

CHURCH HURT? Spotting Spiritual Abuse | Toxic Pulpits Exposed: Break Free from Fear, Guilt & Control

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[0:00] Good evening. Looking at a bit of an interesting topic, really practical topic, spiritual abuse and church hurt.! How do we spot it? Hopefully fix it. Healing wounds and leading with heart. Here's the notes for those that need to download them. You can follow those links, the URL and the QR code.

So just to introduce things, church hurt and spiritual abuse, they're both real things that are a sad reality. And sometimes we minister to believers who face church hurt, which is like emotional or relational wounds from a church setting, or spiritual abuse.

So the misuse of God's authority to control or harm people. And so we want to discern those things and work towards healing and leading with grace.

How do we overcome them? And of course the Word of God tells us the scriptural foundation for the church, really, is that we ought to love one another. As the Lord says, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. And you think about love, really God's love, the love of Christ, it brings healing and protection.

[1:24] Psalm 147.3 of our Lord, it says, He healeth the broken in heart and he bindeth up their wounds. God wants to care for people, love people, the broken, those that have been traumatised by churches, sadly, and pastors, and spiritual hurts that people have suffered because they've been abused by the pastor or the church.

And the Lord reduces selfish shepherds or pastors who exploit people rather than care for the flock. And there's a warning there in Ezekiel 34.2.

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds. Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flock.

So there's a real call there to pastors and ministry. And we're all involved in ministry in one way or another. So we want to look at this truth. Church hurt, it's a real thing. People get traumatised by churches.

They get hurt by pastors. Something happens that offends them. And sometimes they throw in the towel and don't go back to church, which is a really grievous thing. And so some definitions then.

[2:37] What is church hurt? Here's how you could define it. It's emotional, relational, or spiritual wounds within a faith setting. And so in a church, sometimes people get burnt out.

They have conflict. There's leader misconduct. It's often in the media where a pastor falls into sin. And that can be really hard for people to cope with. The harshness of some pastors.

Some pastors exclude people. And of course the enemy uses all of this stuff to have division and discord. And this toxic kind of church politics that can happen that destroys unity.

And people get that bitterness inside when they feel hurt by a church or a pastor. And really God's desire is forgiveness and restoration. And we see the other one, spiritual abuse.

A definition of that one is the misuse of spiritual authority to control or manipulate others. And God's desire really is forgiveness.

[3:40] It's forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. God wants to bring forgiveness and healing, restoration, reconciliation.

So if we've been subjected to church hurt, and it can happen to all of us, pastors can get church hurt too. And pastors wise. So we can all have those times where we feel hurt by people. Or we're in a church setting that is under your thumb, domineering pastoral authority. If you've been hurt, let it go. Leave your offenses at the cross.

Don't get stuck holding grudges. And reconnect. Get back in service. We shouldn't let an off-putting church situation put us off church. People are human.

Pastors can make mistakes. As it talks there about spiritual abuse, they use their authority in God's name. It's a really warped kind of thing, isn't it?

[4:40] They should represent the loving saviour, and they become a kind of despot, a dictator. And what do they use? Fear, guilt, manipulation.

Sometimes the secrecy, isolation, legalism. We're going to get into some of that. For example, some might use things like, you've got to tithe, or God's going to be angry with you. As if there's some kind of, that's some kind of motivator.

Or if you question leadership, then that is rebellion. You can't dare question what the pastor says. And you see all these things, all the damage, all the trauma and the hurt, the shame, confusion, the dependency.

All of these things can happen, which is a very sad reflection on the church and ministry, which is meant to be helping and serving and supporting. And it's the opposite of that.

Next one, number three. Some common forms and dynamics of spiritual abuse. So you've got a table there, as we're going to touch on, all of those four things there. So what does spiritual abuse entail?

[5:44] It's building dependency. Sometimes they justify the harm they do. There's a group thing. And then even when you exit the trauma, there's a whole lot of baggage that people have.

So just working through each of those things. So building dependency. Sometimes people get welcomed warmly by a church. And then they get isolated and controlled. And they lose that trust. There's an exhaustion. What should we do? We should test everything. The Bible says, prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. So you want to really have a church that's acting biblically.

Next one. Sometimes they justify the harm. So they rationalise abuse. They say that, oh, it's just a refining or whatever. It's a spiritual test. So they just go along with it.

And they don't question it. But we should have a healthy view of suffering. We don't use it to justify harm. And then in some churches, there's this group thing where you just talk amongst yourselves.

[6:46] And some churches have the view that we alone are right. So no one else is right. Only our church. It's kind of a cultic kind of idea. Now, of course, we do humbly believe that what we teach and believe and practice is right.

But we don't have that idea that we've got an exclusivity. That no one else has got the truth. And that we shut down any different voices. And we've got the sense of superiority, which is not a healthy thing.

But rather, we should search the scriptures personally. Because even Paul, he was questioned. He was checked by the believers there at Berea that they received the word with all readiness of mind. And they searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so. That's what a healthy church looks like. That you can question me or whoever's behind this pulpit and what we teach and what we say.

That you can question it. You can check it out. Does it line up with the scripture? And we can search the scriptures personally. And that's a really important thing for every believer to do. So that we don't just go along with the group thing.

[7:55] Just because that's how the church is going with a certain thing. We've got to make sure we check the scriptures. We search them out personally. And don't have the view that we alone are right.

Because that's like a cultic idea. And then the last one there you see. That some have got this trauma. This exit trauma. They're in this church out of loyalty.

And it's a fear thing. That they don't go to a different church. Or have a different look at this or that. And there's this loyalty that's driven by fear.

But rather we know in Christ we've got his peace. He says, Come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. He gives us true rest.

It's not this striving to conform. To have this kind of fear based loyalty. So there are some of the forms and dynamics of spiritual abuse. So the next one. Next section. We look at four principles of spiritual abuse.

[8:53] So what spiritual abuse kind of looks like. The principles of it. And you see there just touching on the headings. They discourage personal discernment.

