

August 17, 2023

An open letter to the Ministry: I write this letter to you as individuals and as a collective group who are united in Christ.

Dear Workers,

I want to share with you some experiences from the perspective of survivor who has stayed in this faith despite abuses of the vulnerable in our fellowship. I am not “bitter,” I don’t have a “bad spirit” or other expressions that we like to use in our culture for those who have question or speak up with their concerns. I am hurt and grieving. I want safe fellowship.

I have supported the ministry, loved so many of you, I have opened my home to you, broke bread with you and had wonderful fellowship with many of you. I will continue to support the ministry, but I need you to be a safe travelling partner for my family, my children.

I am going to share some of my experience with you, but I also want to ask you some questions. As this letter finds its way to your inbox, I’m sure many of you are feeling weary of another letter and wish that “we” could just let it go and move on. It has been shared that many (workers and friends) wish not to see or hear about these atrocities that have happened “in the past.” It has also been shared that the past few months has been hard on the ministry because people are expressing their frustration and feelings of betrayal forcefully. Has this been more difficult than the burden the ministry has asked the victims and survivors to carry for years? I, too, want to move on from the past... in fact, I have spent most of my life trying to do just that. So, I am asking you to bear with me for a few minutes and just try to enter in to a survivor’s experience that I hope you never had to experience yourself.

When I was approximately 7 years old, a professing person who attended our meeting started paying attention to me. He would talk to me in a way that made me feel special like I was important enough to be acknowledged by an older person. It started slowly and gradually over time, he started to find ways to isolate me away from the other adults and children. “Show me the chickens, let’s go gather the eggs together.” “Do you want to go for a walk?” He would share things with me that were not age appropriate that peaked my natural childhood curiosity and it progressed over time to sexual abuse. His behavior was calculated and devious. He even got so comfortable with what he was doing that he no longer had to isolate me but would find ways to abuse me in the same room or in a close area to other adults. This experience was my first true realization as

a child that monsters have two faces. One for the public that is charismatic, godly, funny, charming, and one that is evil, consumes innocence and causes unspeakable pain and destruction in private. This continued until I was about 9 years old. I have never fully trusted another person again in my life. There is some part of me that always waits for the other face to appear.

I will leave out the details of my abuse, but if I did put these details to paper, I think you would better understand what you are asking of victims and survivors when you tell them that they must forgive their perpetrator(s) and be willing to meet with abusers in fellowship. I hope that sharing a small part of my story will help you understand how harmful it is to victims and survivors when you advocate that the best place for perpetrators to get help is in meeting. I hope it can help you understand how much pain it causes victims and survivors when you rush perpetrators through a risk assessment and ignore the pleas of those who are suffering. Why is the abuser's privilege to fellowship more important than a safe atmosphere of fellowship for victims and survivors? A perpetrator's presence has the ability to reduce me to a 7-year-old boy again and fill me with unrest and panic. Fear takes over and peace takes flight.

I still ask God every day (well... often... some days I can't bring myself to even ask) to help me forgive my abuser but that doesn't mean I need to intentionally torture myself by giving harmful people access to my life. Do I get to experience psychological safety in fellowship? If not, why? And if not here, then where do I go? Recently it was shared in an open discussion meeting by a responsible brother that if we don't like the way things are being done, we can leave. Is that truly the sentiment of this ministry? Is this the heart of the Shepherd who would leave 99 to go find 1 who is lost?

You might ask... Why didn't I speak up or say something when this was happening? I was a terrified child, ashamed, afraid of not being believed, afraid of getting in trouble, afraid of what others would think about me. One time I overheard some professing adults speaking of another child that had been sexually abused. They decided in their conversation that it would have been better if the man had just killed the child, because that child was going to be so damaged for the rest of their lives that there was no hope for them to have any kind of a life. At that time, it became settled for me that I would never tell anyone what was happening to me, because I thought they would wish me dead as well. I would also like to point out that most letters shared from the ministry over the past few months include a theme of "we didn't know how damaging child sexual abuse was and that it would affect the child for the rest of their lives, so we didn't take the action that we now know we should have..." well these professing people of your generation knew how bad the lifelong impact was and their conclusion was that "we" were better off dead. I don't see how you didn't realize what a grievous crime this is. This statement/theme in your apology letters is triggering and retraumatizing to

victims and survivors. Stop making excuses in your apologies, it makes them cheap and meaningless.

Jesus knew how terrible it was for his little children to be harmed. I cannot understand why those in positions of leadership and authority then and now in our faith could not see what Jesus spoke in plain words about those who harmed little children. I cannot unsee what I have now seen, and I feel deeply betrayed and I am grieving the loss of what I thought this fellowship was. Do you honestly believe that a true Minister of God, a true Shepherd of the flock or someone with the love of our God in their heart would commit such terrible things against a child? A lamb of the fold? These acts are not sins of natural human passion where two consenting adults “slip up and make a mistake.” These acts are calculated, well planned, and executed over time in chilling deceit.

I’ve learned a thing or two on my journey, and I’ll agree with you that good people can do horrible things, but let’s take it one step further. Do men who are led by the Spirit and are professing godliness, who preach that honesty and integrity before God and man, deliberately silence victims and cover for perpetrators? Would a true Shepherd enable this evil to continue to victimize others by covering their actions and moving them around to new fields, provinces, states and countries? I cannot fathom that the Holy Spirit would direct these actions, can you? Maybe none of you in the ministry today are guilty of that, but if you knew or know of harm or potential harm happening to children and you do nothing or keep silent to preserve your place because of fear of man, do you love like a true Shepherd? Are you now complicit in their harm? Is your ministry true and pure before God or are you ruled by fear of those who have implied that your silence on this is required?

