

People make mistakes.

We do things that are misguided or wrong.

Our mistakes do not demonstrate our intent.

Mistakes can be messy, costly, and damaging.

Nevertheless, regardless of the mess, the cost or the resulting damage, we cannot look at the mistake maker and with certainty declare “you meant for this to happen!”

Only God can with certainty know the thoughts and intents of our heart.

[Psalm 139:1-2](#)

[Proverbs 21:2](#)

[1 Chronicles 28:9](#)

[Hebrews 4:12-15](#)

What then, when those thoughts and intents of our heart have been known by God? What is the aftermath of that quick and powerful piercing of our souls that leaves our intents naked and revealed before God?

In our sinful and feeble humanity, we may be quick to pronounce judgment and administer quick punishment, but the author of Hebrews shows us a different progression of events when our intents have been revealed.

Hebrews 4:12 demonstrates the severe power of the Word of God to discern all things, while verse 13 leaves those things now discerned fully out in the open, revealed and no doubt ripe for judgement if warranted, but verse 14 and 15 quickly pulls our eyes away from our intentions and to the beauty and kindness of Jesus who is this great High Priest who is not just aware of the possibly ugly intents of our hearts but is also touched by the ugly infirmities that have touched our lives at the hands of others or we have invited by placing our hands on things that have left us infirm. Between verses 12-15 there are two things being revealed, 1) the truest thoughts and intents of our hearts, and 2) that there is a Jesus who has not just observed our revealed intents like an unaffected audience, but has chosen to be touched by the very things that have touched us and have been seedbeds for those intents. Verse 16 shows us what the culmination of those two revealed things can mean for us, an opportunity to boldly come before a throne of grace to obtain two sure things, mercy and grace. The Greek verbs used for “to obtain” and “to find” speak of things that are certain, not just possibilities. There is certain mercy and sure grace in Jesus.

It is this certain mercy and sure grace that must serve as the framework through which we understand and live out [1 Corinthians 16:14](#) Do everything in love.

Everything must be done in love, even our being on guard, standing firm in faith, our being courageous and strong. Our handling of the open and exposed intents of someone's heart after they have revealed it to us through their own admission or demonstrated it through patterns of behavior, or our having to inventory the messy result of a mistake, even these tasks that take courage and strength, must be done in love.

Only then, when we have placed that certain mercy, sure grace, and active love at the forefront of our decision making can we begin to proceed with the clear, concise, and ordered difficult and often heartbreaking prescriptive tasks given us in scripture regarding how we're to address wrongs committed, both within personal relationships and within the church.

[1 Timothy 5:1, 19-21](#)

1 Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren,

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, except before two or three witnesses.

20 Those who sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

21 I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

[Matthew 18:15-17](#)

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

¹⁶ But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

In a perfect world the result of this careful examination and carrying out of necessary and spiritually significant correction would result in repentance and reconciliation.

We don't live in a perfect world.

There is no guarantee that the person on the other end of this careful examination and biblically mandated handling of wrong doings will be a willing participant. And while we

can't force their participation, in a spirit of love we must give every opportunity for them to participate in whatever long-suffering manner would be biblically responsible and safe for the church-the body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is head.

That we do not live in a perfect world has been made more clear to me and my family over the course of the last year than we ever imagined possible.

You expect the secular world to be what it is. Resistant, defiant, lawless, enemies of God ([Romans 5:10](#)).

But when you experience these characteristics at the hands of a pastor and church leaders, you aren't dealing with the unevangelized enemies of God. You're experiencing firsthand the life fruits of enemies of a different kind ([Philippians 3:18](#)).

What happens when decades long spiritual abuse and systemic negligence get slammed up against the magnifying glass of careful examination that organically occur when a pastor has a moral failing?

One of two things occur:

- 1) Repentance that leads to reconciliation, and restoration if/when appropriate
- 2) Cover up

I thank God that my family has been able to make it to safety, but this past year we have seen firsthand the evil and destruction that comes from the second option, cover up.

In early 2025 our pastor fell in a way I thought would never happen. While not a physical or sexual failing, still profane in that what he would ultimately ask us to accept is that while we believed in a God who could not lie ([Titus 1:2](#)), our pastor was permitted to lie, have it be known that he lied, and we were to be ok with it because the way in which God uses him is "beyond you and me." It was all just so out of this world.

For more than a year our pastor chose to act lawlessly, not following through with any biblical or organizational requirements for accountability or repentance.

Unfortunately, when an abusive leader is at the helm of an organization long enough, with no accountability and no biblical parameters placed on his power and control, the system itself eventually takes on an abuser role, perpetuating the very things it once loathed. Give it enough time and everyone and every aspect of the organization figures out how to comfortably exist in an uncomfortable situation. We all played a part in keeping the abusive system perfectly producing the results it was producing.

