

July 11, 2022

Dear Eastview leadership,

In the last couple of years, the amount of heartbreak from the unraveled scandals of white evangelical churches seems unending. I have read articles on Willow Creek, Ravi Zacharias, Bruxy Cavey and The Meeting House, Hillsong, Mars Hill, Christianity Today, and most recently the SBC. If I've learned anything from these stories it's that God cares very much about truth, that He is close to the brokenhearted, and that He will not be mocked.

I am writing to express my concerns that the leadership of Eastview Christian Church has allowed a potential case of clergy sexual abuse to occur without a proper investigation. I am also writing to express my concerns about a potential culture of silencing, cover-up, and spiritual abuse. Because of these concerns that I will disclose in further detail within this letter, I am requesting an independent, trained, trauma-informed, third-party investigation to be done.

Timeline

Early on in my career at Eastview, in May 2013, Caleb Baker called me to a private meeting on a Saturday night (May 4, 2013) at the Starbucks at College Hills to tell me he had heard from God that we were supposed to be together and even to be married. He added that he had spoken with people in his life, including his father, Mike Baker, about this and they had confirmed his sensings.

I was extremely caught off guard — my relationship with Caleb was completely platonic. He had never conveyed interest in me before this point, and I had certainly not conveyed interest in him. I was also under the impression that there was a policy that does not allow people on the same team to be in a relationship like that. Caleb assured me that there was no such policy, and his dad supported this so it did not really matter.

I felt uncomfortable, and over the course of several conversations, I informed Caleb I was not open to any further discussion until Brooke Yarbrough, who was my direct report at the time, was filled in. This is when Caleb became frustrated with me and told me Brooke did not need to know. He was adamant that I did not share with her, and just to move forward with him. When it became apparent that this was not a boundary I would allow him to cross, he relented and I spoke with Brooke about the predicament.

Brooke took this situation to Jason Smith [the family pastor at Eastview and someone who sat on Mike Baker's leadership team] who confirmed there was no official policy, but, from what I understood, discouraged this relationship to unfold. When I shared what I had learned with Caleb, he was angry and followed up with me to inform me he had talked with Jason personally as well as his father. He told me that they were okay with us being together if I wanted to move forward.

I asked Caleb to give me a month to pray without him contacting me outside of work (I think this was July 2013). I also asked him to never contact me during that month about this situation, so I could discern for myself what God had for me. Caleb did not make it through the month (around 2 weeks) before he texted me late at night to ask me for my thoughts about us

being together. This spurred me to meet with him at Panera to inform him this was definitely not something I wanted to participate in. I shared with him I was very sure and did not want to have any further discussions about this. Very soon after, he began publicly dating [redacted] [maiden name: [redacted]].

Over the course of many months, Caleb and I were able to return to amicable terms personally. In June 2014, the weekend before I was to travel home for my friend's wedding in New Hampshire, after the 5 pm service I found a note inside my car on my dashboard. This note was from Caleb. In it, he shared that he still had feelings for me, that he still felt like we were supposed to be together, and that he would like to discuss this with me.

I remember sharing the incident with a few friends and most of them commented on how off it was that the note was inside my vehicle — that he had taken the time to enter into my private property to try to engage me in a conversation I had expressed a clear boundary about.

Back then, I did not know what I know now. Now that I've worked in several large secular corporations with developed HR departments — I realize this was an act of sexual harassment. It was a violation of personal property and boundaries over an intimate type of conversation I had asked to no longer be involved in by my coworker. As I look back, I am also bewildered at Caleb's ability to maneuver a system by using his father's name and approval, and that the leadership around Mike Baker and over Caleb Baker just allowed that. No one checked in on me and asked me how I was feeling. No one asked if I was okay or if I wanted the behavior to stop.

If you read the March 2022 report about the culture of sexual harassment at Christianity Today¹, we see that years of demeaning, offensive, and inappropriate behavior were normalized because men did not receive any real consequences even when their behaviors were reported. This case is another example of how men are able to easily bypass the (oftentimes limited) procedures in place within the system via their personal connections and positional power.

It has been almost a decade since the beginning of those events that I recounted. As I look back the other piece that sticks with me was that, beyond manipulating the system to get what he wanted and crossing other people's boundaries with ease and charm, Caleb also used God. Caleb told me that God had shared with him that we were supposed to be together and even get married. What a bold claim. When I declined, he quickly moved on to another relationship, which begs the question — did he really hear from God and have such weak character that upon the first 'obstacle' God's will was to be abandoned? Or was Caleb's character such that God seemed like another good avenue to get what he wanted? Is it possible that just like his father's name was easy to use in one situation, "God" was another name to be used?

You might say the use of God was innocent, perhaps even a naive form of faith. If that's the case though, I'd encourage you to ask why someone would need to include God in this type of

¹ Daniel Silliman, "Sexual Harassment Went Unchecked at Christianity Today", in *Christianity Today*, March 15, 2022.
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/march/sexual-harassment-ct-guidepost-assessment-galli-ola-woye.html>

conversation, unless they thought the inclusion would get the other person closer to doing what they wanted.

