

Chapter 1 : Walking a Winding Path, Manipulation, Abuse & Spirituality

Spiritual abuse happens when someone volitionally manipulates another person in order to accomplish an ungodly agenda. Any form of abuse is spiritual abuse. This website or its third-party tools use cookies which are necessary to its functioning and required to improve your experience.

What is spiritual abuse? Spiritual abuse happens when a spiritual authority, such as a cult leader or abusive pastor, seeks to control individuals and ensure obedience. They might claim that salvation depends upon belonging to their church and that, since God speaks through them alone, there can be no further discussion on what the leaders say. Pushing for more money, promising that God will repay, and piling on guilt can be signs of covert abuse. Abusive groups also place great emphasis on performance-related works—attending every meeting; volunteering to help at local, regional, and national events; and devoting required minimum amounts of time to proselytizing. Spiritual abuse can occur when church or cult leaders misuse Scripture to bolster their own authority and keep their members under their thumb. For example, a spiritual authority may use Hebrews 1:1-3: "Our loyalty is due Christ, the Head of the church." Ephesians 1:22-23: "The church is his body, which he saves with his word, so that he might present it to himself as a glorious church, not stained or wrinkled or anything of the kind, but that it should be holy and blameless." Cults and abusive churches pre-emptively insulate members from any information critical of the group. Members are taught early on to be skeptical of any negative report about the group and that the biased media only lies about them. Spiritually abusive leaders can become so adept at thought and information control that those under their sway will actually defend their new identity over their former identity. The more committed to the abusive church a person becomes, the more isolated he becomes from non-members, and the more he fears punishment if he tries to leave. Some people, after a lifetime of emotional investment in a religious group, simply do not know how they could survive if they left. They have no friends other than their fellow church members. They may have cut off contact with family members. They probably have no interests social or intellectual outside of their group. Such is their fear of being ostracized that many stay put, keeping their misgivings to themselves. When our heart aches knowing we have made friendships and secret attachments that will be forever forbidden if we leave, we are in danger. Anchor Books, , page 100. As he described these false teachers, Peter points to their propensity to abuse their followers: "Those who claim to speak for Jesus today should not be placing heavier burdens on people than Jesus would. A pastor is to be a shepherd. Shepherds who abuse the flock can expect severe punishment when the Lord returns: With privilege comes responsibility, and those spiritual wolves who abuse their authority will have to answer to God for the harm they have done."

Chapter 2 : Abuse - Wikipedia

Spiritual abuse is a major factor in people leaving the church for good. In order for ministries and churches to thrive, we must be vigilant to highlight those entities that abuse others. It does us no good to sweep spiritual abuse under the rug and pretend it didn't happen.

Regardless of the religion involved, doctrine is used by both the abuser and the enabling members of the congregation to force the victim into subjection. How spiritual abuse manifests in the context of intimate partner relationships Victims living with an abuser who uses spiritual control in the home are subjected to additional levels of control and coercion not experienced in non-practicing families. By engaging in this behavior, abusers effectively elevate themselves to the role of God. The abuser expects their victims to be entirely submissive to them and exacts punishment for anything less than full compliance. Abusers use scripture regarding wifely duty to manipulate their partners into having intercourse. However, any time a victim does not consent to intimacy, it is sexual assault or rape. Abusers use scripture referencing subjection to guilt their partners into obeying everything they are commanded to do. Victims attempting to resist are met with rants and accusations about being a failure as a partner and parent to the children. If a victim attempts to call the abuser into account for their abusive behavior, the abuser dismisses their concerns and notes scripture references to the woman being the property of the husband. The victim is often prevented from attending church or engaging in social activities with other members of the congregation. They are also subjected to the ridicule of their beliefs or can be forced to practice a religion they do not want to. Women are often not allowed to work outside the home as the abuser enforces strict gender roles. The abuser makes all decisions “ even significant ones ” without seeking input from the victim. How spiritual abuse manifests in the context of religious leaders and congregations Victims of domestic violence also face psychological manipulation from the enabling behavior of their spiritual leaders and congregation. Spiritual leaders are charged with the wellbeing of their congregants. Members of the church seek help with self-improvement and relationships or family life. When victims of domestic violence confide in the clergy, they are unfortunately not always met with the Godly love they hear so much about from the pulpit. Clergy often responds with victim blaming and shaming wrapped in the guise of counsel. Church leaders usually meet with the abuser and victim at the same time to discuss the abuse occurring in the home. This is never a good idea because the victim is not free to say what they need to address. Prayer and self-examination are the most commonly offered solutions, but they also imply the victim is at fault. Victims are discouraged from calling the police or getting medical documentation of the injuries and are instead pressured to pray, change behavior, and submit. Often, members of the congregation will blame the victim and pressure them to stay with the abuser. In too many cases, both clergy and congregation tell the victim that their weak faith is the problem. Safety of the victim is jeopardized. The victim is pressured or coerced to subject to the head of the household and stay with the abuser to avoid breaking up the family. Victims face the difficult choice of not only leaving their abuser, but their entire life behind. Most of the friends, family, and social activities exist within this context. When a victim leaves, they must leave their friends and social connections as well. They may stop attending services permanently, unable to trust that any congregation functions healthily. Breaking free from this dangerous situation is an impossible choice for the victim to make. If they stay, their family remains together, yet they sacrifice their safety and well-being. If they leave, they have a hope of building a better life for themselves and children. However, victims must also consciously choose to leave their entire lives behind, not just the violence. Their lives center around the religious community, and the congregation often shuns those who leave. Such victims are unsure of where to go and whom to trust because they were expected to ignore secular sources of help. How religious leaders and congregations can get involved: Contact a local domestic violence organization and ask to set up an action plan to use when congregants disclose domestic violence. Understand that secular institutions are not there to undermine faith, but to help the victim safely escape their abuser and refer them to legal, medical, housing, and law enforcement resources. Each person in a leadership role should undergo domestic violence and trauma training to learn how to respond to abuse victims appropriately. Give

