

Hope SPEAK

Dear Readers:



In order to share the latest news with you, please permit me to back up a little to give you the setting for it.

I sensed God's call very early in my life, but it wasn't until I had the opportunity to preach my first sermon (amazingly it was on the topic of pastoral sexual abuse) that

God gave me a glimpse of where that call would one day lead. At that time I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, *"this is what I've called you to do."* I understand pastoral ministry is much more than preaching, but I also know when God speaks through His servants, His life-changing power is imparted to those who are hungering and thirsting for a new life.

It has been through studying God's Word that I have come to understand more fully His special calling on my life. He speaks life through His Word and, as I hear His voice, my heart yearns to share His love with others. I understand the solemn and sacred responsibility He requires from His servants. I do not take this sacred calling lightly, because I know without the aid of His Spirit, I am nothing.

Through the ministry experience I have had thus far, God has placed a special burden on my heart to reach the "one lost sheep." I know the pain and isolation of those who feel they are separated from God, their desperate and heartfelt cry is, "have mercy upon me, oh Lord." And I long to have God use me to point these precious souls back to Him.

Ministry, in all its various forms, is the highest calling Heaven can bestow upon those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. All other dreams, goals, and accomplishments fade into insignificance when we see a life transformed and hope restored as God reaches down into our pit of despair, lifts us into His presence, and restores us into His image.

Where will this call lead? Recently I have been honored to be asked by the Illinois Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to pastor in one of their districts. And, after much prayer and guidance, Samantha and I have humbly, yet gratefully, accepted this new calling.

Having personally suffered the devastating and painful effects of betrayal and abuse from someone in this very position, I believe God will use that experience

to enable us to more effectively reach and—by His power—continue to use our experiences to help restore the lost and hurting to Him. I now hold this sacred trust in an even higher regard, having been called to fill this sacred office.

From this point forward, we will continue to press onward with the ministry of The Hope of Survivors but, Provisionally, we will be adding a new component to The Hope of Survivors ministry, one that will allow us to incorporate the messages of hope, love and truth that I will be sharing with our local church family, to you—our extended ministry family. It is our prayer this will help provide spiritual food to many who are unable to be a part of a neighborhood church in their area.

We are grateful to all of those who have supported us and many of you who have joined us in prayer for God's leading into a new, yet highly sacred, calling.

God bless you,
Pastor Steve Nelson, President

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Sanctuary for the Sexually Abused

—Martin Weber, D.Min.

[Excerpt from the book, *God Was There: True Stories of a Police Chaplain* (Pacific Press, 2009)]

Calls past 10 at night are bad news for law enforcement chaplains. Somebody's daughter got murdered in the dark corner of a nightclub parking lot. A teenager must be notified that Dad just died on I-80. A depressed off-duty policeman committed suicide, and his widow needs to make it through her first lonely night.

For me, this Wednesday night call was the worst I ever received as a chaplain. A woman phoned my church office with allegations of sexual abuse by one of our chaplains, Joe.

Her husband had a fatal heart attack several days previously, and my colleague was dispatched to comfort the widow, Janice. She said Joe hugged her while rubbing her body inappropriately. She also said he told her things a man should not tell a woman who isn't his wife. And her husband had not even been buried yet.

Late as it was, I arranged a visit with Janice. I found her in total turmoil, not only grieving about her husband's death but deeply confused about her visit with Joe. Had she done something to encourage him to act that way?

I assured Janice there was nothing she could have done to deserve the type of behavior she was telling me about. Besides, we chaplains operate on a strict code of conduct, and what she was describing was way out of line. Janice nodded agreement, yet seemed plagued by guilt one moment, outrage the next.

Deeply traumatized, she moaned, "What should I do! What can I do?"

"I'll take care of this for you," I assured her. "I'll report what you told me to our supervisor tomorrow and he'll guide you through this. He'll also discuss this with the chaplain."

"I don't want to get him into trouble!" she protested. "He did seem like a nice man, but then ..."

"That's not for you to have to worry about. Besides, you've got a funeral to prepare for."

"Would you help me with that?" I promised Janice

I would guide her through the planning process and then conduct her husband's memorial service.

What a tragic situation: confusion, outrage and guilt with Janice—and then Joe's reaction to deal with. I phoned him to let him know what I heard and that I had to report it. I urged him not to contact Janice again unless he had clearance from the supervisor.

"You don't believe that stuff she's saying, do you?" Joe pleaded.

"It's absolutely unlike anything I've seen in your behavior," I assured him. "I couldn't believe what I was hearing, Joe. But I couldn't disbelieve it either. You know it's not my job to determine your innocence or guilt. Our supervisor will conduct that inquiry."