Whatever Caleb's intentions were, it's very dangerous when people who have positions of power in religious arenas are quick to blanket God's Name on top of their own desires. Caleb asserted God's will onto me using his status as his father's son and his father's approval as evidence of the validity of his claim — this is spiritual abuse. This also led to the creation of an incredibly unhealthy and emotionally unsafe work (and ministry) environment.

For most of 2014, Caleb was put on probation. He told us (Brooke and me) it was for drinking too much at his brother's wedding (which happened at the end of December 2013). I don't know if this is true, or if there was more happening. Regardless, the consequences that were conveyed to us were that he was not allowed to preach several times (which meant last-minute extra work for Brooke and me) and his trip to Israel that year was canceled. He also was to meet with JK Jones [the pastor of spiritual formation at the time and another man who sat on Mike Baker's leadership team] regularly. Caleb was given more resources and care while the women on his team were given more work without additional resources or care. No one came to talk with us during that time about Caleb or how being on a team with him was affecting us. We were also never given the story of the full circumstances by anyone in leadership.

In late January of 2016, Caleb Baker transitioned off of Eastview's staff. The narrative that was shared with students, parents, and staff (including myself) was that he had been given an amazing opportunity to serve at a church in Arizona. Like most transitions in white evangelical organizations, the impression was given that God was calling Caleb to a new church and we are sending him even though we are very sad. We hosted a large celebratory open house for him in the jr. high space.

I remember being confused at the abruptness of the transition. It was only recently that Caleb had finished his probationary period, and a few months earlier, Caleb had even been promoted to Brooke Yarbrough's and my boss.

Certain details were not aligning. If Caleb had a new opportunity and his transition needed to be this abrupt, why did he not move to Arizona for months? Why did he tell us he was receiving severance? Though this is not always the case, I knew it was rare for a person to be receiving severance when they had resigned. For example, I was not offered severance when I resigned a few months later.

When we had an inkling that something was amiss, Brooke and I had another lunch with Caleb when he had already transitioned off staff. We were at Golden Dragon in downtown Bloomington. This would've been sometime in February or March 2016. We asked Caleb if he was fired. He scoffed and told us emphatically 'no'. I remember Brooke saying through tears, "Please just tell us the truth." Caleb told us he had received a new opportunity in Arizona, and there was nothing more than that.

I remember during this time Mike Baker sent an email to all of the staff. Though I could not recall all the details of the email, the sentiment that I have remembered through the years was Mike conveying that he would not apologize for protecting his family.

The pieces I had been able to put together up through May 2022 was that Caleb was removed for sexual misconduct of some form. What is extremely concerning to me is that this is not the story that was told then or is told now.

In December 2021, I reconnected with a woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, who told me that she had a relationship with Caleb that had sexual components for an extended period of time while I was still on staff at Eastview. While Brooke, Caleb, and I were all on staff together, Brooke and I had asked Caleb if he had any connection with this woman because of some rumors we had heard, and he told us multiple times that he had no connection with her outside of Eastview. I believed him. I regret that.

On June 1, 2022, I followed up with Darrell Douglass [an elder at Eastview Christian Church] on these events that have left me unsettled for years. Based on our conversation, I felt compelled to write this letter to express my concerns more thoroughly.

Document Obtained

On June 4, 2022, I was able to obtain a copy of the email that was sent by Mike Baker on March 1, 2016. Here it is posted below:

Dear brothers and sisters,

First, let me apologize for sharing this in an e-mail, but I'm gone for a couple of weeks, but I think it's just time. I want to communicate something maybe I should have a few months ago concerning Caleb's departure. Honestly, I still don't want to, but there are increasing questions and in the end, Caleb is not just a staff member, he's the Sr. Pastor's son. So, here we go, it's a long story, but I'll try to keep it short and explain (as much as possible) my thinking along the way.

Let me begin by saying it has been the roughest six months of 31 years of ministry for both Sara and I, we've been "playing injured" since around September. Sometime in the fall there were allegations concerning Caleb's character. There was **extensive** follow up....extensive conversations, face to face attempts at reconciliation, etc.... Of course, as a father, I had intensely honest conversations with Caleb. I believed, then and now that the claims were unfounded or at least unresolvable. This investigation and worry ruined Christmas, honestly, but I looked forward to a new year. Then the second week of January another accusation. I simply called Caleb and told him, "I can't do this anymore"- he agreed and he sent me a resignation e-mail immediately. In my mind, at that point, he was just my son - not a staff member - and my number one priority. So, I called my friend Cal just as a friend. One thing led to another, and before you know it, he essentially offered Caleb a job. Remember, I more than anyone KNOW my son is not perfect, but still almost all that had been spoken about him was mostly gossip. The sin he did confess to me, was significantly in the past. I believed (and do now) him to have confessed and to be in right standing with God and to still be called to preach.

Now, let me tell you why we handled his resignation the way we did. When there are issues with staff, as the Sr. Pastor, I think three things: 1. Protect the name of Jesus. 2. Protect Eastview Christian Church. 3. Protect my staff. Trust me when I tell you that there are hundreds of things I know about staff and church leaders, both past and present that I keep to myself and do not communicate broadly to protect these three interests. So, I did the same with Caleb. Quick resignation. Move on. No big celebration. As low key as possible. I still think this was in the best interest of the church, Eastview, and the Jr. High ministry. One other important thing, the elders and PLT, especially Jim and Tyler know everything I just told you. I did not act alone in this process.

