

# OpenTheo

## Can Faith Reconcile Justice and Forgiveness? | Rachael Denhollander

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### The Veritas Forum

A conversation with Rachael Denhollander, the brave woman and attorney who stopped the "greatest sex scandal in sports history." Hosted at New York University and moderated by Melissa Murray, Professor of Law at NYU.

### Transcript

[Music] Welcome to the Veritas Forum podcast, a platform for conversations that matter and seeking truth together.

[Music] If my value was based in the decision of twelve jurors, and I didn't succeed, the result in me would be devastating. And so I had to get to the point where I was able to hold on to what was true, regardless of what society said.

[Music] I am really grateful to be here speaking with all of you to write. Before coming, I had the opportunity to look into some of the history and the traditions surrounding NYU, and I was really particularly drawn to the fact that at its inception, this college was designed to provide university education to the common man, something that was available to everyone, not something granted just by birthright as had been the tradition. And I really hope that our dialogue this evening is in keeping with that tradition, that we are discussing ideas that are relevant to all of us, in a way that all of us can engage.

And I can't think of any better discussion to be having this evening on the anniversary of 9/11, than to be discussing concepts of justice and forgiveness. Because these are really concepts that are applicable and vital to all of us. They are interesting to me on a philosophic level, because they seem very antagonistic towards each other, but they are also very deeply personal concepts to me.

And they are really concepts that all of us have to wrestle with, because regardless of your background and where you came from, all of us have been in some way or another

wounded, many of us very deeply. And we have to wrestle with what we do with that. What do we do with that pain? Is there hope to be found? Is there life and healing after suffering severe trauma? And conversely, and maybe just as importantly, all of us to some degree or another, myself included, have wounded other people, and also need forgiveness from those that we have wounded.

And so wrestling with these concepts of justice and forgiveness are vital, both for our personal healing and for understanding our own need for forgiveness. Most of you are likely aware of my story, and it's been recapped a little bit. But the reason that these concepts are so personal to me is because of suffering violation at a very personal level, sexual assault.

The first time I was assaulted, it was actually by a member of my church, and I was seven years old. I was very fortunate because there were adults in that church who recognized the warning signs of grooming, and they came and they warned my parents. And so the assault and the abuse was stopped before it became too severe, but it doesn't take a lot to do very much damage.

And the damage was really compounded by my church because when my parents took steps to protect me, the response of the adults that had surrounded me, that formed my concept of God, that formed my concept of church family, was to respond very vitally. Because I had not verbalized the abuse, I hadn't proved it. And because I hadn't proved it, these adults were not motivated to protect me, but they were motivated to isolate me and my family.

So at seven years old, I lost everything, that formed my concept of church, that formed my concept of God and faith. And all of these adults that I had trusted and looked up to were treating me just terribly, and I couldn't understand why. When I was around 12, I started to process more and to understand more of what had happened.

And so I shared with my parents the abuse that had occurred, and I started to ask more questions. And when I found out why I had lost everything at seven years old, the message that I internalized was, "If you can't prove it, don't speak up, because you will lose everything." And like so much of the messages we internalized with trauma, I didn't even realize I had absorbed it. But that really set the stage for what happened just a few years later, when I suffered a back injury and I walked into the exam room of Larry Nassar.

There were a lot of things I knew about Larry at that time. He was the Olympic team doctor. He was the sports medicine physician for MSU.

He had almost godlike status in the gymnastics world. What I did not know was that by 2000, Larry was a hardened and skilled sexual predator. And he had been sexually abusing children for almost a decade.

I did not know that four others had reported Larry's abuse before I even walked in his door. And so when things didn't seem right, my thought process went back to what had happened when I was seven. I can't prove it's abuse.

It must be me. The problem must be me. And so I stayed quiet.

And for the next year, I stayed quiet. I thought surely at least one of the adults that surrounded me and that surrounded Larry would have done something if there was any question about what he was doing. And what I had to wrestle with when I finally came to grips with the abuse that occurred was that I hadn't just been betrayed by somebody that I trusted.

I had been betrayed by everybody that surrounded him. There wasn't anyone I could trust. Not my doctor.

