

# **A Biblical Response to Domestic Abuse in the Church: A Handbook for Pastors, Elders, and Church Leaders**



**Charlene D. Quint, J.D., C.D.V.P.**

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*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*  
Proverbs 31: 8-9

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*A prayer for those suffering abuse:*

*Loving God, whose Son was both victim and victor, we cry to you for those who suffer abuse. Be with them in confusion and pain. Heal the wounds of body and mind; break open the prisons of fear, self-doubt and despair; and strengthen them to face the future with faith, hope and courage. Reach out to them with your love, that they may be made whole in body, mind, and spirit, through the healing touch of the suffering Christ. Amen. – The Anglican Book of Prayer*



## **1. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCURS IN EVERY COMMUNITY – DOMESTIC ABUSE BY THE NUMBERS**

- i. The Center for Disease Control’s most recent survey states that 35% of women and 28% of men have experienced “rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.”  
<https://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>.
- ii. Around 48% of women will experience emotional abuse or coercive control in intimate relationships during their lifetime. M. M. Carney, and J. R. Barner, “Prevalence of Partner Abuse: Rates of Emotional Abuse and Control,.” *Partner Abuse*, 3(3) (2012): 286–335, <https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.3.3.286>
- iii. On average, a woman will leave her abuser seven times before she leaves for good. National Domestic Violence Hotline, “50 Obstacles to Leaving:1-10” at <https://www.thehotline.org/2013/06/10/50-obstacles-to-leaving-1-10/>
- iv. Abuse is just as prevalent in the Christian community as in the non-Christian and non-Jewish community. Abuse occurs in nearly every congregation.  
<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/2016/10/Domestic-Violence-In-The-Church.cfm>; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-24/how-to-navigate-the-research-on-domestic-violence/8738738> . The most abusive men tend to be those who are “nominal” Christians – those who claim to be Christian but who rarely or sporadically attend church. *Id.*, S. Tracey, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 2007.
- v. Christian women stay in abusive relationships significantly longer than women of no faith. <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/2016/10/Domestic-Violence-In-The-Church.cfm>
- vi. Homicide due to domestic abuse is in our local communities. In 2016, five women in Lake County, IL were killed by their intimate partners or former intimate partners, some even though protective orders were in place. *2017 Annual Report, A Safe Place*. Most women were from middle or upper class communities. In 2018, five women in Lake County were killed by their husband or intimate partner. One, a dentist in the U.S. Navy, lived in Lake Forest and was shot by her former boyfriend before he shot himself.  
<https://jwcdaily.com/2018/01/19/more-lake-forest-murder-suicide-details-disclosed/> Another woman was a married, middle-aged mother of two high school boys who was active in her synagogue and community and lived in Deerfield. Her husband had worked for decades in the financial markets industry and was the chief market strategist for a futures company. He also handcuffed her, dragged her through the house, raped her, and stabbed her 15 times.

<https://abc7chicago.com/deerfield-man-stabbed-wife-15-times-held-her-hostage-court-docs-say/4344241/> Both Lake Forest and Deerfield are affluent communities. On November 30, 2022, a man killed his 36-year old wife, two daughters ages 4 and 6, and his mother, before killing himself, in the affluent Buffalo Grove suburb. The wife had received an order of protection against him, a guardian ad litem was assigned in their divorce, and he had threatened to kill them. <https://www.lakemchenrscanner.com/2023/03/29/newly-released-reports-say-father-who-killed-his-family-in-buffalo-grove-had-previously-threatened-to-kill-them/>

- vii. Over 90 percent of abusers who perpetrate the systematic, persistent, injurious violence that maintains control and power over another are men. Eighty-five percent of victims are women. Michael Kimmel, *Gender Symmetry in Domestic Violence*, Violence Against Women, Vol 8, Issue 11, Nov. 2002, pp 1332-1363, abstract available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=198004>
- viii. Domestic Violence is prevalent in affluent communities, where power and money lead people to believe that rules don't apply to them, and it is prevalent in lower-income communities. However, it is more likely to be kept silent in affluent communities. Domestic abuse permeates all races, ethnicity, religious, and economic groups. [http://www.ncdsv.org/images/DV\\_FAQs.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/DV_FAQs.pdf)
- ix. Even after the #MeToo Movement, the majority of clergy and congregational leaders (and even many counselors) have not received adequate specialized training in how to appropriately and safely respond to domestic abuse within their congregation. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/09/18/pastors-more-likely-to-address-domestic-violence-still-lack-training/> ; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-24/how-to-navigate-the-research-on-domestic-violence/8738738>
- x. Prior to the #MeToo Movement, of Protestant pastors, 42% "rarely" or "never" addressed domestic violence from the pulpit, 22% speak about it about only once a year. About 75% of pastors said they knew a friend, family member or church member who has experienced domestic violence, about 75% admitted it was a problem in their "community", but 75% of pastors thought it was not a problem in their own church. <http://lifewayresearch.com/2014/06/27/pastors-seldom-preach-about-domestic-violence/>
- xi. After the #MeToo Movement, Protestant pastors were more inclined to address domestic violence from the pulpit, with 77 % stating they speak about domestic violence at least once a year. However, many pastors report that their congregations are more confused or callous due to the #MeToo Movement. Although 85% of pastors had heard of the #MeToo Movement, 84% of pastors



had never heard of the #ChurchToo Movement, which involves abuse in the church. <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/09/18/pastors-more-likely-to-address-domestic-violence-still-lack-training/>

- xii.** Each year in the U.S., domestic abuse is responsible for 2 million injuries and 1,300 deaths and 5.3 million female intimate partner victims. <http://hope4dv.org/statistics/?view=mobile>
- xiii.** Victims of domestic abuse lose 8 million days of paid work per year. Domestic violence costs the US economy over \$8.3 billion, of which \$5.8 billion is for medical and mental health services, and \$2.5 in lower productivity. Abused women are also more likely to develop severe health issues including, among women have a higher risk of serious health concerns, including, among other things, heart disease (70%), stroke (80%), asthma (60%), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertpearl/2013/12/05/domestic-violence-the-secret-killer-that-costs-8-3-billion-annually/#1bf20f1a4681> , depression, suicide, gastro-intestinal problems, neurological disorders, chronic pain, disability, anxiety, unintended pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, HIV, STD's and PTSD due to prolonged exposure to stress and forced sex. <https://ncadv.org/statistics>
- xiv.** Fifty percent of victims are harassed at their workplace. Sixty four percent of domestic violence victims have diminished ability to work due to distraction, fear of discovery, harassment by their partner at work, fear of their partner's unexpected visits, inability to complete assignments on time, and job loss. <https://www.domesticshelters.org/domestic-violence-statistics/economic-impact-of-domestic-violence#.WgXlvbpFw6Y>
- xv.** Domestic violence is a top risk factor in mass shootings. In 68% of mass shootings, the perpetrator had a history of domestic violence or killed at least one family member. <https://efsgv.org/press/study-two-thirds-of-mass-shootings-linked-to-domestic-violence/> ; <https://injepijournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>  
For example, the November 5, 2017 massacre that killed 26 people in the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas occurred in a town of 400 people and a church community of 50 people. The perpetrator was a man who had been convicted of domestic violence, spent a year in prison, and received a bad conduct discharge from the military. Domestic abuse is everywhere, even small towns. The goal of an abuser is to destroy the partner who leaves him and everything that she holds dear. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/11/06/the-air-force-says-it-failed-to-follow-procedures-allowing-texas-church-shooter-to-obtain-firearms/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.4d0c23278136](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/11/06/the-air-force-says-it-failed-to-follow-procedures-allowing-texas-church-shooter-to-obtain-firearms/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4d0c23278136)

## 2. WHAT IS ABUSE?

Abuse is a comprehensive set of behaviors and attitudes designed to gain and maintain power and control over others. Abusers are characterized by a lack of conscience, lack of empathy, lack of remorse, and using others for their own selfish needs. They have an insatiable need for power and control, especially over their wife or intimate partner.

[http://www.ncdsv.org/images/DV\\_FAQs.pdf](http://www.ncdsv.org/images/DV_FAQs.pdf)

All abuse can be summarized as an abuse of power and control over others who are less powerful. However, abuse can be summarized into five major categories: (1) Emotional and Verbal (2) Financial (3) Physical (4) Sexual and (5) Spiritual.

According to British psychologist, Kevin Dutton, many psychopaths are functioning in the workplace and are attracted to leadership position, where they hold power and control over others. <https://www.businessinsider.com/professions-with-the-most-psychopaths-2018-5#10-civil-servant-1> (See also Kevin Dutton, *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* (Scientific American, 2013)). The most common careers for psychopaths are:

- i. CEO
- ii. Lawyer
- iii. TV, Radio, Movie Personality
- iv. Salesperson
- v. Surgeons
- vi. Journalist
- vii. Police Officer
- viii. Clergy
- ix. Chef
- x. Civil Servant, Politician

### **3. CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ABUSER – MENTAL DISTURBANCE/PERSONALITY DISORDERED**

- i. **Cluster B Personality Disorders.** The overwhelming majority of abusers have what the American Psychiatric Association (APA) refers to in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) as a Cluster B Personality Disorders.  
<https://saferelationshipsmagazine.com/> Dysfunction is on a sliding scale. Even if an abuser is not diagnosed with a personality disorder (and many are not because they believe nothing is wrong with them), an abuser will have many of the characteristics.
- ii. **Sociopaths, Psychopaths, and Narcissists.** Cluster B Personality Disorders include Anti-Social Personality Disorder (under which are two sub-categories: Sociopaths and Psychopaths), Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and Borderline Personality Disorder. American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5, p.646, 2013
  - a) Many people have more than one personality disorder – for example many narcissists (whose main characteristic is grandiosity and lack of empathy ) are also sociopaths (whose main characteristic is lack of conscience). *Id.*
  - b) Up to 15% of population has one or more personality disorders. *Id.*
- iii. **Dangerous and Severe.** Cluster B personality disorders are considered “dangerous and severe” and have impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and violence in common.
  - a) In layman’s terms, the common characteristics boil down to lack of conscience (as evidenced by the lack of remorse or repentance when they have hurt, mistreated, or stolen from someone) lack of empathy (they don’t care that they have hurt someone’s feelings) and using others for their own selfish needs.
- iv. **Untreatable and Incurable.** Cluster B Personality Disorders (and most abusive behavior) are considered untreatable and incurable. People with these disorders don’t see a need for treatment and do not see anything wrong with themselves. Even if they receive treatment, the change is not clinically significant. They may feign an “apology” to get their partner back into the abusive relationship, but any positive change in behavior is short-lived. They simply don’t care about the devastating effects they have on others.
- v. **Anti-Social Personality Disorder - Diagnostic Criteria** – Much more prevalent in men than women. *Id.* at 662. Also known as sociopathy, psychopathy, or dyssocial personality disorder. *Id.* at 659. Estimated in 3-5 % of population. Characterized by a “pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the

rights of others” with “deceit and manipulation central features” starting when the individual is 15 years old or younger. *Id.* Three of the following seven indications are needed for a diagnosis:

- a) Failure to conform to lawful social norms (destroying property, harassing others, stealing, illegal occupations, disregard for the wishes, rights, or feelings of others)
- b) Deceitfulness (deceitful and manipulative to gain personal profit or pleasure, money, sex, or power)
- c) Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead (decisions made without forethought or consideration for the consequences to self or others, sudden change of job, residence, or relationships)
- d) Irritability and aggressiveness (physical fights, spousal and child abuse)
- e) Reckless disregard for the safety of self or others (speeding, driving while intoxicated, accidents, high risk or harmful sexual behavior and substance use, neglect or failure to care for a child that puts them in danger)
- f) Consistent irresponsibility as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations (irresponsible work behavior, unemployment despite ample opportunities, defaulting on debt, failure to pay spousal support or child support, failure to support dependents)
- g) Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another (i.e. lack of conscience) (blaming victims for being foolish, helpless, or deserving of their abuse, minimizing harmful consequences of their actions, indifference, failure to make amends for hurtful behavior, belief that everyone – including himself – is out to “help number one” and that one should stop at nothing to avoid being pushed around). (*Id.*, pp. 659-660)

vi. **Traits of Sociopaths and Psychopaths** from Hare Psychopathy Checklist and Diagnostic Features of DSM 5 (not all 20 need to be indicated)

- a) Glib and superficial charm – smooth, engaging, charming, slick
- b) Grandiose (exaggeratedly high) estimation of self – arrogant, cocky, self-assured, opinionated, think they are superior to others
- c) Need for stimulation – prone to boredom, engage in risky, thrilling activities to alleviate boredom, don’t finish tasks that they consider routine or dull

- d) Pathological lying – deceptive, deceitful, underhanded, unscrupulous, manipulative, dishonest
- e) Cunning and manipulativeness – use of deceit and deception to cheat, con, or defraud others with callous ruthlessness and lack of concern for victim
- f) Lack of remorse or guilt - as indicated by being indifferent about having hurt, mistreated or stolen from another, disdain and contempt for the victim (lack of conscience)
- g) Shallow affect - superficial emotional responsiveness, emotional poverty, interpersonal coldness despite signs of open gregariousness
- h) Callousness and lack of empathy – lack of feelings toward people, cold, contemptuous, inconsiderate, tactless
- i) Parasitic lifestyle – intentional, manipulative, selfish, financial, exploitation of others
- j) Poor behavioral controls – irritability, annoyance, impatience, threats, aggression, verbal abuse, unable to control anger or temper,
- k) Sexual promiscuity – brief and superficial relations, numerous affairs, indiscriminate selection of sexual partners, several sexual relationships at the same time, sexually coerces others into sexual activity, takes great pride in discussing sexual exploits and conquests
- l) Early behavior problems – lying, theft, cheating, vandalism, bullying, alcohol use, etc. prior to age 13
- m) Lack of realistic long-term goals – inability or persistent failure to develop and execute long term goals
- n) Impulsivity – inability to resist temptations, frustrations and urges; lack of deliberation without considering consequences; foolhardy, reckless
- o) Irresponsibility – repeated failure to honor obligations and commitments
- p) Failure to accept responsibility for own actions – absence of dutifulness, antagonistic manipulation, denial of responsibility, manipulates or blames others
- q) Many short-term relationships – lack of commitment to long-term relationship reflected by inconsistent, undependable, unreliable commitments, including marital commitments

- r) Juvenile delinquency – behavior involving antagonism, exploitation, aggression, manipulation, or a callous, ruthless, tough-mindedness
- s) Revocation of conditional release – revocation of probation or other conditional release (from law enforcement) due to technical violations, carelessness, low deliberation, or failing to appear
- t) Criminal versatility – diversity of behavior that is characterized as criminal offenses, regardless of whether arrested or convicted; taking great pride in getting away with crimes and having no consequences

Hare et al., *The Revised Psychopathy Checklist: Reliability and Factor Structure*, *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1990, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 338-341.

**vii. Traits of Narcissistic Personality Disorder** – More prevalent in men than women. American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5, p.646, 2013. Estimated in up to 6.2% of population. *Id.* Characterized by “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” as indicated by at least five of the following (DSM 5):

- a) A grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g. exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements, overestimates ability, inflates their accomplishments, boastful, pretentious, surprised when they do not get the praise they feel they deserve, devalues the contributions of others)
- b) Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love (ruminates about long overdue admiration and privilege, compares themselves favorably with famous or privileged people)
- c) Believes that he is special and unique and can only be understood by, or should only associate with, other special or other high-status people or institutions (believes he is superior to others and expects others to recognize him as such, attributes “unique,” “perfect,” or “gifted” qualities to himself and those with whom he associates, his self-esteem is enhanced by the idealized value he assigns to those with whom he associates, insists on having only the “best” person serving him (doctor, lawyer, hairdresser, designer, etc), insists on being affiliated with the “best” institutions, devalues those who disagree or disappoint them).

