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Presentation Transcript
Stockholm Syndrome
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The title of this presentation is *Stockholm Syndrome*. It's part of an ongoing series on *Mental Health and the Bible*. I chose to give this presentation during the spring holy day season because of spiritual significance.

I'd like to read to you from an article, that I found on the Internet, by a psychologist named Joseph M. Carver. The title of the article is *Love and Stockholm Syndrome – The Mystery of Loving an Abuser*.

On August 23, 1973, two machine gun carrying criminals entered a bank in Stockholm, Sweden. Blasting their guns, one prison escapee named Jan Erik Olson announced to the terrified bank employees, "The party has just begun." The two bank robbers held four hostages – three women and one man – for the next one hundred and thirty-three hours. The hostages were strapped with dynamite and held in a bank vault until finally rescued on August 28, five days later. After their rescue the hostages exhibited a shocking attitude considering they had been threatened, abused and had feared for their lives for over five days. In their media interviews it was clear that they supported their captors and actually feared law enforcement personnel who came to their rescue. The captors had begun to feel their captors were actually protecting them from the police. Clearly the hostages had bonded emotionally with their captors.

What is it about the human mind that allows this syndrome to take place? Is there anything Christians ought to take note of here? How might this be a seasonal topic related to Passover and Unleavened Bread?

Let's look at the some of the science about Stockholm Syndrome. It *is* rather fascinating, isn't it? We wonder why people do the things they do, don't we? There are some characteristics that they notice about this syndrome. It's defined by six primary criteria: one is positive feelings by the victim toward the abuser or controller. The second one is negative feelings by the victim toward family, friends, or authorities trying to rescue them, or support them or to win their release. The third one is support of the abuser's reasons and behavior. Fourth, positive feelings by the abuser toward the victim. Fifth,

supportive behaviors by the victim, at times, helping the abuser. Then the last one the list is the inability to engage in behaviors that may assist in their release or detachment.

Now, there are a number of situations where Stockholm syndrome can happen. And I thought I'd talk a little bit about that. One, they've noticed this occurring in prisoners of war. Some POWs have actually changed sides during the war when they were held captive. Concentration camp prisoners, a lot of times, develop Stockholm syndrome. There were some prisoners in the German concentration camps in World War II who became guards and were abusive toward their own people and other prisoners. Criminal hostage situations.

Elizabeth Smart, a fourteen-year-old girl was kidnapped from her home in Salt Lake City in June of 2002 by two members of a fundamentalist, polygamous sect – the homeless preacher, Brian David Mitchell and his wife, Wanda Barzee. At first they kept her tethered to a tree in a wooded canyon, dressed in white robes and confined to a twenty foot long trough with a lean-to over it. But after two months, the couple was able to take the girl with them to restaurants and other public places – her face veiled – and she no longer tried to escape. They travelled to San Diego, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada, with this little girl, claiming to be the couple's daughter. By the time they returned to Utah, she'd become so attached to her captors that when she was finally approached by Utah law enforcement officials, who had been searching for her for nine months, she told them she was eighteen and was Mitchell's polygamous wife. Only when she was shown a picture of herself, as she had looked before her abduction, did she admit that she was, in fact, Elizabeth Smart.

I think maybe it's a little bit more understandable when it's a child facing an adult. But this happens to adults, too. I bet there are a number of us that know women who live with men that are abusive – and they continue to live with them year after year.

Cult members are also, sometimes, victim to this syndrome. I was watching Larry King interview authorities, attorneys, parents of the children in the case going on in Texas right now, where the state took four hundred and thirteen children from a polygamous cult. Some of the parents said they thought it was unfair that *all* of the children were taken when there were just a few cases of abuse. It's kind of excusing, isn't it? One is too many, isn't it? He also interviewed two women who had left the cult. They said that it took years to get past the effects of isolation and lack of social skills needed to function in a free environment.

Sometimes incest victims suffer from this syndrome. Battered abused women. It's not uncommon for women to turn on police when the police come to intervene in domestic abuse cases, even though the women are being severely beaten.

Another one would be controlling or intimidating relationships.

So what are the things that cause these symptoms – we can call them – to come up? Well, there are essentially four of them that they've isolated. One is a *perceived threat to one's physical or psychological well-being*. That can be because of abuse, threat, witnessing the abuse to others – sometimes it can be very veiled threats. So one becomes afraid that they

might suffer harm if they don't do what they're supposed to do – according to this other person.

