

## When a Church Wounds

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Rich Nathan  
August 6 & 7, 2016  
Mended  
Matthew 23:1-15

Marlene and I returned last week from New Zealand. How many of you have ever been to New Zealand? How many of you have ever heard of New Zealand? While we were there, I think I taught 14 or 15 times as I led two pastors and leaders conferences. Marlene taught a few times and did a great job! I love encouraging pastors and Christian leaders. Pastoring is really hard work and I love coming alongside of my brothers and sisters, encouraging them to keep going.

We took our granddaughter, Naomi, with us. While we were in New Zealand, we visited the bridge where bungee jumping was invented. And my 13-year old granddaughter insisted on jumping off the bridge.

And, no, I did not join her in jumping. I was queasy just watching her from the bridge. Marlene couldn't even be outside when Naomi was jumping. She watched on a closed circuit TV from inside the clubhouse.

I want to express public gratitude for those who preached while I was gone. We have a great team of preachers here. Thank you, Charles. Thank you, Hannah. Thank you, Shane. Thank you, Andy. I heard nothing but praise for your talks while I was gone.

Let me switch gears here. How many of you had the opportunity to see the movie, *Spotlight*? It was a powerful movie that won the Oscar for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards. The movie draws on the true account of *The Boston Globe's* investigative team as they experience the progressive horror of discovering an extraordinarily high number of Roman Catholic priests in the Boston Diocese who had molested children over many decades. The molestations were known in the Catholic hierarchy, all the way up to the office of Cardinal. And this abuse was swept under the rug. It was all covered up.

What makes a church leader's abuse of a child doubly awful, worse perhaps than abuse by a teacher or a coach? What makes clergy abuse doubly awful is that it doesn't only injure a child's body or scar a child emotionally or psychologically, clergy abuse injures a child spiritually: When a church leader abuses a child, it damages that child's relationship with God and with God's people in the church.

A survivor of abuse was asked in the movie: how could this happen? How did this happen to him? And the survivor answered:

“When you are a poor kid from a poor family and when a priest pays attention to you, it’s a big deal! How do you say ‘no’ to God?”

Near the end of the investigation, Mike who was a reporter on the team, recalls his Catholic childhood. As he got older, he drifted away from the church and then with tears in his eyes, he speaks about the killing of his faith. He said: “I always thought I’d come back. But now...” (And he puts his head down and can’t even complete the thought.)

And, we Protestants say, “That’s what happens in the Catholic Church with all their rituals and with requirements of priestly celibacy.” Listen to Christa Brown, who was sexually abused by her Baptist youth pastor. Here’s what she said:

“Eddie [the pastor] always said that God had chosen me for something special. I guess I really wanted to believe that. Doesn’t every kid want to think that they are special? Besides, who was I to question a man of God? It wasn’t my place.”

How do you say no to God? Sadly, wounds by the church are not confined to cases of child abuse. They extend out to pastors abusing their office and breaking their ordination vows by committing adultery with a church member. Pastors who fleece the sheep by enriching themselves with manipulative teachings about giving. Pastors who gather power through the political manipulation of the church board. There are so many ways that a church can wound people spiritually.

Years ago, I did a conference on God’s power to heal in another state. The wife of the pastor told me that having her church sponsor a conference on healing was really hard for her. This pastor’s wife said that her personal faith had been deeply wounded when her mother contracted cancer and the church would not allow anyone, including her own children, to speak to mom about mom’s dying because that would be seen as a negative confession. To the very end, everyone had to play pretend that Mom would certainly be healed. With tears in her eyes, this pastor’s wife said: “I never had the opportunity to say good bye to my mom.”

Do you know anyone who has been severely wounded by a church or its leaders? Not just offended or put off by something said or done, but spiritually wounded? So that what was done has deeply impacted their relationship with God or with the church.

You know, in this broken and sinful world, we carry with us relational wounds from our family, from our childhood, from broken romances, from our workplaces. In this broken and sinful world, we carry with us self-inflicted wounds from our own foolish choices. In this broken and sinful world, we carry with us wounds from shattered dreams and dashed hopes. So many hurts. So many of us are the walking wounded.

