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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There's No Excuse for Abuse!

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



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- God: Who is He?
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The Crisis and Trauma Series

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A PERSONAL NOTE

from Mike Lindell

My passion is to see people recover from addiction! And that's why I'm proud to partner with author June Hunt and Hope for the Heart, and so excited to use the *Keys for Living* as part of the Lindell Recovery Network. People everywhere are struggling with addictions, wounds, and challenges in life. They need hope. They need help. And the *Keys for Living* provide that hope and real answers from God's Word.

This is the best material I've seen in biblical counseling and caregiving . . . with over 100 topics that speak to almost every presenting problem. There's nothing else like them. They take God's Word and apply it to life's challenges.

The *Keys for Living* are exceptional and outstanding resources for those who need help in overcoming the obstacles they face, and above all, to find Christ.

Read this book. Share it with others. Ask God in prayer to make it real in your life.

May God bless you as you do it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Lindell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Lindell

Lindell Recovery Network

INTRODUCTION

“Intelligent, competent, assured.”

These words painted the picture of an attractive, energetic young woman whom I had known casually for over ten years. But when I received word that, at the hands of her husband, she had been a victim of repeated violence, my first thought was, *How could this be?*

After all, she had worked for several years at a Christian ministry training people how to study the Bible. Then she attended a respected seminary where she met her future husband. However, after they married, her confidence decreased and her fear increased. What was not known to her family and friends, was that she was being abused.

Surely if she tried hard enough he would stop hurting her (typically victims of abuse believe this). But not so. In time, he divorced her for another woman, and they underwent a custody battle over their two young sons.

The judge ruled that until a decision was made regarding which parent would have custody, this arrangement was to be followed: The children were to stay in the home, and each parent would rotate in and out every other week. So every other week for about a year and a half, she stayed in my home.

We had many late-night talks. The one that stands out most vividly in my memory was the evening I asked if she had any pictures to prove to the judge that her husband was an untrustworthy, violent man. Immediately she went to the guest bedroom and returned with pictures of herself—police photographs that showed her head severely bruised and swollen. I was stunned. I did not expect to see such graphic pictures. Her husband had denied the abuse, claiming instead that she had inflicted the injuries on herself—a common “blame game” tactic.

When I gave her this material on domestic violence, she quickly identified with the “scripture twisting.” Unfortunately, many wife abusers are adept at manipulating their wives with scriptures, such as Ephesians 5:22—“*Wives, submit to your husbands.*” These scripture twisters fail to understand that a husband’s “headship” is not a license for wife abuse. To the contrary! Your head does not seek to hurt your hand, and your brain does not tell you to break your bone. No, your head

protects and provides for your body at all costs. Likewise, the husband, as the God-ordained head of the wife, is to protect her from harm, or else he forfeits his right to headship. How significant that Christ, as the head of the church, not only loved her, but gave Himself up for her!

Those who abuse and twist scripture are also careless about heeding all the verses against violence. And sadly, as of yet, I have never talked with an abused woman who has heard passages from God's Word presented from the pulpit that encourage her to seek the protection she so desperately needs. Realize, the Bible says, "*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered*" (Proverbs 22:24).

Rather, after an incident of abuse, too many women hear foolish statements like, *What did you do to cause it?* This indicates that *his* violent sin is *her* fault. Now she is being doubly victimized. It is no surprise that many women who suffer abuse are disheartened, confused, and distressed. They wonder, *Must I really suffer at the hands of someone who has sworn to protect and cherish me? And where is God when I am hurting so much?*

Looking back, I can see God's hand in my friend's life. After two years, she was awarded custody of her children. The judge admitted that, in retrospect, his better judgment would have been to assign only one parent custodial care until a permanent decision was made. Unfortunately, my friend's ex-husband served no time in jail and received no sentencing for his abuse. But he—and all who commit acts of violence and abuse—will give an account to God. The Bible says, "*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account*" (Hebrews 4:13).

The Lord strongly condemns and judges violence and abuse—and His compassionate care extends to those who have experienced it. God is not only with those who suffer, but He has also provided a way of deliverance through His Word. The joy of victory and healing is available to any who seek it. My prayer is that God will free you, or someone you know, from the shackles of unjust suffering.

June Hunt

Founder, Hope For The Heart

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There's No Excuse for Abuse!

