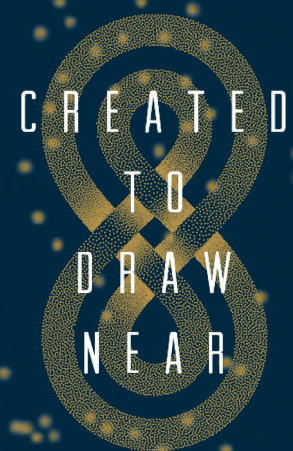


Nearness Gone Wrong: When Leaders Fail

Steve Midgley



When leaders fail...

- An imaginary example?
- The past three years...
 - A pastor and his affairs
 - Discipleship and pastoral beatings
 - Discipleship and bullying
 - Pastoral leadership and bullying

So far from what should be

The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.” (Ezekiel 34:1-3)

So far from what should be

You have not strengthened the weak or healed those who are ill or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

(Ezekiel 34:4)

What this seminar is and isn't...

- Not the reflections of an expert...
...but of a working pastor
- Not describing ways to care for the abused...
...but ways to identify and prevent abuse

NB www.netgrace.org

Definitions of abuse

“Abuse happens when someone crosses the boundaries of another person and enters that person’s personal space for their own gain and to the detriment of their victim. Abuse involves a systematic pattern of manipulating, intimidating, or coercing their victim to gain and maintain power and control over them.”

F Remy Diederich, Broken Trust

Defining spiritual abuse

“Spiritual abuse happens when people use God, or their supposed relationship with God, to control your behavior for their benefit. The physical abuser might use their fist to threaten you. The verbal abuser uses their words. The spiritual abuser uses God (or the Bible, church, or religion) as their justification and/or threat.”

F Remy Diederich, Broken Trust

Features of abusive spiritual leadership

1. Coercion and control

- Required attendance at meetings
- Enforced accountability
- Conformity to detailed rules / standards

Features of abusive spiritual leadership

2. Exclusion, isolation, and fear

“[Someone deciding] not to do everything that was demanded of them would take them into a time of isolation and loneliness. They would be dropped from favour, possibly withdrawn from their ministry. Certainly dropped from friendship. They were no longer to be part of ‘the inner circle.’”

Oakley and Humphreys, *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, SPCK, 2019

Features of abusive spiritual leadership

3. Use of Scripture, or a “divine calling,” to coerce and control

Features of abusive spiritual leadership

4. Silencing of criticism

- by marginalising critics
- by accusing critics of damaging unity
- by identifying critics as resisting God
- through the angry belittling of critics

And silence is infectious...

Revisiting spiritual abuse...

Connected to something good...

Ungodly control

Requiring people
to attend
meetings



Godly appeals

“Let us not give up the
habit of meeting
together”
(Heb 10:25)

Discussion 1: What godly activities might these abusive behaviours be 'connected' to?

Control



Manipulation



Heavy shepherding



Coercion



Pressure to conform



Silencing all criticism



Shaming & excluding



Discussion 1: What godly activities might these abusive behaviours be 'connected' to?

Control



Counsel / guidance

Manipulation



Exhortation

Heavy shepherding



Loving discipleship

Coercion



Godly warnings

Pressure to conform



Christian obedience

Silencing all criticism



Resist false teaching

Shaming & excluding



Church discipline

Undermining ordinary discipleship...?