Not the school. Not my coaches. There was no one that I could trust anymore.

Eventually I told my parents, but again we had no idea what to do. What do you do with information like this? How do you get someone to believe you, especially after you've already been told that you're not going to be believed? I had no way of making anyone listen. And I was terrified of what it would mean for me personally if I were to speak up because I knew it would become a national story if the Olympic team doctor were charged with sexual assault.

And most of you probably already know where the story goes, but after 16 years of waiting and watching and wondering if it was ever, ever going to end. I opened my computer one day and I saw a story trending in my Facebook news feed. And it was a report written by the Indianapolis star that detailed USAG's decades long cover up of the sexual abuse of coaches.

And Larry wasn't in that article, but I knew if the spotlight was on USAG and people were finally understanding the level of corruption in that organization that may be for the first time. There was a chance that people would believe their own team position was a serial abuser. And with my teething baby on my back, I wrote to the Indianapolis star right away and I said, "This is what happened." And I can't file a police report anymore because I didn't think I could, but I will give you whatever you need if you can make the truth come out.

And then I called my husband who was at work and I said, "Hey, I just did this thing. I have an awesome husband." And he said, "All right, let's see where it goes. Let's see what God can do." And within a matter of weeks I had discovered that I could file the police report.

We had packed our family up and traveled to Michigan, started the criminal investigative process, started the Title IX process. The Indianapolis star did come down and record an

interview and within three weeks Larry knew that I had come forward. And I was out there by myself.

I had to write some of the hardest emails that I've ever written to family and friends and tell them, "This is what happened when I was a little child and you're going to see this coming out in the news and I don't want you to open the front page of the paper and see my face and not hear it from me first." And I felt like I had to give up everything. Every shred of privacy, every shred of dignity, just in an effort to make it stop. And the fallout when my interview with public was every bit as nasty as I expected it to be.

But the result was incredible. To this day over 400 women have now come forward as victims of Larry. He is in prison for the rest of his life.

Some of the victims of the child porn have been able to be found. He will never harm another little girl again. Institutions are being held accountable.

Leadership structure is changing. And literally the entire world sat and watched as 256 women stood up and gave their victim impact statements. And forced society to confront the reality of sexual abuse in ways that have never, ever, would never have been required to confront it.

And the impact is global, but the damage is still very severe. And it took a very long time to get to that point. And these concepts of justice and forgiveness were the concepts that I had to wrestle with for 16 years.

And I was terrified to forgive my abuser. Because society so minimizes the trauma of sexual abuse. They so downplay the devastation that I thought if I forgave my abuser it would give them one more reason to say, "See, this wasn't as bad.

Look at how well you've moved on. Look at all the great things that have come because you've released your bitterness." And I didn't want to give anyone one more reason to downplay what had happened to me. So these are the some of the dynamics that I want to explore with you today.

What is forgiveness? What is justice? How do those two interrelate? And can you have both at the same time? When Jacob and I told our pastors at our former church in Michigan what I was about to do, one of them asked a very insightful question. He asked, "Is there anything you personally need to get out of this process besides stopping an abuser?" And the reason that this question was so vital for me was because of my worth, if my value was based in the decision of 12 jurors and I didn't succeed, the result to me would be devastating. And so I had to get to the point where I was able to hold on to what was true, regardless of what society said, regardless of what 12 jurors on a jury pool said.

My healing had to be founded in something other than the societal response to my

abuse. And I was at that place when I reported Larry, but it took years of wrestling to get there. I found beautiful answers to the questions that I sought, and those answers provided a framework for experiencing real healing.

And I'd like to do two things tonight as we discuss these concepts. The very first thing we need to do is just to find the terms. What do we mean by justice and forgiveness? If we don't know the words that we're using, we can't talk about how they apply, right? And then discuss how they intersect and how they impact our life, regardless of the circumstances that you've been through.

And as we do that, it's going to become obvious to you if it hasn't already, that I do come from a Christian worldview. I believe that there is a God who is loving and who is sovereign, and that this God is revealed in the God of the Bible. But I'm not alone in operating from a worldview, because the reality is that all of us operate from a worldview.