Cover up is a team effort, and teamwork makes the dream work. Or in this case, the nightmare.

After nearly four decades of being part of this system, it couldn't be ignored any longer. The system was sick, spiritual abuse was happening, and leaders would stop at nothing to cover it up.

Why would good leaders choose to help cover the sins of a compromised pastor?

Perhaps this was the first time they came face to face with the high cost of following Jesus. If this wasn't their first time, it was at the very least the first time they had encountered a cost this high.

The Bible was clear on what the qualifications of a Godly leader were:

[Titus 1:5-9](#)

5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

[1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)

1 This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

[1 Peter 5:2-3](#)

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

[Acts 20:28-30](#)

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

The Bible was clear on the nature and severity of what had occurred:

[Colossians 3:9-10](#) Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

[Ephesians 4:25](#) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

[Revelation 21:8](#) But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

[John 8:44](#) Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

In [Acts 5:1-11](#) We read the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira, who were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the seriousness of lying.

The Bible was clear on how the sin was to be handled:

[1 Timothy 5:1, 19-21](#)

[Matthew 18:15-17](#)

You would be searching in vain if you were to attempt to look for any biblical justification for what our pastor had done. It just couldn't be found in scripture. Early on the pastor and his eldest son tried to convince me that I just didn't know the Word of God well enough, because I couldn't recall a passage of scripture the son was telling me was to serve as biblical justification for what his father had done to us.

The greater dilemma arose when it was revealed that our pastor was resistant to participating in biblical correction of the issue, and there would be no other option but to proceed with those clear, concise, ordered steps outlined in scripture. [1 Timothy 5:1, 19-21](#)
[Matthew 18:15-17](#)

For those leaders who had direct access and ability to hold our pastor accountable, this was the cross that would have to be picked up in this moment ([Mark 10:21](#)). You couldn't follow Jesus in this situation without picking up this cross. It was costly. It would possibly result in the loss of those possessions in which we had placed so much trust. The applause and approval of man was the possessions in which our system trusted, and now we were being asked to surrender them and follow a clear, concise, and ordered way that was going to be painful ([Mark 10:24](#)). Worse yet, what if doing the right thing, the God thing, the Bible thing got us kicked out of favor with the person or people we wanted applause from most? What if we were kicked out of the system? ([John 12:42-43](#))

Following Jesus was going to be hard, and over the course of the next year it would prove to be too hard for our system and its leaders as they would inevitably walk away grieved, for they had great possessions ([Mark 10:22](#)). They would not be able to participate in the following of Jesus on this matter. They had walked away in spirit and action, but perhaps to their own relief they wouldn't have to walk away physically. They could stay within the safety of the system.

The benefit of having a pastor who was unwilling to participate in biblical correction was that you, the grieved leader, wouldn't have to participate in it either and any cover up justification that was being afforded the pastor would also be afforded you. As the pastor was covering for himself, he would simultaneously be covering you. If he could persuade

others that he was more virtuous, you too would become more virtuous. You were no longer having to look at the loving face of Jesus that was revealing to you what you lacked ([Mark 10:21](#)), you were no longer having to even consider separating from your possessions, that wonderful approval and applause, in fact, you would be the recipient of even more applause.

The rich young ruler was unwilling to pay the cost.

Our church leaders were unwilling to pay the cost.

They both walked away grieved.

But their grief wouldn't last long.

Grief would eventually be traded for gladness or at least relief, but this gladness would not be dispensed from the hands of a God who had extended healing ([Psalm 30:1, 11](#)), no, it would come from a pastor who was declaring there would be peace, but that too proved to be false. ([Jeremiah 23:16-17, 21](#))

The cover up launched with ferocity.

Spiritual warfare was the framework through which everything was to be understood, not the Bible.

Lying would no longer be constrained by the antiquated confines of the ninth commandment ([Deuteronomy 5:20](#)) but would be rebranded as a defensible act of spiritual warfare that could be wielded as a weapon not just against spiritual wickedness in high places, but even against flesh and blood church members that would stand in the warrior's way by asking for accountability.

The Apostle Paul's explanation of spiritual warfare ([Ephesians 6:10-18](#)) was too limiting, perhaps too antiquated as we had determined was the case with the ninth commandment, but we were ready to bring a 2025/26 newness to it that would not only promise victory over the wiles of the devil that had victimized our pastor in the present, the lamb to the slaughter (as he would later self-identify), but the revisionist approach to biblical teaching we were undertaking would also serve to retrofit all that had come before and ultimately produce some sort of reparations for the costly spiritual battles our region had faced and evidently lost over the past fifty years.

False teachings would become commonplace and a means for the character assassination of anyone who stood in opposition to the cover up or had called for accountability. Our pastor's teaching on Eagles and Crows which came nearly a year after his fall, one of many but by far his most memorable cover up sermon, exemplifies this well.