Today I am going to start a new series titled “Mended”. How do we get healed up and restored when we are wounded? I decided to start this series by looking in the mirror. I decided to start with us – the church, so I called today’s talk “When a Church Wounds”.

Let’s pray.

Matthew 23:1-15

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: <sup>2</sup> “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

<sup>5</sup> “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup> they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

<sup>8</sup> “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you will be your servant. <sup>12</sup> For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

<sup>13</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

<sup>15</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Before we look at this text, I need to issue a few enormous caveats. Because there are so many books written about spiritual abuse and there are so many blog posts online about spiritual abuse that virtually everything that is said and done in a church that’s the least bit challenging or makes us uncomfortable or pinches us is labeled abusive by some group or some individual.

It is the rare pastor in a Bible teaching church who hasn’t been labeled “spiritually abusive” at some point in their ministry. So I need to, at the front end, share with you a few things that are not spiritual abuse.

It’s not spiritual abuse to share with God’s people what God’s Word requires. Even if a person feels a bit uncomfortable listening to that. Even if the counsel from God’s Word

is in opposition to what the person wishes to do. For example, if in a sincere and loving way you speak with a Christian friend who claims to follow the teachings of Christ – I believe we approach other Christians differently than we approach those who don't make the claim of following the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. But, if someone says: I am a Christian, I am submitted to the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, then it is not abusive to challenge that person with Jesus' teachings. So, if you in a very loving way speak to a self-professed Christian about them sleeping with their girlfriend or about their plans to divorce or about their tendency to gossip and they don't like what you say. They say, "It feels like you are judging me. You're making me feel uncomfortable." That's not spiritual abuse. It's not spiritual abuse to urge God's people to do what they might not naturally wish to do if your counsel comes from God's Word.

Here's another caveat. It's important to remember that church members are not the only objects of abuse. Sometimes the shepherds, the pastors of the church can be abused by the people. I have learned over the years that sheep bite! I have personally received extraordinarily rude and offensive emails and letters from people who disagreed with something that I taught or something that another Vineyard pastor said or did.

I heard a sad story from a dear friend just the other day. A pastor in his denomination was a victim of a massive power play by the elders of the church. Now, there was no allegation of immorality by this pastor. There was no allegation of financial misappropriation. But a small clique in the church wanted him out and got him fired. He was dismissed. Given no severance pay. And he and his family were ordered out of their church-owned parsonage by the end of the week. This pastor and his family were literally thrown out on the street by a power-hungry group in the church.

So, with these caveats, not everything that rubs against our preferences or our opinions or our behaviors is spiritual abuse. And abuse doesn't just run in one direction – pastors can be abused as much as church members can be abused. With those two caveats, what are the marks of spiritual abuse?

Matthew 23:1-4

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: <sup>2</sup> "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

The first mark of spiritual abuse is that an abusive church

Weights people down

Jesus is comparing what the religious leaders of his day were doing to people, to donkeys upon which people would tie enormous loads on. In Jesus' day, sometimes folks would put so much stuff on a poor donkeys back that you couldn't see the donkey at all. It would be completely covered with stuff tied on his back. And, as the donkey struggled under the load sometimes the owner of the donkey would not only not help the poor beast, but would actually beat the donkey and force it on when the donkey stumbled under the load. Jesus is saying here, that's when you know spiritual abuse. When you see many, many people crushed under the weight with what leaders are loading them up with. That's an abusive environment.

Why do churches and church leaders do it? Have you ever been in a legalistic church? Let me share with you an example of a bulletin that was actually used in a church, I'm not going to say where, but this is a true example of a bulletin that a particular church handed out on a Sunday. The church bulletin said:

Slide (add each point one at a time)

Check yourself. If all people were like you would they:

- Be in Sunday School every Sunday?
- Be on time for Sunday School?
- Bring a Bible?
- Have studied the lesson?
- Bring an offering?
- Attend the preaching service?
- Make an effort to worship during the service?
- Bring someone with them?
- Bring a guest?