occasional sermons dedicated to addressing violence and trauma in the home. Make listings of resources available to any congregant needing help. Do not pressure the victim to stay and pray it out. If they have decided to leave, offer them help, and do not cut them off from the congregation.

Chapter 3 : Religious abuse - Wikipedia

Some abuse is spiritual abuse because it takes place in a spiritual place/context. Sexual abuse by a priest or pastor, for example, is clearly a form of spiritual abuse in addition to sexual abuse. The use of spiritual truths or biblical texts to do harm is another form of spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse What is Spiritual Abuse? It is a subject many visitors contact us about, and one we frequently see in face-to-face counselling. Religious abuse can take place in every religion or religious movement. But this website deals primarily with spiritual abuse that occurs in Christian churches and movements. That said, much of the information we provide and refer to also applies to followers of other religions – including religious movements that are considered to be, theologically, cults of Christianity. The former deals with behavior; the latter with beliefs. Sociologists look for patterns in human behavior and in social institutions. As you read the following pages, a profile of pastoral and spiritual abuse will emerge. Abusive churches, past and present, 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. 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. Rules and legalism abound. For those who leave, the road back to normalcy is difficult. It is – a group of people, which claiming to be Christian, embraces a particular doctrinal system taught by an individual leader, group of leaders, or organization, which system denies either explicitly or implicitly one or more of the central doctrines of the Christian faith as taught in the sixty-six books of the Bible. Alan Gomes, *Unmasking The Cults* paperback [Kindle edition] A wider definition takes actions and practices into account as well. A movement that appears theologically sound with regard to the central doctrines of Christianity, but whose actions and practices are cultic or cult-like in nature, can still be considered a cult of Christianity e. International Churches of Christ. In many though certainly not all such groups, movements, or churches the cult-like behavior is rooted in faulty theology. That does not make it harmless. Unlike physical abuse that often results in bruised bodies, spiritual and pastoral abuse leaves scars on the psyche and soul. It is inflicted by persons who are accorded respect and honor in our society by virtue of their role as religious leaders and models of spiritual authority. They base that authority on the Bible, the Word of God, and see themselves as shepherds with a sacred trust. But when they violate that trust, when they abuse their authority, and when they misuse ecclesiastical power to control and manipulate the flock, the results can be catastrophic. 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 victims. Abusive leaders base their spiritual authority on their position or office rather than on their service to the group. Their style of leadership is authoritarian. Leaders in abusive churches often say one thing but do another. Their words and deeds do not match. They manipulate people by making them feel guilty for not measuring up spiritually. They lay heavy religious loads on people and make no effort to lift those loads. You know that you are in an abusive church if the loads just keep getting heavier. Abusive leaders are preoccupied with looking good. They labor to keep up appearance. They stifle any criticism that puts them in a bad light. They seek honorific titles and special privileges that elevate them above the group. They promote a class system with themselves at the top. Their communication is not straight. Their speech becomes especially vague and confusing when they are defending themselves. They major on minor issues to the neglect of the truly important ones. Why do otherwise sensible and intelligent people put up with abusive churches? Blue points out that many people feel perfectly comfortable being led. When they administer the rules in an abusive manner we will at first tend to submit. Combined with our tendency to want a leader is our incurably religious nature. Our longing for God is essential to us. It is the most significant aspect of our being. It is no surprise then that those who most earnestly desire to please God are most apt to be victimized by spiritual authorities setting themselves up as mediators for God. The spiritually keen are most at risk. And that sometimes means resisting spiritual authorities just as he did. Many of the people we counsel regarding spiritual abuse indicate that they long

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submitted to their leaders because they were afraid to lose their community – their history in the local church and the relationships they have built up with people over time. You are welcome to share this graphic on spiritual abuse on your website or on social media Research Resources Feel free to suggest additional resources.

Chapter 4 : Recovery After Exiting a Spiritually Abusive Group

Signs of spiritual abuse between intimate partners include when an abusive partner: ridicules or insults the other person's religious or spiritual beliefs prevents the other partner from practicing their religious or spiritual beliefs.