Eagles are glorious. Our national bird. Apex predators that no one or nothing would dare come against or take on. You and I could be eagles, perhaps. Well, not me. I was a different kind of bird. See, there was only one bird that would be silly enough to try to attack an eagle. The crow. While this isn't true, it served the agenda well. Crows are scavengers who eat dead things who don't deserve our energy. Don't engage, elevate!

This eagle vs. crow dialogue is a popular pseudo spiritual Facebook post topic, a fact that was pointed out to me by a church board member shortly after the sermon was delivered. By now we had grown accustomed to being preached to from Facebook posts, political news stories, and conspiracy theories usually centered around AI. This isn't hyperbole. This was our lived experience for over a year. Week after week, you never knew what you were going to get, unless something big had happened in the news, like the assassination of Charlie Kirk, then you knew you were going to hear something that would liken our pastor to the assumed truth teller that Charlie Kirk was, and like Charlie's opposition, our pastor had enemies who just wanted to silence the truth, his truth. But no one was waging war against truth, at least none of us members were. We were asking for the truth. Begging for it.

Regarding eagles and crows, by carefully omitting words and splicing together scriptures our pastor could be more convincing than a Facebook post, he could present a secular superstitious view of crows as biblical. While this view couldn't be found in scripture, it was presented as one that was, quoting [Leviticus 11:13](#), but only the first half, that states **“And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination:”** And then skipping ahead to [Leviticus 11:15](#), **“Every raven(crow) after his kind;”** read as if it was one continuous verse, which it is not. Then, speaking of crows(ravens), he went on to say “and so there's just a part of some things that are not Holy. This makes crows symbolic of things that do not belong in God's Holy order.” “The negative spiritual symbol of crows is harassment, and distraction, persistent annoyance, kind of a mental warfare, repeated on attacks meant to wear down faith. These are things that are symbolic.”

The only problem, however, was that this symbolism is not found in scripture. It didn't exist. It wasn't true. The Bible didn't teach this. This was false.

The bible did have a few mentions of ravens but those were at worst neutral descriptions of avian behavior, at best pleasant reminders of goodness. Perhaps these ravens were different from the ones sent by God to minister to Elijah ([1 Kings 17:3-6](#)), or weren't the ones Jesus told us to consider in Luke, the ones that highlight God's provision in that they neither sow nor reap but are fed ([Luke 12:24](#)). Either way, these weren't the ravens of the Bible.

However, our pastor wasn't the only teacher who had found usefulness in a teaching of Eagles and crows for gain (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkFZJRvD-6Q>). Celebrity prosperity gospel pastor Joel Osteen taught an eerily similar, almost verbatim lesson years prior. While both these teachers may have had different gains in mind, our pastor took it a step further and had done something even Osteen wouldn't do, our pastor created a teaching of eagles and crows as a "holy order." To do this he had to overlook the disturbing fact that the same scriptures he spliced together to evidence the unholy symbolism of the crow had first listed the eagle as an abomination. An order repeated in [Deuteronomy 14:12](#). Nevertheless, it was clearly and loudly exclaimed to all the unholy crows present, "peck on stupid!" We knew who the eagle was, and we knew who the crows were.

Isolation would be the method of policing the information highway and maintaining control of the false narrative being platformed and perpetuated by our pastor and other complicit leaders. They had to keep everything in house. There could be no outside involvement. At first glance this reasoning seems justifiable, it's our mess we'll clean it up. What then when it proved to be uncleanable and all the failed attempts or cover-up sermons only resulted in smearing the mess further across people and families who were innocent but had only heard half-truth, or no truth at all?

We had become a full-fledged postmodern church, truth was relative. It had to be. Because if we believed in absolute truth we would have to believe in the Bible and the God of the Bible, but those weren't relative. Those were forever settled. Those were absolute, but we were absolutely not going to be constrained by them. The leaders who at the genesis of this mess had asked for accountability were kept separate and allowed themselves to be kept separate from each other for six months. No follow up. No meetings. No follow through.

Even if the pastor had wanted to confess and address his sin before the church, he would tell me in late 2025 that the Holy Ghost was preventing him from doing so. God was stopping this man from dealing with his unrepented sin, but he explained to me that his board of leaders was "growing to learn that what he had done was the right thing."

We were no longer sheep being shepherded.

The sheep were now forced to maintain an upward gaze as our shepherd was now a soaring eagle. We were to be pastored from the skies. Our pastor was not just our pastor, but we were to understand that he was now operating under a renewed authority from God to defeat the spirit of our area, a job that was his alone and not ours. Where was our food to come from? Who was watching the gate? What of the wolves that would want to creep in unawares? No matter! Look up! Behold the eagle.