Just got to go with what the pastor says. They suppress independent thought. They prohibit open discussion. And they forbid any challenges to authority. So working through each of those.

First one. Discouraging personal discernment. Like we said before. Well believers should test and discern the truth. That's how we grow. It's how we learn. Isn't it? Each of us personally are accountable to the Lord.

And we've got to have discernment. So in some of these kind of cultic churches. And it can happen in independent Baptist churches. Sadly enough. But in all kinds of churches.

The leader claims to be the sole voice of God. So the pastor has got this monopoly on the truth.

And you don't dare question what the pastor says. That's an unhealthy thing.

[9:53] We need to have personal discernment. And you're free to disagree with me. And we're free to discuss things. And have an interchange. The pastor is not on a pedestal. And cannot be questioned.

That's the wrong kind of way of thinking. And so spiritual abuse says that the pastor has got this sole kind of authority. This sole voice of God. But yet as believer priests.

We're all. We've got the priesthood of all believers. That we've all got an equality in the sight of God. And every believer can test and discern the truth. And the next one there is suppressing independent thought.

So in some churches. The life choices are dictated by the leader. So in some churches. They go to the extreme. Where every little decision of your life. You've got to go and check with the pastor.

And make sure that you're in the will of God. As to who you might want to go dating someone. Or whether you want to move somewhere.

[10:49] Or do something. Whatever job choices. Or whatever life choices that you make. Some churches have such a view. That you're dictated by the leader.

That's an unhealthy thing. Again we should search the scriptures. And work it out for ourselves.

How God is leading us. Now get counsel from the pastor by all means.

But they're not the sole authority. You need to come to your own mind on life decisions. That's a healthy thing. Next one number three. They're prohibiting open discussion.

In some churches you can't dare question. What the teaching is. Or ask about this or that doctrine. Because to question will be viewed as rebellion.

You don't question. Or have your own kind of difference. With what is taught. Whereas really. Of course we should be free to. Look around and get our own.

[11:47] Form our own mind on things. Have a healthy kind of look at different views. And viewpoints. And go to different counsellors. To come to our own mind on things. And in some churches you're forbidden to challenge authority.

So if to dare to question authority. Means that you get punished or excluded. Whereas in the Bible. We see that rather. We should all be under that accountability to God.

Even the pastors. The teachers. As it says here. My brethren. Be not many masters or teachers. Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. So anyone who teaches.

Even ourselves. As we might teach another. There's an accountability. So we should exercise humility. And not have some kind of pride like that. Which is an unhealthy thing. So moving on to the next section.

Over the page there. Number five. Some indicators of an unhealthy church. An unhealthy church environment. And some of these things are similar to what we've already touched on.

[12:48] But you see some of these things. Authoritarian leadership. Manipulation and control. Legalism and rigidity. Isolation. And elitism.

And then public shaming. Or harsh discipline. So the first one there. Authoritarian leadership. Again in some churches. And it can happen in independent Baptist churches.

Sadly. But in all kinds of churches. That the pastor is seen as God's mouthpiece. And that they've got no accountability. They're really. Their own little Pope.

In that group. And that authoritarian leadership. And what does it lead to? The church is full of fear. And it's got that word there. Infantilisation.

So in other words. They're treated like children. So the pastor's got this condescending way. Of talking to the congregation. As if you're a load of children. And they're the mighty.

[13:45] High and mighty teacher. But you see in the scriptures. Rather it says. We should not be as lords. Over God's heritage. So not kind of lording it over people. This is addressed to elders.

To pastors. To not be as lords. Over God's heritage. But rather to be in samples. Or examples. To the flock. So rather than being domineering lords. The pastor is meant to be an example.

So they're a role model. And they're not some lord over you. As the congregation. Authoritarian leadership. It's a mark really of a cult. Or of an unhealthy church environment.

Next one. Manipulation and control. So in some churches. They use guilt. Or threats. Or this forced accountability. And what does it cause in members?

It causes this anxiety. You've always got to be measuring up. To expectations of the pastor. Rather than. What the Lord wants. Is that we have.

[14:42] Really this. Shepherding. We see that. The Lord Jesus. Has come. To give unto his sheep. Eternal life. They shall not be plucked out of his hand.

He protects his sheep. There's a protection by the pastor. By the good shepherd. Not a control. And manipulation. Next one. In some churches. There's this legalism.

And rigidity. So. Salvation is kind of measured. By conformity. To rules. Or dress codes. Elevated over grace. It's like. There's this constant.

Raising of the bar. You've got to perform. You've got to achieve this standard. You've got to follow this rule. Or that rule. And conform. To this code. And what does it cause?

It causes burnout. People can't achieve it. The pastor can't achieve it. If we have this kind of legalism. This rigidity. We've always got to meet some. Measurement of men.

[15:38] It's really. Not really of God. But rather we see. It tells of. The. New Testament believer. That.

God's made us. Able ministers of the New Testament. Not of the letter. But of the spirit. For the letter killeth. But the spirit giveth life. So in other words. It's not the letter of the law.

But it's the spirit. It's not about. Meeting. Measurements of codes. And standards. And. Expectations. But rather to have.

That spiritual life. The spirit gives life to us. It's not this code. Of performing. Of legalism. Now that's not to say. We oughtn't to have. Some standards for ourselves.

And try to aspire. To be excellent. At being good. To serve our Lord. To have like Daniel. An excellent spirit. Was found in him. But it's not about. Performing. As if that's some measure. Of our salvation.

[16:31] Or having this. Kind of. Overburdening. Of people. That some churches have. Another. Point there. Is isolation. And elitism.

In other words. They say. We're the only true believers. So. The church down the road. They're. Because of all their false doctrine. They're not true believers. Well. We know that's not true. There's churches. That have all kinds of doctrines.

That may not be. Quite as biblical. As we would. Understand them to be. But they're still fellow believers. They're still brothers and sisters. In Christ. And we can have. Rather than have that pride. And that division.

We can see. Well. Actually. God's people are all over the place. As it tells us here. There's one body. One spirit. In as you're called. In one hope. Of your calling. One Lord. One faith.

