Twitter Thread by Eric Schumacher



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I first joined Facebook in 2007 to report a Facebook group called "Find Dirt on the New Pastor at Northbrook: Because Everyone Has Secrets," which began within about 7-8 months of me arriving.

It has maybe 450+ members, some of which were children of church members (and maybe some on the membership roles). It contained pictures of me (one altered to add 666 to my necktie) and my family (one implying that I abused my youngest child).

I reported it to FB, after which the administrators dropped off it. So I contacted FB again, saying if they didn't remove it ithey would hear from my attorney about defamation of character. It was soon removed (though I may still have printouts of all group pages).

(Around the same time there was another Facebook group called "Take Back the Northbrook Youth Group," for which the cover pic was a former youth group member brandishing a handgun. Removed much more quickly when his mother learned of it!)

What I'm saying is this:

1. This is (one of several reasons) why I don't tolerate people misrepresenting me, making unwarranted accusations, or making threats...especially when they are "Christians."

2. Not much has changed on Facebook in 15 years.

One man would sit front & center and stand up and walk out in the middle of my sermon every week. He pressed his finger into my chest (I thought it was going through my chest) and growled, "DO YOU HAVE ANY JOY?" He later told me that he spent a year praying for God to kill me.

Oh, and then there were the ~150 anonymous letters that were aimed at my Associate Pastor and me, stuffed into every mailbox and left in stacks in every room one Sunday afternoon before the evening service.

Fortunately, a staff member discovered them and alerted me.

I collected them all, fed them through the shredder, and used them to line my dog's kennel.

Had my JEEP egged too.

Then there was the arson threat left on our answering machine...which collected the phone number. Police officer called it and left message stating they were aware of a message they left at the church and would be willing to discuss it. That ended that.

What I'm saying is: Church division is Satanic.

And all this is a reason I praise God for @GABCames. An absolutely conservative, orthodox, Gospel-loving church that loves one another, works out disagreements, forgives each other, and dwells together in unity. No pastor is guaranteed this—and I count it as a sweet mercy.

And what I've described above is much like what many pastors experienced in 2020 and still experience due to divisions over politics & COVID. I know of pastors who have been fired, are depressed and suicidal, and will resign once things are open enough to safely look for a job.

Some people follow their political views, news outlets, celebrity pastors, and conspiracy theories more than they Jesus—like a cult member to the Kool-Aid—and then they think that bullying, spinning truth, and abusing people is what it looks like to stand for the truth.

And I could tell more stories than I told here.

Most pastors won't speak of these things because the response you get is—"Just endure!" and "I'm so sorry" (but no public defense of you) and "You'll get heavenly rewards!" and "Everyone's job is hard. That's life! Suck it up!"

What really sucks is that this roots itself in your brain. It conditions you.

You get anxious going to church when there's absolutely no reason to be anxious.

You overreact to church members who have done nothing wrong.

You're always waiting for the other shoe to drop.

It takes a lot of hard work, therapy, and grace from Jesus to overcome.

I'm very thankful for patient brothers and sisters in Christ.

I actually don't know why I posted all this today.

I was thinking about FB and posted this there and then everything (well...not everything...this ain't half of it!) spilled out.

But I'm not trying to paint myself like a martyr. I'm not.

The causes of all this can't be reduced to a single reason. It was a big ball of confusion, misunderstanding, lies, meanness, peer pressure. That's part of how it works. You can't get back to the start of it to stop it.

And I'm a sinner. There are plenty of ways that I responded poorly, avoided confrontation that needed to happen, sinned against people, and brought the congregation in on what they didn't need to hear...

(like the time I stopped my sermon in John and said I was thinking about cancelling the Lord's Supper b/c what was happening in the church wasn't love and love is a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper).

My conscience is still clear that I didn't cause this. But I certainly sinned in the midst of it.

The effect it had on me eventually made me a worse pastor, husband, father. I had to quit for the good of everyone in my life—though it meant disappointing people I love deeply.

I guess if there's a moral to this, it might be this: the way I remember being treated then and the way groups of people behaved is exactly how I see in Christians behaving on FB, esp. around COVID/politics.

The world is watching this and wants none of it.

Neither does Jesus.

In conclusion (never trust a preacher when he says that)...

So, if you've seen a change in me over the years, one that wants to listen to the voice of suffering people, to hear their stories without "yeah, but!" and "really!? are you sure!?,"...

...and one who cannot tolerate the bullying of crowds, the name-calling and scoffing and dismissal and laughing at those who cry out for mercy, those who's knee-jerk reaction is to scoff and cast aside talk of justice and mercy as some liberal Marxist conspiracy, ...

...and who is willing to speak about abuse and give the abused a voice—it's because of those years, where God beat the crap out of the old me (who's knee-jerk reaction and inability to see and hear and speak needed to die) and started to make someone new.

I'm so thankful he did that. And I'm so thankful that he's not done.

So, you can call me a liberal or a Marxist or a sucker or someone who's been blinded by whatever.

I'd like to think of it as kindness, as the love that is the overflow of faith in Jesus Christ.