Control



Counsel

Manipulation



Exhortation

Heavy shepherding



Loving discipleship

Coercion



Godly warnings

Pressure to conform



Christian obedience

Silencing all criticism



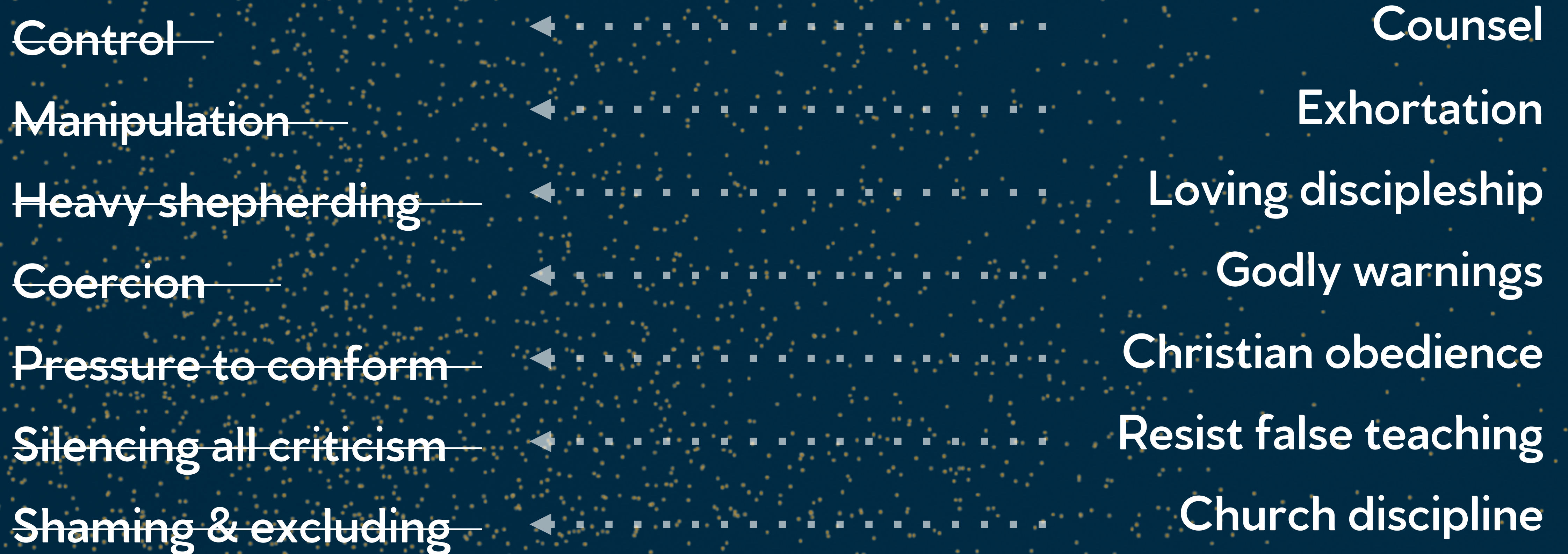
Resist false teaching

Shaming & excluding



Church discipline

Drifting toward abuse...?



A spectrum of intentions

Malicious leaders ← ► Unwise leaders

A spectrum of activities

Control



Counsel

Manipulation



Exhortation

Heavy shepherding



Loving discipleship

Coercion



Godly warnings

Pressure to conform



Christian obedience

Silencing all criticism



Resist false teaching

Shaming & excluding



Church discipline

Two implications

1. Abusive leaders are not universally wicked; they will often do many good things and be motivated by many godly ambitions and desires
2. Every godly leader will, at times, do hurtful and damaging things and be controlling for their own sake

Discussion 2

In the light of these features of spiritual abuse, what questions should we be asking about the ministry we see (or do)?

What practical changes in church life might reduce the likelihood of spiritual abuse happening?

Getting practical

Watch your church

- Notice patterns rather than isolated incidents

Questions to ask of church

Ask

- Is there a climate of fear?
- Is legalism becoming a problem?
- Are non-conformers excluded?

Questions to ask of church

Ask

- Is the church increasingly isolated from outside influences?
- Are leaders defensive and secretive?
- Do those who criticise leaders get attacked and accused of having ungodly motives?

Speaking up...

1. Examine your heart
2. Speak humbly (but do speak)
3. Be ready to be wrong

Seven positive steps

Foster an open and transparent culture

1. Invite regular feedback

2. Listen to critics

3. Get accountability structures in place

Seven positive steps

4. Ensure finances are public
5. Have annual ministry reviews / appraisals (360°)
6. Establish robust complaints procedure / “whistleblowing”
7. Conduct a cultural review

Watching ourselves

- Don't assume "I'd never do that"
- Recognise we are often blind to our own sin
- Invite others to comment on your ministry
(and make it easy for them to do so)
- Notice when you are becoming defensive

Watching Jesus

Authority is good

- All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18)
- The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority (Mark 1:22)
- ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.’ (Mark 1:27)

Watching Jesus

Jesus exercised authority

- He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak (Luke 4:41)
- Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers (Matt 21:12)

Watching Jesus

Jesus set aside his authority

- For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)

[Jesus] being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness. (Phil 2:6-7)

Watching Jesus

Jesus calls us to do the same

- The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave (Matt 20:25-27)