- d) Requires excessive admiration (self-esteem is fragile and depends upon being highly regarded by others, need for constant attention and admiration, see themselves as the center of the universe, expect their arrival to be treated with great fanfare, charming, fishes for compliments)
- e) Has a sense of entitlement, (e.g. unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his expectations, expectations of being catered to and furious when they are not catered to, they insist that they don't have to wait in line, they view their "very important" work or desires as so important that others should defer to them, and become incensed if they don't).
- f) Is interpersonally exploitative within relationships ( i.e. takes advantage of others to achieve his own ends, his sense of entitlement combined with lack of sensitivity leads to the conscious exploitation of other, they expect to be given whatever they want, regardless of the impact on others or the cost of a relationship, they expect great dedication and excessive work from others and employees to further their own goals without considering the cost to others, they form romantic relationships and friendships only if the other person advances their purposes and enhances their self-esteem, they usurp special privileges and extra resources that they think they deserve because they are so special )
- g) Lacks empathy and is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others (they assume others are totally concerned about their welfare while being totally unconcerned about others' welfare, they discuss their own concerns in inappropriate and lengthy detail, they fail to recognize others have feelings and needs, they are contemptuous and impatient with others who discuss their problems and concerns, they make hurtful remarks and do hurtful things without caring of the pain they inflict, the needs of others are seen as signs of weakness and vulnerability, they are insensitive, cold, and lack interest in others
- h) Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him (they begrudge others who are more successful of their success or possessions, they feel that they better deserve achievements, admiration or privileges than others, they harshly devalue the contributions of others, especially if others have received praise or recognition)
- i) Shows an arrogant, haughty behavior or attitude (they display snobbish, disdainful, contemptuous, or patronizing attitudes,

they look down on people in positions of service (such as a waiter, attendant, child care worker, teacher, bank teller, customer service person, secretary, receptionist, or anyone who earns less than they do) and call them rude, clumsy, idiotic, or stupid

viii. **Additional traits of Narcissistic Personality Disorder** (Leon Seltzer Ph.D., Psychology Today, Nov. 7, 2013 at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolution-the-self/201311/6-signs-narcissism-you-may-not-know-about>)

- a) Are highly reactive to criticism – or anything they assume or interpret as negatively evaluating their personality or performance.
- b) Fragile Egos. Although they outwardly appear self-confident because they are highly skilled at exhibiting exceptionally high self-esteem, underneath they have a fragile ego and are insecure. Thus, they are constantly driven to prove themselves.
- c) Inordinately self-righteous and defensive – they need to protect their overblown but fragile ego. They cannot admit a mistake or offer a true apology. They have a “my way or the high way” attitude in leading and decision-making.
- d) React to contrary viewpoints with anger or rage.
- e) Projection. Project onto others the qualities, traits and behaviors they can’t or won’t accept in themselves. They cannot accept that they have any deficits or weaknesses, and they accuse others of the very things that they are most guilty of. By invalidating, devaluing and denigrating others, it makes them feel better about themselves.
- f) Have poor (or no) interpersonal boundaries. They view others as extensions of themselves who exist to serve their needs, and they put their needs above everyone else’s. “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine” mentality. They don’t view others as independent beings with their own needs, opinions, and goals to be honored. They dominate conversations about themselves, are not interested in others, and even brag about how they got away with something (a crime, an affair, how they chewed someone out, how they manipulated or conned someone) – not realizing that the listener is appalled at their lack of kindness.



ix. **A Few Abusers/Narcissists/Sociopaths/Psychopaths in the Bible:**

- a) Pharaoh – only wanted Israelites to serve him, would not let them go because he would have lost free labor, even after he let them go he changed his mind and tried to destroy them.
- b) Saul – repaid David’s friendship with evil, plotted against him, used his daughter Michal as a bargaining chip, hunted David down for no reason, falsely accused David of treason, jealous
- c) King Ahab and Queen Jezebel – killed the priests, worshipped Baal, killed a neighbor to get his land,
- d) Athaliah (daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) – killed her grandchildren and took over the throne, when one grandchild was saved and crowned the next king, she accused the people who saved them of treason (projection) 2 Kings 11
- e) Nebuchadnezzar – arrogant, boastful, invaded Israel, threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fire, made people worship him. God turned him insane and let him eat grass like a donkey for 7 years until he humbles himself and acknowledges God. Daniel 4. The only person in Old Testament that God “zapped” to turn his heart towards God.
- f) Most of the kings of Israel. Time after time, they became powerful and full of pride, then turned from the Lord. For example: “But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.” 2 Chronicles 26:14. Uzziah raged at the priests when he was doing what only priests should do – burn incense – and they rebuked him. 2 Chronicles 26: 16-19
- g) Levite Who Let His Concubine be Gang Raped. The concubine left her “husband” and went back to her father’s house. (This is very unusual – we can only assume that it was so abusive at her own house that she left and went back). After four months, her husband came, spoke kindly to her, and convinced her and her father to let her go back to him. When he stayed over in a house on the way home, the townspeople gathered around the house demanding the man come out so they could rape him. He gave them his concubine instead. She was gang-raped, and then died. The man cut up his concubine into 12 pieces, sent the parts to all the 12 tribes of Israel, blamed the townspeople (taking no responsibility himself) and started a battle. Clearly knowing the harm that would come to her, the Levite put her in harm’s way, clearing the way for the townspeople to inflict the actual harm. Judges 19, 20

- h) David's Son Amnon. Amnon burned with lust for his half-sister Tamar, manipulated a way to be alone with her, and raped her. As soon as he was done, he hated her, discarded her without any emotions and no consideration of how he had defiled her and ruined her life, and he sent her away. When she said he should marry her, according to Jewish laws of someone who seduces a virgin, he refused. 2 Samuel 13.

x. **Some Descriptions of Abusers/Narcissists/Sociopaths/Psychopaths in the Bible:**

2 Timothy 3:1-8. *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. . . . They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.*

Galatians 5: 17, 19-22. *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

1 Peter 5:8. *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Matthew 7:15-18. *Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

Romans 1: 26-32. *And because they thought it was worthless to embrace the true knowledge of God, God gave them over to a worthless mind-set, to break all rules of proper conduct. Their sinful lives became full of every kind of evil, wicked schemes, greed, and cruelty. Their hearts overflowed with jealous cravings, and with conflict and strife, which drove them into hateful arguments and murder. They are deceitful liars full of hostility. They are gossips who love to spread*

*malicious slander. With inflated egos they hurl hateful insults at God, yet they are nothing more than arrogant boasters. They are rebels against their parents and totally immoral. They are senseless, faithless, ruthless, heartless, and completely merciless. Although they are fully aware of God's laws and proper order, and knowing that those who do all of these things deserve to die, yet they still go headlong into darkness, encouraging others to do the same and applauding them when they do!*

Matthew 12:33-37. *Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

John 8:42-44. *Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

Daniel 12:10. *Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.*

Psalms 58:1-5. *Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge people with equity? No, in your heart you devise injustice, and your hands mete out violence on the earth. Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies. Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be.*

Pride is the root of the abuser's evil. 2 Chron. 16:16, 32:25; Psalm 10:4, 31:18, 59:12, 73:6, 101:5; Proverbs 3:34, 11:12, 13:10, 14:3, 15:25, 16:5, 21:24; Isaiah 2:11, 2:17, 13:11, 37:23; Daniel 5:20; Hosea 13:6; Amos 6:8; Obadiah 1:3; Romans 12:6; 1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 John 2:16.

Pride – the Greatest Sin. According to C.S. Lewis, pride is the greatest of all sins. "Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind." A person filled with pride has to be better than others, is never satisfied, craves

power, is an enemy to God, and is vulnerable to the devil. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 121-122.

Abusers are Predictable. Just like those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are predictable and have similar ways of talking, acting and thinking because the same Holy Spirit informs their thoughts and actions, abusers are predictable and have similar ways of talking, acting and thinking because the same Enemy spirit informs their thoughts and actions. (1 John 3: 7-10, Romans 8:4-8, Ephesians 2:2)

#### **4. EMOTIONAL AND VERBAL ABUSE – IS PRESENT IN 100% OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

Emotional abuse is at the center of all abusive relationships.

<https://centerforfinancialsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/adams2011.pdf> All forms of abuse are designed to hurt another person emotionally and psychologically. Emotional and verbal abuse is used to control and emotionally destroy spouse by humiliation, ostracism, cruelty, raging, making her think she is crazy, turning her children and friends against her. Emotional and verbal abuse is the easiest form of abuse to inflict, as well as deny. Scars are internal, devastating, and wounding of the spirit.

- i. name calling,
- ii. raging (An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins. Prov. 29:22. One of the acts of the flesh is fits of rage. Gal. 5:19-21),
- iii. lying and deceit (2 Tim. 3:1-8, Prov. 6:16-19),
- iv. gaslighting (doing or saying something very harmful and then denying that it ever happened) (the first incident of gaslighting in the Bible was when Satan, disguised as a snake, questioned Eve, deceived her, and caused her to doubt what she believed to be true (Gen. 3:1-5)),
- v. projecting: accusing the victim of the very things they themselves are most guilty of (affairs, being manipulative, being mean, being abusive, stealing/hiding money, etc) ( for example, Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, killed her grandchildren, put herself on the throne, and cried “treason” when one surviving grandchild was crowned king. 2 Kings 11:1-14)
- vi. criticism, contempt, stonewalling, defensiveness (Dr. John Gottman calls these the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” that predict the end of a relationship) <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-four-horsemen-recognizing-criticism-contempt-defensiveness-and-stonewalling/>; see also J. Gottman and N. Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country’s Foremost Relationship Expert*, (Harmony 2015)
- vii. silent treatment, withholding affection or support,
- viii. telling their targets they are stupid, worthless, a whore, and other insults,
- ix. parental alienation: telling their children that their mother is worthless, calling her names, raging, etc. in front of the children, telling the children lies to make them turn against their mother (your mother is stealing your college funds, your mother left because she had an affair, your mother abandoned you, etc.)

- x.** social alienation, slander, rumors, libel, false accusations,
- xi.** blame-shifting, taking no responsibility for actions,
- xii.** denying, justifying, or minimizing allegations of abuse
- xiii.** trivializing the accomplishments, achievements, and contributions of others;
- xiv.** inability to affirm or appreciate the contributions and attributes of others
- xv.** exaggerating their own achievements, accomplishments, contributions, or attributes,
- xvi.** intentional cruelty followed by blaming the victim for feeling hurt,
- xvii.** isolation, exclusion, refusing to help, favoritism,
- xviii.** Unreasonable demands, impossible to please, sabotage, perfectionism, refusing to cooperate or help, refusing to be able to schedule or coordinate calendars,
- xix.** changing the rules so the abuser always wins,
- xx.** creating chaos, conflict, and drama,
- xxi.** discarding treasured items, pets, mementos, family heirlooms, family photos, gifts from children,
- xxii.** intimidation, coercion, threatening adverse consequences if she doesn't do what he wants: threats of divorce or affairs, to sell the house, to kill her, to get custody of the kids if she leaves, to leave her penniless if she leaves,
- xxiii.** stalking (as Saul stalked David), surveillance, cyberstalking, tracking, recording, using technology against them, constant texting and demands to know whereabouts and who they are with,
- xxiv.** jealousy (Gal. 5:19-21),
- xxv.** triangulation and divisions (Gal. 5:19-21; Prov. 6:16-19), controlling relationships so that people must pay homage to the abuser to have access to others (i.e. playing the godfather)
- xxvi.** crazy talking in circles (never resolving matters, illogical reasoning, repeating non-sense, diverting away from matter), ad hominem attacks (attacking the person rather than the merits of an issue)
- xxvii.** guilt-tripping the target to comply, playing the victim when there are consequences for bad behavior,

- xxviii. refusing to honor agreements, court orders
- xxix. limitless ways to emotionally hurt someone

## **5. FINANCIAL ABUSE – IS PRESENT IN APPROXIMATELY 99% OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS.**

Financial abuse is prevalent in almost all abusive relationships.

<https://centerforfinancialsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/adams2011.pdf>

Financial abuse is used to control a spouse by making her financially dependent without means to support herself or access to funds. It also makes it very difficult to leave an abusive relationship. Money is power. Abusers know that.

- i. not allowing the wife to have access to funds,
- ii. not putting their wife on bank accounts,
- iii. making their wife ask for money every time she needs it and demanding receipts and change,
- iv. keeping financial secrets, secret accounts
- v. wasting large amounts of marital funds on risky ventures without agreement or knowledge of spouse,
- vi. sabotaging her career or education,
- vii. lying about finances,
- viii. refusing to support his family (1 Timothy 5:8), refusing to obtain employment commensurate with ability, education and experience
- ix. forcing her to give her paycheck to him,
- x. forcing her to pay all expenses while he hoards money in his secret accounts,
- xi. refusing to consult her or get her agreement for significant financial matters,
- xii. forcing her to sign a prenuptial agreement immediately before the wedding,
- xiii. refusing to abide by financial agreements (Num. 30:2)
- xiv. incurring large amounts of debt, destroying her credit (Prov. 22:26)
- xv. using her personal information to incur debt in her name
- xvi. refusing to pay the mortgage, utilities, doctors, and other life necessities

**xvii.** financial deceit and cheating (Prov 22:28; Dt. 19:14)



## **6. PHYSICAL ABUSE – IS PRESENT IN APPROXIMATELY 98% OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

Physical abuse is present in almost all abusive relationships.

<https://centerforfinancialsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/adams2011.pdf>

Physical abuse is used to control the spouse/partner by inflicting physical trauma, neglecting her needs, putting her in harm's way (so she is hurt by someone/something else). Many, if not most, people think of physical abuse as the only form of domestic abuse. Many people view physical abuse as hitting or punching (think NFL player Ray Rice video). Oftentimes, abusers in affluent communities are too smart to leave a bruise on a wife – so they inflict other forms of physical abuse.

- i. withholding medicine or medical treatment,
- ii. refusing to take them to the doctor or emergency room when needed,
- iii. pushing them out of the car miles from home in unsafe neighborhoods and leaving them to find their way home,
- iv. shoving or grabbing them, spitting, pulling hair,
- v. blocking them from movement or escape,
- vi. pushing down the stairs,
- vii. sabotaging the car (cutting break lines, putting on bald tires, etc.), “accidentally” running them over with a car,
- viii. throwing objects,
- ix. cruelty to animals (Prov. 12:10, 27:23; Dt. 25:4; Exodus 23:12-13),
- x. Throwing out or destroying items or things (i.e. the family pet) that are precious or treasured,
- xi. Using or threatening to use weapons or lethal force
- xii. Punching, slapping, kicking
- xiii. Death - 94% of murder-suicide victims are female, 72% are perpetrated by an intimate partner or spouse  
[https://ncadv.org/assets/2497/domestic\\_violence\\_and\\_physical\\_abuse\\_ncadv.pdf](https://ncadv.org/assets/2497/domestic_violence_and_physical_abuse_ncadv.pdf)
- xiv. the list is endless.

## **7. SEXUAL ABUSE – IS NEARLY UNIVERSAL IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

Coerced sex is present in nearly every abusive relationship. Abusers feel they are entitled to sex on demand. Married abusers view a wedding ceremony as giving consent to use his wife's body whenever he wants.

Sexual assault (rape) is present in approximately 68% of abusive relationships. <https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx> In 80% of the cases, the sexual assault is repeated again and again. *Id.* Sexual abuse is an especially damaging form of physical abuse. It is used to control a spouse with humiliating, dehumanizing, degrading sexual acts for the abuser's own gratification and to show power over a victim; almost always a characteristic of narcissistic personality disorder, sociopathy, and psychopathy.

Approximately 18% of women have been raped in their lifetime, and half of those rapes were perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner.

<https://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>. Comparatively, approximately 1.4% of men have been raped in their lifetime.

<https://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>.

In 90% of the cases, children witness rape or physical violence against their mother, causing severe emotional problems and depression.

<https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx>.

