Association of Family Life Professionals (AAFLP).

**Samantha serves as Vice President and CEO of The Hope of Survivors and speaks internationally on pastoral sexual abuse.** She has served as personal ministries and community services director, holds North American Division certification as an Adventist Community Services caseworker, received the 2004 *Woman of Distinction Award* from the Northern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC). She is a Board Certified Biblical Counselor (BCBC) through the International Board of Christian Counselors, holds a degree in Biblical Counseling, is a Certified Belief Therapist (CBT) through the Therapon Institute, and has authored a book for helping victims of abuse, as well as a training manual for peer support groups. Samantha is also a member of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals (AAFLP).

**The Board of Directors** consists of church leaders, pastors, licensed counselors, physicians and other professionals.

**The ministry is not owned, operated or subsidized by any church or denomination.** It is an independent organization, working cooperatively with many denominations, and is a supporting lay ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, not only to its own members but to 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 no 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 the church body and church leaders.

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

Your donation will expand the ministry, spreading the truth to some who might not be reachable through any other means. It 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 gifts 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 this concept may seem foreign or possibly so extreme that some will be tempted to think there is little reason to bring up such a topic. But whether or not you agree, far too many women have fallen prey to the seductive charms of a seemingly caring and nurturing man, who is also her pastor and spiritual leader.

Quite possibly one of the primary reasons this problem is so prevalent can be found in the relationship between a pastor and the members of his congregation. One of the greatest vulnerabilities that women, and sometimes men, face from a pastor is what can best be described as "automatic trust." This form of trust is often given without reservation and is based on the premise that a pastor is a godly man and, as such, is 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 crossed it can be very difficult to accurately comprehend what has actually taken place. A woman's senses may be saying one thing, but she may be unable to equate the actions with the person of the pastor. She will tell herself that she misunderstood what was actually going on. She must be mistaken; certainly the pastor would not do or say what he did.

To complicate all this even further, when a pastor begins to share his feelings and problems with other women, the natural response will be one 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 made, the pastor can then begin to subtly create divisions within the unsuspecting woman's personal life, sometimes creating problems in her marriage, then twisting Scripture to encourage or justify his wrong behavior.

**DOESN'T GOD FORGIVE US WHEN WE MAKE MISTAKES?** Amazingly, an all too often justification for a fallen pastor's actions comes directly from the Bible.

The story of David's sin against Bathsheba is 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," God will overlook this relationship as well. And, "since I am also God's 'anointed,'" He will bless our union as He did David.

Ironically, they leave out the most important part: David wholeheartedly repented of his murder and adultery. He pleaded with God to forgive him and not leave him to face unrepented the consequences of his sin. (See Psalm 51.) David lost four of his children and the respect of his people. The penalty of his actions reaped a terrible harvest, causing destruction and heartache

down through the ages of time. The record of David's actions are preserved as a warning to all who are tempted to follow in his footsteps, but not as a justification for sinful 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 experienced abuse or another devastating event in her life can have extreme emotional vulnerabilities. If left unhealed and unguarded, they become easy targets for an offending pastor. While not all pastors who become involved in misconduct are purposefully looking for a potential victim, many repeat offenders have learned how to spot and exploit the most susceptible women. It may appear that he understands you better than anyone else, or that you share many things in common. This is not necessarily because he is so "in tune" with you but, rather, because vulnerable women 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 he can't live without you, an emotional connection is not love. Love is a decision, a choice, 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 can lead us to violate His Word. If the pastor truly 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 and 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 problems, you now bear the weight of his problems, too. This is part of what makes pastoral abuse so damaging. Remember, he is responsible, not you.

**HOW DO I START OVER?**

You start by praying and asking God to forgive your sins and to help you to know truth. Ask Him to heal you emotionally, spiritually and physically, and to help you overcome your weaknesses and pain. God's Word has promised, *"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."* (Matthew 21:22, NKJV) He will gladly give you all that you ask for (in accordance with His will) and more! He is more than willing and able to renew your heart and give you a new start. Find a Christian counselor, confide in your spouse, report it to the church, or talk with a trusted friend.

