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Mentoring with Dignity: A Plan for Pastors and Churches to Support Women in Recovery from Domestic Violence

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MENTORING WITH DIGNITY:
A PLAN FOR PASTORS AND CHURCHES
TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN RECOVERY
FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

MARTHA F. WILLIAMS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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PASTORS AND CHURCHES TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN
RECOVERY FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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DEDICATION

Niki, Drew and Ben, you keep me going and growing.

May you always remember God's grace in your lives.

I love you!

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Mom and Dad, who taught me to value education and hard work.

My siblings Jonathan, Jennifer, Melanie, Stuart, and Christopher, you shaped me more than any of us will ever know.

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FOREWARD

This project, while only formally in process for several years, has been a lifetime in the writing. I wish there were no need for this project. I wish I had no passion for this topic. I wish there were no room for me to be in any way considered an “expert.” The topic is important for churches, for men and women, and for me as I continue to heal and grow from the experiences of my own life.

This work is presented for pastors who do not understand what is wrong when people come to see them with abuse-related problems. These men and women, called out by God to lead His people, need the wisdom, perception, training, education, and covering of the Holy Spirit to gently, lovingly speak truth with authority into these lives.

While this work is addressed to pastors and churches, it truly is for all women and men who find themselves in incredible emotional pain and do not know why or how they got there, how to get out, or even what is wrong. May Mentoring With Dignity provide an avenue for hope and healing.

My personal commitment in life is to be a passionate, creative, empowering catalyst while using my God-given voice to encourage others to fully embrace God’s calling in their lives.

May this work serve in such a capacity.

My goals for the project include:

- For church communities to become aware of violence and abuse issues in their midst.
- For church communities to gain understanding of the abused and the abuser.
- For church communities to create awareness and understanding of the problem so that
real help can be offered by and within communities of faith.
- For church communities to become aware of real and subtle signals of abuse and
realize the underlying myths surrounding the problem.
- For church communities to be involved in a multifaceted, multi-disciplinary approach
for building awareness and offering education about the problem.
- For church communities to provide relevant information and education for children,
youth, and adults.
- For church communities to cooperate with community resource people and agencies.
- To encourage pastors to set goals about awareness and education.
- To encourage pastors to become aware of the availability of resources within their
communities.
- To encourage pastors to look for the signs of potential abuse among those they serve.
- To encourage pastors to use language in prayer, teaching, and sermons which might
allow those in abusive situations to know there is awareness, openness, and
availability of guidance surrounding this topic.
- To provide those in recovery opportunities for education and support, in order that they
might see their own situations and become aware of the root causes that influence
their personal decisions for health and wholeness.

ABSTRACT

This work addresses the need for the church, fully supported by the pastor and leaders, to minister to women who attend church and are suffering in abusive marriages. The Mentoring With Dignity recovery program provides a simple, easily accessible solution that can be readily implemented by churches and is built of commonly known, widely acceptable and respected components: Twelve Step and Stephen Ministers.

The church must work for compassion and justice in any area that takes away freedom, stifles life, or invalidates persons. Violence against another in whatever form it takes is an offense against the integrity of life so freely given by our Creator. The church and her leaders must advocate for the powerless in society. It is time to take a stand, to love enough, and to see and call abuse the evil that it is.

INTRODUCTION

The ministry concern addressed in this work is how the church, supported by pastors and leaders, can fully minister to women who attend church and are suffering in abusive marriages or where domestic violence is present. This will be addressed very specifically in the proposed Mentoring With Dignity program in chapter nine.

There is little awareness in churches, denominations, and among pastors of this problem. There are also limited ways to address the concern other than by referral to professionals, namely abuse shelters and therapists. Consequently, little lasting ministry takes place other than referral. The majority of those abused are not ministered to prior to referral or after discharge. Those whose suffering is not so acute as to require an abuse shelter or in-patient therapy are often ignored by the churches. My concern is denial by pastors and the church community of abuse in its midst. Because of denial, there has been abandonment of the women in need.

There are two distinct ways to address the problem: (1) Prophetically highlight the problem and be disappointed when the prophetic words are ignored, or (2) Provide a simple, accessible solution built of common, easily understood components. The proposed solution will be composed of widely known and respected parts, such as AA's Twelve Step programs or Stephen Ministries, and readily implemented wherever churches have Twelve Step groups and Stephen Ministers operating in their congregation.

Domestic violence is pervasive in our society and crosses all socioeconomic levels, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Abuse affects our lives, our homes,

and our society. “Violence in the family—physical assault, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and destruction of property—is a relentlessly democratic activity.”¹ This atrocity is occurring in every population group in our society. Domestic violence and abuse affect all components of our society, including those who attend church. All women, men and children are potential victims. In a policy document, the National Council of Churches states:

Family violence is a common experience for adults and children of every race, class and religious affiliation: it occurs in every type of family configuration... The circumstances cited by law enforcement and other secular agents indicate that members of faith communities are not exempt from the victimization or perpetuation of abuse.²

- One in four women will experience abuse from an intimate partner at some point in their life.³
- In the United States, one case of physical spouse assault is reported to police every sixty seconds.⁴
- Nearly 40 percent of all visits to hospital emergency departments are domestic violence related.⁵
- Intimate partner violence made up 20% of all reported nonfatal violent crime experienced by women in 2001.⁶
- 1,247 women and 440 men were killed by an intimate partner in 2000.⁷
- 1,218 women were killed by an intimate partner in 1999.⁸

This violence and abuse take a great toll on the entire family system and is likely to affect future generations as well. “Even more costly is the damage to the social fabric

¹ Marie M. Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*, Revised edition, 2002 (Seattle, WA: The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1991), 3.

² *A Policy Statement of The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America*. (New York, NY: National Council of Churches General Board, 1990), 31.2-1.

³ Kathy Heffernan, “Signs of Domestic Violence,” *Vision, National Association of Catholic Chaplains*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 2005), 1.

⁴ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ipv01.htm> (accessed 27 November 2004).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ipva99.htm> (accessed 27 November 2004).

itself when people no longer feel safe within their own families.”⁹ In writing on this topic, I do not mean to say that pastors and churches are not concerned about domestic violence and abuse. My only desire is to inform and facilitate healing care from the church community to those in pain. This work attempts to bring focused information and education surrounding the topic to those who often feel isolation rather than invitation from their communities of faith.

“National statistics show that 85 percent of victims are women.”¹⁰ Undoubtedly many men suffer emotional and physical abuse in their marriages. For the most part, these men are “silent victims,” that is, society, statistics, and literature are only just beginning to hear their voice. There are unique factors and issues that male victims face. Due to the limited scope of this project, the focus will be on female victims of male perpetrated abuse. Thus, for the sake of clarity, this work will refer to a male abuser and a female victim or abused.

Domestic violence is an activity that is engaged in because it can be, because people look the other way. It has been “accepted” for centuries. It is a learned behavior. Now is the time for the church to help with the unlearning of these behaviors. Abuse will stop only when everyone in every setting and every structure gives the same message, that it is wrong and unacceptable. The church can and needs to be a part of giving this message with compassion and hope for change.

While the church may be reluctant to face this issue, the problem and its ripple effects exist among its members and attendees. Pastors and leaders have the responsibility to acknowledge the problem, name this sin, and learn to welcome, affirm,

⁹ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-1.

¹⁰ Heffernan, 1-2.

and support both abused and abuser in their midst. The church has a tremendous opportunity to embrace this and lead the way in reconciliation and healing.

In a sample of abused women collected by John and Phyllis Alsdurf, authors of *Battered into Submission*, data indicates women in abusive situations are in their first marriage, with children, had attended some college, and nearly 50 percent had graduated. They held part-time jobs, were in good physical health, described their families of origin as average, religious, and stable, and were from relatively violence-free, middle-class backgrounds.¹¹ These could be average churchwomen.

This work presents an overview of the issues of domestic violence and abuse. It will ask the question, what is the responsibility of the church and its leaders in response to this critical concern affecting so many? This will include a practical application in the form of a proposed model for recovery, Mentoring With Dignity. In this, leaders, laity, the church community, and the local community work together to each provide critical pieces that affirm, encourage, and support women and men as they seek to climb out of the pit of pain and shame that abusive relationships create.

Chapter one introduces the ministry problem to be addressed by way of a story to engage the reader, allowing a grasp of the problem and the need for change and solution.

Chapter two lays the biblical and theological underpinnings of the abuse issue. It reviews scriptures that have been used to help expose abuse in our midst. It also addresses ways in which scripture has been interpreted in such ways as to bring harm by creating fear, shame, or unwillingness for women to move away from violent situations, especially in marriage.

¹¹ James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989).

Chapter three specifically defines the many and various forms of abuse, including verbal, psychological, physical, and sexual. It also describes the patterns and cycles of violence and abuse.

Chapter four examines the profile of an abused person or victim. This includes a look at the reasons people stay trapped in this kind of a situation.

Chapter five reviews contributing factors and profile data of the perpetrators of abuse and violence. This explores some myths about abuse and abusers as well.

Chapter six observes the effects of denial, fear, dishonesty, co-dependency, low self-esteem, and the ease of being caught in a victim mentality. It also addresses the steps to getting unstuck, the necessary steps required to make new and permanent change, and the risk of giving up the known, even if painful and unhealthy, for the unknown of an uncertain and yet-to-be-revealed future. Ways in which these mindsets and worldviews help people stay trapped in abusive relationships are also explored.

Chapter seven speaks to the role of the church or faith community and especially the role of the pastor in addressing violence and abuse in family systems, not only in the congregation but also in the church body as a family system. It addresses the importance of naming the problem and lists practical ways in which the church can address violence and abuse in its midst.

Chapter eight looks at the stages of recovery in preparation for setting up a proposed solution. The eight stages are identified as: unaware, aware but doesn't care, seeker, newborn, child, teenager, parent, and grandparent. There are specific developmental tasks in each stage in terms of readiness to move to the next stage.

Chapter nine proposes a model for recovery from abuse, the Mentoring With Dignity recovery program. The model is adaptable to various age groups and genders, utilizing a wide range of resources from pastors, laity, congregations, and the community at large to address this important issue in our midst. The model is one that may be adapted to recognize and address any number of other concerns facing our faith communities today, including divorce and co-dependency.

Chapter ten re-emphasizes that abuse is present in our communities of faith and needs to be dealt with in a compassionate, direct, and straightforward manner. This is important so that all may have access to support, encouragement, and opportunities for growth and change in order to become safe in their situations; this is only truly possible through Jesus Christ. Pastors need to be educated thoroughly and informed in the ways in which they have enormous power to contribute either to the healing and health or to the ongoing devastation and destruction of men, women, and children in their communities. The entire church community needs to be empowered to participate in offering opportunities for recovery to all people.

CHAPTER ONE

It is Sunday morning and families are arriving at the local church: moms, dads, children, all are dressed in their Sunday best, shoes shined, faces washed and hair combed. Each family may have experienced the usual Sunday morning rush and scramble, even a squabble or two. One or more families come with some added and unseen pain. They might be described positively in terms such as “Looks good,” “What a beautiful family,” or “They seem so happy.” However, unseen problems may be kept under wraps, out of sight, denied upon inquiry. The family struggles with violent outbursts, abuse, disrespect, hidden actions, activities, and behaviors never displayed at church. They may be broken and beaten. Some may be ashamed, afraid, disappointed, disillusioned, angry, brokenhearted, or suffering pain that has no place for expression within the family of faith. Family members may have feelings of insecurity, loneliness, abandonment, and dishonesty, because what they show to the world outside their home, to their church friends and in leadership meetings, is less than the whole story.

God desires our whole hearts. God asks us to tell the whole story. If the whole story remains untold, unacknowledged, and unaccepted at church, where do families who suffer abuse have any hope of being honest? Where can they admit defeat and pain? They wear masks and happy faces. They present themselves as dutiful fathers, perfect homemakers, and compliant children, all playing their expected roles. They may not even recognize themselves as they participate in the church service. Sunday morning may be the only place and time all week for respite from the agony of their homes.

However, they remain vulnerable and fragile because they adhere to and hide well behind spiritual niceties and always answer “fine” when asked how they are doing.

As these families participate in the community of faith, they rarely hear about healthy ways for husbands and wives to interact and so are left to find their own ways. The wives may know some things are wrong but are reluctant to raise issues that are unspoken in the community. She may not want to risk rejection by the community of faith or further the abuse at home. The children rarely hear in the church community about family life and assume the ways in which their family interacts are normal, even though “normal” is only a setting on the clothes dryer. They have learned to tolerate and accept their home life as appropriate—it is all they know. The children watch their parents, put on their happy faces every Sunday as they arrive at church, and have dutifully learned to follow suit. Attitudes and behaviors are learned and reinforced by example.

Either husband or wife may have experienced past abuse over many years and may carry long held attitudes that they deserve the lives they lead. The possibility of another option may never cross their minds. They may be unable to take care of or stand up for themselves or understand their own value. They may think their only choice is to minimize the negatives and maximize the positives to preserve an unhealthy marriage to which they vowed lifelong commitment.

In one specific example, an abused woman went on a church women’s retreat and opened up to her roommates. After returning from the weekend, her experiences seemed unreal, too difficult to talk about, too painful to bring up again. None of the church women contacted her to ask how things were. Previously the woman had opened up at

Bible study. Without meaning to be dismissive or devalue the woman's experience, the Bible study members made comments like: "This is just a phase," "Smile, God loves you," "Look on the bright side," "I'll pray about that," and "Aren't you exaggerating things a little?" These comments were meant well, however they only pointed out the pain and discomfort of the listeners and served to communicate to the woman that they did not know what to do with what she had shared. The woman decided to keep these painful revelations to herself in the future.

The woman did not confide in her pastor, because it did not seem safe. Her pastor had never referred to issues of abuse in families. He lacked specific training in this area and was unprepared to quickly address it with respect and dignity. The congregation lacked trained people to provide easy access or a comfortable place for this woman to ask questions about her relationship, tell her story, or share her pain.

The woman's husband occupied a position of leadership in the church and was therefore respected. His position made the woman's concerns more difficult to raise. The church system put men in charge and women were allowed involvement only in certain areas. The power relationship in the church confirmed that men were in charge, made the decisions, and would stick together. It was a male-dominated system.

The woman had never seen the church deal with the issue of abuse or any other issue of such emotional volatility. These things, if dealt with at all, were handled behind closed doors. The lack of openness about abuse in the church added to the woman's fear of raising the issue, of bringing her questions and concerns to light.

Things continued to get worse at home. Without anyone really being aware of their troubles, one day it was announced this couple would be separating, that the wife

and children had left, and a divorce was pending. Many in the congregation were confused because the couple seemed happy. Congregants commented, “They are so nice, they have such great children. I can’t imagine what went wrong.”

In this example, the family split up and the church members did not know why, nor did they understand what went wrong or realize their part in it or recognize ways they could have helped. The church members returned to their Sunday morning routine without further consideration for the broken family. The situation remains undiscussed, as if it were a completely private matter within that family. The pastor was relieved of the discomfort of lacking skills to help the family. The family, now in pieces, moved on and the problem went back underground.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Code of Care

This chapter addresses the biblical and theological foundations that inform Christians about the question of domestic violence. Without using the specific language of domestic violence, the Bible teaches care and hospitality for those who are oppressed. However, God's Word mandates providing for the most vulnerable, caring for them and giving them protection. It requires care of widows, the poor, orphans, and the disenfranchised in society. It alludes to abuse and violence in the home and in families. A number of texts are used to address this issue. Depending on how they are interpreted, some of the passages can be harmful and others helpful in the cause of justice in relationships. This chapter will address what Marie Fortune calls roadblocks and resources¹ and what Al Miles refers to as biblical sanctions and scriptural misconceptions.²

In many cases, clergy and leaders in the church have done an incomplete job of teaching what God says about violence in general and more specifically about violence against women and children. Violence and abuse in the home, between loved ones and partners, exist all around us, and church communities are not exempt. Spousal, family, and intimate partner violence contradict expectations and beliefs about what is right,

¹ Marie M. Fortune, *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987).

² Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000).

good, and trustworthy in those relationships. Psalm 55:12-14 (RSV) speaks to this unique pain and betrayal:

It is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.

The confusion, heartache, and betrayal resulting from domestic violence challenge description and comprehension.

What does God's Word have to say about this topic? How have scriptures been interpreted to harm the abused and justify the abuser? How have scriptures have been used to rectify, combat, and change the dynamic?

Two Perspectives

Religious leaders need to deconstruct roadblocks and construct resources so that the hope of Jesus Christ, the light and life, may be the healing balm needed by those caught in the devastating cycle of domestic violence.³ Religious leaders can use biblical sanctions or scriptural misinterpretations to perpetuate violence or make it clear that such behavior and action is unacceptable in the eyes of God.⁴ Biblical texts and scripture can perpetuate *harm* because of how they are used to address domestic violence, or they can be used to *help* preserve life and dignity.

Survivors and those in abusive situations need all the resources possible to encourage, support, and uplift their spirits. They need help to move forward rather than remain trapped, submissive, and simply enduring. The theology of ministry must embrace, empower, equip, encourage, and call for action to promote the life of freedom

³ Marie M. Fortune, *Leadership Training: Religious Resources & Roadblocks To Ending Violence Against Women* (Seattle, WA: FaithTrust Institute, 2004).

⁴ Miles, 25.

that Jesus Christ promises and provides. Believers are to live lives abundant and full, free from violence, aggression, disrespect, and dishonor. A theology of ministry that binds people to stay for unjust reasons in relationships that cause pain, suffering, and death denies the teachings of Christ that we love one another as he loved us.

Violence in families began with the first family, Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. Genesis relates stories of blame, shame, sibling rivalry, and murder. Stories about difficulties in family systems and relationships can be found throughout the Bible. While these accounts in scripture do not justify abuse or violence in families, some may misinterpret them and use them as justification.

Texts that have been used to support control in relationships must be analyzed. Texts that have been used to suggest power over others in relationships must be reviewed and seen as tools for putting a stop to violent and abusive behavior. Some texts may be challenging to understand and must be examined in context to clarify the message. Other texts call for action and provide direction for response to domestic violence.

Throughout scripture, God admonishes believers to protect and care for those who are in violent situations, against whom evil is perpetrated. David cries out for God's protection and mercy in the Psalms. All who love God are called to participate in this mandate of care and protection. The church has been slow in response, particularly to certain populations, especially to those caught in domestic violence and abuse. "Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun: Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them" (Ecclesiastes 4:1 NRSV).

Headship

The position that condones abuse in the home may stem from the concept of male headship and female submission in Genesis 2 and 3. These texts are cited as support for male dominance and female submission, because woman was created from man's rib (Gen. 2:21), the man named the woman (Gen. 2:23), and more specifically, "To the woman he said... 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'" (Gen. 3:16 NIV).

Another text used to justify male headship or dominance and female submission is 1 Corinthians 11:2-6. This passage speaks of the man as the head of the woman and refers to the woman being created for the man. The text continues, however, with discussion of the need for equality and mutuality between men and women:

"Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God" (1 Corinthians 11:11-12 NRSV). Paul appears to further the view of male dominance and female submission when he says, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man; she is to keep silent" (1 Timothy 2:12 RSV).

In the 4th century, Augustine interpreted Genesis 2 and 3 as the basis of his doctrine of original sin. The core of this position blames the woman for introducing sin and suffering into the world through temptation and sexuality. This understanding places the blame for any emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual, and/or verbal abuse on women. In Augustine's view, women are to blame for sin and suffering in the world.

Interpretations of scripture endorsing and supporting male headship increase the likelihood that some faith communities may directly or indirectly affirm men as being more capable or intelligent, more responsible for exercising control in and over the marriage, family, and church. Male headship as a doctrine may be used, again unintentionally, to cause a woman to hear that she needs to stay in a marriage under any and all circumstances. The leader in this kind of a system may discourage a woman from leaving her role to love him through the difficult times. They see this abusive behavior, which we may call sin, as a call to the wife to be self-sacrificial and more submissive, for her to try harder, be more gentle, and so forth. A woman may be encouraged that her role is to keep peace, harmony, honor, and commitment, to not break her vows, practice forgiveness, and even be a witness for Christ's unfailing love to win him over.

Submission

Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:21-33 NIV)

This Ephesians passage is often cited as the source for discussing the submission of women. Some use this text to justify the expectation that women submit to the power

and control of their husbands. However, the text also promotes mutual respect and honor.