Rape is not often reported because of the shame, humiliation, fear that they will be blamed and not be believed, and fear of retaliation. Rape is rarely prosecuted because it is difficult to gather enough evidence beyond a reasonable doubt – since most rapes take place in private, with no witness, with no video or photos, and the rapist always denies or claims it was consensual. Of 1,000 actual rapes, only 310 ever get reported (however, much fewer are reported in a marriage or long term relationship

<https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx> ). Of those 310, only 50 result in arrests. Of those 50 arrests, only 28 result in a felony conviction, and only 25 result in incarceration of the rapist. Therefore, 97.5% of rapists go completely unpunished. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>

Sexual Abuse in Marriage or Relationships include:

- i. Pornography addiction (leading to pornography-induced erectile dysfunction and requiring wife to “perform” degrading and dehumanizing acts)
- ii. Forced, coerced sex
- iii. Rape – Approximately one in five women in the US have been raped in their lifetime, and approximately half of those were raped by an intimate partner or spouse, and forty percent were raped by an acquaintance.

[https://ncadv.org/assets/2497/domestic\\_violence\\_and\\_physical\\_abuse\\_ncadv.pdf](https://ncadv.org/assets/2497/domestic_violence_and_physical_abuse_ncadv.pdf). Marital rape, like other rape, is a crime. (The marital exception to rape was abolished in Illinois in *People v. M.D.*, a 1992 case in which a church-going physician who accused his wife of infidelity raped his wife multiple times and shoved his fist into her vagina, causing permanent damage).

- iv. Demanding sex in exchange for grocery money and other necessities
- v. Multiple affairs
- vi. Criticism of body
- vii. Use of derogatory names
- viii. Accusations of affairs
- ix. Bestiality
- x. Forced videos or photographs of sexual acts or nudity
- xi. Sexual deviancy of all kinds
- xii. Sexual abuse is especially damaging to the victim. Women who are victims of sexual assault have worse mental and physical health, more PTSD symptoms, more pregnancies, more sexually transmitted diseases, were more likely to have an abuser harass them at work and threaten them with murder, and were more likely to threaten or attempt suicide, compared to women who had been physically, but not sexually, abused.  
<https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx>.
- xiii. Most women in sexually abusive relationships do not report the rape. Only 6% contact the police after the first rape, and only 8% applied for a protective order. On average, Caucasian women waited 8 years to apply for a protective order, while Latina women waited 5 years and Black women waited 3 years.  
<https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx>.
- xiv. The Bible recognizes that sexual immorality is particularly damaging to the victim by requiring sexual purity to prevent such enormous damage (Matt 5:27-28; Eph. 5:3-7; 1 Cor. 5, 6:13 and 18, 10:8, Colossians 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Jude 1:7). God puts the responsibility of spiritual purity and sexual purity on husbands, and even goes so far to say that he will not punish women for unfaithfulness when it is a result of the unfaithfulness of their husbands (Hosea 4:10-14).
- xv. Reproductive abuse, including hiding contraceptives, forced pregnancy, abuse during pregnancy, refusal to take her to the hospital for the birth of a child or needed checkups, using a child to keep a spouse in a marriage (anchor baby)

## **8. SPIRITUAL ABUSE IS USED TO CONTROL A SPOUSE OR PARTNER BY TWISTING AND MISINTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES**

Spiritual abuse is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women to encourage, excuse, maintain and promote male entitlement, privilege, and abuse. See <https://sojo.net/articles/im-marriage-counselor-heres-what-i-want-christians-know-about-domestic-spiritual-abuse>. The following are common examples of spiritual abuse and misapplication of Scripture:

- i. Claims that Scripture allows the abusive behavior, that husbands are the head of the wife, and husband are entitled to demand submission to his every whim (Ephesians 5:22-23. 1 Peter 3: 1-6),
- ii. Claims that she must stay in an abusive marriage because God doesn't like divorce (Malachi 2:15),
- iii. Claims that she is a bad Christian/Jew/mother/person if she leaves,
- iv. Claims that she is required to "forgive and forget" regardless of his non-repentance (Luke 17:3-4, Matthew 18:21-22),
- v. Claims that forgiveness means reconciliation and staying together as a couple,
- vi. Claims that "the past is the past" and should have no effect on the future,
- vii. Claims that God has forgiven him "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12) and so should she,
- viii. Claims that everyone sins, one sin isn't worse than any other (Romans 3:23),
- ix. Claims that she should not "judge" him and accept him as he is (Matthew 7:1),
- x. Claims that she must submit to her husband's demands for sex whenever he feels like it, regardless of her condition or his cruelty (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). On November 13, 2021, Pastor Burnett Robinson, senior pastor of Grand Concourse Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Bronx, infamously claimed from the pulpit, when preaching about wifely submission, "Gentlemen, the best person to rape is your wife." <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/22/the-best-person-to-rape-is-your-wife-says-bronx-pastor/>
- xi. Claims that he has "changed" - although he does not demonstrate confession to others, repentance, compensation for losses, a change in attitude and behavior, or humility

## **9. CONFRONTING THE ABUSER – WHEN CONFRONTED, THE ABUSER DOES NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS ACTIONS OR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

When confronted with his actions, the abuser likely has one or more of the following reactions:

- i.** Deny/Lie/Minimize/Justify/Blame – abusers will have one or more of these reactions.
- ii.** Denies the abuse to victim and to others. (“It wasn’t rape – you agreed to it.”)
- iii.** Lies about the abuse. (“I might have left you 35 miles from home in the ghetto, but I tried to go back and get you, I just couldn’t find you.”)
- iv.** Minimizes the severity of the abuse. (“It couldn’t have been that bad. If it was that bad, you would have left 10 years ago.”)
- v.** Justifies his actions by comparing them to something worse. (“Well, at least I’m not as bad as \_\_\_\_\_. So, I fondled my daughter’s breasts – at least I didn’t rape her.”)
- vi.** Justifies his actions. (“I have to be the boss in our relationship. Just like in business, you can’t have a bunch of people making decisions. Someone has to make all the decisions. That’s me.”)
- vii.** Blames something or someone else (usually the victim) (*i.e.* “You made me mad. If you didn’t screw up then I wouldn’t have to yell at you.” “You know I don’t do homework with the kids – you shouldn’t have asked me.”)
- viii.** Gaslighting – tries to make the victim feel like she is going crazy or not in reality by trying to convince the victim the abuse didn’t happen, or that he didn’t say what he just said, or that she misunderstood.
- ix.** Yells at her that she is too sensitive and shouldn’t cry
- x.** Yells at her that she is over reacting and shouldn’t be angry
- xi.** May attempt to get victim back into abusive relationship with false professions of love, false promises of change and feigned apologies (*i.e.* “Mistakes were made.” “I’m sorry that you feel that way.” “I’m sorry you are sad.”)
- xii.** Projection – claims that the victim does the very things that abuser is guilty of (*i.e.* abusive, having an affair, a bad parent, a bad person, a horrible Christian/Jew, cruel, name-calling)

- xiii.** Plays the Pity Card – the abuser claims that he is the victim to elicit pity (*i.e.* “She left me, I’m all alone.” “I’m in jail because she called the police.” “I can’t see my children because she got a restraining order.”) A sure sign of an abuser.
- xiv.** Punishes the victim for confronting and exposing the abuse – with more abuse. Retaliation and vindictiveness.
- xv.** When the victim leaves, his goal is to destroy her using the things most precious to her – her children, her family and friends, her faith, her career.
- xvi.** Social alienation - slanders the victim to family, children, friends, church/synagogue community, professional community as punishment, especially when the victim leaves.
- xvii.** Parental alienation – slanders the victim to turn the children against her, especially when the victim leaves.
- xviii.** In summary, attempting to reason with, confront, or rebuke an abuser is useless and results in further abuse. “*Whoever corrects a mocker [a proud and arrogant man Prov. 21:24] invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.*” Proverbs 9:8.

## **10. CYCLES OF ABUSE**

### **i. Cycles of an Abusive Romantic Relationship**

- a) Idealization Phase – initial phase where the abuser is very charming, charismatic, romantic, very attentive. Also called “love bombing.” The partner often feels she has met her “soul mate” and the partner becomes attached quickly. The abuser is pretending to be Prince Charming. He is manipulating his partner and doing everything he can to ensure that his partner forms strong emotional and financial attachment to him.
- b) Devaluation Phase – almost immediately after the abuser has secured his position in which his partner is emotionally and financially dependent upon him (usually after an event such as a wedding, moving in together, partner giving up her job, becoming business partners, buying a house with his name on the title and the mortgage, having a child, etc.), he will methodically engage in abuse that escalates over time. Once an abuser has moved on to the devaluation phase, he will not return to the idealization phase.
- c) Discard Phase – regardless of how long the relationship, whether they have children together, or how much the victim has sacrificed for the abuser, the abuser will discard his partner with as much empathy as throwing out yesterday’s newspaper and try to destroy her. Every relationship with an abuser ends very, very badly. The abuser immediately moves on to his next victim, usually one whom he has been grooming while with his primary partner, and the cycle repeats with the new victim. However, he will continue his abuse of his former partner using the legal system, the children, supporters, and refusal to comply with court orders.

See e.g. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/idealize-devalue-discard-the-dizzying-cycle-of-narcissism-0325154>,  
<https://neuroinstincts.com/idealize-devalue-discard/>,  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/reading-between-the-headlines/201703/the-danger-manipulative-love-bombing-in-relationship>

### **ii. Cycles of Abuse Within an Abusive Romantic Relationship**

- a) Tension Phase– this feels like “walking on eggshells.” The abuser is agitated and easily angered. Nothing that the victim does can please him, and the victim is in fear of upsetting the abuser and another abusive episode. There is no way to predict what the abuser wants. There may not be physical violence (or minimal physical violence), but there is

emotional abuse, intimidation and threats. Fear of violence is used to coerce partner.

- b) Violence Phase– a violent episode, which may include physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse.
- c) Honeymoon Phase – Abusers often act differently after violent episodes. (1) Some ignore or deny the violence (2) some blame their anger on something their partner did or said (3) some fear losing their partner and act genuinely sorry. During this phase, the abuser will be on good behavior and may try to “make up” for his violence by (i) acting apologetic (ii) sending cards and flowers (iii) buying presents (iv) helping around the house (v) spending time with the kids (vi) going to church (vii) getting counseling (viii) making promises to change or (ix) seeking pity. This phase is an attempt to draw his partner back into the abusive relationship and give her hope of real change. It is never a real “honeymoon.” The cycle then repeats, with increased frequency and severity.

See <https://ncadv.org/dynamics-of-abuse>,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cycle\\_of\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cycle_of_abuse)



## **11.EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE ON THE VICTIM**

A steady dose of abuse has a myriad of negatives effects on a victim. Below are some of the most common effects of abuse on women. The effects on children are equally, if not more, devastating, but they are not covered here.

- i. **PTSD and Physical Ailments.** Victims of abuse experience fearfulness, anxiety, panic attacks, inability to concentrate, recurring nightmares and distressing memories, hypervigilance, exaggerated negative feelings, blame and emotions, detachment, inability to feel positive emotions, irritability and anger, and reckless or self-destructive behavior. They also experience a multitude of physical ailments, including GI issues, heart issues, headaches, strokes, flashbacks, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, chronic pain, hypertension, anxiety cough, and change in fine motor skills. 100% of women who experience abuse experience PTSD, with 87% experiencing moderate to severe PTSD. Mindy B. Mechanic, Teri L. Weaver, and Patricia A. Resick, "Mental Health Consequences of Intimate Partner Abuse: A Multidimensional Assessment of Four Different Forms of Abuse," *Violence Against Women* 14, no. 6:634– 654 (June 2008), doi:10.1177/1077801208319283.
- ii. **Depression and Hopelessness.** 94% of women who are victims of abuse experience depression. *Id.*
- iii. **Trauma Bonds and Soul Ties.** Much like an addict experiences withdrawals when stopping use of a substance, victims of abuse often long for an abuser, even when she knows he is dangerous. She longs for the times when the abuser was good to her with the hope those times will return, but not realizing he was putting on a false persona. This longing is known as trauma bonds or soul ties, and is often a physiological response to abuse. When a woman is physically intimate with a partner, her body produces oxytocin (also known as the cuddle or bonding hormone), which can stay in her body for up to six months. God designed oxytocin to bond us in marriage, but the Enemy uses it to bond victims to abusers. This is one reason why, on average, women return to an abuser several times before she leaves for good.
- iv. **Cognitive Dissonance.** Cognitive dissonance occurs when we have two opposing notions in our mind at the same time, which cannot both be true simultaneously. Our brains work overtime to resolve this dissonance and determine which to believe. A woman desperately wants to see her husband or partner as a "good guy" despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. A woman will deny, minimize, or justify the heinous actions of an abuser so she doesn't have to face the reality that he is actually a monster and his actions are abusive. Often a woman needs a counselor's help in resolving the cognitive dissonance so that she sees the abuser for who he is, not who she wants him to be. Importantly,

cognitive dissonance is a primary reason why others often support an abuser, rather than a victim.

- v. **Spiritual and Emotional Unhealthiness, Inability to Establish Healthy Boundaries.** Many victims of abuse have a misunderstanding of spiritual and emotional health. These people have an inability to establish healthy boundaries, and they extend excessive altruism in attempting to act like a “good Christian.” They may give so much of themselves and their finances that they end up exhausted, poor, and in debt. They may feel responsible for the actions of others. They also have an inability to discern evil, are overly concerned with opinions of others, take on undeserved blame, and experience feelings of guilt and shame even though they are not to blame for his abuse. People without healthy boundaries have a reluctance to have no contact with their abuser and mistakenly believe that they can and should maintain a friendship or relationship with the abuser even after a divorce. People in unhealthy relationships may also develop people-pleasing behaviors, perfectionism, constant comparison with others, an inability to form close relationships or trust others, a need to fix others, and eating disorders. Other common traits are a sensitivity to rejection, not feeling seen or heard, and the need to over explain or make excuses. Shame and guilt, poor self-esteem, difficulty expressing emotions, fear of social situations, and being overly self-conscious are other dysfunctional ways of relating to others.
  
- vi. **Believing the Lies of the Abuser, Allowing it to Determine Self-Worth.** Abusers are liars. Lying is a universal characteristic of abusers. Jesus informs us that Satan is the father of lies, and those who make a lifestyle of lying are his children (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8–10). Oftentimes, the victim in abuse believes the lies of the abuser that she/he is unlovable, unworthy, unintelligent, ugly, not sexy enough, responsible for the abuse, and similar lies. The process of healing is essentially the process of identifying and rejecting the lies of Satan from whatever source, and replacing them with the truth of God.
  
- vii. **Generational Sin.** Children in homes where domestic violence is present often develop severe short-term and long-term mental health issues. They often learn to be either abusers themselves or become a partner of an abuser. Boys who witness their mother being abused are 10 times more likely to abuse a female partner as an adult, while girls who see their father abusing their mother are 6 times more likely to become a partner to an abuser as an adult.  
<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/effects-domestic-violence-children>
  
- viii. **Child Abuse.** Studies show that approximately 70 % of men who batter women also abuse children. As the danger and violence of the abuse against women increase, the percentage of men who also batter children approach 100%. Lundy

Bancroft & Jay G. Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Sage Publications, 2002), 43.