And then at the end of the list it said:

Give yourself 10 points for every question to which you can answer a "yes". If you scored 100 points, you are a perfect example. If you scored 90, you are just about right; if you scored 80 points, you are slipping; 70 points, watch your step; 60 points, you need emergency care.

I don't want you to hear me say that it's not a good thing to attend church or it's not a good thing to be on time or to try to worship or to tithe or to invite a friend, but this measuring of yourself, giving points to yourself for performing, is the antithesis of the good news of Christianity which teaches us that it's not our performance that makes us right with God. A person is right with God through faith in the performance of another, namely Jesus Christ. I'm relying on his performance to make me right with God. The churches who get folks to focus on their own performance weighs people down and are abusive.

Where do you see people stumbling under the load at churches? Most churches wouldn't say "you've got to follow this list of rules to be right with God". But there are all these unwritten rules and ways of communicating expectations of what it means to be a good Christian around here. You need to be at five meetings per week. You need to spend a number of hours doing ministry. You need to witness so many times per day. You need to push your career and schooling totally aside for church activities. There is expectation upon expectation. Family must be sacrificed for church. Child-raising must be sacrificed for the church.

If you're not driving a great car and prospering financially then you don't have enough faith – so people get weighed down then you don't have enough faith – so people get weighed down by debt they can't afford to prove their faith.

Have you ever been in a church where people were weighed down by the enormity of the church demands on their lives? Have you been in a church where a lot of people with the constant sense that enough is never enough? When a church produces lots of burned out Christians, the environment of that church is abusive.

Jesus' leadership style is so different. Why are they beating people up who have stumbled under a load? Jesus looks at weighed down people, people who are crushed by the level of expectation and the burden of do-it-yourself performance based Christianity, and he says to those people, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened down, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." If a church does not somehow communicate the gentle rhythms of God's grace, the invitation of Jesus to come to him and find rest, then the environment of that church is not a healthy one.

Here's a second mark of spiritual abuse.

Matthew 23:5-7

<sup>5</sup> "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup> they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

Jesus is talking about an outward show of religious devotion. It reveals a fundamental problem. The leader is seeking admiration and applause from the people. Jesus accuses the religious leaders of his day of engaging in all of this religious activity in order to meet their own needs for power and recognition.

So, here's the second sign of a spiritually abusive church. The first one was, a spiritually abusive church weighs people down. The second sign is that a spiritually abusive church:

### Sucks people dry

Jesus is giving us a wonderful test of distinguishing between strong biblical leadership on the one hand and abusive leadership on the other. The test is who is being served? Whose needs are being met here? The goal of strong, healthy, visionary leadership is to encourage, to strengthen, to empower, to lift up those that are being led. But abusive leaders suck people dry. They just use people to serve their own interests. Jesus says this about the leaders of history.

Luke 20:47

<sup>47</sup>They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

Whenever you see a system set up so that the leader, the counselor, the pastor is just vacuuming up all these benefits. Pastors living these absurdly extravagant lifestyles when planes and mansions and Bentleys and still asking for more. That's an abusive ministry. That's an abusive church. They aren't there to empower, to encourage, to serve. They are there to be served; to take not to give; to devour not to feed. In the Old Testament, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel this powerful word of rebuke to the religious and the governmental leaders of Ezekiel's day. Shepherds in Ezekiel's day were not just religious leaders, they were also government leaders, political leaders. Here's what he says:

Ezekiel 34:1-3

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?' <sup>3</sup>You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

An abusive church weighs people down. It sucks people dry. And here in verses 8-10, is the third mark.

Matthew 23:8-10

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup>And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. <sup>10</sup>Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah.