Fidelity seems to describe this idea of mutual submission and commitment. Fidelity is defined as “faithfulness to something to which one is bound by a pledge, by duty, or by a sense of what is right or appropriate.”⁵ At the moment one partner violates the other, fidelity is broken. That partner has broken covenant and has left the relationship, the marriage. Marriage is a communion characterized by love, mutuality, and trust which defines fidelity. Scripture speaks throughout of the sobered, prudent, careful, grace-filled discernment process regarding how to walk with one another in fidelity in marriage. There is a time to let go of those who constantly are unrepentant in this regard.

The harm from this passage results from its use by those who desire and chose to demand power over their wives in a marriage relationship. The passage calls for women to submit themselves to their husbands in everything and respect their husbands. It says the two will become one flesh and implies that the wife is part of and loses her identity to her husband. The words *submit* and *submission* can be problematic when taken out of context. The husband can expect the wife to submit to his will and can point to almost anything as a sign of disrespect. The reference to leaving the mother and father and joining as one flesh has been used to justify isolation of a spouse from family, friends, co-workers, and church acquaintances. The reference comparing the husband’s role to that of Christ’s relationship to the church can be interpreted to mean the husband controls his wife in an effort to cleanse her imperfections and meet his needs.

⁵ Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1973), 426.

A fuller reading of the text, however, reveals God's overarching principles of mutual respect, love, care, concern, appreciation, and regard for one another. The text calls the husband to sacrifice himself for his wife as Christ led and cared for the Church with his own service and sacrifice. Paul cites Christ as the model of servanthood. The text speaks to mutual subjection and mutual submission and says that husbands and wives are to serve to one another. The passage admonishes and instructs the husband to love and tenderly care for his wife. Colossians 3:19 reinforces the expectation for tenderness and love: "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (RSV). The question becomes not about submission, power, and control but about love and what that love looks like.

Suffering

Another harmful view of scripture holds that suffering and the claim of suffering abuse at the hands of another will honor God or bring a partner to God. Women have been encouraged to understand 1 Peter 4:13's instruction to "rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ" (NIV) as a way of accepting abuse by a partner. They are encouraged to see abuse as their cross to bear and accept it as a way of identifying with Christ. This view of suffering with Christ forms the base for inappropriate responses that minimize, "Christianize," or "spiritualize" abuse.

The helpful, converse view of suffering teaches that God promises to be with the sufferer but does not mandate suffering at the hand of another. Suffering can be an opportunity for growth, for change in one's life and way of thinking. However, encouraging growth and change does not justify abuse. God does not abandon the

sufferer of abuse. The sufferer may question “Where is God?” and “Why is this happening to me?” However, the good news is: “For neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39 RSV).

God Hates Divorce

Malachi 2:13-16 has been used by some leaders and pastors to keep people in harmful marriages.

Another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why? It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking Godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. I hate divorce, says the LORD God of Israel, and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment, says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. (Malachi 2:13-16 NIV)

The author addresses husbands and speaks clearly about their responsibility to their wives as evidenced in verse 15, when he refers to “the wife of your youth.” Again, this passage is speaking about fidelity and the nature of commitment in a marriage agreement. In the cultural context of this passage, wives could not divorce; however, men were discarding the wives of their youth. The text is not written to, for, or even about the women; these are instructions to the husbands.

By nature of the culture during Old Testament times, men were simply casting off their wives, usually at midlife. While men had the legal and cultural right to divorce, they were abusing the privilege. God said you don’t just throw away your wife, the wife

of your youth, because you are tired of her. God witnessed the covenant of their youth and firmly reminds men of their responsibility to care for their wives as they would their own flesh and blood. The text says God desires godly offspring, but does not indicate that this should come at the expense of another's life, in the belittling, harm, abuse, or violence of one spouse toward the other.

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. The Jewish tradition teaches that this was the end of prophecy. The Israelite culture was unique in the midst of those surrounding it, because they worshipped only one god without idols. The people were to remain faithful and not go out to worship other gods; they were not to be lured away. This passage is metaphorical in that sense. It is not suggesting or demanding spouses who are being abused stay home and endure violence.

A number of aspects of the Malachi passage can be used to prohibit a spouse from leaving an abusive marriage. The sentence "For I hate divorce" is often held up as though it stands alone without the accompanying phrase "and the covering of one's garment with violence." The Lord acting as witness sounds intimidating, as though God is watching every move. However, because God has witnessed an event does not prevent one from leaving a situation harmful to oneself or to one's children. God hates both divorce and violence.

Of course, God hates divorce, the breaking of fidelity of the covenant of marriage. The marriage relationship is God's ultimate gift, the vehicle by which is given a glimpse into perfect communion with all the safety and trust that perfect love brings. It mirrors God's desire for us as individuals and as the Church, the Bride of Christ. Yes, God hates liars, cheaters, and those who abuse the innocent ones. He is grieved by our brokenness,

by our failure to maintain fidelity in relationships. We all break it everyday in so very many ways.

The use of the word *covenant* may hold some in a marriage. Some see a covenant as an oath with God, and therefore they cannot break the covenant. The text in Malachi says, "God was witness to the covenant between you and your spouse, the spouse of your youth." Some think the only reason one can leave a marriage is faithlessness defined as adultery or sexual infidelity. However, the breaking of faith and trust in a relationship certainly includes violence and battering. The breaking of trust, the breaking of faith, is fundamental to this question of a covenant being broken when the relationship is broken. The one who perpetrates violence against another breaks the covenant whether it is through verbal, physical, financial, sexual, or spiritual abuse. The covenant is broken in God's eyes at that time, not at the time of the divorce.

Jesus says more about his concern for divorce proceedings in Matthew 19:6: "[W]hat God has joined let no man destroy." Divorce and the accompanying legal proceedings are the public act and acknowledgment of the reality that has existed privately, perhaps for a long time. Violence and infidelity have broken the covenant, the union, the spirit of the law, and ultimately the marriage. The divorce is simply a public acknowledgement of the broken covenant.

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:3-4 RSV).

Mutual responsibilities and rights are afforded to both men and women, to husbands and wives. The responsibilities and rights of one do not reign over and above the other; they pertain to each other in mutual submission. This text, however, has been

used by some to make sexual demands, sometimes unreasonable and abusive ones, of their partners. The intimate physical sharing between husband and wife is one of God's greatest gifts. This intimacy demands mutual love, care, respect, affirmation, choice, and ultimately unconditional regard for one another, even over and above regard for self. This is true mutuality.

The Foundation for the Church's Response to Abuse

Compassion is necessary. Throughout God's word, the teaching is clear: Christians are expected to love, care for, and provide hope for those in need, and are identified by their love for one another. "All men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35 NRSV). In Matthew 10:42, Jesus instructs us to serve him by "offering a cup of cool water to the least of them." In Micah 6:8, believers are "required to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God." God asks believers to face heartache, be honest, and acknowledge pain and harm.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each tell the story of the Good Samaritan, which gives clear instruction for action on behalf of those who cannot care for themselves. The parable asks who is neighbor and what is to be given to and done for them. Followers of Christ and the people of church communities are to provide help, safety, and opportunity for healing to those in harm's way. How often has the church been unwilling to see abuse in its midst? How often have leaders stayed clear out of fear, pride, and ignorance and cut a very wide swath around such issues in their faith community and the community-at-large, simply not wanting to get involved? The church needs to reach out to those in need, no matter their position, feelings, possible

misunderstandings, or fears. “It is not accidental that in Jesus’ parable it was religious leaders who failed to assist the assault victim in the parable. Even though a legalistic duty was met, it is evident that we are begin challenged to go beyond the letter of the law.”⁶ The following modern re-writing of the Good Samaritan story brings clarity to the ways in which Christians miss opportunities to serve their neighbors.

The Good Stranger

As a Christian woman was traveling the road between romance and reality, she fell in love with a charming but insecure young man. And it came to pass that after they were married, he beat her and robbed her of her dignity, and she ran from the house bruised and afraid, and wished she were dead.

A pastor saw her swollen face and stopped to give advice. “Wives submit to your husband,” he read, then closed the Book and prayed that God would bless the meek. He excused himself to attend a seminar on Motivating Strong Leaders.

A doctor stopped and bandaged her face and gave her a prescription for Valium.

A woman’s Bible study leader heard her sobs, and felt a rush of pity. “I don’t know what she sees in him,” she thought and thanked God for her own gentle husband. And she went on to buy the young woman a Christian book on Making Your Marriage Work.

A police officer asked if she needed help. She asked that he arrest her husband. The officer asked if there were any witnesses to the assault. Since there were none, he left her alone.

A Mission Circle president learned that she was wandering the streets without a purse, her clothing torn, and said to the treasurer, “How awful! Poor dear!” And they agreed that something should be done, and that they would bring it up at their next meeting.

A social worker noticed her and stopped to talk. “What did you do to provoke him?” she asked. The battered woman turned and walked away. The social worker concluded that she didn’t really want any help.

And while the battered woman was wondering where she would sleep that night, a stranger greeted her and said, “Sister, come with me. We’ll get some food at the crisis center and maybe some clothes.” She took her own threadbare coat, and placed it on the wounded woman’s shoulders.

And when they found the Crisis Center it had no empty beds. The stranger took the woman to her attic room, and cooked a Kraft dinner and

⁶ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-2.

canned peas on the hot plate. She made a pot of tea and listened to the incoherent burst of pent-up pain. She wept to hear the broken dreams, self-doubt and shattered faith. And as the woman dropped to sleep upon the couch, the stranger breathed, “You’re a survivor, like me,” and made herself a bed to lie upon the floor.

Which of these people was a neighbor to the woman who fell into the hands of the abuser?

The one who had compassion on her.

Go and do likewise.⁷

Conclusion

God desires that humans care for one another, especially for those who are downtrodden and heavy laden. “Learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 NIV). Several scripture passages can be problematic in that they have been used to help perpetuate abuse and violence. In truth, scripture gives a message of freedom, justice, life, and health. Pastors, spiritual leaders, and teachers must have a clear understanding of the scriptures and the ways in which their misuse can hurt the cause of equality, justice, and respect for men, women, and spouses everywhere and bring the balm of hope, help, and healing. Miles declares,

Let me say again, it is vital that all clergy and other spiritual leaders be accurate in what they preach and teach women, men and children about the Bible. Otherwise, it makes it very easy for perpetrators of violence to twist the Scriptures to justify their position on the ill-treatment of women.⁸

Chapter three gives an overview of the problem of abuse. It provides specific definitions of various types of abuse to set additional groundwork for understanding this complex issue including abuses other than physical abuse.

⁷ Esther Barnes, *The Link & Visitor* (February 1998), as quoted by Dr. Marie M. Fortune, *The Colorado Trust Monograph Series: Ending Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence*, Book 3 (Seattle, WA: FaithTrust Leadership Training, 2004).

⁸ Miles, 40.

CHAPTER 3

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

Abuse is difficult to define because of the range of and type of abuse, as well as disagreement among observers as to what constitutes abuse. Bruises, black eyes, and broken bones are not what truly define abusive and violent behavior. This is one of the difficulties in defining and even talking about the topic. For the purpose of this paper and to provide a foundation for discussion, domestic violence and abuse are hereby defined:

Domestic violence is the mistreatment of one family member by another. Most often perpetrators of abuse and battering are: a spouse, ex-spouse, boyfriend, ex-boyfriend or lover. Most often victims of abuse are women and children. The abuse can be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and psychological.¹

Abuse is “any or all behaviors between intimate partners in which one harms or gains or maintains control over the other person.”² The abuse may display itself in numerous forms including emotional or psychological, property destruction, physical, financial, or sexual. Abuse robs individuals of power and creates a climate of fear and intimidation.

Dr. Steve Stephens, psychologist and author says, “Abuse is any behavior that ultimately takes away another’s voice.” Abuse is defined by the outcome for the victim: the power and control exerted over the victim in robbing her of respect, dignity, freedom, and expression of personal autonomy.

¹ Zoe Brown and David Charlsen, eds., *Family Violence and Religion: An Interfaith Resource Guide* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1995), 11.

² Michael Lindsey, Robert W. McBride, and Constance M. Platt, *AMEND Breaking the Cycle: Workbook for Ending Violent Behavior* (Littleton, CO: Gylantic Publishing Company, 1993), 3.

Abuse is degradation and criticism, the attack of one's personhood, not merely a comment or attack about an action taken. It is finding a soft, vulnerable spot and continuously demeaning it. It is kicking people when they are down. There are ways too numerous to name or mention for people to harm one another. We are all harmed, and we all do harm to others. Wounded people wound others.

The definition of abuse will be different for each person based on history, experience, and family upbringing. What is tolerable to some may be intolerable to others. Education, self-esteem, and self-awareness allow people to make healthy choices in their own situation. It is important to look for ways to talk about these concerns so that people will remain open and able to ask themselves the hard questions about any intimate relationship.

Each of the forms of abuse can and do occur along a continuum, from mild to severe and all the way to life-threatening. In the very early stages and beginning forms, it might be difficult to define certain actions and behaviors as abusive. This is like the frog placed in a kettle of cool water: as the heat is turned up, it simply adjusts and eventually dies. If the frog were to be dropped into a kettle of boiling water, analogous to the escalated abuse situation, it would be wise enough to jump out immediately. Women need to see the small, early forms of abuse and understand that things will only get worse without intervention.

Anne Ganley has made this helpful distinction: "Hands-on battering involves physical contact with the victim's body through sexual or physical battering. Hands-off battering involves psychological battering and destruction of pets or property."³ Further she states, "Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, physical,

³ Carol J. Adams, *Woman-Battering* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 17.

sexual, psychological, economic, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners.”⁴

Dr. Ganley lists the following seven means of abuse.

1. Threats of violence against victim, self or others
2. Acts of violence against self or people other than victim
3. Attacks against property or pets
4. Emotional abuse, humiliation, degradation
5. Isolation of victim
6. Use of children
7. Threats of deportation, leaving, abandonment or divorce⁵

Verbal

In her work, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, Patricia Evans defines verbal abuse as “words that attack or injure, that cause one to believe the false, or that speak falsely of one. Verbal abuse constitutes psychological violence.”⁶ “Generally, in a verbally abusive relationship the abuser denies the abuse. Verbal abuse most often takes place behind closed doors. Physical abuse is always preceded by verbal abuse.”⁷ In other words, research shows that verbal abuse always comes before physical violence is exhibited. This makes identifying and addressing verbal abuse so critical. While not all spousal abusers come from the same mold or follow a precise script, there are identifiable stages and patterns.

Verbal abuse may come in a seemingly random pattern, an unexpected manner with no real rhyme or reason. This lack of an obvious pattern makes it that much more difficult to identify and name. While the last episode may not be easily forgotten, each

⁴ Dr. Anne Ganley, “Definition of Domestic Violence,” *FaithTrust Leadership Training Conference*, Seattle, WA (June 2004).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* (Avon, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1992), 81.

⁷ Ibid., 19.

outburst can feel like a specific one-time event on a new topic. This makes it very difficult to see the patterns of abuse that are and have been developing over time. “Often, the partner of a verbal abuser does not recognize verbal abuse for what it is until the abuse changes, in kind or in intensity.”⁸

Evans identifies ten patterns of verbal abuse. These ten patterns are:

1. It rarely occurs in public.
2. It is unexpected.
3. It occurs when feeling happy, enthusiastic, or successful.
4. It begins to seem familiar.
5. It often communicates disdain for personal interests.
6. Partner does not seek reconciliation or even is aware or bothered by incident.
7. The relationship may seem functional.
8. There is some sort of isolation.
9. The partner is doing the defining of the relationship, himself and the upsetting interactions.
10. The abused does not say to the abuser what she hears.⁹

The identification of any of these patterns is helpful in acknowledging that abuse is occurring. As one begins to recognize abuse, these patterns will prove helpful and provide clarity as they are observed more frequently or with more intensity over time.

Further, Evans identifies 15 categories of verbal abuse. These categories are:

1. Withholding
2. Countering
3. Discounting
4. Verbal abuse disguised as jokes
5. Blocking and diverting
6. Accusing and blaming
7. Judging and criticizing
8. Trivializing
9. Undermining
10. Threatening
11. Name-calling
12. Forgetting
13. Ordering
14. Denial

⁸ Evans, 17.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

15. Abusive anger¹⁰

These types of verbal abuse are used to maintain power and control over another. These are tactics used to build walls and maintain distance from the threat the abuser sees in his partner. The words of verbal abuse become weapons, as identified by the aforementioned categories.

Emotional/Psychological

“Emotional and psychological violence is any behavior that exploits another’s vulnerability, insecurity, or character.”¹¹ It is the use of mental strategies or mind games to manipulate and control. These would include anger, aggression, humiliation, intimidation, stalking, controlling, insults, rejection, threats, accusations, and making comments and statements that distort reality. The goal is to inflict pain and emotional damage on the other person.

This abuse is most difficult to define or observe and is the most damaging of all. Living in this kind of world, especially if these behaviors happen only between the two and not in public settings, is utterly “crazy making”¹² for the recipients. There is little way to make sense of the world, to explain these comments and attitudes to others, to even see any patterns. Part of the nature of abuse is that it begins small and can even seem innocent. Each or any of the little comments taken on their own would seem rather insignificant, and so they go unchallenged. The children’s taunt of “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me” is true only to a point. The “sticks and stones,” physical abuse, do hurt, but so do the words, insults, and degrading remarks.

¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

¹¹ Lindsey et al, 3.

¹² This sub-topic is covered on page 35.

Physical

According to Lindsey et al:

The infliction or threat of infliction of any bodily injury or harmful physical contact or the destruction of property or threat thereof as a method of coercion, control, revenge or punishment upon a person with whom the actor is involved in an intimate relationship.¹³

While this speaks of bodily harm and destruction of property, there is so much more that makes up an abusive relationship.

“Physical violence is any physically aggressive behavior, withholding of physical needs, indirect physically harmful behavior, or threat of physical abuse.”¹⁴ As noted from this definition, even physical abuse does not always leave visible marks that show to the world. This is all the more reason that education, training, and understanding are imperative goals. Culture must begin to understand and address abuse and violence as more than black eyes, bruises, and broken bones.

Sexual

Sexual abuse is “any non-consenting or sexually exploitative verbal or physical behavior. Previous consent does not imply current consent.”¹⁵ Often there is the perception that whatever has been going on previously is acceptable. That may well not be the case. This points out the need in a relationship to begin with clear boundaries in place, knowing what is acceptable, tolerable, loving, and respectful, and not allow that line to be crossed even the first time.

¹³ Lindsey et al, 3.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Lindsey et al, 3.

“Marital rape may afflict one in every eight wives, or more.”¹⁶ Marital rape is therefore likely much more common in abusive relationship. It is important to realize how truly troubled abusive partnerships are in every area. Marital rape quite obviously breaks fidelity in a severe and damaging manner. An area of concern and confusion surrounds the seeming acceptance of marital rape. For instance, if a church member sexually abused a child in the church, the protective barriers would go up immediately. It would be clear to others how depraved that adult’s thinking and acting processes were. There would be an immediate attendance to the needs of the child. Yet sexual abuse within a marriage setting seems easily accepted. This hands continued twisted power over to an abuser and causes utter humiliation to be suffered by the victim.

Cycle of Violence

There are three classic stages of the abuse pattern.¹⁷ The first is the tension building stage. During this time, the abused tries to keep things on an even keel, to live life and even enjoy it, hoping that things can remain manageable. Soon, abuse begins, whether verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual, and the abused manages to keep some control over the developing situation. There is still an ability to keep the peace. However, the abuser becomes more possessive and less reasonable, and the pressure is building. The abused feels angry, but tries to keep things calm, hold life together, and not let the anger show. She is doing everything possible to maintain at this point. In a marriage, it is necessary to maximize the positive and minimize the negative. The challenge is to pay attention and maintain balance.

¹⁶ Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*, 3.

¹⁷ Susanne Smith, *Family Violence* (Waco, TX: Health Ed. Co., 1998).

Ultimately, however, the second stage is entered. A major battering event occurs. The event can last several hours or several days. There does not necessarily even need to be a specific triggering event: the abused may even be asleep when it begins. While the abused will remember details of the assault, the abuser will likely only remember in generalities the feelings of being upset and angry. It is likely that all involved will blame alcohol, drugs, or some other outside cause for triggering the event, anything other than that the abuser is not well.