If the eagle didn't hold your gaze, or if you asked questions, you too would experience a metamorphosis like the shepherd had. You went from sheep to crow. A nuisance, a scavenger pecking at the neck of the eagle. The church was asked to soar to higher altitude in an attempt to suffocate the crows. In God's holy order, crows couldn't survive at the higher elevation. Go up! Higher! The higher we went, the less air the crows would have and hopefully this lack of oxygen would force the crows to abandon their attack. In one prayer meeting our pastor exclaimed "if we can get in the glory enough, we won't have to rebuke anyone!" What? Were we to understand that creating a spiritual moment would negate the need for biblical correction? Yes, that is exactly what we were expected to understand, believe, and perpetuate. And for more than a year we did exactly that, we learned to circumvent the truth by creating a spiritual moment.

Intensely focused prayer could shift the atmosphere, if we could all get on the same page for three minutes, we could really shift some things. I don't know why, but three minutes would often be mentioned, I don't believe it had any significance but just became a common turn of phrase. We called the glory, we released our shouts, often while being chastised by our pastor that people watching football games show more enthusiasm than we were. We worshiped a lot as a demonstration to the devil that we meant business. Lots of talking to the enemy, or trying to offend the devil, to show just how much we loved the Lord. Emotions ran high, and sometimes it even felt like hope could begin to emerge. There were a few times throughout the year where a few of us would talk after a church service and would say something like "did you notice it? It almost seemed like pastor was going to say something about what he did, it felt like he was going to do the right thing." That never proved to be anything more than a feeling.

We had to keep going higher. Don't engage, elevate!

We didn't have time for cognitive reasoning, logic, or intellect. Not only were those a waste of time, but they were also the tools of the enemy against the spiritual objective we had to accomplish. Elevation above all else. But when would we know if we had gone high enough? The answer: When there were no more crows pecking for truth!

The elevation would cut off the crow's oxygen. Lack of oxygen is terrifying.

Even more so when friends and loved ones stand watch as you choke and gasp.

Was the church achieving higher elevation?

No matter, the crows were choking.

First there had been a board of leaders that pecked at the eagle asking for accountability at least once, but that hadn't lasted long. Then there were two crows who had made multiple

attempts to seek resolution, one would eventually be choked out and reverse course. There remained at least one crow that just kept pecking. How much higher would we have to go to choke out this one? Would choking be sufficient in silencing this crow?

Maybe, maybe not, but it wasn't a risk the pastor could take.

He would need a large sword.

Threats of death and destruction are large swords that carry a mighty blow, even more so when they're wielded against "your precious family." I was to learn of this sword in a phone call with my pastor in mid-December. He asked me to engage with him in public, exchange niceties, I could only assume this would be so others would perceive our interaction as agreeability between the two of us. He assured me that "no one on the board would think that you've changed your mind. They won't think less of you." The overall purpose of the discussion was to ask for my agreeability so we could "have a good Christmas" and remind me that the pastor would "hate to see anything happen to my precious family," after it was explained that an unnamed "high ranking spiritual leader" had told him to wield a large sword against his opposition. Clearly, I was his opposition.

According to him, I had become his opposition when my wife and I stepped down as youth pastors a year prior in 2024, so we could focus on raising our two-year-old daughter and begin a series of four invasive and personal surgical operations that would present a long and delicate healing/recovery process. We had volunteered for four years, the entirety of the COVID pandemic, non-stop through a six month miscarriage, the eventual pregnancy and birth of our daughter, holding down jobs, but what had made me the pastor's opposition was that I had told him we were stepping down, instead of asking him if we could step down. By doing this, my telling him instead of asking, he explained to me that I had walked away from the most effective ministry of my life and stepped into the seat of judgement against the office of pastor. He couldn't fathom that his current moral failing was the actual thing that set us in opposition, it had to have been when I walked away from my volunteer position, he perceived it as walking away from him. I explained to him that as things stood currently, I couldn't be on the same page with him and maintain a clean conscience before God. Nonetheless, he was the victim. The following Sunday we exchanged niceties. I shook his hand; he complimented my suit. Mission accomplished.

None of this made sense. Why would an eagle need a crow to shake his hand? The pastor had emerged triumphant. Why did it matter what I thought? I was quiet now and had been so since September when I made my final appeal to our church board. I was the only church member that I knew of that had finally been able to obtain a copy of our church

bylaws which evidenced that our pastor had in fact lied, but I had kept them between me and the church board. There was no public menace.

Our family had already been iced out. People didn't engage with us, they knew we were relentless crows that would ask for accountability and truth at every opportunity, so it was safer for them to not engage, lest they be labeled a crow.

Sure, death has no sting and the grave no victory ([1 Corinthians 15:55](#)), but that isn't the case for crows. While we know we shouldn't fear men who can kill our bodies ([Matthew 10:28](#)), if the pastor brings the sword against you, it is to be understood that he is acting on behalf of God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

I accepted the reality that I would have to be destroyed. My hope was that the system would be satisfied destroying me alone, and maybe my wife and daughter could be spared.

