

Dear Precious Soul,

You have been on my heart. I am a survivor of adult clergy sexual abuse and shared my story on a [podcast](#) a year ago. My former pastor abused me for many years after I came to his church as a new believer seeking refuge after a personal crisis. I was 21, and he groomed me using spiritualized language. Silenced by fear and other coercive control tactics he employed, I remained single as he abused me, convincing others I never wanted to marry when, in reality, the abuser was convincing me that God wanted me single to serve Him.

However, this spiritualized control tactic was only to serve the predator. I never thought I would be free. I never thought I would have a future outside the jail cell he locked me in. The abusive pastor entrapped me, and I would physically harm myself. I was trauma-bonded to the pastor, so I was under the delusion that he loved me, and I loved him. But at the same time, I hated him for how he stole my life from me. I hated and was disgusted by him, but I disassociated to survive.

I finally got out when someone blew the whistle on the toxic church environment. The church, which operated more like a cult, was outed as a spiritually abusive place, and a young woman spoke up as to how the pastor was speaking inappropriately toward her (attempting to groom her). There were questions about my “relationship” with this abusive pastor. Despite him claiming he had compromising images of me, which I do not know how he secured, I finally disclosed the abuse, and people were shocked that it was worse than they had imagined. I disclosed the abuse to an amazing, supportive pastor from another church and a former church member. That former member, not understanding the situation correctly or maybe out of his own pain, told everyone another story—a narrative of consent that, for many years, harmed me more profoundly than the abuse itself.

What complicated the situation more was that we were all part of an abusive system that a narcissistic, predatory leader had built. So, I apologized to those I had led in a toxic way—those I had harmed as I tried to survive a system designed to control us and rob me of so many precious years of my life that I would never get back. All the while, I had to wrestle with the reality that I was targeted and exploited by a predator. That “church” is now defunct. If the abuse occurred in one of the [13 states and DC](#) where clergy sexual misconduct is illegal, that predatory pastor would be declared the criminal he is. I took the pastor to court for a restraining order, but the judge didn’t grant it due to “lack of evidence.” I fled my home and almost all my belongings to get away.

I remember feeling the weight, almost literally, come off me when I settled in my heart to disclose and when I was finally able to step down from the leadership position and just be an average person, not the image of glory the abusive pastor wanted me to be to “prove” that God blessed his abuse of me. Jumping off the stage of the show the abusive pastor was directing was unbelievably freeing. I finally got to be me and to know me, finally free from the shackles of the pastor’s coercive control and sexual abuse.

I want you to know that today, I am happy and healthy. I have the family I never dreamed I could have—the family and the freedom the predator never wanted me to have. I wish I could invite you into my life today to see what the Lord has done. Yes, I have post-traumatic stress, and I see a trauma therapist weekly for \$150.00/session even though a decade has passed. Yes, I can never get those stolen years back. Yes, I use a pseudonym because some people are uneducated about clergy sexual abuse of adults, and so they victim shame. But the tide is turning. Many do understand or genuinely desire to understand better. There is hope, and healing is possible. I am no longer a prisoner of the perpetrator’s abuse.

A question I asked myself that helped me was: If I had met another pastor, a healthy and Christ-like shepherd instead of a predatory person skilled in coercive control, who would I be today? I found that question so healing. I came to the pastor as a new believer hungry for God. Had I encountered a godly pastor, my life would’ve looked different. I can’t change that now. But I recognize that God sees and knows, and as the Good Shepherd, He seeks us out.

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel

shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.” Ezekiel 34:7-16

As I shared, I told my story on a [podcast](#) a year ago. Experts on the topic of clergy sexual abuse of adults, human trafficking, and counseling were also guests on this podcast series. They affirmed my story as one of abuse. There are educated people who understand, care, and want to support survivors. I am one of them. You are loved.

In Christ and with hope,  
Tamra