Even now, however, as we try to move on (it's March 1st) rumors and gossip persist in some circles concerning Caleb, and of course this has reached some (many?) of you. Someone even fraudulently sent letters representing two girls that had no knowledge of it and were upset to learn of it to several churches around the country with untruth, slander, and attempts to hurt my family. Still, I live in a forgiveness mindset. This is where I stand. So, what can you as a staff do now?

1. Pray for your Sr. Pastor and his wife.
2. Forgive Caleb and extend him the grace you have received and pray for him.
3. Kill gossip and slander by not talking about this and simply saying, "I'm not at liberty to talk about it" to anyone who asks.
4. Pray for Eastview - still believe God has great plans for us, here, now!
5. If you need to talk, see one of the PLT.

Well, that's it. I hope this helps us move forward. I think God is ready. Last night our speaker prayed over the mega-church pastors - "God, there is at least one pastor in here who has been in a long winter, I pray for the freshness of spring in their lives." A tear came to my eye, and I knew that prayer was for me and Sara.

Love ya,

For further legibility, here is the text typed out:

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Love ya,
Mike

In the appendix of this letter, a more detailed audit of this email is provided.

Clergy Sexual Abuse?

There is a lot to be said about the disconcerting nature of this email. In this email, Mike Baker discusses “**extensive follow up**” — was this follow-up done by independent, trauma-informed, third-party investigators?

If those who investigated were in your leadership, they had conflicting interests. If those who investigated were in your leadership or a part of your organization, a power dynamic would've also been present that could have potentially put those who were being investigated in a position of felt fear. Allegations of sexual misconduct always warrant investigation to the extent of the misconduct — including if the misconduct is actually an assault or abuse/trauma of any kind. If those who investigated were not trained professionals in trauma, how could the presence of trauma be accurately assessed?

The research on trauma denotes four main responses to a traumatic event: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Marriage and family therapist Pete Walker says that the fawn response is “a response to a threat by becoming more appealing to the threat”², which can include softening details to make them more palatable. If an investigation is done in a way that at any point makes the one being questioned feel unsafe, it is very normal for questioned individuals to fawn. That is why allegation credibility must be assessed by those who do not hold power over the individuals who come forward, who do not represent the organization associated with the alleged harm, and who are trauma informed, which means considering all aspects of safety, including gender and physiology.

In my conversation with the woman I reconnected with in December 2021, she expressed that part of her desire to remain anonymous is her fear of Mike and Sara Baker and what lengths they would go to protect Caleb.

Whether the Bakers would be a real threat to this woman or not, I ask you to consider why that would be a fear for her?

Mike Baker also labels the allegations “**unfounded or at least unresolvable**” — any competent investigation into these matters would render these two words incomparable. Something that is unequivocally “unfounded” is not the same as something that is “unresolvable.” Regarding matters being “unresolvable,” I again ask if there were professionals who are trained to specifically investigate these types of situations who were invited to attempt to resolve the allegations?

Experts in matters of abuse assert that pastors do not have “affairs” nor do they have secret sexual relationships with congregants. Rather, the intrinsic power dynamic warrants the labeling of these types of events as clergy abuse.

In 2022, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) created a committee to develop training and resources on abuse in the church, and this is the definition of clergy abuse from that report:

Clergy Abuse

Clergy abuse is when a Pastor uses his position of spiritual trust to harm. Clergy abuse is always a form of spiritual abuse but it often also takes the form of emotional, financial, or sexual abuse. The impact of abuse by a Pastor who is ministering in the name of Jesus the Good Shepherd is devastating. Clergy sexual abuse is not an “affair”

² Gina Ryder. “The Fawn Response: How Trauma Can Lead to People Pleasing”.
<https://psychcentral.com/health/fawn-response>

or a “relationship” but a predatory sin against a vulnerable sheep. When a Pastor crosses any sexual boundary with a congregant, whether a child or an adult, it is clergy sexual abuse.³

Unless the woman that came forward toward the end of Caleb’s time on staff was his current wife, it would seem he was in a(nother) secret sexual relationship. There seems to be a pattern of secrecy with women over many years, and it also seems that there is potentially a case of clergy sexual abuse that has happened under the leadership of Eastview Christian Church.

I write ‘seems’ because I hope I am wrong, but that is not something we can determine without the help of trained professionals.

Impression Management

In light of this information, I’m writing to ask you all to consider if you truly believe the narrative that has come to be publicly distributed and accepted demonstrates care for the vulnerable and the pursuit of truth? I’m writing to ask you all to consider who was protected and valued by the transpiring of these events?

Dr. Preston Hill, a theologian and pastoral therapist, helped create a resource entitled *Sexual Abuse and Trauma-Safety: A Biblical and Theological Reflection*. He studied under N.T. Wright for his dissertation. Here is a reflection from this resource:

Trauma-safe ministries never value the social image of the ministry above the safety of its members. Whenever ‘moral failing’ happens at the hands of our ministry leaders we must expose these horrors without condition, without apology, without timidity, and with all haste.⁴

Certainly, we all know more now than we did then, but I ask you — what constitutes “**extensive follow up**” and “**attempts at reconciliation**” if these terms were determined by those with power within the institution? Were power dynamics discussed when this situation was evaluated? When the decision was made to send Caleb to another church with no public knowledge of any form of moral failure, much less potential clergy abuse, who did that benefit?

