

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point”

~ C.S. Lewis: Writer, Theologian, Scholar



Every month, courageous men and women write of their testimony or life story that becomes evidence of overcoming pain, abuse, triumph, receiving or extending forgiveness, and discovering their calling to comfort others in the same way that they have been comforted. The stories are not just stories, but words on a page that is an outpouring of sorrow in a human being’s life transformed into something useful and helpful to hurting people around our city and hopefully beyond. Those who choose to write of their sorrow, allow themselves to be in a very vulnerable place because they write to anonymous people who will read of the details of shame, guilt, sin, dark secrets and potentially open themselves up to be judged by these anonymous people because of the details on paper. Not many of us are willing or able to share in such a way because of the condemnation from others we may receive. How much courage one must have to not only pen the darkness but also allow others to have a glimpse. I cannot express the gravity of that willingness. Truthfully, who among us is willing to speak to the world of conversations that had only been between us and God? Again, not many are so brave. We choose to hide those unspeakable occurrences as skeletons in the closet and rationalize the hiding through statements like, “God and I have already dealt with this. He has forgiven me and that’s all I need.” Through justifying the hiding, we hinder a blessing that can occur when another has stumbled in a similar way and can find encouragement through triumph when the sin is made public.

Another vulnerability or danger that can occur when making one’s story public is that those anonymous people can become offended or defensive by some of the details. It’s such a shame when this happens, because the person telling the story of their life is made to feel even more ashamed or victimized if they are told to conceal the affiliation of their perpetrator. Let me declare this in the most appropriate manner possible. A perpetrator is a perpetrator regardless of their race, religion, creed, gender, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, social status, birthplace, and the like. Perpetrators can be found anywhere at any time. It hurts my heart to acknowledge, but the truth remains that sometimes perpetrators end up in positions of

leadership in ministry. It’s a very dangerous place for individuals of this nature to come into power because of the depth of harm that is done to the victims. The wounds run deep and wide because the wounded are left with the physical and emotional wounds as well as spiritual wounds that will often turn them away from their church, God, and any other support they may have found in that safe haven. The safe haven becomes a threatening place to flee from and avoid at all cost. Then, the victim is left all alone trying to process their pain in isolation.

It truly is naive to believe that individuals with this harming nature could NEVER end up in my church or faith belief because they have and do. Just look across the news headlines over the past 20 years where children, women, families have fallen victim to harm done by a leader in their church. It can become very shameful for the church to discover that someone they allowed to be in leadership had abused this authority and harmed another, especially when the news becomes public knowledge through a headline story. We don’t want to believe that someone who is supposed to help others would possibly be capable of hurting another, especially, if we had come to admire and trust this particular individual in leadership. We want to bury our heads in the sand by denying the truth and maybe even minimize the gravity of the harm done by the perpetrator in leadership. We use statements like, “He/she is such a good person. There’s no way that happened.” Or we will berate the victim by making other harmful statements like, “don’t say anything to anyone” or “You must have misunderstood what he/she meant.” We reinjure and re-abuse the victim. This happens over and over again in church situations. It’s obvious as to why because the church will then reap a majority of the repercussions due to the ministry leader’s huge mistakes and the public humiliation.

We do understand the humiliation if a particular church or faith belief is mentioned in a testimony especially when it relates to a perpetrator in leadership who is guilty of abuse of authority. The truth elicits many emotions like denial, minimization, rationalization, defensiveness, and shame if the truth is acknowledged. We must remember that the truth does not mean that the whole faith belief, congregation, religion, or ward is the perpetrator. It simply means that the man or woman of that denomination had conducted the victimizing. Certainly, the particular church must own some of the responsibility. The entity *was* the one placing an individual into a position of authority and power over others and must acknowledge the mistake in allowing someone of that nature to have the ability to harm others. The truth must be acknowledged so the problem can be addressed and changed. So, the screening and/or monitoring process for leaders must need some fine tuning to prevent a repeat of harm to more potential victims.

Victims of church leaders are in a very difficult place. They can’t go to their church leader for help, they can’t go to their congregation or ward for help, they can’t even confide in trusted friends who may be connected with the perpetrating leader. They often find themselves alone and wondering where to go to unload and heal because everyone is a potential perpetrator.

Just last month, Mr. Lemon had mentioned how the trajectory of his life had turned when a particular leader had abused the authority given and harmed his family. The church took responsibility at the time and had him removed from his position, which is what any church would hopefully do. However, he was left in isolation with his pain and unable to speak of the truth of his perpetrator for the last 45 years. Last month was the first time he had ever gathered enough courage to publically speak of his abuser and the truth behind the circumstances that led him to the boy's ranch. C.S. Lewis said it best, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point." It requires so much courage to be able live out our virtues simultaneously even individually. My prayer and hope is that all who have read his testimony will see what a tragedy he and his family had survived then overcome. All the while, he finally decided to take a stand and speak publically of the one who had harmed. His motives are pure in that he just wanted to be able to tell the truth of his story, not incriminate a particular faith belief. I implore all readers to consider his bravery as a victim empowered to tell of how he survived and overcame adversity despite the odds against him. His life today is simply a miracle that only the work of Jesus Christ in a heart can accomplish...healing from brokenness... regardless of the source. Thank you Lord Jesus that you continue to take all of us, no matter where we have come from, what things have been done to us, and all the junk we have placed in our lives to mold into something precious in Your sight. It's nothing short of incredible. Amen! Amen!

— Shannon Harrison, MA

Eye Test



“Servant of God no More”

I have too long thought wrong
 I have over and over thought of
 Myself as Your servant and only that.
 I am not, I have blinded myself
 And made myself deaf.
 You sent Your son from heaven to befriend
 The world, not control it.
 I have befriended Your Son through my faith and belief in Him
 and through
 That I have become Your friend.
 You never intended for me to serve You
 Blindly and deafly
 Never knowing what is really going on.
 I know now You never wanted servants.
 You want friends, people willing to love You freely and
 willingly.
 People who will share their secrets with You.
 In return, You do the same.
 I no longer believe I have a master.
 I have a Best Friend.
 I will not ever find One better.
 We will get mad at each other when things are not going the way
 we want,
 Even though You being mad at me is usually
 Me taking a step on the path You don't want me to tread
 And me being mad at You is usually
 Me, not getting what I want when I want it.
 That does not mean we don't forgive One another
 Or that we ever stop loving each other.
 Why it has taken me this long to figure out, I have no clue.
 Probably because I am just now taking off the blindfold
 And taking the plugs out of my ears.
 I no longer step out with a master.
 Forever more I step out with You as my Friend.

~by Rachel Vaughan

Estate Plan Organizer

Did you know? - The online Estate Plan Organizer (EPO) will take you through the estate planning process quickly and easily in about 30 minutes. You can save your work at any time, and come back at your convenience. In addition, the EPO will also provide access to a representative from PhilanthroCorp for assistance in finalizing and implementing your plan.

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