Following the battering, violence, or abuse, a “honeymoon” phase begins in which the abuser is sorry at some level and promises that the violence will never happen again. The abuser then becomes loving and affectionate, even offering gifts. During this phase, there is forgiveness and a patching up of the relationship. Then, however, the tension begins to build again, and the cycle repeats. “Battering is not solely a crisis, it is a chronic situation marked by crisis events.”¹⁸

This cycle, this dance which plays out over and over, is chronic and acknowledges that the behaviors of the abuser are not truly random. While it may appear random and disconnected to the victim, the twisted internal world of the abuser is distorted and acting within its own logic. Therefore, no amount of submission, no amount of niceness, love, or change will help the abuser to heal.

Power Over Reality

Patricia Evans, in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, explains that the abuser is living in the “Power Over” reality. In a battering situation, there is a primary aggressor: one person is down, the other up. This reality is one in which the end goal, the constant

¹⁸ Adams, 8.

goal of every action is to always win, to be more powerful than the other person. On the other hand, the abused is living in a different reality, that of being connected to one's own feelings and cooperating and participating with the other in a mutually supportive and empathetic relationship. When these two positions collide with one another, head to head in an intimate relationship such as a marriage, there is certainly room for tremendous harm. These differing ways of viewing relationship and of understanding marriage create the groundwork for a difficult and destructive relationship. This is where knowing oneself and understanding the other is imperative to being able to work together for a mutually rewarding and encouraging relationship.

While not all angry people are addicted to the anger, there is a pattern identified where a build-up of inner tension leads to the release of angry outbursts toward a partner. Evans calls this build-up-and-release cycle, similar to that of violence identified earlier, the cycle of anger addiction, and she calls the abuser an anger addict.¹⁹ Evans asserts that one reason anger addicts do not apologize is that if they were truly repentant, they would need to give up their fix.

The anger/abuse cycle carries a double reward for the abuser. First there is a sense of relief, a kind of euphoric high after exploding at his partner because he has released the tension built up since the last outburst. The second reward is that he has reasserted his dominance and Power Over his partner.²⁰

By nature of the definition of a cycle, abuse will not go away. The acting out of anger may diminish for a while. The abuser's general attitude seems to be that since this feels so good, there could not really be anything all that wrong with it. His thoughts may continue along this line: "If this is helping me, how can it be hurting another?" And since

¹⁹ Evans, 106.

²⁰ Ibid., 106.

abusers are often interested first and foremost in their own comfort and taking care of themselves, they may truly see nothing out of order in the behavior.²¹

Objectification

Objectification occurs when people are viewed as things, as inanimate. People hit and hurt things, not other people. Prostitution and pornography are abusive of all persons involved, whether male or female, because of “using” another for personal gratification. There is never any excuse for abuse or violence against another person. It is only as we objectify people that we can be violent toward them.

The challenge is to identify the root causes and sources of low self-esteem and feelings of lack of power and control that cause the aggressive and violent outbreaks. There are many surface level symptoms that can be cited, but the real work is to go deeper and find the root causes. One needs to identify the cues, the buttons that get pushed, the set-ups which lead one to lash out at another. Some of these may go back as far as early childhood.

Everyone gets angry about something. Violence lives within every being. It is easy to try to separate the world into two camps, those who are violent and those who are not. Only when one is truly honest is there the realization that each person carries within a piece of the abuser. Jesus states in Matthew 5:22 that “anyone who is angry with his brother has committed murder in the heart.” This immediately eradicates any subtle distinctions about only some having the ability to be angry, violent and abusive.

All have hearts that are capable of evil, hearts that could be the spawning and breeding ground for violent thoughts and behavior. Abuse is so much more than an anger

²¹ Ibid., 108.

problem. It is a complex combination of factors, more of which will be identified and addressed in chapter five. It is important to remember that anger is but one sign and symptom of abusive relationships.

Generation to Generation

Dr. Anne Ganley contends that domestic violence is a learned behavior.²² This behavior is learned through observation, experience and reinforcement. This raises the question of where this took place. Children learn everywhere; from day care onward, they learn that if they are a bully, they will get the prize. Cartoons teach that arrogance is cool; MTV and pop culture assert arrogance and self-will as a birthright. The distorted sense of self for the abuser is the result of an entire enculturation process with freewill being foundational. While in many cases this behavior stems from issues within the family of origin, meaning the abuser was abused or witnessed abuse, there are many other factors that contribute to this issue.

There is a critical need for adults and parents to see and understand the long range, generational effects of their choices. Adults need to seek help and take the responsibility to break free from patterns, whether they are the abused or the abuser. The good news is that since this is a learned pattern of behavior, there is a new choice to turn and go a new direction, unlearning the behavior.

Family rules and patterns of coping, adaptive and maladaptive, are often passed on from generation to generation, unfortunately, such dysfunctional coping through the use of violence and aggression continues to be transmitted across generations.²³

²² Ganley, *FaithTrust Leadership Training Conference*.

²³ Pauline Boss, *Family Stress Management: A Contextual Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 81.

Boss, in *Family Stress Management*, calls these inherited coping strategies.

Scripture speaks to the sins of the fathers being passed from generation to generation in Exodus 20:5. According to Dr. Ganley, this learning and unlearning occurs in the family and community which she defines as schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, peer groups, etc. It also occurs through the culture: music, films, TV, and video games.

Crazy Making

When abuse occurs, a spouse may be present physically, but psychologically not acting like a loving mate. This causes a great deal of confusion and makes it hard to move, make decisions, or go forward. In these power struggles and control issues, this not knowing what to expect moment-to-moment produces “crazy making,” an apt term coined by Bach and Deutsch in 1980.²⁴ One never knows which person is coming through the door. As a way to understand crazy making and the imbalance it produces, imagine if every time the front door were opened, the world outside was radically different, not just every day, but every time: one time a mountain, the next a desert, the next a forest, or an ocean. How would one prepare to go out? They would open the door, look out, go back in, and try to get ready for the conditions. But by the time they arrived back to go out, the exterior world would have changed dramatically and without warning. After a few attempts, most would likely stop trying to prepare or go out at all. That is what happens in “crazy making”: one simply gives up, quits trying to make sense of their world, stays in, feels isolated and alone, and begins to question their own sanity. This produces a frozen state, such as that of a deer caught in a car’s headlights. There is trust

²⁴ George R. Bach and Ronald M. Deutsch, *Stop! You’re Driving Me Crazy* (New York, NY: Putnam’s Sons, 1980), 272-273.

and investment, and then the rules change. There is living constantly under an illusion of hope.

Conclusion

Abuse is sin. This sin is played out in various forms and to varying degrees. Until it is acknowledged, identified, and observed, as such no hope exists for change, healing, or reconciliation. Because abuse shows itself in so many forms, there is need for education and information-sharing that will communicate the complexities of the problem.

Abusive behavior is frightening; it is evil. This sin causes death to the spirit and potential physical death as well. Any form of abuse ultimately breaks the fidelity of a relationship and in so doing ends the marriage relationship. While there is not one simple definition of abuse, the same is true of the abuser and the eventual results of abuse. It is important to realize that this issue is more complex, dangerous, and widespread than is often addressed in our communities of faith.

Chapter four will specifically address the victim or abused, including the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. The chapter will also address naming and self-abuse.

CHAPTER 4

THE ABUSED

There is really no such thing as typical or average when it comes to persons who find themselves in abusive relationships. There are, however, some common denominators as to why women stay in these painful relationships. One pattern that often develops is the woman becoming her own abuser, even when abuse from another ends. There are also a number of misunderstandings and misconceptions surrounding those who are abused. This chapter will specifically examine the abused.

Why They Stay

One question often asked by those outside the system of abuse and violence is why a person would stay in that relationship. This is a very complicated and multifaceted issue, the answer to which will be different in every situation. Here are some of the most critical reasons a person stays in an abusive relationship.

Financial dependence on abuser making it difficult to imagine how to survive on one's own. If there are children, fear that they will be deprived.

Lack of an available support system to assist them in recognizing and escaping abuse. Friends/family who never see the partner's negative side may not believe the victim at first or may minimize the situation. Friends/family who have tried to help in the past only to see the victim return to the abuser maybe disappointed or angry and less inclined to offer help again.

Failure by societal institutions to understand spouse abuse or to take the problem seriously and to take appropriate action. Examples: Clergy who focus on sanctity of marriage and emphasize maintaining the relationship at all cost; counselors who subtly or overtly side with the abuser; law enforcement officers who

minimize and do not arrest abusers or do not treat victims with respect; doctors who do not address obvious signs of abuse in their patients.

Increased threats by abuser when a victim tries to separate. There also may be threats by abuser to kill victim, children, or other family, and /or to commit suicide. Knowledge of other battered women who were killed after separating from their abusers.¹

Abuse and the cycle or pattern of violence is a progressive situation. There are numerous things to keep a woman in the situation. There are a variety of situations and circumstances that make a woman unable or unwilling to see and make new choices. Each woman will have to make her own decision. No one can decide for her when enough is enough. The following list points out some of the ways in which the attitudes and thoughts progress to a state of terror, keeping a woman connected to an ultimately unhealthy relationship. By the time a woman is suffering terror, she will have a very difficult time moving in any direction. She is likely quite traumatized.

There are a number of reasons a woman may stay in an abusive situation. A number of these relate to long held attitudes and even misconceptions. Other reasons are related to the progressive nature of abuse. The following list prepared by the National Domestic Violence Hotline covers the most common of these.

- At first because they love and care about abuser. Believe that the violence is temporary and/or caused by unusual circumstances. Hope it will soon stop. (This hope is typically reinforced by periods of time in which there is no abuse and partner is loving or at least civil.).
- Belief that they should understand their attacker and help them to stop their abuse. For women especially this is part of the spousal role. Her inability to help her partner may mean to her that she is ailing in the role of nurturer.
- Belief in the value of holding the family together putting this value above their personal pain, fear, etc. May feel pressure from family, religion, etc. to do this.
- Feelings of personal incompetence such as feeling that one must have a partner to get by in the world, even though they are abusive.

¹ National Domestic Violence Hotline website, <http://www.ndvh.com/> (accessed 27 December 2004).

- Self-blame. Believe that they are in part responsible for the abuse. Their abuser is punishing them for their inability to act properly or to meet the abuser's expectations. NOTE: Self-blame is a recognized side-effect of repeated traumatic stress.
- Increasing mental and physical exhaustion due to unpredictability of abuse. Victim experiences increasing confusion and difficulty in thinking clearly as a result of the pressure of living with someone who changes from kind to cruel without warning, of never knowing what's going to set them off next, of living on continual alert. Increasing mental and physical exhaustion.
- Growing self-doubt about their value as a person, their judgment, capabilities and attractiveness as the effects of abuse eat away at self-esteem. ("Maybe he's right, maybe I'm exaggerating; and anyway, how could I manage on my own?" "How will I ever find anybody?" etc.).
- Need to defend the abuser. Battering reduces faith in oneself and increases isolation so that victim comes to feel they cannot survive without the abuser. At this point any threat to the abuser may be perceived as a threat to themselves, and they may act to protect the abuser..
- Belief that all men are abusive. This is reinforced by growing up in a culture in which physical aggressiveness is considered manly. May come from being raised by abusive parents).
- Belief in omnipotence of abuser caused by abuser's control tactics. (This will be stronger if victim has separated and been forced or enticed into returning only to have abuse continue).
- Terror induced by prolonged abuse.²

These are the most common reasons why a woman may stay in an abusive situation against all reason.

Self-Abuse

There is much said about the cycle of abuse, of violent action displayed toward another. This cycle also plays itself out in self-abuse. Over time as the patterns continue, the victims internalize the abusers' lessons and become their own abusers.

And in short order, I learned to treat myself as I had been treated—neglecting, avoiding, criticizing, demeaning, and berating myself for having feelings and needs, for being human... Shutting off this part of myself made me strong, stronger than I knew. It helped me endure and survive the fact that my needs

² Ibid.

weren't being met. But my feelings, needs, and humanness caught up with me. That part of me refused to be ignored any longer.³

A number of questions develop in our attempt to understand the abused.

- Where does the willingness to accept a volatile situation come from? Is this related to self-esteem?
- How does one see the abuse and then make changes to stop? Is the woman aware? How many years has it been going on?
- Why does one become so incredibly uncomfortable when things are going well? Is this self-sabotage?
- Why do victims almost stir up trouble in relationships and in their surroundings? Have they simply become so accustomed to chaos and would rather live there? Is this like the child who decides negative attention is better than no attention at all?
- Has living in chaos simply become so normative there is discomfort with calm?

Women can ignore, deny, dismiss, and whitewash pain for a long time, but certainly not forever. It will always come back and show itself in some way, shape, or form. One of those ways is in the body, for the body does not lie. There will be symptoms that crop up as disease or simply "dis-ease." Just as anger not dealt with manifests itself volcanically or through passive-aggressive tendencies, so with all other emotions. Survival is one thing, but it is not really living. It is only when women honor self, the unique creation that they are, that they will be able to live peaceably with themselves and others.

³ Melody Beattie, *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps* (New York, NY: Fireside, 1990), 20.

Inner Critic

One way the abused are rendered powerless is through the development of an inner critic or critical parent. This inner voice of negativity and criticism repeats endlessly the lessons taught by the abuser. This results in the abused person becoming his or her own abuser. It is for this reason that geographical cures, moving to new locations, and even moving away from the abusive environment do not create recovery. The abuse has become internalized and will not be gotten rid of by external changes and methods alone. The pattern of abuse has become ingrained as a pattern of behavior and response. People then begin to create crisis just to be able to live in a state where they are comfortable and familiar. "Recovery is often a long process and is frequently confounded by the revictimization which results from the 'blaming-the-victim' response which comes from family, friends, representatives of the church, or society at large."⁴

Every abused person is powerless in some areas of their life and powerful in others. They feel powerless in every area of their life. Isolation creates a situation where they do not and cannot have an accurate view of self. They are not actually powerless. An abuser seeks to render the abused powerless in every area, and where they are not so, to cause them to believe they are powerless.

Abused people have trouble when they focus on their inner critic. This takes them further down. The focus needs to be on self-care, stewardship self-awareness, and gathering resources. When one cares for the little things, the ones they can control, it is amazing what happens. Recovery can begin at that point.

⁴ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-2.

Naming

There are a number of reasons that women feel inhibited in naming abusive behavior, that is, reporting it to anyone. In *Woman-Battering*, Carol Adams shares this:

Telling is suffused with feeling of stigma, fear, defilement, guilt, and denial. Disclosing abuse is scary. It's embarrassing. She feels responsible and may fear being prejudged. Naming may not occur because she is suffering from the shock and stress of ongoing traumatization.⁵

She may then become further ashamed of the inability to stop the abuse, which only multiplies as shame about her silence. Living with the dishonesty of not sharing, she may become more isolated and withdrawn, steeped in embarrassment so as not to tell anyone what has been or is happening.

Other factors that inhibit sharing include a fear that people won't believe what is said. A woman may feel disloyalty to her abuser or fear of reprisal or punishment. She desires to avoid embarrassment. She may remember her own family story of "not telling." There may be the fear of being sent away or the removal of her children. She may even believe she is to simply turn the other cheek. She may feel uncertain about the reaction of those she tells, and while struggling with naming what is happening, she is nonetheless unable to tell others about it. Naming the abuse may not happen simply because she is not aware that anything is really wrong; both she and the abuser minimize what is happening. She may believe she has provoked the incidents. Ultimately, "naming may not occur for many because they have no name to give to their experience."⁶

⁵ Adams, 31.

⁶ Ibid.

Three Themes

In light of these tendencies, three themes emerge.⁷ The first is the idea of shame on the part of the one being abused. There is intense aversion to letting others know what is happening in their life. There is often embarrassment surrounding the ongoing nature and continuing cycle of abuse. Outsiders may find it easy to ask what they think is a simple question, “Why don’t you just leave”? The complexity of that question has been explored. Second, there is great fear for most women of being alone. Even the appearance of having a marriage in place seems better to them than being alone. Third, at some point there was once a genuine loving relationship as they understand it. The victim also sees and has seen the best of her partner at one time or another. Having shared a loving relationship with that person leaves a strong internal memory, one that is hard to shake, even with abuse. Hence, their confusion, grief, and pain are real. To move on is not an easy choice.

Conclusion

There is wide variety among those who are abused. These women come from all walks of life. Factors such as geographical location, education, family history, or even church attendance act neither as sole identifiers nor as sole disqualifiers. In other words, these women do not fit into a neat, identifiable profile. However, there are some common reasons why they stay in abusive relationships. There are common patterns and factors in the progressive nature of abuse and in attitudes that allow the abuse to continue.

⁷ Anita Maher, professor at George Fox University, identified these three themes from an early reading of the dissertation project (February 2005).

Lack of naming is a problem for the abused. Many of these women fall into patterns of self-abuse as the routines of abuse settle in.

In chapter five, we will look at patterns and behaviors of the abuser, misconceptions, communication patterns and gender training issues.

CHAPTER 5

LOOKING AT THE ABUSER

Signs of a Battering Personality

As with the abused, there is no fully typical or normal abuser. One can only look at patterns, trends, and behaviors. The following list shares a number of signs to be aware of in a relationship; these may be early warning signs of an abuser.

Jealousy: At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say that jealousy is a sign of love. Jealousy has nothing to do with love: it's a sign of possessiveness and lack of trust.

Controlling Behavior: At first the battered will say this behavior is out of concern for the others safety.

Quick Involvement: Many battered men and women dated or knew the abuser for less than six months before they were married, engaged or living together.

Unrealistic Expectations: Abusive people will expect a partner to meet all their needs; the batterer expects her to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, and friend.

Isolation: The abusive person tries to cut the partner off from all resources.

Blames Others for Problems: The battered will tell the partner that they are to blame for anything that goes wrong.

Blames Others for Feelings: The batterer will tell the partner "you make me mad," "I can't help being angry."

Hypersensitivity: An abuser is easily insulted and will "rant and rave" about the injustice of things that have happened, things that are really just a part of living.

Cruelty to Animals or Children: This is a person who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain or suffering.

"Playful" use of force in Sex: This kind of person may like to throw the woman down and hold her down during sex.

Verbal Abuse: In addition to saying things that are meant and hurtful, this can be seen when the abuser degrades the partner, curing them, running down their accomplishment.

Rigid Sex Roles: The abuser expects the woman to serve him.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: There is confusion by the abuser's "sudden" changes in mood.

Past Battering: A batterer will beat any partner if they stay long enough for the violence to begin; situational circumstances do not make a person resort to violence.

Threats of Violence: This could include any threat of physical force meant to control the partner.

Breaking or Striking Objects: This behavior is used as a punishment but is really designed to terrorize the partner into submission.

Any Force During an Argument: kicking, punching, slapping, hair pulling, pinching, biting, stomping, poking, and spitting are all forms of physical violence.¹

This list includes a number of things to watch for and be aware of as signs that may indicate a battering personality. Exhibiting one of these traits does not make one an abuser, but especially as the number of observed traits increases, behavior characteristics must seriously be taken into account. It is important to be aware of the part these traits may play in an abusive situation.

Cobra or Pit Bull

Research concludes that there are two types of abusers. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman document this in *When Men Batter Women*. In a study of more than 200 couples in dangerous relationships, they identify two types of batterers: Cobras and Pit Bulls. Cobras are the more violent of the two. They strike swiftly and ferociously,

¹ National Domestic Violence Hotline website, <http://www.ndvh.com/> (accessed 27 December 2004).

always remaining in control and feeling entitled to whatever they want. In monitoring vital signs, researchers found that Cobras resemble the snake for which they are named. These abusers become still and focused just before striking out at the victim. They become internally calm during an abusive outburst. Cobras have often been physically or sexually abused themselves, frequently in childhood, and tend to see violence as an unavoidable part of life.

Pit Bulls are driven by deep insecurities and often have an unhealthy dependence on the mates they abuse. Pit Bulls are violent because they are insecure. They are more likely to lose control, letting their emotions burn slowly until they explode in anger, volcanic in nature. They are afraid of losing their wives and therefore try to control them through physical and emotional abuse.²

Responsibility

There is a tendency to look at violence as a direct response to external factors and pressures. The aggressor wants this to be true and works over time to convince her that whatever she did is what generated the response. In other words, if she would change, not do such and such, do more of such and such, he would not have to be abusive. In reality, however, internal thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and rules always precede the actions of violence and abuse. An investment of time and energy by the abuser must be made to guide him back to the beginning and examine the seeds that have grown into this violence.

² Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York, NY, Simon & Schuster, 1998).

Those who will not accept responsibility for abusive behavior are caught in the mindset that it is acceptable to hurt others when they feel hurt and lash out when in pain. These individuals are trapped in the mentality of a schoolyard bully. They lack emotional maturity and constantly blame of others, circumstances, and situations in order to avoid personal responsibility. In terms of this accountability, the victim may or may not be a source of the conflict, but one thing is certain: they are NOT responsible for the abuse and violence directed toward them.

This cycle of violence is universal. One can identify emotional triggers and the cascade of cognitive distortions—thinking errors—combined with primitive urges to strike perceived enemies, which lead them to justify harm while at the same time denying causing any harm. It is the same cycle found operating in pedophiles.

Misconceptions

A common misconception is that battering is an out-of-control behavior. It is just the opposite. It is an attempt on the part of the abuser to be in control and control others and the situation. The behavior is under their control. The abuser chooses when, where, and whom he batters. He chooses the placement of blows and strikes to hide evidence from others. He chooses to direct violence only toward specific victims. He has the awareness of arrest or possible loss of job, so he is able to limit his violent outbreaks in places and situations where that may in fact occur. “Genetics, illness, alcohol and drugs, anger, stress or the behavior of the victim or relationship does not cause domestic violence.”³ Domestic violence and abuse are situational by nature.

³ Marie M. Fortune, “Cause of Domestic Violence: Learned Behavior,” *FaithTrust Leadership Training Conference*, Seattle, WA (June 2004).

The person most likely to be abused is the one most vulnerable in the system. Those who participate in and perpetuate violence think it is their right, that they are entitled to use force. Usually they have found that force works. No one has stopped them or even questioned their behavior. The violence has worked. It has generally caused the desired response and gotten submission or compliance from their partner.

There are any number of myths or misunderstandings of what domestic violence is and who commits it. A list of common misconceptions follows.

- Low-income or minority issue
- Drugs and/or alcohol cause the violence
- The violence must be provoked
- Those battered have certain personality traits—are co-dependent
- Those battered won't seek help or won't use what is offered
- Batterers are mentally ill
- Men and women are equally violent
- This is "just" a family problem—needs to stay private
- Domestic violence occurs only between married couples—not so also occurs:
 - Gay, lesbian
 - Bi-sexual
 - Co-habitators
 - Young/old dating couples⁴

Often the abused partner has implemented few, if any, negative consequences for the behavior. For the most part, they have accepted the treatment without much objection. The abused has helped the abuser learn that this behavior will be tolerated in the home. The abuse has been accepted, giving tacit approval for it as a way of living in relationship. Batterers are not bad people, in fact, they may be quite charming in public. There is often a dual persona, one for others and one for home.

⁴ Marie M. Fortune, "Common Misconceptions," *FaithTrust Leadership Training Conference*, Seattle, WA (June 2004).

Awareness

It is of vital importance that the abuser begins to think about what is going on and see how he responds to the stimuli in his environment. This is always a first step toward making necessary changes. The AMEND abuse recovery program encourages men:

Look at your own history, take a history for someone. The tendency is to see each episode as an independent and separate event brought on by its own set of unique circumstances. This is simply not the case; the events are not separate. They are a part of a pattern, of a dance where the steps are repeated and all are involved.⁵

Many abusers have been taught that feelings are better left unshared and unexpressed. They have come to understand that there are certain feelings that are good and those that are bad. There are acceptable emotions and those that need to be subdued or hidden. In this kind of situation, anger may be the only expression of emotion that is available for communication. "Abuse and violence appear to work, at least in the short term. But what they appear to accomplish, changing a situation or someone's behavior, does not effectively decrease your (the victim's) emotional pain."⁶ Ultimately, abuse as a tool does not work. The abuser needs to find other ways to communicate, to express emotion and feeling.

Offering treatment for the abuser is the first step toward change for them. Even though most do not go for treatment, some do.⁷ First, the abuser must be willing to see the patterns and want recovery for himself.

⁵ Lindsey et al, 26.

⁶ Ibid., 28

⁷ Ibid., 11.

Gender Training

AMEND materials speak of ways in which society functions to gender-train men to express and communicate using violence. The two-fold reason that training to be a man equates with training to be violent are that:

nearly all societies want men to have the potential to use physical force as a legitimate means to resolve conflict, and that many men have been given neither the means to determine acceptable boundaries for violence nor have they been given the tools to resolve conflict without resorting to coercion.⁸

Research indicates that the following five characteristics are part of male sex-role training:

- Sense of right—the idea that he is doing what is right to enforce justice
- Sense of duty—to defend their families or culture from danger
- Ability to objectify—in war men are trained to kill objects not people
- Sense of disconnection—trained to be impersonal and distant goal-directedness—trained to take charge and find solutions to problems
- Ideology is more important than people—societies rest on position men are assumed and expected to be willing to fight, for might equals right—strength and physical force determine who is going to survive, who has status and power⁹

Conclusion

Statistically, while men are the predominant aggressors, there is not one specific profile that fits abusers. There are some signs, signals, and patterns of behavior to be aware of in identifying potential abusers. There are some common misconceptions about who abusers are and in what types of families this abuse takes place. It is important that awareness of the problem, learned communication styles, and societal gender training norms be evaluated in the context of abuse as well. There is an understanding that violence is a learned behavior and thus can be unlearned. Nonviolent methods of dealing

⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁹ Ibid.

with and coping with life—with anger, stress, disappointment, and frustration common to all—need to be learned by all.

It is important to remember that the abuser is complexly broken, lives in a distorted world, and is dangerous. The behaviors of an abuser are not related to the marital relationship. The inner problems, distortions, and world views supercede the relationship. There is nothing the victim can do to fix him.

In chapter six, the focus will return to women and the steps it will take for change to occur in their abusive relationships. The chapter will look at recovery in terms of a series of small steps, the need for accountability, the role of denial, and the place for integrity in relationships.

CHAPTER 6

STEPS TO CHANGE

This chapter reviews various steps and stages on the way to change. It will address the roles of accountability, denial, awareness, integrity, and victimization in this journey. Each of these places presents a risk for the traveler to become stuck or trapped along the way and stop changing. Recovery is a process, it does not occur in one decisive swoop, but rather bit by bit, awareness by awareness. These ever-deepening circles of change take place whether change is being addressed for the abused or the abuser. The chapter will conclude with several lists that encourage and remind the reader of actions and thought processes to be considered on the road to recovery.

First, Stop the Pain

When there is discomfort, there are also restlessness and high anxiety wanting to explore any possible solution. Belief that a situation can be fixed with enough understanding of self, of the other, or of the relationship is a way to avoid change. A great deal of time and energy are already being invested in trying to understand. Sometimes, a miraculous breakthrough occurs, but usually not.

The following story well expresses the need for one to worry less about looking for a solution or even gaining understanding, but to first stop the pain.

There is a story of a wealthy man in a crumbling relationship. This had led to a crumbling life. Desperate for answers, he traveled around the world to study with a renowned master. "I don't understand why this is happening to me.

I brought some books with me and I want to think and study. I can learn how to fix this." The master nodded saying, "Books are good. Meditation is good. You are welcome here."

The man took a room and began to read, think and pray. He began to fill books with notes, arguing and debating with himself.

The first morning the elderly master came and asked seriously, "Do you now understand?"

The man began to recite from his journals. Suddenly and without warning, the master swung his staff and hit the man hard on the shoulder. Taken totally by surprise, he lost his balance and fell out of his chair onto the floor. "Why did you do that?" he exclaimed in outrage. The master bowed, indicating the session was over and left without another word.

The man considered this a challenge. He would understand, he would explain everything. *He would find the answer.* He redoubled his efforts. Every morning, the pattern was repeated. No longer surprised, the man did not lose his balance. Day after day, the bruises grew more painful. His resentment grew, as did his determination to provide an answer to his dilemma.

More books arrived. More notebooks were filled. The man's intensity was so great he was finding it difficult to sleep, had little interest in eating, and his health began to deteriorate. He began to take his daily blow in silence, realizing he did not know what he could say that would satisfy the master.

One morning when the master arrived, the only open space was the window, which let light into the room. Soon, that would also be covered with books. The master again asked the question and readied his staff.

This time as the stick whistled through the air, the man reached up with his aching arm to grasp it firmly and prevent the blow from landing.

At once, the master's serious face broke into a wide and happy smile. His bow indicated an acknowledgment that this action was the right answer to his question. The lesson over, he turned to leave.

"What just happened?" the man asked wonderingly.

The master turned and answered "My son, it is not necessary to understand everything now. What is important first, now, is to stop the pain. It is a hard lesson for some to learn."

The answer is to stop the pain. First, the drinking must stop; then therapy will work. First, the abuse must stop; then recovery can begin. What is important first is to stop the delivery of pain. Only then can one learn to fix anything that can be fixed. One of the problems with recovery is the willingness to accept the pain and remain in the dilemma, searching for some other answer. The simplest answer is right there: Stop the pain. It was not necessary to harm or attack the master, simply to grasp the stick and stop the pain. Violence is rarely necessary as a defense.

Sadly, one must often "hit bottom" in the pain and reach a point where the vast capability to endure pain has finally reached its point of no tolerance. There is an unwillingness to take action until there is no longer an option: stop the pain or die.

There will be time for understanding everything, but first it is essential to stop the harm. Plug the leak. Close the account. Take away the keys. Move out. Change the locks. Don't answer the phone. Remove the victim to safety. Research informs, but action liberates. Identify the instrument by which harm is delivered. Grasp the stick firmly.¹

Thus, in an abusive situation, the first step needs to be stopping the pain.

Denial

Denial is very powerful. "Denial is the refusal to believe what one sees or hears. It is the refusal to believe or accept a physical reality."² It is commonly seen as a defense mechanism in which external reality is rejected. Often people cannot see things that are obvious to others. There are always tradeoffs and risks that keep individuals and families from seeing reality. With awareness, something must be done. Changes must occur that will demand time, energy, and risk taking.

The real value of denial is debatable. It can be a tool for survival when life is simply too much for the psyche to bear. However, denial can also serve as dysfunction when it precludes or prevents taking healthy action in a situation.

"Denial serves best in situations where there is finality, in those things that cannot change, such as death."³ However, the tendency is to stay in denial and block recognition, growth, movement, acceptance, and reorganization in a situation that can be changed. In other words, denial can be helpful and healthy when used for the short term. It can be harmful if used as a long-term coping mechanism in situations where adaptation and change are necessary for growth and recovery.

¹ Kueker, David O., "Psalms of Divorce" (unpublished work). Used by permission of author.

² Boss, 123.

³ Ibid., 122

Passive acceptance of trauma, stress, and problems may at times be functional. It can and does lower family stress. There will, however, come the time to stand up and say “Enough!” It will be time to take control, to take care of the stress with finality. Denial is simply a way to wish the situation would go away. Denial allows one to simply hope and dream that things will be different without the hard work of implementing change.⁴

Denial, hiding out behind other family issues, “cannot last very long without reaching a breaking point—some kind of crisis.”⁵ Denial also consists of magical or fantasy thinking, of playing the “what if” or “if only” game. One must acknowledge the present truth without minimization or exaggeration. It is important to identify the problem as a systemic one and look for solutions from that perspective. Each person in the system must own his or her respective part.

There are a number of common ways to remain in denial. Denial can cause one to refuse or even acknowledge the need for help. Rationalizations such as “This is a private problem,” “I am different,” “I’m not like those people,” “This situation is different,” and “They really did make me do it” are common responses when the person is challenged to see reality. Another way to use denial is to convince those asking that things are okay, that life is just fine, that you like things the way they are. Blaming others, looking for a scapegoat or sacrificial lamb to solve a dilemma is used to rationalize behavior, to stay in denial. Saying that there is not time or energy, that it is just too painful to deal with the situation is at least honest, but makes one just as unable to move out of denial.

Denial must be acknowledged and broken through for recovery. The ways denial is kept alive will work only until the cost of remaining trapped becomes more painful

⁴ Ibid., 127-130.

⁵ Ibid., 184.

than the cost of giving them up. As one investigates a move towards stability there are three possible outcomes: they can continue to live in the chaos, they can die, or they can change.⁶ To be willing to truly change, to see the path and choose a new road is the most difficult.

Everyone wants the quick cure. The tendency is to think that if the problem has been identified it should be over and done with and take care of itself. These attitudes, patterns, and ways of responding have taken a long time to form and will not go away overnight. There will be good days, and there will also be difficult times. Recovery does not look like neat, clean stair steps going in one direction, always toward change. It is a lot of “two steps forward, one step back.”

As a general strategy, active coping strategies are more effective than passive coping strategies or behaviors, especially in the long run. Passive coping behaviors, such as denial, may work for those with a fatalistic worldview or for those who have given up hope. Those who try to live life and stay in denial may do so until it nearly kills them emotionally, physically, and spiritually. One cannot be truly living and be in denial forever.⁷

Change

The point of willingness to change happens in different ways and at different times for each woman. There are several important facets to change. One of those first ones is hitting bottom. Generally there is the wake up call or proverbial straw that breaks and disrupts the system. The abused then has a crisis and plummets into what is known

⁶ Lindsey et al, 19.

⁷ Boss, 146.

as hitting bottom. Hopelessness, not being able to see ahead, to barely believe anymore, is a bottoming out place. One must face the reality that life is not working. At this moment, denial has been broken through. After the low comes a point of decision making: Will the event be ignored, forgotten, dismissed, or will it awaken one to enter into an opportunity for recovery?

Being in recovery means that the functionality of the individual or the system can be better, the same, or even worse than before the event. "One of the difficulties for someone wanting to confront the cycle of anger, violence and abuse is that when hitting bottom there are no guarantees in this regard. Things may actually get worse or in some ways be worse."⁸

Although some ambiguity, an absence of facts, and some ambivalence create uncertainty as to how to proceed in a family, "There can too much of each and families can become immobilized."⁹ The same thing happens with the one abused, if she cannot fight off the abuser or run from him, she may become frozen, unable to move or respond and ultimately just gives up or faints. These are the stages of survival, fight, flight, freeze, or faint.

In an abusive relationship, "The partner learns to tolerate the abuser without realizing it and to lose self-esteem without realizing it. She is blamed by the abuser and becomes the scapegoat. The partner is then the victim."¹⁰ She has become the "whipping post" and is not even aware of it. The abused must realize what is happening; she must see clearly with new eyes what is reality and that there are new choices to make.

⁸ Boss, 63.

⁹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁰ Evans, 30.

It is critical when talking about and working with people in abusive situations for each person involved to examine the occurrence of violence in their own lives through the years. In other words, take time to write a complete history of violent episodes: those as initiator, those as victim, and any events witnessed. It is important to view the many ways, places, times, and circumstances in which violence had an effect or influence, what that felt like at the time, and what it feels like now.¹¹ It is necessary to take this inventory in getting ready for change.

Awareness

All parties must acknowledge awareness of the situation for change to begin. These would include the victim, the abuser, and the church. Each one must care for the ways in which he or she contributes to the situation. This is not easy. As awareness unfolds and the acknowledgment of abuse occurs, there is great need for support and validation for the victim. "There are possibilities for a happy relationship if *both* parties are willing to change."¹² Especially once violence and abuse have escalated to an acknowledged level and physical abuse has entered in, it is very difficult to see clearly the various parts. It is easy to simply see the abusive actions and the abuser as the problem. One must take care of personal issues and dilemmas. There must also be an examination of growth, maturation, and family of origin concerns. Only when this awareness has occurred can one move on to a new place. This change in self and in the situation will not be easy. It may be the most difficult thing one will ever do. Change requires tremendous energy, tenacity, self-love, time, and emotion.

¹¹ Lindsey et al, 6.

¹² Evans, 82.

Small Steps

It is important to start slowly with change, whether for the abused or the abuser. Begin by saying “no” in little things, in little ways, standing up for yourself, and see that you survive that. It is important to “gradually realize that lightning doesn’t strike and there may be even more strength the next time around.”¹³ By taking small steps, the real problem is confronted. It is important to “stop empowering the problem and begin to empower the solution.”¹⁴ “When we stop controlling others and allowing them to control us, we become free to take care of ourselves.”¹⁵ “We no longer have to allow our self-esteem to be determined by the actions, words, feelings, or beliefs of others—people from our past or those in our present.”¹⁶ These little steps are like a paint-by-number kit: each color alone does not amount to much, but added together it creates a full and rich painting. In this same way, baby steps will lead to a rich, full, and meaningful life.

“We all build walls for safety and protection.”¹⁷ The building blocks of the wall do not form with the intention to keep the world away, but as a means to survive the various and numerous wounds experienced on the way through life. At some point, however, this wall no longer protects but actually becomes a prison and causes more harm than good. The dilemma then becomes how to get around, go over, or get under the wall. The problem is that none of these attempts work. The only way out is through the wall, and that requires tearing down the blocks one at a time. This is slow, painful, risky, and difficult work.

¹³ Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps* (New York, NY: Fireside), 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷ Lindsey et al, 71.

Three Phases of Treatment

“First is stabilization, followed by a period of extended management and finally comes recovery.”¹⁸ Stability for the abused and all those within the system is absolutely the first step towards recovery.

With alcoholism, AA understands the need to be sober, to stop the drinking in order to work on the real issues. As alcohol is a symptom and coping mechanism, so the acting out with violence is a symptom and expression of deeper-rooted and underlying themes that need to be addressed and worked through for the abuser. The abuser will need help to see that his life is unmanageable and out of control.

According to the AMEND materials for ending violent behavior, treatment for people who batter can be divided into three phases. The first step is identifying those places in which life is chaotic, violent, immoral, destructive, and abusive to self or others. Second, in this identification and cessation of these activities, some stability will emerge. Third, from that place of stability, from that solid foundation of acknowledging and ending behaviors, a road to recovery and new patterns of living can develop.

Accountability

As stability creates the foundation for change, accountability becomes the cornerstone. Reactions to life and its circumstances always involve choice. Each must be willing to take personal responsibility for their actions, thoughts, feelings, words, and behaviors. The idea that someone else has made an abuser respond in a mad, angry, or violent fashion is simply not true. No one makes another mad. Taking personal responsibility for a violent outburst is crucial if this behavior is going to stop. “The

¹⁸ Ibid.

source of the violence lies within the individual and is not the result of external pressures, provocations, issues, demands, stressors or the actions of others.”¹⁹ Each must question why they are angry and resentful and where that is coming from within self.

One must risk giving up everything and letting go of life as they have known it. Recovery will challenge everything one believes. This point of decision also creates a crisis of belief, a crisis of faith. “Adult female victims who have believed the promise of the church that Christian marriage is ‘till death do us part’ and that God would protect them from all harm, may well experience a severe crisis of faith.”²⁰ When this issue comes up, it may well represent or bring to the surface and cause a crisis of faith. Women of faith have a unique and significant challenge to deal with in order to reconcile their faith and experience of violence perpetuated against them. All that one believes may be brought into question, and concerns about where God is in the midst of the abuse are likely to surface. There is the need to look at what one really believes about God, health, safety, values, and the meaning of existence.

First, there must be an admission and recognition of one’s helplessness to change or control her abuser. Next, she must acknowledge what she needs from others. The most courageous and yet also the most difficult thing she may ever do is to admit to herself and others what is really happening in the life of the family. Only with an honest appraisal of life the way it is, not the way she wishes it were, can the first step toward doing something different be taken. The ultimate goal is to learn to be straightforward with her needs, to find that place of balance that is neither passive and nor aggressive, but

¹⁹ Lindsey et al, 11.

²⁰ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-3

fully congruent and assertive. If she were to take an aggressive posture and stance, she would be prone to act out in angry outbursts, just like her abuser.

Movement and change toward recovery begin with self-worth, self-esteem, self-love, and self-care. Low self-esteem is a barrier that must be overcome when getting help and getting out. Living with abuse of any kind constantly undermines and challenges one's self esteem. It takes an enormous amount of self-esteem and energy not only to realize but also believe that you and your partner are living in different realities. With that realization comes the task of detaching from what are likely long-established patterns.

So how much is too much? “When life has become unmanageable *it is not an accident*”²¹ (emphasis added). There are numerous factors contributing to the generalized disorder swirling around. While one can appear well ordered to the external world, internally there is much chaos. There are good times, but they will not last long. Efforts and attempts are made to feel good, to feel better, and so obsessive activity may increase. These behaviors replace the vital and longed for human contact, but are only a temporary patch over the deep and empty hole of needing to belong. The cost of giving up so many things that one has become dependent on is terrifying. The only way out is to establish stability in new relationships.