One baptism. One God. And father of all. Who is above all. And through all. And in you all. So rather than having that exclusivity. That elitism. It can just create pride.

[17:26] And division. And discord. There are believers all around us. In different churches. And they're fellow believers. We don't need to be.

Having that kind of. Elitism.

Where we're above them. As much as we hope to. Encourage them to. More sound doctrine. But not in a. Proudful way. And then the last one. You see.

Public shaming. Or harsh discipline. In some churches. They really emphasize. Discipline. And go to the. Extreme. We see that. It tells us in Galatians 6.

Brethren. If a man be overtaken. In a fault. Ye which is spiritual. Restore such an one. In the spirit. Of meekness. Considering thyself. Lest thou also be tempted. So when there is need.

For correction. It's not through humiliation. But it's a loving correction. It's a gentle correction. It's a correction. That's done with meekness. To restore people. To restore people gently.

[18:21] To bring them back. To the truth. To encourage them. To bring them in. To welcome them in. Not to humiliate them. With some kind of harsh discipline.

It's sadly the case. In some churches. That there's this. Over emphasis. On church discipline. That goes beyond. What's reasonable. Of course. There's needful areas.

Where it's a salvation issue. Or there's something very serious. A very sin. Very serious sin issue. But the motive is to. Welcome them back. To fix them. To restore them.

This sense of. Where it says. To restore. To restore such a one. It's got the sense of. Restoring. Like a. Where you get a broken bone. It's knitting it back together again.

That's the. Kind of Greek sense. Of that word. To restore. That's the sense. Where you want to. Help that broken. Brokenness. To be fixed. To be healed. To restore people gently.

[19:15] Not to have this. Harsh kind of discipline. Next section. The hallmarks. Of cult-like. Behaviour. And again. This can be. Especially. Present.

In. Independent. Baptist context. Sadly. It can be. Something that is in. Independent. Baptist churches. As much as we would. Very much. Adhere to being.

A like-minded. Independent. Baptist church. There's some. Independent. Baptist churches. That are. On the extreme. End. And. Even. In the.

In Adelaide itself. We know. That some churches. That have this kind of attitude. Of all of these. Or some of these. Things. So for example. Authoritarian leadership. That the pastor.

Is some. Unchallengeable. Ruler. And there's a harshness. About them. And not a kindness. They just got this. Domineering. Kind of way.

[20:10] About them. That's. There's this. Authoritarian leadership. Now of course. We believe in. Pastoral authority. There is. A godly. Scriptural. Truth.

That the pastor. Has. Some authority. But not this. Authoritarian. Leadership. Where it's a domineering. And they can't be challenged. And. That kind of thing. Next one.

Is thought control. Where they suppress. Any reasoning. Or dissent. So you can't have. Any slightly different. Opinion. Or view. Or. Aspect of doctrine.

That you might see. Something slightly different. That you've got to. Submit to. The. Pastor. And what the pastor says. Otherwise you're. Treated.

Badly. And. You can't have any different kind of view. You can't disagree. You can't have a different way of thinking. It's all. Controlled. Third one there.

[21:06] Us versus them. Mentality. Again. Like we've talked about before. Where all outsiders. Are deemed as. Compromised. Or worldly. So you can't have anything to do.

With any other kind of Christians. Now that's really. Again. Unhealthy. Of course there is the truth that. Ecumenism is a bad thing. Where we might be.

Getting. Veered off track. But. That sense where. We are still. Fellow believers. And we can have. That thought. That they are fellow believers. Again.

Isolation. In some churches. They cut people off. From non-members. Even family members.

There's this isolation. Isolation. It's a very. Really. An ungodly thing. To have that kind of isolation.

They use loaded language. Like calling others worldly. Rebellious. Backsliders. Not right with God. Using this kind of language. There's a fear. And shame based control.

[22:03] Where. There's this judgment. This threat. Of divine punishment. People are put on these guilt trips. Because they can't measure up. To

what. The pastor expects of them. Next one.

Exploitation. Where there's. This manipulation. Could be financial. Emotional. Or service based. That people are. Pushed. And overworked. And overburdened. And just used up.

This exploitation. Then the last one. Is. There's barriers to exit. So. If someone was to leave. Well they'd be seen as. Doing something wrong. They'd be given this.

The shunning. Or they'd be slandered. If they leave. And they'd be. Feeling guilt. Because they've left the group. So all of this. Kind of things. Really it's.

A spirit of legalism. And this can happen. In some churches. Where. The pastor. The church. They add. All kinds of. Non-biblical things. As if we can't.

[23:00] Please God. Without all of these. Non-biblical things. They're not even in the Bible. Because we know. Our Lord says. They're teaching. For doctrines. The commandments of men. These man-made standards. And rules.

That are prescribed. By the leaders. So. Got to do all these things. You got to. Cross all the T's. And dot all the I's. And you've got to just. When the pastor says something.

To jump. And you say. How high. It's just. You just go along. With whatever. You're told. And. It can even. It can even. Be like. A works-based. Salvation. Idea. Where you're adding.

To your own. You're adding. To your salvation. Your own righteousness. As if that's part of your salvation. By performing that way. So you've got these kind of things. These are what abusive churches can use.

This cultic like methodology. And philosophy of ministry. So it's this control oriented kind of leadership. So all of these things. Are really cult-like behaviors.

[23:56] And that can happen in. What is really. What should be a good. Bible-based church. Can have all of these things. Which can be very damaging. And wrong. All right.

Next section. Narcissistic leadership. It's interesting. In the book of Esther. You've got this character called Haman. And he demonstrates. A lot of these kind of.

Characteristics. That are narcissistic. It's interesting. I was doing a bit of study on this. And pastors can be. Often quite prone. To being narcissists. It's quite a bad thing.

One study. Says. That 21% of pastors. Have got unhealthy. Narcissistic characteristics. So. I guess it's true.

Because. When someone's. In a public speaking role. Or in some kind of. Authority kind of role. It can go to their head. And they can get. To. Have. Some of these things.