I don't think Joe was pleased with me, but I did report what I heard to the supervisor, who asked me to accompany him on a visit to Janice and introduce him to her. He assured her of his concern about her report and that he would conduct a thorough investigation.

I can't tell you what happened with Joe the chaplain and Janice, the widow. Before their case was settled, I was called to work in another part of the country. I don't know how the case turned out, because I had to leave both Joe and Janice entirely in the care of the chaplain supervisor, and the outcome was confidential. It would not have been possible, or appropriate, for me to inquire about the case when I no longer carried the badge of that police force.

What a sad experience. Never in my life had I been involved with anything quite so traumatic concerning these charges against a professional colleague and friend.

Another friend of mine earned her doctorate at Princeton University's seminary. Her project was helping women who suffered sexual abuse, usually from men who were domineering—often their incestuous fathers. Sometimes the abuser was a religious person who committed his crime in the name of God. All the women in my friend's study had abandoned organized religion, and most or all of them had given up a personal relationship with God. The goal of the project was to discover

what might help them regain their trust in God and perhaps reconnect with the church.

As I recall the results of the study, every one of the women associated their heavenly Father with abusive male authority. My friend gathered them into small groups and studied with them how God the Father is revealed in the person of Jesus, the suffering Savior of victimized humanity. They talked about Christ on the cross becoming the ultimate victim, beaten and humiliated. Thus He understands and empathizes with others who today suffer abuse.

Identifying themselves with this view of God completely transformed these women's concept of their Father in heaven. All of them received some measure of emotional and spiritual healing, some of them quite dramatically.

I volunteer for The Hope of Survivors, an organization that serves victims of clergy sexual abuse from various denominations. Many have distanced themselves from church and God. Some have sought escape from painful memories in various addictions, including dysfunctional relationships. Their lives have been devastated and in some cases nearly destroyed. Many are profoundly lonely. Often fellow church members, even closest friends, sided with the abuser and ostracized the victim.

In ministering to them at our weekend conferences, we explain that the clergyman, as both a spiritual leader and professional caregiver, bears responsibility for any pastor-congregant relationship that becomes sexualized. Then we connect them to Jesus, who suffered physical, emotional and spiritual abuse from clergy.

I take it a step further, explaining how our Lord is no longer a victim of his abusers. He rose triumphantly as they cowered before His powerful presence. He soared in our new humanity to heaven's sanctuary, where He now reigns over abusers, their enablers and corrupt institutions. Soon He will return to this earth and take us to a new home where abuse will never happen. Meanwhile, as our loving and faithful high priest, He protectively watches over us. He invites us to cast all our concerns and confusion upon Him as He intercedes for our needs. In heaven's sanctuary He feels our anguish, soothes our resentments and calms our fears.

How about you? Are you feeling so messed up and broken, so violated yet so sinful, that you fear you might never be healed from what others have done and also forgiven for your own sins? Then flee for

refuge to God's sanctuary and embrace your new and true identity in Jesus. In fact you can do that right now.



Martin Weber has served many years as a pastor, most recently in suburban Sacramento, California, and has volunteered as a law enforcement chaplain. Among books authored are his own story of abuse survival, My Tortured Conscience, "book of the year" Hurt, Healing and

Happy Again, and soon-to-be-released, God Was There.

Weber is currently editor of Mid-America Outlook and director of communication for the Mid-America Union of Seventh-day Adventists. He and his wife, Darlene, have two adult children and live with their four cats in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Testimonials

"I really appreciate you and your husband taking time out of your busy lives to be such a wonderful support to us. You have helped me more than you will ever know with your emails and story from the media clips."—IL

"...we are very grateful for THOS, because your ministry serves a very large purpose and one that many victims will benefit from."—MO

"I have said it before and I will say it again. One thing I admire most about people is an ability to speak the truth in love, even when it hurts. ...You hit a homerun with the message I needed to hear. ...I want God to clean house and He has used you, to open up those areas in my life. I can't thank you enough for all that you have exposed to me. Not just in what is happening in my wife's life, but mine as well. You really have been one of the main tools that God has used in my life for change."—OH

"Getting help has been the best thing I have ever done. It was a risk for me to talk to you, ...but I suppose I took it in faith, and so far it's been amazing how beneficial it's been. I find it very helpful to hear your perspectives, especially the reassurance that God can help me heal from this."—U.S.