## An abusive church

### Shuts people up

You must understand that in Jesus' day a Rabbi's authority with his disciples was enormous. The disciples of a Rabbi were required to obey that Rabbi without question. It was required that disciples would never walk beside a Rabbi. Never walk in front of him, always walk behind him. Never initiate conversation with a Rabbi. Never greet the Rabbi first. And Jesus saw this exaggerated authority given to human beings and he said, "Stop it! Let's cut it right at its root. There is only one who you should give this position of unquestioning authority to. You have only one Rabbi, the Christ," Jesus says.

You have only one authority that you are to submit to in an unquestioning way—God. So when a leader's teachings or a leader's authority, a leader's opinions get somehow mixed up with the teaching and the authority and the opinions of Christ himself, in the eyes of the church, in the eyes of those he or she leads, that is spiritual abuse. Sometimes in certain charismatic churches it may not be the leaders' teachings but their prophecies and "hearing from God". Prophetic words – "God told me he wants you to do this or that. You're supposed to obey these words without questioning."

Now, we must understand the difference between spoken rules and unspoken rules. No one who is not a megalomaniac or an insane person, no one is going to stand up and say, "My words and my views are the same as God's." But the unspoken rule in a spiritually unhealthy fellowship or in a church may be that no one is permitted to disagree with the leader. See, one of the questions that I would immediately ask someone who wondered whether the church they were attending, the fellowship they were in, the organization they were a part of was spiritually abusive—one of the questions I would immediately ask them is, "Well, tell me this. What is the consequence in that fellowship, church or organization, what is the consequence for disagreeing with the leader?"

Tell me what has happened to people who have disagreed with the leader and I will tell you if that place is abusive. If the consequence of disagreeing with the leader is isolation of the person, cutting off, labeling, and the person is automatically considered divisive just for disagreeing then that is a good sign that the leader is claiming exaggerated authority. Only God can never be disagreed with. Abusive churches shut people up.

What is the consequence in this place of asking questions? Of wondering about teachings? Of wanting to dialogue about direction. What happens when that kind of discussion gets initiated? It is not divisive to ask a question. It is not divisive necessarily to disagree or to have an opinion. Abusive leaders communicate to the church: "Don't talk. Because if you talk, as I have said to you before, then you get labeled in some



places as the problem.” The problem is not the abusive leader who believes he or she is 100% right and won’t ask forgiveness when they’re wrong. Abusive churches always label the person who raises the question as the problem.

Listen, if you ever meet a leader who simply can never acknowledge that they are wrong. If you ever see a leader who won’t back down no matter what. Someone who simply can’t apologize. That leader is an unsafe leader. They are abusive. In a marriage, in a family, in a workplace, in politics and in a church. Have you ever been in a church where no one was allowed to ever question the pastor or the elders or the deacon board? Where simply asking a question or raising an objection got you or someone else as a problem person? That’s a mark of an abusive church.

I need to raise a caveat here. I’m not saying that it’s abusive if you raise a question and a church leader disagrees or has a strongly held opinion different than yours. I’m talking about a system where no one can give opinions contrary to the pastors or the elders or the deacons. Where people are shut up. Where the prevailing rules in the church are “Don’t speak or you will be forever blacklisted and kept from leadership or future responsibility.”

Let’s continue.

Matthew 23:13

<sup>13</sup> “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Let’s remember the marks of an abusive church. An abusive church weighs people down, sucks people dry, shuts people up and most tragically, spiritually abusive churches

Cuts people off

Like the abusive priest in Boston, spiritually abusive churches and spiritually abusive church leaders cut people off from God and from God’s people. Jesus is leveling the ultimate charge against the religious leaders of his day. He says, “You religious leaders, you won’t enter God’s kingdom.” And then literally goes on to say, “You slammed the door in the face of those who want to enter. You religious leaders, you build a wall that gets between people and God. It’s one thing if you don’t want to experience God’s presence and God’s spirit in your life, but then through your teaching, you cut other people off from experiencing God’s presence and God’s spirit in their lives.”

Jesus is giving us a clear test to distinguish between healthy churches and abusive churches. Does the church and its leaders assist you in deepening your relationship with

God? Do they encourage you to experience God and experience God's presence for yourself? Does the church encourage personal intimacy with God? You personally hearing from God? Your love for God? Your personal relationship with God? Or does the church and its leaders get in the way?