[24:51] Like Haman. So. There's some. Narcissistic things. That are not. Really. An issue. But. There's some unhealthy. Narcissistic things. So you see.

As in the example. Of Haman. So. Haman. We know. You know the story. Likely. You know the story. Of Haman. That he had a lot of pride. And ego. And so there's.

A time where. He. Wanted people. To bow down to him. And. Honor him. He almost demanded. Worship. And Mordecai. Didn't want to bow down to anyone.

Other than the true God. He was. A believer. And. Because Mordecai. Didn't bow down. Haman got really fuming mad. He had this pride and ego. That people.

Would. Honor him. And reverence him. This is one of the traits. Of. Narcissistic. Leaders. They're arrogant. They crave worship.

[25:47] They crave attention. They crave. This kind of submission. From others. Pride and ego. Then you see. Manipulation. He deceived the king. He made the king.

Enact this law. For his own ends. Because he wanted to punish Mordecai. And Mordecai's people. And. You see. Manipulation. Is a big thing.

With narcissistic. Leaders. So. We should rather have truth. And accountability. Because we can all be prey to it. So. When I'm talking narcissistic pastors.

Narcissistic leaders. Can happen. Any ministry in the church. We can get narcissistic. Got a guard against it. Roofless ambition. He used others. To fuel his ambition.

And we know in the Bible. True leaders serve. They don't exploit. Like the Lord Jesus demonstrated. And modelled for us. He says. For even the son of man. Came not to be ministered

unto. But to minister.

[26:44] To serve. To give his life a ransom. For many. So true leaders serve. We know the Lord. Knelt down and washed feet. And he had that heart. Of a servant.

So true leaders will serve. They don't have this kind of exploitive. This ambition. That just uses up others. All right. And we see narcissistic leaders.

They get enraged at correction. You can't tell them anything. If you were to tell a leader. Hey. Pastor. Maybe we could do it this way. Instead of that way. Or make some kind of suggestion. A real narcissistic kind of pastor. Will say. No. You can't do it any other way. It's my way. Or the highway. That kind of rage at correction. They won't take any correction. They won't. Take any feedback. And what does the Bible say? God resists the proud. He resists the proud. Pride goeth before destruction.

[27:40] And a haughty spirit. Before a fall. And so you see. With Haman's case. What he did. Was he erected this gallows. To basically.

Kill. Mordecai. And it ended up. That things reversed. And he was the one. Who ended up. Getting executed. On his own gallows. So. It. Goes to show.

The same truth. That is here. That. Pride goes before destruction. Pride just leads to destruction. So. Narcissism. It's really self-destructive.

So you think of a narcissist. Over the page. A narcissist lives to protect. And promote themselves. They've got this intrinsic need. For control. And some pastors.

Or preachers. Will use. The. There's a Bible reference. That says. Touch not the Lord's anointed. Oh you can't say anything against me. Because I'm the Lord's anointed. And they shut down.

[28:35] Any kind of criticism. And some congregations. Will. Put the pastor on a pedestal. And just. He can't be touched. You can't question. You can't dare. Have a different opinion.

Or a different idea. To the pastor. And they'll choose charisma. Over character. So they'll find someone. Who's got that. Charismatic kind of nature. That kind of appealing. Kind of nature. To be their pastor. Rather than the character. Of the man. So we've seen Haman. An Old Testament example. A New Testament example. Of narcissism. Is diatrophies.

In 3 John. Talks about diatrophies. John talks about him. He loves to have the preeminence. He receiveth us not. He's prating against us.

With malicious words. So he's using slander. And it says. That he doesn't receive the brethren. He forbids them. And casts them out of the church. So you see this picture.

[29:31] Of a narcissistic kind of leader. That he shuns people. He slanders people. He's got this ambition. To be preeminent. He's got to be the first. He's got to be the top dog.

And no one else can. Have any kind of. Prominence. He's got to have the absolute preeminence. And we've always got to watch that. All of these things speak to me. As the pastor of this church. But it can speak to every pastor. Hopefully every church. And really every one of us. That we shouldn't have this kind of attitude. Like Haman. Like diatrophies. This ambition for preeminence. But rather we should be the servant. The servant of all. So that's healthy ministry. Rather than all of these things. That we're talking about today. Next section. Number eight. How do we build.

A safe church. A supportive church. A restorative church. What are some of the elements. Of a church environment. That's supportive. So we're going to touch on all these things.

[30:26] Just in passing. Some of the elements. A shared purpose. Handling tough emotions. There's that support. A building of better relationships.

Helping people grow. Keeping leaders fresh. And sending out for the mission. So the first one there. A shared purpose. And really what is our purpose. It's the mission of Christ. We're a mission station.

We're a rescue station. To seek and to save. That which is lost. And we want to build around that mission that we have. Which is grace ultimately too. It's grace that saves. It's grace that trains.

It's grace that helps us grow. And we want to be a gracious people. So newcomers come. They might have some rough edges. We exercise grace. We extend grace.

We love people. And it's not about performance or perfection. They've got their warts and all just like we have. But we want to embrace people. And be that supportive environment.

[31:22] So we've got that purpose of grace. And we keep going back to the gospel. That's what we're on about. We're here to save souls. And reach souls to be a gracious church. That's our purpose. Then the next one.

How do we handle tough emotions? How do we handle it? When there's disagreements amongst us. Between us. Pastor to congregation even. How do we handle disagreements? Can we have humility and kindness?

Can we model apologising and forgiveness? Learn how to say sorry. Learn how to forgive. That we'll handle those tough things. It won't stop us.

It won't stop our mission. We'll handle those tough emotions. Next one. We think of support. That we'll have pastoral care and prayer and counselling. We'll find ways for people to get help.

So we'll have that bias to help people. We'll have that bias to support one another. Building better relationships. Sure enough relationships get tested even in a church.

[32:21] We're brothers and sisters. And even brothers and sisters in families can have relationship challenges. But we know the word of God tells us how do we handle relationships? Love.

