

Acts of Faith

In faith communities like the Duggars, abuse victims are encouraged to be filled with grace. It's not that simple.

By Mary DeMuth May 22

It's never simply over.

Yesterday was hard for me. I opened my computer to the news of several instances of sexual abuse reported (within the church), including the [claims about Josh Duggar's gross indiscretions](#) and his subsequent confession. And something in me sunk, particularly because of this statement by his parents: "Even though we would never choose to go through something so terrible, each one of our family members drew closer to God."

[\[Josh Duggar apologizes amid molestation allegations, quits Family Research Council\]](#)

While I'm grateful that this travesty produced fruit and closeness, as a victim of sexual abuse, I am skeptical. Though we may not know the details of recovery during these years, it's easy to sweep something away by pointing to God in a statement.

But it's not so simple to get over sexual violation. Recovery takes years of stops and starts, and forgiveness is not a one-time easy decision, particularly if it's demanded or expected right away for the sake of peace and putting something shameful behind you.

Often we see in communities of faith that victims are admonished to be grace-like, offering instant forgiveness to their abuser as if it could be doled out like a trinket or candy. And when someone is pressured to "be like Jesus" and forgive swiftly, often this pressure causes harm.

Sexual violation cuts deeply. It eats away at worth, esteem and personhood. I believe it is one of Satan's greatest weapons against humanity, paving the road for future self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts, feelings of utter worthlessness, sexual dysfunction, guilt, shame and any manner of disorders. And moving beyond it is excruciating, long and sometimes debilitating.

[\[How do evangelicals view the Duggars? It's complicated.\]](#)

Instant forgiveness and “putting it behind you” only delays the healing process, a journey that only begins by stating the awfulness of the violation. By shoving the story under the rug for the sake of your family or church community, you may save the perpetrator’s reputation and the reputation of those near him or her, but you lose important ground in becoming free.

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An untold story never heals. It just festers until it comes out in unwanted behavior.

Easy “forgivism” may gloss over the terrible situation in the short term, but it reinforces to everyone that the egregious, soul-siphoning sin committed against the victim was trivial, easy to get over. It forgets Jesus’ strong [admonition](#) that “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Of course I’m not advocating bitterness. And I fully welcome grace. God has the most beautiful ability to make beauty from ashes, and we are most like Him when we extend forgiveness. But that journey must be allowed to take the course in due time, not rushed, not forced, not prescribed.

I first forgave the teenage boys who molested me as a five-year-old when I was in college, a decade and a half after they spent a year violating and demeaning me. In that moment, I believed, naively, that I was done, that I would never have to revisit the pain of that year.

Instead, I found that healing happens in layers.

When I got married, my sexually abused past roared to life, and, once again, I had to choose forgiveness. I had to seek more counseling. My husband had to choose to forgive what those boys did too. Even today, when I suffer a

flashback of memory, triggered by yesterday's news, I have to breathe out forgiveness. I finally had the courage to [write](#) it all down 41 years post-abuse. But even so, today I am shaky and mad.

[\[Huckabee backs Josh Duggar, slams those 'sensationalizing' molestation allegations\]](#)

Those who know me see great redemption (thanks to Jesus, who took on my sin, the perpetrator's sin, and all sexual sin upon his shoulders). They see joy. They see a changed life. But I would be perpetrating a myth if I told folks it was simple and easy to get past it.

I don't know the dynamic of the Duggar home other than what's portrayed on TV and through their public statements yesterday. I hope and pray that they are working through this very dark issue and finding hope and healing through honesty and authenticity. But I also hope that this situation doesn't shame victims into thinking they're less-than if they struggle still to forgive the person who stole their innocence.

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