



Theology of Spiritual Abuse

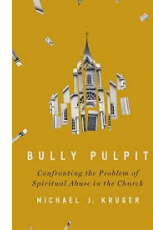
Saturday 19th May 2024 – Tom O'Toole

How does the Bible help us understand the topic of spiritual abuse?

Some Definitions

Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader - such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization - wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals.

Michael J. Kruger



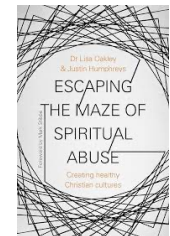
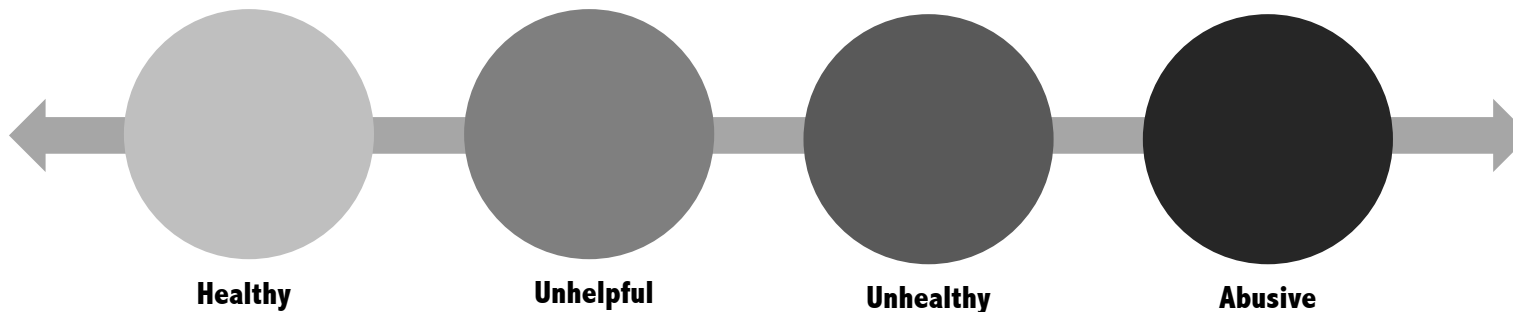
Three Features of Spiritual

Abuse (Scot McKnight)



1. Asymmetry in power between person with spiritual power and another person.
2. Can be a one-off, but usually becomes a pattern or even a culture.
3. The person with power behaves in a way that psychologically, emotionally and spiritually wounds the other person.

A Spectrum of Behaviours (Lisa Oakley)



Jesus and the Shadow Kingdom

Matthew 7:13-27

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy^[a] that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.’

²⁴ “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

A contrast between two ways.

The contrast is not between Christian and explicitly non-Christian, but rather between truly Christian and something that outwardly looks Christian.

Not everything that calls itself Christian is Christian!

Matthew 16:11

... Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!

Two Things to Watch Out For

1. Wolves in sheep’s clothing
2. The ‘yeast of the Pharisees’ infiltrating our own lives and ministries.



Jesus' Critique of Abusive Leadership – Matthew 23

	What are they doing?	Describe it with language from the spiritual abuse conversation	What do these behaviours look like today?
Matt. 23:3			
Matt. 23:4			
Matt. 23:5			
Matt. 23:6-12			
Matt. 23:13			
Matt. 23:14 <i>(this verse might be in a footnote)</i>			

Jesus' Critique of Abusive Leadership – Matthew 23

	What are they doing?	Describe it with language from the spiritual abuse conversation	What do these behaviours look like today?
Matt. 23:15			
Matt. 23:16-22			
Matt. 23:23-24			
Matt. 23:25-28			
Matt. 23:29-36			



Great sermon series from *Church of the City New York* about this chapter.



Truth-Telling

Jesus said to him, “I am... the truth” **(John 14:6)**

(The devil) does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **(John 8:44)**

Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... fasten the belt of truth around your waist. **(Ephesians 6:11,14)**

Create Space for Truth to Be Spoken

Prize the Truth

Be Brave In Naming Things For What They Are

*When ethical leaders cast light, then people don't feel as if they have to hold their stories and their experiences close to their chest, they don't have to keep secrets, they don't have to be afraid of expressing appropriate dissent, they don't worry about what's going to happen if they ask a question or voice disagreement. But when leaders cast a shadow, the impact of that is that everybody then keeps everything close to them because they learn that if they tell their story, if they speak out, if they use their voice and their agency it's going to result in further harm, so they live in these shadows. **(Wade Mullen)***



Leadership

Humble Leadership

Gentle Leadership

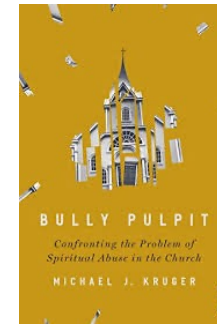
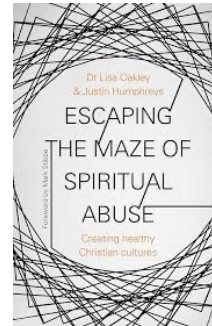
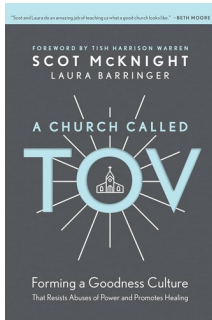
Shared Leadership

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” **(Matthew 20:25-28)**



Further Resources

Books:



Podcasts & Videos:



Social Media

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