Charity. 1 Corinthians 13. The whole chapter really. But charity. Love. It suffereth long. It's long-suffering. It's kind. Charity. Envieth not. It's not got this jealousy.

Charity. Vaunteth not itself. It's not puffed up. So charity doesn't go around showing itself off and making a big fuss about how important it is. It's not puffed up.

It's not prideful. It's humble. And these are all things to help us have healthy relationships, healthy communication. How do we listen to one another? How do we make peace?

And that's a healthy church. We can manage to get along with each other even when there's differences. We don't have to be a cookie cutter of the pastor. And everyone's got to conform to a certain shape or type of Christian that the pastor wants.

[33:22] That's not a healthy thing. We can allow some differences because ultimately we're all different. And every one of us brings something because we're different. We've all got something to contribute.

Next one we see steps to grow. So it's about growing together and encouraging others. We see it tells that we are his workmanship. We are his masterpiece.

We're created in Christ Jesus. We're created with a purpose. And it's good works. He's given us works to do. He's given us opportunities to serve. He's ordained that we should walk in them.

So we see some of the steps to grow. It's got the sense that we will grow. We'll keep walking. We'll keep maturing as we serve others, as we get stronger in our faith. We can help one another to grow.

And so many of you here are older Christians. You can help the younger Christians. And as a younger Christian, you can look up to the older Christian. So we can help one another and support one another.

[34:20] Another thing in the list there is keeping leaders fresh. Sometimes leaders can get burnt out. Pastors, pastors' wives, they can get exhausted.

They can get tired. We're only human. So there's a need to take rest as well. And for yourselves as workers, you might be a worker in a particular department of the church. Don't be afraid to say, Pastor, I need to take a bit of time out to refresh, to renew.

Because sometimes we can be hard at it week after week, preparing things, running a program.

And it's important that we look after ourselves physically, that we take rest when we need them, like that Sabbath principle, and that we check in with each other regularly so we're not overloading.

Because sometimes it's often the ones who are busy, you give them another job to do because you know they're going to be willing to serve. But it shouldn't be overburdening one or another.

So keeping leaders fresh, looking after each other, and then sending out for the mission.

Sometimes people will leave the church and hopefully they're leaving to go and bless another church or to go and start another church or leading for another ministry.

[35:33] And so we want to encourage that, to send people out from this church that will grow God's kingdom everywhere. There won't be some sense of holding people back when they've got a mission to go to.

That will encourage them, will cheer them on as they go to take the mission to another place. Next section, number nine, there's legitimate ministry and the spiritual abuse.

Sometimes spiritual abuse comes out of what is meant to be a good thing. All right, so I've just got a few of the list there, on the page there. Obviously discipleship is a good thing, but then there can be this heavy shepherding that is not a good thing.

Giving is a good thing, but then there's this kind of enforced giving, which is not a good thing.

Leadership, we need strong leadership, but then leadership can become a dictatorship. There's accountability, where we should have some submission, but then there's this kind of overburdening of that accountability.

There's modesty, which is a good godly thing, but then there's man's kind of interpretations, which get imposed on people, which is not a good thing. There's wise counsel, and then there's having to kowtow to the pastor to go to his counsel all the time and come under his direction all the time.

[36:48] So we'll just touch on some of these things. So I'm just making the point that really there is good ministry, and maybe in some churches there's good intentions behind what they're trying to do, but they've taken it to an extreme, and it's become excessive, and it's become beyond what's reasonable and what's right.

So for example, discipleship. It's a good thing. We want to be disciples. We should have discipleship in our church where we're learning and growing together. We're getting a good godly mentor.

That's a good thing, and you can be a mentor, a disciple of younger Christians yourself, women to younger women, men to younger men. So for example, it talks about, as Paul talks about, that what he's received, Timothy, he says, commit thou to faithful men, and then those men are going to be able to teach others also.

So there's like a ripple effect that Paul gives to Timothy, Timothy gives to faithful men, the faithful men then teach others also. So it's like a domino effect. That's a good thing, that we should want to teach people, but then on the abusive side, there's this, what they call heavy shepherding, controlling people's lives, like I talked about before, where you go to the pastor, and you say, oh, it's just, you can go to some extreme lengths.

Should I buy this house? Should I move to this location? Should I marry this person? It's not the pastor who is necessarily God's voice to you on every individual, personal decision of your life.

[38:20] You can bounce things off the pastor, which is probably a healthy thing to do with some things, but you don't ask the pastor every little nitty-gritty of your life. And some churches, they push that.

They make this, it's called heavy shepherding, where they're controlling people's lives. You can't do any little thing. I can't go and buy that car without asking the pastor. That's silly.

It's really silly. So there's that truth of discipleship, but there's that abuse of heavy shepherding.

Next one, voluntary giving in worship. Of course we should give.

God loves a cheerful giver. He wants us to have a voluntary heart, a cheerful heart when we give, but in some churches, there's this guilt-driven imposition where they mandate tithing, for example, or they force people to do a certain kind of giving in a way that's forced on people and you can't have any kind of freedom to give.

You're giving out of a grudging, of a burden, of a duty, which is really not New Testament giving.

Next one you see, leadership. Again, leadership's a good thing.

[39:27] He says to the leaders, the elders, he says, feed the flock. He says, be an example to the flock. There's humble, godly leadership.

But then on the abuse side, you've got a leadership that demands blind obedience. So you've just got to do everything the pastor says without any question, without any reservation.

And that, it's almost like your obedience to God is your obedience to the pastor. That's really bad. That's wrong. God doesn't call us to a blind obedience like that.

Next one we see, grace and freedom. We've got freedom as God's people. We've got the liberty. It says, stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. We've got an absolute freedom as God's people under grace. We've got a liberty in Christ. Whereas on the extreme side, in some churches, it's all about legalism and fear where everything's dictated and there's a whole load of rules and expectations and standards and conformity and a checklist almost.

[40:37] You've got to make sure you don't miss any things. It's this bondage that is on people at times in some churches. And that's not a healthy thing. That's really not right.

