

Trauma and the Benefits of Resilient Recovery for the Incarcerated

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Introduction

Children may be on the receiving end of sexual predators who cause trauma. Parents, the church, and society must protect them. This paper has a two-prong approach. First, to bring awareness of the danger of pedophiles who instill trauma in our children. The problem is that pedophiles or sexual child molesters exist in society and cause damage to victims, our innocent children. Secondly, this paper deals with the recovering incarcerated sex offender who will return to society someday after serving their sentence with redemptive hope in God's forgiveness and begin recovery. I will examine trauma among the incarcerated, focusing primarily on incarcerated child sex offenders¹, their victims, and the potential for redemptive recovery. Emphasized recovery for those who are forgotten and put away from society for a good reason, but serve their time in prison, and hope to be reintegrated into society upon release from prison. Currently, I serve as a chaplain to a population of sexual child molesters, and from my discoveries came this applied theology paper.

Imagine being marked for the rest of your life as a child molester or pedophile? Being marginalized by society because of your history of illegally causing sexual trauma to children? You would be a marked person throughout the rest of your life, and for good reason, protecting children from you. Sadly, trauma and sexual assault towards our Adventist youth by adult Adventist sex offenders continues. Recently, in Utah, justice caught up with a church member who "faces 26 felony charges, including multiple counts of rape, object rape, and forcible sodomy."² How could this happen? Where were the parents to protect their child? If that is not

¹ In 2010 there were 639 federal incarcerated sex offenders and by 2016 the numbers increased to 1,148.

Kenneth P. Cohen, Staff Director. Mandatory Minimum Penalties for Sex Offenses in the Federal Criminal Justice System. (Washington, DC: United States Sentencing Commission, 2019) p. 4.

² Brock Marchant, *Former Church Youth Leaders Charged With Raping Teen in His Utah Congregation*,. (Salt Lake City: The Salt Lake Tribune, June 28, 2025),

enough unnecessary trauma, a New Jersey Adventist who may have been a deacon of the Burlington Seventh-day Adventist Church “had sex with a girl under the age of 13 over two years at multiple locations.”³

My introduction to sexual child molesters happened in the mid-90s when I served as a Chaplain for U.S. Marines. I became acquainted with an incarcerated sergeant serving time at the Armed Forces Brig in Okinawa, Japan, where I baptized him. No one from his unit wanted to speak with him, and he was shunned because of the crime of sexual assault on his stepdaughter. The punishment for his crime was 30 years at the Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Years later, I followed up with a second visit, encouraging him to stay close to Jesus Christ as we await his second coming, and never to assault children again. “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”⁴

This raises a question: what leads people to accept Jesus Christ as their personal LORD and Savior when they face such terrible prison sentences resulting from causing sexual trauma to children? They may feel guilty and seek healing. If they turn to Jesus Christ while incarcerated, he becomes not only their best friend but also their Savior and LORD. “Character building is the work, not of a day, nor of a year, but of a lifetime.”⁵ Serving time may seem like a lifetime away from family and society as the world passes by. We understand that sanctification is the result of

https://www.sltrib.com/news/2025/06/28/former-utah-church-youth-leader/?utm_campaign=snd-autopilot. bmarchant@sltrib.com.

³ Leland Pinder, *Deacon Arrested and Charged for Sexual Assault of Child*. (Mount Holly, New Jersey, 6 ABC Action News, June 6, 2025,) <https://www.6abc.com>.

⁴ 2 Pet 3:14, All Bible verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905) p. 452.

daily and lifelong faith in Jesus Christ—a time and place to grow in grace, even for the repentant child sexual molester. God wants to forgive the most hardened sinner who comes to His Son, Jesus Christ, seeking rest.⁶

Living With Trauma

Traumatic experiences can occur at any stage of life, in childhood or adulthood. “Childhood traumas can arise from various events and are divided into two main categories: neglect and abuse.”⁷ Unresolved wounds can persist into adulthood, and finding resolution is crucial to achieving a healthier lifestyle. Sexual child molesters may have faced sexual trauma as children, kept it silent from others out of fear. Unfortunately, they perpetuate pain and suffering upon their victims, whom they prey upon through manipulation and lies.

