

Betrayal: Darkness Disguised As Light

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For it is not an enemy that reviled me—that I could bear—Not a foe who viewed me with contempt, from that I could hide. But it was you, my other self, my comrade and friend, you, whose company I enjoyed, at whose side I walked in the house of God. (Psalm 55: 13-15)

When someone we know, trust and love betrays us, it can be horrific. The pain of the betrayal is often overwhelming and very difficult to accept and understand. Before we ever get to admitting and convincing ourselves that our friend or trusted loved one betrayed us there are many things that happen—mostly adding pain to an already heart-wrenching situation.

When we are in relationship with someone, be it a friendship, intimate relationship, colleague or a family loved one, what happens in the process of caring and sharing is the development of trust, admiration and love. The results are bountiful, including respect, loyalty and companionship to name just a few. We trust and hope in other people, placing our inner thoughts, dreams and aspirations at their feet. We do so in the hope that our feelings will be respected. Over time, trust develops, and a mutual feeling of joy fills the relationship with opportunities that allow for wonderfully creative things to occur.

But, what happens then when that trust is broken? Disbelief is certainly a big part of what takes place. We can't imagine anyone whom we love and respect could hurt us so deeply—especially when the action of betrayal is something profoundly hurtful and disturbing. Such is the case of sexual abuse.

We have found that abusers do everything in their power to groom the communities they live and work in. They enter the lives of individuals and families to get closer to the victims they wish to pursue. They do good things or mimic good behavior to get closer to the families and victims. They do everything in their power to make certain others recognize the good they do. On the surface, the “good” things they do appear to be good. Offenders believe the actions and “good” deeds they undertake are good actions, and they operate in a way that no one can convince them otherwise. They persuade their victims and vulnerable others to believe what they are doing is helping and not hurting anyone. It is absolutely insidious on the part of the offender.

Of course, the offenders are always right. They win every argument, justify all of their bad behavior and blame their victims and everyone else in their path for their wrongdoing. By giving gifts, time and offering “assistance” in any number of ways, they justify their actions and try to appear innocent.

When anyone questions offenders, they minimize their bad behavior and get angry thinking anyone would doubt their good intentions. They are hurt and insulted and wonder why no one appreciates their wonderful efforts. Some get angry and become bullies and try to scare their victims and their families. They can become vengeful and plot to hurt those who get recognize their real intentions. Some use money to buy their victims, their families and those around them. A school principal, pastor or Bishop might think the gifts are wonderful thus making the path clearer for the offender to break rules and move forward pursuing possible victims.

The problem with all of this is that while most of the good things offenders do happen in the light of day, these actions really represent darkness and chaos. Offenders create a cloud of

darkness through their bad intentions and misguided behavior. It causes confusion and in this darkness people can become lost. The darkness of offenders' motives invades everything and causes others to doubt their own intuition and beliefs. Their darkness is disguised cleverly as light.

The answer to all of this is to always stay in the light. Be mindful of the values and principles you espouse and do not depart from them. When someone tries to talk you into something that causes discomfort, stop, say "no" if possible, and redirect yourself back to the path you are comfortable with. Be mindful of the warning signs of perpetrators—most offenders think the rules don't apply to them. Rules apply to everyone including us. Don't break the rules, and when you notice others who do break them in ways that benefit themselves and others, be very wary.

Sometimes children and other vulnerable persons reach out to others to try to tell them something is wrong. Believe them. Do not hesitate to accept what they are trying to say. Do not be tempted to go further into the darkness offenders create to add confusion and create a smoke screen for their bad behavior. Bring light to this darkness—ask questions, follow the five steps in the VIRTUS® program which highlights appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Never let children be alone with any person you have not fully vetted. Talk to, listen to and observe the children and vulnerable persons in your life. Be open to the light and closed to the darkness. When those we admire, respect and love hurt us, we are often in denial about their actions because we never think they would hurt us. But they do, and we must remind ourselves of this once in a while. Stay in the light.

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