

Shining a light on our lurking depravity

## **I never imagined Kevin Spacey as a moral guide. Still, even when the bar was not high, the news has been heartbreaking for humanity.**

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

November 10, 2017



I was listening to [Terry Gross interview Anthony DeCurtis](#) about the fascinating life of Lou Reed. As they talked about his music and art, I was immediately transported to a time when I made Brian, my boyfriend (now husband), elated by giving him some of Reed's music. That \$12 tape may have been the best gift I ever bought him.

Then, Gross and DeCurtis delved into Reed's marriage, and how he beat his first wife.

It was almost more than I could take. I mean, I never mistook Lou Reed for some paragon of virtue. But it felt like another rock in the avalanche that has been pelting down on us. We have been stuck in a deluge of men behaving badly.

I never imagined [Kevin Spacey](#) should be my moral guide in life. I barely knew who [Harvey Weinstein](#) was before I heard the horrors of his multiple assaults. There's always been an undercurrent of "something-not-right" with [Louis C.K.](#) But still. Even when the bar was low, the news has been heartbreaking for humanity.

And then we have the on-going dissonance from the men who claim to stand for a strong moral fabric in this country while they're making [secret deals in back corners](#) to make sure women stay quiet about how they were harassed. I didn't have a super high opinion of FOX's egomen. The [Religious Right's support](#) of Donald Trump, even after he bragged about assaulting women, felt terribly predictable.

Now we find out that [Roy Moore](#) was molesting 14-year-old girls when he was in his thirties. That creepy guy who lurked in our junior high school locker room? He is running for a senate seat, with [Christians who defend his behavior](#).

Then, of course, theologians and pastors are hardly excused. [Roman Catholic priests](#) are entangled with abuse cases in Brooklyn. It seems like new revelations are always coming out about [John Yoder](#). And women writers, academics, and speakers who frequent conferences have our own whisper networks. We warn each other, *Stay away from that guy....* And, all too often, it is someone whom I thought was a paragon of virtue, a moral guide in life, and worthy of respect.

Then I just have to sigh. *Really? Him, too?*

If there is one thing I hate the most about John Calvin's theology is his view of the depravity of humans. I despise it because it feels emotionally abusive to tell people that they are depraved and to understand ourselves as depraved.

But I hate it equally because even though I reject it every couple of months, it's also something that gets proven so often.

So, I try live life, like a decent mom. Many of you know what it's like. As parents, we expect people to be good. We tell them that they are good. But we also become acutely aware of the possibilities for some something horrible. Our eyes get shifty and our intuition grows sharp. We can no longer afford that opiate of denial. We

realize that we all have the capacity to do terrible things to one another.

That's how I understand this doctrine that I hate so much. Depravity cannot corrupt that overwhelming truth that we have been made good, and that we are created in the image of God. But, it's a reminder that we still have that taint of cruelty. We respond by making sure that we have the check and balances in place. We create space for victims to tell their stories. And we welcome repentance, transformation, and reconciliation.

As our days grow shorter, it feels like a shadowy time. Yet, we cannot cure a sickness without casting a spotlight on its symptoms, and we will not be able to construct a healthy society without hearing the nauseating truth. Yet, if we do, we can create a world where victims have a voice and where they are believed. We can cultivate workplaces where powerful men do not use their authority to subjugate women to sexual acts for professional favors. And we can hope and pray for the transformation of society, that it will be a place where women and children have respect and dignity.

May God help us.