

Spiritual Abuse Recovery: ***Dynamic Research on Finding a Place of Wholeness***

Spiritual abuse, the misuse of spiritual authority to maltreat followers, in the Christian church is a complex issue. This study focused on how people processed their grief after experiencing spiritual abuse in their local church and how they rediscovered spiritual harmony.

Chapter One, entitled What's Going On?, sets the stage for this research and the ministry problem which it has isolated.

Chapter One covers the following topics:

**Church Ministry Problem
The Context of the Study
Purpose and Research Question
Overview of the Literature Review
Overview of the Theological and Biblical Foundations
Dissertation Focus
How Participants Were Recruited
Size of People Sample
Limiting Conditions and Scope
Internet Factor
Summary**

This chapter begins with the question: What factors create a condition that find dedicated believers in Christ, who have been active in serving in their local church for a number of years, spiritually abused and now outside of their church and among an 'exiting' statistic?

Church leaders are asked two questions:

- 1. Spiritual abuse appears to have taken its toll on people within the Christian church, therefore, how can church leadership be informed about this issue in order to prevent this pattern in their own church community?**
- 2. Equally, how can church leaders minister effectively to those who come to them for help?**

Spiritual abuse is defined and used in a very specific sense. Chapter One recognizes that spiritual abuse is a multifaceted issue, that there is a devastating emotional toll upon church attenders who were active participants in their churches, and that this malady beckons consideration by church leaders and church congregants alike.

Questions that wounded Christians typically ask are: Why should I continue to go to church? Why should I attend church at all if I/we have been wounded by church leadership? Why can't I just be a Christian and not bother to go to church? I believe that I need to find a healthier church--where can I find a caring church family?

The first chapter describes how the author got interested in this topic. The Research Question for this project was: How have Christians recovered after experiencing perceived spiritual abuse in a local congregation? This book aims to demonstrate a path forward to greater freedom in Christ and spiritual harmony after a debilitating season of disillusionment with church leadership.

This introductory chapter outlines how subjects were recruited and the basic parameters for this study. It may be a distinct advantage in this study for subjects to have felt comfortable in sharing information with a female researcher who is not an ordained pastor. Also, the insights understood from the viewpoint of 'the other side of the pulpit' have some advantages when delving into this sensitive topic.

Chapter One describes the use of the Internet and how it has provided instant and accessible opportunities for online submissions. The virtual Christian community often is the first line of help available to hurting Christians. For church attenders recently disfellowshipped and seeking ways to cope, the Internet has provided an immediate oasis of consolation in this desert time of their Christian experience.

Chapter One recognizes that there may be a challenge for pastors reading this book. They will need to try to set aside preconceived ideas of why they feel that people have left churches. It will be important for pastors to fairly consider what issues this research is trying to address.

Excerpt from Chapter 1

What's Going On?

Every year dedicated Christian¹ people leave churches because of spiritual maltreatment at the hands of clergy. What factors cause dedicated believers in Christ, who have been active in serving in their local church for a number of years, to be spiritually abused and outside the church, reduced to an 'exiting' statistic? This book is based on doctoral research done by Barb Orlowski who traced the process of spiritual recovery among church congregants who were compelled to make the decision to leave their home church.

Spiritual abuse is a complex issue and the devastating emotional toll upon exiting church attendants who were active participants in their churches beckons consideration. The concept of spiritual abuse may not be a familiar concept to church leaders. Many issues demand the time and energy of pastoral and other church leaders, and spiritual abuse and the recovery of abused believers may remain at the periphery of their attention and interest. This book aims to bring spiritual abuse to the center of clergy's attention, and invites them to consider this very real dysfunction in the Church today and to consider if they and their church community can be part of the solution to this identified church malady, rather than part of the problem. Participants in this study describe how they went from a point of emotional woundedness to a place of spiritual recovery. Learning what factors helped in their recovery will aid church ministry leaders in how they and their congregations can minister with greater effectiveness in this area of need in the Church.

¹ In the context of this discussion, the term *Christian* can be defined as those who have personally believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, (fully God, fully man) and that by believing in his finished work on the cross and his Lordship from heaven that they have his indwelling presence by His Holy Spirit. Christians have the hope of eternal life with God after this life.