In prison, trauma exists as inmates may sexually assault each other. Doing time in prison and trauma go hand in hand. These wounds might be physical, leading someone to visit an emergency room, or psychological, stemming from traumatic events experienced before or during their time in prison. These challenges can involve single or multiple traumas that affect the mind.⁸ We will now look at trauma caused by separation from family and friends.

Separation Trauma

Not only do the incarcerated suffer because of separation from their family, but their children may also suffer. Children of incarcerated mothers suffer from “psychological stress,

⁶ Matt 11:28

⁷ Bengu Sare Sevda Pelin Kilic, “Current Approaches in Psychiatry” review of *Effects of Early Psychological Trauma on Limbic System Structure and Function*. Isik University, Istanbul December 3, 2024, p. 692

⁸ Scott Floyd, *Crisis Counseling. A Guide for Pastors and Professionals*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008) p. 42

emotional trauma, and developmental setbacks” due to the mother’s absence.⁹ Children of incarcerated parents may suffer from “severe anxiety, depression, PTSD, and toxic stress, which may cause delays in cognitive development.”¹⁰

A few inmates have expressed that their spouses, siblings, or parents are also incarcerated, in different state or federal prisons. The absence of parents in their lives makes it difficult for children to bond. It also causes guilt for not being home to celebrate birthdays or even attend a parent’s funeral. It can be a generational family-related activity to continue incarceration instead of breaking the chain of bondage. “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.”¹¹ Generational curses of learned crime become acceptable within gangs, where youth discover camaraderie that may end in incarceration because of lawlessness. This criminal lifestyle perpetuates a vicious cycle of dysfunctional family trauma.

With God’s intervention, generational incarceration can cease, starting with one person who wants to stop a criminal lifestyle. Finding a church family is what the next generation needs, Adventists who care for those broken souls. The cycle can be broken when an inmate accepts Christ as LORD and Savior of their life because Jesus sets us free. Only by God’s grace does a criminal's thinking transition to responsible, accountable decision-making before going

⁹Prashasti Jain, Totuka A, Jain P, Paliwal S, Saini G, Sharma M. *The Psychosocial and Developmental Impact of Maternal Incarceration on Children: Legal and Ethical Implications*. J Pharm Bioallied Sci. (Bethesda, Maryland, 2025).

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40655731/>

¹⁰ DLA Piper, Andrew Cohen, Aylin Corapcioglu, Mariel Smith, Krista Ellis, *Trauma Caused by Separation of Children from Parents. A Tool to Help Lawyers*. Massachusetts, American Bar Association, <https://www.americanbar.org>, January 2020), p.6

¹¹ Exod 20:5

home after completing a prison sentence. We will now explore the effects of trauma upon the first family.

First Family Trauma

God appreciates our free will offerings, as they show our love. When Cain, Abel's brother, brought his offering, God did not accept it, and Cain became filled with uncontrolled anger. Had he listened and faithfully provided an animal sacrifice, as Abel did, God would have accepted Cain's offering. Cain's reaction was an angry facial expression from the heart. God's admonition. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."¹² Cain's uncontrolled jealousy toward his brother Abel led him to murder his brother. Cain killed his brother Abel out of envy and unchecked anger, which triggered the murder of his brother. And why did he kill him? Because "his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."¹³ His parents suffered a double traumatic loss. For Adam and Eve, it was a double-edged sword to lose one son, and the other was removed from the family for murder.

Adam and Eve grieved the loss of their son Abel, especially as they waited for the anticipated Redeemer.¹⁴ The Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary notes an interesting point on page 31 of the book *Desire of Ages*. "The Saviour's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their firstborn son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer."¹⁵ Now, what does

¹² Gen 4:6-8.

¹³ I John 3:12

¹⁴ Gen 3:15

¹⁵ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary, Genesis*, (Pacific Press and Review and Herald Publishing Associations, 2016), p. 116.

a family do in this matter when their hopes are now shattered? Turn to God for help. This is the best solution for all of our problems, yet I have discovered in prison that people don't always seek God. This is where the chaplain can come in to bring help and a compassionate listening ear to hear the pain in the voice of parents hurting for the loss of their son, and the separation from banishment.