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

This trap is just another form of manipulation. Tell him 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 is often a secondary victim of the abuse against his wife. The consequences of their compounded abuse often lead to tremendous emotional and spiritual problems. If unresolved, these issues can go on unhealed for years, and only an act of God's grace can heal their broken lives.

**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 pastoral sexual abuse, it is equally important to realize that abuse is not 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 devastating.

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



most attractive option presented to her was a relationship with the pastor. Rather, she was simply looking for hope and healing and was exploited by someone cloaked in a form of godliness that, while professing a desire to help, actually abused his sacred trust. How tragic the truth really is.

Unfortunately, the longer the abuse takes place, the greater the level of control that must be exercised over the victim in order to maintain secrecy and compliance. For the victim, the price tag for the anticipated emotional healing was paid for with the physical contact, carefully coerced and manipulated by the offending pastor. Often the victim cannot see a way to disentangle from the controlling influence of the abuser and, in hopelessness, resigns herself to give in to his cleverly disguised 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 often more easily given than restored. For you, as the

husband, there may be things your wife does which can act as reminders, or triggers, mirroring the events that took place during the abuse. As difficult as it may be, try to deal with these areas in an objective manner. Tell your wife that when this event takes place it makes you feel uneasy and suspicious. Although you now realize you may be reacting from previous experiences, ask her to help you find a positive solution to the problem.

Some things you will be able to change, others may need to be eliminated altogether. An example of this would be that if the abuser maintained contact with the victim through email 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, the remaining areas will be worked through as your love and trust are restored.

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

**HOW DO I FORGIVE?** You may not be able to recover all the losses sustained to your marriage, but there is 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 One whose example has gone before you who, when He was abused, prayed, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

In order for forgiveness to be complete it must be unconditional. Tomorrow you may once again be reminded of the pain and suffering you have gone through. If you truly forgave, you cannot retract your forgiveness when painful memories resurface. You will always need to leave them 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 the evil that has befallen you, but doing this only follows the path of lies that were used to perpetrate such terrible evils against you and your wife in the first place.

It is natural for you to harbor thoughts of anger or resentment toward the abusive pastor. But anger is self-defeating and destructive. Healing begins when forgiveness is given. Ask God to give you His grace to forgive the one who tried to destroy you, and place His love in your heart.

Sadly, if left unrepentant, the payment for the abuser's actions 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 when hugging and touching can be wrong.

If you are being hugged when you don't want to be, or 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 if it's the pastor who is asking you 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 and that he needs to stop.

**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.

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 actions.

**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. His 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. He has someone special for you that will never hurt you.

**HE SAYS HE LOVES ME IN A SPECIAL WAY, LIKE GOD LOVES HIS CHILDREN.** He may tell you you're special to him and that you make him happy in a way no one else does or ever has. These words are very manipulative and are

often used to control unsuspecting victims. A spiritual leader who says these things 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 do anything to hurt someone either.

This might be confusing and you may not want to talk about it, but there is help and hope for you. Your feelings are greatly confused right now and you don't want to hurt the person doing this to you. You do not have to keep quiet while being abused by your youth pastor, Bible worker, school dean, elder or deacon or anyone in the position of spiritual authority.

#### WHAT IS WRONG BEHAVIOR?

- Hugging you too often or too closely
- 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
- Talking inappropriately about sex
- Touching or caressing you sexually
- Passing you notes, calling you a lot, texting or emailing 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 doing any of these things, please tell someone. Contact us. We can help you.

#### YOU MAY BE THINKING OR FEELING...

- I am 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 anything 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 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.
- People 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 won't get in trouble for telling. The person who hurt you might, but that is because what he has done is wrong, not because you did anything to him and not 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 or encourage us to keep secrets from our family and friends. Good pastors are important because they can really help you grow in your relationship with Jesus but, if the pastor is doing something wrong to hurt you, he is 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 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 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 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 and refer her to a qualified counselor before it's too late.