It's a weird feeling to be in church services where you understand that many people present would feel a sense of relief if you were destroyed. For some it would bring the end of the pecking that had irritated them for a year, and for others it would serve as proof that the covert curses our pastor had spoken over his perceived enemies were in fact true prophecies. Either way, you knew that if something bad happened to you or your family the best you would get from people who had once been your close friends, people whose children you had ministered to and cared for as their youth pastor, even people that had held you as a baby, would just be a courteous head shake and wide eyes, that non-committal gesture we make when we don't want to show agreement or disagreement. Ambiguous. Ambiguity is the life blood of spiritual abuse.

What wasn't ambiguous was that our pastor had sinned against the church body.

He and his board of leaders had covered it up.

No true repentance had been made.

I had not done the thing that was in question, yet me and my family were the ones who were facing destruction.

My character was the topic of discussion once board meetings resumed, and board members would call me to tell me they defended me. But why? Were they more comfortable discussing the person who was asking questions and calling for accountability, than they were holding accountable the person who had done the thing that brought us to this moment? What was the charge against me? Pecking?

Early this spring, in a member meeting, the pastor declared that the attack against him was to end immediately. Maximum elevation had been achieved. No more pecking would be

tolerated. He was the victim. His fall was a simple misunderstanding of him being caught off guard and while he had done a thing that was not ideal, he was not a creep who hated women. Far from it, he was like a lamb to the slaughter ([Isaiah 53:7](#)). It was explained to us that many leaders and pastors who together represented 250 churches were applauding what he did to us and beyond that, one leader was so incensed by our actions that he wanted to visit us in person to do something to us that “we wouldn’t like”. What sword was this mystery leader to wield against us? What were our charges? While nothing was made clear during this fauxpology, one thing was certain: the eagle had landed.

Our pastor had safely touched down on the face of the moon. He wasn’t even in our atmosphere anymore. He had been elevated beyond any biblical mandates or constraints placed on pastors in scripture, let alone any organizational or legal requirements of integrity and order. He was a spiritual warrior, championing spiritual territorial mapping.

Spiritual warfare is real; the Bible tell us so. The Bible also tells us where it’s happening, how it’s happening, what our involvement is, what our objective is, what armor we wear, what weapon we use, and where/when the victory will come.

The bible doesn’t directly command, teach, or instruct Christians to engage in spiritual mapping, nor does it tell us to battle spirits over geographical areas, or eras of time. Because of this, the bible can’t be used as the rules of warfare on this front. This requires a rulebook made by man. This is the book our pastor had been authoring since early 2025. A rulebook not rooted in the forever settled Word of God, but in non-authoritative human experience. A rule book with one man as primary author, later joined by a list of supporting authors-leaders, and promoted and circulated by sheep who just didn’t want to get involved or risk being labeled a crow.

What made this cover up so successful wasn’t the efforts of the complicit leaders, sure what they had done or more importantly not done was inexcusable and unquestionably disqualified them from leadership, but they were in way over their heads in dealing with our pastor. Our pastor had already survived a devastating church split decades earlier in which he and another family member were the two opposing parties, but together they left a trail of bodies that if you didn’t know better you would assume had been the result of at least ten angry leaders. He wasn’t about to let this shameful new thing be the bookend to his ministry that had already been shrouded in so much embarrassing controversy.

The key to the success of this cover up was our pastor’s ability to shift his own personal moral failings into the realm of spirituality. Not just the spiritual reality we understand as part of our everyday existence, the kind the Apostle Paul writes about, but a spiritual warfare reality in which he was the general, made all the rules, and the only ones that could

understand his methodology were a supporting fistful of white knuckled leaders from other states who had heard a version of events from a man who clearly struggled with telling the truth, but they were willing to fly in and inflict pain at a moment's notice. This was the method.

If there was any doubt in our mind that the pastor meant business, it was made very clear when a member present at this meeting asked when the church would be given opportunity to address this betrayal by the pastor, and we were told that we wouldn't.

Furthermore, we were put on notice that we should now be expecting people in our church to develop cancer. The spiritual cancer that the pastor claimed had been in our midst, would now be manifesting in the bodies. Crows only? One would have to assume.

A big claim for sure, but one that was relatively easy to accept given that for the past two years our church had lost two precious friends to cancer, both very unexpected. This was on-brand for our system. Covert curses sputtered out like prophecies.

And yet even amid this madness, not just the member meeting but the entire year prior, our family had hope. We knew the teachings of Jesus, that bad things could happen to anyone, eagle and crow alike, but that we wouldn't be alone when they did. Jesus was with us, even to the end of the world. We knew and held close the dialogue of [John 14-16](#), that the Holy Ghost was not only a teacher but would bring to our remembrance the things Jesus had said, so we didn't have to rely on the ever-changing Spiritual Warfare handbook the eagle had authored, we could rely on the forever settled Word of God. And we knew [Deuteronomy 13](#) would be what we had to obey even if these prophecies of illness came true, and they very well may, but even then if the one speaking them over us was asking us to believe and follow a different god, a god who not only could lie, but ordered his generals to lie to the church in the course of spiritual warfare, we weren't to follow him!