We all have a faith structure, whether it is agnostic, atheistic, polytheistic, theistic, all of us have a faith structure that we're operating from, and a lens through which we view life. And we can't discuss these important concepts and dive into philosophical concepts if we're not honest with that upfront. So let's just be honest about it.

This is the framework that I'm coming from. So what is justice? What do we mean by it? We hear that term used all the time, but what is it? What are its defining characteristics and ideas? I think one of the best ways that we can discuss that is to look at how it's used culturally. And I think one of the greatest cultural icons we have of someone who fought for justice was Martin Luther King Jr. And he has just beautiful writings on both of these concepts, justice and forgiveness.

His pursuit and understanding of justice powerfully changed the world, and his writings are as sobering as they are inspiring. King once wrote that his pursuit of justice would involve authority and power, because he knew that you had to have those things to be able to pursue justice. But he wrote, "I am not interested in power for power's sake.

I am interested in a power that is moral, that is right, and that is good." So the first thing we see in the pursuit of justice is that it is focused on some sort of moral standard. It's anchored to some sort of moral standard. It differentiates between what is right and wrong, what is bad and what is good, and that's the motivation for seeking it.

And he expanded more on these ideas, writing, "Cowardness asks the question, is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" Vanity asks the question, "Is it popular?" But conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but we must take the position that is right. This right, this pursuit of what was right, this pursuit of justice to King was not a standard that was utilitarian. It wasn't based on political expediency, it

wasn't based on cultural popularity, it was anchored to morality, to an absolute moral standard, and that was his guidestone.

It came from outside human opinion and perception. And his powerful exposition of his pursuit of justice is seen even in very simplistic form if we just go as basic as looking at the dictionary definition. I know dictionaries aren't terribly popular tools now and then, but it gives us the elements to define justice.

So, Miriam Webster's dictionary defines just in several ways, and we're going to see these terms reflected in how Luther and how King used the term justice. So first, just is having a basis or conforming in to fact or reason. Justice is defined as conforming to a standard of correctness, having that moral standard that we're anchored to.

It is faithful to an original. It is acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good. It is being what is merited or deserved.

These are the elements from the dictionary definition of what the word "just" means. You see a common thread through these definitions? All of them require some sort of standard. Some sort of absolute truth.

In the same way that King powerfully taught that we are to ask the question what is right, we see that justice is comparing something, some event or some action against a firm immovable standard. This means two very important things. First, it means that the standard exists.

There is some standard. If there is not some standard by which we measure our actions, events or ideas, there can be no such thing as justice. C.S. Lewis perhaps said it best in his book, "Mirror Christianity." And this is a quote that I held on to, particularly for the last two years.

Lewis said, "My argument," oops, sorry guys, totally missed that slide. There we go. "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cool and unjust.

But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" And in the same way Martin Luther King explicitly appeals to the standards of God in his pursuit of justice as the defining characteristic for what we ought to support or oppose. King powerfully wrote, "If any earthly institution or custom conflicts with God's will, it is your duty to oppose it.

You must never allow the transitory, evanescent demands of man-made institutions to take precedence over the eternal demands of Almighty God." Now for those who wish to dive deeper into the argument that God of the Bible is the moral law giver for the standard, I highly recommend C.S. Lewis's book, "Near Christianity," because the majority of his text is devoted to establishing that exact line of reasoning. But for the

purposes of tonight, since we don't have time to dive into all things that we'd like to, I want to expand on the conclusions that come from this idea that a standard exists. And the first is this.

Because the straight line exists, there is goodness. The standard of what is good is right, the straight line, as Lewis called it, is not and cannot be a matter of opinion. In the same way that King says, "We don't ask the question, what is popular or what is expedient." That standard of goodness comes from outside our human perception and our human popular opinion.

If something is truly evil, it requires an absolute standard. And if everything in life is based on nothing more than human perception and human reasoning, there can be no real standard by which we deem something right or wrong, just or unjust. Even standards that attempt to appeal to universal themes apart from God require human opinion if left to themselves.

For example, the idea that what is wrong is whatever harms the common good. Well, who defines harm? Who defines collective good? Who made the rule that harm is what defines the collective good? Without some standard of right and wrong that transcends our human authority, there is no true real right and wrong, and therefore no ability to have justice. No straight line against which we measure the crooked.