This was the battle of the Reformation. Reformers like Luther and Calvin protested against the church system that has gotten in the way of people's relationship with God. The church taught that the only way to connect with God was through the church machinery. The church claimed to be the mediators between God and people. And with one voice, the Reformers said, "Church, get out of the way! We are all priests before God. We can go to God directly through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ!"

Look at who the abusive leader cuts off. Not the God rejecters, the cynics, the hard-hearted. Jesus says, "You are cutting off the God seekers." To abusive leaders he says, "You yourselves won't enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to get in. You are cutting off God's seekers." People who just want to experience more of God. They want to hear more from God. They want to grow in God. They want to love God. They want to know God. There are so many ways, friends, for church to get in the way of people's relationship with God. The church's teaching can sow massive amounts of unbelief concerning whether it's possible to hear God's voice or to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts are always viewed with suspicion. A church can sow cynicism in their people. Mistrust, unbelief. Finally, in verse 15 we read this:

Matthew 23:15

<sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Spiritually abusive churches weigh people down, they suck people dry, they shut people up, they cut people off. And the fifth mark of a spiritually abusive church is that it

Slide

Locks people in

Spiritually abusive churches always communicate to people that we alone have the truth. Our particular church has the corner on the market of truth. We alone structure things in a biblical way. Every other church is following some manmade system. They aren't following the pattern of the apostles the way we are. We are the best. We are the truest. We are the most faithful to the Bible.

See, the Pharisees weren't merely concerned with making converts to Judaism. They didn't travel land and sea to convert people to the Jewish faith. The Pharisees were

concerned with making converts to Pharisaism. It's not enough that people come to God; they need to be clones of us. Because we alone possess the truth.

We are the only ones who are right. When a person in one of these abusive churches hears that we alone are right, you know what the real message is? You have no alternative but to stay here. There's no alternative but to stay and be abused. I have talked to people who have been in the most abusive situations for five or 10 or 15 years and I ask, "Why did you stay? Why did you stay with that abusive husband? Or that abusive wife, or girlfriend or boyfriend? Why did you stay?" Bottom line was they felt like they had no choice. Nowhere to go. They were so beaten down that their self-esteem and confidence in their own judgments that they felt that they had no place else to go. I WAS CONTINUALLY TOLD, "No one else would ever love ME. No one else would ever accept me so I might as well stay and be abused."

I have talked with people who have come out of really abusive churches and they've said the same thing: "I knew that there was something terribly wrong here 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, but I didn't think I had an alternative because we were told over and over that there were no other good churches. That every other church didn't teach the Bible truthfully. That every other church made compromises and watered things down and they were confused. We were basically taught there's really no good alternative in this city to us."

If you are ever in a church that communicates that it alone has the corner on the truth, get out of there! There's not going to be a Vineyard section in the Kingdom of God! Or a Baptist section, or a Pentecostal section. Jesus sees one church in the world and that's how we see things here at Vineyard. There's one church in our city. We do things a little differently, we have slightly different practices, different ministries, different styles, different doctrines, but we have an incredibly warm and loving relationship with so many other churches in our city. The First Church of God, Bishop Timothy Clarke. With Rhema and Pastor Lafayette Scales. With Grove City Nazarene and Pastor Mark Fuller. With Grace Brethren Church and Pastor Mike Yoder. With Upper Arlington Lutheran and Pastor TJ Anderson. With Anglicans and Baptists and Pentecostals and Methodists and Presbyterians and Catholics. No one of us has the corner on the truth.

So, how do you or someone you love get healed? How do you get mended when you've been spiritually abused? If you or someone you love have been in an abusive situation, actually during the series we're going to have follow-up seminars to take the message we're giving on the weekend a step further. This Tuesday evening at our Cooper Road campus, we're offering the following seminar

Healing from Church Wounds  
Tuesday, August 9  
7:00-9:30pm

More info contact [supportforlife@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:supportforlife@vineyardcolumbus.org) or 614-259-5289

If you think that would be helpful to you or to someone you love, come on out. You don't have to be a member of the church to come. There's no cost.