Environment of Healing

—Rebecca Peters



I ended the relationship with the pastor in December 2006 because I couldn't take it anymore. I had no idea what I had been involved in; I just knew for some time—a year or two, in fact—it was not right. Something about it—even beyond the sexual impropriety—was *very wrong*. But, I couldn't find my way out, which I will try to explain a bit later

on. When I told my husband Greg the whole truth in early February about the pastor and me, he blurted out, “this has been hostage taking.” Even to this day, he will tell you he had no idea why he said that, given his long involvement as a “friend” of the pastor's. But, at some level of his psyche, we would soon learn he was exactly right. After I disclosed in February, the pastor continued to blame and shame me for leaving him, as evidenced in emails to Greg (we still have) where he describes in great detail his love for his relationship with me, asking literally, “How could she abandon me after all I did for her?”

I drew close to the pastor over the three-and-one-half years he spent incorporating me into his life as minister of the church. When we first met, I was in a position of leadership there and was contemplating seminary or some kind of “spiritual vocation.” He knew early on I felt I was called to ministry all my life. I was also going through a dry and arid time in my marital state. Over time, he sensed my desire to grow further spiritually, and so the relationship was coined a “spiritual friendship.” For all intents and purposes, it felt and acted as such. I was introduced to many readings, writings, books, and journals. This felt like a “gift from God” to me, and the pastor affirmed this thinking with Scriptural references of the Spirit moving, etc. It was a very large affirmation I had been seeking for many years. I liked/appreciated the attention and the sort of “notoriety” that came with having a spiritual mentor. Many of my women friends were lightheartedly envious that I had a male I could relate to, as most of us were experiencing similar midlife crises issues in our lives that involved our seemingly nonresponsive husbands, etc.

The pastor learned early on I was raised with a “God's going to punish you” kind of theology and, over time, he introduced me to a God who was all about love (and only later would justify becoming

sexual as a means to experience such love). I had grown up with strict parents who endorsed a rather punitive view of God all the while we were a very active, churchgoing family. There was physical abuse in the house and, therefore, obedience to certain kinds of authority was apparent. The pastor spent a lot of time getting to know the dynamics between me and my mother and father and the struggles that were present, especially around my tendency to speak out on matters and being punished physically when I used it to question authority, i.e., my father had no problem using the strap on me when I disobeyed.

Likewise, the pastor learned more and more about my arid marital/home life at the time and found ways to make himself a good listener and attentive person—the exact complaints I had about Greg during this period. He also knew, by getting to know Greg, that Greg struggled with some self-esteem issues at that time. The pastor picked up the slack in this regard and was highly attentive to new clothes I bought, creative ways I was tending to the youth group, supporting me in my return to college, and counseling me on some possible career changes. He copied part of my journal once, something that upset me greatly at the time, but again, I dismissed it/forgave him for it after he minimized his actions and said he thought it would be helpful for him in trying to help me become well.

The pastor's support for me at the church also garnered much credibility from the parents of the youth I was leading at the time. The pastor became included in many of the gatherings we had as families outside the church. He was popular, engaging, and charming. The girls in the youth group bonded with him well, thus, so did their parents. *Who wouldn't* want their kids to be part of a successful church youth group? And I, as leader, was receiving positive strokes all over the place from the pastor and others. As the pastor and I became more public, more known to others as spiritual companions, the attachment deepened within the “familial confines” of a faith community.

His befriending of Greg, appointing him Chair of Trustees, inviting him to go fishing; all of this tightened the web of trust and love. He would learn more and more about me, even more than mentioned above.

The pastor waited for the time when we were to attend a conference away together when he made his first sexual move. He even gave me a butterfly pin after it happened, and connected it to its resurrection symbolism. The next morning, I woke up in my

own room bewildered, frightened, yet still with deep feelings for him. When I confronted him, he suggested we read Psalm 139 and pray together. I hoped things wouldn't happen anymore. Two weeks later, when I confronted the behavior and said I would have no more of it, the pastor told me that when I get him, I get all of him. And so, out of fear and shame, I stayed longer than I ever should have. Eventually, I had enough and disclosed to my husband and to my current pastor, as the abusive pastor had retired by then.

The Church had a response team but it provided very little in terms of helping me understand exactly what happened to me and to us as a couple. I felt desperate! I turned to the Internet to see if I could find something that would help us grasp this horrible nightmare. A Google search led me to The Hope of Survivors website. I couldn't believe what I had found!