But if there is a moral law giver who set a standard by which we can measure whether something is just or unjust, then true goodness exists, and by converse, so does true evil. And there are several very healing truths that flow from this revelation. The first is this.

If goodness exists, there is hope. No matter how dark it gets, if you can see that something is evil, it means there is goodness out there, and that gives hope. Evil does not have to be minimized.

It doesn't have to be mitigated. It doesn't have to be downplayed. You can call it what it is and know that the goodness exists, and there is hope.

This lets you speak the truth about what happened to you without minimizing or mitigating or downplaying, without being dependent on what culture or society says about what was done to you. You are not dependent on society's response to know if something is just or unjust and to be able to grieve it. You can grieve the damage, even if others minimize or excuse it.

And learning to grieve the damage in ways that are non-destructive is the first step in reaching healing. And that's not an easy step to take. So the first thing we see is that there is a standard and it exists and it brings freedom.

The second implication is this. The moral lawgiver who defines goodness cares about

justice and evil. In the Christian faith, right and wrong, flow not from some capricious decision that God makes, but from the very goodness and holiness of God, from his very being and his essence.

And so in the Christian faith, the reason that we feel evil so keenly is because it is such an aberration, from incredible goodness of our loving father. Such an aberration from the one who defines that straight line. And because goodness and evil exist in opposition to each other, in contrast, the more one understands the good, the more you will understand and be able to recognize the evil.

This means that God, as the ultimate standard of goodness, feels and recognizes and understands the evil even more keenly than I do. And what this really means ultimately is that it matters. My abuse matters to God because he understands it even better than I do.

And here's where we see, if we apply the definition of justice to my abuse, here's where we start to see a little bit of tension. Because that last element of justice was getting what is merited or deserved. So if I am desiring justice, I am desiring that my abuser gets what he deserves.

And this is where we start to feel that tension and that question of can you forgive and still desire justice. If we accept that justice is conformity to an absolute standard of goodness, a standard that is set by God, then justice is a good thing. But forgiveness is also held out in the Christian faith as being right and good.

So how can both be good? Well, to understand that we need to get very basic again, what is forgiveness? Martin Luther King Jr. talked beautifully about forgiveness. That is one of the hallmarks of his social justice movement is the non-violence that he preached and the love for his oppressors that he preached. And you will see this reflected again even just in a very simplistic dictionary definition of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is giving up resentment and a claim to retaliation. It is giving up resentment and a claim to retaliation. And there are two key things about this definition that really helps us understand how forgiveness and justice intersect.

The first is this. In the definition of forgiveness, notice that the thing being released is personal to me. I am giving up my vengeance, my retaliation, my bitterness.

But justice comes from outside me. Justice is conforming you to an absolute standard. And that standard exists even when I give up my personal vengeance.

Forgiveness is my personal response to my abuser. Justice is ensuring that an outward standard is followed. And it is this reality that allowed men like King to powerfully advocate for justice.



And yet advocate justice strongly for loving and forgiving the abuser. This means I can be bitter and retaliatory and never see justice. And it means that I can pursue justice and yet forgive.

And the second dynamic that we see with this is a very simplistic truth that if there is a moral law giver, the straight line, then there is someone that is higher than me who is capable of meeting out full justice. Justice does not depend on what I do ultimately. And this is one of the areas where I find that the Christian faith portrays the most beautiful and true picture of both forgiveness and justice.

The Christian faith teaches that not only does God love, but that God is just. That he pours out wrath on evil because he cares, because he loves, because evil is even more glaring and blatant to the Creator than it is to us. And I absolutely love the way Martin Luther King Jr explained this.

He said that God whom we worship is not a weak and incompetent God. He is able to beat back gigantic waves of opposition and bring low prodigious mountains of evil. The ringing testimony of the Christian faith is that God is able.

And very often we think of the idea of God punishing and God's wrath being seen as something that is negative and vengeful. But what we need to understand tonight, what I want you to understand tonight, is that punishment for evil, the bringing of justice does not happen because God does not love, but because he does love. When my innocence was stolen as a young child, twice over, God saw that damage and he said, "This is evil and it matters to me." What happened to me matters and it is seen and it is heard and someone cares when no one else did.