This story is real. The facts are true.

Prominent and highly esteemed, he is praised for his significant contributions to the community. What woman wouldn't feel fortunate to be his wife? She certainly has all the finer things in life. And the children have the best that money can buy. How could she think of destroying such a picture-perfect family? How could she risk losing her security or stepping into an unknown future?

Where would she go? What could she do? How would she support herself? Even worse, if she began to expose the terrible truth, would she lose her children?

She feels hopeless. Who would believe her? No one could conceive that such a pillar of the community would punch and pummel his wife night after night.

She is skilled at hiding her feelings as well as her bruises. With swollen, tear-stained eyes, she wrongfully reasons: *It's mostly my fault!*

But her Creator God knows the undeniable truth:

*"You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror."*

(PSALM 10:17–18)

DEFINITIONS



*“The home,
by God’s design,
is meant to be
a safe and
secure place
marked by love,
respect, support,
and growth.”*



God designed the marriage relationship to balance, to benefit, and to better both the husband and the wife. With the first marriage on earth, He created Eve to be the perfect companion for Adam. He intended the pair to love, honor, and cherish each other all the days of their lives, just as He intends the same for every married couple today.

But in too many homes around the world, the marriage *bond* has become *bondage*—shared lives have become shattered by abuse. Husbands are berating, belittling, and betraying their wives. Wives, too, are badgering, bullying, or even beating up their husbands. Yet these secret assaults stay hidden from the outside world. The sacred relationship created by God has been undermined by one mate hurting and harming the other.

Any form of abuse is a flagrant violation of the marriage vows: “To have and to hold from this day forward, to love and to cherish, ‘til death do us part.” And although such abuse frequently occurs behind closed doors, it is blatantly evident before the eyes of the Lord.

*“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.
Everything is uncovered and laid bare
before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*
(HEBREWS 4:13)

What Is Abuse?

While abusive acts are committed by both husbands and wives, in cases of domestic violence, approximately 95 percent of victims are women.¹ (For that reason and the sake of simplicity, most of the references in this resource refer to an abused wife and an abusive husband. Although the reverse is also true, it is rare.) Although abusive treatment has a long history of being tolerated socially and even legally, abuse grieves the heart of God.

In some countries, wife beating is considered a cultural norm. The majority of healthcare workers in those countries, both male and female, condone husbands using physical force against their wives under certain circumstances, resulting in abused women who receive little or no emotional support, even from a national healthcare system. For example, if a Turkish wife criticizes her husband, the public supports his inflicting her with painful blows as her rightful punishment.²

Often, women suffering in other countries get little help from those around them, but help is available from above. God promises to be close to the brokenhearted, to compassionately care, and to comfort the abused.

*“He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

Abuse means “to mistreat, hurt, or injure.”³

Abuse and violence are often used interchangeably, although the word *violence* implies an escalation of abuse and introduces the element of fear of harm as a means of control.⁴

Violence, in Hebrew, is most often a translation of the word *chamas*, which means “to wrong” or “treat violently.”⁵ *Chamas* is also translated as “malicious, destroy, wrong, crime, ruthless, plunder,” and “terror.”⁶

God feels strong opposition against anyone
who is abusive or violent toward another.

*“‘I hate the person who covers himself
with violence’ says the LORD.”*

(MALACHI 2:16 GW)

Domestic violence and **family violence** are the legal terms for physical spousal abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, or any other physically abusive relationship within the home or family.⁷

Domestic violence refers to a pattern of coercive and violent behaviors exercised by one adult in an intimate relationship with another.⁸

Domestic violence is not an issue of marriage problems or irreconcilable differences resolved by conflict resolution.

Domestic violence is *not* a pattern that ends on its own. Nor is it *ever* the fault of the victim(s). This kind of abuse:

A—Affects everyone in the family

B—Bridges all levels in society: racial, religious, geographic, and economic

U—Undermines the value of others

S—Seeks to dominate others

E—Escalates in intensity and frequency

Spiritual leaders, community officials, family, and friends need to be responsive when informed of spousal abuse. Abuse of any kind should never be tolerated nor hidden under the cover of male supremacy or “godly submission.” To the contrary, the God of the Bible is our God of refuge, a stronghold of support and defense against violence.