Victimization

Victimization is the overpowering of a person or family with physical or psychological trauma that results in feelings of helplessness, distrust, and shame... To be victimized, loss must occur: loss of power, loss of control over what is happening, and most debilitating, loss of self esteem.²²

²¹ Lindsey et al, 17.

²² Boss, 160.

Victims “suffer feelings of helplessness, shattered assumptions of fairness and order, and shame and loss of self-esteem.”²³

Charles Figley, family psychologist, holds that “family abuse is the most debilitating of all forms because the source of comfort is simultaneously the source of pain.”²⁴ Danieli talks about the “intergenerational transmission of victimization” and lists the following steps to stop the occurrence for families and for individuals.

- Redefine the event
- Find meaning in the event
- Change behavior to prevent from happening again
- Seek social support—especially from those who have successfully navigated a similar event
- Work through self blame regarding the other’s behavior²⁵

“Self-blame by the victim may occasionally be adaptive, but only when the blame is directed to behavior; it is not adaptive if it is directed to one’s character.”²⁶

Victims must understand that, while their adaptive behavior to abuse is dysfunctional, it is not about being good, bad, or stupid. They are not diseased or weak-willed. They have been making the best choices they knew how to make in order to survive. At the time, they have made decisions they believed were their only choices. Acting or behaving in a helpless fashion does not make one a helpless individual. Some common, adaptive, defense mechanisms, which are true in all dysfunctional families, include “denial, isolation, inexpressiveness, and keeping secrets.”²⁷ Running away, hiding behind behaviors, blaming self and others, comparing, and rationalizing are additional defense mechanisms.

²³ Boss, 163.

²⁴ Ibid., 161.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 163.

²⁷ Ibid., 164.

Chronic victimization from within the family system creates negative effects that are greater than those threats that come from outside the family system. When victimization is occurring, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, overpowered, and immobilized. There is a sense of inability to escape danger. One can begin to believe she must deserve this bad treatment.²⁸

“Our society still tends to blame victims.”²⁹ And communities often pull away from rather than support and reach out to failing or troubled families. Victims need to stop blaming self for more than is appropriate. It is important for them to look around and take responsibility for what is theirs, but not what belongs to others.

Intermittent reinforcement, or random conditioning, is very difficult to deal with for either the abused or the abuser. Part of the reason for this confusion and devastation is that they never sure which they will receive: love or violence. They are never sure which condition the abuser will bring through the front door. “There is no better way of making people compliant than beating them up on an intermittent basis.”³⁰

Boss clearly delineates the response of the abused: “Behaviors produced by victimization are passivity, isolation, feelings of helplessness, and distrust of the world. Behaviors of recovery or empowerment are finding and developing options, making choices, getting information, finding peer support groups, and developing a future.”³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 165.

²⁹ Ibid., 168

³⁰ Richard Gelles, Director of the Family Violence Research Program at the University of Rhode Island, *Newsweek* (4 July 1994), 29.

³¹ Boss, 173.

Integrity

“Perhaps the most important part of recovery is developing a trustworthy relationship with self.”³² Integrity is about learning to be you, just like you are, not like you wish, hope, dream, or want to be but just like you are today. This acceptance is the only place to start for any hope of lifelong change. “You were unfaithful to yourself and so someone hurt you. By being true to yourself you will heal. And out of that healing a spiritual life emerges. It’s amazing what betrayal can teach us if we are willing to learn.”³³

A part of learning to go a new way, to make lasting change has to do with integrity. There needs to be a commitment to honesty at every level and in every situation. A published list of mine spells this out in detail:

Integrity Is:

- Taking responsibility for your words and actions
- Keeping your promises to self and others
- Being faithful in little things
- Telling the truth with love
- Defending your ground in what is right
- Maintaining virtue
- Living a morally upright life
- Making good and healthy choices
- Standing firm in conflict
- Never blaming or belittling others
- Admitting when you are wrong (to self and to others)
- Doing what is moral and legal and ethical
- Holding to truth no matter what the consequences might be
- Maintaining an honorable reputation
- Respecting healthy boundaries
- Protecting self from temptation
- Avoiding the appearance of evil
- Showing respect for other people

³² Patrick J. Carnes, *The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitative Relationships* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Healthy Communications, Inc., 1997), 203.

³³ *Ibid.*, 206.

- Trusting yourself while doing what is right³⁴

Integrity toward self and in relationship with others will be critical in breaking the patterns and cycle of accepting abusive behavior. An important step toward change is acting with integrity in all relationships, especially the relationship with self. Do not be your own worst enemy.

Lists for Recovery

Here are some things that encourage the recognition of denial, working on recovery, and beginning to heal.

- Begin
- Be honest with self—tell the whole story from the beginning
- Identify, acknowledge and stop denial
- Clearly define boundaries, draw lines in the sand
- Clearly define and communicate limits
- Develop and communicate consequences
- Be prepared to follow through
- Follow through every time
- Have an action plan prepared
- Remove self from situation
- Have a support system in place
- Fully embrace your value
- Find the places where you give permission to be violated

³⁴ Alice Gray, Steve Stephens and John Van Diest, eds., *Lists to Live By: The Fourth Collection* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002), 108. List by Martha F. Williams.

- Talk about the shame, the guilt
- Understand others' woundedness, but don't allow it to be an excuse
- Be accountable to self and others
- Forgive yourself
- Begin again. Take a new road...

Because recovery requires one to be aware of so many things, having a short, simple list of reminders can be helpful. This list is one that can be easily referred to as a reminder that recovery is a process, a series of steps, and growth in awarenesses. It will take time and require changing lifelong thoughts and patterns.

This additional encouragement is laid out in the form of 26 reminders, using the alphabet as a memory aid.

Admit, own, and honor real feelings, the reality of the situation

Believe in self, in a hope and a future

Command respect, first for self and then from others

Decide to change and define your boundaries

Express your pain, emotions, thoughts, AND feelings

Forgive self and others

Grieve the losses, real and imagined

Highlight new healthy habits

Isolate no more

Join in events and activities

Kindness for self and others

Limits—set them

Make over your thinking patterns

Note your worth

Open self to new opportunities

Plan vigorous and rigorous self-care, which equals self-love

Question everything—does this fit with the new?

Review and re-evaluate regularly

Sustain support networks

Take and make time for self

Understand the cycles of abuse, the part you play

Value a changed life

Watch for trip wires

EXpose the old that will try to creep back in

Yearn for a new way

Zealously guard recovery

Lists provide a quick and easy way to grasp large amounts of material. There will be times and places where reading many sentences may simply bog one down in the process. As a tool, lists can help give the victim a reminder or encouragement to stay in the process, not give up, continue examining self awareness, and give oneself credit for steps taken thus far. These lists may be posted on mirrors or bulletin boards. Keeping such lists in the car, briefcase, or purse may also provide the right encouragement at just the right time.

Conclusion

This process of recovery is a great deal like the man who walks down a road and falls into a hole. The next time, he sees the hole but still falls in. On the third attempt, he sees the hole and is barely able to miss falling in by taking great pains and care to scoot around the outside edge. The next time he sees the hole, he has learned a thing or two, pauses, turns, and goes down another road altogether!

Women need to learn to talk about, define, and set limits with their partners. They must not dismiss the small early incidents, nor ignore, deny, forget too readily or easily, nor take on blame that does not belong to them.

An abused person needs to accept the current reality, what is actually happening. This must be compared with the ideal reality, what one wishes were happening. Looking squarely at reality brings a deeper understanding of how the world works and how everything is linked together. Often this clarity is sufficient for a new insight to burst into consciousness. This awareness will solve great problems, unravel great dilemmas,

and become the catalyst for change. Breaking out of denial can provide for the willingness to take a new road. Change can happen when the truth is brought to light.

“The bottom line is: Your life is up to you. Take charge of it or somebody else will.”³⁵ “You may experience terrible choices on your recovery path. They will force you to define who you are and what you are about. Expect the difficult.”³⁶

Chapter seven will address more specifically the role of pastors and the church surrounding domestic violence and abuse. These areas of exploration include awareness, education, compassion, and justice issues as well as some suggested action steps for both pastors and the church.

³⁵ Carnes, 211.

³⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF PASTORS AND THE CHURCH

The focus of this chapter is the role of pastors and the church in helping raise the awareness of domestic violence and abuse in the midst of the community. “What every battered woman needs: a community to hold her abuser accountable because she could not and spiritual support from her pastor and church. She needed not to have to choose between safety and the support of the church.”¹

How can leaders learn to hear the story behind the story? How can pastors and helpers carefully, gracefully, and with integrity, intention, and caution guide a woman to make her own decision, the one that will best care for all involved? How can pastors serve as a mirror for those coming with questions? How can they help the abused see and hear their own, current reality? How can questions for discernment be asked without alienating or dismissing the one who comes? How do pastors help people in difficult situations see the reality of the situation and make appropriate choices? How does the church avoid heaping on guilt, stress, or judgment onto an already confusing life situation? These are the questions that bring to light the difficult and delicate situation pastors and churches find themselves in surrounding issues of domestic violence and abuse.

¹ Adams, 12.

Response of Silence

Often there has been a response of silence from the church community. It is silence out of ignorance, fear, or shame, simply out of not knowing what to do, but silence nonetheless. Even with awareness, there might be nothing one can do nor anything the church can do. So the silence, ignoring, denial, and shame continue. The church may believe taking a neutral stance or saying nothing about the problem helps. In reality, it denies and dismisses that there is a problem. "All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing."² For in doing nothing, in not acknowledging the problem as the church has often done, there is tacit acceptance.

One might presume that the church has full knowledge of the sin of abuse, yet it simply does not respond. However, the church is often simply unaware of its responsibilities. This is the point exactly, that the church needs to be more informed and aware. A commitment to this area will be radical indeed. It will be asking the church to look at an area it has long been quite willing to remain silent about.

When a person or community refuses to acknowledge a problem, they are in essence participating in allowing the conditions to continue! "The alternative to the painful process of becoming educated and prepared is silence."³ The church has too often been silent on this issue, not knowing what to say or how to approach and support those who struggle.

Hiding behind ideas such as "It doesn't happen here," "I don't know anyone who is in this situation," "I don't know what to do about it," "That is their private life," "I can't say or do anything until I am asked," and "what could I do anyway" simply keeps these

² Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 115.

³ Adams, 8.

behaviors hidden. A refusal to acknowledge abuse leaves people with no place within the church to share their concern, to even ask questions about whether a situation is healthy. There is naturally a reluctance to speak the unthinkable.

Awareness

“The gender of the minister may be a barrier to telling. A woman may not feel safe telling a man.”⁴ Women who suffer abuse or marital rape may believe that clergymen will identify with the man and his good qualities and behaviors. This is why it is vital to have women available to minister to women. It is also important to have places of peer support by other women who have lived in and through abusive relationships. A woman may also see the minister as naïve and therefore easily manipulated by her abuser. There may understandably be a lack of trust of men in general.

In terms of soliciting data, in encouraging people to open up, Adams suggests looking at behaviors as adapted from the work of Jones and Schecter.⁵ Being too general or vague with questions may not create disclosure, and being too specific and labeling behaviors as violent or abusive also may not elicit a response. This may be due to the victim having not yet named such behaviors in this fashion; it may actually cause them to stop sharing.

Adams reminds us that naming, creating safety, and creating accountability must take place in the midst of community. For many, the church is that place of community, and the response of the church will be significant in the ultimate health and healing for all

⁴ Adams, 30.

⁵ Ibid., 41.

involved. Speaking about ministers in particular, Adams asserts, "By facilitating naming, we provide connection, we offer hope, we promise that change can occur."⁶

It may be seen as meddling in people's private lives, and yet the gospel calls us to get to the heart of matters, issues, and people. There are a number of things a pastor and church can do to be prepared, to raise awareness, to serve both the abused and the abuser in their midst.

What the Church Can Do

First, pastors and church members should be aware of the extent of the problem. It isn't a problem to be ignored or addressed through simple clichés.

Second, pastors and counselors need to help abuse victims set boundaries in their lives. Battered women often find it difficult to make choices because someone else has been making decisions for them...

Third, if you are a pastor, a counselor, or just a caring friend, you can provide counsel and comfort. She needs to hear from you that she doesn't deserve to be abused. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, and don't let her convince herself that the abuse will go away.

Fourth, be prepared for crisis intervention. A pastor or counselor who receives a crisis call only has a few moments to discern the extent of the threat and appropriate actions that should be taken. Sometimes the crisis arrives at your office or home. If the couple is separated, her abuser may stalk her...

Fifth, the church should address this important issue of domestic abuse. By speaking to this issue, we break the silence surrounding abuse and confront it with biblical principles. The church should hold batterers responsible for their actions. Intervention, confrontation, and tough love should be tools used to fight abuse in our communities.

If the batterer is a member of the church, then Matthew 18 provides a model for confronting "offenders" within the church. Galatians 5:22-25 talks about the fruit of the Spirit which includes kindness, gentleness, and self-control. These and many other verses provide a model for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians have an important role in dealing with abuse within our society.⁷

⁶ Adams, 45.

⁷ Kerby Anderson, "Abuse and Domestic Violence," Probe Ministries website, <http://www.probe.org/docs/abuse.html> (accessed 27 November 2004).

Listen Well

Often the local pastor will be the first person with whom a woman may feel comfortable sharing her concerns about a relationship or her marriage. “For some women, turning to a clergy person is often a logical step in response... They are often the first people approached in a crisis.”⁸ There are several reasons for this. Cost is one factor. The stigma that exists about counseling may be another. There may be some reluctance to bring the topic up with friends, so the confidential nature of a clergy relationship is an additional reason they are so vital as listeners. For these reasons, a clergyperson will often hear the first concerns she expresses. He needs to have good information and a good understanding of the topic in order to maximize the effectiveness of such an opportunity. A woman may come with generalized concerns and upon discussing them, some things may become clear to the listener. It is important to be aware of the best ways to guide this situation and not be caught unawares.

Spiritual leaders are given unreasonable entrée into the lives of others. That privilege must be held with great care and caution. It is a holy and awesome responsibility that cannot be taken lightly. Of special and significant concern for pastors is the need and desire to support and care for all the parties in the system. This is a tricky and delicate line to walk. Safety of all parties is the first and most immediate concern in every situation.

Pastors and others to whom those in an abusive relationship might come for counsel need to be very careful in their approach. There must be awareness of preconceptions, biases, and assumptions surrounding this area.

⁸ Adams, 69.

Because of the nature of the pastoral office and their current involvement in family counseling, it is imperative that leaders be aware of and trained about abuse. Well meaning helpers without understanding can make things even more difficult on those being abused. Sometimes pastors have even given the abuser tacit permission to continue the behavior, especially through silence or misinformation.

It is imperative in abusive situations to hear from all parties involved, to whatever extent that may be possible. It is also crucial from a safety perspective that a husband and wife not be questioned or tell their story in the presence of one another. There are too many other issues and concerns that contaminate the telling of an experience in that setting. There may be fear to share what is really happening on the part of either party in the presence of the other. In many situations, one party is more believable or more easily garners sympathy. Great care must be taken in listening. There may be a tendency for the listener to more readily and easily relate to one party. Only through self-awareness can they be prepared to address and deal with biases and preconceptions.

Love One Another

As the renowned psychologist Carl Rogers spoke of “unconditional positive regard,” it is imperative that the church and her leaders and members offer this to all persons in situations of violence and abuse. As we are instructed by Jesus, we are to hate the sin and yet unconditionally love the one who sins. In John 8:7, Jesus says, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone.” We are not to judge others. It is imperative that the church as the Body of Christ honors the person and loves him or her as a child of God. We are all created in the image of our Creator.

Responsibility of Church Community

One key way churches can help is to teach the value of “one another.” It is important to really see and hear each other. It is critical to not minimize, dismiss, undervalue, or put others in boxes of any kind. Too often, we put on blinders to shield ourselves from things that are uncomfortable or unknown.

The responsibility of the church community is to no longer be silent, ignore, or deny abuse and domestic violence concerns in their midst. “The church is NOT here for us, the church IS us and we are here for the world.”⁹

Individuals and congregations need to talk more about, define more clearly, and explain in the larger context the effects of disrespect. On the surface, this appears to be the more inane level of psychological abuse. Psychological abuse has not been talked about in our culture until more recently, and in this the church lags behind. There is an attitude that these things cannot be happening to godly, Christian people. So without any acknowledgment, those who find themselves in this kind of situation are often left without the resources of the church or church family, the community they so desperately need.

“Ministers need to state clearly that abuse is occurring.”¹⁰ It is important to name abuse as such. There needs to be clear communication about the issue so there is no confusion. The words spoken by the abused or the pastor cannot seem as hints or be veiled, indirect, or timid; this would only create a lack of response from either party. “We urge one another to foster situations in which the signs of family violence can be

⁹ Erwin McManus, from a speech at Sunset Presbyterian Church, Portland, OR (July 2003).

¹⁰ Adams, 28.

named, and appropriate responses can be made.”¹¹ It is important on this journey to use clear, concise, and accurate language. Words must be used that express specific feelings rather than generalized statements. Only as the real hurts are identified clearly and specifically can one begin to resolve abuse issues.

Often people and even leaders do not know what to say or how to address the situation. This leaves many hurting families on the outside of a church system that seemingly would rather keep its head in the sand on this critical topic. Our current religious system seems conditioned, even entrenched in the ministry of *rejection* rather than in the ministry of *reconciliation* and recovery.

Violence and the Spiritual Life

Violence and abuse within a family system strike and affect the very core of our being and therefore affect our spiritual journey, our ability to be in relationship with God Almighty. Because of the betrayal of trust, this breakdown is more devastating, more deeply felt, and more destructive than violence between strangers. Psalm 55:4-8 and 12-13 speak to the anguish, heartache, and heartbreak of taunting betrayal by those close to us. From the people one longs to find trust, acceptance, love, care, and concern, there is instead rejection and verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual assault. Any combination of the above creates much confusion and fear. The betrayal is intense.

As the church responds, it is important that this does not become an “us against them” or “me-you” problem. Violence between intimates in a family system is a church family issue and needs to be addressed in that context. It is also important that a pastor

¹¹ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-31

not set himself up in an expert position, leaving others as novices. Abuse needs to be regarded as a concern we desire to look at and address together.

Pastoral Response

As a pastor becomes aware and involved and finds himself in a dilemma, not being sure where to turn or how to manage a situation, the first and foremost response must be to stop the violence, to protect all those involved from further harm. “Individual pastoral care is not the solution to ending battering behavior. A coordinated community response is.”¹² It is important for pastors and church congregations to know about resources in their area, even to work in conjunction with them for an integrated health, hope, and healing plan.

As a leader or church family, it is easy to get distracted or sidetracked “in the crisis of chaos.”¹³ There is a need to stop and boil the situation down to three steps. The first is safety. The second is accountability for the batterer. The third is restoration, only if both parties choose to restore the relationship. Otherwise, there is grief work, mourning the loss, and helping the abused to move on within the community.¹⁴

Pastors often want to start with restoration, with keeping the family together, and sometimes that is even at all costs. This is a façade, trying to look good, to put on a good face. This will not bring health or healing, it will not change the circumstances. All that is likely to be accomplished is keeping the family together for another day of violence and/or abuse and sometimes even for the ultimate cost, the loss of life. “Family

¹² Adams, 8.

¹³ Marie M. Fortune, “Goals for Intervention,” *FaithTrust Leadership Training Conference*, Seattle, WA (June 2004).

¹⁴ Ibid.

togetherness has become an idol, and often a most oppressive one.”¹⁵ Pastors and church families have often seemed to put the family staying together ahead of individual safety and well being.

Marie Fortune presents a list of immediate tasks that clergy need to pursue in order to be involved.¹⁶ The first response must be to listen, not only to hear the words but to believe what is being said and its ramifications. The danger must be assessed and addressed. Safety for all involved, from not only physical but also psychological harm, is imperative. It is also important to make referrals. This is not an area to be easily managed alone. It is important to work with other helping professionals to bring care to all involved.