I’m asking these questions not to accuse, but because I care so much about the Church. We cannot be a light or a city on a hill if we are bent on harboring darkness in the corners. I love the Church and I believe God has more for us than the protection of our institutions and reputations. I believe healing can happen for us and through us, but not if we care more about preserving ourselves than being a safe space for the hurting.

In his email, Mike Baker shared that the lack of transparency surrounding Caleb’s transition as well as the other “**hundreds of things [he] know[s] about staff and church leaders**” is due to

³ Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault to the Forty-Ninth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (2019-2022), p. 2458, <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-Study-Committee-Report-on-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Assault-1.pdf>

⁴ Preston Hill, Rebecca Henderson, Angel Bailey, & Thomas Ryden, *Sexual Abuse and Trauma-Safety: A Biblical and Theological Reflection*, M25i, 5.

his goals to: **“1. Protect the name of Jesus. 2. Protect Eastview Christian Church. 3. Protect my staff.”**

In response to this, I bring more of Dr. Hill’s and his associates’ words:

Trauma-safe ministries are never shy to bring darkness to light even when this may hurt the reputation or finances of our institutions. ... The defense that this might ruin our public witness to the world is no good reply either because ‘by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35) and this love is absent unless we act to help the vulnerable.⁵

The world is watching us. Victims are watching us. The next generation is watching us. And too many times, we have shown to be more interested in looking good than being transformed for good.

It leaves me deeply unsettled to know that there might be substantial information on a significant portion of church leaders associated with Eastview Christian Church that has been kept secret or silenced due to a desire to protect Jesus and your institution.

I submit to you that Jesus Christ does not need our protection, but He does ask for our trust and for us to live in truth because that is who He is.

Dr. Diane Langberg, a Christian psychologist and expert on trauma and abuse, says this about the Church:

We are called to be a sacred place for the vulnerable. We have often chosen to be a safe place for the powerful and have deceived ourselves into believing that God would call that good.⁶

In the recent events concerning the SBC, what is so damning is not only the evil directly perpetrated against victims by abusers, but the silence and suppression of truth by those who knew wrong had occurred and instead of closing the gate to protect the sheep, they opened the gate of another pen.

On systemic abuse, Dr. Langberg notes:

We would rather believe a reassuring lie than an utterly inconvenient and disturbing truth. We protect the system by shielding the accused. We say we do not want to falsely accuse. But we are not as adamant about the failure to protect victims. ... We give credibility to those who are not afraid, have confidence, and seem important to sustaining the system. We give more credibility to power.⁷

I know these are strong words that are tough to swallow. I wish they did not feel true to me about Eastview.

⁵ Hill, Henderson, Bailey, & Ryden, *Sexual Abuse and Trauma-Safety: A Biblical and Theological Reflection*, 5.

⁶ Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, (Brazos Press: 2020), 38.

⁷ Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 81.

The reality is not only that Mike admitted to suppressing information about Caleb and apparently “hundreds” of other instances for other staff members and church leaders, but that an entire leadership team and elder team allowed that email to stand as a source of truth. Two teams of men affirmed this was the appropriate way to communicate about and handle such matters.

It is the very fact that Mike can share that he “**did not act alone in this process**” that is especially alarming. Where were the accountability and feedback systems?

Silence is complicity. Saying nothing oftentimes is saying a lot.
If you disagreed with these matters, you said nothing.

I am aware that there was at least one person on your pastoral leadership team who admitted he felt that what was portrayed to the public about Caleb’s situation was a lie. However, he felt powerless to do anything except comply with Mike Baker.

I am sincerely wondering if you think a sense of powerlessness to speak against felt lies is what Jesus hopes to foster through His Church? Is that how unity is enacted in your organization?

Multiple people have mentioned to me that though they have been harmed deeply by Eastview they hesitate to share openly for the fear of retaliation. So I would invite you to reflect on what a system centered around compliance lest there be retaliation denotes.

Dr. Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer write, “Pastors, leaders, and congregants in a church with a *tov* [goodness] culture are free to tell stories that are true.”⁸

In Dr. Wade Mullen’s book about the tactics of abuse in churches, he discusses the concept of impression management. There is a degree of normalcy to impression management — the way we each behave in our pajamas in our homes is different than how we behave giving a big presentation at work. However, Mullen shares, “impression management becomes unethical when the front-stage persona is used to hide truths that ought not to be hidden.”⁹

From my perspective, the narrative of opportunity and calling was used to hide the truth that moral failures and misconduct had transpired. You might say there has been no active hiding, no covering up, but what would the average student or parent who had been around during that transition say about what happened and the reasoning? If the average congregant’s answer is not the main reason Caleb left during that time, what are we to make of that dissonance?

Why has this information been suppressed, and what does that say about what is important to your church? What is the point of managing this impression? What good is it to preach the Word without living the Truth?