Again, on the theme of leadership, what should we have? Servant leadership. The leader, the pastor, the youth leader, the children's worker. We should all be servants in whatever capacities of service that we serve.

Even as a musician, as a song leader, we're serving. We've got a heart to serve. We're not there to impose, to dominate. It's like our Lord talks about that we should have a lowliness of mind.

Now, in other words, a humility, esteem others better than ourselves. Don't just look out for your own interests, but look out for the things of others. Look out for others. So we should have that kind of servant leadership.

Not that when you get a position, it goes to your head and you think, oh, I'm the pastor now or I'm the deacon now and that kind of attitude where you've just got some name or badge or title or status and everyone else is less than you.

[41:43] It's not how it's meant to work. We're meant to be family. Yeah, all brethren. And so there's that servant leadership. Again, some of these things are a little bit repeated of the same kind of themes.

We see the same heart there, the mind of Christ, the servanthood. He took upon him the form of a servant. He humbled himself, became obedient unto death. Next one, we see accountability and openness.

There's the truth that really we should be honest with one another. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. And we should be able to have honest, open conversations and even disagree with each other in a respectful way that we can come to the same mind.

Sometimes you're going to get feedback that feels like, oh, I didn't really want to hear that. So I might give you some feedback about how you're doing something and you actually, oh, I'd rather not have that kind of feedback.

That means I might have to change something. But the faithful are the wounds of a friend. It's a good thing. And, you know, feel free to give me feedback if there's things that you think I can improve on.

[42:49] And there's that principle, the next one there, iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Sometimes a bit of healthy kind of abrasiveness at times, like you've got to be made sharper.

Someone might rub you up the wrong way, but he's actually trying to help you. He's trying to encourage you. He's trying to make you stronger and a more resilient Christian. So iron sharpens iron.

There's a sense where, hey, we can have that healthy interaction and sometimes a healthy, honest conversation where we might actually, might be a difficult conversation, but it's going to help us to grow.

So there's that accountability. We should have that and encourage that rather than in an unhealthy kind of abusive church setting, they suppress any kind of dissent. So you don't dare question the program of the church or the vision of the church or the pastor's views on this or that, whereas really, in a healthy church, there should be a willingness from the pastor to have a healthy discussion on things, not to suppress dissent.

Next point is the fact that we're not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. So the emphasis in the Bible is the inner transformation.

[44:11] It's the heart. That we've got to get the heart right. That we're going to have that renewing of our mind. We're going to find what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God to not be conformed to the world.

But it's not about, as in the abusive kind of church settings, where it's all about outward performance. You've got to kind of measure up to what the pastor expects of you and it's about outward performance, about attendance or about what you do, about all about what you're doing rather than actually it's not about our performance.

It's about the inward transformation. Of course we should ideally want to be serving and active believers. I'm not discounting that. But you're not in this pressurised situation where you've got to perform all the time.

Next one we see unity. We want to be that one body like we talked about, that unified body of Christ. Whereas in some churches there's this elitism and this exclusion.

And you could call it really a separation that's overly aggressive. Where it's almost like it becomes cult-like, cultic, where they only mix with their own kind.

[45:27] But that church is kind of just its own little insular kind of group, an isolated kind of group. And we've got churches like that in Adelaide, churches that won't interact with the other independent Baptist churches, that they're so aggressively separating that they can't have anything to do with the like-minded churches except for some minor points essentially, that they've got to have this exclusivity, this elitism.

And it's a bad thing. It's not how the Bible wants us to be. Next one we see, this truth of forgiveness and restoration. What should we do?

As we read before, forgive one another. Have that heart to forgive, to love, to care. Whereas in some churches it's all about shaming people and rejecting people, finding something to pick on people and be correcting people all the time.

Next one, modesty. As we say, there is the truth of modesty. Men should dress like men, women should dress like women, there should be a godliness, there should be a modesty about their appearance and such things.

But then in some churches there's this enforcement of a rigid dress code where it's going over the top. And that, again, it's not the intention of it. It's about the inner heart.

[46:48] It's about the attitude as well. It's about that godliness. That's what matters the most, not some dress code that's imposed. And then we see counsel again, that truth of wise counsel.

And sometimes in some churches you can't get counsel outside of the pastor. You can't go and get information or go to some other source of counsel. It's all in-house. It's a dangerous thing again. All right, last page. Looking at some truths about healing and restoration. Number 10. So God's model for shepherding is that, it's seen in Ezekiel 34 where it says, I will bind up that which is broken.

And we're going to go through some of these steps to healing. So how should we care, exercise grace, encourage connection, and have an emphasis on Bible truth.

The Lord says, I will bind up that which was broken. That's the heart of God to heal brokenness. And it's the same for leaders, for pastors, for every ministry that would be healers, not controllers.

[48:04] We're not meant to be controlling people. The pastor's not meant to be controlling people, but to be showing grace, to be part of the healing, to lead people to Christ, to be really a messenger of Christ, a representative of Christ, to be like Christ.

And so we want to have that, cultivate that culture of grace as well. There's no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

But there's that culture of there's not really a condemnation because we're under grace. And so it shouldn't be that the pastor is always finding fault or any one of us finding fault with any one of us, that we should not rather have that attitude of condemnation, trying to judge other people, but to have that spiritual heart, that culture of grace, of non-condemnation.

And that's not to say there's times where there will be a sin issue. We need to address that, but it's done in a godly way, in a supportive way, in a way that Christ would address it.

So when you think about healing, you think about how can we show care when people are hurting, they've got church hurt.

[49:20] How can we listen to people when they're wounded and they've got trauma? How can we listen to people without judgment? How can we offer grace? We're all recipients of it and we're not a deserving recipient ourselves.

I know for myself, I don't deserve his grace. And so we should have the same heart to others, shouldn't we? To show grace to others, to extend forgiveness and show God's love. How can we

have that healthy connection as a church to bring that healing, that healthy connection, that we've got that sense of community.

Hey, we're looking out for one another. We're God's community. And we're teaching truth. So we want to go to the scriptures and really open the scriptures to people, not using scripture as a manipulation to use scripture to punish people or to browbeat people.

