

# THE CHURCH AS A REFUGE

*WITH GUEST SPEAKER, DR DIANE LANGBERG, PHD.*

HOSTED BY COLONIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SENDING PROJECT AND REDEEMER FELLOWSHIP

April 4, 2019

## **WANT TO ASK DR. LANGBERG A QUESTION?**

**THE FINAL SESSION (SESSION 4) WILL BE Q&A WITH DR. LANGBERG**

**THROUGHOUT THE DAY:**

**(1) USE THE INDEX CARDS IN YOUR PACKETS TO WRITE YOUR QUESTIONS.**

**(2) PLACE YOUR CARDS IN ONE OF THE MARKED RESPONSE BOXES:**

- **ON THE TABLE AS YOU EXIT THE SANTUARY**
- **IN THE FOYER ON THE INFORMATION DESK**
  - **IN THE SNACK AREA**

## **SCHEDULE**

### **All Sessions Except Lunch Breakouts are in the Sanctuary**

9:00 – 10:20            WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS  
SESSION 1: UNDERSTANDING POWER AND ITS ABUSE

10:20 – 10:35            BREAK

10:35 – 11:55            SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

11:55 – 1:15            BREAK FOR LUNCH

12:15 – 1:00            BREAKOUT SESSIONS

If you ordered a box lunch, please grab a lunch, including beverage, in Fellowship Hall and be in your breakout room in time for a 12:15 start.

1:15 – 2:35            SESSION 3: RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

2:35 – 2:50            BREAK

2:50 – 4:00            SESSION 4: CONCLUSIONS AND Q&A

## **BREAKOUT SESSIONS: DURING LUNCH BREAK**

### **TRAUMA HEALING GROUPS – TERRACE ROOM (2ND FLOOR)**

*Directions:* Walk through the central hallway of Fellowship Hall (where the water and snacks are). Turn left at the end of the hallway and walk up the stairs. Terrace Room is to your right at the top of the stairs.

Led by: The Sending Project

The Church as a Refuge Conference raises our awareness of God's call for leaders to not be complicit in the abuse of the emotionally and spiritually wounded, but to protect and bless the vulnerable. What action steps can conference participants take towards the healing of the deeply wounded? Over a year ago The Sending Project partnered with American Bible's Society's Trauma Healing Institute (THI) to bring Trauma Healing Groups to Kansas City. THI groups are based on Biblical principles and are clinically sound. Trauma Healing is designed to equip church leaders with basic mental health and biblical principles so that they are better able to respond to their own inner pain and that of others. Learn more about Trauma Healing Groups at this breakout session.

### **RACIAL HEALING – FELLOWSHIP HALL**

*Directions:* Fellowship Hall is where the water and snacks are. Walk to the enclosed classroom on the right with the "Racial Healing" sign on it.

Led by: Elevate KC

In this breakout, we will address the real aspect of the trauma experienced for people of color. We will talk about the current state of systemic racism that is keeping groups of people from excelling. We will also talk about what can or should be done to level the field in this matter of racial healing.

## NEARBY LUNCH OPTIONS

Our location: 9500 Wornall Rd, Kansas City MO 64114

### FOR DELIVERY or RAPID PICKUP

**Panera** at 103 and State Line: [www.panerabread.com](http://www.panerabread.com) - 816-942-3648  
10229 State Line Road KC MO 64114

**Jimmy John's at 103 and State Line:** [online.jimmyjohns.com](http://online.jimmyjohns.com) - (913) 730-3920  
10314 State Line Road; Leawood, KS 66206

### FOR RAPID PICKUP

**Chipotle** at 103 and State Line: [order.chipotle.com](http://order.chipotle.com)  
10221 State Line KC MO 64114

**Firehouse Subs:** [www.firehousesubs.com](http://www.firehousesubs.com) - (816) 214-6815  
Ward Parkway Mall #779: 8600 Ward Parkway Suite 2128; Kansas City, MO 64114

### OTHER DINE IN OR DRIVE THROUGH OPTIONS:

#### At corner of 95<sup>th</sup> and Mission:

- McDonalds
- Oneill's Irish Restaurant
- Planet Sub
- Dewey's Pizza

#### At Ward Parkway Mall - 86<sup>th</sup> and State Line

- Chick Fil-A
- Five Guys Burgers
- The Garage (burgers and such)
- Charleston's

## SESSION 1: UNDERSTANDING POWER AND ITS ABUSE

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### INTRODUCTION

Our response to the most helpless exposes who we are.