I won’t keep you much longer, I just have a few more things that I need to share with you... I have waited for an appropriate unified response to the revelation of the widespread depravity and evil that exists among us. I expected clear swift action and a unified response from this ministry. What I have experienced is regional attitudes with different approaches to the same problem, none of which has been overwhelming or spectacular in any way. I do appreciate that some effort has been made; however, if it weren’t for tremendous outside pressure from a relatively small number of people, it is doubtful that we would see any meaningful changes to address the safety of our fellowship.

The best predictor of future behavior... is past behavior... With our current statistics of sexual abuse in our fellowship, it is likely that many children are currently being abused in fellowship by people that you know and love. These victims will not bring their stories forward until they are adults. If we don’t seriously address this abuse problem in our fellowship, abuse will continue to happen in the same widespread fashion. There are currently many allegations of abuse that are known in our fellowship and have yet to be

addressed in areas of the US and Canada and around the World. This is not acceptable, and children are currently being harmed. This information has been provided to the appropriate oversight of each area. We are waiting for action.

What does this look like? Here are a few suggestions that will help discourage abuse in the fellowship. These are not big asks and are in no way exhaustive to address the current issues.

- All allegations are taken seriously and handled immediately. Swift removal of the perpetrator and appropriate notification is essential.
- A victim supportive environment instead of a perpetrator friendly environment. Let's make sure victims are cared for and that they are the center of our efforts. Perpetrators should be removed immediately, and they can receive support for their soul and fellowship in many ways that do not involve access to children of our fellowship.
- Strong evidence-based Child Safe policies that are consistent across regions and are enforced uniformly.
- Education on how to recognize abuse, grooming behavior, act on it.
- Transparent communication about real issues in our fellowship without the fear of being labeled a problem, excommunicated, or forced out of our place. Open communication is effective at helping us recognize unhealthy patterns of behavior and to correct thinking errors.
- Focus on Jesus and true doctrine. Leave customs and traditions that are used to control and shame people. This leads to confusion and unnecessary guilt which is part of the abuse cycle.

I don't think anything on this list of suggestions is unreasonable or goes against scripture. Some areas are further along on this journey and can be roadmap to help others. If you don't agree that additional actions and safety measures are needed to make our fellowship a safe place for children, you should ask yourself... Why not?

I am thankful each day for God's Gift to me,

David Cooke

****My letter disclosing my abuse to my Parents,***

Mom and Dad,

I love you and I know that what I have to share with you this morning will be difficult for you. I feel that I have to share what is on my heart.

I have only had a brief conversation with you about the current state of affairs in our fellowship. I understand that many do not want to get involved and would rather not

know just how serious this problem with child sexual abuse and sexual assault is in the ministry and fellowship.

Here is the current situation: *Note- this is old information, the numbers reported have all increased since this letter was written.*

500+ alleged perpetrators of child sexual abuse have been reported – most have at least 3 allegations of abuse from different victims – very few have been dealt with.

Around 33 workers have been removed in the US and Canada due to Child sexual abuse and sexually inappropriate behavior

5 or more workers have left on their own

A few workers have spoken up against the abuse and have been threatened with silence or forced to leave the work.

20 or more elders have public allegations of child sexual abuse made against them

3 conventions have been cancelled in North America this year due to this issue (1 by the workers, and 2 by the owners)

It has become increasingly evident that action taken by many overseers and others in responsibility in the past, for whatever the motivation, has protected the predators and silenced the victims in misguided effort to maintain the appearance of purity in the

fellowship and ministry. I cannot accept this.

I was sexually abused frequently for a period of 2 years when I was (7-9 years old) I have never told you this because I was too traumatized to feel safe enough to share. It has affected every aspect of my life and it has taken me years to get to a place where I feel healed enough to even talk about it. I have experienced panic attacks, depression, anxiety and during my first year that I spent in the ministry, I was suicidal. I believed that the work would be a good place for me, that no one would ever want me or love me

because of my abuse. What I didn't expect was the psychological abuse and control I experienced in the ministry as well as the homosexual advances and grooming behavior that I experienced. This set off all my alarm bells and I was traumatized all over again. I thought about killing myself every day. One night I stood on a train bridge in downtown Halifax for hours wishing I had the courage to take my own life, I wanted to die so

badly.

When I think of all the children that have been hurt and traumatized for life by workers and elders that were trusted and let into our homes, I have no words to express the anger and betrayal that I feel. To know that these children will experience the mental anguish and shame that I felt for most of my life for something that is not their fault.. it has broken me all over again.

I tell you this now because I will not stop advocating for the safety of children in meetings and fellowship whatever the cost. I am 100% assured that I am on the right side of this fight. Jesus saw the children as precious and he was very clear about the wolves in sheep's clothing. There are wolves who have taken advantage of the absolute trust that we have given our ministry and those in responsibility who have protected the wolves.

It is always difficult for me to return home and I know that this has been a source of pain for you and it has limited our time together over the years. For that I am sorry. We have all been robbed of so much by sexual predators. I wish it was different but every time I visit it takes weeks for me to recover emotionally.

I write this note, not to cause you pain, but to help you understand in some small measure why I have to push for a safer fellowship and a safer ministry. To be in fellowship with a predator robs me of all my peace and rest. I cannot stay here and do nothing or I will lose myself again.

Love, David