I remember staying up very late absorbing and printing off everything they had for resources. I also reached out via email to Samantha. In retrospect, it became a vital link to our survival. The commonality of husband involvement helped Greg out tremendously, and I think was one of the saving graces of our marriage. We purchased their DVD set which was really a godsend to help us find our own language as to what happened to us. Most of all, it was Samantha's continuous empathic and professional support that helped us through tumultuous times as we sought justice through the Church amidst a contentious predatory perpetrator. Although her words are her words, Samantha's words would help me find my words when I could not on my own due to the trauma. This was extremely helpful in the healing.

"In looking back, one of the most difficult aspects of clergy abuse is that it uses the tactics of the abuse of theology as well as abusive theology."

It has been two years since I "emerged." In looking back, one of the most difficult aspects of clergy abuse is that it uses the tactics of the abuse of theology as well as *abusive* theology. I am most grateful that Samantha's email exchanges contained appropriate and sensitive use of Scripture to support us without reminding us of these actions by our perpetrator. I also recall some difficult processes with the Church governing body that I felt were questionable, but had no one to turn to locally who would be able to relate. When I reached out

to The Hope of Survivors, their advice and counsel proved to be accurate and validating of our intuition, which was tremendously uplifting and helped us move forward with our case.

I believe the United Methodist Church could learn much on how to support victims/survivors by seeing The Hope of Survivors in action. The Hope of Survivors created a healing environment where Greg and I could thrive. I give thanks for their tremendous empathy, respect, and genuineness, as well as their groundedness in the faith, that helped us survive, and now thrive!

* All names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Australia Division Update

The Hope of Survivors (Australian Division) has some big plans for this year. We have plans to bring Steve and Samantha here to run some seminars for us. Initial inquiries have been made and we feel a visit from them is much needed and would be much appreciated. Some funds have been earmarked for this purpose, however, other donations and funding are still being sought. We are looking forward to meeting Steve and Samantha in person and feel their knowledge and experience will be invaluable in raising awareness of the issues of Clergy Sexual Abuse here, as well as helping those who are on the journey of healing from abuse.

At the present time we have decided to remain under the umbrella of The Hope of Survivors in the U.S., as there is a large amount of paperwork and legal fees to gain incorporation (and tax deductibility status) in Australia. Arlagene is graduating this year with a Bachelor of Social Science (Counseling) and is caring for the counseling work, while Coralie is caring for the administrative duties in the Australia division. We are looking forward to a productive year where those who have been abused can gain healing, and those in spiritual leadership can remain true to their high calling.

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Touching Lives Around the World

—Samantha Nelson

It is always a blessing to be able to touch people's lives for Christ and to see the difference that just a simple hug, a listening ear, a kind word or encouragement can make, especially when the Holy Spirit is at work in the process. This recent trip to Norway and Romania was no exception. There is no doubt the Lord was at work and He was touching hearts and lives.

The first week of February was spent in Norway, conducting meetings for individuals and groups, as well as teaching classes at the European Bible School (EBS). It was great to see how the students were



so enthusiastic about learning how to share their testimony through Biblical illustrations, as Steve demonstrated it and then had a few of them share their own. They also learned how to help someone who had suffered abuse as we went through the book *Reaching the Hurting* and shared Biblical principles of help, hope and healing. During the process we were able to spend some one-on-one time with a few of the students. Here is a note we received:

"It was really good having you guys over here. Thanks for sharing and teaching! [My friend] is doing better; I can see that God is working on her. We started to pray together every night and it's good for both of us."—Student at EBS, 2009

In addition to the meetings and classes, Steve conducted a revival series at the end of the week. The



Lord moved upon the hearts of the people and helped them to see His great love for them. In fact, one translator was so touched by God's love as it was being shared in the sermon that she

began to cry as she was translating. Tears of joy; of hope; of knowing the love of God.

All too soon it was time to leave the beautiful white

landscape of Norway and our beloved family in Christ and head to Bucharest, Romania. While the flight from Amsterdam to Bucharest left much to be desired (due to an unruly seat-mate [not Steve], not the flight itself), it was soon forgotten in the "busyness" of the work that lay before us, the sadness of Bucharest's 75,000 stray dog population, and the joy of being with our Romanian family in Christ. Truly, the food and hospitality of the people is amazing. Those who love God let His love shine forth in bright beams! I want to express a very special thanks to the Morcov, Petre, Ciur and Papadopol families for taking such good care of us while we were there. God bless you!

The week started off with a meeting at the Romanian Union Conference office. We were to hold a seminar on pastoral sexual abuse the next evening and one of the officials at the Conference wanted to know exactly what we planned to discuss. Due to a recent situation of abuse in the Union's jurisdiction, he was quite concerned that any discussion of the topic could become divisive. We assured him we were there to help and that discussing the topic would help the people not cause further damage. After all, God knew the timing of all of this (we surely could not have known!) and we had received approval from the Union to speak on this topic long before the abuse situation became public knowledge.