- ix. **Inability to Establish economic Self-Sufficiency and Financial Stability.** Due to the financial abuse that is prevalent in 99% of abusive relationships, the victim is often forced to terminate education, stop working outside the home, or accept low-paying positions. Abusers often drag on litigation, hide funds or squander them. Abusers are notorious for refusing to pay child support and maintenance.
- x. **Abuse always escalates, causing women to be non-functional.** The longer she stays, the more severe the abuse, the less functional she will become. <https://www.thehotline.org/2018/09/28/escalation/>
- xi. **Substance Abuse.** Victims often turn to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms.
- xii. **Suicide.** Victims who are not supported by a family, church, friends, employers, or others rightfully feel betrayed by the very people whom she has loved the most, and who should love her. These often turn into feelings of hopelessness. 23% of domestic abuse survivors have attempted suicide, compared to 3% of the general population. “Domestic Violence Survivors at Higher Risk for Suicide,” DomesticShelters.org, June 8, 2016, <https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/health/domestic-violence-survivors-at-higher-risk-for-suicide>.
- xiii. **Death.** Domestic abuse is the #1 killer of women in the world, accounting for 58% of the homicides of women. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2013*, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf). 72% of murder-suicides are committed by a spouse or intimate partner, and 94% of the victims are women. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), “Statistics,” <https://ncadv.org/statistics>. The most dangerous time is when a victim is leaving an abusive relationship, and the abuser realizes that he has lost control.
- xiv. **Relationships with abusers always end badly – very badly.** They usually culminate in financial ruin, emotional devastation, physical illness, and even death. The length of a relationship is dependent upon how useful the woman is to the abuser and how much psychological and physical abuse she can tolerate. In some cases, the partner of an abuser has become too ill psychologically or physically to withstand the association any longer. The narcissist will then effortlessly replace her with a new, unsuspecting, adoring victim. (Linda Martinez-Lewis, *Freeing Yourself From the Narcissist in Your Life*, p. 161, Penguin, 2008)

## **12.WHY WOMEN STAY**

On average, a woman leaves an abusive relationship seven times before she leaves for good. <https://www.breakthesilencedv.org/beat-that-seven-times-statistic/>

Women stay in or return to an abusive relationship for a number of reasons. Below are 10 of the most common reasons:

- i. **#1 Reason: Lack of Funds.** She has been kept from access to funds or she has put her career on hold and lack of finances is a major obstacle. She has no money, nowhere to go, no way to pay for rent, no way to pay for attorneys for the divorce process, no way to feed her children, no way to protect the family pet. <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-dara-richardsonheron/economic-empowerment-is-c b 7792540.html>
- ii. **Charming at First.** Her husband/partner was charming and charismatic when they were dating and she keeps hoping that person will return. She does not realize that he put on a false persona to get her emotionally and financially attached to him, and that the Prince Charming he once was in the idealization phase will never return.
- iii. **Cycle of Abuse.** He is not always abusive, in the honeymoon phase he tries to win her over with apologies, promises of change and what she hopes is real repentance. She keeps hoping that his promises of change are true, and this “nice” side of him will win over his “dark” side.
- iv. **Religion.** She may be religious and her religion strongly disapproves of divorce. Or she has been advised by clergy to stay in the marriage or submit to husband’s authority.
- v. **Threats.** The abuser has threatened her if she tries to leave. Threats may include killing her and her children, cutting off funds, destroying her, dragging her through court, telling everyone she’s mentally ill, turning her children and family and friends against her, getting her committed to an insane asylum. She knows that her abuser will try to destroy her when she leaves, which is true.
- vi. **Physically Prohibited from Leaving.** The abuser may lock the doors of their house, refuse to provide her with a car, hide the car keys, cut off all contact with others who may help her, refuse to provide her with a phone, keep track of her calls, or keep a weapon by his side (even when sleeping) to keep her from leaving.
- vii. **Children and Family.** Most women with children do not want to break up a family. Abusers know this. Abusers will force a partner to become pregnant (an anchor baby), and use children to keep their partners from leaving.

- viii. **Denial.** Many women are in denial that they are being abused and they believe the abuser when he minimizes or justifies the abuse, or blames it on her. No woman wants to admit that she is abused. It's easier to label him an "alpha male" a "strong personality" or a "leader" rather than an abuser. If a woman admits she is being abused, then she often recognizes that has to do something about it. Denial keeps her from having to act.
- ix. **Unable to Recognize Different Forms of Abuse.** Many women think that domestic abuse is only being physically hit. They don't recognize emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, and spiritual abuse. And they don't recognize physical abuse that isn't hitting.
- x. **Abuse Towards Children Usually Prompts Women to Leave.** Women endure abuse to themselves because they think it is better to protect the children, suffer abuse herself, and keep the family together than to break up a family. When a woman finally leaves, it is usually because the abuse has escalated, is now directed towards her children, and she can no longer protect them.  
<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/2016/10/Domestic-Violence-In-The-Church.cfm>

See also <https://www.thehotline.org/2013/06/10/50-obstacles-to-leaving-1-10/> ;  
<https://ncadv.org/why-do-victims-stay>

### **13. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN ABUSER WHEN A WOMAN LEAVES**

Abusers are predictable. Just like a person who is influenced by the Holy Spirit will act in accordance with the character of God, a person who is influenced by the spirit of the Enemy will act in accordance with the character of the Enemy. When a woman leaves an abuser, she can expect the following behaviors.

**Danger and Destruction.** Keep in mind, if he cannot own his victim, he wants to destroy her. Thus, leaving an abusive relationship is very, very dangerous.

**Homicide.** A woman is 70 times more likely to be killed in the few weeks after she leaves than if she stays. <https://fireflyin.org/resources/news-library/domestic-violence-does-not-discriminate/> Approximately 75% of women who are killed by their abuser are murdered as they attempt to leave or after they have left an abusive relationship. Approximately 4,000 women in the US die each year because of domestic violence. <http://www.domesticabusehelpline.org/infodomesticviolence.htm> . Women are killed by intimate partners in 40-50% of female homicides, more than any other perpetrator. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447915/>. Intimate partner homicide is one of the leading causes of death among women. *Id.*

**Ghosting.** Some abusers simply disappear and have nothing to do with their children, former spouses, or the financial and parenting obligations of their family. They start a new life.

**Continued Abuse.** The majority of abusers continue their abuse. What you can expect when a woman leaves:

- i. **False apologies followed by blame.** If he thinks there is a chance of getting his victim back, he will use feigned apologies, crocodile tears, promises of counseling, promises to work with a Christian mentor, and other tactics that have worked in the past. If this doesn't work and he feels the victim will not come back, he will lie, deny, justify, minimize or blame the victim for his abuse.
- ii. **Pity Play.** He will play the pity card – he will play the innocent victim to get sympathy (he will claim she abandoned him and he did nothing wrong.) In some cases, he will attempt to manipulate his victim by claiming depression or that he will kill himself if she doesn't return.
- iii. **Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality.** An abuser often has a charming, outgoing, charismatic personality; he is often a leader at work or in the community. He relishes the limelight and admiration, and wants to appear to others as a pillar of the community. However, he is abusive behind closed doors. (The Bible calls this hypocritical or two-faced.)

- iv. **Vindictive.** He will become very vindictive and use every effort to destroy the leaving victim emotionally, physically, financially, sexually, and spiritually.
- v. **Social Ostracism and Alienation.** He will conduct a smear campaign of lies and false accusations against his victim to friends, family, congregants, country club members, etc. to vilify her, cut off her network of emotional support, gain supporters against her, and make himself look innocent.
- vi. **Parental Alienation.** He will conduct a smear campaign of lies and false accusations against his victim to her children, grandchildren, and step-children to vilify her, turn them against her, cut off emotional support, destroy her relationship with them, gain supporters against her, and make himself look innocent.
- vii. **Use the church, claim his territory, “find God.”** If he or his wife have ever attended church, the church will get played. He will use the church as a camouflage to give him a cloak of respectability. He will suddenly become a regular attender and volunteer for high-profile positions. He will claim the church (along with church friends and pastors and the community) as his “territory” so that it is unsafe for the victim to attend, and he will try to force the victim out of the church, the circle of friends, and the community. He will lie to the pastor, and claim he has “found God” and has changed. He will use the ploy known as “cheap grace” (a term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer for preaching forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, and communion without confession) by feigning repentance and demanding grace be given to him.
- viii. **Financial lies and abuse.** He will lie about his finances and income, and hide assets to avoid child support and financial obligations to his spouse.
- ix. **Abuse the court system.** He will use the court system to further his emotional and financial abuse against the leaving spouse and to gain sole custody (abusers are much more likely to seek sole custody than non-abusers, and often obtain it.)

## **14. TOP 13 THINGS A PASTOR AND CONGREGATION CAN AND SHOULD DO TO SUPPORT A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL ABUSE**

**God's Heart.** We are called to support the oppressed, those who cannot speak for themselves, the widow without a husband, and the orphan without a father. (Psalm 68:5, 82:3, 146:9, Proverbs 23:10, 31:8,9; James 1:27). How much more, then, are we called to support those whose husbands and fathers are actively and intentionally abusing them?

**Pastoral Impact.** The way a pastor responds to a domestic abuse victim has a huge impact. Pastors are often viewed as God's representatives with tremendous moral authority. Victims often view a pastor's words as words directly from God. A pastor's voice is the most influential voice in the room. An appropriate response can begin her journey to healing, while an inappropriate response can further the devastation and enable the abuse to escalate.

**BELIEVE, EDUCATE, ACCOUNTABILITY, REFER & REPORT, SUPPORT (Go B.E.A.R.S!)**

### **B - BELIEVE THE VICTIM**

- i. **Listen, Believe and Validate.** Listen, believe and validate her in a compassionate and caring way. It has taken a lot of courage to reach out to a clergy. She has likely been hiding the abuse for years. She may be panic-stricken with stories that seem out of a movie. People who have lived with constant abuse suffer post-traumatic stress have trouble concentrating and seeing a way out. The stories are very likely true.
- ii. **Affirm Her. Assure her Abuse is Always a Choice, and Not her Fault.** Assure her that, regardless of what her abuser has told her, she did not cause the abuse and the Scriptures do not condone abuse – ever. Abuse is always a choice. Affirm her in her efforts to be a faithful wife and keep her family intact. Affirm her that she is not the problem, the abuser has the problem, and very likely will not change.

### **E - EDUCATE YOURSELF, YOUR STAFF, YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND YOUR CHURCH**

- iii. **Reading, Training, Network.** Make sure you know the tactics of abusers, and how to help a victim heal. Reach out to local professionals so that you have a referral network. For a more complete understanding of domestic abuse and how to respond appropriately, we highly recommend taking the 40 hour training sponsored by the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and other state coalitions. <https://asafeplaceforhelp.org/programs-services/40-hour-domestic-violence-training/>



## **A - ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE ABUSER**

- iv. **Separation and Church Discipline.** The Church must recognize our primary job in this situation is to protect the sheep of our congregation, not provide a safe haven for wolves. Only if she wants and only if she is safe, approach the abuser with two other church leaders to propose a period of physical separation and to determine if he is repentant, or open to abuse perpetrator counseling. (Matthew 18:15-17). Separation from the abuser is needed by the victim and by the congregation for her safety, for the unity of the congregation (the abuser will cause division), and for the repentance of the abuser if it is ever to occur. The abuser, not the victim, should be required to leave the marital home. Abusers very rarely change, but if a change occurs, it is only because of consequences.

True Biblical repentance requires him to:

- a) Openly confess that his actions were wrong, apologize, and take full responsibility for his wrong actions. It does not include a statement that “mistakes were made” or “I’m sorry you feel offended.” These are non-apologies and take no responsibility for wrong actions. James 5:16 (confess our sins to one another).
- b) Openly confess his actions to her, his children, and others. (Abusers will slander and blame the wife to others, who should hear his confession of abuse and of the lies he has told them). Eph. 5:11-13 (“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.”)
- c) Attend and complete regular perpetrator counseling sessions and meet regularly with a mentor from church. Proverbs 12:15, 11:14, 19:20-21, 28:26 (listen to advice, accept instruction from others)
- d) Make restitution for her losses caused by the abuser, including, but not limited to, medical bills, broken personal items, hotel bills if she needed to leave the house, debt, bad credit, foreclosure, and restoration of broken relationships. Leviticus 6:1-7; Numbers 5:6-7 (when someone realizes his guilt, he must confess his sin and make full restitution plus 20%)
- e) Change his attitude (from pride and arrogance to one of humility) and behavior (from abusive to non-abusive and non-slanderous) for a significant period of time (over a year). He has had a lifetime believing the lies of Satan, and it will take a significant amount of time to replace those lies with God’s truth.

Pride (arrogance, haughtiness, no need for God or others, viewing oneself as better than God and others and having no need for them) has long been called the original sin, the sin from which all others arise (St.

Augustine quoting from Sirach 10:12-13), and the utmost evil (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 121-122). Thus, true repentance requires at the very core setting aside pride and putting on humility. James 4:6 (God opposes the proud); Philippians 2:3 (do nothing out of selfish ambition, but be humble); Proverbs 8:14 (God hates pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech); Proverbs 3:10 (where there is strife, there is pride); Proverbs 16:5 (God detests all the proud of heart); Proverbs 21:4 (haughty eyes and a proud heart – the unplowed field of the wicked – produce sin); Psalm 10:4 (in his pride, a wicked man does not seek God).

All these should be required prior to allowing an abuser back in your congregation. Far too often, it is the victim, not the abuser, who must leave the church for her safety. Following these steps will allow the victim and her children to safely attend her congregation, be surrounded by supportive congregation members, and not be in fear of running into her abuser at her house of worship. It also sends a clear message to the children (as well as the congregation, outsiders, and the abuser) that the abuse is wrong and not condoned. Encourage the victim to require these changes prior to allowing him back in the family home. Abusers who are unwilling to take these steps are not truly repentant. Be careful of abusers who “apologize” and cry crocodile tears, but do not want to undergo these steps, or start these steps but do not complete them.

- v. **Removal.** Only if she wants and only if she is safe, if the abuser refuses to repent and attend abuser counseling, bring the matter before the elders of the congregation. The elders should remove him from membership and from attending the congregation so that it is a safe place for her to worship, and so that your congregation is not divided by the abuser.

*Matthew 18:15-17. If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

*1 Corinthians 5:11-13. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”*

*2 Timothy 3:1-7. But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving,*

*slandorous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

*Titus 3:10-11. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.*

*Proverbs 22:24-25: Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.*

## **R - REFER HER TO DOMESTIC ABUSE PROFESSIONALS AND REPORT**

- vi. **Mandatory Legal Reporting.** If children are involved, as mandatory reporters, clergy have a duty to report abuse to DCFS immediately. 325 ILCS 5/1 et seq. Reporting is required whether the children themselves are being abused, or if they are witnessing the abuse. Make sure she and the children are safe. Let her know that it is not un-Christian to use our laws to protect herself and her children. Sit with her while she makes the phone call to DCFS. If she will not call DCFS, let her know that you are a mandatory reporter and must call DCFS yourself.
  