As leaders need to be competent and diligent in their response, Fortune lists a number of pastoral concerns, which also need to be considered:

- Do not use confidentiality as an excuse to not protect
- Do not interview victim and abuser as a couple
- Do not attempt to counsel them together in order to stop the violence
- Do not minimize the incident—assume this is only the tip of the iceberg
- Do not refer to enrichment or communication workshops—this is far beyond that
- Do not try to deal with alone—you need help—refer, refer, refer
- Do not become emotionally or physically intimate with victim—boundaries
- Do not be taken in by a batterer’s claim to conversion
- Do not help the batterer avoid legal consequences
- Do not forgive an abuser quickly and easily—wait for signs of true repentance¹⁷

Education

Church communities and pastors need basic, factual information. There are so many misconceptions and so much misinformation about what constitutes abuse and

¹⁵ M. Scott Peck, *Further Along the Road Less Traveled* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1993), 136.

¹⁶ Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

violence, in other words, how these issues are defined. Without an adequate understanding, there is no recognition of abuse, and things will be accepted and overlooked that may in fact be early warning signals, early concerns to be addressed in the situation. Without education, more harm may occur.

It is critical for pastors to invest the time and energy in preparation and education on this topic before its arrival on the church doorstep. There are a number of good resources that can be read or viewed. Education is a vital piece in making one able to address these issues. The church must take responsibility to educate about healthy family systems. The church must also operate like a healthy system as the Body of Christ. There must be active and proactive approaches. The church can be a leader rather than a follower in educating people about intervention and the prevention of abuse.

It is imperative that our church communities address these issues head on in a straightforward and open posture. In teaching, training, and sharing it is important to use a number and a variety of tools and techniques. These include multi-media, writing, small groups, personal testimony, statistics, role plays, panel discussions, large and small group discussion, presentations, lectures, brainstorming, printed materials, visual aids, questions, storytelling, and experience-based learning. Each of these modalities will be important in communicating the message, sharing information, and challenging old beliefs. It is also important to look at the information and discussion in light of scripture, allowing participants to see with new eyes and a new knowledge-base that these issues are God's truth and in God's Word.

In training experiences, it is valuable and important that there be some discussion in small group settings. In this way, leaders can learn from the people and from one

another, from their own community history. Each will bring personal experiences, perceptions, and assumptions to the discussion. There is a great need for these realities to be brought out into the open, especially among leaders.

Education will require concern, care, compassion, and justice. It will require turning away from a stance of ignoring the problem. There must be a new understanding that this kind of thing does in fact happen in church communities and that the church and pastor have a responsibility in the concern of domestic violence.

Compassion and Justice

Pastors must be champions for the causes of social justice. Abuse is clearly an issue of justice. In terms of compassion and justice issues, “the church is called to both a pastoral and a prophetic (justice) response to this epidemic problem.”¹⁸ It is imperative to confront those issues where a belief system blocks justice, domestic violence being one of these issues.

Our communities need to be involved in both compassion and justice responses. Compassion can be described as seeing people floating downstream in the river and rescuing them, pulling them to shore. Justice would entail going upstream to find out why people keep falling into the river and then taking steps to prevent the situation from continuing to occur. It is vital to make churches safe places for all those involved, the abused, the abuser, and the family members. The church needs to find ways to create justice for those that have been harmed, to not simply reach out in compassion. Church communities and leaders must be willing to go to the source of the problem, to say this

¹⁸ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-3

must end, and to promote change at the grass roots levels for long-term health and healing.

Pastors and church leaders have a significant responsibility to acknowledge abuse in their midst and not soft peddle it in any way as a family issue or private matter, or deny its existence in the congregation. They must stand up for what is right, just, honorable, and true. They must call this sin a sin and treat it as such. Violence is a sin that affects every part of one's being and will do so through the generations if there is not intervention.

Let Healing Begin

There are a number of ways in which the church either participates in or perpetuates the violence cycle. It takes hundreds of years for the church to agree on anything. In this sense, there is still deconstruction of the problem. It is time to shift gears to the construction of safety. It is time to begin by accepting what has been done to justify and ignore the problem and its effects through the years. It is not possible to deal with or address concerns when the church is unaware.

Leaders must ask if there are things in the church structure that keep a woman in an abusive situation. Are there things, subtle or overt, that communicate lack of safety and keep her from talking? Is there enough safety and trust so that when she is hurting, she can also be vulnerable enough to get the help she needs? Often women will sense if there is discomfort on the part of a pastor and will simply not bring up the issue, choosing to suffer in silence, to carry on as though things are fine. "Fine" is often used to ignore, deny, whitewash, lie about, and dismiss the true reality: the severity of a life in chaos.

It is important for churches to be safe places where abuse can be talked about. In addition, there is the need for “guardrail” programs that address violence and abuse before it erupts and destroys. *Prevention leads to protection*. There is also the need for critical care programs. These intervene and come alongside in the midst of and following a crisis. *Intervention leads to protection* for those who cannot protect themselves; the Bible mandates care for widows and orphans. Are not the women who are subject to violence, abandonment, and divorce the widows of our 21st century?

Action Steps

Appendix F contains a list of 18 items that the National Council of the Churches of Christ have identified in their national policy statement that churches can do.

It is important for the church to ask how it has and does contribute to abuse, how its structures keep people trapped in these cycles. There is a perpetual breakdown of relationships, whereas priority is usually given to politics, programs, political correctness, and the status quo. How do these structures perpetuate the cycle of abuse? They do so by putting the system, structure, or expectations above individuals and human hearts that need attention and nurture.

Conclusion

How can the church protect and provide hope? We need to “begin articulating a faith that will provide men and women with resources for strength rather than resources

for endurance. We must articulate a theology of empowerment rather than a theology of passive endurance.”¹⁹

The National Council of Churches policy statement also gives us this roadmap:

Such responses should encompass every aspect of the communal life of the church, from proclaiming the Word of pastoral care, to compassionate action and advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable and the powerless, to religious education of adults and children. Only through such shared commitment to a pastoral, prophetic, and preventive response can individuals and families affected by family violence experience the church as the presence of God’s loving care in the midst of crisis.²⁰

One of the things Jesus did best was to speak truth into the core of the people he met. Take the woman at the well, for example. The church needs to be willing to ask the hard questions, not to accept the “Sunday morning” situation as reality, to look deeply into people’s hearts, minds, and emotions and invite them into a place of reconciliation. Only as the church models vulnerability, sensitivity, and an unwavering stance, only as it reaches out and takes the first risk can people begin to open up and know that love, care, and acceptance are available in the Body of Christ. Pastors and leaders must take a stand and lead by example. It will not be tidy, safe, neat or clean. It will not be fun but scary, risky, and outrageous.

Chapter eight will discuss the application of a recovery program in examining the stages one goes through in healing from abuse.

¹⁹ Joy Bussert, *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment* (New York, NY: Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 1986).

²⁰ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-3.

CHAPTER 8

STAGES OF RECOVERY

Abuse has likely continued over a long period to be recognized. In the same way, it will take time to recover from such experiences. While it may not have required many explicit or planned steps for abuse to occur, it will take some very definite and intentional steps to remove oneself from an abusive situation. People will be at different stages with regards to recovery. In rehabilitation to recover from a stroke, broken bones, or even a heart attack, an occupational therapist works to prepare a person to be as independent as possible upon returning home. He recognizes these recovery stages: independent, modified independent, minimal assistance, moderate assistance, and maximum assistance needed. These same stages can be applied to all types of recovery. As in rehabilitation, it is important to start slowly and build up flexibility, strength, and stamina.

Stages of the recovery process are listed below. The stages hold true for both the abused and the abuser. The stages of recovery are listed below and will be discussed in more detail throughout the remainder of the chapter.

- Stage one—unaware
- Stage two—aware but doesn't care
- Stage three—seeker
- Stage four—newborn
- Stage five—child
- Stage six—teenager

- Stage seven—parent
- Stage eight—grandparent

In the first stage, a person is unaware that there is anything damaging going on. They are busy moving through life. This unaware stage, as it progresses, will settle into denial. Once denial has been broken through, there is a stage of awareness, but still little desire to change. Even if desire is present, the ability to move seems overwhelming. Slowly as awareness builds, the person may begin to actively seek out recovery.

Seekers

How do pastors recognize those seeking for change, for a new way, those ready to begin recovery work? These women show an interest in the topic, are asking questions, call a help line, call their pastor, visit a website, pick up and read literature or books, respond to public service announcements, or respond to television programs. Those in this stage of recovery will be limited in number. In other words, pastors need not worry they will be overwhelmed with people coming forward all at once if they openly bring up the topic. The people will come forth more intermittently. They will straggle in. As with all recovery, awareness is progressive. As they come forth, it is vital that they are met while still in the process of asking questions, which shows they are ready. This is why it is so imperative that pastors have already gathered the information and understand abuse and the steps to recovery before that first contact.

People's first encounter, their first question becomes what is known as a "teachable moment." When they ask, they are ready to hear. At first, they are ready,

though probably not for the whole story, but they are looking to begin. They want to understand and be affirmed, encouraged, and supported.

They may also come to their pastor feeling only generalized discomfort about their relationship. They might not really have the words to express or an ability to name the problem as abuse. Abuse may exist in situations where the pastor is consulted about depression, dissatisfaction, or discomfort. These people are unaware of any specific problem that can be named, but are just becoming aware that something is not right.

In this seeker stage, it is important to identify those who are ready to do something about what they are experiencing in their own situation. Those who speak in generalizations or ask vague questions are likely still in a great deal of denial.

Newborn

Stage four represents a newborn in the stages of recovery. These people are in an infantile state and need total care and support to simply survive. Only after the basic needs of survival have been met can they grow and take responsibility for their own recovery.

Shelter ministries are in place to care for this piece of the process. It is vital that pastors be aware of the resources in their own communities. They need to have a good working relationship with those involved in the shelter ministry. They may need to refer the person or family that is ready and in need of this kind of safety and protection. In other words, churches do not need to set up shelters; there is likely already one functioning in their community. The primary focus of a shelter or safe house ministry is

to receive and care for abused persons. The time a person needs to be sheltered may be a few days or longer, depending on their awareness level and other resources available.

People may move in and out of this level. They may be in awareness one moment, then the next moment back in denial. Recovery is not always steady upward progress or growth like going up stair steps. Adults may choose to stay in recovery, staying in a shelter or returning to the abusive situation, believing things will have changed.

Child

At a certain point along the recovery continuum, people begin to rediscover their personal power. They are entering the child stage. They begin to show curiosity, interest, and an intense need to work with someone who will parent or re-parent them. They are hungry and eager for someone to model for them a healthy, caring relationship of commitment, time, unconditional love, and respect. These things will be very healing for them. People need to be met where they are. Newborns and infants are fed milk and move on to meat only as they mature.

Children ask questions—they are curious. They want to learn, grow, and experiment with their own autonomy. They learn skills of daily living, such as managing money through an allowance. There is the freedom to mature within the structure. As a child, the person in recovery needs to be cared for and supported on the journey. They need balanced, nutritious meals to grow in stature. They need education to allow their minds to reason with more and more maturity, to eventually manage abstract situations. Children need creativity and play to balance the hard work of growing up again. In

recovery, they need emotional security and safety to be willing to try some of the new concepts and ideas they are being bombarded with in the process. They need the stability of ones who have gone before, parents or grandparents, adoptive parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and other mentoring figures.

Teen

As persons in recovery approach the teenage stage, they are ready to enter a small support group, to learn from and be with peers. “The most important skill to acquire and use in recovery is the capacity to get a consultation.”¹ This means inviting others into one’s journey and being vulnerable to share one’s story, experience, pain and fears. It is only in being willing to expose our skeletons, the things that truly support us, healthy or not, and allow for a more objective consultation that recovery can be experienced.² It is important to allow others to lead the way with problem-solving skills. They have likely learned these skills through their own difficult experience. The abused will best learn a new path through her own personal experience as well.

This is the value of a support group. One goal of the group is to include all in the fellowship. The group provides a safe and healthy family model. Each participant is encouraged to keep coming back and develop a mentor relationship. At this point, they are ready to work with a mentor. They have reached a level of maturity, established some equilibrium, and gotten down the road of recovery far enough to not want to turn around and go back to where they came from.

¹ Carnes, 207.

² Ibid., 210.

This teen stage is about investing in one's own recovery. The abused have already experienced others bossing them around, telling them what to do. There will be resistance. Women must choose recovery for themselves; the journey cannot be taken for anyone else. No one can do the work for them. They must get on the road to recovery and take the trip one step at a time. The only way out is through. Philippians 3:13-14 reminds us, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me." Recovery is about pressing on.

Faith, trust, willingness, a desire for change, and perseverance all become vital at this stage. One must be willing to take each step as it is revealed, not always being able to see the full outcome or end result. It would be nice if the path were lit up with a floodlight that would allow a full view of the path for miles ahead. This floodlight would also allow the shadows to be revealed so that nothing could jump out and startle or delay progress. It would light the road behind, reminding that there is no going back. However, recovery is a journey by flashlight rather than by floodlight. There is just enough light cast to reveal the next step, to keep on the road, and to embrace recovery one little step at a time.

Personal Process

Another crucial piece of recovery is that they must acknowledge that they have been a part of the problem all along. They have been co-dependent, wanting to please everyone, trying to do enough, or trying to do it all the right way. They have been dancing as fast as they can but realize that it has never been enough and that it will never

be enough. It is time to choose to grow up and change in ways that are most healthy. It is time to change according to a personal timetable and in unique ways. They must chart a course of recovery that is manageable and achievable. It is easy to bite off too much and try to make all kinds of changes at once. Baby steps with naps, rest, and pauses along the way are the only ways to affect ongoing and life-altering change.

In this way, recovery is a unique and individualized process. While the steps and stages may mirror one another, the specifics of each situation warrant freedom along the journey. The pace will be different for each one. The amount of circling back will be unique to each journey. In this, the role of the pastor is to always be a pointer toward God Almighty, who is the ultimate healer, giver of life, abundant life, and lover of souls.

Recovery is Real

The recovery process will require grief work along with everything else. There must be grieving of the real losses that occur with change, with taking a new road. The loss of hopes and dreams, of life not turning out or looking like it had been imagined, must be worked through. Dealing with other people in our families of origin and our family of faith is also part of this process.

Recovery is about becoming real, just like the Velveteen Rabbit, the classic children's story written by Margery Williams in 1922. Toni Raiten-D'Antonio developed the following things that being "real" means in our world of objects, based on this wonderful story of a rabbit learning about being real.

Real is——

- Possible
- A process

- Emotional
- Empathetic
- Courageous
- Honest
- Generous
- Grateful
- May be painful
- Flexible
- Endures
- Ethical³

As the velveteen rabbit learned, being real has little to do with the exterior, with what others see. Rather it is all about the process of living with integrity, growing, and being—being real.

Conclusion

Recovery does not occur all at once. It is a process, a journey. This recovery will go through the eight stages of unaware, aware but doesn't care, seeker, newborn, child, teen, parent, and grandparent in much the same ways we go through maturation as humans. While the stages are predictable, the timing and eventual outcomes are not. This recovery process of growing up again will require grief work, letting go of what might have been. Recovery is real and worth the time, energy, and effort.

Chapter nine introduces the Mentoring With Dignity recovery program. This program can easily be adopted and adapted by churches because of the built-in use of such well known components as the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and Stephen Ministries training.

³ Toni Raiten-D'Antonio, *The Velveteen Principles: A Guide to Becoming Real* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2004), 17-30.

CHAPTER 9

MENTORING WITH DIGNITY RECOVERY PROGRAM

This paper has asserted that domestic violence and abuse are a problem for churches and church attendees. I have shared lists, data, and ideas of ways the church and pastors can help victims of abuse. This chapter presents a model for a very practical application that churches can implement to encourage, support, and care for women and men who are ready to move away from domestic violence and abuse.¹ Victims are ready to take a new road if one is provided. The goal of the Mentoring With Dignity² recovery program is to be specific, clear, and transferable.

Those who are abused are often bereft of protectors. Several factors create this situation. The world in chaos is too busy with its own reeling out of control to notice victims' problems. People today do not even know the names or phone numbers of their neighbors or have any regular contact with them. Even in our churches, we seem less and less connected with one another. We are often unaware of the successes, failures, sorrows or problems of our neighbors.

¹ Abusers may also be ready to move away, however this complex problem requires its own research and is beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, a person may be the victim of abuse in one setting and an abuser in another. Besides, men are abused by women. The assumption of this recovery program is to be dealing with women in a domestic setting.

² The author appreciates the ongoing dialogue with Pastor David O. Kueker of Jacksonville, IL. As a Fuller Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry student, David began designing a church planting strategy that would combine cell church, small group and leadership development methods with a Twelve Step program for recovery and emotional support of persons undergoing divorce. This strategy was the basis for the Mentoring With Dignity program, after many hours of discussion to refine the basic ideas to serve a different but similar population. The program is based largely on what we have found helpful in our personal lives and professional practice of ministry.

The abuser has deliberately, intentionally isolated the victim, making a bad situation worse. Through the years, the abuser has created tension between home and the outside world; the victim gradually withdraws from the outside world to make peace. The victim eventually wears out her own support network by complaining repeatedly about the abuse and doing nothing to leave the relationship. Eventually her friends and family become convinced she will not change. When she is ready to change, she often has no one left to turn to for support. Often, as other family members are likewise dysfunctional, remaining in contact with the victim will aid and abet the abuse by creating obstacles to leaving.

It is the goal of the Mentoring With Dignity recovery program to provide the victim at the moment she is ready with the support she needs to change. The program will support her with an appropriate nuclear and extended families that adopt her and provide the nurture and support necessary for her safety and healing. The program will attempt to *provide* what she has been *denied*.

Basic Assumptions

This plan of recovery is not for every person in every situation. There are some specific assumptions:

1. The victim is relatively safe. If not, shelters run by local social service agencies are available until the woman is physically safe.
2. The victim is relatively emotionally healthy. If not, counseling by women's crisis centers and therapists are utilized with inpatient therapy for the most

difficult situations. Often these services are available without cost.³ This support continues until the woman is emotionally healthy enough to practice self-care in a group environment.

3. Even a victim who is relatively safe and emotionally functional is far from health and wholeness. Therefore, a person beginning a new life, away from abuse, will go through a number of developmental stages just as if life were beginning all over again. The Mentoring With Dignity program assists the victim to grow at each stage of maturity and provides helpful rites of passage to the next stage.

There has been the tendency in churches to make programs dealing with domestic violence and abuse a top-down, denominational-level undertaking like many other national social problems. Rather, the solution needs to be a grass roots effort in each local church. The solution needs to be: of the people, by the people, and for the people. Change in attitude and then ultimately behavior begins with a single seed, with one person reaching out to another and so on.

The intended audience of Mentoring With Dignity is victims who are ready to hear, who have been in the past or currently are struggling with these issues. It is also for those who are close enough to be affected and concerned. It is important to wait for people to be ripe and ready. If one attempts to pick fruit too soon, it will go to waste. If concerned people intervene before the victim is ready, it may jeopardize further attempts or offers for her to grasp and choose recovery. No amount of preparatory work can succeed before the victim is ready. Therefore, it is wise from the perspective of

³ In Illinois, for example, victims of domestic violence or sexual assault are provided free counseling through state-supported agencies on a county-by-county basis.

stewardship to work only with those who are interested, who are already awakened to the need and desire change. As with alcoholic recovery, the Mentoring With Dignity program is based on Twelve Step programs. The goal of these programs is not to change all alcoholics but to be ready to help the alcoholic who desires to change. There needs to be a willingness to start small. A one-line invitation in the church bulletin will attract those with interest. Mentoring With Dignity is not intended for those who are not ready to choose recovery. The invitation needs to be light, not heavy handed, and if there is not interest, then let it be. People are not ready to change until they are ready. People will not and cannot hear until they are ready. An ancient proverb says, “When the student is ready the teacher will appear.”

Overview of the Program

The Mentoring With Dignity recovery program has five components: Education, Support Group, The Self-Care Retreat, Mentors, and Certified Group Leaders. Each part is vital in providing a complete program of support and care to victims of abuse. Level One, Education, attracts people curious about abuse and begins relationships that may lead to recovery. Level Two, is a Twelve Step support group meeting similar to those of Alanon and focuses on steps one through three. Level Three, The Self-Care Retreat, helps those who are ready to write down a personal inventory and work on steps four through nine of the Twelve Step pattern. Level Four, Mentors, are persons who have completed the Self-Care Retreat and are willing to serve as Twelve Step sponsors; Mentoring With Dignity calls them mentors because they meet for additional training and support using the Stephen Ministries model. Level Five, Certified Group Leaders, are

trained as Stephen Leaders and are able themselves to train mentors to participate in the support group meetings. Certified Group Leaders begin new meetings and connect to provide national leadership for Mentoring With Dignity.