Another thing that they've noticed is the *presence of a perceived small kindness or reward from their abuser*. They're being abused, but some small kindness is shown. You know, a woman, who's been beaten by her husband, may be given a birthday card or flowers, and she reasons that he's not all bad – while she's still carrying the bruises of her last beating. The Stockholm prisoners saw bathroom privileges as kindness on the part of their captors. If I told you folks that you couldn't go to the bathroom today, you'd laugh your heads off at me, and walk out whenever you jolly-well-wanted to, wouldn't you? But that's because you can, isn't it? So they were being allowed to go to the bathroom, and that was such a great thing that they were allowed to do – that's how it was perceived. Of course, they had to go with dynamite strapped to their chests.

Another thing that happens – it's essential for this syndrome to develop – is *isolation from the perspectives of other than the abuser*. Isolation. Have you noticed that David Karesh, down in Waco, and this thing now, they usually have compounds? Where they have to stay away from everybody else? But it can be more subtle than that. I didn't realize it, but for many years, I had only one perspective of Christianity – the one that I heard from my church. I was aware that there were others, but I saw them as all incorrect, so I never bothered to investigate that much about what they believe. So even though I was free to do what I wanted, there was something that kept me from exploring, and looking around and understanding more. The Stockholm robbers, for five days, told their captives all about all the wrongs that they had suffered at the hands of society. That was the agenda that they kept pounding home – how mistreated they had been, and how unfair everything was to them, and how the deck was stacked against them from the get-go. We could just keep on with that, couldn't we? We've all heard talk like that. Before it was all over, the captives saw them as *victims*. They saw them as victims. The same kind of excusing often happens in abusive relationships, doesn't it? “He only hit me once this time. And it wasn't with his fists. It was with his open hand.” That kind of thing.

The fourth thing...let me go over those again. A perceived threat to one's physical or psychological well-being. The presence of a perceived small kindness or reward from the abuser. Isolation from perspectives of others than the abuser. Then the fourth one: The *perceived inability to do anything about it* – to get away. A lot of times there's a walking on eggshells feeling that comes along with, because the threat of harm is always present.

One of my clients, recently, was telling me that her father would often come home drunk and angry. She and her sister could tell, by how hard he slammed on the brakes and how far the truck slid in the gravel, just how bad it was going to be that night for them. They, before he got home, would scramble to make sure that all their chores were done – the clothes were folded, all their homework was done, etc. – in hopes that he wouldn't blow.

A lot of times domestic abusers try to ensure that their mates don't have any way to survive financially. Sometimes they get so deep in debt *deliberately* that it's almost impossible to get a divorce – or at least, that's what they tell their mate, whom they're trying to control.

They've noticed, too, that a lot of times victims, in these cases, talk about avoiding trouble – you know, they're just doing what they do to avoid trouble – scan the mail, serve the food on time, avoid certain topics, avoid family, avoid friends, make sure the kids are all clean and neat and quiet – all of that kind of thing. And, certainly, the inability to do anything about it – to get away – is very much a part of this syndrome.

So, is there anymore to it than that? Well, they think that one of the things that makes this work is that people, generally, don't like to hold differing views in their minds. They're going to come down on one side or the other of an issue. And that's especially true when a person is under stress and filled with anxiety. A heavy smoker *knows* that smoking is going to cause lung cancer in most people, but they continue to smoke. The smoker changes his thoughts about it and says such things as, "Well, I'm smoking less than I did ten years ago," or "I smoke low tar cigarettes," or "Those statistics are made up by the cancer industry conspiracy," or "There's always something. We all die from something." All these things are kind of a way to minimize the truth about what's going on, and just accept the situation, and go the way that's most convenient at the moment.

You purchase a fifty thousand dollar Hummer. You justify the expense and the related issues by saying, "It's great on trips" – which you take *one* every year. Or, "I can use it to haul stuff" – you know, a coffee table every six months or so. You can carry a lot of people in it, but ninety-five percent of the time there's just one person driving it.

Your husband or boyfriend becomes abusive and assaultive and you say you can't leave due to finances, or the kids, or other factors. "He only hits me with an open hand." "He has a lot of stress at work." "He was mistreated as a child." That kind of thing. That's a way to try to justify staying where you are and staying in the situation – or keeping your Hummer, or continuing smoking, or whatever we want to do. It's hard for us to try to maintain two different viewpoints in our mind. And when we're captive like this – and isolated – we hear only their perspective. So they think that what happens is people just go with that, because it's uncomfortable under that kind of stress – fear of danger – to keep your own perspective as well.

There was a cult in the fifties that thought God was going to come and take them all away to another planet in flying saucers on a certain date so they could be protected from the coming wrath of God. When the date came and the saucers didn't, what do you think happened? The compound emptied? No, they did *not* say, "Oh, that guy's wrong. We've been misled." What they did was, they claimed that because of their faithful activity, God wasn't going to have to send punishment on the earth. They had saved the planet. By the way, does that sound vaguely familiar to anybody?