The meeting the next evening was a precedent-setting meeting. To our knowledge, and according to what we've been told, it was the first meeting where pastoral sexual abuse had been discussed.

You see, Romania was formerly a Communist country and, even though Communism is long gone, there are still some people who are afraid to speak about certain things. Abuse is one of them; pastoral sexual abuse is certainly one of them. All in all, the Lord blessed the meeting and those who were there to seek information, healing and truth about pastoral sexual abuse. In fact, after we returned to Illinois, we received this message via email, *"I have a great news for you. A girl who was at Wednesday's meeting [the meeting about pastoral sexual abuse], it was her first time in a Seventh-day Adventist Church and now she comes every Saturday."* We also received this note from one of the pastors, *"...let me assure you that your efforts are not fruitless. You have contributed to a change of mind and helped many to become aware of an issue which is important and has to be dealt with."* Praise

God for the good He did that night in spite of any of the opposition, controversy and fears surrounding the topic.

A follow-up meeting was held the next day with a representative from the Union. Then, we began to prepare for the revival series to be held that weekend in the village of Cazaci. We spent the weekend with Alina's parents (Alina and her husband Gabriel are the Norwegian and Romanian representatives for The Hope of Survivors), as her father is an elder in the church and helped to arrange for Steve to conduct the revival series there.

Gabriel translated and did a wonderful job. (Thank you, Gabriel!) The meetings went incredibly well, by God's grace. In fact, after the last meeting, the church remained full of people who wanted to meet with us privately for prayer and counsel. During those meetings, our hearts were deeply moved by what we heard and we sent many prayers to the Throne of Grace on behalf of these dear children of God. One young girl really reached into the depths of our hearts but I will leave that story for Steve to share later. He has already used it as a devotional many times and is writing it out, so it can be posted online. We fell in love with the people in the Cazaci Seventh-day Adventist Church and they with us. That's God!



On February 15, there was a book launching of *Puterea de a Mangaia (Reaching the Hurting)* in Romanian. Thank you Chrisian Salcianu and Elena Pridie of Advent for your quick work in translating the book in time for our arrival! Also a special thanks to Pastor Ion Buciuman for allowing us the use of the Balta Alba Church to conduct this book launching. There were about 40 people in attendance and we had a great time of questions and answers and then a book signing. The feedback we have received has been that the book is very helpful and needed. In fact, Pastor Buciuman wrote a review you can read (if you read Roma-



nian) at <http://www.majesty.ro/RONDO-de-Ion-Buciuman/puterea-de-a-mangaia.html> and he intends to use it in his prison ministry work as well. To God be the glory for providing such a needed book in the Romanian language!



Our last weekend in Romania was spent conducting the revival series at the Popa Tatu Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bucharest. Pastor Adrian Bocaneanu did the translation for the meetings and we are especially thankful for his cooperation in the use of the church for many meetings. The Saturday morning meeting was so full it was standing-room only. There wasn't even a place for me to sit, so the pastor permitted me to sit on the platform behind Steve while he preached.



During our brief respite in Holland, we were blessed to be able to visit the Noah's Ark replica in Drachten. You can learn more about this project at <http://www.arkvannoach.com>. It was incredible!



While there is so much more that took place, space prohibits me from sharing it all. Suffice it to say, the Lord went before us, stayed beside us, and blessed all the efforts—in spite of anything anyone tried to do to hinder the work. We were given invitations to return and do more speaking at a future date, and we even met people who have expressed an earnest desire to work with The Hope of Survivors in Romania. We praise God and thank Him for the special blessing of being able to touch lives around the world. We thank you for your support of this critical work around the world.



A Story of Faithfulness

—Jill Morikone



She rose early as usual. Outside darkness lingered, while she prodded the hot coals and gently coaxed the tiny flicker until it burst into flames. She straightened her back, grabbed a shawl to ward off the morning chill, and slipped out the door with the water pot, careful not to waken the

two other women still slumbering on their mats. She would get the water and start breakfast early.

Even the birds seemed hushed as she hurried to the well. Widowhood had devastated her early in life. Still so young, still beautiful, yet so alone. After all, she'd failed to produce sons—no children were born to her and her husband. Her sister-in-law, also a widow, bore the same curse. As the gods would have it, her mother-in-law's husband had died as well, leaving them nearly penniless and with no hope of another son for either woman to marry, as was the custom in their eastern culture.