*“My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation.
He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—
from violent people you save me.”*

(2 SAMUEL 22:3)

Abuse and Punishment for Sins

Question: “Would God condone my husband’s abusing me in order to punish me for my sins?”

Answer: No. Many instances in Scripture show where God used one nation to bring judgment on another nation. However, there is no instance where God used the violence of one mate to punish the other mate. God hates sin, and abuse is sin. The truth is:

An abusive mate is abusive as a result of choosing wrong over right.

While you may be the recipient of your husband’s abuse, you are not the *reason* for that abuse.

The violence of your husband exposes his sinfulness, not your sinfulness.

God instructs all of us to:

“Do what is just and right. . . .

Do no wrong or violence.”

(JEREMIAH 22:3)

What Are the Different Types of Abuse?⁹

Can you always identify abuse when it is happening? Probably not. Abusive behavior can be aggressive or passive, physical or psychological, direct or indirect. Regardless of the method, all abusive behavior comes from those with hardened hearts—those who want to punish, coerce, and control.

Although abusers treat their mates unjustly, they blame their mates for “making” them abusive. “You made me do it! If it weren’t for you I would never have done that!” The abusive husband is “never” at fault—or so he hurtfully says.

After the pileup of put-downs, harsh beatings, and even sadistic sexual acts, wives can tragically start to believe, *He’s probably right. It really is all my fault.* But God knows the abusive husband is *entirely wrong.* And He knows precisely what is in the abuser’s heart: Along with deception resides another evil—injustice.

*“In your heart you devise injustice,
and your hands mete out violence on the earth.”*
(PSALM 58:2)

Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse is using *words* or *tone of voice* to gain control, hurt another person, or destroy that person’s self-worth. Like physical abuse, verbal abuse is devastating within a marriage—a destroyer of respect, trust, and intimacy.

Identify the extent of abuse you may have endured by placing a check mark (✓) beside any of the following behaviors that have been used against you.

Verbally abusive language is characterized by such things as:

- Badgering with excessive questioning or accusations
- Belittling by mocking or name-calling
- Blaming you for the abuse
- Confusing with mind games or twisting what is said
- Controlling with criticism or sarcasm
- Degrading with public or private put-downs
- Demoralizing by making light of the abusive behavior

- Devaluing by demeaning family or friends
- Disempowering by continually dictating orders
- Dismissing by always claiming to be right
- Disrespecting by denying that the abuse ever happened
- Insulting with coarse language or profanity
- Intimidating with yelling or threats
- Manipulating with threats of self-injury or suicide
- Paralyzing by threatening to report you as an unfit parent
- Shaming with humiliation or “guilt trips”
- Silencing with constant interruptions or by changing topics
- Telling half-truths or lies

The internal negative impact of verbal abuse can last much longer than the external negative impact of physical violence. Name-calling, derogatory comments, persistent shaming, ridicule, and threats are devastating and highly destructive . . . making the victim (whether husband or wife) even more vulnerable to being controlled by the abuser. The psalmist says of the verbal abuser . . .

*“His mouth is full of lies and threats;
trouble and evil are under his tongue.”*
(PSALM 10:7)

Emotional Abuse

While all forms of mistreatment are emotionally abusive, certain overt behaviors can be labeled as *emotional abuse*. All acts of emotional abuse fit into one of two categories: passive or aggressive.

Identify the extent of abuse you may have endured by placing a check mark (✓) beside any of the following behaviors that have been used against you.

Passive emotional abuse is characterized by such things as:

- Avoiding the expression of true feelings with you
- Being unwilling to take a fair share of responsibility with you
- Brooding and sulking when around you
- Changing passwords linked to joint financial accounts
- Denying your request to leave when you ask
- Displaying continual irritability around you
- Disrespecting your rights, opinions, or feelings
- Failing to return to your home at a reasonable time
- Forbidding access to your money, checkbook, and/or credit cards
- Holding back appropriate attention from you
- Keeping you from getting help to overcome an addiction
- Manipulating your children
- Monitoring all of your computer usage
- Neglecting your important family gatherings
- Refusing to give you deserved compliments
- Rejecting your need for emotional support
- Resisting helping you with the children
- Stopping important information from getting to you
- Using the “silent treatment” against you
- Withholding a listening ear from you or a response requested by you