So that's a little bit about this syndrome. I think most of us know people who have fallen prey to this in abusive relationships, or extremist church groups, political groups. You know these right-wingers that are out in Montana in the compounds with all the weaponry and everything? They're only talking one story. There's not a lot of freedom to talk about different kinds of perspectives there.

So that's a bit about the Stockholm syndrome and what causes it. But I mentioned earlier that we wanted to talk today about the spiritual ramifications of this. In Matthew 20, and verse 28, it says:

Mt. 20:28 – *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto – not to be the head of some group of people – but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many....*

We had a wonderful celebration last night. What were we celebrating? What was it we were celebrating last night? Well, four thousand, five hundred years ago, when that celebration first began, Israel was celebrating the fact that they were free from Egypt. They were *free*! They were captives anymore. In the New Testament we're told that we're to celebrate another kind of release – freedom – the demise of another *kind* of captivity and another captor to another kind of freedom.

So let's ask the question, "Ransomed from what?" Let's go to Acts 26, and verse 9. This is Paul talking to King Agrippa. He's telling about how he was called, and that he used to be persecuting the church, and against Jesus, just like all the Jews are. He said, in verse 9:

Acts 26:9 – *I, too, was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, I was on the road and I saw light from heaven – brighter than the sun – blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It's hard for you to kick against the goads." And then I asked, "Who are you Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet." What was the condition he was in right then? Blind, right? – that blinding light? "I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. And I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. And I am sending you to them to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." So there he was – blind – and he was going to go give sight to people. He was going to cause them to see. And he was going to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of the *devil* to God so that they could receive forgiveness of sins and a place among them who are sanctified by faith in Me.*

The way the devil enslaves us is through sin – the little perks that come along with doing something wrong. See, it's kind of like that in the syndrome, isn't it? There are little kindnesses dished out to keep people *under control*.

We want to ask this question, "Free from what?" In the book of Revelation we see a picture of the domain of the devil. There's a picture of a beast and a false prophet

cooperating to do what? To *control* everybody in the world. They have this thing called the mark of the beast. If you don't have that, then you can't buy or sell anything. It dictates when people worship. It controls everything. That's what that's about. That's what his system is like. It's a controlling system. And every time we've had an outbreak of this system in history....people don't like to be under this because we were not *designed* to be enslaved. We were designed to be *free*. So every time we have an outbreak of this system in history, many people *die* to get rid of the control of others. That's what most of the wars have been fought over in times past. So it's a system that abuses people, holds them down, chews them up and spits them out. The governing body is *not* there to serve the people, but the people are there as cannon fodder to nourish and serve the system. That's how Satan's system works.

By contrast, we are told that God's way is free. We're told that Jerusalem above, which is the mother of all – Paul said – is free. That would mean the Kingdom of God is free. And that would mean that the church is free. If Satan uses the perks of sin to hold us in control, then what God had to do to save us was to free us from sin, didn't He? And that's what He's done. We're told that we're no longer to be slaves of sin, but to give our lives, the way Christ did, to good works.

Remember, when we look around in the world, we're not looking for an organization. We're not looking for a government necessarily. God, nor the devil, are limited to organizations. This is a war of ideas and concepts and approaches. That's what this is all about. Anybody can be doing God's work one minute and the devil's the next. It just depends on what your position is. Are you taking God's position? Or are you going to take the devil's position. So look for that application of tight control. And look for the application of free-flow of the Holy Spirit. That's how you can tell the difference.

Let's go back and think about the Stockholm syndrome for a minute. What were the causal factors that they said? The perceived threat of harm. They had dynamite strapped to their chests. They had detonators that they could trigger at any time. That's definitely a perceived threat of harm, isn't it?

One time I worked in a congregation that was very close to a very troubled congregation in our church. Their pastor had been accused by a neighboring pastor of sexual misconduct. I had just moved into that area, so members from this church – where the pastor had been accused – came to tell me about their terrible minister that had done this horrible thing. And I very carefully asked everyone of them to tell me *how* they knew this happened. One got it from somebody...and so I wound up managing to talk to all the people whose names I heard. When all was said and done, nobody had actually seen anything that was in the least bit incriminating, and every bit of it came from one place. You could track it all back, when you got down to it, to *one* person. And that was from this other minister. He had a very small church and the pastor that was being accused had a very large one. And all these people saw this other minister as their savior and the solution to their problems. Eventually, enough of them complained about him – and I think the complaint, really, was lodged by the pastor that wanted his church and who had spread all this gossip – and he kind of marshalled the forces and got all these other people to say that they thought this guy was improper. When he finally was removed and this