Power is the ability to do something: to influence, to have leverage, to master, to dominate, to coerce.

In Genesis:

- God invested us with power: “Let us make humans in our likeness and let them rule.”
- God gave us this power not for humans to rule each other but to exercise over God’s creation.
- Power was given to humans who reflected God in every way together, and who bore His character.
- After Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan: Power was now used by humans who bore a likeness to the enemy of God.

Many humans feel powerless:

- Some only in certain contexts, some all the time
- The weaker and needier we feel, the more dangerous we are when we are given a position of power because we are more likely to use that power to “feed ourselves.”
- An individual’s power can vary within different contexts.
- A sense of powerlessness in one arena may be the driving force to abuse power in another arena.

Vulnerability:

- Means being susceptible to attack or injury
- People in vulnerable situations: a woman in a room full of men; client in a therapist’s office; parishioner in a pastor’s office; patient in a doctor’s office; student with a teacher; a child with a parent.

Abuse occurs when:

- power is used in a way that wounds the vulnerable; when trust is exploited
- a person uses power for his own ends
- the shepherd uses the sheep for food rather than feeding the sheep

To be truly “consensual” requires two things:

- one must first have the capacity (physical; emotional; mental) to choose
- it must be safe to say no (safe: physically, financially, socially, etc.)

## DIFFERENT KINDS OF POWER

### A. *Physical*

- size or just their “larger than life” presence

### B. *Verbal*

- people who are articulate/have a command of words, can dominate a relationship, a group, etc.
- words have tremendous power (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr. for good; Adolf Hitler for evil)

### C. *Emotional*

- Examples: spouses have this power with each other; people who use moodiness to manipulate; preachers to sway their congregants
- When verbal and emotional power are combined in ways that speak to the longings of human hearts, the force is extremely powerful. We typically trust that behind the words is integrity.

### D. *Knowledge, intellect, skill*

- Examples: car mechanic with someone who doesn't know cars; those with theological knowledge have theological power (we give them power because we trust he/she is speaking for God); sick patient with a doctor
- We assume that knowledge and skill are held by trustworthy people

### E. *Position*

- literal position (e.g., CEO, therapist, pastor) or by reputation or status
- those labeled in public as brilliant, godly, etc., are accorded power simply by their reputation

### F. *Culture*

- We are easily seduced by the culture we have been marinated in
- We are blind to its aberrations
- We not only ingest the toxins, we transmit them to others
- The power of culture increases exponentially when it is “baptized” by church leaders (e.g., the denomination; the institution).
- The teachings and rules of a given culture (including churches, denominations) can result in systemic abuse, which is very difficult to discern and extremely difficult to change.
- To say or do nothing when power is abused is to cooperate with/to contribute to defacing God's image in another human being. It is to join with the enemy of God to destroy that image.
- In an abusive system, there is no safe place; power is used to protect the system not the victims

### G. Spiritual

- Power that is given spiritual credibility is not only very powerful, it is also silencing.
- Higher-Power people often exhibit the following:
  - The more power one has the less empathy/compassion he/she has for people who don't have power. (*Jesus had the highest power and the deepest compassion*)
  - Feel fewer restraints/rules don't apply to them (*Jesus used His power in "eye-dropper" amounts*)
  - Less accurate in their judgement of other's feelings (*Jesus knows our hearts*)
  - Do not adjust to others' emotions (*Jesus became a baby and man and He bore our sufferings*)
  - Experience less distress with other people's distress levels (*Jesus was wounded for our transgressions*)
  - Stereotype more (*Jesus never healed the same disease the same way*)
  - Are resource rich (have a lot of things at their fingertips they can use)
  - Believe they can act without serious consequences
  - Are self-serving
- Lower-Power people often exhibit the following:
  - Experience greater restraints and threats
  - More likely to be victims of bullying and abuse
  - They track with the emotions of others in power and are most aware of anger in high-power people
  - More likely to be women or a different race than those in power
  - Are vigilant trying to navigate threatening environments
  - They inhibit direct expression of their thoughts (i.e., they "shut up"; they are voiceless)