It used to be you could hardly wait for the services and to be involved; now it is drudgery to go at all. You used to have such a light and blissful feeling as you worshiped the Lord in the services; now you just go through the motions, feeling heavy, staring placidly toward the platform, sometimes wishing you were somewhere else. You compare how they are now to how they were when they first came. Is their life, as it should be, appreciably better, or have they and their family experienced an inordinate share of tragedies, seemingly inexplicable difficulties, and reversals? Does this scenario sound familiar to you? Still, this nagging inward sense something is awry persists. Something not on the surface. Often, these are the symptoms of a church or group laboring under the heavy-hand of hyper-authoritarianism. That is to say, the leadership is dominating, controlling, and manipulating their followers, and exploiting them for their own personal gain and private kingdom-building. Wholesale abuse and misuse of authority is an integral part of the very foundation, fabric, and functions of such groups. Hyper-authoritarian leaders, instead, lead people to themselves, and indoctrinate them to be their followers, in total submission to them and their authority. Moreover, members are indoctrinated and compelled to accept the leadership-set agenda of the group, regarding which they have next to no real say, as their personal burden and responsibility, and thus to commit their time, talent, And most importantly, their tithe, to its successful completion. The following are some of the signs and symptoms, or common characteristics, of hyper-authoritarian groups, churches, networks, and ministries. It simply is not feasible to elaborate on them in an article such as this. However, I have addressed most of them in various books, booklets, and articles I have written on the topic, particularly my book, *Charismatic Captivation*, from which this article is taken. Bear in mind that the list is by no means exhaustive, and that these are general, rather than, exact descriptions. It is vital to understand that every single one of these actions of patent spiritual abuse are actions of witchcraft or sorcery, which is defined as actions in which one person is seeking to usurp and override the will and personal autonomy of another person by whatever means. Only the devil attempts to do that. God will never seek to usurp your will, for any reason! Those who operate in any form or kind of witchcraft are never operating through the Holy Spirit on behalf of God as His surrogates, but rather are always agents of Satan – no ands, ifs, or buts; PERIOD! So, what should you do if you realize that you have been exposed to the spiritually and psychologically devastating actions of authoritarian abuse? [CLICK HERE](#) to read the rest of this article that tells you how you can obtain the information and help you need to be liberated from the damaging effects of these dastardly, demonic workings of Satan. If you need deliverance, [click here](#). Steven Lambert [[Click on image to learn more about this powerful book](#)] *The Anointed Book* that has helped many to be set free from the fetters of demon powers! Lambert authored several books catalog at [realtruthpublications](#). His bio, extensive blog, and scheduling information are available on his ministry website at: You can follow him on Twitter and Facebook. Thanks for reading this article! If you enjoy the spiritually enriching articles on *Spirit Life Magazine*, please sign up to receive new articles via email immediately when they are posted simply by entering your email address in the "Articles Via Email" widget located on this page toward the top of the right-sidebar. Just below that widget is another widget – "Newsletter Sign-up" – you can use to subscribe to our newsletter we send out periodically to inform you of all our new articles and occasionally other information as well.

Chapter 5 : 33 Signs of Spiritual Abuse | Spirit Life Magazine

The idea of spiritual abuse is not a new phenomenon. In the Old Testament, God spoke against those who operated in their own authority while abusing the very people they were to bless.

Pat Zukeran looks at positive steps one can take to recover from an abusive church situation. Looking at the problem from a biblical perspective, he considers recovery from abusive churches and abusive leaders. He also looks at how abusive churches can begin the process of changing into an affirming, positive congregation. This article is also available in Spanish. Leaving an unhealthy church situation can leave some very deep scars. One example of the collateral damage is a very painful exit process. Those who leave an unhealthy church situation suffer isolation, bitterness, embarrassment, grief, and anger. This is coupled with confusion and wondering how God could let this happen. They also chide themselves for getting into such a group and staying in the organization as long as they did. At times, I am glad to have left the organization. I enjoy the new freedoms I have in Christ and relief from the burdens I was carrying for many years. At other times I suffer the pain over the lost years and lost friendships. It leaves us spiritually disorganized and emotionally cut off from the healing love of God. Many end up forsaking the church or religion. Many quit seeking God and give up on the church all together. Ronald Enroth states that victims of church abuse suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. Although exiting is difficult, recovery is not impossible. Keep in mind the healing process is not the same for each person. For some, healing may take years; for others it may happen in a few months. Some will be able to recover through the help of a mature Christian community while others may need professional Christian counseling. Discerning Good from Abusive How do we discern a healthy church from an abusive church? Unfortunately, abusive churches can exist in evangelical and mainline denominations. They are not just fringe churches on the outer circle of evangelicalism. Here are some questions that can help show if you are in an unhealthy situation. First, does the leadership invite dialogue, advice, evaluation, and questions from outside its immediate circle? Authoritarian pastors are threatened by any diverse opinions whether from inside or outside the group. Group members are discouraged from asking hard questions. A healthy pastor welcomes even tough questions, whereas in an unhealthy church disagreement with the pastor is considered disloyalty and is virtually equal to disobeying God. Spiritual language is used to disguise the manipulation that is going on. Questioners are labeled rebellious, insubordinate, and disruptive to the harmony of the body. Attempts are made to shut them down. The only way to succeed is to go along with the agenda, support the leaders, scorn those who disagree. Second, is there a system of accountability or does the pastor keep full control? Authoritarian pastors do not desire a system of accountability. They may have a board but it consists of yes-men whom he ultimately selects. The use of guilt, fear, and intimidation is likely to produce members with low self-esteem. Many are beaten down by legalism, while assertiveness is a sign that one is not teachable and therefore not spiritual. Fourth, are family commitments strengthened? Church obligations are valued more than family ones. Although many may verbally acknowledge the family as a priority, in practice they do not act like it. The church made her feel guilty because she was choosing family over God. The mindset is loyalty to God means loyalty to his church. Fifth, does the group encourage independent thinking, developing discernment skills, and creation of new ideas? Abusive churches resort to using pressure to have followers conform, and there is a low tolerance for any kind of difference in belief of a non-essential nature and behavior. There is a legalistic emphasis on keeping the rules, and a need to stay within set boundaries. Unity is defined as conformity. These leaders evaluate all forms of Christian spirituality according to their own prescribed system. Sixth, is the group preoccupied with maintaining a good public image that does not match the inner circle experience? Seventh, does the leadership encourage members to foster relations and connections with the larger society that are more than self-serving? Finally, is there a high rate of burnout among the members? If these are character traits of the group you are attending, you may be in an abusive church and should consider leaving the organization. Many such leaders come from churches that were abusive or have an unmet need for significance. Many may have begun with noble intentions, but their unresolved personal issues cause them to become dependent on their ministry to meet their needs. In his book,