⁸ Scot McKnight & Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming A Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Tyndale, 2020), 53.

⁹ Wade Mullen, *Something’s Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself From Its Power*, (Tyndale Momentum, 2020), 12.

Recently (June 2022), I was told by another previous employee of Eastview Christian Church that they were required to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA) for their severance. Unless this NDA was about intellectual property, and I have reason to believe based on what they shared that it was not, this is extremely concerning.

Lori Anne Thompson, a survivor of clergy sexual abuse and advocate, poignantly states: “NDAs are for trade secrets, not trauma secrets.”¹⁰

Dr. Langberg comments:

Such a requirement [NDAs] is demanded for the sake of a system - usually a ministry of some sort. So a Christian is asked to agree to cover-up wrongdoing for the sake of the system - or worse, for the sake of God’s reputation. It suggests that *to speak the truth* is to hurt God and his name. How can this be?¹¹

Mike’s email clearly shares that silence is the way forward for the staff. Families at Eastview were never told the nature of Caleb’s departure. There are employees who have been legally bound to silence in other matters for the sake of your institution. How else is this to be interpreted outside of a culture of silencing and cover-up?

Relaying signs of a toxic culture, Dr. Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer write:

In a power-through-fear culture, the powerful pastor and his close associates decide what information will be disseminated and what will be held back. The privilege of knowing what is going on, one quickly learns, is for the insiders’ eyes and ears only. People resign and leave with no explanation, often ‘called to a new ministry,’ and only the insiders know why. This form of secrecy induces fear in other staff members to stay in line.¹²

Spiritual Abuse

Dr. Langberg writes, “Spiritual abuse involves using the sacred to harm or deceive the soul of another.”¹³

Caleb used God in an attempt to get me to think as he thought. Mike used God in an attempt to get the rest of the staff to think as he thought.

Without dissecting all of the spiritual language that is used by Mike in his email to position himself as both a victim and a hero, one aspect that is especially concerning is that Mike equates silence around Caleb’s sin as godliness. Discussion in the pursuit of the truth is labeled as “**gossip**.” The lack of transparency is equated with the protection of the Name of Jesus and the church.

¹⁰ The Roys Report. “Lori Anne Thompson on Truth, Trauma & Advocacy”.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/lori-anne-thompson-on-truth-trauma-advocacy/id1470242499?i=1000564089445>

¹¹ Diane Langberg. “Non Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) and the Body of Christ”.

<https://www.dianelangberg.com/2021/02/non-disclosure-agreements-ndas-and-the-body-of-christ/>

¹² McKnight & Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming A Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*, 36-37.

¹³ Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 127.

In her devotional for counselors, Dr. Langberg writes, “Any cause that leads us to sin — to sanction or hide sin — is an ungodly force in our lives.”¹⁴

Jesus tells us in scripture that He is the Truth. 1 John 1:5-6 says, “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not know what is true.”

If we believe these scriptures to be true, it seems egregious to equate hiding sin and moving on quickly as the right things to do. So I’m sorry to disagree with Mike Baker, but I do not believe “**God is ready**” for these types of actions to be cloaked in His Name. I would also add using and asserting phrases like “God is ready” in the nature of the email is spiritually manipulative, if not completely spiritually abusive. When God is ready to be less than the full truth, I no longer want to be a Christian.

Mike also speaks of forgiveness and grace for Caleb, intertwining these concepts with silence and moving on. Dr. Hill and his associates share instead that, “Forgiveness is not reconciliation and is not contrary to moral or legal justice.”¹⁵

In their resource for trauma-safe churches they also stress:

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or quickly moving on ... nor [does it] mean that the wrongdoer deserves to be trusted again or that there should be reconciliation (i.e., being trusted again with a new relationship).¹⁶

I also must emphasize one more time in this section how theologically problematic and potentially arrogant it is to assume that the Name of Jesus Christ needs our protection and is that deeply intertwined with one’s brand/institution. This type of conflation is the breeding ground for rampant spiritual abuse. In the stark words of Dr. Langberg:

True ministry is not domination won in the name of Christ or the claiming of power to rule over others for our own sakes. Whenever the church seeks dominion or loftiness or expresses itself in pride, it becomes the refuge of unclean things.¹⁷

Concluding Thoughts

In March 2022, it became public that an allegation was made against Bruxy Cavey, a Canadian megachurch pastor. His church, The Meeting House, invited a third party investigation. The third party investigation relegated his behavior as “sexual misconduct.”¹⁸ In response to this,

¹⁴ Diane Langberg, *In Our Lives First: Meditations for Counselors* (CreateSpace, 2013).

¹⁵ Hill, Henderson, Bailey, & Ryden, *Sexual Abuse and Trauma-Safety: A Biblical and Theological Reflection*, 3.

¹⁶ Hill, Henderson, Bailey, & Ryden, *Sexual Abuse and Trauma-Safety: A Biblical and Theological Reflection*, 3.

¹⁷ Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 141.

¹⁸ Mike Thom. “Bruxy Cavey had sexual relationship constituting abuse over course of several years: Church board.”