If you cross that line and 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 and is not meant to be with you. Never share your feelings for her or try to convince her that it is somehow God's will for you to be together. If you do this, you are willfully sinning, under the guise of being a man of God, and that is a perversion of the truth.

When someone turns from God in this way, he/she often does not return. Do you really want to take this step? Do you want to cause another to fall?

As a minister, 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 be very successful and they equate their success and God's blessing to a "specialness," about themselves. They 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 boldly plunge forward on the path of no return.

God holds you to a greater level of accountability because you represent Him to His church. He does not lightly regard this type of sin and neither should you.

**I'VE NEVER FELT LOVED LIKE THIS.** It is unwise to say such things, even if you think you feel this way. In this situation, it is a form of emotional manipulation and control. By saying this, you will only confuse her. She needs help; please don't betray her trust.

No matter how you may feel, speaking these words to her can never be right!

**BUT I'M SO HAPPY.** While God wants you to be happy, 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 ministry God has called you to uphold. You are the shepherd of His flock and, as the shepherd, you are to guard all of His sheep. Please don't become a 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 her built on lies, adultery and deceit?

To encourage division in her marriage in the place of healing violates a sacred vow that you, as a minister, have promised to uphold. Your responsibility is to help heal and protect their marriage.

Even if she were to leave her husband for you, how could she ever trust you, 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 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 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 heal the patient. It's obvious how wrong this would be.

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

It's commonly perceived that sometimes a woman will go after a pastor. She appears to be drawn to him because of his power, and seduces him, thereby supposedly causing him to "fall."

True, a woman may be attracted to power, or to a certain pastor, but an important question to ask is this: Would she be "after him" if he were not the pastor? Evidence seems to indicate this is not the case. However, if it is indeed true, the pastor needs to recognize that his position of spiritual authority is the

reason a woman would be drawn to him and, outside of that role, he is not a potential “target.” But, regardless of this special set of circumstances, the fact still remains the pastor or spiritual leader is always responsible for maintaining healthy, safe and appropriate boundaries—under all circumstances—with 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 potentially 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 offense should be for a pastor who not only has spiritual authority and power, but is called to maintain a higher degree of accountability due to the sacred office he holds and the One he represents! It is a spiritual crime of the highest degree. A mistake like this made by one who represents the Savior of the world cannot be placed on the same level with someone without that calling, position or experience. God requires that His representatives reach 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 people. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Many people mistakenly believe that when a pastor or 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, Volume 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)?

Accountability is not only valuable but indispensable.

**Note:** Abuse is not always by pastors. The same principle applies to anyone in the role of spiritual authority (elder, deacon, teacher, etc.), whether officially employed by the church or serving as a volunteer.

**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, your family and the flock of God.

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

#### YOU MAY HEAR THINGS LIKE:

- The pastor’s 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 discuss nothing that goes on in your home with anyone else.



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

You know he is not who he professes to be and he has no business being a pastor in his current condition. He may tell you God appointed him and is blessing his efforts, therefore, you need to keep quiet and “touch not God’s anointed.” He may claim you are the problem because you’re not more supportive of him, you don’t understand him or his needs, 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 look bad.
- 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 the pastor.
- You're afraid he will possibly leave or divorce you if you expose him.
- You're afraid he might take the children from you.
- You keep hoping and praying things will get better and he will change.

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, that places you in a situation that is more of 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, he 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 and recognizes your pain and He is there to help you. Read Malachi 2:14-16 for further comfort.

Perhaps your husband does treat you and the children well, as he should. What clues would you have if he were possibly committing adultery with a member of the congregation?

#### 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.
- More controlling (tries to make sure your schedule is full, knows where you are)
- Suddenly restless (uneasy being at home with the family)

What can you do? First, be aware of what's going on in your own heart and mind. Everyone is vulnerable in some way. Discuss your feelings with your pastor-husband. Talk with a trusted friend or counselor. God may impress you to report your husband's behavior to the church and/or the proper authorities. Don't allow fear to keep you from doing what is right and necessary.