The psalmist’s words reflect the feelings of a person being emotionally abused:

*“I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.
My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction.”*

(PSALM 31:9–10)

Aggressive emotional abuse is characterized by such things as:

- Blocking the doorway when you are arguing
- Breaking promises to you or not keeping agreements
- Checking up on you continually
- Damaging your treasured items
- Demanding that you behave adoringly in public after abusing you
- Driving recklessly to instill fear in you
- Expressing excessive anger toward you
- Forbidding you from seeking necessary medical treatment
- Harassing you with unwanted phone calls
- Hiding your car keys as a means of control
- Interfering with your work
- Interrupting your sleep
- Intimidating you with threatening gestures or body language
- Isolating you from family and friends
- Making unwanted visits to you
- Manipulating your decision making
- Monitoring all of your phone calls
- Prohibiting your participation in major decisions
- Stalking you
- Suspecting your activities with excessive jealousy
- Threatening you with weapons

The psalmist describes the aggressive emotional abuser like this:

*"In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises."*

(PSALM 10:2)

Physical Abuse/Violence

Physical abuse involves a person's use of physical size, strength, presence, or position to control or hurt someone else. Often beginning with verbal threats of physical harm—"You'll wish you had never been born!"—verbal abuse escalates to physical abuse and the threats become reality.

The first act of violence makes it easier for the abuser to be violent again if there are no immediate repercussions. Once a taboo is broken (e.g., "never hit a woman") even an isolated minor attack can escalate into major assaults.

Place a check mark (✓) beside any of the following behaviors you have experienced.

Acts of violence include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing/shoving | <input type="checkbox"/> Shaking severely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slapping/striking | <input type="checkbox"/> Slamming doors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kicking/stomping | <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing objects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grabbing/choking | <input type="checkbox"/> Breaking teeth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confining/locking up | <input type="checkbox"/> Breaking items |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Binding/chaining | <input type="checkbox"/> Breaking bones |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scratching/pinching | <input type="checkbox"/> Destroying property |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poking/piercing | <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening injury/death |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burning/scalding | <input type="checkbox"/> Harming pets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biting/spitting | <input type="checkbox"/> Killing pets |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pinning down | <input type="checkbox"/> Kidnapping children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Punching | <input type="checkbox"/> Harming children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pulling hair | <input type="checkbox"/> Killing children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Twisting arms | <input type="checkbox"/> Using weapons (stabbing/
shooting) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hitting walls | |

The Bible warns us against being around those who are violent:

*"Do not envy the wicked, do not desire their company;
for their hearts plot violence, and their lips
talk about making trouble."*

(PROVERBS 24:1-2)

Sexual Abuse/Violence

Because many men believe their wives are to be submissive to all of their desires, many women experience sexual abuse—some even without realizing it.

Identify the extent of abuse you may have endured by placing a check mark (✓) beside any of the following that you have experienced.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Sexually degrading attitudes and treatment
- Discrimination based on gender
- Withholding sexual intimacy and romance
- Unjust accusations of extramarital affairs
- Brazen flirtation with members of the opposite sex
- Misuse of Scripture to justify sex “on demand”
- Threats of forced sex
- Threats of going “elsewhere” for sexual gratification
- Adultery
- Obscene gestures
- Forced sex (“mate rape”)
- Sodomy (forced oral or anal sex)
- Homosexual acts (rejecting sexual fidelity with wife)
- Forced involvement in perverse sexual acts
- Using objects on sexual parts
- Forced exposure to pornography
- Coerced sexual acts with others

The writer of Hebrews clarifies God’s position on the sexual relationship in marriage:

*“Marriage should be honored by all,
and the marriage bed kept pure,
for God will judge the adulterer
and all the sexually immoral.”*

(HEBREWS 13:4)

Forced Marital Sex

Question: “Is it ever right for a husband to demand sex from or force sex on his wife?”

Answer: No. God’s purpose for sex in marriage is for procreation and for the pleasure of both husband and wife.

- Sex within marriage is designed to establish a bond, not a barrier.
- Forced sex is rape.
- Forced sex produces fear that prevents and destroys intimacy.
- Forced sex is lust, not love.

*“Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have.
Love doesn’t . . . force itself on others,
Isn’t always ‘me first.’”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–5 MSG)

What Is Misogyny?