Level One: Education

The goal of Level One of the Mentoring With Dignity program is to put before the public honest information about abuse, the difficulties that women experience as a result of it, and programs that are available in the community. Sharing the concepts of the program helps identify women who are ready to change. This is the first step in a major goal to end the victim's isolation.

The program does this by providing the following:

- A speaker's bureau including members of the program, ranging from personal experience testimonies to educational lectures
- Single events open to the public
- Informative classes, 4-6 weeks in duration on domestic issues; these classes also build relationships
- Special open meetings of the Mentoring With Dignity recovery small groups.

At each event, the facilitator attempts to build relationships with those present and especially with those who are experiencing or have experienced abuse. The facilitator can use the trust gained to encourage the victim to seek support. The importance of building ongoing supportive relationships is openly stated at the first event as the purpose of the meeting.

A leader teaches the classes, but program members who are prepared to act as mentors are present in the classes, lead discussion groups, and sometimes share their own stories of hope and recovery.

Topics of these classes would include:

- What is Abuse?
- Information on Victim and Abuser
- Readiness for Recovery
- Help, Healing and Hope
- How the Twelve Steps Can Help in Recovery
- An Outline of the Mentoring With Dignity Approach to Recovery.

In addition to events, the following can serve as aids to education:

- Literature is developed to inform, but even more, to provide the means for the victim to contact and be in relationship with someone in the program.
- A web site is developed to provide information on the topic and plan of recovery. This will include meeting times, locations and contact persons.
- An 800 number with local contacts and meeting times is given; there may be an answering service or automated voice-mail with prompt callback: “Press ‘1’ for the phone number of a local contact. Press ‘2’ if you are in danger (automatically connects the caller to a domestic violence hotline). Press ‘3’ if you are looking for a meeting...”
- The program recruits referral sources such as pastors, professionals, and community leaders during continuing education events. It is a goal to be particularly available to clergy during these events.

- Partnering with local domestic abuse agencies.

Mentoring With Dignity is presented to the public as a Twelve Step approach to help victims of abuse. Co-dependency with an abuser is an aspect of the problem and Twelve Step approaches have proven effective in dealing with the co-dependency issue. Twelve Step programs are widely known, accepted, and respected.

Level Two: Support Group Meeting

The Mentoring With Dignity program uses small support group meetings as the initial relational response to the victim's emotional need for support. These women are a part of the church and community, and they need support as they take a new road to begin a journey away from violence and abuse in their home. Level One is education. Level Two builds a supportive community.

There is a need for people to come alongside; Twelve Step support groups meet this need. When trapped in abuse, the victim feels stuck in a deep hole. Many people walk by and never notice the victim's circumstance. Others notice but know of no way they can help. Others look in and express sympathy. Still others throw in things to help, such as phone numbers. Finally, someone who knows how to help jumps into the deep hole. Worried, the victim says, "Thanks, now we are both stuck in this hole!" The one who jumped in says, "I've been here before and know the way out." It is critical for someone who knows the way out to join the victim in the hole and guide her to freedom. Those who know the way out can be most effective. Twelve Step groups bring together the experienced and inexperienced to dialogue together in an environment with minimal structure.

The purpose of Twelve Step groups is to encourage people to “work the steps” in order. Mentoring With Dignity is focused on working the steps in three successive levels. Level Two works steps one through three. Level Three works steps four through nine during a retreat. Level Four works steps ten through twelve by encouraging people to become mentors.

Victims need numerous hours of unstructured relational time to heal from an abusive relationship. At this point, they are very needy. Recovering victims can provide this support in a Twelve Step environment. Pastors and employed church staff simply do not have the time available to provide what is essential to recovery. It is not that they lack desire, but these shepherds have an entire flock to care for and therefore must make good time management decisions and set healthy boundaries.

Clergy do not have all the necessary gifts for this kind of ministry. Clergy often do not have adequate training. They often do not have extensive one-on-one time available. They do not have similar experiences to provide empathy and rapport. The Mentoring With Dignity solution is to have available a guided support group opportunity which can provide all the time needed by needy people. While a Twelve Step support group may not be as efficient as a trained therapist, the process utilizes the Body of Christ by allowing volunteers to utilize their passions, giftedness, experience, and training to help others.

The Mentoring With Dignity plan follows a proven model, that of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. It also includes materials laid out in Melody Beattie's work, *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps*. The advantages of using this mixed approach are the familiarity of millions with the language and process of the Twelve

Steps and the availability of educational materials. The Twelve Steps journey can be used to evaluate change and progress in recovery.

Support groups need some structure. Without structure, these groups can go off on tangents, lose focus, and become unhealthy. They can become places to focus on the problem rather than on new ways of living and relating to life. The Mentoring With Dignity model proposes having only trained group leaders, because leaderless groups can be problematic and at times do more harm than good. There can be a tendency for those new to the group and not yet experienced in recovery to give advice. Immature participants may want to act like therapists. To address this, we will utilize the proven Stephen Ministries program to train group leaders and facilitators.

At the beginning of each meeting, those present will review the agreed upon structure. Normally, Twelve Step groups begin with a reading of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Mentoring With Dignity groups will also begin with such a reading to clarify the group purpose, boundaries, and rules. Women are coming from chaotic situations where the rules change all the time, where there is not continuity from day to day. The predictability of the group will be welcome structure and creates both freedom and safety. We all do better with clearly defined boundaries and expectations.

A small group environment provides a safe place to share all that is happening. This is vital for the woman to learn to walk on her own, apart from an abusive and controlling relationship. She may have burned out friends and family as she talked for months or years about her problems yet was unable to leave the relationship. She will likely need to retell parts of her story over and over. In a support group specifically designed for her, she will find a good place to share her story. Others in attendance will

understand and appreciate her need, having been in the same place. The group will contain members at all stages of recovery and will welcome with empathy and understanding the new person just beginning to make peace with her own story and experiences. The group will be organized in such a way as to provide women the time they need to talk about those who have caused them harm and the ways in which life feels overwhelming. They will also need to talk about their fears and distress.

Women will share their own experiences rather than respond with advice to the experiences of others. Abused people are often not able to give good advice, and without recovery they can give it abusively. This advice-giving will be correctly pointed out as controlling and coercive, which is the problem they are trying to leave behind. Since this kind of group format does not permit such “cross talk,” but requires that each one share only her own pain and experience, there is freedom to open up and feel secure that criticism and comparison will not come from the others.

There is confidentiality within the group. A key slogan used in Twelve Step groups is: “Who you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here.” This allows women to feel safe and free to share. The group acts as a healthy family system for women who may well have never experienced healthy relationships.

Women need an individualized approach. The concept of the Body of Christ is one of individualized gifting for ministry. In the church, it is vital to honor the priesthood of all believers. Lay people must be involved, who are gifted by the Holy Spirit and have similar experiences to share. Common experience provides expertise and instant rapport to address the problem. These women can come alongside in support and encouragement in ways a pastor cannot. To have women involved in this ministry may be particularly

important where the pastor is male. The woman seeking recovery has likely left a situation where the abuser is a man, and she may be very reluctant to share, discuss, or seek guidance from another man.

The invitation to attend the group is crucial. No one is forcing or even suggesting attendance. The group is open and available for women seeking a new path, desiring to take a new road, go a new way.

In the meeting, new participants are encouraged to move from being newborns—who are totally dependent for nurture—through a healthy childhood experience of learning to live in freedom. The group in essence becomes a healthy nuclear family experience with parental figures (certified group leaders), aunts and uncles able to serve as mentors or coaches, and siblings as companions who are either ahead as role models or behind needing support and encouragement.

Sponsors help participants in Twelve Step groups. Mentoring With Dignity uses the word *mentor* rather than *sponsor*, because we believe in training our sponsors. Mentoring is managed with the same guidelines for sponsors in Twelve Step groups. The abused woman selects her own mentor. This is especially important because of her need to learn how to select a healthy authority figure for her life. For too long, victims have been told what to do, whom to trust, and where to go, and they need to begin to believe in themselves and their own abilities for making wise, good, healthy choices for the new life they are beginning to create. Choosing a mentor always needs to be a process of self-selection.

Many women who live in violent homes went from their father's house straight to their abuser's house. They never have had much experience in making their own personal choices. If you are seeking to help an abuse victim, you should encourage her to make her own decisions. Resist the temptation to rescue and

take over her life. She needs to feel empowered, not helpless. At the same time, you can provide suggestions about finding a family counselor or a domestic violence agency.⁴

This personal choice is imperative because an abuse system is about people in authority having been assigned or chosen. The victims have had no say over so many things. Another important component of recovery is for the abused to choose a mature, healthy, honest, and caring individual as her authority figure.

Generally, the certified group leader supports this selection by advising and encouraging but does not serve as a mentor. He is supporting those who are ready to be mentors. He also helps oversee the program, supports special concerns, and mentors and cares for group leaders.

After one has attended and participated in the Self-Care Retreat experience, she may mentor those new to the program as the new participants choose her. Mentors and certified group leaders are easily identified because they wear nametags at meetings. Depending on the custom of the group, nametags might consist of only first names, or they might have full names and contact information.

The focus and content of the group meeting will be the first three of the Twelve Steps and the first part of the serenity prayer, by which we understand we are helpless to control the person abusing us but can yield all of this to God. This allows significant grieving to occur. Questions about the rest of the program are answered fully.

Victims who are not physically safe or emotionally healthy are linked with community resources to provide for these needs. They will be encouraged and supported through these community agencies and their programs. Until the victim is ready to

⁴ Kerby Anderson, "Abuse and Domestic Violence," Probe Ministries website, <http://www.probe.org/docs/abuse.html> (accessed 27 November 2004).

choose a mentor, the group leader might assign someone to act as a liaison during this treatment.

The normal pattern, however, is for a victim to first come to the group as a guest of the one who will be her first mentor. That developing relationship is to have begun prior to her arrival in the group. These relationships will frequently begin during the educational events of Level One.

The group can also provide social opportunities for adults and their children to help one another, such as babysitting co-ops, free rummage sales, clothing and household items exchange, co-op food buying, outings for play and education, and fun gatherings. These activities meet the goal of ending isolation.

Once there has been some recovery and healing, the group needs to begin to look outward. They need to begin to see the world around them, pray, and invite others to attend. This is the twelfth step, and it is a necessary step for continued recovery. New participants need to realize that in a group they are not alone; there are others who have experienced and suffered similar things. They have made a way through, so they provide potential role models for the future. There are even those who are living joyful and free after years of pain and abuse.

The focus in the group is directed towards self, not toward the abuser. The focus stays on the solutions even while one is sharing problems. "I learned the truth. It wasn't about the other person; it was about me."⁵ The focus needs to be on the victims in recovery.

⁵ Beattie, 1.

When I took my eyes off the other person long enough to take a look at the state of affairs in my life, that's when I found the undercurrent of fear, anger, pain, loneliness, emptiness, and unmet needs that had controlled me most of my life.⁶

A group provides flexibility. "Addiction is a multifaceted and multidimensional problem."⁷ A group setting is uniquely able to address many facets and dimensions as varying individual experiences are shared. There are many parts of each story that may especially affect the beginner in profound ways. While some things will not be relevant to a person, one is always encouraged to "take what they like and leave the rest."⁸ A small group of similar sufferers provides great opportunity and variety in topics.

The main goal of the Mentoring With Dignity support group is to help all in attendance work the first three steps, which are:

- Step One: We admitted we were powerless over other people, that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Step Two: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood God.⁹

It is important to help those new to the program to understand these goals:

- To acknowledge that if they could have fixed and changed the problems, they would have.
- To surrender the willfulness to control and fix other people.
- To step away from denial and admit that there is a problem that is not going away.
- To be willing to trust in a power outside of themselves.

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Peck, 135.

⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous* website, "What are the Twelve Steps," http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/default/en_about_aa_sub.cfm?subpageid=59&pageid=9 (accessed 1 April 2005).

⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have recovered from Alcoholism* (New York, NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976).

- To come to believe, not to come believing.
- To help those who are living in recovery and have been long in the program to strengthen their own recovery by mentoring others and giving back by becoming mentors.
- To connect those trained as mentors with those who are new to the program.
- To keep the group relational rather than task-oriented.
- To accept the freedom to change at one's own pace.
- To provide markers and guides for the journey, i.e. literature and sponsors.
- To protect the safety of others through anonymity.
- To be a soft landing spot after a long day or a hard week.
- To offer encouragement and hope.
- To be a place for women to hear the truth and learn to interact with healthy people as opposed to the abuser.
- To provide time and space to tell one's own story without labels, criticism, or judgment.

Level Three: The Self-Care Retreat

The goal of the retreat is multifaceted. It is important that this be an experience rather than simply a teaching time. Leonard Sweet uses the acronym EPIC to describe communication that is experiential, participatory, image driven and connective in nature.¹⁰ Therefore, the retreat time will include any number of sensory experiences, not simply didactic teachings.

¹⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

The self-care inventory retreat provides a sheltered environment to allow persons at the proper level of maturity to do a Mentoring With Dignity program personal assessment. This assessment corresponds to the fourth step, moral inventory, of the Twelve Steps program. Participants are not ready to develop an inventory and go on their retreat until: (1) they are productively working with a mentor, (2) they have the intention and energy to go to the next level, (3) they are able to see both their and the abuser's role in the problems, and (4) they are at a relatively high level of safety and emotional stability. Their mentor invites them to the retreat. Customarily, participants go on retreat with their mentor, and the focused time deepens and strengthens their relationship. Each retreat will likely yield new insights and experiences to the mentor.

A sample retreat schedule is included in Appendix H. Anticipated outcomes for the retreat include the following.

- An individualized plan for recovery
- Identification of strengths and resources
- Definition of obstacles and challenges
- Formulation of some goals:
 - Timelines and action steps
 - Plugging-in resources
 - Identifying obstacles
 - Be as concrete as possible
 - Identified accountability
 - Short-term goals—one day, week, month
 - Long-term goals—quarterly, annual, five years

- Outcomes—what the desired “new life” will look like
- Dreams for the future that will motivate hard work in the present.

In the retreat, a special notebook will be provided for each participant. In the early pages, there will be many “fill in the blank” exercises; toward the end of the notebook, there will be lots of white space. This mirrors the process of moving from dependency to independency, from direction to freedom. Even with more guidance in the early stages, there will be lots of room for personality, creativity, and individuality. This must be a very personal expression. At the end of the notebook, there will be several pages of white space to symbolize the future as fresh, new, clean, and wide open to all possibility.

Level Four: Mentors

Sponsors are a key component to any Twelve Step program. It is in a relationship with someone who is healthier than you that healing comes. Sponsors understand us because they have learned from experiences similar to ours. In the Mentoring With Dignity program, we believe in the value of training sponsors. To reflect this significant difference, Mentoring With Dignity refers to sponsors as *mentors*.

Persons who have successfully completed the self-care retreat are eligible to begin working as mentors. They are put into leadership roles in the group activities of Levels One through Three.

Mentors will meet with their home group weekly. They will be involved in one or two mentoring relationships. They will meet in a separate group for supervision twice

a month. Mentors practice ongoing recovery in life. They practice all twelve steps, but particularly steps 10-12.

Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Twelve: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.¹¹

As a part of the twelfth step, mentors help others with their recovery. They make themselves available as mentors and indicate this by wearing nametags at meetings. Not wearing a nametag is an indication that she believes she needs a break or is struggling. If a person chooses to remove herself as a mentor for a prolonged period, attendance at another self-care retreat may be required for her to return to this level.

Mentors also have mentors, who are referred to as coaches. Additional coaching meetings are available to mentors to help them clarify their recovery goals, work well with those they mentor, report progress to their coaches, and receive coaching.

Level Five: Certified Group Leaders

Each Mentoring With Dignity support group has a leader who takes responsibility for the health of the group. Specific training certifies these leaders. All mentors are coached and trained with materials available from Stephen Ministries.¹² Mentors are

¹¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous* website.

¹² Stephen Ministries, St. Louis, MO. The not-for-profit religious and educational organization works transdenominationally and internationally to develop and administer the Stephen Series system of lay caring ministry, the ChristCare Series System of small group ministry, and many other resources "to equip God's people for the work of ministry." <http://www.stephenministries.org/> (accessed 27 December 2004).

trained as Stephen Ministers. Groups may choose to use the ChristCare¹³ small group materials. Trainers of Stephen Ministers are referred to as Stephen Leaders. Mentoring With Dignity certified group leaders are persons who have successfully completed the training offered by Stephen Ministries in St. Louis to become Stephen Leaders. All certified group leaders are required to meet all criteria specified by Stephen Ministries for Stephen Leaders, including continuing education.

Certified group leaders are empowered to begin their own group. Mentoring With Dignity asks that each group begin with at least three persons who have successfully completed the self-care retreat and are experienced and successful mentors. Each group then begins with at least three mentors and is led by a group leader trained as a Stephen Leader. Groups without a Stephen Leader receive coaching from someone who has this training.

Certified group leaders are practicing Stephen Ministers who have completed the Stephen Leader training and started their own home group. They have at least one other person in training, who acts as an apprentice leader in their home group. They function as a “Parent” to their group. When their apprentice starts her own group, they are honored and referred to as “Grandparents.” Group leaders participate in national and regional training events, encouraging them to learn ways to better lead their groups. Additional training is available to those who are certified.

¹³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY

As long as the church fails to believe that abuse is present among its attendees and remains quiet on this subject, it is failing in the ministries of reconciliation, compassion, and justice so needed in the world today. Continuing to allow the secular world to lead the way in building shelters, providing safe houses, and attempting reconciliation, counseling, rehabilitation, and recovery ministry without Christ in the equation is failing to be salt and light in the world. The world so desperately needs the loving, compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ, who is the only way to life, true abundant life, for He has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

The church is called to bind up the brokenhearted, care for the wounded, and protect the downtrodden. The Body of Christ is to indeed be the body, the broken bread of sustenance and nourishment, the poured-out and spilled blood of Christ. The church is to serve, nourish, sustain, empower, equip, and encourage, walking alongside and struggling with those in pain, as Christ would himself.

A commitment to this area, of reconciliation in these terms, will be radical indeed. It is asking the church to look into an area it has long been quite willing to remain silent about. It will not be easy. It will involve investing in deep and intimate ways into helping people's lives. Yet the gospel calls us to get to the heart of matters, issues, and people. One of the things Jesus did best was speak truth in love into the core of the people he met. The church needs to be willing to ask the hard questions, not to always

accept “Sunday morning” as reality. There is the need to look deeply into people’s hearts, minds, and emotions and invite them into a place of healing and recovery. Only as the church models vulnerability, sensitivity, and an unwavering stance, only as it reaches out and takes the first risk can people begin to open up and know that love, care, and acceptance are available in the Body of Christ.

There is the need to recognize and be free from any form of oppression or power struggle. As in world politics, repression and aggression continue as long as they remain unchecked, unnamed, and unrecognized. As individuals and as a society, we must move away from any and every form of oppression. “Abuse not only harms the partner but also the family and ultimately our society as a whole.”¹

The failure of the church to confront or deal with violence and abuse between intimates on any level is fundamentally a problem of being unwilling to face sin that surrounds our human hearts. The problem can be so easily veiled behind things like family headship, submission, loving one another, and forgiving wrongs.

Often the leader must take the first risk of vulnerability and confession. Pastors and leaders must take a stand and lead by example. It will not be tidy, safe, neat or clean. It will not be fun but scary, risky, and outrageous.

The church and her leaders must advocate for the powerless in society, powerless and oppressed for whatever reason and in whatever way. It is time to take a stand, to love enough, to see and call evil what it is. The church must work for compassion and justice in any area that takes away freedom, stifles life, and invalidates persons who are the unique and marvelous creations of God Almighty. Violence against another in whatever form that takes is an offense against the integrity of human life.

¹ Evans, 12.

EPILOGUE

While the language of poetry and dreams is too informal for doctoral work, one personal experience demands to be included.