Next one, number 11, some safeguards. How do we have these things? How can we have that kind of church that cares for people, that's not a spiritually abusive church?

How can I not be a narcissistic kind of pastor how can I safeguard and protect my own inner life? And we've all got to have that heart.

[50:31] Hey, I've got to look out for myself. Am I getting off track? I've got to be honest. And watch out is the burnout, is the pride. We can all get pride. We can be proud about what we do for God.

And that can be a bad thing. It's like in the scriptures it talks about some who served and they said, I've just done that which was my duty to do. I've just done that which I ought to do.

I don't really deserve any credit for it. I'm just doing what I ought to do. And how can we look after our own heart? It says, keep thy heart with all diligence.

Watch out for yourself. As a pastor, it's easier to look at others or as a fellow Christian, you might see faults in others. It's about our own heart.

Keep your own heart with all diligence. Keep your own heart right. Think about some healthy boundaries that you're getting rest and you've got accountability as well.

[51:32] It's good really as we try to in our church, we have got a church committee which I bounce things off so there's a sense why I have got some accountability. It's good to not be a standalone leader.

And in any ministry of the church, it's good to work as a group, to work as a team, to have others to help you and you can help them so people aren't burnt out and they're looking after each other.

You're not overextending. Cultivate humility as well because when we do something for God, sometimes we can get prideful about what we do for God. And hey, we should do things for God but let's not get prideful about it.

It says, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up. Embrace feedback too.

Stay open to correction. To constructive, even critical input.

It's how we grow, isn't it? If we don't get feedback, we won't know how to improve. I know there's some things people have said to me that were quite pointed and quite confronting about me.

[52:39] And if they hadn't told me, I wouldn't have known to improve in those areas of my life. And I've been still making the same mistakes and doing the same things that actually were a negative in my life.

And so, having constructive feedback is really, it's really a very important thing. It's actually people are blessing you when they give it to you because you're going to grow by it.

You're going to improve. Next one, core virtues. It's all about love really, love in action. These are the building blocks.

This is how we can be a church that is strong, that we don't veer into that area of abusive leadership, of spiritual abuse, that we'll have that heart to have relationships with God's people, with our brothers and sisters, rather than about performance, about showing off, that we'll have that love that we can all flourish together, we can serve one another, that kindness, that we'll have that heart to be kind.

I know for myself, I look back before I was saved and I was a bit of a bully at school with a couple of people I can remember and I'm ashamed of that. When I was unsaved, I was quite a bully and I don't want to be a bully, I'd rather have kindness.

[54:02] It's important, isn't it, that we have that heart to have kindness, to have patience with other people, to have gentleness and compassion, that we'll have humility, that we'll let go of power, of ego, of status, even the good things that we do for God, that we're not going to have a pridefulness about it, but we'll keep humble.

We'll have an integrity in every area of our life that will be whole, that will be right with God. We'll have prayer, to pray for one another. We'll have collaboration, that will nurture in unity.

When we work with other people, we'll find ways to get on with each other, we'll find ways to have harmony and we'll overcome disagreements. We'll have grace that will honour people and value them and we'll extend forgiveness and understanding and then we'll have discipleship too, really, as we all, it's for all of us to be a disciple and to disciple others, to help others grow.

Some warnings to wind up there, number three there, some key warnings, there's pitfalls of power because even though we might be trying our best to do something for God, we've got the carnality to combat, don't we?

We've got the flesh and we've got to keep that in check. So there's the truth of authority versus control. I read something there that we believe in pastoral authority, of course there is that role of the pastor as the shepherd watching over the flock, but we don't believe in pastoral sovereignty in the sense that the pastor is the king and you're the subjects of the king.

[55:47] It doesn't work like that, whereas some churches are like that, that the pastor is a king on his throne and above others sticking his nose up in the air, pastoral sovereignty.

He's the king. No, the Bible says that the pastor is the servant of all, meant to be a minister, which means servant. It's not about a sovereignty, but a guiding and a watching over and not a dominating, a domineering.

And then we should watch for self-righteousness too. It can creep in. We might have the right intent, but when our motives get self-centred, when we think we're earning credits because of our works, it becomes self-righteous behaviour, doesn't it?

And then we should reject control tactics too. Again, some pastors have become like control freaks, micromanaging, watching over everything that gets done, as if not trusting people.

But mind you, the pastor needs to be careful, but to not have that control freak kind of attitude. Or like wielding God's authority, just because I'm the pastor, I've got God's authority over everybody else, to manipulate people or abuse that power.

[57:00] Next one, again, getting back to the foundation, the big picture, what are we on about? We're meant to be the body of Christ, a maturing body.

God's design is that we have the church edifying the body, that we have the growing of people, the perfecting, the maturing of the saints, and it's the saints who are to be matured for the work of the ministry.

It's like a ministry training centre. This is the ministry training of the church that you are being prepared, you are being made able ministers or servants and it's every minister, every member of the church is really a minister.

Every one of us ought to be maturing and growing, preparing for, serving. and the essence of it all really is that unity of the faith, that building up of itself in love.

And Christianity really boils down to love at the heart of it, that we should love one another, as we read before, to love one another. So just to close, as we read before, the Lord heals the broken in heart and he binds up their wounds.

[58:18] There's people with church hurt all over the place. We've got some refugees in our church that have come from other churches where they've been hurt and there's been wounding and we want to have the heart to care for people, the broken.

We can be suffering church hurt ourselves, God forbid that we as a church should hurt anybody.

But we want to have the good shepherd's heart. He loves the sheep, he lays down his life for the sheep, he's got a humility, he sacrificially guards and guides his sheep, he leads the sheep and so should we as it tells the elders there in Acts 20 to take heed to yourselves to the flock.

He says to feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood. Think of the love of God, the blood brought people of God and ministry is about the heart of Jesus, it's his love, it's as he modelled it to take on the form of a servant.

And you think there is truth but truth is not to be wielded as some kind of weapon over God's people, it sets us free. The truth shall make you free.