Healing Spiritual Abuse, Ken Blue does an outstanding job identifying unhealthy leadership. Here are a few characteristics of an abusive leader. Abusive leaders use their position to demand loyalty and submission. That is a false basis of authority. The only authority God recognizes and to which we should submit to is truth. They can also defend themselves against any who might challenge them. Therefore, all people, especially leaders, need some form of accountability. When they act in a manner contrary to Scripture they need to be confronted, and improper behavior needs to be corrected. In 2 Samuel 22, the prophet Nathan confronted King David about his sin. In Galatians 2, Paul confronted Peter, the leader of the Apostles, for not acting in line with the truth. Truth and its authority are not rooted in personality or office. It is derived from the word of God and the truth it proclaims. Frustrated by his manifest lack of success, he turned to the congregation to meet his need. He has laid on them a building program in hopes that a new, larger, more attractive facility will draw more people. The congregation has split over this issue. Many have left the church, and those who remain are saddled with the debt. Many members were busy with family commitments, work, and needed personal time for rest, but were pressured to attend the numerous church events. These leaders saw their success in the numbers that attended their functions and needed their turnout to satisfy their sense of worth. Christ-like leadership is servanthood. True leaders gain the loyalty of the sheep because of the quality of their character and their attitude of servanthood. The members freely submit to Christ-like leadership and do not have to be coerced to follow. Good shepherds lighten the load of the sheep while false leaders add to the load on the sheep. Should you find yourself in such a situation, the first thing to do is pray for the leader. Second, in a loving and graceful way confront the leader, addressing what you see as unhealthy practices in his leadership. It may take a while for your words to sink in, so be patient. However, as in many cases, the leader may get defensive and reject your advice and in turn make accusations against you. It is best to leave the situation and let God deal in His way with the leader and his organization. The Road to Recovery As we discussed earlier, exiting an abusive or unhealthy church situation is a very painful process, but recovery and healing is possible. When you realize you are in an authoritarian church, it is best to leave and make a complete break. Many members remain, thinking their presence will help change the situation, but this is highly unlikely. In fact, remaining may perpetuate the existence of the organization. Acknowledge that abuse has taken place. Denying this will only stall the recovery. Next, develop relationships with mature Christians who will listen to your story and support you in the healing process. In a safe and supporting environment you will be able to share your feelings, experiences, hopes, and struggles. Although it may be difficult, understand that recovery rarely happens in isolation. You must learn to trust again, even if it is in small, tentative stages. Expect to wrestle with some difficult emotions. Recognize that you will go through a grieving process-grief for lost years, lost friends, and the loss of innocence. You may also feel guilt, shame, and fear. It is natural to feel foolish and experience self-doubt. These are actually healthy emotions that should not be bottled up inside. Regret over poor decisions is a sign of growth, and you will eventually leave those emotions behind. Therefore, it is crucial to find people who will be supportive and help you address hard feelings. For some people, professional Christian counseling is necessary. Seek out a counselor who understands the dynamics of abusive systems and can provide the care and warmth needed.

Spiritual abuse happens when a spiritual authority, such as a cult leader or abusive pastor, seeks to control individuals and ensure obedience. Spiritual abuse is closely associated with spiritual manipulation and is not God's plan for promoting spiritual growth.