And if we really think about it, would we want it any other way? I think back to another quintessential sexual assault case we had in the last few years, the Brock Turner case. A young woman who was victimized in that case got up and testified powerfully to what Turner had taken from her and what was the judge's response. Six months, six months imprisonment and he got out in three.

Did the whole world stand up and say, "Look at that judge. Look at how loving and compassionate that judge is. We need more judges like this." That is not what we did.

We intrinsically knew that the most unloving thing that judge could do for both parties was to pretend that that evil wasn't as evil as it was, to minimize it, to mitigate it, to act like it didn't matter. And the only reason a judge does something like that is when he doesn't care. But that is not the kind of God that we have.

But the Christian faith goes one step further even than that. Not only does God love and bring justice, but then God offers to take that justice upon himself to make forgiveness possible. The Christian faith teaches that God's love requires justice and requires

punishment for sin because evil is real and it matters.

But it also teaches that God in his love and mercy gave himself to allow that justice to be poured out on him. This is what is referred to in Christianity as the "atonement." Christ coming to earth to sacrifice himself for our sins. Christ took the punishment, the justice, on himself.

And because of this, in the Christian faith those who repent turn from their evil and place their faith in Christ will no longer receive what they deserve. Not because it doesn't matter. Not because what they did wasn't wrong, but because someone else took their place.

But either way, justice is still done because the evil is real and it matters and God cares. Only in the Christian faith do we have a God who unfailingly loves enough to always bring justice, but also unfailingly loves enough to take that justice upon himself to make forgiveness possible. And this means that I have been the recipient of that incredible love too.

I had someone stand in my place. That was one of the most incredible powerful things about sitting there and watching that sentencing hearing and looking at Larry, sitting in the chair, listening over and over and over again to all the evil things he had done being held up in front of him. And I watched that and I thought to myself, "What if I were in that chair?" I'm not Larry, I'm not a serial pedophile, but if every nasty wicked thing that I thought or said or done was held up in front of me in a courtroom, how hard would that be? Coming face to face with my own ugliness.

But I had a God that took my place. And it also means that if I have a God that is strong enough to forgive even someone like Larry, that is the most secure place I could ever be, because his love is strong enough to keep me to. That's someone that I can trust when I can't trust anyone else.

Someone who sees my abuse and who said that matters to me and I will bring justice for that and that was evil because I am so good. And that is why the quote by C.S. Lewis that he finishes near Christianity with is just incredibly powerful to me. Lewis says Christianity, if false, is of no importance at all.

But if true is of infinite importance, the one thing it cannot be is moderately important. I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. Thank you.

That was really powerful. So there's a lot we could start talking about based on your remarks. But one of the things I think struck me most powerfully was the connections between justice and forgiveness, right? The idea of law, the higher power, and then forgiveness flowing from that.

What about mercy? Where does mercy fall? Yeah, excellent. I think that's another entire topic. But mercy I see as being closer to the personal forgiveness.

I am able to extend mercy to my abuser, but it is not my role to remove him from that final judgment of justice. And I think when we're dealing with an issue particularly like abuser, where it's criminal behavior, there's an element of love for those who are around me, who could be further victimized by this person, that demands that justice be carried out for their safety as well. So on that topic, was there ever a point where you regretted waiting 16 years? Because you knew that this might be going on and then later when you were actually faced and confronted with the idea that he had been doing this and it was far more vast than you had even contemplated? The honest answer is it's not more vast than I thought it was.

I think the worst thing about those 16 years was knowing what Larry was probably still doing and feeling completely powerless to stop him. One of the dynamics I was very acutely aware of the social dynamics surrounding abuse. And so one thing I was very certain of is that I wasn't Larry's first victim.

It was clear this was something he did regularly. And I knew that there are always people that speak up and they're not listened to. So the fact that Larry could be abusing the way he was was very clear indication to me that those who had spoken up were not being listened to.

And so that begs the question, what more can I do? So my moment I had actually talked about going to the press when I was 17 when we started to figure out what was going on. And we weren't even sure how to get a journalist to take up the story. But what I said to her at that point was this can't be done anonymously.