<https://chvnradio.com/articles/bruxy-cavey-had-sexual-relationship-constituting-abuse-of-power-over-course-of-several-years-church-board>

Cavey released a confession of his “affair,”¹⁹ and the teaching pastor, Danielle Strickland, who is also a justice advocate that has worked extensively with women who have been trafficked, resigned out of solidarity with the victim. Strickland stated clearly in light of her resignation that “sexual misconduct” needs to be be rightly labeled as “clergy sexual abuse.”²⁰ After Strickland’s resignation, as of June 9, 2022, thirty-eight more reports of clergy sexual misconduct and abuse have been made regarding four former pastors as well as other leaders and staff.²¹ On May 31, 2022, Bruxy Cavey was arrested by the police for sexual assault.²²

As The Meeting House continues to wade through these new allegations, here’s what one of the members of their Board of Overseers has recently reported back:

There are multiple stories of victims who felt shamed and rejected by the church, while the offender was supported through so-called restoration.²³

This statement resonates with me because it captures my experience with you and your institution. Men such as Caleb Baker and ██████████ were allowed to be ‘restored’ in the midst of significant character deficiencies. Women like Brooke, myself, and many others whose stories I am aware of but have not obtained the right to share, were chastised, disrespected, and abused in the privacy of your offices. I know I am not the only person who has spent countless hours with professional counselors to navigate the trauma I have from working at Eastview Christian Church.

Restoration that does not include rehabilitating the vulnerable and the harmed is not restoration in the Name of Jesus. I am so thankful Danielle Strickland was willing to sacrifice, at a great cost to herself, in order to stand with the woman who had been harmed. I am so thankful she was not willing to minimize the reality of the situation. Look at the amount of freedom and truth her decision brought. I hope some of you can be brave like Danielle. Sacrifice and solidarity can heal the harm of sin and silence. I believe it is the way of Jesus.

Caleb and his actions must be investigated by those who can do so competently and carefully. Beyond Caleb and his actions, I beg you to examine your own hearts and the system you all have built. How was a young man who had demonstrated significant lapses in character time and time again made to be the leader of the team and positioned as the example to follow for all the jr. highers in the church? How was that good for Caleb much less anyone else? The global conversations about the white evangelical movement have elicited the point that too often we have valued charisma over character. Caleb is one of the most charismatic people I’ve ever met. He is funny, winsome, and brings incredible energy into a room. But bypassing

¹⁹ Bruxy Cavey. “My Confession.” <https://bruxy.com/my-confession/>

²⁰ “Danielle Strickland & Jarrod McKenna | Bruxy Cavey Resignation | The Meeting House | 10th March 2022.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHV8nATJ9Tg>

²¹ John Longhurst. “Ontario church discloses dozens of abuse reports.” <https://anabaptistworld.org/ontario-church-discloses-dozens-of-abuse-reports/>

²² Leonardo Blair. “Ex-megachurch pastor Bruxy Cavey arrested for sexual assault; police say there could be more victims.”

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/ex-megachurch-pastor-bruxy-cavey-arrested-for-sexual-assault.html>

²³ Longhurst. “Ontario church discloses dozens of abuse reports.” <https://anabaptistworld.org/ontario-church-discloses-dozens-of-abuse-reports/>

character formation due to the strength of a person's charisma is a disservice to the individual and a danger to the Church.

I understand how we often think shielding people from the consequences of their sin is gracious, but I have come to believe that many times this is a form of cheap grace that demonstrates a lack of trust in God. In cases of abuse, this kind of grace is comforting for the abuser and not for the victims. I use the term "abuse" broadly but seriously. Dr. Mullen defines abuse as such:

When someone treats you as an object they are willing to harm for their own benefit, abuse has occurred, and that person has become an abuser. ... Abuse involves any action that takes power from another in an attempt to use them.²⁴

Especially when harm has been done to others, repentance is not just saying sorry to Jesus in your heart. As much as Mike Baker wants to assert his authority to do so, right-standing cannot be determined by those in power if not affirmed by the ones harmed. Repentance requires actions that demonstrate a turning from sin which includes reparations to those who have been harmed (and I will add I think it is less about the reparation itself but the spirit of reparations that matters). Look at the story of Zacchaeus.

In the survivor and advocate community, it is often discussed that for victims to feel safe and begin regaining the ability to trust, repentance must be demonstrated by the perpetrator and the enabling community. Demonstrated repentance would include both confession and fleeing from temptation. If a person has abused another by using the power in their position and they are repentant, why would they want to be in that position again anytime soon? In the same manner, if a person has abused power or manipulated a certain kind of system, putting them in a position where that same kind of power and system is easily available to them is in fact unkind to the individual and disrespectful to those who've been harmed.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Leniency to the dishonest is cruelty to those whom they injure."²⁵

I believe God can truly redeem and restore anything. But redemption and restoration cannot come without truth and without the leadership of the vulnerable rather than the powerful.

I urge you to invite a third-party trained organization to do a full investigation of your organization. [GRACE](#) is an example of this. They have the ability to perform investigations with professionals that are trauma-informed. They are also knowledgeable of church organizational dynamics, power dynamics, and abuse. I don't need you to accept my assessment without investigation, but I encourage you to pursue the truth, believing with you that the truth will indeed set us all free. I want justice for Caleb and the people impacted by him. I want peace for Caleb and the people impacted by him. It is my sincere hope that you want these things too.