They range from abusive marriages, homes and even abusive church environments. Over the years, there has become an awareness of how church and ministry environments can misuse their influence and authority in a way that damages the spiritual and emotional life of people. This has become known as spiritual abuse. The ramifications are more harmful than most people realize. The Need for Better Answers I find that the majority of Christians who have served God for a long enough time have at some point been a part of a spiritually toxic environment. Yet I rarely see people walking through any kind of process to heal from those harmful situations. In fact, I find that people in these kind of settings lose their sense of judgment. You begin to think that living with the ups and downs of addictions is normal. Addressing Spiritual Abuse Patterns Many churches are making changes in making the health of their church family a high priority. Love, honor and a renewed lens on healthy authority are beginning to take shape. But we still have a ways to go. I have spent countless hours personally working with people who have come out of spiritual abuse. Some of the stories would make the hairs on your arm stand on end. Yet God has graciously worked in many of their lives to heal those wounds and renew their belief systems; allowing them to cultivate healthy connection and fellowship. Along my work with people and churches as well as extensive research, I have compiled some common signs that an abusive environment is in play. Please understand that I do not throw the abuse word around loosely. This is a very serious issue and I share this with great sobriety and through much prayer. If you did not listen to or watch our two part episode on spiritual abuse , you can tune in here. The standards of honor, respect and authority are distorted. This is the biggest factor when spiritual abuse is taking place. Instead of a culture of honor and respect that is given from both leadership and followers, an authoritarianism exists. Over time, leaders lose their ability to be approachable. There is little emphasis in working through issues, so people either quietly leave or sit in silent submission with no personal engagement. Instead of empowering the people, they become conditioned to just go with whatever is happening. The concept of spiritual fathering can become distorted in this. Leadership is driven to use force, intimidation or manipulation to make things happen. Unsafe environments when it comes to dealing with problems. A church is safe when it knows how to deal with problems effectively with love, grace and truth all in play. In a spiritually abusive environment, people are often demonized in embarrassing ways. Relationships are not protected and betrayal takes place. People lack the maturity to take a step back and see how to work through issues in a more healthy way. If we win an argument and lose a genuine opportunity to preserve a relationship, we lose. I have also found that when a church does nothing about a problem it should address, that passivity can be incredibly damaging to the church culture. Heavy religious performance driven culture. You cannot have an abusive environment without this, because the abusive culture pushes people to give, serve, do and live in performance based Christianity. As long as people are busy and doing things that serve the success agenda, things are ok. Any emphasis outside of that is frowned upon and given a cold shoulder to. In this setting, there is a heavy emphasis on how things look. It becomes more important that things look ok rather than authentically doing life as a body with effective vulnerability. We lose value for a healthy heart life. People are becoming weary of the television perfection that Christianity portrays. Meanwhile, our perfectionistic values put an ungodly pressure on people that skews how they interact with God. They become subtly trained that their relationship with God is based on service and how perfect things go. It exhausts people and leaves them disillusioned. Unfortunately, in a high performance based environment, people become commodities in the goal of growth, success, status and achievement. Fear and shame drive people into submission. People are often punished in shameful and often public ways that crush them. Emphasis on a charismatic leader who becomes the ultimate spokesperson on all spiritual issues. Reading non-approved books is frowned upon, because the belief is that people cannot think for themselves. There becomes an unhealthy dependency on themselves. Spiritual abuse

can begin to shift when the church leadership is willing to admit mistakes and authentically share their own personal journey in redemptive ways. When was the last time you heard a pastor express repentance of certain areas to the congregation? Over spiritualizing of everything. This is a major problem in general. It shocked me how much this happens, but it does in growing form. The thought of being this controlling sounds exhausting, but it is how many leaders attempt to feel safe. This can get into who people marry, what job to get and what decisions to make. A culture of exclusive spirituality. We are the ones who get this. This is a tough one, especially because the church still has a very poverty driven mentality on a lot of financial perspectives. Many still think its ok for people who are in ministry position and give full time hours to it, to live in lack and poverty circumstances. In some churches, you cannot have a Sunday go by without a majority of talking time being spent on how people need to give more to the latest project. When you have an achievement minded church culture, then financial campaigns will always be in play. They will never end. Creating an internal bubble that isolates people from their families, other ministries, etc. One of the problems with modern ministry is that people are easily burned out and disconnected from other parts of their life. In fact, when I left formal pastoring, I was amazed at how much time I could invest in my relationship with my wife and children. It was astounding to me how church life can isolate people from many important areas of their life and wholeness. Unwillingness to act with compassion towards those who leave. There is a time where dangerous and toxic people have to be dealt with. But many times, there are just honest disagreements or new paths opening up for people that churches need to recognize. Healthy churches know when its time for someone to move on and honor that transition. Abusive church environments make it difficult to leave or move on. People are often shunned. Communication gets shut down. They get treated as an outcast. Leaving a church is very difficult to begin with, but abusive environments make it painfully worse. There is either no accountability structure or the one that is in place is a small huddle where there is no collaboration or council on issues. There is little room for healthy debate and reasonable discussion over issues. A strong legalistic and religious pressure. Because the emphasis is often on how things look, there can be a legalistic pressure on sin, sanctification and holiness. People are taught in such a way where they always feel they have to do better, perform better or work to be good enough. Are there any you would add to this list? Please share in the comments below.

Chapter 7 : What is spiritual abuse?

Religious abuse is abuse administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation, which may result in psychological trauma. Religious abuse may also include misuse of religion for selfish, secular, or ideological ends such as the abuse of a clerical position.

Writing about your feelings and experiences. Feelings from hurtful stimulus were not permitted to be expressed in an emotionally abusive system. Writing has been found to be very helpful to survivors of abuse and enables you to process your thoughts by getting them out of your head and down on paper where you can reflect and make sense of them. If memories become too painful while writing child survivors may experience feelings of rage, intense sadness and fear, it may be necessary to seek out a supportive, safe person; i. An understanding counselor is especially recommended if you begin to have memories of being sexually abused, or are experiencing frequent and overwhelming nightmares and flashbacks. They should be willing to listen, validate and empower you; not try to control you or tell you to "get over it. During this time it is helpful to have a therapist that is knowledgeable with trauma, mind control and abusive groups. We can never recover all we lost, and while we need to grieve those losses, we must first acknowledge those losses. Return to index

Networking with others Try to network with others that have exited and who have gone through similar experiences. Healing takes place in the context of non-controlling relationships and connection with others who will support you, believe you, and validate your experiences. Those who are further along in their healing, and who are supportive, can be especially helpful. Return to index

