



Spiritual Abuse Syllabus

Fall 2021



#ACNAtoo

Advocacy Team

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Introduction

Have you ever experienced a church where the leader must be obeyed without question because they have a direct line to God? Where there is an explicit or implicit narrative that this church/family/group is the only one that “gets it right”? Where the flow of information in and out of the group is tightly censored? Where leaders use scripture to control all aspects of your life?

You may have experienced spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse that is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. In [Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse](#), Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys distill years of academic research into the following characteristics of spiritual abuse:

- manipulation and exploitation
- enforced accountability
- censorship of decision making
- requirements for secrecy and silence
- coercion to conform [inability to ask questions]
- control through the use of sacred texts or teaching
- requirement of obedience to the abuser
- the suggestion that the abuser has a ‘divine’ position
- isolation as a means of punishment
- superiority and elitism

The following syllabus is designed to help you identify spiritual abuse, name the harm that has occurred, and find healing.



Books

- [*Church Called Tox*](#) by Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer
- [*Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures*](#) by Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys
- [*Jesus & John Wayne*](#) by Kristin Kobes Du Mez
- [*Redeeming Power*](#) by Diane Langberg
- [*Sacred Wounds*](#) by Teresa B. Pasquale
- [*Something's Not Right*](#) by Wade Mullen
- [*The Pandora Problem: Facing Narcissism in Leaders & Ourselves*](#) by E. James Wilder
- [*When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*](#) by Chuck DeGroat

Articles

- [*"What Is 'Spiritual' Abuse? A Working Definition"*](#) by Scot McKnight
- [*"10 Ways to Spot Spiritual Abuse"*](#) by Mary DeMuth
- [*"Fertile Soil for Abuse: A Reckoning at Covenant Fellowship Church"*](#)
by Esther Yoon-Ji Kang and Susie An



Podcasts & Videos

- [The Allender Center Podcast: Spiritual Abuse Series](#)
- [The Allender Center Podcast: When Narcissism Comes to Church](#)
- [The Allender Center Podcast: Mind Control and Dogmatism in Spiritual Abuse](#)
- [Church Hurts: Naming Spiritual Abuse](#) (July 17, 2020)
- [Langberg: Narcissism and the Systems it Breeds](#)
- [Langberg: Signs of Spiritual Abuse & Beginning Recovery](#)
- [Langberg: Use and Misuse of Authority](#)
- [The Place We Find Ourselves: Spiritual Abuse \(Episode 89\)](#)
- [The Rise & Fall of Mars Hill](#)
- [The Spiritual Abuse Podcast](#)
- [Theology Gals: Spiritual Abuse](#)

Social Media

- [Laura Barringer](#)
- [Timothy Isaiah Cho](#)
- [Chuck DeGroat](#)
- [Kristin Du Mez](#)
- [Kyle J. Howard](#)
- [Wade Mullen](#)
- [Scot McKnight](#)
- [Lisa Oakley](#)
- [Reclamation Collective](#)
- [Religious Trauma Institute](#)



Communities

- [Evolving Faith](#)
- [Chasing Justice](#)
- [Black Liturgist](#)
- [AAPI Liturgy](#)
- [The Witness - BCC](#)
- [OnBeing](#)
- [Spiritual Friendship](#)

Where do we go from here?

- [Find care on Wheaton's campus.](#)
- [Suggest a Wheaton Chapel Speaker.](#)
- **Find a trauma-informed therapist**

Some locally known trauma informed therapists who have received Allender training can be further researched and found at:

Art of Living, Crystal Lake, IL

Compass Counseling, Barrington, IL

True North Palatine, Palatine, IL