Yes, the cover up was successful.

The pastor's method of shifting human failings into an unknown spiritual reality was effective. But what would ultimately seal the deal for our sick system wasn't the method, but the sad reality that we sheep were biblically illiterate when it all started and later on when we began independent learning of the true Word of God, it had come too late to salvage a system that was bent on silencing anyone who asked questions. That the system will continue to run, we have no doubt. But an operational system does not a good system make.

We didn't know the Word of God. Not the way we should have. Even today there are sheep still sacrificing their wives and children at the altar of the system, while they pray for a sign,

anything. Anything that will give them an out from having to pick up the very costly cross they don't want to pick up, so they can follow Jesus.

No out is coming. No sign. No word.

Because they're looking for something that will be contrary to the forever settled Word of God. God can't defy his character. He can't give you the thing that would make the pastor's wrong, right.

You'll be waiting till you die, so the prayer becomes that your family would outlive you so that they can one day find a passageway to safety. A passageway for which you withheld the keys while you waited for a sign ([Luke 11:52](#)), and they were made merchandise of ([2 Peter 2:3](#)).

I have no doubt many read their bibles. But do they understand it? We hope. But what of those scriptures that stand in opposition to every single act of spiritual tyranny a pastor and his complicit applause addicted leaders have committed? Toss em'! Refer to the spiritual warfare rule book! When in doubt, defer to the pastor. He will teach you and guide you in all things that will make this hellish reality of corruption something palatable and digestible.

And when you find yourself in need of a new doctrine of deflection, man can create it. Should we repent? Nope! You don't even have to confess specific sins, just get the joy like David did in [Psalm 51:12](#). This is not hyperbole. We sat and listened to this be sermonized.

After all, corruption is only corruption if you call it corruption, right? Well, no, it's still corruption. Call it spiritual warfare, it's still corruption. Spirit of the age? Nope, still just lying.

Well after all, this is war, and in war the ends always justify the means, right? Nope. No, even war has rules that have been instituted to prevent inhumane acts of evil. And when those rules are violated. It's called a war crime.

So, whether you call it corruption or a war crime, it's not of God.

Even if you call it a Holy War. It's not of God. It's not true. It never will be.

When pastors and leaders are permitted to step outside the forever settled Word of God for the handling of any church matter, even once, you never again get to expect use of biblical framework in the handling of any situation in the future. You forfeit one of the most effective safeguards given the church, of which Jesus Christ is the head.

This time it was lying.

What's next?

Look around you. You won't need to look very hard to identify countless spiritual war crimes and inhumane acts being perpetrated against sheep in the church daily, all around our nation. It's in the news. It's in your family history. It's your friends, your loved ones.

The trail of bodies is not in some far-off place, remote and obscure. It's in our own backyards. Simply take your eyes off the eagle for one moment and you'll see it. Countless casualties. Many men, but mostly women and children. Ask me how I know. I've lived it. I've buried family members in this system. But our buried aren't in the ground, they walk amongst us and we tell ourselves spiritual myths created by man so we can feel justified or better about the ceremonial fistful of dirt we threw on them when they were looking up at us from life's six foot deep holes and leaders and our system deemed them too problematic or not loyal enough to be pulled out and we held wide the double doors for them to exit the synagogue, but then acted surprised when they finally did say "goodbye." Buried alive. I almost allowed my wife and daughter to be counted amongst these perished.

And more times than not we've stood watch while they've gasped and choked for air, because we had to have our sign. Feeling around in the dark for a fig leaf large enough to cover our shame, in the hopes that maybe the shame can be covered and we'll get to keep some of our most treasured possessions...the applause and approval of men.

Why did we leave?

Because as the leader of my home, a husband, father to a daughter, I knew eventually the prey would become the predator. It's the natural progression of all things profane. That which was once innocent or at least ignorant, will eventually become the embodiment of the very thing that tried to devour them, and the sickness continues. Men in churches who are abused by leaders and a sick system will eventually become the sick system and the abusive leaders they once loathed. It's the only way you make it out alive. But it's not really living. You're a spiritual zombie. Physically present and compliant, but mentally and spiritually crying out for something different. You'll find yourself saying time and again: "Did you feel it? It almost seemed like he was going to do the right thing?" Hope deferred, indefinitely.

Be careful while looking for your sign. Heaven forbid upon the conclusion of your looking you finally see that the predator wasn't in a pulpit or platform separate from your home, but your waiting and seeking for things outside the Word of God became the very thing that devoured the sheep so close and precious to you.