Retribution for Cain's crime of murder, violently assaulting and traumatizing his brother, resulted in the punishment of being banished from the community and departing society. Cain became a "fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."¹⁶ Inmates doing prison time for causing sexual trauma are separated from family and their victims, so the victim is safe. They may even have a different identity for their safety to avoid possible retribution. There have been sexual child molesters assaulted by other inmates who believed they were doing God's work of punishment and revenge. This is unacceptable behavior that endangers the safety and security of the prison. There is a price on the head of the inmate who causes sexual trauma toward children, for other inmates hate them with a passion. Often, the sexual offender spends their time in isolation from others for their protection.

Jesus wants us to remember the incarcerated and visit them, as if we were incarcerated with them.¹⁷ Incarceration can be brutal for families with a loved one behind bars, as they are physically separated. Because out-of-sight, out-of-mind thinking takes over. Correctional chaplains can adopt a redemptive approach to ministering to the incarcerated sex offender in the Name of Christ. God calls chaplains to provide pastoral care and counseling. By praying encouragingly, you press courage into a person. To discourage means to suck courage out of a

¹⁶ Gen 4:12

¹⁷ Matt 25:39, 40

person. “Your hope, your courage, your belief in them and the future can be transferred.”¹⁸

Correctional Chaplains can build up inmates who have experienced the adverse effects of trauma behind bars and encourage child sex offenders to repent of their lifestyle. The aim is to direct people toward discovering healing through Jesus Christ, the most outstanding physician for the sick.¹⁹ He calls us to shine the light of love in a dark place. “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?”²⁰

As we shine our light or our witness for Jesus Christ, with his love, we first find that there are five kinds of trauma. To impose any trauma onto another person, especially children, is very sick. Yet the pedophile is attracted to the child because he is in darkness that needs light to shine on them. The five kinds of trauma are as follows:

1. Children not receiving what they need as they develop, such as “wounds of withholding.”
2. What children don’t need is any abuse or aggressive wounds.
3. Traumatic events such as vehicle accidents or viewing a death.
4. Betrayal, “abuse of power, cheated “by a lover, or insulted, and
5. Continuous intimidation by “an overly controlling or addictive spouse.”²¹

Understanding the different kinds of trauma that exist can help narrow down just where one can focus and find professional counseling for that specific area. We move on to sex offenders who impose sexual trauma on children.

¹⁸ H. Norman Wright, *The Complete Guide To Crisis and Trauma Counseling. What to Do and Say When It Matters Most!* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2011), p. 425.

¹⁹ Luke 5:31

²⁰ Mark 4:21

²¹ David Sedlacek, *Trauma and Its Impact on Pastoral Leadership*. Journal of Applied Christian Leadership, Vol.16, No. 2, Art. 5. Digital Commons, (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, <https://research.ebsco.com/c/dfir3y/viewer/pdf/bxkooodw5v>.) p. 4.

Sex Offenders and Trauma

Before incarceration, child sex offenders may have secretly engaged in illegal online child pornography. Or they may have assaulted children, which led to their arrest. “Today, computer telecommunications have become one of the most prevalent techniques used by pedophiles to share illegal photographic images of minors and to lure children into illicit sexual relationships.”²²

Some child molesters, when they were children, experienced sexual molestation. “To be a victim of childhood abuse makes a person feel weak and vulnerable. Although it is a totally distorted impulse, one of the ways a deeply wounded person counteracts the feelings of weakness is to become the victimizer.”²³ This sinful act is passed on from one generation to another. “The term sex offender generally refers to individuals who have committed sexually violent crimes, comprising a heterogeneous group in terms of both the nature of their offenses and their personalities.”²⁴ This is a destructive crime, much like Cane killing his brother, Able, and then discovering his punishment is banishment from family and society. It silently destroys the perpetrator who destroys the children.

The silent crime of selling child pornography is illegal on the internet, and the perpetrator is slowly being drawn into a dark temptation of danger. This could go on for years until they are discovered. These morally separate themselves from their victims without realizing that it is

²² Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). *How Can We Help You. Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) Child Victim Identification Program (CGIP) Innocent Images National Initiative* (Washington, D.C. May 9, 2003). <https://www.fbi.gov>.

²³ Robin Casarjian, *Houses of Healing, A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom* (Dedham, Massachusetts: The Lionheart Foundation 1995) p. 42.