²⁴ Mullen, *Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself From Its Power*, 2.

²⁵ Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, 168.

I imagine some of you reading this might be feeling a lot of fear right now. Considering the idea that maybe you perpetuated significant harm or allowed significant harm to happen can bring up a sense of shame. I am so convinced that God has more for us though than living out of our shame. The truth always welcomes us out of hiding. It welcomes us to deeper courage and it is always an invitation to further intimacy with Jesus. I really believe that — for you and for myself.

We as the Church cannot turn a blind eye to the potential of wrongdoing, especially our own. We have to do more than the bare minimum when it comes to pursuing integrity. The women in this situation deserved better and still deserve better. Your church deserves to know the truth. You deserve to know the truth. We all do. We all can be free.

In Christ,



Christine Lee

Appendix: An Attempt to Decode the Tactics of Abuse

I asked Kyle Howard, a leading voice in church abuse and a provider of soul care for ethnic minorities who've experienced racial and spiritual trauma, to review Mike Baker's email and give feedback. He gave permission for me to share the following quote with you:

“As a soul care [provider]/Christian counselor who has been working in the field of church abuse and mediation, even without knowing the backstory, I would find this message to be extremely problematic. It reads like a cover-up via hyper-spiritualized speech and emotional manipulation. It is honestly a textbook example of how megachurches and megachurch pastors cover abuse. Given my line of work, I review messages like this fairly regularly. In many cases, there is a need for more context prior to providing any kind of assessment. In this case, regarding this message from Pastor Mike, I would say that there is clearly an abusive power dynamic present within the leadership of this church and a third-party investigation from a reputable firm should be insisted upon by the congregation. Something is going on here and there is a clear attempt to cover it up.”

Dear brothers and sisters,

First, let me apologize for sharing this in an e-mail, but I'm gone for a couple of weeks, but I think it's just time. I want to communicate something maybe I should have a few months ago concerning Caleb's departure. Honestly, I still don't want to, but there are increasing questions and in the end, Caleb is not just a staff member, he's the Sr. Pastor's^a son. So, here we go, it's a long story, but I'll try to keep it short and explain (as much as possible) my thinking along the way.

Let me begin by saying it has been the roughest six months of 31 years of ministry for both Sara and I, we've been "playing injured" since around September^b. Sometime in the fall there were allegations concerning Caleb's character. There was extensive follow

up^c...extensive conversations, face to face attempts at reconciliation^d, etc.... Of course, as a father, I had intensely honest conversations with Caleb^e. I believed, then and now that the claims were unfounded or at least unresolvable^f. This investigation and worry ruined Christmas,^g honestly, but I looked forward to a new year. Then the second week of January another accusation. I simply called Caleb and told him, "I can't do this anymore"^h- he agreed and he sent me a resignation e-mail immediately. In my mind, at that point, he was just my son - not a staff member - and my number one priorityⁱ. So, I called my friend Cal just as a friend. One thing led to another^j, and before you know it, he essentially^k offered Caleb a job. Remember, I more than anyone KNOW my son is not perfect^l, but still almost all that had been spoken about him was mostly gossip^m. The sin he did confess to me, was significantly in the pastⁿ. I believed (and do now) him to have confessed and to be in right standing with God and to still be called to preach^o.

Now, let me tell you why we handled his resignation the way we did. When there are issues with staff, as the Sr. Pastor, I think three things: 1. Protect the name of Jesus. 2. Protect Eastview Christian Church.^p 3. Protect my staff.^q Trust me when I tell you that there are hundreds of things I know about staff and church leaders, both past and present that I keep to myself and do not communicate broadly to protect these three interests^r. So, I did the same with Caleb. Quick resignation. Move on. No big celebration. As low key as possible^s. I still think this was in the best interest of the church, Eastview, and the Jr. High ministry. One other important thing, the elders and PLT, especially Jim and Tyler know everything I just told you. I did not act alone in this process^t.

Even now, however, as we try to move on (it's March 1st)^u rumors and gossip persist in some circles concerning Caleb^v, and of course this has reached some (many?) of you. Someone even fraudulently sent letters representing two girls that had no knowledge of it and were upset to learn of it to several churches around the country with untruth, slander, and attempts to hurt my family^w. Still, I live in a forgiveness mindset^x. This is where I stand. So, what can you as a staff do now?

1. Pray for your Sr. Pastor and his wife.^y
2. Forgive Caleb and extend him the grace you have received and pray for him.^z
3. Kill gossip and slander by not talking about this and simply saying, "I'm not at liberty to talk about it" to anyone who asks.^{aa}
4. Pray for Eastview - still believe God has great plans for us, here, now!^{bb}
5. If you need to talk, see one of the PLT.^{cc}

Well, that's it. I hope this helps us move forward. I think God is ready^{dd}. Last night our speaker prayed over the mega-church pastors - "God, there is at least one pastor in here who has been in a long winter, I pray for the freshness of spring in their lives." A tear came to my eye, and I knew that prayer was for me and Sara.^{ee}