Sighing, she filled her water pot. The eastern sky was lightening. Dawn. Her favorite time of day with its rosy hues and all nature welcoming the new day with joy. Today though didn't hold any such joy. What hope did she have? What hope did any of them have?

There was, however, the startling announcement just the night before. They had been sitting around the fire, the three of them, when her mother-in-law, Naomi, had spoken. "I believe I want to return to my people, the country of Israel. I've heard it told that

the Lord, Jehovah, has visited our people with bread. The famine is over."

Her sister-in-law had been excited, chattering eagerly about the opportunities there. She herself had not been too sure. Trade the only home she'd ever known for the scary unknown? What about her gods? Would she leave them here in the land of Moab? A troubled look had crossed her face as she stared into the leaping flames. Just who were her gods anyway? They couldn't see or hear, and she never knew if they were going to hurt her in anger—let alone answer her prayers. No, she didn't really believe in them anymore. But what of this Lord—*Jehovah*—Naomi had called Him. Who was He really? Could He answer prayers? Most of all, would He, could He possibly love her, just a widowed heathen woman?

Naomi had looked directly into her eyes and seen the torment there. "Ruth, my daughter, you can find the answers to your questions about the God of Israel when we get there."

A noisy group of women and girls approached the well. She'd better hurry. She'd lost too much time in her dreaming. Lifting her water pot, she balanced it on her head as she rushed up the rocky trail toward home.

A few weeks later found the three women already on their trek back to the land of Israel. Rounding a bend in the road, they paused to rest. Naomi's hair clung to her in the heat, and her breathing seemed labored. Ruth gently guided her to a large smooth stone by the side of the trail. "Sit down, Mother dear, and rest awhile."

Creative ways to help...

Did you know The Hope of Survivors is listed on the social networking site **Facebook**? Check it out! (http://apps.facebook.com/causes/47537?m=33935&recruiter_id=12747904)

Have you ever wished you could buy products with The Hope of Survivors logo on them to help raise awareness and generate conversations about pastoral sexual abuse? Now, thanks to **Charlton Commerce's online store**, you can! Just visit <http://thos.webstore.us.com>.

No money? You can still support The Hope of Survivors! We will receive a penny each time you search the Internet using **www.GoodSearch.com**. Just be sure to type The Hope of Survivors in the charity to be supported box.

Do you shop online? Then shop through **iGive.com** and earn money for The Hope of Survivors each time you order from popular merchants online!

You can also donate through **American Express Giving Express** by going to: <http://amex.justgive.org/nonprofits/donate.jsp?ein=65-1211701>.

Thank you for supporting The Hope of Survivors!

Naomi smiled gratefully as she patted the rock on either side of her. “Come here, Ruth and Orpah, there’s something I want to tell you both.” Pausing for breath, she continued. “You both should return home to your father’s house. I’m an old woman, I can’t provide you with other husbands, it would be best for you to return home.”

Stunned, Ruth looked out over the rocky outcrops and hills as she realized she could go home if she wanted. But that would mean leaving Naomi! She loved Naomi, but more than that, she felt a responsibility for Naomi’s welfare. In her culture, children cared for their parents, and since she had married Naomi’s son, she was linked with his family even more than her own. What was her duty? Should she return home or continue on with Naomi toward Israel?

Faithfulness—that was her duty—whether it involved starting the fire in the morning, carrying water from the well, or even following her mother-in-law to a strange country. The land of Israel would look different from her home country of Moab; the Israelites would have different customs, a different culture, and a different language. In spite of all that, she would go. She would do her duty. She would be faithful. And, who knows, maybe she could learn more about their God, Jehovah. Maybe, one day, she could learn to worship, honor, and love Him too.

After Orpah took her leave and returned home to her family, Ruth made one of the most impassioned statements of faithfulness found in the Bible. She said—*“Intreat me not to leave thee (Naomi), or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”* (Ruth 1:16,17) Ruth was faithful in life, faithful in death. Faithful to Naomi’s God—who one day would become her own God.

I’ve often marveled at the faithfulness of Ruth, shining brightly from the pages of my Bible. Ruth was faithful to her mother-in-law even when she was excused from that responsibility; she was faithful to a God she didn’t even know and hadn’t learned to love yet.

But, more importantly, I see in this story God’s faithfulness to Ruth. Faithful to pluck her, a simple heathen woman and gently lead her to a knowledge of Him. Faithful to His Promise to bring good out of even a hard situation, like that of her husband’s

death and her subsequent loneliness and poverty. (See Romans 8:28) Faithful to bring her and Naomi safely to Israel. Faithful to grant her favor in the sight of Boaz, wealthy landowner in Bethlehem and a near kin. Faithful to bless her with a loving husband, to supply her needs, and to grant her a son, Obed, who became the grandfather of King David and through whose line finally came Jesus Christ.

