

MONTH 11: NOVEMBER

Reclaiming Spirituality: Is Faith Possible on Your Terms?

[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse. Please take care of yourself. You can stop anytime.]

"Can I ever trust God again?" "Is my faith destroyed forever?" "How do I separate God from the person who used God to hurt me?" If you're asking these questions, you're not alone. Clergy abuse attacks your soul. Let me talk about what spiritual healing might look like — and whether faith is possible after abuse.

THE UNIQUE SPIRITUAL WOUND

When clergy abuse you, they weaponize your devotion to God, your trust in spiritual authority, your desire for deeper faith. They frame abuse as "God's will," "sacred connection," "spiritual intimacy." This isn't just sexual abuse. This is spiritual desecration.

WHAT SPIRITUAL TRAUMA LOOKS LIKE

After clergy abuse, survivors often:

- Can't pray (triggering)
- Can't read scripture (the abuser used it)
- Can't attend church (panic attacks)
- Rage at God (How could He let this happen?)
- Doubt their salvation
- Feel spiritually "dead"

THE QUESTIONS SURVIVORS ASK

***"Did God allow this?"** I can't answer this. But I can say: Abuse is the abuser's sin, not God's will. The abuser used God as a weapon. ***"Was my faith ever real?"** Your faith was real. The abuser exploited your devotion, but that doesn't make your devotion fake. ***"Can I trust a church again?"** Maybe. Maybe not. Some survivors find healing in different communities. Some practice faith outside institutions. Some walk away entirely. All valid.

PATHS TO SPIRITUAL RECLAMATION

****Option 1: Faith Outside Institution**** Private prayer, nature spirituality, meditation, reading texts independently. ****Option 2: Different Faith Tradition**** Leave Christianity for other traditions. Find communities with better accountability. ****Option 3: Deconstruction & Reconstruction**** Question everything. Examine beliefs. Rebuild based on YOUR values. ****Option 4: Secular Humanism / Atheism**** Walk away from faith entirely. Find meaning in ethics, community, purpose without God. ****Option 5: "I Don't Know"***** You don't have to decide right now. Uncertainty is okay.

PRACTICES FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

• Reclaim what was contaminated (rewrite prayers, reclaim passages) • Create new spiritual practices (journaling as prayer, walking as meditation) • Find community outside church • Work with a trauma-informed spiritual director

SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL HEALING

You'll know you're healing when: • You can think about faith without panic • You can distinguish God from the abuser • You feel agency in your spiritual life • You trust YOUR spiritual discernment

THE BOTTOM LINE

Clergy abuse tried to kill your faith. But YOU get to decide if it succeeds. You can rebuild on your terms, walk away entirely, or hold space in uncertainty. Your spirituality is YOURS now.

RESOURCES: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | You deserve support. Take care. 