If you raised children in the group If you raised children in an Armstrong group, you may be carrying a lot of guilt. Think about making a choice to talk to your children about what they and you were involved in, letting them know you were terribly deceived and are genuinely sorry for the pain it has caused. Indeed, it will benefit everyone if all can talk things over and eventually forgive each other. Thankfully, God is a forgiving God. In turn, we must forgive ourselves. Their self-perceptions were greatly distorted. Experts who have worked with traumatized children who grew up in destructive religious groups say the most important things these children need, upon removal from the group are: In other cases, your grown children may be involved in a life of alcoholism, illegal drugs, etc. First realize that it is not up to you to try and get them straightened out. They must seek professional help in order to recover. Start encouraging your children, validating them, seeing the best in them, taking an interest in their lives, and doing things with them now. It may take several years to have a closer relationship with them, but demonstrating your love and acceptance and supporting them is the best thing you can do. When individuals are willing and ready to change, there is always hope for a better future. With prayer, patience, kindness and the grace of Jesus many things can be overcome and healed. Return to index

If you were raised in the group If you were born or raised in the WCG, PCG, or any abusive offshoot, you probably never had a normal, happy childhood. You may not have been given any opportunity to have autonomous thought, and your lives were regulated. Many also have suffered a lot of needless guilt, phobic fears, low self-worth, shame, and even abuse. They often have difficulty making decisions, trusting those in authority, and developing skills, especially social skills. As you start making your own decisions, living the way you know is best for you, and understanding that you are worthwhile and have something unique to offer others, then you will lose that feeling of being different and ashamed. Each human has talents and gifts that are unique. Each has their own interests and their own personality that they were born with. And no one any longer has the power to ruin or curtail your future that you have in front of you. The best revenge is to recover and become happy and productive. Return to index

Sorting out spiritual concerns It is very common for exiters especially those who were raised inside to not feel any type of spiritual connection after exiting due to the spiritual abuse and Scripture twisting they endured. If you went into the group as an adult, you can experience an intense spiritual betrayal and shattering of your faith. Regaining trust will take much time. As a result, you might have a tendency to blame yourself and think you need to "do something" to bring God closer. He understands everything we are struggling and suffering with and will comfort and encourage us. Nothing can take us out of His hand. Spiritual Healing links Child survivors who were taught a harsh, demanding,

punitive "God" have great difficulty understanding what the real God is like and may not be able to open a Bible for a long time. This also is true with those who were recruited as adults. The true God of love was revealed through Jesus who desires to have eternal, loving fellowship with us and who brought healing and rest to the afflicted. We are saved by faith in Him, through grace, and nothing else. Spiritual abuse in the group was intense; therefore, spiritual abuse and tactics used by mind manipulating groups to distort the Bible to support their agendas must be recognized. Our Booklist gives a list of several recommended books. The foundational lies that were programmed into our mind about ourselves, the group, and the Bible must be uncovered and replaced with the truth of the Word of God. A sensitive Christian therapist who uses cognitive therapy and is knowledgeable with trauma, controlling, abusive religious groups, and the effects of thought reform can be helpful. **What Were the Lies and What is the Truth?** The important thing is to do what feels best for you and to not push yourself. Take time out to rest. Return to index **Sp**iritual bondages and strongholds Many exiters have struggled with various spiritual bondages and strongholds. Some were even involved in occult activities before going into the high demand group. Being delivered from these things is an important part of becoming free in Christ. Sample prayers are at: **Prayers for Freedom From Spiritual Strongholds** also includes recommended books to read. You may feel that you want someone to pray with you, or you may decide to pray by yourself. These prayers should not be construed as some kind of ritual that will bring quick healing, but they have been found to be very effective in setting others free of emotional ties with destructive, totalistic groups and in breaking spiritual strongholds. A knowledgeable therapist should be sought out for serious or ongoing problems, such as addictions. What about professional therapy? You can extend your love and be willing to communicate about everything, but if any of them have substance abuse problems, or an inability to relate, they will need to take responsibility themselves to get help. You cannot solve their problems for them and it is not up to you to fix them. Even if they do say they are sorry, it is okay to be cautious and to set boundaries. The love, acceptance and belonging you needed while in the group was not unconditional. You do not need to continue to try and please others who only end up abusing them and never changing. If you grew up in what may have been considered a dysfunctional family before you became a member, you did not realize that you were worthwhile even though you were imperfect, immature and vulnerable.. If you are having a very difficult time with all this, perhaps even feeling deep anger and resentment toward your extended family for their past lack of love toward you and their present unwillingness to understand what you have experienced even attempting to place guilt, blame and shame on you, consider receiving professional Christian counseling from someone who is knowledgeable with abusive, high demand religious groups; especially one who can help you to break the emotional ties and to be able to establish other good relationships in your life. Return to index **Se**eking forgiveness from others If you feel there were members or loved ones that you hurt by your actions, or words and that you want to ask their forgiveness for, you can consider contacting them. This could be in person, by a letter, or on the phone. However, if you feel that contacting them will make things worse, or if you do not know where they are, realize that if you are a Christian, God, through Christ, has already forgiven all your sins, past present and future. If you taught things that you now know gave others a very wrong impression of God for instance if you are a former minister, elder or deacon, and which caused sorrow, if it is impossible to make it right with others, know that God has forgiven you because of what Christ Jesus has already done for you in His death, burial and resurrection. Return to index **Fo**rgiving yourself The deceptive group used guilt manipulation in order to control its members, so you have undoubtedly been made to feel you are the guilty one and you probably feel defective in some way. It was the group that was defective, not you. Try to forgive yourself of whatever you felt you did or said. You are a unique human being with gifts and talents that God has endowed you with and He loves you. The Lord Jesus took all your guilt and shame upon Himself when he died for the sins of the world. Let Him set you free from all guilt. **An End to Guilt** Excellent message that focuses on the unconditional love of God and gives a clear understanding of grace Return to index **I**s it possible to forgive the abusers? Coming to the place where we can say we forgive those who abused us can take a long time and should never be rushed. We will never forget what we suffered. Nor does it mean that we must refrain from exposing them, for in speaking up others are warned. Forgiving also does not mean that we must reconcile with those who abused