We believe in the Bible truth, we are God helping us a strong independent Baptist church but we're not as some independent Baptist churches Christians.

[59:42] That would be harsh and unkind and domineering and spiritually abusing people. But we believe the truth sets men free.

It's the soul-saving truth that the gospel saves. We can know the truth and the truth shall make us free. And think about how can we heal before we lead, that we'll get things right ourselves, we'll serve before we speak, we'll love before we correct and ideally that grace, truth and humility will mark every ministry decision, that everything we do will be under his hand, that when we'll see his face we won't have any shame, that we've dominated people, we've dominated people, that we've had anything spiritually abusive, that there's been any church hurt and that the church body will be a place of healing, of love, of restoring, a place of grace and that pastoral authority will be there but it won't be pastoral sovereignty, it won't be in a harsh narcissistic way but rather out of love.

Hopefully that's given us some thoughts about these truths, I know it's a very real thing, spiritual abuse, church hurt, it's all over the place, there's lots of people hurting and of course we know in some churches, churches, there's been horrendous things happen by those that have been the clergy, that have been the leaders, the ministers, the pastors, there's a lot of abuse, there's a lot of damage and people hurt, people have been hurt by churches and they've given up on really anything to do with God because they've been hurt by churches, it's a woeful thing, it's the devil's work and we don't want to be any part of such a thing.

Let us pray. Lord we thank you that you love us and you are the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. Help us Lord to have your gentleness and love, your care and compassion.

Lord we pray that if there's any that have any kind of church trauma or church hurt that will just find that restoring of your hand, that will find that watching over of your spirit, that will know your healing power and we'll know Lord that you heal the broken in heart and you bind up our wounds.

[62:07] Help us Lord not to have anything that has happened to us to put us off church, to not hold on to that but to let that go Lord to know that you're in control and that you are the good shepherd and we can come under your hand.

Lord we praise you for everyone that is here. We pray against any kind of spiritual abuse as we know it can happen in churches and sometimes in families where sometimes the husband might even go to domestic violence over their wife by some misguided application of scripture Lord or as a father or mother might become heavily handed in an over the top discipline of their children.

Lord we know there's many spiritual abuses from pastors and some of this extreme teaching that is out there Lord. We pray that people might find a place of healing and find recovery from that.

We pray Lord that we might be a spiritually healthy church where these things do not happen and we'll be a family that loves one another and grows together in love.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Ideally you'd want to hope and pray that it will change. It's often the case though if someone's a narcissist they don't generally change which is a problem.

[63:31] Yeah. They generally don't change. But yeah it's a very real thing and it seems to be a big thing talking frankly among independent Baptists at times can be independent Baptists every church is independent but if you get someone who's an overlord kind of pastor and they're schooled that way it can become very controlling which can be really damaging.

Yeah. It's a kind of sad thing really because it would be pretty much otherwise an otherwise good church but they spoil the good that they do by having that.

So they've got to be right about everything but they're losing the real righteousness because you see that really with the Pharisees that the Pharisees in the Bible they had their doctrines really they were quite right with their doctrine but they had their hearts wrong and that's what can happen.

They can have the doctrinal right and down pat but their hearts are wrong and they miss the true righteousness which is really by faith isn't it? It's Christ's work. Yeah so it can be a big problem.

I guess you've got to make your own mind up in a way. There's lots of God's people are in all kinds of churches and you almost feel sorry for them when some people are in a congregation like that where they might be under that kind of control.

[65:00] You feel sorry for them that they're in that difficult spot and hopefully you can be a friend to them and encourage them, be a brother, a sister to them, look after them.

Every church is myself, any one of us can be inclined to do the wrong thing, can become dictatorial, any pastor can make the mistake of being like it.

Yeah and any one of us can be, we can be harsh with people when we should be kind. I guess it's the carnality of man isn't it? It's the human nature to act that way and to be selfish, to be like Haman, to be like Diotrephes, putting others down.

Because it can be the case with such churches, they put others down to make themselves look better. So they might attack our church for example on some particular issue to make themselves look like they're more spiritual or that they're more right, they're more correct.

It can be the case, we might be like it too. We might, because there's churches that we know, we might think, we don't think they've got the right doctrine on this or that, but we can get prideful too and arrogant.

[66:20] So it's in all of us, we've always got to watch ourselves, don't we? You can hope that those that are in such a controlling kind of church might come to understand or be able to cope with it or find a church that's not like that.

And I suppose as far as associations with other churches, I know we're a little bit careful, not in a prideful way, but for example there's churches in this locality that we might know them and we might associate with the people from those churches but we wouldn't probably co-minister with them or have them come and preach for us for example.

There's good churches, there's good people in churches that are not so good, like we know there's uniting churches that they're more evangelical, they're more biblical than others, whereas some are totally left field and embracing all kinds of abomination.

Sometimes it's about the local minister in those churches as well. There's some churches that have music that we think that's gone too far this way or that way that we wouldn't want to be joining forces with them.

But then on the same side there's like-minded churches like in Adelaide, we know there's churches alike to ours that we gladly go and join their young adults and their youth programs or if they have an evangelist come, we'll gladly go and join them and be a part of that because they're mostly like-minded to us so it's a good and healthy thing to fellowship with them, have a men's breakfast or whatever and they can reciprocate to and come and join our things.

[68:05] So it's more fellowship with like-minded churches, I think that's a good thing. Hopefully God gives us grace to be a church that's not like that kind of church and I've been attacked by other pastors myself because our church doesn't measure up to what they want us to measure up to and really nitpicking on definitions of this or that.

It's really trivial things that we have a different mind on and it's just very unhelpful and it's ungodly really. I think it's really the enemy's work to cause that kind of discord and that division and really we should all be getting on with the same mission because we've all got the same mission and they're still godly people and lovely people and well-meaning pastors I'm sure too but they might just veer on that side where they're just a little bit cultic, a little bit exclusive, isolated.

It's a sad thing, it's a sad reflection on them that they choose that kind of path really. Thank you.