One voice is never going to be enough. We're going to have to have press involvement. We're going to have to reach other victims until we have those dynamics in place.

There's nothing I can do. I did try in 2004 to go to a coach. And I told her what he was doing.

And she was engaged to a police officer at that time. They're married now. And the honest truth is that my hope was that they would speak for me.

That they would say I'll help you report because I knew if I had someone in the gymnastics world and someone who was an officer who could vouch for me that that was a lot more likely my claims would be taken seriously. But the response that I received was that they continued to send girls to him and they cautioned me against speaking more publicly because of the retaliatory effects on me. And my concern wasn't the retaliation so much as empowering him to continue.

The more someone spoke up and he got away with it the more empowered he was. And

so I waited for the right dynamics. And you waited a long time and sort of lends itself to thinking about the cultural moment that we're in.

One of the things that you said earlier about just your history and then your relationship with the people around you is that you had these really tight relationships with your church family, with your own family, with people in the gymnastics community. And yet, one presented with your own testimony about what had happened to you, everyone is sort of hands off like we can't help you. Or more particularly we don't want to help you and we're going to shun and ostracize you.

Have you ever thought about what it means to forgive them or what it would require of you to forgive them for that injustice done to you? Honestly, I feel like that's almost been as difficult, if not more, in some ways than for giving my abuser because there's an element with Larry where you can look at him and you can say there's something seriously wrong with this man. That's not really the case with my church family and the people that I reported to. They're very well meaning people.

There's not anything wrong with them mentally. And yet they made some very, very tragic and devastating and damaging decisions. And so forgiving them has been a process that I've had to work through right alongside, forgiving Larry.

And it's again releasing that desire to retaliate, to be vengeful, to be bitter, and to leave that justice to God to say God saw that, it matters to him. And the truth will be known and it will come out and God will fight for me. Does it make you wonder though, is there anything more profound as a betrayal than just sort of bystanders seeing something happening and refusing to say nothing? I think about that a lot in our present political moment when so much is going on when we think about children being separated from their parents at the border, the women who have come out and spoken about their abuse within the workplace.

And so much of this goes on and we all just kind of go about our lives. We've talked about justice and forgiveness. We've never actually talked about complicity.

Like what does it mean to be complicit in someone else's crime simply because you are unwilling or you feel unable to actually step up and do something about it. Do you have thoughts about that? Do you find that those people in your life were complicit? I think there is a degree of complicity. I don't think it's always malicious.

The coach that I reported to was someone who is very loving. And she wanted to do the right thing, but she made very wrong decisions that were very damaging. But I think that aspect of complicity is probably the greatest thing that we really have to deal with because the reality is that so many women aren't abused, both domestically or sexually, because that many men are abusers.

You don't have 25% of women abuse because 25% of men are necessarily sexually abusers. It's because those abusers are able to abuse so many because no one who is around the abuser stands up and does the right thing. No one who is around the victim does the right thing.

And when you're in that situation, your ability to advocate for yourself to find your voice is almost non-existent. Stopping evil is really dependent on the people who are outside the situation who have the power to do something. And I think that's a thread we see throughout history.

One of the most painful aspects, even of reading through Martin Luther King's works, was how much he discussed that aspect, that the greatest impediment to the civil rights movement was not the Klu Klux Klan. It was... - Well, meaning white people. - It was well-meaning white people.

That said, I agree with you, but not important enough. There is also a degree of impotence with which the well-meaning white people faced when they were confronted with the civil rights movement. I imagine the people that you try to bring this to their attention also about this.

There's nothing I can do. And you talk about this and you relate it to sort of a kind of sexual culture where women must present irrefutable proof in order to be believed. And maybe that's changing right now, I think, with the Me Too movement, you're sort of seeing just the scores of women complaining and bringing claims against a single man.