- vii. **Order of Protection.** Advise her that she can get an emergency order of protection from the local county court. Some courts, like Lake County, IL, have an office which can help her complete the petition and provide legal advocates in court. An order of protection has a number of remedies to protect her and the children. While laws vary from state to state, in Illinois, an emergency order must be filed within a short time (ideally 24-48 hours) of the abuse, and will last only three weeks. At the end of three weeks, she can ask for a plenary order of protection that will last for up to two years. Go with her to file, or have a church staff member go with her. Let her know that it is not un-Christian to use our laws to protect herself and her children. The order of protection is a civil remedy, therefore the standard of proof is a civil standard (a preponderance of the evidence, more likely than not, 51%), not a criminal standard (beyond a reasonable doubt). Because it is not a criminal matter, the abuser will not be incarcerated. Remedies in an order of protection can, among other things, include:
  - a) custody of the children,

- b) keeping abuser 500 feet away from protected parties and their home, school, place of employment, church, and other protected places
  - c) exclusive possession of the marital home
  - d) allowing her support for separate housing if she chooses to leave the marital home
  - e) if she leaves, the marital home, temporary exclusive possession of the marital home to allow her to remove her possessions and move out
- viii. **Law Enforcement.** After you make sure she and the children are safe, advise her that she can report the abusive incident(s) to the police and encourage her to do so. If there is no police report, the courts and police will assume that nothing happened. Prosecutors may or may not choose to prosecute a criminal matter, depending on the facts of the abuse. Prosecutors need a victim who will press charges and testify to obtain a conviction. Go with her to file. Because abusers are likely to be vindictive, she should get an Order of Protection prior to filing a police report.
- ix. **Domestic Abuse Counselors and Services.** Refer her to local domestic abuse or sexual abuse counselors and organizations. Encourage her and her children to obtain these free services from professionals who are trained experts in domestic and sexual abuse. She may feel that she needs a pastor's approval to seek counseling.
- x. **Separate Counseling, Not Marital Counseling.** It is very important to know that marital counseling by the pastor is not indicated and not appropriate in domestic abuse cases. Separate counseling to help the victim heal and set boundaries is needed. Perpetrator counseling to get the abuser to understand, take accountability for his destructive actions, and make long term positive changes may be appropriate, but will not be effective for narcissists, sociopaths, or psychopaths. It will simply make them smarter abusers who will use the new "lingo" to further abuse her and manipulate counselor, pastor and the system. <https://saferelationshipsmagazine.com/is-batterer-intervention-programs-killing-women> Marital counseling and marriage books are appropriate for normal marital issues, such as different communication styles, different parenting styles, etc. – not abuse.
- xi. **Legal Counsel.** Refer her to legal counsel who is familiar with domestic abuse issues and who will support the victim if she chooses to divorce her abuser. A "marriage" to an abuser is not a marriage designed by God, who commands husbands to love and protect their wives. The religious marriage covenant has already been broken by the abuser, and a civil divorce is merely a civil legality that recognizes that the spiritual marriage covenant has already been broken.

*"...The Lord does not regard your offering any more or accept it with favor at your hand. Yet you ask, why does He reject it? Because the Lord was witness [to the covenant made at your marriage] between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously and to whom you were faithless. Yet she is your companion and the wife of your covenant [made by your marriage vows]." Malachi 2:13-14 AMPC*

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." Ephesians 5:25*

*" 'The man who hates and divorces his wife,' says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'does violence to the one he should protect' says the Lord Almighty." Malachi 2:16 NIV*

## **S - SUPPORT**

- xii. Ensure Safety and Safe Housing.** Make sure she and her children are safe. Offer temporary housing if she needs it. Offer her the support of families who have been trained in domestic abuse to walk alongside and support her and her family. (It is best that no one discloses her location, however). This is a great congregational ministry. If you don't have a domestic abuse congregational ministry or families that can house her, refer her to a local domestic violence organization.
  
- xiii. Check Ins, Continued Emotional Support, and Financial Assistance.** Check in with her from time to time and be patient. Your emotional support will be appreciated far more than you may realize. On average, a woman will leave her partner seven times before she leaves permanently. Since almost all women have been victims of financial abuse, she will likely be in need of financial assistance.

## **15. WAYS TO BECOME A SAFE CHURCH**

The church is called to be a safe haven for the oppressed and for the protection of its flock. The following are ways to become a safe haven for victims of domestic abuse.

- i. **Level 1 (One Star)**: COST: \$.
- a) Validation,
  - b) Listening,
  - c) providing referrals,
  - d) providing books and resources,
  - e) occasional sermons on abuse and toxic behavior,
  - f) providing brochures in the women's bathroom with referrals to DV organizations, police, Order of Protection courtroom, trauma-informed counselors, trauma-informed attorneys, etc.
  - g) Place a purple ribbon, one purple star, and "DV Safe Church" on your website, brochures, and door to denote that you are a church that supports victims of domestic abuse



DV Safe Church

- ii. **Level 2 (Two Stars)**: COST: \$\$\$. All of Level 1 plus:
- a) Establish an educated DV Care Team of volunteers to support victims to:
    - 1. attend court hearings
    - 2. move furniture when needed
    - 3. provide simple car and home repairs as needed
    - 4. provide mentors to victims and their children

5. provide temporary emergency housing when needed
- b) Educate pastors, elders, staff and DV Care Team on domestic abuse by sending them to training, including AbuseCare Workshop and 40 hour training by Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- c) host a Bible study and support group (see AbuseCare resources)
- d) provide escorts to car in parking lot
- e) prohibit abuser from entering grounds when an OP is in place
- f) Place a purple ribbon, two purple stars, and “DV Safe Church” on your website, brochures, and door to denote that you are a church that supports victims of domestic abuse



iii. **Level 3 (Three Stars)**: COST \$\$\$\$. All of Level 2 plus:

- a) Establish employee policies with time off for going to court (which is required by law), moving, dealing with abusers.
- b) Place a purple ribbon, three purple stars, and “DV Safe Church” on your website, brochures, and door to denote that you are a church that supports victims of domestic abuse



iv. **Level 4 (Four Stars)**: COST: \$\$\$\$\$. If you really want to support abuse victims, and be on the leading edge, all of Level 3 plus:

- a) establish an emergency relief fund for moving, legal bills, counseling, and medical bills caused by abuse
- b) Because abusers hate to pay child support, establish a scholarship fund so that your congregants' children can participate in worthy activities, attend church youth programs, and have assistance with college expenses
- c) Because abusers hate to pay maintenance, establish a group of local employers and staffing agencies to whom you can refer women who need jobs



DV Safe Church



## **16.TOP 13 MISTAKES CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS MAKE**

(see also <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/february/how-pastors-perceive-domestic-violence-lifeway-autumn-miles.html> )

The church can be either an incredible source of support, or an incredible source of pain for victims of abuse. Below are some of the most common mistakes made by clergy in addressing domestic abuse.

- i. **Fooled by Charm, Failure to Recognize Domestic Abuse as Evil.** Some clergy are fooled by the charming, outgoing, charismatic personality of the abuser who is often a leader at work or in the community, relishes the limelight and admiration, and wants to appear to others as a pillar of the community. Although clergy usually have good intentions, they often do not want to admit that someone in their congregation who appears “normal” is actually an instrument of evil. Often clergy do not recognize that the victim (and now the church and clergy) is in a very real spiritual battle of good v. evil. And many clergy do not want to admit that “evil” is the appropriate characteristic of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse “steals, kills and destroys” a family (see also John 10:10), it is perpetrated by one who often appears outwardly as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13,14), but is characterized by lies and destructiveness. (2 Tim. 3:1-8). Instead, clergy often do not recognize the abuse, which may be called an “incident”, “mistake”, “a strong personality”, or some watered-down version that does not recognize the evil nature of the intentional, systematic, multi-tactic destruction of one he should protect.

Cognitive dissonance plays a huge role when clergy and others fail to see an abuser as he really is. We all want to think the best of others that are in our social networks because it reflects on us. No one wants to believe that a congregant, relative, or friend is actually an abuser, because we would then either be seen as someone with a similar moral compass, or we would have to distance ourselves and “defriend” them (e.g. no one wants to be the friend of Jeffery Epstein when the truth comes to light). It is easier for people to discount the reports of abuse, so that they continue life as normal with the abuser.

- ii. **Fooled by False Apologies and Lies.** Some clergy are fooled by the abuser’s false apologies, promises of being “a changed man,” and lies. Abusers feign apologies in order to get their victims to return to the abusive marriage (and to get into the good graces of the pastors and church). These tactics have worked before to get her to come back, and abusers count on them working again. Abusers deny, justify, minimize the abuse. Abusers blame the victim and will falsely accuse her of any number of things to escape exposure. The most common accusations are that the victim left because she is having an affair (which is often what the abuser has been doing), that she has mental illness issues (while the abuser is

usually a Narcissist, Sociopath, or Psychopath), or that the victim is the perpetrator of abuse. Abusers will falsely accuse others of the things they are most guilty of themselves (a tactic called projection). Lying is a primary characteristic of any abuser. If an abuser is truly repentant, he will humble himself, and undertake the steps outlined above for imposing church discipline. (See Matt. 7:21, James 2:17). Abusers demand their own way and hate being told “no.” To test whether an abuser is repentant, clergy need to recognize the response of an abuser to the imposition of church discipline and saying “no” to his demands.

- iii. **Not Believing Her, Blaming Her.** Some clergy do not believe the victim or validate her. They ask blaming questions like “If it was so bad, why did you stay so long?” “Are you sure you aren’t exaggerating? He’s such a nice guy.” “That is crazy. He wouldn’t do something like that.” “What did you do to provoke him to do that?” “He would like you more if you lost 30 pounds and dressed nicer.”

If the clergy feels the abuse wasn’t “bad enough” to leave, the victim is blamed for leaving. However, if the abuse is outrageous and horrific (and it often is), the victim is not believed because it sounds too over-the-top, like a Hollywood movie. The victim is silenced and blamed – yet again. The blame for the abuser’s behavior is put on victim, rather than the abuser. The victim is further victimized by her clergy, resulting in emotional devastation to the victim. Many victims state that the lack of support and betrayal of their church is more painful than the actual abuse.

The victim, who likely has made Herculean efforts to be a faithful wife and keep her family intact, feels betrayed by her clergy as well as her husband. She will feel that she is the problem, rather than the abuser. She learns that the church is not a safe place, and no one believes her, so she must keep the abuse silent. She may be distraught, depressed, or suicidal because she thinks that her husband, her clergy, and her God are against her. She is completely alone.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/31/feature/the-epidemic-of-denial-about-sexual-abuse-in-the-evangelical-church/?utm\\_term=.5311ab9ca49f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/31/feature/the-epidemic-of-denial-about-sexual-abuse-in-the-evangelical-church/?utm_term=.5311ab9ca49f)

- iv. **Demanding Submission or Return to Abusive Relationship.** Some clergy tell a victim that for her husband to change, she must submit to her husband more, pray more, and be a better wife, thereby taking Ephesians 5:22 out of context. Some clergy tell a victim that her husband will be won over if she has a gentle and quiet spirit, taking 1 Peter 3 :1-6 out of context. Some clergy tell her that she must submit to his demands for sex, taking 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 out of context. This misguided advice puts the victim back in harm’s way, doesn’t hold the abuser accountable, and puts the blame back on the victim. In reality, he’s an abuser. And abusers abuse, regardless of what she does.

<https://factsandtrends.net/2018/10/25/5-myths-the-church-often-believes-about-domestic-violence/>

- v. **Criticism for Leaving Abuser, Advising a Life of Bondage to Abuse.** Some clergy criticize a victim for leaving, and tell her the only escape from a marriage for a Christian woman is (i) when the husband has committed adultery (taking Matt 5:32 and Matt 19:9 out of context) or (ii) if he is a non-Christian and wants a divorce (taking I Cor 7:12-15 out of context). However, the vast majority of abusers are sexually deviant and have repeated affairs (sexual immorality – not just adultery - is condemned throughout the Scripture), and are habitual pornography users (which Jesus condemns as adultery in Matthew 5:27-28). It is questionable whether a true follower of God can also be an unrepentant, continuous abuser. (1 John 3: 6-10; Galatians 5:19-20). It is more likely that he is using the church as a camouflage for appearances. Further, male abusers are unlikely to press for a divorce, and this advice sentences a woman to a lifetime of abuse.

Women who initiate divorce are willing to suffer a great deal financially to escape from the toxicity they are experiencing at home. Approximately 70% of divorces are initiated by women (<https://divorce.com/blog/who-initiates-divorce-more/>), even though they suffer a 45% decline in their standard of living after divorce compared to a 21% decline for men. Lin IF, Brown SL. The Economic Consequences of Gray Divorce for Women and Men. J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci. 2021 Nov 15;76(10):2073-2085. doi: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa157. PMID: 32906147; PMCID: PMC8599059 at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8599059/> In a 2013 survey, the most common “final straw” reasons for divorce were infidelity, domestic violence, and substance abuse, which are often interconnected. Scott SB, et al., Reasons for Divorce and Recollections of Premarital Intervention: Implications for Improving Relationship Education. Couple Family Psychol. 2013 Jun;2(2):131-145. doi: 10.1037/a0032025. PMID: 24818068; PMCID: PMC4012696 at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012696/>

- vi. **Failure to Recognize Abuse, Danger or Damage to Victims.** Some clergy do not realize that once a woman leaves, she is significantly more likely to be the victim of a homicide than if she stays in an abusive relationship, and therefore do not ensure she and her children are safe. Most congregations do not have a domestic violence congregational ministry. Therefore, the victim (who often has no access to funds) has to somehow find safe housing for herself and her children, while still getting the children to school, going to work and paying the bills. She also feels very alone without any supportive people from her congregation. She may not consider herself “abused” (most people only think of abuse as being hit) and therefore not even consider a local domestic shelter. (B. Roberts, *Not Under Bondage: Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery and Desertion*,

p26, Maschil Press 2008). Christian women, on average, stay in an abusive marriage 33% longer than non-Christian women. *Id.* at 42.

- vii. **Failure to Report.** Many clergy do not realize they are mandated reporters with a duty to immediately report suspected child abuse or neglect to DCFS and take mandated reporter training. (See 325 ILCS 5/4). Many clergy don't know what is considered child abuse. Some clergy do not know that reporting is required whether the children themselves are being abused, or if they are witnessing the abuse. Rather than reporting immediately to DCFS or law enforcement as required by law (325 ILCS 5/7), some clergy want to check with the abuser first, conduct their own investigation of the allegations, or decide whether to report by committee, rather than allow DCFS or law enforcement to do so. Some clergy will fail to report, or discourage a victim from reporting, because the report may tarnish the abuser's reputation or career. In a church investigation, abusers will deny, justify, or minimize the allegations, or falsely blame the victim, and the abuse doesn't get reported. Even during a DCFS investigation, abusers will deny or mitigate the abuse, which causes many DCFS reports to conclude the allegations are "unfounded." Some clergy may mistakenly think it "unChristian" to use secular laws to protect a victim and her children. Without a DCFS report indicating abuse, children are likely to be placed in the custody or joint custody of the abuser (who often ask for sole custody).
- viii. **Failure to Advise Order of Protection or Ensure a Safe Home.** Some clergy are unaware, and therefore do not advise, that the victim can get an emergency order of protection from the local court which has a number of remedies to protect her and the children. Without an order of protection, the victim will continue to be abused by the abuser. Even with an order of protection, the abuser will abuse the court system in an attempt to destroy the victim emotionally and financially. And even with an order of protection, many victims have been killed by their abusers.

In addition, without an order of protection, in order to have a safe place to live, the victim is forced between a number of untenable options. The following outline the options, along with the likely course of events that will follow:

- a) Leave her home with the children and live in a shelter, with family/friends, or rent an apartment (if she has the money). As a result, the children are forced away from their home, school, friends, and activities. In this case, the children will want to know why they are being taken from their home, and teenagers will demand to know. The victim will then have to respond to their inquiries and, if she tells the truth about the abuser, they will not want to believe her if the abuser is their father. Older children almost always turn against their mother for upsetting the home, unless they, themselves, have been the victim of severe abuse. The abuser is likely to accuse her of kidnapping the

children, because she has taken them without his permission. He may file a police report and make criminal charges against the victim. The abuser will demand to see them, and it is likely that he will stalk them, demand to know where she lives, and continue to harass and abuse her. If she rents an apartment or home, the victim will use precious funds that she will need.