new minister was put in his place, everybody was overjoyed. Finally, they had a good pastor. That lasted about thirty days. Everyone soon saw that this guy was as mean as a snake, that he was as abusive as they come, he was threatening people with disfellowship. Some then rode Job's horse all the way down to my house to complain *again* about their minister. I said, "Well, if you think he's mistreating people, why don't you do something about it?" "Well, he'll disfellowship us." So there's the perceived threat of harm, isn't it? That's one. So I would say to them, "If you were disfellowshipped, would you still be faithful to Jesus Christ?" "Well, yes." "Would you obey God rather than men?" "Yes." "Do you work for the church? Is this guy your employer? Does he control your salary?" "No." "Could you go to church somewhere else? You're always welcome here." "Well, yeah." "Well, then what's the big deal? If you don't like him, why don't you do something about it?"

I'd just like to know if there are any people sitting listening to this that fear leaving a controlling group because you would be *punished* in some way – isolated from your friends, or from your family, or from salvation, from the true church? If you feel that way – if you feel constricted – and yet you're afraid to do anything about it when it comes to going to church, you *are* suffering from the Stockholm syndrome.

It's so true that the victims in that Stockholm bank robbery became very compliant. They just couldn't stand the dissonance. But, you know, in another robbery, a sniper shot and wounded a robber through the window of a bank, and two women hostages propped him up in the window so the sniper could finish the job. Different ways to deal with stressful situations. Right? Not everybody succumbs to the syndrome. And nobody *has* to, because we all have *free* choice. We've been given that by God Almighty and He *expects* us to use it.

In this church I was mentioning, the pastor let those who had been in the ministry and who were deacons continue to have their perks. They got to keep their ordinations and they were still allowed to give sermonettes, or to clean the toilets, or stack the chairs, or whatever *privileges* they were allowed to continue to do, *as long as they toed the line*. "It's going to go okay. I'm going to stay out of trouble. There won't be any problems if I just do what I'm told." There it is again, right? Isolation from the perspective of others.

I noted it early on that this minister was really big on everybody coming to church all the time. He didn't like people going to other churches. In fact, he even *told* people that. He wanted them *there*, where he could talk to them *every* week. He had lots of meetings. And he just pounded away on his agenda. He did his very best to isolate people. Regular attendance was rewarded with small benefits and inconsistency in attendance was punished.

I was talking to an elderly woman who has fallen prey to what I believe is the most cult-like of the churches of God, and she told me that if her pastor found out she had ordered any of our CDs from LifeResource Ministries, she would be disfellowshipped.

What's it like where you go to church? What's your excuse for staying there if it's like that? A lot of people tell me, "Well, I stay for the people." Do you love them enough to

help them get free of that kind of mind control? Or are you just there to reduce your own dissonance and not make any trouble? Don't make any waves? Just keep everything calm? Just like that woman who lives with the abuser, and tells herself that she couldn't make it without him, so she stays and she lets him beat the kids and herself – just to keep everything on an even keel.

I was talking to one of my clients awhile back, whose father, when she was fourteen, came to her room drunk and wanted her to undress. Her mother was in the house and would *not* protect her. So she told him that if he ever came in her room again, she'd call the police. He left. Her mother was weak. She was strong.

Do you remember what the children of Israel did when they got hungry? “Oh, we wish we were still back in Egypt, where we had those good onions and garlic and leeks.” They wanted to go back and be *slaves*, instead of free when the going got tough. Being free was hard. They had to *think*. And they had to have *faith*. They wanted to go back and let Pharaoh kill some more of their babies. It's the same thing!

And fourthly, the perceived inability to get away. You know, this congregation that was being bullied by this narcissistic pastor thought that there was nothing they could do about him. I don't understand how they could believe that because they watched *him* get rid of their pastor. They all thought they just had to live with it and suffer along – till after about a year – he was removed, but not because of anything *they* did. So their perception of helplessness was all a self-created illusion. You don't have to cooperate. And you don't have to go along with it. You don't have to make a lot of problems. You can just *walk away*. You know, I thought that if I did that, I would be isolated. But I found out there were more people outside of the group I was in that believed like I did than there were *in* it. So I'm now a part of the *greater* church, instead of the splinter group.

When John McCain was a prisoner of war – he was a naval pilot, I believe, wasn't he? – naval aviator, shot down over Vietnam, taken prisoner – imprisoned for quite a long time – one day they told him it was time for him to go home. He said, “There's other guys that have been here longer than I have. Send them home first.” He just wasn't going to play the game their way.

