

## Hearing Luka - A sermon from my new book

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*Photo by Bob Huneycutt*

Recently I've had a lot of time on my hands, so I've been learning how to play plenty of new songs. One song that had a strong effect on me was a song called Luka by Suzanne Vega from the Eighties. It is very pretty song and I started learning to play it, but there was a problem - every time I would get choked up and couldn't finish. This happened dozens of times.

I still remember the first time I heard Luka. I was driving around Chicago in an old Ford van and it came on the radio. The deejay said this song blew him away when he heard it. Then he played the song and it was, indeed, quietly emotionally devastating.

Luka is a child who is strictly disciplined by his parents, you might even say abused.

My experience was that every time I got to a line that said, "They only hit until you cry," that would tear me up. I began to ponder what was causing this extreme emotional reaction.

My parents were, in fact, rather strict, which was typical for their time, but not abusive. My Father was authoritarian; he expected to be obeyed immediately. If not, he would take off his belt and hit my sister and me. I was completely a wimp about it. I didn't try to be tough or manly. I screamed and tried to get away, but he held me firmly by the arm. I don't remember if it hurt but I do remember acting like it did. My Father was probably embarrassed to death; he always thought that I was too effeminate.

Until recently I believed that was all in the past and I had dealt with it, but my reaction to Luka led me to question whether there might be something unresolved in my mind and that I needed healing.

Step One: I tried to find in Reverend Moon's speeches some guidance or opinion about corporal punishment, but I couldn't find anything. I do feel that under certain circumstances spanking is justified. Some children are harder to manage and if the parent can punish with love and communication, it might

lead to a better outcome. Maybe my problem was I didn't feel loved when I was growing up. Discipline without love is akin to abuse.

My Father died last year in August, but before he died, we spent a lot of time together. He had dementia so he didn't always remember what we had done from morning to afternoon, but he did love to sit at the marina and watch the boats sailing by; we did that for hours.

I thought all those relationship issues from childhood were settled. I had forgiven him and learned to love him.

I remember that my oldest son Sam disobeyed when he was seven and I was furious. I spanked him with a switch or, to rephrase it, I hit him with a stick. I regret that now, of course. At that time one of my close friends said it was okay to spank your children, even necessary. Recently I decided to ask that friend how he feels about that now, and he said: "I no longer believe that and my wife never condoned that."

I also asked my Mother, "What did you think when Dad hit us with his belt?" She said flatly, "That never happened. He never laid a hand on you or your sister."

That caught me by surprise, my Mother is 86 and her memory is diminished, or maybe she's blocking out certain memories. I asked her if she remembers hitting us with her hairbrush. She laughed and said, "I never even owned a hairbrush."

I called my sister who confirmed all that I remembered. She said: "The first time he spanked me I tried to act tough and not cry or show any reaction. That only made it worse; he hit me harder and longer. Next time I started crying before he even hit me."

Finally, I began to understand why the words "They only hit until you cry" were affecting me so much.

Finally, as a last step, I had a conversation with God. I told him everything that I was experiencing, and He helped me understand that the reason I was getting emotional over the song is that I was tapping into what God feels when he sees children being abused or who don't feel loved or are ashamed.

These are really deep feelings and so hard to resolve. I remember in sixth grade when I partnered with a classmate on a class project. He came to my house after school to work on the project, but my parents had an ironclad rule that I was breaking: no friends, no one in the house if the parents are not home. We were latchkey kids. When my parents got home at 5:00pm, Dad kicked my classmate out of the house. Then he took off his belt and wore me out. I was 11. Afterwards, I went outside to see my classmate off, and he asked me about the commotion - he could hear me yelling. I lied and insisted that I hadn't been punished.

My Dad never understood me, especially because I became a rebellious teenager and grew my hair long, but honestly, I didn't feel loved. It was no surprise, then, that by the time I turned 15, I stopped going to church and no longer believed I was loved by God.

It was six years later when I had an experience that convinced me that God had never stopped loving me, and that was the day I met Jesus.