- b) Leave her home without the children and live in a shelter, with family/friends, or rent an apartment (if she has the money). In this case, the children stay in the marital home, with school, friends, and activities intact. The children will demand to know why their mother has left, and the abuser will tell the children their mother abandoned them, had an affair, is crazy, has mental health issues, etc. and otherwise alienate her children from her. Older children almost always turn against their mother for upsetting the home unless they, themselves, have been the victim of severe abuse.
- c) Stay in the marital home with the abuser and children during separation and divorce. In this case, the abuse and parental alienation will escalate. This is not safe, but is sometimes the only option. Older children almost always turn against their mother for upsetting the home.

ix. **Discourage Police Involvement with Criminal Behavior.** Some clergy are unable to identify criminal behavior, do not ensure the safety of the victim and children, or do not advise her that she can and should report the incident(s) to the police. Some even discourage her from reporting crimes to the police. For example, Paige Patterson, while president at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, discouraged a student who had been raped from reporting it to the police and told her to instead just forgive him, in an attempt to “break down” the victim. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/may/paige-patterson-fired-southwestern-baptist-seminary-sbc.html>.

x. **Marital Counseling, Failure to Refer to Domestic Abuse Counselors.** Some clergy do not refer abuse victims to professionals who are specifically trained in counselling victims of domestic and sexual abuse. These clergy may be unaware that domestic and sexual abuse are unique (in the characteristics of abuse, the tactics of the abuser, the effect on the victim, and the dynamics of how it plays out) from the normal marital issues of relatively healthy individuals (*e.g.* different communication styles, financial worries, teenager issues, elderly parents, etc.). Some clergy attempt to engage in marital counseling with the couple, hoping for reconciliation, and are themselves manipulated by the unrepentant abuser, and end up siding with the abuser rather than the victim. As a result, the victim and her children are further abused and cannot heal, and the abuser continues to play games with the victim, the clergy, and the congregation. Universally, mental health professionals agree that marital

counseling is not recommended and is unethical for people in abusive relationships. (<https://www.thehotline.org/resources/should-i-go-to-couples-therapy-with-my-abusive-partner/>; <https://lifesavingdivorce.com/couplescounseling/>; <https://www.gottman.com/blog/v-is-for-violence/> ). Normal marital counseling assumes that both parties are at least partially responsible for the marital troubles. However, in abusive situations, the abuser is entirely responsible for his abusive behavior and sees no reason to change. Clergy and even counselors who are not especially trained in domestic abuse do more harm than good when attempting to conduct couples counseling in cases of abuse.

Some clergy are so eager to “save” a marriage that they ghost write love letters and letters of apology for the abuser to give to the victim, which leads to further confusion and inability to discern the true nature of the abuser.

- xi. Failure to Recognize Abusers Have Personality Disorders.** Some clergy are unaware that most abusers consist of people who have permanent, untreatable, incurable mental illness called Cluster B Personality Disorders consisting of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Anti-Social Personality Disorder (*i.e.* Psychopaths and Sociopaths), and Borderline Personality Disorder. (See elsewhere in this handbook for a more complete discussion.) Even if the abuser is not diagnosed, he will exhibit many qualities of the disorders. While psychiatrists diagnose the collection of intentional actions to harm others with these secular labels, the spiritual term is serious, ongoing, unrepentant evil.

Clergy often make the mistake of treating abusers as if they were emotionally healthy, fully-functioning individuals by making appeals to their “good nature,” “conscience,” sense of right and wrong, or empathy for the damage done to the victim in order to change the abuser’s behavior to align with healthy behavior. This appeal is fruitless. Abusers are characterized by a lack of conscience and lack of empathy. Unlike healthy individuals, who feel good when they help others, these disordered individuals get an emotional “buzz” from hurting others and being vindictive. In their game of cat and mouse, abusers feel especially pleased with themselves when they can get away with covertly hurting their victims while simultaneously looking good in front of others they wish to impress, and making their victim seem unreasonable.

- xii. Failure to Impose Church Discipline.** Some clergy do not follow Scriptural directions to impose congregational discipline on those who practice flagrant, unrepentant, continuous, and serious sin as set forth in Matthew 18:15-17, I Corinthians 5, Titus 3:10, and II Timothy 3. Scriptures require the congregational leaders to expel the unrepentant abuser from the congregation to (1) protect the victim, (2) stand on the side of righteousness, (3) show her children and others that the congregation stands on the side of the innocent and oppressed, (4) stop divisiveness caused by the abuser, and, (5) hopefully (although it rarely

happens), bring the abuser to a point where he humbles himself, recognizes his sin and destructiveness, confesses, repents, and is reunited with God and others.

Some clergy offer excuses for not following the Bible mandate of imposing church discipline, including: the church and/or its leaders may be sued by the abuser, the abuser won't change anyway, the church has a policy of allowing attendance for all, the church doesn't want to get involved, the church doesn't want to embarrass or expose the abuser, it's the job of police and courts not the church to discipline the abuser, the church must forgive the abuser and let him back in the congregation, the church doesn't believe the victim, the church trivializes or minimizes the abuse. None of these is an adequate reason for refusing to follow the Bible. (Whoever knows the right thing to do, yet fails to do it, is guilty of sin. James 4:17)

When clergy and congregational leaders do not impose church/synagogue discipline, evil wins. As Edmund Burke eloquently said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." When clergy and congregational leaders do nothing, the following chain of events inevitably results:

- a) The abuser will engage in a smear campaign of lies and false accusations against his victim to friends, family, congregants, country club members, her clients, etc. to vilify her, to cut off her network of emotional support (*i.e.* social alienation and ostracism), garner support, and make himself look innocent. The victim, on the other hand, usually takes the high road and does not discuss the abuse. Others will usually not verify the false accusations with her, and will engage in slander and spread the rumors. Because no one wants to believe that their charming, charismatic, pillar of the community, friend, family member, and fellow congregant is actually a pathological liar, this creates cognitive dissonance. To resolve the dissonance, many will believe the abuser, and turn against the innocent victim – leaving her completely alone and without emotional support. Women often report that being betrayed by their church family, friends, and family is worse than the betrayal and abuse of their spouse.
- b) The abuser will engage in a smear campaign of lies and false accusations against his victim to her children to vilify her, turn her children against her, cut off emotional support, destroy her relationship with her children (*i.e.* parental alienation), hurt the victim, garner support, and make himself look innocent. The victim, on the other hand, usually takes the high road and does not discuss the abuse or say negative things about their father. Because (1) children do not want to be discarded like their mother (2) children know who has the power and the money and, for survival, want to align with the one with power and money, and (3) children do not want to believe that their father is a liar, this creates

cognitive dissonance. To survive and resolve the dissonance, they will believe the abuser, and turn against the mother. This is emotionally devastating to the victim, and too many times leads to suicide.

- c) The abuser will make a pity play – he will play the victim to get sympathy (e.g. she abandoned me, she had an affair, she has mental health issues, she kidnapped the children) – and many (including clergy) will believe him and turn against the victim.
- d) He will cut off her income and all financial resources. He will take the funds in any marital account and start depositing his paychecks into his own individual account. If the victim is a stay-at-home mother, this is financial devastation. She has nowhere to go. He may also ruin her credit by taking out loans in her name and saddling her with debt.
- e) When the victim exposes the truth of the abuse, the abuser’s supporters will shun her and try to silence her. They will tell her it is “unChristian” or “unkind” to say negative things, she needs to forgive and forget, her abuser has moved on, and she needs to move on too. Of course, the abuser has moved on because he has no remorse for the destruction he left in his path, and he already had a replacement waiting in the wings. However, the victim is in a long-term healing process because of years of trauma and betrayal by her spouse, children, friends, family, and congregation – just as he planned.
- f) Nothing is more exciting for an abuser than getting away with wrongdoing while looking good to others. Because the abuser incurs no consequences for his behavior, and he is embraced by church leaders and those who believe his smear campaign and take pity on him, he will be emboldened, he will continue the abuse against his victim (when others aren’t looking) and he will continue the denial, justification, minimization and blaming the victim for his abuse. He will not repent - and he will not be able to reconcile with God or his spouse.
- g) Because there has been no congregational discipline, he will continue attending the same church/synagogue using the church/ synagogue as a camouflage to give him a cloak of respectability – while he continues his campaign of abuse against his spouse/ex-spouse when others aren’t looking. Others assume that he is a “good guy” – which is exactly the image he wants to project.
- h) Because the abuser continues to attend the same church/synagogue, the innocent victim is forced out because the church is not a safe place for her with her abuser there. Because of the betrayal she feels, she may lose her faith altogether, or she may reject organized church – either way, she will reject God and never step into a church again.



- i) If she does not lose her faith, she will still wrestle with the betrayal of her church. She must find another safe church/synagogue family and will often need to move out of her town and start a new life because she has been slandered and socially shunned by the faith community. The abuser will always be a direct threat to her. Therefore, seeing an abuser, particularly one who has incurred no consequences, often triggers PTSD symptoms in the victim – anxiety, panic attack, extreme fear, etc.
- xiii. **Non-Supportive of Separation and Divorce.** Often clergy do not support the victim if she needs to divorce her abuser, claiming that God does not allow divorce. This causes the victim to either (1) return to an abusive relationship and continue to be traumatized or (2) divorce and suffer the shame of feeling that God no longer loves her and her congregation is against her. Some clergy value the legal institution of an abusive marriage (which is not a biblical marriage at all) over the individual to the point that they tell the victim to stay in an abusive, and even lethal, relationship. Clearly, Jesus always put the value of the individual over institutions and traditions.

## **17.WHAT ABOUT DIVORCE?**

There is clearly a great deal of debate over divorce in Christian circles, including legitimate and illegitimate rationale for divorce. God's divine intention for marriage is found in Ephesians 5. Both spouses are called to support each other out of love for Christ. (v. 21 TPT) A husband is called to love his wife with the same sacrificial love that Christ had for his Church, and a wife is called to support and be devoted to her husband.(v. 22-33 TPT). (The Passion Translation is used here using the word "support" rather than "submit", due to the misinterpretation used to justify abuse by demanding submission to an abuser.) When God's design for marriage is demonstrated between a husband and wife, it is a little bit of heaven on this earthly planet. However, if what God designed for our good has been twisted into a prison of abuse, we would do well to consider the following arguments allowing for divorce in cases of abuse.

**i. Divorce Was Provided as Remedy for Sin to Mitigate the Damage of Evil and.**

Throughout the Old Testament, particularly in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God's law provided remedies for sin, when His original design for humans to love each other (Leviticus 19:18) and to love God (Deuteronomy 6:6) was violated. God's original plan for marriage was a masterpiece of harmonious lives, living in love and unity, and together serving God, each other, their family, and their community for the remainder of the lives of the couple. Divorce was permitted due to the Fall, a remedy for sin that the Father graciously allows to protect injured spouses in cases when sin has grievously shattered the union of husband and wife. Matthew 19:8. Forcing a woman to stay in an abusive marriage is sentencing her to spiritual, emotional, and sometimes physical death. While divorce is unfortunate and is always the result of sin, divorce itself is not always sinful, and not everyone in a divorce situation is guilty of sin. It is often the only option, and the lesser of two bad outcomes. *See also*

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/when-god-allows-divorce/>

John Calvin summarized that God "did not lay down a law about divorces, so as to give them the seal of his approbation, but as the wickedness of men could not be restrained in any other way, he applied what was the most admissible remedy." A popular Christian ministry eloquently stated: "Many of God's laws are concessions to contain the effects of sin, and we should be grateful that, in His grace, the Lord seeks to mitigate the damaging power of evil."

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/hard-hearts-and-divorce/>

- ii. An Abusive Marriage Cannot Serve Any Purpose of a Godly Marriage.** The primary purposes of a God-ordained marriage are to (1) provide a picture of His love for us in the love that a husband has for his wife (Eph. 5:21-33) (2) serve and glorify God together (Matt. 18:20), and (3) bring up children in the love of the Lord (Malachi 2:15; Deut. 6:6-7), (4) provide affection, love and companionship, and a co-laborer that we need for an abundant life (Amos 3:3; Eccl. 4:9-12) (5) provide physical enjoyment (Heb. 13:4; Song of Songs) and (6) for a husband to

provide physical, emotional, and spiritual protection over his wife and children (Malachi 2:16; Eph 5:25) See also <https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/gods-plan-for-marriage/embracing-gods-purposes-for-marriage/> .

An abusive “marriage” can never serve any of the purposes of a marriage designed by God. Indeed, an abusive “marriage” is not a marriage at all, but rather resembles a master and slave relationship.

- iii. **Abusers Do Not Intend to Enter Into a Godly Marriage.** Abusers never have any intention of entering into a God-ordained marriage. The wife of an abuser was deceived and defrauded into entering “marriage” by a fraud and a liar. The abuser had no intention of keeping the marriage vows of loving, honoring, or cherishing her, but rather always intended to control and abuse his power over her. This is clear because the abuse, in the vast majority of cases, starts immediately after the wedding when the “hook” is set. (See traits of a sociopath/psychopath herein). Unlike the healthy marriage in which a couple experiences the normal highs and lows of life, abuse is planned by the abuser from before the beginning of the marriage. Abusers are incapable of emotional intimacy, empathy, and loving others as defined in Scripture and in healthy relationships. They use others, including spouses, and they use the word “love” to meet their own selfish needs. Spouses, like others, are expendable to abusers. When spouses are no longer useful, they are discarded and replaced. Fraud, deception, coercion, error about the quality of a person, psychological disorders are all grounds for annulment in the Catholic church as well as grounds for annulment in most civil courts.  
<https://madisondiocese.org/documents/2016/9/Appendix%20A%20-%20Explanations%20of%20the%20Grounds%20of%20Nullity-1.pdf> (Annulment is a term used in Catholic law, as well as civil law, for a judgment that invalidates a so-called “marriage” from the beginning.)  
<https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/annulment#tab--what-does-the-tribunal-process-involve> ;
- iv. **Civil Divorce Recognizes that Marriage Relationship is Already Terminated.** A civil and legal relationship set up by a governmental authority should not be confused with a true marriage ordained by God. A civil/legal divorce is simply a recognition that the marriage relationship is already severed as a result of the abuser breaching his marriage covenant with his wife.
- v. **God divorced Israel.** In the Old Testament, God set forth a bilateral covenant with Israel in which God would extend his blessings to Israel if and only if Israel kept God’s commandments. If Israel did not keep its end of the covenant, God would withdraw His blessings. Dt. 28 – 30. After many years of God’s patience, God divorced Israel for her continuing, unrepentant sin against Him, her hardness of heart, and her spiritual unfaithfulness. Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8.

God did not sin when He divorced Israel, because He is incapable of sin. But His divorce acknowledged that the relationship had been severed by Israel because of its continuing, unrepentant, serious sin against Him. God's example stands for the notion that those who have been faithful to a spouse, but have suffered continuing, unrepentant, serious sin, may seek a divorce to acknowledge the termination of the relationship.

- vi. **God Commanded Divorce.** God himself has commanded divorce to separate God-loving people from evildoers to ensure His purposes for marriage and family. In Ezra 10:10-11, Ezra commanded 113 Israelite husbands to divorce their pagan wives. Having just returned to Israel from exile in Babylon as a result of marrying pagans, which, in turn, resulted in turning their backs on God, Israel was under strict orders not to marry pagans. God did not sin when he commanded the Israelites to divorce evil people who practiced worshipping idols, sexual immorality, and child sacrifice. Divorce is not necessarily sin, but it is always the result of sin. *See also* Malachi 2:11-12
  
- vii. **Proper Context of "God hates Divorce" from Malachi.** Malachi 2:16 has long been used to keep women in bondage to an abuser, using the slogan "God hates divorce." However, other translations state:

*And this is another thing you do: you cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because He no longer respects your offerings or receives them gladly from your hands. Yet you ask, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have acted treacherously against her, though she was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant. Didn't the one God make us with a remnant of His life-breath? And what does the One seek? A godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously against the wife of your youth. Malachi 2:13-15 HCSB*

*" 'The man who hates and divorces his wife,' says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'does violence to the one he should protect' says the Lord Almighty." Malachi 2:16 NIV*

Those who use this to keep women in abusive relationships ignore the entire context from verse 10 to 16. This passage states that God is witness to the marriage vows, He is witness to how a man treats his wife, He is witness to a man's spiritual and physical unfaithfulness and treachery to his wife. Therefore, when a man deals with his wife treacherously (*i.e.* deceitfully and underhandedly), and divorces her because he hates her, he does violence to his wife because he is charged with protecting her. The passage ends with a command to men to be faithful to their wives. Based on the context, we know this means being spiritually faithful (that is, to be kind and of one spirit) and physically faithful (that is, to refrain from sexual sin).