But, more than simply the story, I see God’s faithfulness to take an ordinary woman of ordinary ability, and—through her surrender and faithful service to Him—transform her into an extraordinary woman with an extraordinary story. A story of what God can do in your life or in mine, if we simply trust Him and are faithful.

Have you experienced God’s faithfulness in your life today? Maybe you experienced it in the stretching of your budget to meet expenses, or in His healing touch on yourself or your loved ones. Maybe it was evident in the joy of a marriage restored, a heart mended, a life rescued from the grip of Satan. Maybe His faithfulness burst across your heart as you saw a rainbow of promise hang on a cloudy sky, and you renewed again your faith in the promises of His Word.

Maybe you observed it in the simple things of nature as you watched the sun rise, golden hues of light touching the frosty ground; wondering as you saw it how God helps the flowers push their way up through the earth or how the first daffodil blooms in the woods and you know that spring is coming. Winter cannot last forever. Or, just maybe, His faithfulness has touched your soul gently as when the sun rose after a sleepless night yet you could exclaim: *“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.”* (Lam. 3:22,23)



Has God asked you to take a journey? It may be a rocky journey, the path strewn with stones and big boulders. It may be an unknown journey to a place, physically or emotionally, that you have not traveled before. Yet, God’s faithfulness will be like a beacon of hope, a reassurance that He will not leave you to travel alone, He will guide you safely to exactly the place He has in mind for you. He will take your ordinary life’s story, and transform it into an extraordinary story of His grace and mercy. What a faithful, faithful God!

“I Know the Plans...”

—Samantha Nelson



It was a new day. A new year. January 1, 2009. I passed the microphone to Steve after I had introduced myself and briefly mentioned that we were Illinois transplants and originally from the beautiful mountains of Northern California. I was intentionally vague and not inclined to

disclose any really personal information. As I sat listening to Steve describe the ministry of The Hope of Survivors and the issue of pastoral sexual abuse, I was stunned to hear him begin to tell about the different abuses I had endured at various times in my life. *“Lord, make him be quiet,”* I silently prayed. Steve continued. *“Lord, please silence him!”* my plea became more desperate. Yet he continued. *“Father, make him stop!”* Then, after a moment of stillness, I surrendered and said, *“Ok, Lord, you must have a purpose in this. It’s ok with me.”*

Now, why would I care if Steve shared our story? After all, we have done so numerous times—publicly and privately—on radio, TV and Internet. Our story is no secret. I cared because, this time, I felt vulnerable. This time, I was sitting in a room full of convicted felons—drug dealers, murderers, rapists, child molesters...

Why were we there? On that evening, I wish I knew. You see, we had been invited to become volunteers at a prison, helping with the chapel ministry there. It wasn’t something we had thought of doing on our

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

— ***Jeremiah 29:11***

besides, we surely have more than enough work to do with The Hope of Survivors. Yet there we were, wondering what God had in store for us—and for them—through this turn of events.

own; we were asked and, after praying about it, we believed we should agree to it. There really wasn’t anything appealing to us about the idea of working with convicted sex offenders, although we certainly understand they need the love and forgiveness Jesus has to offer as much as anyone else. And

Thankfully, it didn’t take long for us to discover the good things God had planned for us in prison ministry. We have been able to go a few times now, and Steve has shared messages of God’s love and hope for a better future. I have shared about our work through The Hope of Survivors. But sharing has not been the biggest blessing for us—it has been seeing the inmates respond to the Holy Spirit and draw closer to God. It has been in seeing their hearts softened by the touch of the Lord. It has been in hearing some of them talk about how The Hope of Survivors has helped them through the sharing of our testimony by enabling them to share their own painful experiences. God knew some of these inmates had experienced pastoral sexual abuse firsthand—either as victims or perpetrators—and needed to hear the truth. Truly, the Lord desires to heal all who will be healed.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

We no longer question why we’re there. We know why. We consider it a blessing and honor to be part of this prison ministry. We rejoice when the inmates ask how they can pray for us and for The Hope of Survivors. We no longer think of them in terms of the crimes they’ve committed. They are children of God. They are our brothers in Christ. They are family.

Isn’t it good to know that Jesus died for each of our sins and, if we choose, we can accept the forgiveness He offers (1 John 1:9) and have the following apply to our lives? *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived:*



neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Praise God we can each walk in newness of life, being a new creature in Christ!