A woman had a recurring dream. Often she would wake in a cold sweat and terror from this dream. It occurred over and over, before her children were born and afterwards, in various geographic locations and no matter what the work environment. She dreamed she was being attacked in some way. She knew she was in some sort of imminent danger, and was trying desperately to cry out for help. She would open her mouth and try to scream with all her might. But nothing would come forth. She would try again and again. This was agonizing; she felt the tension and frustration even during sleep. Her voice was trapped within her own chest and was not allowed to pass her throat to reach the outside world. She felt absolutely helpless, for she was doing all that she knew to do in recognizing danger, attempting to call out, and putting forth tremendous effort. Her voice could not be heard. She would wake herself from the agony and effort and, after realizing there was no immediate physical danger to herself or her children, reluctantly fall back asleep.

This continued for years and years.

Her painful and abusive marriage ended. The partner she believed loved her all those years had now been fully revealed as the angry, selfish, unhappy, abusive man that he was. One marriage therapist described him this way: "He was a verbally, emotionally, physically, sexually, and spiritually abusive nice guy."

One night, this recurring dream yet again entered her nighttime landscape. The fear was real, the terror the same, but the response was not. She prepared to call out, to scream, but something even better occurred. She hopped on a bicycle, rode around the block, and with an exuberant wave of her arm, rode off into the sunset. She has not had any such dream in over 13 years. She was free at last.

Thanks be to God. I am still riding that bicycle into each sunset ordained by my Creator.

APPENDIX A

STANDARD INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Marty Williams Dissertation—williamsmar@msn.com

4 Touchstone Drive #83 Lake Oswego, OR 97035 503-697-3632
George Fox University—July 2004

Dear participant:

I am exploring the topic of domestic violence and abuse and specifically how the church may or may not be helpful around this situation. I hope to put together some tools and training materials especially for pastors and leaders as well as for those just beginning dating relationships. Thank you so much for sharing your time and energy, your heart and your story.

Name
Address
Phone
Email

How would you define abuse and more specifically abuse in a relationship?

Have you ever been in an abusive relationship?

If so, when, and for how long? Are you currently in this relationship?

Describe the first time you experienced abuse and identified it as such?

What red flags existed in your thoughts about this relationship?
What was the first red flag?

Why do you think you ignored or didn't notice the red flags?

If out of the relationship, what helped you move out of this relationship?

Why do you think you didn't move away from this relationship earlier?

What would have helped you move out of it earlier?

What support structures in your life helped you to move away from the relationship and/or encouraged you to stick it out?

How were you able to discern that your relationship was appropriate to work out vs. appropriate to leave?

APPENDIX B

LITURGY FOR HEALING

By Martha F. Williams (11-27-04)

Leader—Gracious God, creator of all life, we come to you, we come together to stand against violence in our world, and particularly on this day domestic violence, that harm the occurs in families, in intimate relationships, that is going on behind the closed door of what needs to be the most sacred, the most intimate, the most safe place in our society, our homes. In confidence, with great humility and with confession as needed, we seek you in prayer:

L: For children, the precious innocent ones who you welcomed to your side, who suffer pain and abuse, who suffer neglect or witness trauma from those who are to be most loving and responsible for their care.

All: God, grant them safety and your protection

L: For women and for men who are hurt in so many ways, verbally, emotionally, physically, sexually, spiritually by those with whom they are joined with in an intimate relationship, by those who profess and are expected to love them.

ALL: God, grant them strength, courage and your divine wisdom. May they have the serenity to accept the things they ought, the courage to change the things they need and the wisdom to discern the difference.

L: For those men and women who do the harm of violence and abuse to those that they love and are called to protect.

ALL: God, grant them new awareness and life changing humility, honesty and repentance.

L: For all those who are here this day suffering violence and abuse in their families, for those who live with the scars of such abuses,

ALL: God, grant them your care and your divine perfect love, comfort and healing.

L: For all people everywhere,

ALL: God, grant us eyes and hearts that will not turn away but that will be open to those

around us in the pain and the dilemma of domestic violence and abuse struggles.

Closing: Loving God of grace, peace and compassion please strengthen us as we reach out with your hands to provide care, to protect and to honor all of your precious children. Stand with us as we may encounter opposition. Go before us leading the way to healing and health for our communities. Give us grace and courage, sensitivity and compassion that come from you alone. We entrust our lives to your loving and grace filled care.

AMEN

APPENDIX C

A TEACHING TOOL

Janet's Story: A Case History¹

Be prepared with a pile of eight blankets or old bedspreads. One workshop leader or planner reads the script of Janet's story. Another workshop leader sits in a chair in front of the group. The reader asks the participants to listen to each statement from Janet's story, giving the instruction that, after each statement, one participant is to come forward and place a blanket over the person seated in front.

The purpose of this presentation is to help participants visualize the way in which the circumstances of a battered woman's life limit her options. This is the most graphic way to answer their persistent question, "Why does she stay?"

The idea for this presentation was derived from an exercise developed by the Duluth Project and Ellen Penz.

Script:

- Janet is thirty-five years old. She has been married for sixteen years. She grew up in the church and is a committed Christian. She has four children ages seven to fifteen. *[Pause.]*
- When Janet was a child, she saw her father hit her mother. He did it once or twice a week. Several times, Janet recall, her mother had to go to the hospital. *[Pause. Wait for one person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- Janet's uncle molested her for five years. She was eight years old when it started. She was afraid to tell anyone. *[Pause. Wait for a second person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- When Janet was in high school, her pastor taught a course for the church youth group on marriage. He emphasized that marriage was forever, that it

¹ Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers*, 46.

was sacred. *[Pause. Wait for a third person to come forward with a blanket.]*

- Janet quit school in her second year of college in order to marry Bob. He had a good job and he didn't want her to have to work outside the home. *[Pause. Wait for a fourth person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- Bob began abusing Janet the first year of their marriage when she was pregnant. She threatened to leave. He told her to forget it, saying that no one else would have her. She nearly lost the baby. *[Pause. Wait for the fifth person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- Five years and two children later, Janet went to her mother for help. Her mother said that this was just the way marriage was: it was her cross to bear and she had to accept it. *[Pause. Wait for the sixth person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- Janet thought about going to her minister. But her minister knew and respected Bob, who was an active lay leader in their church. She didn't think her minister would believe her stories of beatings, humiliations, and rapes. *[Pause. Wait for a seventh person to come forward with a blanket.]*
- Janet left once and went to stay with her best friend. Bob found her and told her that he had a gun. He said that he would use it if he had to. *[Pause. Wait for the eighth person to come forward with a blanket.]*

[Address the person under the blankets.]

"Janet, why do you put up with this? Why don't you just leave him?"

[The person under the blankets replies nonverbally by attempting to move but cannot get up because of the weight of the blankets.]

[When you pause after reading each of the next statements, ask a participant to come forward and remove a blanket.]

- Janet remembered that her ninth grade Sunday school teacher taught her that she was a child of God and that God cared about her. *[Pause.]*
- Janet read in the paper about a new law that said that husbands could be arrested for beating their wives. *[Pause.]*

- Janet remembered that Mrs. Jackson, the mother of her best friend in high school, had divorced her husband and moved away. Janet know that her friend's father had been abusive. *[Pause.]*
- Janet read a story in *Good Housekeeping* about a battered woman who was her age. Until then, she had thought she was the only one. *[Pause.]*
- Janet read in her Bible: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Cor. 3: 16-17)." *[Pause.]*
- Janet saw an ad in the newspaper for a shelter for battered women. She realized that there was a place where she could go to be safe. *[Pause.]*
- Janet read in the church bulletin that there was to be a presentation at her church about battered women. She was afraid to go, but she thought that maybe this meant that her pastor would be willing to help her. *[Pause.]*
- Bob hit their son and threw him across the room. Janet decided that she could not let her children be hurt any more. *[Pause.]*

[Address the person playing Janet.]

"Janet, remember that 'for freedom Christ has set you free.' Go in peace."

APPENDIX D

TEN COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS¹

By David Burns, a commentary for the abused woman—

1. *ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING*: You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure. This shows up constantly when in an abusive relationship. The abuser is all right and I am all-wrong. I am either perfect or worthless. I did it right or wrong, nothing in between not even some of it done well other needs improvement. Life is good or bad, not ok. Everything is a drama, comedy or tragedy. If he is right, then I am wrong.

2. *OVERGENERALIZATION*: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. If I don't stand up to him one time, it is over; I never will be able to. I might as well give up; quit even trying, what is the use. Goes with black and white thinking, all or nothing. There is a need to take each every event at face value, to examine it and allow it to stand-alone. This helps one to not feel so overwhelmed.

3. *MENTAL FILTER*: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire glass of water. Like a magnet for criticism every negative comment is allowed to penetrate and stay with you. There are no filters or boundaries in place to help ascertain that all of these comments are less about you and more about the abuser. This is like selective hearing or selective sight. We have learned to only pick up, like lint on black wool the critical and negative comments; those that make us feel bad about ourselves.

4. *DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE*: You reject positive experiences by insisting they "don't count" for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences. This same ability to selectively hear plays out here in that you are not able to even acknowledge positive comments or experiences. Your world has become so colored by the critical, the negative, by your feeling bad and even being more comfortable staying there.

5. *JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS*: You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

With all the filters in place and selective hearing aid turned up to full volume of course you jump to a conclusion that what was said was bad, was negative, was critical, was harmful, hurtful, was intentional to your destruction.

¹ David Burns, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1980), 42.

A. MIND READING: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don't bother to check this out.

B. FORTUNE TELLING: You anticipate that things will turn out badly ,and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already-established fact.

6. MAGNIFICATION (CATASTROPHIZING) OR MINIMIZATION: You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities) or the other fellow's imperfections. This is also called the "binocular trick."

7. EMOTIONAL REASONING: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."

8. SHOULD STATEMENTS: You try to motivate yourself with "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

9. LABELING AND MISLABELING: This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a *loser*." When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: "He's a blank blank." Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

10. PERSONALIZATION: You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

APPENDIX E

WISH LIST

Following is a list of concerns, experiences, thoughts, and feelings that met and accompanied the author on her personal journey of abandonment, betrayal and divorce while an active member of a faith community. These are written merely as thoughts, ideas, concerns, and hopes for others.

- That anyone had shared about the power/abuse/violence cycle
- That one of the pastors we met with had known some of the questions to ask, to seek the problem, to help put words to the experience for me
- People to know how to simply say they were sorry for the pain
- What and how much to tell others
- What to make public
- To laugh, remember the first time...with a single parents group...people that understood
- For childcare, to continue to be able to participate in things...couldn't get home and get the kids up to take babysitter home...just didn't make any sense
- For food, meals, house and yard help.... it was just all pretty overwhelming
- This was like a death...same care and compassion and concern as those who have lost a parent, etc
- This was in many real and all the practical ways a death the death of a marriage, the death of spouse, of parents, of me as a wife and so on
- A ritual to honor the death of a marriage
- For people to simply do for me...I didn't have the ability to ask...didn't really know what I needed, the needs were too staggering
- For people to simply sit with me, let me talk if I wanted...let me cry if I needed

- Family to grieve out loud with me, to be aware it couldn't make it worse
- For family, friends to join me in commitment to not speak ill of former spouse
- For my in laws to not totally reject me...I foolishly had believed that for those 20 years they loved me for me...not just as "brood mare" birthing heirs
- Invitations to play and have fun...to do normal things
- People to surround my children, to offer them stability in the midst of such chaos. This was especially important for the boys, to have another kind of male/father role model
- Help with self-care—reminders, prodding, invitations, provision
- Affirmation of my value and worth and that none of those things had changed with the separation/divorce
- Ability to continue to serve in the church
- Needed people who understood, who had been there, who could/would come alongside and give me hope for a future
- Felt like there was a great big D on my forehead....
- That Sunday morning walking into back of sanctuary was most lonely moment of entire week, trying to find a place to sit, especially when no kids—the need for people to not just say hi, but to take the next step and invite me to sit with them, invite me to...so hard to reach out through these days...not knowing what people thought, aware of their discomfort and not knowing what to say to them that would not make it worse, that would be honest

APPENDIX F

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

From A Policy Statement of The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.¹

1. Speak out clearly and unequivocally in a context of justice making, naming as sin family violence.
2. Provide to clergy and lay members education and training resources, which address family violence, abuse and neglect.
3. Encourage clergy and lay leaders to work cooperatively with specialized community resource to provide for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of victims, offenders, and other family members.
4. Encourage clergy and lay counselors to use child protective services in each state as a resource through which to protect children and vulnerable adults.
5. Support community interventions, which protect victims, hold offenders accountable for the offense, provide where appropriate incarceration and treatment for offenders, and provide support for other family members.
6. Urge support of denominational, ecumenical, interfaith, and public policy initiatives, which will bring community resources to bear in response to and prevention of these and related problems. These related problems include the increasing incidents of the phenomena of “date rape” as well as the unethical betrayal of trust and sexual victimization of clients, women and children by such therapeutic “mentors” as pastors, physicians, and counselors of different kinds in institutions of both church and society.
7. Encourage denominations to provide educational and supportive (respite) programs and resources for families, which care for dependent older adult.
8. Oppose decriminalization of child sexual abuse offenses.
9. Encourage denominational use of resources in prevention education with children and teenagers.
10. Address the needs of victims of battering that have been incarcerated because they have defended themselves against their abuse: use prison chaplancies as a resource to seek justice for these persons.
11. Continue to support ecumenical and denominational programming in human sexuality education for all ages through local churches.
12. Support research into the relationship between family violence and social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse and pornography.
13. Encourage denominations to provide guidelines and training which

¹ *A Policy Statement*, 31.2-1.

address the prevention of sexual abuse in childcare programs sponsored by local churches.

14. Encourage denominations to develop pastoral care materials that address the spiritual and religious needs of victim who are in the midst of crisis.
15. Encourage seminars to integrate information about family violence and abuse into the curricula so as to better prepare ministers to recognize and respond to this problem.
16. Continue to advocate reform of criminal justice system in order to assure accountability of crime of family violence and to guarantee appropriate rehabilitative treatment for offenders.
17. Encourage member communions to reexamine the scriptural, theological and traditional assumptions which may restrict the acceptance, contribution, and vocational of women in their ecclesiastical structures and may thereby offer unintended support for a patriarchal view of women as subordinate to men, the base upon which much abuse toward women and children is built.
18. Urge communions, working with local congregations, to create and implement programs, which address the problems of family violence, abuse and neglect in such a way as to prevent their further occurrence, especially as these problems occur within the context of church-supported programs and services.

APPENDIX G

MENTORING WITH DIGNITY: AN OVERVIEW

Level One—Education

Purpose/Objectives: To put before the public honest information about abuse.

Structure: Facilitate a speaker's bureau providing personal experience testimonies and education lectures. A four- to six-week series.

Content: Topics include,

- What is abuse?
- Information of victim and abuse
- Readiness for change/recovery
- Help, healing and hope
- How the Twelve Steps can Help in Recovery
- An outline of the Mentoring With Dignity program of recovery.

Leadership Preparation: Outlines each topic on paper.

Cautions: Make attendance information light; only those who are truly interested and ready need attend. The presenters need to be well-informed professionals and/or passionate women with a story of hope to share.

Other: These didactic teaching tools need to be prepared and available both as Level One materials or as stand alone educational opportunities.

Level Two—Support Group Meeting

Purpose/Objectives: To serve as the initial relational response to the need for emotional support. Build a supportive community for healing and recovery.

Structure: A Certified Group Leader (Level 5) will meet in a weekly ninety-minute meeting, ideally following an all-church meal with childcare provided. Provide an individualized, self-paced approach to change.

Content: Focus on the first three steps of the Twelve Steps and the first portion of the Serenity Prayer. Follow an agreed upon purpose, boundaries, and rules for the group process.

Leadership Preparation: Training to become a Certified Group Leader (Level 5).

Cautions: Take care to not have groups get caught in problems, but stay focused on recovery.

Other: This is the core of the Mentoring With Dignity Program.

Level Three—Self-Care Retreat

Purpose/Objectives: To provide a sheltered environment to allow persons to work through a program of personal assessment.

Structure: Retreat offered twice a year, moving to quarterly as the program grows.

Content: See Appendix H.

Leadership Preparation: Must be qualified to implement content; this would include Certified Group Leaders and other capable volunteers and contract persons.

Cautions: Need to address cost and not make cost prohibitive. Need to establish a scholarship fund source and criteria for access.

Other: This is a key component and may be offered as a standalone retreat opportunity to help defray costs.

Level Four—Mentors

Purpose/Objectives: To have those who have gone before in relationship with those who are beginning the journey, acting as trained mentors.

Structure: Eligible to mentor upon completion of the Self-Care Retreat. Placed in leadership roles in Levels One through Three.

Content: Mentors lead by experience in sharing their own journeys.

Leadership Preparation: Meet weekly with home group. In two mentoring relationships. Meet for support twice a month, practice the Twelve Steps, and report to a Certified Group Leader.

Cautions: If not involved for a time (length to be determined), needs to attend an additional Self-Care Retreat.

Level Five—Certified Group Leaders

Purpose/Objectives: To take responsibility for a healthy weekly group.

Structure: Oversees and begins groups as needed.

Content: May choose to use Stephen Ministries ChristCare materials.

Leadership Preparation: Trained as Certified Stephen Ministers.

APPENDIX H

LEVEL THREE SELF-CARE RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday evening: Relationship Building

Sharing our stories, getting to know each other.
What we've learned from practicing the first three steps.
How the inventory and steps 4-9 help us reach a new level.

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
Step Six: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
Step Seven: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.¹

Saturday:

Morning: Teaching

Session I 8-10am:

What a healthy life/marriage/family feels like

Using Maslow's Hierarchy of needs

Define the abuser. "People who eat people," is Barbara Sher's term for narcissistic people who abuse others. "The fascinating thing however is not these childish tyrants; it is the people who become their caretakers."²

How we respond to them – "If they would listen, they would change."

How marriages fall apart: John Gottman.³

Four Horsemen – 90% likelihood the marriage will fail when present.
(abuser routinely practices all four upon the victim)

Criticism

Contempt

Defensiveness

Stonewalling

¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

² Barbara Sher, *It's Only Too Late If You Don't Start Now* (New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 1998), 233.

³ John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 68.

These destroy the foundation turn it into honeycomb, break down the skeleton, and create osteoporosis.

Marital Cascades refer to a pattern of escalating abuse. There is routine and then escalation, which undermines a sense of safety and security.

Session II 10:30-noon:

Collecting information for the inventory written in the notebook.

Cognitive Distortions of Abuse (Burns, see appendix *****)

How each distortion reinforces feelings of hopelessness and helplessness

Lunch

Afternoon: Application

Session III 1-4 pm:

Participants are divided into small groups for practice.

They alternate writing and sharing their answers to clarification questions in the notebook. Hopefully “a-ha!”, light bulb and firework moments will occur.

Following is a list of ideas and activities that may be shared about or participated in during the application time of the retreat.

Importance of Sabbath

Mini vacations

Ongoing self-care

How to hold ones heart, give self-hugs

Massage

Stopping old tapes and messages from playing.

Visual aids surrounding tapes that won't play. Old cassette tapes pulled out like spaghetti

Sand to practice drawing lines in the sand.

Framed art—that is expression of love, love of God, love of self

The value of notes to self, on mirror, in car, etc.

Healthy self-talk

Getting past memories by remembering and releasing.

Tin with rocks and slips of paper—throw into ocean, river, lake, or off cliff

Hope chest-mini, fill with the broken dreams

Burn the inventory or memories

Shred the memories

Journaling, not just written, but also visual, words, lists, pictures, art, etc.

God box, put in and leave there

Learning about safe people

Saturday evening: Relationship Building

Sharing what we have learned
Working on our own inventories

Sunday:

Morning: Teaching

Session I 8-10am:

Burns techniques to deal with cycles of cognitive distortions—attachment hunger
Information from *How to Break Your Addiction to a Person*. Howard M.
Halpern⁴
Triple Column technique⁵

Session II 10:30-noon

Journaling: Powerful questions that help us.
Practical Guidelines for Making Amends.
How the Mentoring With Dignity program can help us
Mentoring others helps us.
Writing goals for recovery
Practical Guidelines for being a Sponsor/Mentor

Lunch

Afternoon: Application

Session III 1-4pm:

Making Amends—Fifth step work.
Writing and sharing goals for recovery in small groups.
Litany of forgiveness, rituals for putting behind...rocks, box to throw into
ocean, river, burning...bury
Something to take home as reminder...on this day, in this place I

Closing ritual of hand washing (update: foot washing, ritual for remembrance of
baptism).

⁴ Howard M. Halpern, *How To Break Your Addiction to a Person*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, Inc, 1982).

⁵ Burns, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*.

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