Other translations condemn when a man acts “deceitfully,” “treacherously,” “unjustly,” “unfaithfully,” “violently,” and “cruelly” toward his wife.

In short, it is a passage focused on admonishing men to treat their wives well, not treacherously. It does not prohibit all divorce, but it does condemn a man who divorces his wife treacherously or out of hatred. It is important to bring this passage into context by looking at the Bible in its entirety and all the other things that God hates which make divorce an unfortunate necessity. The following are just a few passages that give us insight into the heart of God:

*“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” Proverbs 6:16-19*

*“The Lord abhors dishonest scales.” Proverbs 11:1*

*“The Lord detests men of perverse heart.” Proverbs 11:20*

*“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21*

*“For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Ephesians 5:11*

It is important to glean the proper lesson from this passage in Malachi and not drop pithy quotes out of context. The entire book of Malachi is God warning about hard, unloving hearts. To be sure, God does not like divorce. God doesn't like divorce for the same reasons no one else likes divorce: because divorce is the result of horrific sin that rips apart a family, is wounding and painful, leaves emotional scars that may never heal, and leaves people financially devastated, especially for the women and children. But more importantly, God hates the cruelty, treachery, deceitfulness, violence, unfaithfulness, injustice, pride, haughtiness, lies, scheming, dissension, hate, perverseness, sexual immorality, idolatry, jealousy, rage, selfishness, envy, impurity, immorality, greed, and other sin that are the very characteristics of an abuser and are the very reasons for divorce from a person who chooses to abuse. So, he tells men in this passage in Malachi to man up, be a godly man, and start treating their wives as they should.

- viii. **Have Nothing to do With Them**. Scripture has many references to separating ourselves from evil (and abusers are evil) and those who profess to be believers but persist in serious, unrepentant sin.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul provides a perfect description of abusers who profess to be Christians: *“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* Paul tells Christians to *“have nothing to do with them.”* (v.5) He makes no exceptions for wives. (See also 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18 for instructions to Christians to remove evil people from their lives and their congregation.)

Indeed, Paul does not instruct *“Have nothing to do with them, except for their wives, who must stay with an evil man who is intent on destroying her, her family, her spirit, and her body.”* Such an instruction would be against the very nature of God, who has compassion on the weak and powerless (Proverbs 31:8-9), who came to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8) and give us an abundant life, unlike the nature of Satan and his minions (including abusers), who have come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

- ix. **Flee from Evil and Danger**. Many references in the Bible command us to flee from evil and danger. (*e.g.* Proverbs 22:3; Prov 22:10). In numerous Psalms, David flees from his oppressors and prays for the Lord’s deliverance from his enemies. (Psalm 28, 35, 36, 37, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 69, 71, 73, 120, 140, 141). The Lord’s prayer asks God to *“deliver us from evil.”* (Matthew 6:9-13). Jesus commands, *“When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.”* (Matthew 10:23). Taking refuge and fleeing from the danger and evil of domestic abuse is Scriptural.
- x. **Separate from Evil**. In 2 Corinthians, Paul warns Christians against being married to an unbeliever and those who are wicked: *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [i.e. Satan]? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. . .”* 2 Cor. 6:14-17. Abusers are predators who prey on kind, giving, and forgiving Christian women, who should not be married to them in the first place and need to separate themselves from their abusers.

- xi. **Jesus Settles Dispute Between the House of Hillel and House of Shammai.** In Matthew 19, Jesus was asked to solve an ongoing first century philosophical dispute among the Pharisees between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 regarding the definition of “indecent” as a valid cause for divorce. The House of Hillel held that under Deuteronomy 24, divorce for any reason whatsoever was allowed, even for trivial reasons, such as a wife burning the toast, while the House of Shammai claimed that divorce was commanded only for adultery (Greek word *moicheia*).

Jesus rebuked both Hillel and Shammai in his answer, reminding them that God’s design for marriage was for a man and woman to live together as one in unity. Jesus rebuked them for looking for approved reasons to divorce, rather than focusing on the purpose of marriage. He stated that Deuteronomy 24 did not *command* divorce on either grounds, but *allowed* it because of men’s hard-heartedness to their wives. That is, divorce was allowed as a remedy for the sin of hard hearts. However, he stated that divorce was not God’s ideal. He further condemned Hillel’s claim that any trivial reason for divorce is valid, and condemned Shammai’s claim that divorce was commanded for adultery, as the only valid ground for divorce.

Addressing the specific translation of the word “indecent” in Deuteronomy, and using the Greek word *porneia*, Jesus stated that sexual immorality (*i.e.* *porneia*), which can include all forms of illicit sex, including sodomy, incest, prostitution, bestiality, marital rape, pornography, defiling one’s spouse or children by subjecting them to viewing pornography or recreating it, is a legitimate ground for divorce, as is adultery (Greek word *moicheia*).

However, Jesus did not condemn other grounds of divorce found in Exodus 21:10-11 that were not up for debate. Under Moses’ law, a man was responsible for his wife’s food, clothing, and other marital rights of peace, permanence and security. In Jewish court cases that arose from this passage, wives were granted divorce for cruelty, disrespect, abuse, humiliation, failure to provide food and clothing, and sexual neglect. We incorrectly interpret Jesus’ answer as allowing divorce only for adultery, when, in fact, Jesus recognized several reasons for divorce and encouraged us to focus on the divine purpose of marriage. (B. Roberts, *Not Under Bondage: Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery and Desertion*, pp. 79-88, Maschil Press 2008)

- xii. **Abuse, Neglect, Desertion, Hardness of Heart.** Many Christians cite Paul’s teachings as forbidding divorce except in cases of abandonment when a non-Christian spouse leaves. This is a misunderstanding of Paul’s teachings. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul states, “And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. . . . But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace” (1 Corinthians 7:13, 15).

Paul allowed for divorce in cases where a spouse, because of his abuse, abandonment, or desertion, causes a separation. Paul used the Greek word *suneudokeo* for the word “willing,” meaning in agreement with, consenting in a hearty way, being of one mind, enthusiastically agree to cooperate with a partner to reach solutions and achieve the things both have committed to do together. He uses the Greek word *oikos* for “live,” meaning to dwell comfortably together, as when God dwells in us. Paul used the Greek word *apistos* for “unbeliever,” meaning a person who is not to be trusted and is without trust in God. Paul used the Greek word *chorizo* for “leaves,” meaning to separate or divide, both physically and in terms of opinion or spirit. Paul uses the Greek word *eirene* for “peace,” meaning harmony, security, safety, prosperity, and an exemption from rage and havoc. Finally, Paul used the Greek word *douloo* for “bound,” meaning make a slave of, reduce to bondage, or give oneself wholly to another’s needs and service.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Paul states that if a Christian is married to an unbeliever who, though not a Christ-follower, is of one mind with her, is in agreement with her, respects and loves her, and is wholeheartedly committed to cooperate in the marriage, raising godly children and living in peace and harmony with her, then divorce is not called for. However, Paul recognizes that sometimes a spouse rejects God and God’s commands to love the other spouse. He understands that in certain cases a spouse’s sin is so serious that it causes a deep division, resulting in rage and havoc and a lack of harmony, security, safety, prosperity, or financial security. In that case, the nonoffending spouse is then essentially treated as a slave in bondage to the offending spouse.

Paul is stating that if a sinful person has caused a division in the marriage relationship such that there is no longer peace between the husband and wife, and there is instead a deep division, the nonoffending spouse is no longer obligated to be in bondage in a marriage to the offending spouse. The fault is not with the one who divorces but the one who because of his sins causes the separation in the first place, resulting in the nonoffending party seeking to divorce. Paul assumes that an unbeliever causes the separation because a true Christ-follower who is filled with the Holy Spirit would repent, stop his sinful ways, and seek reconciliation. Thus, whether a spouse claims to be a Christian or not, when his actions show that he has rejected God and cause a deep division with his spouse, she is not required to stay in an abusive marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).

We cannot interpret this passage to mean that if an abusive person still wants to stay married, the spouse must stay in the abusive marriage. An abuser seldom wants a divorce. A toxic person likes being in power and control over his spouse,

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<sup>1</sup> Greek references and definitions are from the Blue Letter Bible, including Strong’s Definitions and Thayer’s Greek Lexicon at <https://www.blueletterbible.org>.



and he doesn't want to part with what he perceives as *his* money. However, an abuser is unwilling to live in peace with his wife, cooperate, or do anything that would make a marriage work. Paul does not require us to stay in these toxic marriages, even if the abuser wants to stay married (See also B. Roberts, *Not Under Bondage: Biblical Divorce for Abuse, Adultery and Desertion*, pp. 37-44, Maschil Press 2008)

While some abusers claim to be Christians, and therefore claim 1 Corinthians 7 would not apply to them (and thus arguing that the victim has no justifiable reason for divorce), it is doubtful that any abuser who continues to abuse a spouse and/or children without repentance is actually a true Christian. 1 John 3:6-10 is clear in how to recognize children of God compared to children of Satan: children of God do not continue in unrepentant sin, while children of Satan do not do what is right and do not love their brother and sister.

**xiii. Advice for Normal Marriages is Not Applicable to Abusive Marriages.** In summary, the majority of the Bible's direction for marriage is much like most Christian marriage books now on the market. Most of the Bible's instructions on marriage, like most Christian marriage books, are directed toward normal, Christian people who have the Holy Spirit in them, who are committed to the good of their spouse, and who experience the normal ups and downs of marriage. They are full of great advice for generally decent, good-hearted people. They don't recommend divorce as a first step. They recommend kindness, faithfulness, turning one's heart towards their spouse, protection, and unity of spirit that comes with a Christian marriage and two hearts who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

But most of the Bible's instructions on marriage, just like most Christian marriage books, are not applicable towards women living with someone who is intentionally destroying her, who has no repentance, and who is controlled by Satan (regardless of whether he sits in a church pew.) For those situations, the Bible warns us to flee from evil and separate ourselves from evil people, and books which are specially written to address abusive relationships tell us the same thing.

## **18. WHAT DOES BIBLICAL REDEMPTION LOOK LIKE? WHAT DOES IT NOT LOOK LIKE?**

### **i. If the Abuser's Heart is Changed: God's Redemption Looks Like 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Daniel 4:28-37, or 2 Chronicles 33.**

The Bible records only three truly evil people whose hearts were changed: Paul, King Nebuchadnezzar, and King Manasseh. Each one was subjected to severe consequences prior to humbling themselves. In the extremely rare case that an abuser's heart changes, the abuser will have a similar testimony to that of Paul as found in the first chapter of 1 Timothy, and he will have the following characteristics:

*"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:12-17*

#### **Characteristics of a Changed Heart:**

- He confesses his wrongdoing for everyone to hear
- He gives all credit to Jesus for saving him
- He points others to God, not himself
- His actions are 180 degrees opposite, from selfish and violent to loving and gentle
- His attitude is changed to humble and grateful and giving God all honor
- He admits his prideful attitude of the past
- The fruit of the Spirit is abundant in his life
- Change has come about because God imposed a huge consequence on him (blindness or insanity)
- The change is permanent, because it is from God
- It may be too late to save his marriage (that is between her and God and the abuser), but God can change hearts
- The humbling of a hard heart only comes after severe consequences

### **ii. If the Abuser's Heart Doesn't Change:**

## **God's Redemption Looks Like the Exodus**

In the vast majority of cases, an abuser's heart will not change. God will perform a rescue mission, and she will need to leave her abuser and head toward the Promised Land that God has promised for his children.

### **Characteristics of God's Redemption and Rescue Mission**

- Abuser's heart is like Pharaoh: evil, proud, without conscience, without empathy, unconcerned for the well-being of others except to the extent that others can serve him, becomes harder over time, unrepentant
- Victim's request for reasonable treatment is denied, and abuse escalates
- The abuser will come after her when she leaves – after all, he feels he owns her and doesn't want to lose his free labor (or pay for a divorce)
- God performs a rescue mission to take victim away from evil – He draws a definitive line against evil for His people
- The rescue mission is messy, hard, dangerous, and takes a long time
- The rescuer (Moses) has to remind her to look forward to God's promises and not to doubt Him, because she is constantly looking back wondering if she is doing the right thing and is nearly paralyzed with fear of the unknown
- God takes what others meant for evil and uses it for good
- God uses the very weapons used by abusers against them
- God does not require or even request her to reconcile with the abuser, rather, He helps her escape
- God restores her to a place that is even better from where she started
- God will send a Moses, or lead her Himself

### **iii. When the Abuser's Heart is Not Changed but The Wife Returns: What God's Redemption Doesn't Look Like: Judges 19, 20**

No one should return to an abuser until after the abuser has shown true repentance for an extended period of time. Sweet talking and promises by an abuser should not be trusted. Otherwise, the abuse will escalate, and will be worse than before.

### **Characteristics of the Return to Escalating Abuse**

- The abuser is like the Levite: he's a liar, deceiver, controlling, blames others for the huge problem that he creates, doesn't protect her, doesn't care about her, and doesn't care about others, no conscience, plays the pity card and self-righteous card, creates conflict, wants to be right and self-righteous in front of others regardless of the cost

- The modern-day abused wife is like the concubine: a woman without marital rights and only used for the gratification of the husband. The modern-day abused wife is a “wife” in name only.
- The abused wife leaves
- Abuser tracks her down, comes after her, and demands she return
- Abuser convinces her and her family she should go back to him
- Abuser eats and drinks and is merry, he has no remorse, no apology, no repentance
- Abused wife caves under the pressure and returns
- Abuser demands that she come home immediately, rather than wait for a safe time
- There is no repentance in his heart, no admission of wrongdoing, no change of attitude
- When the abused wife returns (trusting that he has changed since he came all the way to persuade her to return, so she mistakenly assumes that he cares for her), the abuse is worse than before
- His true colors are shown under adversity (he cares only for himself and his well-being, not at all for her or her well-being)
- He intentionally puts her in harm’s way, knowing the horrific consequences, and accepts no responsibility
- He lies and blames others for his wrongdoing
- He starts division among people
- He plays the victim, even though he is responsible for the loss of his wife
- She dies an emotional death and perhaps a physical death because of the continued abuse

## **19. WHAT ABOUT FORGIVENESS?**

Forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood words in the Christian lexicon. The following sheds some light on the meaning of biblical forgiveness in the context of domestic abuse.

- i. **Human forgiveness does not mean the victim must now trust the perpetrator, restore the relationship, forget the wrong, or perceive the wrong acts to be acceptable.**
- ii. **Human forgiveness means that the victim allows God to do the avenging, and he or she gives up his or her right to get revenge for the wrong.** “Repay no one evil for evil. . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12:17, 19.
- iii. **Forgiveness does not mean that the victim should not seek justice from the civil and criminal courts, which have been established to further justice.** Romans 13:1-7 clearly points out that governments and laws were instituted to protect people, and that we should place ourselves under its authority. Forgiving someone does not mean that laws do not apply to them, nor does it mean that a victim should not seek legal protection.
- iv. **Forgiveness requires that the victim take a full inventory of the wrongful acts that he or she is forgiving.** Like a bank that chooses to forgive a loan and not seek repayment of a debt, a victim needs to take assessment of the total amount that is forgiven.
- v. **If a relationship is to be restored, there must be true repentance first.** Luke 17:3-5 requires forgiveness if the offender repents. God requires repentance before He comes into a relationship with us. He does not expect more from us than He Himself is willing to do.
- vi. **Sometimes sin is so egregious that a restored relationship is not possible.** Sin always has consequences, even when there is forgiveness. God forgave David for his abuse of power against Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, but his sin had far-reaching consequences for the rest of his life, and the lives of his descendants. (See 2 Samuel 12).
- vii. **God requires repentance before He forgives.** That is the message throughout the Bible. When hearts are truly repentant and turn to God, God’s forgiveness includes a restored relationship with Him. (1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron. 6:37; Prov. 1:23; Isaiah 30:15; Isaiah 59:20; Jer. 15:19; Jer. 18:18; Ezekiel 18:30, 32; Ezekiel 33:12; Hosea 14:1; Matt. 3:2,8,11; Matt. 4:17; Matt.11:20-21; Luke 5:32; Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5; etc.)