²⁴ Grilli, S. Irene Petrucci, Viviana Langher, Maria Elisabetta Ricci, Simona Galasso, Luciano, Antonio Maria Pagano, Uberta Ganucci Cancellieri, Serena Onorati, and Giulio D'Urosio, *Evaluating Violent Recidivism: A Quality Study on Sex Offenders*, p. 761

illegal to view photos of child pornography on the internet. When they are arrested, they are shocked because they only looked at pictures. But then, their dark thinking led them to contact minors on the internet and invite them to encounter a personal secret visit either online or at a specified location.

They may have allowed their senses to be numbed by alcohol, drugs, or out-of-control pornography addiction. This lowers their resolve to think and reason clearly, as they thrive on child pornography. Before they knew it, they were addicted. The cost to incarcerate child sex offenders in 2021 was \$ 5.4 billion.²⁵

Childhood sexual trauma, unless resolved, can bleed into adulthood, causing greater destruction to the person and their innocent victims. Healing and recovery are intentional approaches that may be incorporated if one is open to change by ceasing the sexual abuse of minors.

Avoiding Recidivism and Resilience

It is imperative for incarcerated child sex offenders preparing for release to society to align their thinking and heart with a godly focus. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”²⁶ This will enable avoiding the temptation of returning to a life of crime, such as engaging in child pornography or assembling near children. Unfortunately, child sex offenders are viewed like the lepers of Jesus’ day, outcasts of society. People didn’t socialize near lepers or, as today, with pedophiles. With a godly focus, they can

²⁵ Maria Blackburn, *Incarcerating Child Sex Abusers Topped \$ 5.4 billion in 2021 Study According to Study, The Findings Highlight Financial Toll of Not Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*. (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, April 5, 2022) <https://www.hub.jhu.edu>

²⁶ Eph 6:11

change and bounce back from being in bondage to traumatizing children. They can live free from sexually abusing children, but it will not be easy. They cannot be present with children any longer.

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”²⁷ When I was a sailor, I witnessed a burial at sea on a Navy ship. It was as fast as the casket disappeared into the water. Our sins can be buried suddenly at the bottom of the ocean if we ask for God's forgiveness. “Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”²⁸ Being once dead “in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.”²⁹ God’s redemptive love is for everyone. “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”³⁰ What a wonderful Savior we serve.

Be Aware and Care for Children

It is not popular to report a sexual assault on children. It is embarrassing and terrible to hear of such trauma against helpless, innocent children, but that is our Adventist responsibility as good neighbors of the communities we reside in. Sex offenders must be registered according to the “Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act”³¹ of 2006 within the United States.

²⁷ Mark 9:42

²⁸ 1 Pet 5:7

²⁹ Col 2:13

³⁰ Matt 5:44

³¹ Lucinda A. Lee Rasmussen, *Adjudicated Adolescents Located on a State Sex Offender Registry Website as Adults: Common Denominators*, (San Diego, California, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, Vol. 33, No. 4, 441-464, San Diego State University, 2024) p. 443.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2023.2280006>

Being proactive—when we see something suspicious, we should report it to law enforcement. This includes children’s classes at church, school, and day care. We want to avoid repeated sexual molestation trauma offenses under our roofs and protect all children.

Incarceration prevents sex offenders from traumatizing more innocent children. In some jails, inmates are assaulted by others because child molesters are hated and looked down upon.

Reporting Is Practicing Resilience

Reporting to the local police department on a 911 phone call that a child has been sexually molested is key to stopping the molester from assaulting more children. If you know they should not be in the vicinity of children and discover them, report them to the police.

In past generations, reporting sexual abuse of children may not have been accomplished because the family knew or was related to the perpetrator. Or there was a fear that the child would be taken away and placed in a foster home. By reporting, we stop crime. Today, more people are coming forward with strength and confidence, recognizing that it is ethical to call for help to prevent children from being sexually traumatized. When we do the right thing, we feel better. “He who keeps the commandment keeps his life, he who despises his ways will die.”³²

Child Protective Measures

Adventists have received abundant guidance from the Bible and Ellen G. White's writings on how to nurture and care for children. Jesus states, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.” This admonition highlights that the angels of children communicate with God in the heavenly sanctuary. Imagine having that close connection with God, who protects children and values them intimately and deeply. The responsibility to care for their children rests with parents

³² Prov 19:16

and neighbors here on earth. This is why we must take steps to ensure children are cared for at home, day care, and in their Sabbath School Classes.