So what can be done to break the spell when things like this happen? I was watching *Larry King Live* this weekend, and he was interviewing two women, who had come out of that polygamous cult down in Texas. And they were talking about how hard it was for them to break free. They had no frame of reference except for the compound – no information about what was going on in the real world. They had no job skills. They had no social skills. But once they got free, they found out that there were people there, who didn't even know them, who were willing to help – that God was going to take care of them. When they realized that, then the *spell was broken*. The key to it all was a *different perspective*. That's what allows the freedom to start happening – to take a different perspective.

Did you know that God has given each Christian a calling and a spiritual gift to help them fulfill it? And that gift is supposed to be used in the context of the church. We don't

always get to decide ourselves what our gifts are. It's supposed to be a community effort, where we all work together to help each other figure out what they're good at. It's not necessarily an individual thing, although it's also very highly individualistic in another way. But that gift comes directly from God. We're all responsible to use it. And when you're in a free church, the ministry *teaches* you about that, and encourages you to learn what it is that God has given you, and encourages you to learn how to use it to help the congregation and to help do the work of God.

When you're in a cult, nobody wants to talk about that, because it cannot be controlled by people. So it's frightening to people that want to control others. You might ask yourself, if you have responsibilities in your congregation, "Are they insignificant perks that you get for towing the line? Or are they the result of you being free to use the gifts that God has provided you in a powerful way?" Maybe you stay away from your gifts because you don't want to rock the boat or cause trouble. It's not the thing to do where you go to church. That should tell you something. That should tell you something about the kind of church group that *you* are in.

Let's go to Titus 2, and verse 13.

Titus 2:13 – *While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us – to ransom us – to set us free from all wickedness, and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own – who are just going to sit back, and be quiet and not make any waves....* No, that's *not* what it says, does it? It says: *...people who are eager to do what is good* – using your gift is what is good. It's what's expected. And the truly free people of God are free to *obey*, to join in with the whole church and to do the work of God. And they are free to *eagerly* use their gifts and to do good works *because they are free!*

The apostle Paul tells us something very important. It's in the first chapter of Galatians – very important for those of us who want to shake off stagnation, and who aren't eager to do good works, and want to get rid of slavery, and who want to grow. In this chapter, Paul was explaining that he was called later and separately from the other apostles. He knew that he needed to be joined to them and to cooperate with them, but he also knew Jesus Christ came to him *directly* and gave him a job to do – and that in Jesus Christ he was *free* to do that the way he saw fit.

Let's read in Galatians 1:10.

Gal. 1:10 – *Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? That's a question that all of us need to ask from time to time. Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.* You see, you can't have a case of spiritual Stockholm syndrome and be a fully functional servant of God, because that syndrome makes you a slave of people. And you can't be free to obey God if somebody's enslaving you. When we're caught in a spiritual Stockholm syndrome, we're afraid of what people will do to us. And sometimes it takes courage to resist abuse in the world – that's true. I think that fourteen-year-old girl had a lot of courage to resist her father when he made such an obscene request. She told me that he'd punched her in the nose a lot of

times when she was a kid. She was thirteen when that happened. The first time he ever hit in the nose, she was seven. So to stand there in front of him and tell him, “You lay a hand on me, I’m calling the police,” took a lot of courage.

But, you know, with the spiritual Stockholm syndrome, it’s not really so much about courage. It’s not. It’s not about courage. It’s about I. It’s about *believing* that God didn’t create us to be subjected to that kind of situation. It’s about believing that God doesn’t want us to be in it. And it’s about believing that God will take care of us and provide a way for us to be free. That’s all faith, isn’t it? It’s not about *us*. It’s about what *God’s* going to do. If we have faith that God will take care of us for doing the right thing, then the courage is going to take care of itself. He’ll take care of that. He doesn’t tell us to do something and then not give us the courage to do it. So another way to say this is, to remain in a spiritually constricted situation happens because of a lack of faith.

To constrict people happens because of a lack of faith, too. We’re afraid that if we let things go out of our control, it’ll go off track. That’s because we don’t believe what God says about the Holy Spirit and it’s work in the church.

Well, I’d like to conclude by saying that there are some people who think they’re being abused when they’re not. You know, it’s always complex with people. You go one way and talk about one problem, then there’s something else over here that’s just the opposite. There are people who think I’ve been talking about them all day long, and, actually, I *haven’t* been. There are people who have immaturely assigned to themselves gifts, when in fact, they don’t have these gifts at all. And this can cause just as much trouble as being afraid to find out and use our gifts. So next holy day, we’re going to examine what freedom in Christ means and how to use it to please God, instead of others, or even ourselves.