

Why the Duggars Kept Josh Duggar's Sexual Abuse a Secret

One of the most important things I've learned over the last few years (and am still learning) is to listen well to people directly affected by some topic or circumstance that I want to write on. I like to find people to read or talk to who share the big points of my faith in Christ and my confidence in the Bible as authoritative for today but who have firsthand experience with something that I am thinking about in more general terms.

When talking about race relations, I have come to deeply value Thabiti Anyabwile's and Anthony Bradley's public writings. We share the same faith, but they have an experience of race as black men that I can't fully understand as a white woman. I need their perspective. I also have a number of African-American friends who aren't public personalities. They have helped me understand white privilege and the subtle slights many blacks still experience regularly in a way I could have never understood on my own.

On the issue of homosexuality, I see Wesley Hill as a gift to the church. His writing has certainly been a gift to me. I have other friends I won't name who are closer to home. They teach me from firsthand experience the deep struggle for identity when the natural attraction so many of us take for granted is not natural at all for them. We share core convictions around the sexual ethics that Scripture requires, but they open my eyes to a struggle I can't really understand without experiencing it firsthand.

The issue in my news feed repeatedly right now is sexual molestation by Josh Duggar. There are a myriad of voices

speaking into this subject. A few still defend the family, but the vast majority I read are quite critical. But within the criticism, there are a wide variety of voices as well. The voices that I most value are those from men and women with whom I agree on the core doctrines of Christianity. I struggle to read commentary from those with no understanding of grace or forgiveness. And I struggle to read commentary from those who do understand forgiveness through Christ but don't really understand the complicated issues around incest and molestation in the home.

Thankfully, there are good resources from those who have experienced sexual abuse and have a strong faith in God and confidence in His Word. Mary Demuth has become a respected voice on this topic to me. I also have a few unnamed women in my life who have experienced this firsthand. I value their insight deeply and defer to their feedback when I write around this subject.

I have been thinking a lot on two particular facets of the Duggar's story. The first is the violation to the victims that the Freedom of Information Act allows. I have a friend closer to home who was raped as a young adult. The press were able to access her address through the Freedom of Information Act, and I wept to hear her description of them hounding her *at her home* to get information from her about her rape.

Media sought my friend out for a statement because there was a public scandal surrounding her rapist and his fraternity. Similar to the Duggars, the media felt entitled to harass her because it was a story with public interest. The law prohibits the media from publishing a victim's name, but it doesn't prohibit them from getting their hands on personal information and contacting or harassing the victim.

The law also doesn't prohibit publishing information that hints at the victim's identity, which happened in the case of the Duggar daughters. There are just no words for this second

violation of victims, and information that can identify victims should never, never, never be released to the media.

The second issue I've been thinking about is what I see as a very natural desire as a parent to protect your child from the label of sexual offender and how that led to choices that backfired and resulted in far more stigma and attention for Josh Duggar. In a similar situation as the Duggars, I likely would have also wanted to shield my son from the police and try to get help from people I thought would keep my privacy. I would want to do my best IN HOUSE for my child who did this thing and my children who were affected by it. I get that natural desire. But in the end, that effort (coupled with the unwise choice to expose your family to reality television) backfired.

There is a road to walk when a crime has been committed, even if it is a crime committed by a juvenile. And it is much wiser to walk with our children down that path than to try to find a different one for them to take. If you are white and privileged, there are often options for avoiding arrest and legal consequences that other juveniles regularly face. But the fact that you can avoid consequences does not make that the best choice.

As embarrassing as it might be to have a juvenile arrest and conviction for sexual molestation, it's powerful to be able to say as an adult that you faced it head on and dealt with the consequences at the time you committed the act, that you agreed with the court on the seriousness of the crime you committed and you took the steps you needed to make sure you never did it again.

The media (especially that around reality television) is atrocious. They are vile and exploitative. They set up a naive family for stardom because it would make them money and pounced upon them when they fell for the same reason, never

with concern of the cost for the smallest in the household. Now, there are five young girls/women who have had their most vulnerable moment exposed to the world, and it makes me sick from every angle. Whatever value we might see from this exposure, no one had the right to do this to them, taking away the last bit of autonomy they had around this subject.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books, including The Gospel-Centered Woman. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*