

## Letter I shared with the CA staff today

Dear CA/AZ/NV staff,

I am writing to explain my motives for raising my voice in support of the many victims among us, and many more who could no longer remain within our fellowship. My sincere hope is that what I write will deepen an understanding of their plight.

I am not a victim of child sexual abuse, at least as far as anything I can recall. However, I have known trauma. I feel compelled to write to those of you, specifically to those who also aren't CSA victims, and perhaps don't feel you can really enter into why CSA is so damaging. Surely some of you receiving this are victims of CSA, it is statistically impossible that this would not be the case. For you, I hope this letter brings a little balm.

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I have struggled with anxiety and panic attacks throughout my adult life. My father Rex Paddon did also, as if it was some genetic condition. As a result, I have had periods in my life where I can best describe my quality of life as follows:

Imagine being so physically, mentally, and emotionally tired that your mind and body crave sleep. Your head aches, and any task requiring any cognitive effort is overwhelming. So you lay in bed, unable to do anything else. However, as you start to slip into a slumber, you fight it off, forcing yourself back awake. This is because even though your body is screaming for sleep, this pain is nothing compared to what lurks on the other side of the transition into sleep. You continue to fight off unconsciousness until finally you lose this battle and drift off. Once asleep, you enter into a terrible nightmare; you knew it was coming. You aren't even sure you are asleep, it feels like you've just transitioned into this horror from laying in bed directly. The nightmare progresses until your mind, unable to take the nightmare anymore, jolts you back awake. However, now your bloodstream is flooded with fight-or-flight hormones, as you had entered into a full panic attack in your sleep. You arrive into consciousness directly into a state of simultaneously experiencing the sensation of a raging fever and nausea combined with the chest pains of what you are sure is a heart attack. You are quite sure you are dying, and try to reach for your phone to call 911. However, you pause, because you've been through this before, so the logical part of your brain tries to tell you that you aren't actually dying. But you still fear that maybe this time it's different, maybe this time you actually are dying. So you lay there, hoping maybe you really are dying, for this way at least it would all finally be over. Slowly the adrenal hormones fade from your bloodstream, allowing the full panic to reduce to more of a state of intense fear and dread. As that sensation finally dulls, the pain of the overwhelming fatigue begins to return and take over as the dominant sensation. You lay there in a pool of sweat, realizing in horror that the rest of the dark hours of the day will continue this hellish cycle. Eventually, the sun comes up, so you rise out of bed, welcoming that at least the busyness of the day enables the cycle to be broken for now. Though you've hardly slept, you gather strength to try to make it through another day, avoiding thinking about repeating the same cycle later that same evening; that's not the bridge you must cross quite yet.

Now imagine that's your regular quality of life, and what a living hell that existence would be. This is the trauma experience. If the description of my experience evokes empathy from you, I ask you not to direct your empathy toward me but toward the many victims of CSA; my trauma will typically pale in comparison to the experience of CSA victims.

A few weeks after the Dean Bruer news came out, I had the worst nightmare of my life. In

that dream, I saw and felt the intense pain of the abuse victims, and viscerally saw their tormented screams being silenced. It was more vivid than any dream I've ever had. It was before I really knew much about any of the CSA victims; I now know many that I'm close to who have come out as part of this tragic multitude who continue to live in torment. As for me, I've had the privilege of professional therapy over many years for my struggles with anxiety, and my quality of life today is nothing like what I described above. But I suspect that I have had a taste of the horror of the torment of CSA victims. And this is why I have been compelled to lend my voice to their plight with all the intensity I can muster. From what I've tasted, it's an experience I would not wish on my worst enemy. Yet such an existence has been chained to innocent children and carried on through their lives. Nobody wishes more than they do that they could somehow 'just get over it'; I'm sure it's what they desperately want more than anything.

As for the root of my own trauma, that's an ongoing journey. However, I do believe a major contributor is the culture of "I want to be more worthy" that I've grown up in. When someone is confronted with an impossible task, yet is expected to overcome that impossibility, it creates extreme anxiety. Nothing in my power can make me more worthy of redemption; the best I can do is fill that void with self-righteousness. However, I have very recently realized that while becoming more worthy is an impossibility, in the loving heart of my Redeemer, I always have been worthy. And there exists no power that can rob that from me.

I hope my vulnerable sharing helps bring some understanding of why some of us cannot speak of these things in measured tones. It is while I am promoting that we do everything possible to stop anyone within our fellowship from harming our children. Even if those measures seem extreme, no actions we would take are more extreme than the suffering these children endure, often for a lifetime.

With hope and care,

Steve Paddon