us. Our abusers were sinners who used the power of thought reform in order to control us. Some abusers were outright evil. Child survivors, especially, should realize that they are adults now and their abusers do not have that same power over them anymore. Forgiveness which is a choice entails turning the perpetrators, including the entire evil system, over to God, knowing that in His time, and in His way, He will surely administer justice. In the meantime, we can choose to not let them have the rest of our life by allowing them to control our emotions and ruin our future happiness. Return to index P
ace yourself When trying to recover and heal from a high demand, abusive group, be sure and pace yourself. Recognize when you are starting to feel overwhelmed and finding it very difficult to read and retain information. This is a very common symptom and will pass in time. Move away from anything that is making you feel burdened, pressed or squeezed into a mold. Realize that being under a lot stress or experiencing triggers will cause symptoms to increase. Take a break when you need it, and do whatever you have to in order to stay away from relationships that get in the way of your healing process. This may mean distancing yourself from those you know who are still in the group. Get adequate sleep, exercise, and times of relaxation, as neglecting these things can affect how you feel physically and emotionally. Return to index W
hat about professional therapy? If you feel you need further help in resolving depression, relational problems, abuse from your past, guilt, phobias, anxiety, fears, shame, addictions, etc. Realize that long term emotional stress such as anxiety, grief, fear, guilt, anger, etc. This needs to be taken into consideration along with therapy. A good counselor can help you work through these things, yet at the same time should never try to control you, attribute your symptoms exclusively to problems prior to entering the group, or blame you for being deceived, but will instead empower you and listen to you.

Chapter 8 : 14 Signs of Spiritual Abuse - Mark DeJesus

*To recognize a spiritually abusive leader, first we have to define spiritual abuse. Jeff VanVonderen, co-author of the classic book *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, defines spiritual abuse like this: "Spiritual abuse occurs when someone in a position of spiritual authority-the purpose of which is to 'come underneath' and serve, build, equip and make God's.*

If You let me, I will catch fire Consider this a PSA that these people are out there. Some red flags from my own experience: Not an exhaustive list. Under a cut for length. Content warning for discussion of abusive and manipulative tactics, my personal examples of same, brief mentions of self-harm and suicide, mentions of ableism. I am still working on trusting my gut more on this because these weird instincts often turn out right somehow. People who cannot respect that are likely to be boundary violators in general. If you ever feel like you cannot say no because the consequences will be shitty, please get out of that situation. This includes trying to passively aggressively shame you. An example I might think of in terms of specifically spiritual abuse is someone telling you you are a fluffy bunny or a coward for being uncomfortable with doing something they want you to do. Still makes my blood run cold to think of. This is the spiritual equivalent. Get at least a second opinion if not more before you act on anything. I know on tumblr we try to not judge other people or question the truth of their claims, and in many ways I appreciate that. But when somebody is claiming to give you unsolicited advice or messages from some higher power, please please question it. You are not being bad or somehow invalidating them if you choose to ignore their advice. This is a particularly nasty manipulation technique because it preys on the way we all want to believe we are out of the ordinary. Whoops, not Special anymore. My ex use both this AND the previous tactic in a really charming double-hit of mindfuckery. It might seem benign but it can be a really subtly nasty control thing. This can be more about them and them getting to feel good about themselves by having you reliant on them than it is about genuinely helping you. I mean if they keep pushing this really hard. Someone who respects you will respect your boundaries. If they lie about non-spiritual things in a big way, or show manipulative behaviour in non-spiritual settings. There are lying liars that lie out there. I am pretty remorseless about this after the time I forgave someone who, in order to stop me being mad at them, lied to me about attempting suicide and put up with some wildly shitty antics for another year. You are not a bad person for holding shit like this against people. You are working with the data they give you. This just lends more authority and legitimacy to whatever tactics they are using or agendas they are pushing. Run your own checks on everything someone else conveys to you that seems to conveniently fit their ulterior motives. My ex used to do this all the fucking time until I had a meltdown in school because I was so emotionally exhausted at which point she slowed things down a little. Please use your discernment. Literal-doomsday type things are a gigantic red flag. My ex had a remarkable gift for seamlessly channeling entities when I thought it had been HER saying incredibly shitty and hurtful things to me. But oh no, how wrong I was, it was never her, and so I had no cause to be mad, did I? If you are doing heavy duty rituals involving channeling, astral stuff, spirit work, high-intensity high-energy stuff, with multiple people, IMO there need to be discussions beforehand. Everyone has to be able to give informed consent to what is going ahead. There have to be safeguards in case people want or need to back out at any point. This is serious shit. I have a sexual aspect to my personal practice and that is fine. That is not fine. If someone does something sexual or quasi-sexual that makes you uncomfortable or is non-consensual in the context of a spiritual practice this is JUST as serious as any other context. If all you talk about with that person is the spiritual stuff. Fuck, I could not spend a schoolday with her without any of that stuff involved. If they undermine you seeking appropriate help for your health conditions, esp. Again, keeping you reliant on them. If you have certain mental health conditions, it may make it easier for abusers to make you believe what they want you to believe and they may use that against you. I know this is a very disturbing thing to think of someone actually doing but it does happen. My ex told me my hallucinations were real and at one point almost induced a full on psychotic break [which I had already had one of and would go on to have another]. Now this is tricky because there are legit reasons to keep things secret. It is legit not to want details of your practice to be general