“The early training of children is a subject that all should carefully study. We need to treat the education of our children as a business, for their salvation largely depends on the education they receive in childhood. Parents and guardians must themselves maintain purity of heart and life if they desire their children to be pure. As fathers and mothers, we should train and discipline ourselves. Then, as teachers in the home, we can train our children, preparing them for the immortal inheritance.”³³

What parent wants harm to come upon their children? We must first establish professional boundaries in the Children’s Sabbath School Classes. Ensure that all teachers in children’s divisions undergo regular criminal background checks to protect our adolescents, because our teachers will not have a sex offender criminal record.

Sex offenders reentering society after incarceration must register with their local law enforcement, police, or sheriff’s office.³⁴ For example, sex offenders in the state of Texas face specific living restrictions. They cannot “live near schools, parks, or places where children gather...violation of these living restrictions can result in harsh penalties.”³⁵ Where do I get a background check for children’s Sabbath School Teachers? The local police department or Public Safety Office. Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprinting services may also be obtained at various local community locations.³⁶

³³ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association) 1954) p. 27

³⁴ Charles Doyle, *Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) Survives Renewed Constitutional Challenges*. (Library of Congress, Justice and Law Enforcement, LSB10473, 2020) Congress.gov.

³⁵ Bryan Fagan, *What Texas Law Says About Sex Offenders and Child Interaction*. (Houston, Texas, Law Office of Bryan Fagan, 2024), <https://www.bryanfagan.com>.

³⁶ PrintScan. A First Advantage Company, Delivers advanced fingerprinting solutions through a national network of convenient locations by appointment, 2025) <https://www.printscan.com>.

Protecting our children means conducting regular criminal background checks on instructors and educators. Not allowing sex offenders to teach creates a safe environment for our children to learn more about Jesus Christ. It shows that church leadership has carefully and thoughtfully implemented safety measures for children.

“The Sabbath-school is a missionary field, and very much more of the missionary spirit should be manifested in this important work...In every grade, in both primary and advanced classes, teachers need to look constantly to the great source of light for wisdom, for grace, and for power to mould the hearts of their scholars, and that they may deal intelligently with the purchase of Christ’s blood.”³⁷

Correctional chaplains can minister to sex offenders to bring about a positive change, seeking recovery and healing. The biggest obstacle sex offenders have is setting aside their pride and asking for help. Chaplains help to expel the light of Jesus Christ emanating from the sanctuary in heaven. “At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.”³⁸ There is healing and health for those willing to find recovery. “I will also make you a light of the nation’s so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”³⁹ Expelling light in a dark prison is challenging and can only be accomplished with our personal connection and relationship with Jesus.

³⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*. (Washington, DC: Review and Hearld Publishing Association, 1900) p. 35.

³⁸ Acts 26:13

³⁹ Isa 49:6

Child molesters who are recovering from sexually assaulting children experience forgiveness from God. They are not allowed to be near children, but they can have contentment as found in the writings of Paul: “not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”⁴⁰ Some prisoners who have come to know Jesus Christ have found peace with God, even while serving a life sentence, because He changes and gives a new heart and mind.⁴¹

Conclusion

Trauma caused by manipulating child sex offenders can be avoided. We want pedophiles who attempt to sexually assault children to be caught by the law and serve time in prison, isolated from society. Convicted pedophiles, for the safety of others, are separated from their families, victims, and society.

The first family of Adam and Eve in Eden suffered the loss of their son at the hands of a jealous, angry brother, who was later banished from home and society for his crime. Sex offenders cause trauma, oftentimes by manipulation and lies to their victims. They may have been sexually assaulted in childhood. We need to stop child sexual assaults by requiring regular criminal background checks on all persons associated with Children’s Sabbath School, day care programs, and elementary schools, leaving nothing up for question.

The sex offender, after doing time in prison, can learn to avoid attending activities where children frequent and distance themselves out of safety and respect for innocent children. This will ensure they will not become recidivists.

⁴⁰ Phil 4:11

⁴¹ Ezek 36:26

In 2016, there were 1,148 federal incarcerated sex offenders serving time. It is costly to incarcerate these criminals. That is why recovery is essential and possible through a close relationship with Jesus Christ, joining a personal recovery accountability group, and being an active member of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church for an affirming community of support.

Remember that these people will eventually be released from prison and may be our next-door neighbors. If children visit our neighborhood, the recovering sex offender cannot be within proximity of children.