Let me close with just a couple of thoughts quickly about being mended, being healed from spiritual abuse. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12

Romans 12:2

<sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

I believe that the place mending starts, healing starts, is in our minds and thoughts. When someone is abused, let's say by a person in authority, the victim of abuse has the tendency to not only be suspicious of unhealthy authority in the future, they'll be suspicious of ALL authority. If a man in authority has been abusive, then we're going to struggle with all men in authority. If I've been wounded in a romantic relationship, I might struggle to open my heart again even to someone deserving of my love and trust. We have to renew our minds, our thinking, when we come out of a spiritually abusive church. We need to renew our minds about what?

We need to renew our minds about the church. Some people say after they've been abused by the church or by a church leader, "OK, I will continue with Jesus, but I'm never going to trust the church again or be in relationship with the church again. Never again. I've just been too hurt. I'm not writing off Jesus, but I'm writing off his church."

But, you see, the New Testament doesn't allow us to do that. The New Testament says that when we embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we look to God and say, "God, save me. I need to be forgiven. I need to be changed. I need to be saved. Not on the basis of what I've done, but on the basis of what he has done for me on the cross and dying for my sins. Save me, Lord. I trust in Jesus' bloody death on the cross as the full payment for my sin."

The New Testament teaches that a double wedding takes place. A double wedding. First, we are united to Jesus Christ when you ask him to forgive and save you. You say, "Yes, that's what I want. I want to walk down the aisle and find Jesus waiting for me. I want to exchange vows with Jesus. I want to hear him say that he will be devoted to me, that he will love me and he will forgive me. Yes, that's what I want." But the New Testament says that there's a double wedding. You're not only being joined to Jesus, but you also are marrying Jesus' church.

A lot of folks say, “I didn’t sign up for that! I signed up for Jesus, but not his people!” It reminds me of Jacob in the Old Testament, believing that he was going to marry Rachel and waking up in the morning and seeing her sister Leah lying there in the bed. We wake up in the morning after salvation and we say, “Ok, I’m going to roll over and embrace Jesus and, oh my goodness, look who’s there staring back at me – the church! There are people with funny personalities and the weird views. People I’ve never gotten along with. People who sing off key. People with annoying children and annoying habits.” You can’t write off the church because if you are a Christian, you are married to her. You need to renew your mind about the church.

#### Renewing our minds about the church

There’s a beauty in Jesus’ church. There is a goodness. There is love to be found in the church. Encouragement to be found in the church. Help to be found in the church. Sacrifice to be found in the church. I’ve been part of Jesus’ church for 42 years. I know her well, warts and all, and I can tell you without any reservation at all that the best people – the most sacrificial, the kindest people that I have personally ever met are in the church. The church is not all warts, there’s beauty there.

If you are to be mended, you need to renew your mind about the church and

#### Renewing our minds about God

Spiritual abuse distort our view of God. God is not a harsh task master or always disappointed in your performance, always screaming “not enough”. God is the father of Prodigal who upon seeing us, turning towards him from a long way off doesn’t stand in dignity, but runs towards us. As you renew your thoughts about God, God is the father of the Prodigal who, the moment we turn towards him, forgives us, embraces us, kisses us, clothes us, feeds us and celebrates with us. There is mending and healing for you, friend, if you’ve ever been abused by a church or its leaders. God is there, ready to heal.

Let’s pray.

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## When a Church Wounds

Rich Nathan  
August 6 & 7, 2016  
Mended  
Matthew 23:1-15

### I. An Abusive Church:

- A. Weighs People Down
- B. Sucks People Dry
- C. Shuts People Up
- D. Cuts People Off
- E. Locks People In

### II. Mended from abuse by:

- A. Renewing our Minds about the church
- B. Renewing our Minds about God