knowledge. It is legit to have a closed tradition. But absolute secrecy creates a safe space for abusers. If someone does or pressures you to do something you are uncomfortable with, you do not have to keep this a secret. If someone is making threats, implicit or no, about what will happen if you break secrecy, this is a red flag. Abusers try to isolate victims. They may tell you or imply that if you talk about it no one will believe you or you will be locked up for being crazy. Bonus ableism points if you have a pre existing mental health condition that they know about. This is not ironclad, everyone has doubts at some point to one degree or another. BUT you are always allowed to decide that is too much and bail. If a person is seriously stressing you out and damaging your mental health like this, red flag red flag.

Chapter 9 : Spiritual abuse | Apologetics Index

Spiritual abuse happens when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control, or exploit a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds Research resources on religious movements, cults, sects, world religions and related issues.

They may try to put undue influence on the choices that people in their congregation are making. He is attempting to sow fear as a carnal means of keeping people in his church. You will be in rebellion, and you will open yourself up to all kinds of calamity. Fear is the motivation behind such comments – not love. You can be sure that this type of reasoning is not from God. Jesus never motivated people out of fear. Fear is a form of manipulation, which is sin. Instead of motivating people through love and a call to serve the body of Christ and reach the lost, a spiritually abusive minister will try to motivate through manipulation. The apostle John is called the apostle of love because he wrote so much about our call as Christians to walk in love. By keeping people in fear, controlling spiritual leaders work to get good Christian people to build their religious kingdoms – by telling them that they are building the kingdom of God. We see this kind of prophet and priest in the book of Jeremiah. The controlling leaders are focused on their own needs being met, and the needs of the people are ignored. Jesus was more critical of the religious leaders of His day than He was of the sinners, and for good reason. The Jewish leaders put false religious burdens on the people for the sake of their own prosperity. They crush you with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to help ease the burden. Today, it is the manipulative spiritual leader. Many Christians today find themselves bearing the heavy load of the religious baggage in an abusive system. Around the world, hurting churchgoers struggle to earn the favor and approval of a modern-day Pharisee, all the while thinking they are earning the favor of God. And no amount of work for a spiritually abusive pastor will give you more acceptance than you already have. Jesus recognized the burden that was being placed on sincere believers in His time, who just wanted to do what is right. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, even though they were involved in the religious rituals in the temple and synagogues. They were bewildered harassed and distressed and dejected and helpless , like sheep without a shepherd. This outside force was the religious system that placed its emphasis on outward appearances. If one failed, then there was judgment. It meant they had no one to lead them to spiritual green pastures. A shepherd leads his sheep to a safe place where food is plentiful and where they can find rest. Ezekiel 34 contains an exhortation in which the Lord holds the leaders of Israel responsible for failing to care for the flock: Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd. Perhaps if they recognized how God viewed the situation, they would change their ways. This is a telltale sign of spiritual abuse. A church or pastor with an elitist attitude teaches, if ever so subtly, that no other church or ministry is preaching the pure gospel – or at least, no one is preaching it the way they should, in other words, the way that he is preaching it. If anyone breaks this rule, he or she is viewed as rebellious. We see a biblical example of this in 3 John 9 – I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. A spiritually free pastor realizes that no one denomination or local church can represent the love of Jesus to a city. A healthy church will promote revival in the entire Christian community. It will not promote the idea that it has some kind of doctrinal or spiritual superiority. In a healthy relationship, a spiritual mentor will provide godly counsel from selfless motives. If that means that you will need to leave the church or ministry, then they will rejoice that you are being sent out to be a blessing in another place. If the godly counsel that you receive is not giving you peace or rest in your soul, it may not be from the Lord. Because man is a sinner, building healthy spiritual relationships will always be a challenge. But because He has chosen to use sinful men and women to lead His

church, there will always be the possibility that a local congregation can fall into deception or unhealthy spiritual patterns. There must be a balance between humbly seeking guidance from a person of spiritual authority, and subjecting yourself to the manipulative practice of spiritual abuse. Finding that balance is an ongoing process in life. Both sides of this spiritual spectrum are dangerous, and should be avoided. Ask God to give you the grace and guidance to walk in the tension of these truths â€” opening yourself to the input of mature Christian leaders, while avoiding spiritual control. If you find yourself striving to gain the acceptance of spiritual leaders, or if your church constantly requires more and more of your life with no end in sight â€” and little encouragement along the way â€” then you may want to re-examine the church you are attending. Do you need to pray with someone? Do you want to know Jesus? Order your copy from Shop CBN. More from Hensley Publishing.