### H. Withholding

- We withhold to control or coerce another
- When we stand together with abusive systems, when we keep silent over the abuses, we are withholding our power to do good and we are complicit in the abuse.
  - Complicit: "folded up together with"
- When someone speaks out in an abusive system, we call them a dissident.
  - Dissident: "one who sits apart" (consider Jesus, the prophet)

## THE ABUSE OF POWER

The abuse of power involves 3 things: the deception of self; the deception of others; and the coercion of others.

### A. *Self-deception*

- Requires deadening oneself to the discernment of good and evil
- Uses deception to say the external things justify what we are doing
- Functions as a narcotic; it numbs us to the danger of our choices; we lose our taste for good and our power to hate evil

### B. *Deceiving Others*

- Once we deceive ourselves, we use our verbal skills, reputation, role, etc. to easily deceive others
- Present ourselves as “for others” rather than “against others”
- We allow ourselves to be deceived by the deceiver, when we want what they seem to promise (consider: teacher, coach, pastor, generous giver, political leader, etc.)

### C. *Coercion*

- Restraining; silencing someone; surround someone with words; threat of consequences; impose burdens to weigh them down; withhold what should be given; fear;
- Through psychological means: threaten isolation from the group; “no one will believe you”
- Can involve good things (e.g., adult giving a child food, shoes, presents, to groom them)

## POWER FROM GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

Jesus: ALL authority, ALL power has been given to Me. (Matthew 28). Jesus: As the Father sent me, so send I you. (John 20)

- 1) Every bit of power we hold is derivative, given to us by God to use on His behalf for the single purpose of glorifying Him and for the good of others.
- 2) If we understand the nature of power and its source and its danger we will walk very humbly with others.
- 3) We make the mistake of seeing God’s power as external. Power is not having rule over a spouse, a church, an institution, etc. It is internal. God’s kingdom is the kingdom of the heart, not of our institutions, our churches, schools, missions, etc. He is building His kingdom by having authority over the human heart to the point that it is full of the Spirit of Christ. When we are full of God’s power internally we bring light and life and love to all of our external enterprises – and He is glorified.

## SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

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Heaven leaves the chapel and goes down into the dungeon.

Jesus demonstrated in His flesh the character of God – we are to do the same.

When God's people worship over and separate, untouched by the dungeons, they are not worshipping the God of the scriptures.

How can we be a sanctuary for those wounded by abuse? FIRST STEP is empathy: find out what it is like to be a victim.

Many do not experience a one-time event traumatic event: instead, they live with relentless, ongoing trauma, growing up in a violent neighborhood. They are literally being forced to marinate in evil.

For deeply wounded ones, all these aspects their personhood have their roots in the life-destroying acid of trauma:

- how the brain works
- how the body works
- how the self is understood
- how the thoughts are organized
- how emotions are named, labeled, and regulated
- how relationships are understood

Words such as sad, afraid, overwhelmed, mean something different to trauma victims. We compare it to our experience and assume it's the same. When there has been significant trauma, we do **not** understand.

Trauma is indeed extraordinary not because it is rare but because it completely overwhelms the normal ways human beings cope with life.

The push/pull between the need to forget the trauma and the need to speak of it is the central dialectic of trauma, which is experienced by the traumatized and those who bear witness to that trauma.

Traumatized people need attention and assistance usually for a long time.

Ongoing abuse results in broken identity. You cannot be repeatedly abused and not have that shape your "I am."

Abuse:

- teaches people they are trash, expendable, shameful, bad, evil, etc.
- is crushing
- oppresses
- silences
- does spiritual damage
- hides the love of the Father
- renders any idea of refuge incomprehensible
- shatters the thought or hope of a safe shepherd, let alone One who gave His life for the sake of His lambs

Humans learn about the abstract (the intangible) through the concrete. Our understanding of words like love and trust or safe comes from experiencing humans who demonstrated that for us and with us.