The funny thing about the truth is that it really is absolute.

It's not relative at all.

Jesus is THE way THE truth THE life ([John 14:6](#)).

Why look ye for a sign? You already have the light. You have the forever settled Word of God. You are filled with HIS spirit.

[John 12:36-37](#)

36 Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

37 Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

Signs are of no value apart from the action they illicit. But signs can't force you into right action. Signs may come and go, and you can miss them. Signs cannot demand to be believed, just ask Jesus!

The light has come. Jesus is that light. The revealed Word of God is given us and is good for all things in the handling of our lives. The Holy Ghost teaches us and brings to our remembrance the things Jesus has said.

What sign do we seek?

Peace?

I know too well how the “I do/don't have peace about it” endless loop works. You have a tough decision to make; you're torn between two realities. We pray but we're still unsure. So, we take a page out of Gideon's playbook and start laying out fleeces ([Judges 6:36-40](#)). If this, then that, or if that, then this, and so on. We're not talking about picking paint colors, we're talking about lives. Yes, the same dilemma Gideon was faced with, living and dying and taking other people with him into whatever outcome lay before. But when we read about Gideon's fleece experiment in context, we realize what we're seeing is not a celebrated pattern of decision making meant for us to follow, it's a clear lack of faith. God had already promised Gideon sure victory. Gideon was testing God. The very thing scripture tells us not to do ([Deuteronomy 6:16](#)), in fact Jesus is so resolute on this concept of not testing God that when he's face to face with the devil in the wilderness Jesus reveals this testing of God is the method of manipulation the devil was attempting, and instead of performing any signs, Jesus relies on what is “written” to bring this spiritual battle to an end for the day ([Matthew 4:7](#)).

In his extravagant grace and mercy God withheld his hot anger from Gideon, despite his lack of faith and fear. I can't judge Gideon, but I can't follow him in this decision-making

process either. I must fearlessly follow Jesus and know I too can rely on what is “written” ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)).

When you’re in the midst of a dysfunctional system that oils its gears with greasy anger, twisting of scripture, and relies on spiritual mysticism instead of the things of God that are revealed and forever settled in His Word and echoed in us by the indwelling Spirit of Truth that we were promised the Holy Ghost would be ([John 14](#)), there is no peace. Thank God! For it is that very lack of peace that leads us to say “hey, something isn’t right here!”

And when that lack of rightness agitates your spirit enough and you know it’s time for action you start looking at those tracing paper thin Bible pages a little differently. You’re a little hungrier than you were before. Your prayers actually get a little quieter than they have been because now you’re not just trying to cultivate a spiritual feeling, you’re really thinking about what you’re asking God, you start seeing the lives of your family that hang in the balance, and when that God given intellect he’s blessed you with kicks in and that renewed mind starts being able to formulate cognitive reasoning that’s informed by scripture and resurrection power you realize that what you’ve read in all these New Testament letters to the churches is just how much the heart cry of the writers was that these precious believers would be on guard for falseness in the church, even more than the world.

The wickedness of the world wasn’t foreign to them, many of them had come out from that wickedness, they could spot it a mile away. But there was a mixing of the profane and the sacred that was happening in the church, and it seemed convincing and it sounded spiritual, and it felt more comfortable because it had similarities to what they had always known before, and it was rooted in loyalty to a system they were familiar with and an honor culture dedicated to man that wasn’t going to lead them anywhere but back into bondage and ultimately death.

Read it for yourself! The book of Hebrews will break your heart, because you understand the struggle of wanting to remain where you’ve always been. Read Romans and you’ll understand that it’s not enough to just have truth, but it must be held in righteousness ([Romans 1:18](#)). And that before you find yourself worshiping the creature more than the creator you must first be willing to change the truth of God into a lie ([Romans 1:25](#)). Realizing that what proceeds a reprobate mind is that willingness to check your mind at the door and not retain God in your knowledge ([Romans 1:28](#)). Being led by sensuality, those things that appeal to our senses, and realizing that our worship has turned into some sort of pseudo-Christian spell casting that we’re hoping will generate enough of an emotional high to hypnotize us into agreeance with things that are contrary to the very nature of God.

Friend, Jesus doesn't need you out of your mind, he doesn't need you just operating in your emotions, he doesn't need you out of balance in any way. He wants you whole and assessing things with a renewed mind ([Romans 12:2](#))

[Matthew 22:37-38](#)

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

If the only way you can get through a church service is to compartmentalize or shut part of yourself down or off in an effort to power through till the dismissal, there's your sign that something isn't right.

If you find yourself needing to be more numb each time you gather so you can tune out angry professions of personal preference or political commentary, how are you being edified? Encouraged? More importantly, how are you being protected and corrected?