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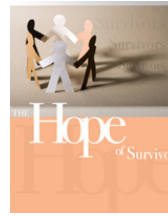
Samantha and Steve Nelson are Co-Founders of The Hope of Survivors. They strive to facilitate healing in the lives of those who have been wounded by a spiritual leader.

The ministry is founded on the commission in God's Word, which calls us to "...comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

—2 Corinthians 1:4



Helpful resources...



New Tool! Do you like to lead small groups? Do you have a heart for sharing the pain of others? Have you ever wanted to be involved helping victims of pastoral sexual abuse? Well, now you can! The Hope of Survivors has just released a new resource—

THOS Support Group Manual, available for only \$49.95. This manual provides step-by-step instructions and guidelines for becoming a THOS Support Group Facilitator in your area. Order today at www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/products.asp!

Please Note: The purchase of a *THOS Support Group Manual* does not automatically grant you permission to begin a THOS Support Group in your area. You must comply with the guidelines in the *Manual* and submit to a background check (fee included in purchase price of *Manual*) and review process before being approved as an official THOS Support Group Facilitator.



Reaching the Hurting—A Biblical Guide for Helping Abuse Victims is a powerful tool for individual growth, small group Bible studies, and women's ministries. It covers a range of topics, and is not specific to pastoral sexual abuse.

Order your copy today at:

<http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/products.asp>

On sale now for \$5 plus shipping!

Current Project Needs

- Monthly operating expenses (postage, office supplies, utilities, printing, etc.), staff, educational materials and victim assistance.
- *Hope & Healing* (victim's) conference expenses (meeting space rental, meals, travel, materials, etc.).
- Calendar project printing costs (\$5,000). If you make a donation for this project, please specify "Calendar" on your check. Thank you!

Donations are the primary source of funds that make it possible for The Hope of Survivors to maintain its ministry. Since The Hope of Survivors receives no denominational subsidies, your gifts are vitally important. Thank you for considering a tax-deductible donation to further the work of this ministry and bring hope and healing to wounded hearts.

Calendar of Events

April 22, 2009

Annual Board of Director's Meeting (Online)

May 17, 2009

St. Louis, MO—*Hope & Healing* Conference

Time: 9:00am-4:00pm (Sunday)

Location: Hampton Inn (St. Louis Airport), 10820 Pear Tree Lane, St. Louis, MO 63074; Hotel phone (314) 429-2000



Cost: The conference itself is provided as a free service of The Hope of Survivors, however, there is a \$15 charge per person for lunch. You are responsible for your own lodging (special rate of \$69 per night) and transportation, if necessary. REGISTER ONLINE at <http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/registration.asp>! Registration deadline is May 1.

Speakers include: Steve & Samantha Nelson, Co-Founders of The Hope of Survivors; and Martin Weber, Communications Director for the Mid-America Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and member of the board of directors of The Hope of Survivors.

Note: There are no childcare services available for this conference.

August 24, 2009

Redding, CA—Fundraising Event

Prime 11 Cinemas—Monday Sponsorship Program Arranged by The Hope of Survivors' volunteers, Peggy and Dave Mahrt, The Hope of Survivors will be the recipient of a portion of funds collected at **Prime 11 Cinemas** during the day. If you're in the area, please plan to participate in this fundraising event.

October 2009 (Tentative Date)

Queensland, Australia—*Hope & Healing* and *Faith & Fidelity* conferences.

These conferences are for victims of pastoral sexual abuse and their families, and for pastors and church leaders. The presentations address the dynamics of pastoral sexual abuse between an adult woman and a pastor and provide information for healing and prevention. These conferences will take place in conjunction with the further training and establishment of the Australian Division of The Hope of Survivors, **provided funding is available to do so**.

Future Events

Nairobi, Kenya—*Hope & Healing* and *Faith & Fidelity* conferences.

These conferences are for victims of pastoral sexual abuse and their families, and for pastors and church leaders. The presentations address the dynamics of pastoral sexual abuse between an adult woman and



a pastor and provide information for healing and prevention. These conferences will take place in conjunction with additional training of the Kenyan Division representative of The

Hope of Survivors, and the transition of donated land to the NGO for the purpose of building a healing center, **provided funding is available to do so**.

To schedule or sponsor a conference in your area, call (866) 260-8958. Check our web site for additional details and the most current information. www.TheHopeOfSurvivors.com

THE
Hope
of Survivors

P.O. Box 16 Thompsonville, IL 62890

April 2009

If you'd like to be removed from our mailing list, just let us know and we'll take care of it.