We learn about the unseen by way of the seen – the Word became flesh.

Anything we do in our relationships that doesn't look like what we see Jesus doing teaches lies about God. We teach lies about God's heart and character by word, by deed, and by covering up.

Jesus demonstrates that our God does not just speak words to us but acts, first in the dungeons of human hearts and then through the lives of those same people into the dungeons of this world.

Jesus demonstrated in His flesh who God was – we are to do the same. This is when we become a healing community.

The mark of God incarnate is humility, righteousness, and service.

The mark of true Christianity is always likeness to Christ.

## SESSION 3: RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

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Christendom, the institution, is not Jesus Christ.

The true church is to bring light into darkness, which means seeing things as they really are and calling them by their right name.

The institution often responds to the vulnerable as if they are a disturbance to an “important mission.”

When we consider our churches, the real question isn’t “who are we?” – it is “who is He?”

Ezekiel 34: “I will eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing. . . [then] they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.”

We are to be faithful to Him – not to our mission, to our system.

The voices of the victims today – the abused, violated, crushed – are the voice of God to His church.

- Through them, God is turning on the light. He is exposing us to ourselves (and others).
- He is pointing out the cancer and pointing us to fidelity to Him alone.
- *Are we listening?*

By silencing the voices of victims, and rushing to protect our institutions, and by striving for externally pristine environments that do not expose our great unlikeness to Christ, we are missing Him.

### SOME GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

What does it look like for a church to look like Jesus, to be a place of healing for the wounded?

1. We need to acknowledge to ourselves and publicly that the problem of abuse is not just “out there,” it is in “in here” (in our congregations).
  
2. We need to approach this work very carefully. Be honest: we do not know very much.

3. We need to grasp something of what some of these abuses **really** mean. What is physical abuse? Emotional abuse? Verbal abuse? Domestic abuse?
4. Any kind of abuse is an abuse of the vulnerable by the powerful. It is NEVER 50/50. It is NEVER caused by the victim. Vulnerability at any time, any age, requires protection. Our response to vulnerability exposes who we are.
5. Anyone who abuses another human being is exposing the content of their own heart. It does not tell us anything about the victim.
6. Research has demonstrated we can **rarely** tell who is lying. It is rare that a victim of abuse (child or adult) is lying about the abuse, and when they do it is usually to protect the perpetrator.
7. Offenders deceive themselves about what they are doing and its impact on the victim. They have habituated deceit. True repentance is slow and hard, and words and promises cannot be trusted.
8. What about God's grace and mercy? Grace and mercy never tolerate sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Nothing can be crueler than the leniency which abandons someone to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."
9. Church leaders are not trained to investigate child abuse, domestic abuse, etc., or crimes of any kind. It is okay to not know – it is not our job. We need to reach out to authorities to do the job they are trained to do and that is totally independent of your organization. Reporting crimes does NOT prevent us from being the church.
10. Background checks for church staff is good, but these checks only tell you who has been caught. We need policies and procedures to protect those in our midst.
11. Sexual abuse in Christian organizations should be the "king of all oxymorons." God is honored when the unfit shepherd is removed.
12. Your churches have gifted lay leaders – those who have studied the various types of abuse, so they are equipped to "walk alongside" abuse victims.

13. Many survivors turn to addictions, are depressed, suffer PTSD, etc. So, when you meet a troubled church member, ask about their history – know that they have a story.
  
14. Understand that change is hard and slow, repetitious and takes courage.
  
15. God's people are called to humility. Church leaders must recognize their potential for bias based on their own life circumstances.
  
16. *A word to the deeply broken and vulnerable:* It is often true that who Jesus is, is often not who the church is. He does not look like His body, the church, because the body often does not follow its Head. Look to the Head, then make your judgements about the body. Jesus wept over His people. He is and always will be the God of the millstone.



## SESSION 4: CONCLUSION AND SPACE FOR Q&A

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