If you're looking for a sign that dismisses you from having to pick up the costly cross to follow Jesus, a sign that takes away all internal conflict and discomfort, you will walk away grieved. That's a reality, but it doesn't have to be your reality.

Stay, leave, believe, don't believe, trust, don't trust, ask, don't ask, feel, don't feel. The endless ticker tape that runs through your mind. I'm not here to add to that, so I will be very clear with you. I'm not bored. I need no followers. I don't need your money. I don't need you to believe me, nor believe in me. I don't even need your support, and I mean that in as kind a manner as possible. This isn't a transactional moment.

More than knowing the details of the sick system, I want you to understand that you do NOT have to walk away from God nor sound biblical doctrine to be safe. That is NEVER the only option. God isn't the problem, neither is the bible. Do not allow the truth to be spoken evil of because of the corruption of a handful of corrupt men and a sick system ([2 Peter 2:1-3](#)).

Whether you stay or leave a sick system, remember this is tale old as time. It's been happening since the beginning and will continue till that epic [Revelation 20:10](#) moment where the devil is defeated once and for all. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Learn how to read the Bible. Read it. Pray, talk with God. He cares, he listens, he talks back, first and foremost through scripture. Know his voice. If it's God, it will echo what scripture has already said. We need illumination of what is written and who God is and has always been, not new revelation that adds to what is already established. Learn what worship really is supposed to be, so you won't be manipulated into using it like a spell or enchantment to shift atmospheres or circumvent truth. Educate yourself on spiritual abuse and toxic faith

systems, what they are, what they aren't, how to identify them. How to survive them, because you will not change them.

But in all this doing. In all this learning. In all this illumination. Let it be done in love. The love of Christ. The love of your family. The love of a truth that is strong enough to not shy away from tough questions. A truth that loves the light and demonstrates in every way that it is wrought in God.

Stop the bleeding where and when you can. First for yourself, so you can soberly help the ones you love.

Jesus heals.

Jesus makes dead things alive again.

In [John 11](#) Jesus brings his friend Lazarus back from the dead. Jesus does the calling forth and does the miracle. But before the calling forth, Jesus asked humans to participate in the rolling back of the stone that covered the cave where death appeared to have already had the final say. A peaceful moment? Not even in the slightest! An uncomfortable and potentially stinky moment to be certain.

Then the miracle emerges, Lazarus comes forth. What was dead had been made alive again. An event that would serve as the definitive moment for a corrupt religious system that had missed the turn because their obsession with maintaining whatever amount of position and power they had been able to negotiate for and elevate to in a political climate that stood for everything they claimed to hate, but were desperately jealous for ([John 11:48](#)). A system of blind fools who appeared righteous unto men but had been swallowed up by hypocrisy, iniquity, extortion, excess, and was producing members who were twice as bad as the system that had birthed them ([Matthew 23](#)). This is where it would be decided that a large sword would be the only way to handle this Jesus. He had to go ([John 11:53](#)).

Even then, this Jesus who at all times knew all men, even the most secret intents of their heart ([John 2:24-25](#)), this Jesus, once Lazarus had walked out of that cave, again looks to the people to conclude this moment, to be agents of freedom under his command to help untangle Lazarus from the grave things that bound him. "Loose him, and let him go." [John 11:44](#)

People. Freedom is not passive. We are called to be active participants in being free of things that would bury us alive or keep us bound and living incomplete. Jesus invites us to engage. Participate. Carrying a cross and following is active. There is some walking involved. It's ok if it feels uncomfortable in the beginning, it's new. The good news is that Jesus isn't asking us to forge a new path, he's asking us to follow HIS, while he heals and fills in the old well-worn pathways in our hearts and minds that didn't lead to good things.

In that following we have a light and lamp to help make those steps a little less intimidating ([Psalm 119:105](#)).

So, you're being spiritually abused, what do you do? Quit God? Hate the church? Nah. No sick system or abusive leader is worth you living through hell on earth just to abandon the truth you so deeply love and cherish even if it's been a little or a lot mishandled. This is not your end. It may be the end of an era, but you aren't an era. You're not a bird, despite what you may have been brainwashed into believing. You're a person who until you take your final breath gets the chance to start over again, and again, and again.

There is resurrection power in Jesus ([Romans 8:11](#)).

Dry bones can live again ([Ezekiel 37:5](#)).

Spiritual abuse doesn't have to result in our crash out. But will we be willing to roll stones back, and help loose each other from the trappings of death things?

Some may continue to seek signs, but as for me and my house, we're rolling stones back and trusting God during the necessary uncomfortable and unpeaceable moments that loosing grave clothes can challenge us with. No need to be buried alive. Not today, not ever.

Jesus, help me to be fearless to follow you.

To know you.

To know your voice.

To know your word.

To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that I might be filled with all the fulness of God. ([Ephesians 3:19](#))

Whatever you have for me God, I want it.