Love ya, Mike

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- a. Use of "Sr. Pastor's" instead of "my"—strategically asserting his positional power and reminding us that is to be the lens through which people see Caleb. Also mentioning Caleb as not just a staff member but the senior pastor's son is inherently problematic. There seems to be an implication that Caleb should be entitled to extra privilege in some form because of this title. This type of communication is common in systems and people with narcissistic tendencies (see Chuck DeGroat's *When Narcissism Comes To Church*).
 - b. Reframing this situation into a hardship for the Bakers instead of focusing on how this has impacted any true victims.
 - c. "Extensive follow up" is vague and lacks transparency on who conducted the investigation, the parameters of the investigation, and its competency.
 - d. The use of "face-to-face reconciliation" is borrowing spiritual language to give the impression that righteousness was pursued. Lack of trauma-informed training is apparent, as face-to-face meetings can cause victims to feel panicked, afraid, and unsafe. Also, this is spiritually manipulative — there can be no reconciliation without repentance, and repentance is not mentioned whatsoever.
 - e. Abuse of power and emotionally manipulative. This is strategic in trying to convey the legitimacy of the investigation. However, Mike has already proven the enmeshment of the way he sees Caleb that is trending toward bias that does not value accountability.
 - f. "Unfounded" is not equivalent to "unresolvable". Already mentioned in the letter, but this is super disturbing and showcases traces of the sexist attitude of not believing women.
 - g. Again, Mike positioned himself as the victim instead of centering those who were actually harmed. This is also another example of communication that has traces of narcissistic tendencies.
 - h. Does this mean this allegation was never investigated? Again, at least with how this is written there does not seem to be proper protocol in addressing sexual impropriety by a pastor.

- i. Here, Mike clearly states he handled this situation within his organization more as a father than as a senior pastor — this is bias, nepotism, and power abuse.
- j. The vagueness here is concerning — what does “one thing led to another” mean? What details were shared with Cal/Central?
- k. “Essentially” is not the same as unequivocally. So if the public narrative was that Caleb was offered a job when there was no true job offer yet, this is another layer of deception.
- l. An assertion of power — “more than anyone” — combined with language often used in these types of religious contexts — “not perfect” — to minimize the potential severity of the situation.
- m. “Almost all” is not the same as “all” being gossip. Also, Mike qualified this as “mostly” gossip. What was done with the part that wasn’t gossip? “Gossip” is also commonly used by white evangelicals in cases of spiritual abuse to blame shift. It is subtle, but it is a refocusing so the target of the problem is now on those who speak about the events rather than the perpetrator himself/herself.
- n. This is vague. What is “significantly in the past”? Is that a couple of months or years ago? Caleb’s childhood or several weeks ago? It would be important to determine a thorough timeline to corroborate this statement. It is also problematic if Mike was the only one to receive Caleb’s confession on behalf of the organization.
- o. Use of positional power and spiritual language to bypass repentance or making restitution to those who have been harmed.
- p. The clarity in which these priorities are laid out denotes a common tactic of spiritual abuse — things are hidden for the sake of Jesus and the institution. It is labeled as “protection” to make the perpetrator seem righteous. The reality is sin is minimized for Jesus and His Church’s sake — which is also an abuse of scripture.
- q. What about those on your staff who did not feel protected? I felt violated and dehumanized by this email.
- r. Is this an admission of guilt in hiding hundreds of instances that should welcome further investigation? Or is this a threat that those who speak out could have their secrets shared? Often in toxic environments, statements like this are made to continue a culture of silence and fear.
- s. “No big celebration. As low key as possible.” — Since I am one of the people who was asked to throw Caleb’s departing celebration, I would contest this. We threw him a significant departing celebration. I think Brooke Yarbrough would corroborate my memory of this. If that was considered low key what would be high key?
- t. This statement and the sentence before it denote that any identified abuse is systemic.
- u. A little over a month after Caleb’s resignation requires “moving on” when there seems to be no substantial investigation that has been done. Also, there is subtle language to position himself as the victim once again.
- v. The narrative is shifted subtly even further, and now Caleb is centered as the victim.
- w. The Bakers are completely centered as the victims with no mention of the women or others impacted by Caleb’s behavior.
- x. Using spiritual language to center himself also as a hero.
- y. Strategic use of “Sr. Pastor” and third person to assert positional power. Again, this type of communication is very common in systems that contain narcissistic tendencies.
- z. The conflation of forgiveness and grace with a lack of accountability, repentance, or true reconciliation. Also uses spiritual language to manipulate others into a choiceless situation — to not forgive Caleb would be not receiving the grace Christ offers. Forgiveness has to be the choice of those harmed, not demanded by those in power. Demanding forgiveness is a tactic of spiritual abuse.
- aa. Clear call to silence and equates any dialogue about this situation as “gossip” or “slander”. This is spiritual abuse. Also the script given is literally, “I have no freedom to speak.”
- bb. Here it seems we see some of the impact of American triumphalism in white evangelical theology.
- cc. This is cloaked as an open invitation but even the email itself proves the leadership is unlikely to be safe for those who have been harmed to share without retaliation.
- dd. Spiritual abuse in asserting God’s approval of this narrative and the lack of justice. The conflation of Mike’s desires with God’s desire.
- ee. Centering himself as the victim again.