If this situation doesn't describe you or someone you know, praise God! But, please don't discard this knowledge. Proper education can be a safeguard in the future.

#### 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 you 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. Disbelief abounds, compounded by gossip. Unfortunately, these immediate responses are seldom comforting to anyone, especially a victim. When the congregation places the blame for pastoral misconduct on the victim, she is re-victimized.

It is important for the congregation to love and support the victim and her family, as well as the pastor and his family. Love and support do not mean turning a blind eye, leaving the pastor in the pulpit or eliminating consequences for the pastor's sin against God, the victim, his family and the congregation. Love—genuine love—seeks eternal wellbeing rather than 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."
- Claim the victim is being evil because she is telling people about the abuse.
- Tell the victim to keep quiet.
- Accuse the victim of hatred, jealousy, revenge or wanting to destroy the church.

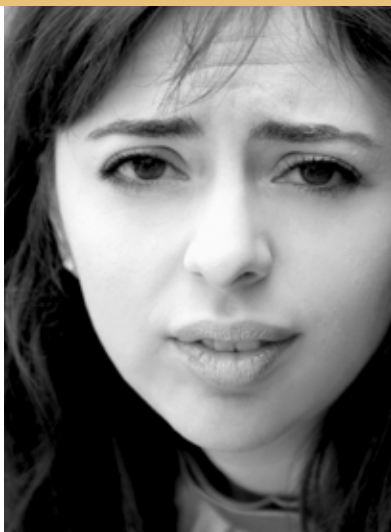
Many victims have experienced prior abuse or some other trauma in their lives. This may at times affect their judgment in different areas (dress, another's character and intentions). Abuse has nothing to do with intelligence. The Hope of Survivors has assisted victims from every class of society, including licensed therapists, nurses, etc. Intelligence, knowledge, education—or lack thereof—are not

indicators of vulnerability to abuse. It is the emotional state that primarily makes one vulnerable.

Sometimes, when there can be no resolution within the church itself, cases of abuse are taken to criminal or civil court. Remember, if this happens, it was most likely not the victim's first choice, but her only perceived option after failing to secure justice or resolution through her beloved church. If this has happened, 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 redemption of both the offended and the offender.

Church members themselves will have to learn to cope with the pain and stress caused by the pastor's sin. They too have been betrayed and deceived by the 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 are many, affecting not only the congregation but the community as well.

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 stand as a representative of Christ to the people. For his own



eternal wellbeing, he needs to step down or be removed so he can focus on reestablishing a saving relationship with Christ.

**HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?** During a counseling session or when working together, the pastor may begin by sharing his feelings with another woman, sometimes subtly twisting Scripture to encourage or justify his wrong behavior 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 may be overly friendly or flirtatious. Perhaps he is very controlling or manipulative which indicates a focus on self, which can lead to an abuse of power. He may make inappropriate comments toward or about women. And if he counsels with women alone, that can open the door to inappropriate sexual advances and abusing someone in his care. His sermon content or preaching style may have suddenly changed, and he may no longer possess the Spirit-filled power he

once had. All these outward indicators are 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 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 Christ 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 calling.

**HOW CAN WE HEAL FROM THIS?** Only God can bring true healing from such pain and devastation. We must pray for each other, the pastor, the victim and their families. Ask God to forgive and heal them, and to rebuild their 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 for 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 this crisis, the church cannot go into denial or shift blame upon the victim of clergy sexual abuse.

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

authority. Because he violated the sacred trust of his office, he must step down from his position.

The church should offer to assist the pastor, his family and the victims in getting proper counseling, and provide the opportunity for them 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 reveal true repentance.

Perhaps you're still wondering if someone who has experienced a moral fall should be brought to accountability. The question must be asked: How will the world view the exalted character of God and His power to work through the church 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, but ultimately it will preserve the church's witness to the community as a beacon of light and hope in a world of evil.

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.