- viii. **Forgiveness cannot be demanded by the abuser.** His job is to make things right, without demands or strings attached. If he “demands” forgiveness, he has not repented.
- ix. **Forgiveness takes time and the Holy Spirit.**

## **20. WHAT ABOUT A FALSE ACCUSATION OF ABUSE?**

Pastors are often very concerned that a person coming to them with an accusation of domestic abuse is not being truthful. Below are some things to consider as we ask for the Lord's discernment in these situations.

- i. **The Spirit of Truth.** We have the Holy Spirit for discernment. We should earnestly inform ourselves about domestic abuse as much as we humanly can, and seek truth from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.
- ii. **94%-98% of Claims of Abuse are True.** Most researcher state that false claims make up only 2-6% of claims. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21164210>; <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/false-sexual-violence-assault-rape-allegations-truth-rare-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-a8077876.html> Therefore, the claims are true 94-98% of the time. It is fair to presume that the woman is making a true claim. However, it is prudent to be mindful of things that arise that would damage the credibility of claims.
- iii. **Domestic Abuse is the Most Prevalent, Yet Under-Reported Crime.** Domestic abuse is by far the most prevalent crime, but it is also the most under-reported crime. (<https://www.dailyherald.com/news/20190902/how-childrens-advocacy-centers-help-reduce-trauma-for-child-abuse-victims>). It's far more likely that there are cases of unreported domestic and sexual abuse than there are cases of overreported abuse.
  - In previous years, RAINN (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network) reported that out of 1000 rapes, only 360 are ever reported, and only 4 result in incarceration, resulting in 99.6% of rapists going free. However, more recent figures indicate that out of 1000 rapes, only 310 are reported, resulting in 25 incarcerations (2.5%). <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>. However, in the context of a marriage or long term relationship, only 60 ( 6% ) of sexual assaults are reported. <https://www.nij.gov/journals/256/Pages/sexual-assault.aspx>.
  - The primary reason for not reporting a rape is the fear of retaliation.
  - With respect to childhood sexual abuse, approximately 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will experience childhood sexual abuse, but only 1.8 in 1,000 children are ever reported. [www.amjudges.org/publications/courtrv/cr35-1/CR35-1McDonald.pdf](http://www.amjudges.org/publications/courtrv/cr35-1/CR35-1McDonald.pdf)  
Abusive parents are far more likely to seek sole custody of children compared to non-violent parents, and are successful 70% of the time. [https://www.violencefreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CCADV-CCASA-Fact-Sheet-on-Myth-of-False-Allegations\\_updated-2.21.14.pdf](https://www.violencefreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/CCADV-CCASA-Fact-Sheet-on-Myth-of-False-Allegations_updated-2.21.14.pdf)
  - A Safe Place is successful in obtaining an order of protection for its clients in approximately 95% of the cases.

- False rape claims have similar characteristics: they are usually bizarre forms of cruelty that don't make sense, and they are usually made by people with a criminal history, or a specific type of mental illness known as factitious disorder (related to Munchausen syndrome) that compels them to say they've been assaulted in dramatic ways. <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2018/9/18/17874504/kavanaugh-assault-allegation-christine-blasey-ford>

iv. **Consider the totality of the circumstances:**

- A woman's identity is usually wrapped up in her relationships as wife, mother, friend, sister, etc. They are inclined to stay in abuse, and only leave when it comes to a point that is unsustainable or their children are affected.
- Women rarely want to leave a man who loves them and is a good father and a good husband – what would be the motive?
- Women in abusive relationships are also victims of financial abuse in 99% of cases. Yet, they are willing to live in poverty or far lower standard of living to get out of abuse. She has nothing to gain financially.
- Does she have a history of lying? A criminal record? Making up factitious stories of victimization?
- Does she have a history as a responsible godly woman? Is she sweet, kind, giving, forgiving, lovely, generous, without guile, loyal? These are the traits that abusers look for.
- What are his characteristics that he shows to the outside? Abusers are often friendly, outgoing, charismatic, well-dressed, attractive, arrogant, prideful, in positions of leadership, wealthy, very concerned about appearances, generous/volunteer when it makes them look good to others. They have Jekyll/Hyde personalities – one way to others, and completely different to their spouse.
- It is better to err on the side of supporting a victim than supporting an abuser.



## **21. HEALING**

The church can support a victim's efforts of healing. Below are some important things about healing to keep in mind.

- i. **The Response From A Pastor and Church is Important to The Healing Process.** Many people view pastors and church leaders as the mouthpieces of God. A pastor will have the most influential voice in the room. Elders, Deacons, and other church leaders also have voices of influence. Speak words of healing. Refer to sections 15 and 16 for practical steps to take.
- ii. **Healing From Abuse Takes Time.** Professionals in the field estimate that healing takes approximately half the time of the actual abuse. So, if a person was in an abusive relationship for 10 years, it may take 5 years to heal from it.
- iii. **Healing Takes Intentional Effort.** Healing doesn't happen if a person does not make the intentional effort to do so. Therefore, healing also takes time spent with professionals who are familiar with domestic and sexual abuse. Clergy can refer her to domestic abuse professionals and support her in her efforts.
- iv. **Healing Takes No Contact With Abuser and His Supporters.** Healing takes being removed from the abuser and his supporters, and having no contact with them. (Prov. 4:14-16; Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:5; 1 Cor 5:11; Titus 3:10). Contact with an abuser will always result in the abuser continuing to abuse and manipulate. Abusers are vindictive after a spouse leaves, and encourage their supporters to do the same. Do not encourage her to "reconcile" or have a relationship with the abuser or his supporters. Some contact may be necessary because of children, but contact should be limited as much as possible.
- v. **Healing Takes Love from Good People.** Healing takes being with supportive, loving people who see the good in her and affirm her. We heal in community with healthy, loving, compassionate people. Love truly heals.
- vi. **Healing Takes Using our Spiritual Armor in the Spiritual Battle.** Make no mistake, domestic abuse is first and foremost a spiritual battle. Satan wants to render God's people useless and ineffective. His mission is to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). In domestic abuse, Satan has sent in a Trojan horse to destroy a family from the inside. God's mission is to give abundant life and partner with us in bringing His kingdom to earth (John 10:10; Matthew 6:10). We need a combat mindset and the armor of God to heal and win the battle.
  - God's Truth
  - God's Righteousness
  - God's Peace, and Feet That are Willing to Move When Called.
  - God's Faithfulness.

- God's Salvation.
- God's Spirit and Word
- Powerful Prayers for Boldness and Action

vii. **Healing Takes Rejecting the Lies of Satan and Accepting God's Truth.** When people recognize, reject and replace lies with Truth, they will recognize, remove and recover from abuse. I call these the 3 Rs of Truth, and the 3 Rs of Abuse.

Healing occurs when the victim rejects the lies of Satan, the abuser, his minions, and all others who have rejected her, and replaces them with the truth of God's perspective. (*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Rom. 12:2) There may be hundreds of lies that need rejecting and replacing, thus, healing takes time. God's Truth is the healing that sets victims of abuse free from the bondage of Satan. (*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* John 8:31-32) For example, the abuser has told her for years that she is worthless and unlovable and a horrible mother. But God says she is a beloved daughter of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 John 3:1), that she is wondrously and wonderfully made in His own image (Psalm 139:14), and that she is a good mother who loves her children very much like He loves us (John 3:16). It takes time to reject Satan's lies and accept this truth.

Below are some of the lies that a victim must recognize, reject, and replace with Truth:

a. Lies that she believes about God.

God doesn't care about me. God is distant. God made a mistake when he made me. God sent abuse to punish me. God sent abuse to teach me a lesson. God's promises don't apply to me. God must hate me – everyone else has such a great life, but me.

b. Lies that she believed about herself.

I'm not good enough for someone to love me. I'm not pretty enough or smart enough. Everyone else does amazing things but not me. I am unlovable. I don't think there is anyone out there for me.

c. Lies that kept her from recognizing abuse.

Abuse is just hitting. He had a rough childhood. He had a stressful day.

d. Lies that got her into abuse.

It's okay if I choose a spouse that needs work – no one is perfect. I can choose a spouse who is not sincerely following Christ – after all, he claims

to be a Christian. I can love someone enough to change them. Things are moving so fast – he must really love me! If I don't get married to him, no one else will want me and I will be single and lonely my whole life. I can tell something is not right, but I might as well go through with the wedding – we've come this far. Those little things, like being contemptuous to his mother and speaking down to the waitress, they don't mean anything – I'm sure he will always treat me well.

e. Lies that kept her in abuse.

If I pray hard enough, God will zap him into being good. If we go to counseling, that will solve everything. If I just keep being really nice, he will return the kindness and be nice to me. Prince Charming will come back, just like when we were dating. Divorce is a sin and God will be mad at me. If I am thinner or prettier or give him more sex, he will be nicer. Maybe it is all my fault – I can't seem to do anything right. I need to forgive and forget and stay in my marriage – real love means staying in a marriage no matter what. My spouse is a decent person, he just had a bad childhood and he's under a lot of stress. Everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God, I'm a sinner too and his sins are no worse than mine. He says he's sorry and he's so sweet after something happens – so there's hope he will change. If I just explain it one more time, he will understand and change. I can't leave, I will be a bag lady. I can't leave, everyone will turn against me. I can't leave, I have to stay to protect my children. It's better to be together than to have the kids be brought up on a broken home.

f. Lies that keep her from healing.

I should have seen it coming. I should have left years ago. I should have waited to leave. If I had tried harder, the marriage would have worked. I should be nice and try to be his friend – after all, that's the Christian thing to do. I expect him to act like a decent human being and feel guilty for what he put me through. His mean words still hurt me. I am what my abuser and his friends say about me – I'm a loser. I can co-parent with my abuser – it's best for the kids to have a coordinated mom and dad. I will always live in fear, doubt, and anxiety. My mind seems so confused and scrambled, I don't even remember who I was – I will never get back to who I once was. Everything triggers me – I will never get back to normal. I don't have a purpose on this earth. I can go back to the same hectic lifestyle. I'm offended at everything. This is just between me and my husband – there is no spiritual battle here.

- viii. **Healing Takes Believing Who God Says You Are.** When we believe that God is who He says He is, and He will do what He says He will do, we heal. God's opinion of us is the only one that matters. He is our identity. When we look at ourselves the way that God sees us – we are healed. This is how God sees each one of us:
- He delights in you, rejoices over you, sings songs over you, and gives you His peace (Zephaniah 3:17).
  - His banner over you is love (Song of Songs 2:4). He has called you by name; you are His (Isaiah 43:1).
  - He is always with you; therefore, He wants you to be strong and courageous, not timid or fearful (Joshua 1:9; 2 Timothy 1:7).
  - You are His workmanship and His masterpiece! He made you uniquely for a job no one else can do. He has equipped you for doing good works here on earth that He already had planned in advance of your arrival (Ephesians 2:10).
  - No matter what happens, no one and no circumstance can derail God's plans for your life! You are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37–39).
  - He wants you to have an abundant life (John 10:10)—not mediocre, not ordinary, not just getting by, not just surviving. He desires you to have a life that is full of miracles, filled with His Presence and His Spirit, overflowing, joyful, and full of blessings, good things, and good people.
  - His Presence and Spirit are always with you, guiding you with His right hand (Psalm 139:7).
  - He created you wondrously and wonderfully (Psalm 139:13–16).
  - He thinks about you all the time (Psalm 139:17–18).
  - Every one of your days has been ordained before you were even born (Psalm 139:16). Nothing is ever a surprise to God. He has already equipped you with everything you need to conquer your earthly trials.
  - We are Children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 John 3:1–2); therefore, we are royalty! Princesses and Princes! Let us hold our heads high, walk with confidence, take our rightful place beside our Father, and come boldly to His throne to receive His grace and mercy (Hebrews 4:16).
  - Our heavenly Father is the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5); therefore, we are lionesses and lions! Let us wear that title fearlessly!
  - Jesus came not just to forgive our sins but to rid us of shame, guilt, despair, mourning, disgrace, inadequacy, injustice, broken hearts, oppression, traumatic pasts, and broken lives (Isaiah 61). Therefore, we must go boldly to the cross and leave these at the feet of Jesus. Do not pick them back up and take them with you.

- You have the same power in you that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 6:10–11).
- You have the authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, and drive out demons (Matthew 10:1, 8; Luke 9:1–2; Mark 6:7, 13). We command under the authority of Jesus.
- God will give you the right words and the right time (Matthew 10:19, 20).

ix. **Healing Takes Being In God’s Word**. Being in God’s Word, and reading it from a domestic abuse perspective, brings God’s Truth, God’s perspective, and God’s healing. We are in a spiritual battle of a lifetime. We need to know God’s Word in and out. It is where we find the Truth to combat Satan’s lies. Ask the Holy Spirit, our Teacher, to guide and reveal God through the pages of Scripture.

x. **Other Techniques for Healing**

- a) Journaling
- b) Telling or writing the story (but only to safe people who have earned the privilege to hear it).
- c) Volunteer. It takes the focus off yourself when we help others.
- d) Practice a Healthy Lifestyle – exercise, get enough sleep, eat healthy foods and drinks, don’t over indulge in unhealthy substances or practices.
- e) Get back to Nature – it’s God’s own cathedral.
- f) Build community with good people.
- g) Join a Spirit-filled Bible study. We learn and heal in community.
- h) Adopt a pet – God made them for our healing. If you adopt a rescue animal, you will heal each other.
- i) Education on domestic abuse.
- j) Creativity – music, art, pottery, cooking, writing, making things, performing, and the like are all healing. Remember the things you loved to do, or take up a new hobby!
- k) Cultivate an attitude of gratitude – it is the key to joy.
- l) Establish healthy boundaries in all relationships.
- m) Laughter – it really is the best medicine!

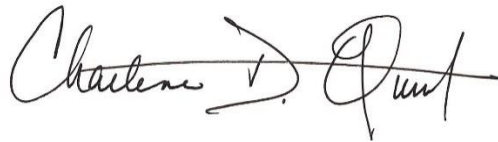
- n) Worship music and praise – it opens up a portal to heaven and sends the Enemy packing.
- o) Powerful prayers – to overcome doubts, to bless your home and children, to expel the Enemy and his minions.
- p) Take thoughts captive. Refuse to let negative thoughts enter, replace them with God’s truth.
- q) Refuse to be a victim. Have a victorious mindset.
- r) Refuse to be offended. Offense is the bait of the Enemy. Satan would love that we spend the rest of our lives offended with a victim identity, so we are ineffective in bringing God’s kingdom to earth.
- s) With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, write your Mission, Vision and Values statements. Put them where you see them every day. Ask God to make them a reality.
- t) Read or listen to good books.
- u) Create a safe, peaceful, loving new home. Redecorate. Replace the things that have bad memories.
- v) Make steps toward financial security.
- w) Take a class. There is so much to learn!
- x) NO CONTACT with an abuser and his supporters.
- y) Travel. God made a big world to explore!
- z) Help others when you are healed and redeemed. Your testimony is their lifeline and escape plan. “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.” Psalm 107:2

**xi. Healing Must Be the Top Priority.** If a victim doesn’t take the effort to heal from abuse, and merely stuffs it away or tries to forget about it, it will take its toll on her. In addition, children need a healthy mother to form emotionally healthy bonds with her and to become emotionally healthy themselves. Healing should be a Number One priority for the victim.

**xii. The Church Is Called to be a Place of Healing.** When the Church acts like the body of Christ, healing is seen in the Church.

*Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.*  
Psalm 107:2

Fearlessly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlene D. Quint". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line crossing through the middle of the letters.

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