

Justice

By Jan Tuin

Questions that every survivors of clergy sexual abuse asks herself are, "Where is justice? What do I do to find justice?" As she begins to understand the full truth and impact of the betrayal, the abuse, these questions become a dominant issue.

The truth is that the onus of justice should not rest on the victim. If it were done correctly, the church would take every step to seek justice. They would hold the pastor responsible for his actions; remove him from position and the local church. They would seek healing for the victim. They would check their own accountability and accept their responsibility for allowing such a breach of trust to happen in their church. They would make sure they had prevention policies in place to safe guard abuse from happening again. They would detail a policy of what to do if it ever did happen again.

It is a tragedy but most churches do not do it right. Instead of seeking justice, they protect the offender, or even try to cover up the offense that has occurred. They "shoot the messenger" (the victim) and make her the scapegoat as they protect the abuser. The issue becomes "what can we do to help our pastor" while they blame, shun, and force the victim to leave the church.

It is in this setting the victim feels alone with her pain. She is disillusioned that the church fails to protect. She feels that since the church does not seek justice, she is responsible to take action. Since her trust has been shattered, she desperately needs someone who will listen to her with compassion. She needs financial compensation to help her get the professional help she needs to overcome not only the abuse, but heal from why she was vulnerable in the first place. She needs reconnection with God because spiritual truth has been warped by a pastor who twisted scripture and fed her lies; many times she experiences ritual abuse. She feels a keen sense of responsibility to make sure no other victims get caught in the same web of deceit.

Even they are common threads in clergy sexual abuse, each circumstance is unique. The victim/survivor has different personality traits, emotional issues, and variable vulnerabilities which determine how and if she will seek justice. The spectrum ranges from a victim feeling terror at the thought of disclosing, all the way to victims going public as they pursue a legal litigation in a court of law.

Her first task; however, is to take care of herself. She is wounded deeply. In order for her to find healing, it is important for her to find her voice. She needs to get professional help from a licensed therapist who understands clergy sexual abuse. Because the abuse did not happen in a vacuum, she needs to understand what made her vulnerable. Usually a victim goes to therapist desperate to find relief from the pain from the clergy

abuse, only to discover that in order to be healed, she must go back and do the hard work of dealing with other unresolved issues in her life.

Right after escaping from the abuser, she is weak and wounded and is not in a position to seek or even think about justice. She needs to step back and realize that she must find healing before she could consider taking on the task of seeking justice. It is not long until she feels anger to help her detach from the soul-bond that held her captive with her abuser. She sees him for what he is – a spiritual leader who took advantage of her for his own gratification.

As she begins to heal, the question of justice will arise and become strong. If the church has not handled it properly, each victim must decide for herself what she is to do. In our experience with victims, there are varied ways they deal with justice.

In my personal situation, I was not emotionally strong enough to do anything but seek healing after I disclosed to my husband and subsequently, the church. I did contact the state and the seminary where he would file for his credential to practice counseling. Although that did not produce support, I went on to write my story. It was part of my healing, but I also wanted to write to help other victims who suffered as I did. Soon after that, I took over the leadership of Tamar's Voice and I felt like I was doing what God called me to do to bring about justice as I worked with other victims.

I have been blessed to witness how God has used my personal tragedy to open the doors for me to help women find healing.

Another victim is doing all she can to find her personal healing as she works with her therapist. She has told no one besides her therapist and us at Tamar's Voice. She is finding justice in her life by becoming healthy and whole so that she can move on with her life. Professionally, she is helping others to make huge differences in their world.

We have worked with a victim who felt she needed to find justice through a law suit. The church turned a deaf ear to her when she tried to tell them of her abuse. She won a settlement and used the money to remarry her husband with a beautiful wedding ceremony which included their two young children. She received enough money to make a down payment on their home. After that, she moved on with her life, free of the bondage.

Another victim contacted the church where her abuse happened, thirty years after the abuse. The church validated her by giving her understanding advocates who helped her take her case all the way to the general church in their denomination. In his elder years, the abuser's credentials were revoked. Her case has set a significant precedent in that denomination. Because she had such good advocates, she now wants to train to be an advocate to help other victims.

Justice happens in many different ways. Some justice we may not witness in our lifetime but we must remember that God delivers the ultimate justice. We must do what God asks us to do and when we can do no more, we must open our hands and give it to Him. He is a God of Justice!