We might not have believed them all individually, but we cannot ignore the seriatim effect of all of them coming forward. But then it goes back to what do we need to feel empowered to do something? How much proof do we need to be able to come forward and say, "I think something is going on." Or, "I'm not sure exactly what's going on, but I think it's worth your attention." What do we need to do as individuals in the world as part of an ecosystem where we are all linked in some way to feel like we are empowered to speak up, even if we don't have irrefutable proof? One of the biggest threads that I see with that is just the willingness to hear something hard about your community and to hold to an overarching moral principle as being more important than something else. So, for example, this particular election cycle was very painful to be walking through the Larry Nassar trial and this election cycle because you had two candidates, both of whom allegedly had things in their past.

And you have Republicans who are saying, "Well, that's different." And Democrats say, "Well, that's different." You have people defending their sports teams, their colleges, their alma mater. Everyone is willing to say it's difficult or it's wrong, sexual abuse is wrong, domestic abuse is wrong, until it touches something that they care about. Until they think that speaking up might cost them something.

So, for example, politically, well, if I acknowledge that my candidate might have done this and I don't vote for him, I might lose this ideology to this privilege. Or my school might lose their ideology. This we have something that we deem more important than ultimately what is right.

More important than finding out the truth. And, societally, we need to get to the point where we hold what is true and what is right as more important than the political game, the sports game, our alma mater, our physical community. And to be able to signal that to a survivor.

Because that's what survivors are always asking. They're always on the lookout, "Is it safe?" "Am I safe? Can I trust you?" And one of the simplest ways to do that is when you see that in your community, speak up. And that does not always require us to look at something and say, "This is absolutely true.

Every single claim that comes out is true." But to say, "Hey, wait. We need to stop and listen to this. This issue matters.

This is important. We need to hear this person. We need to investigate.

We need to find out what is true. Because if this is true, that is more important than this other ideology that I'm holding." In the last month, we've heard more discussion of the Catholic Church and sexual abuse by priests of children in the Catholic Church. Is there something about faith communities that may make them especially susceptible to this kind of thing where people are like, "People keep secrets or are afraid to come forward," or, "By standards, do you not feel empowered to come out and say that they've seen something or that they think that something is a miss?" I think there are dynamics that can lend itself.

And I do think there are the same dynamics you see in a lot of other organizations. And one of them really is a very high, imbalanced respect for authority, I think is the way I would phrase that. Where the person that is in authority is really given a status that's hands-off.

----- of the children at the border continue to resonate. What can we use people of faith do to use our voices productively to think about these things and think about what it means to be an ally rather than a bystander? I think the first thing we need to do is wrestle with these concepts to learn to think well about them so that we can be productive when we raise our voice. But I think there are really two elements of that.

There's empathy and there's advocacy. To put yourself in the other person's shoes to listen, to hear, to grieve with them, but then to advocate for them, to stand up and say this is not right. In situations where you're dealing with criminal issues, I had an

incredible attorney that I sought who was an old family friend.

Just for counsel, and all I wanted was his professional opinion. I brought him the evidence as a "Do you think the district attorney would pick this up if I go and file a police report against Larry? What do you pick it up?" And I wanted his professional opinion, but he went a step farther than that. He said, "But I will help you.

I will write a letter on your behalf. I will come to court as a character witness. I will do whatever I can to help you." That was the first time in my life that someone outside my family has said, "I will help you do it." He used his position of privilege.

He used his education. He used his authority, his credentialing. He used all of that on my behalf when I couldn't give him anything.

And all of us have places where we can do that. Whether that is walking your friend to the police station and being there with them, whether it is providing physical help so they can leave a dangerous situation, or whether it is simply raising your voice and saying this is wrong, we need to do something about this. What can we do? And seeking out organizations and ministries that are active on the front lines, ministering to refugees and to immigrants who are coming over, pouring your time and your resources and your thought into things that can be projected.

But I think that aspect of empathy, learning to put yourself in the position of the other person and listen and hear what their experience has been like, and then to let that love for them motivate you to act on their behalf. Let me just say, I found everything you said so inspiring as a person of faith. Your example is one of such strength and compassion and grace under pressure, and I'm so pleased to have been able to share the stage with you tonight, and I know that I speak for everyone here.

When I say I really applaud your courage, I applaud what you came forward to do, and I appreciate the sacrifice that you made for everyone. And I'm so grateful that you're here tonight. Thank you.

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