His words are repugnant. His philosophy is reprehensible, especially to God, Creator of *women* as well as of men. His name is Otto Weininger.

This young Austrian philosopher intended to create a wave of public debate with his 1903 work, *Sex and Character*, but instead had to settle for a ripple of controversy as his treatise on the sexes was largely discredited by academia.

Among other things, Weininger stated, “The complete female knows neither a logical nor a moral imperative, and the words *law, duty, duty to oneself* are the words that sound most alien to her,” and “Genius is identical to depth. Just try to connect the words deep and *woman . . .* and everybody will hear the contradiction.”¹⁰

Otto Weininger was a misogynist—a hater of women—a miserable, misguided man who ended his life by suicide. The last scripture a misogynist would want to read is 1 Corinthians 11:7.

“The woman is the glory of man.”

Misogyny is “hatred and distrust of women.”¹¹ The word “misogyny” comes from the Greek word *misogynia* (*misein*, which means “to hate,” and *gune*, which means “woman”).¹²

Misogynists have often experienced mental, emotional, or physical harm from women during childhood, or they have been brainwashed to believe that women are bad, cruel, or completely inept and irresponsible. Therefore, they overgeneralize and think all women are the same. Their behavior toward women, especially their own wives, reflects the bitterness and hatred stored within their hearts.

*“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.”*

(MATTHEW 12:35)

Misogynists:

- Have a gender prejudice against all women
- Think women are weak and thus despise them

- Feel both threatened and enraged by a woman’s tears
- Act both lovingly and hatefully toward women
- Primarily use mental and emotional abuse to control women

The words of wise King Solomon can be applied to the misogynist:

*“There is a time when a man lords it
over others to his own hurt.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 8:9)

What Is Misandry?

Her words are equally repugnant. Her philosophy is equally reprehensible, especially to God, Creator of *men* as well as women. Her name is Valerie Solanas.

Before her death in 1988, this radical American feminist and misandrist derived a measure of infamy not only for attempting to murder acclaimed pop art painter Andy Warhol, but also for founding SCUM, the Society for Cutting Up Men. Her accompanying manifesto was filled with revolting hate for men.

While many quotes are clearly cutting and cruel, others can be deemed only as deeply deranged.

To call a man an animal is to flatter him. . . . Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex.¹³

Again, the Bible presents the opposite view to that of the misandrists:

“A man . . . is the image and glory of God.”

(1 CORINTHIANS 11:7)

As with misogyny, God is both angered by and anguishes over the attitudes and actions of those who belittle and berate anyone created in His image. *“In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”* (Genesis 1:27).

Misandry is the hatred and/or oppression of males.

Misandrists have typically experienced some form of abuse at the hands of significant males during their childhood or adult years. As a result, they overgeneralize and reason that all men are going to act in a similar fashion. Their behavior toward men, especially their husbands, reflects the bitterness, fear, and hatred stored within their hearts.

Misandrists:

- Harbor prejudice against all men
- Think all men are evil, sexually abusive, oppressive, and/or violent
- Fear the strength of a male, assuming his strength will be used to subjugate or abuse
- Alternate between loving and hateful actions toward men
- Manipulate men with sex and punish them with mental and emotional abuse

The writer of Proverbs warns against such women:

*“Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths.
Many are the victims she has brought down;
her slain are a mighty throng.
Her house is a highway to the grave,
leading down to the chambers of death.”*
(PROVERBS 7:25–27)

Characteristics of Abusive Women

Question: “What are some characteristics of women who are abusive toward men?”

Answer: The characteristics often fall into three categories:¹⁴

- *Alcohol abuse*—Women who abuse men are frequently alcoholics.
- *Psychological disorders*—At least 50 percent of women who abuse or are violent toward men are afflicted with Borderline Personality Disorder, which also contributes to suicide, chronic lying, erratic moods, sexual difficulties, and addiction to alcohol.
- *Unrealistic expectations*—Women who have unrealistic expectations of their relationships with men may, as a result, blame the shortcomings of men for their own depression, anxiety, or caustic behavior.

“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.”

(PROVERBS 14:1)

Husband/Male Abuse

Husbands/men who are abused by women:

Are most often passive, sick, or elderly

Are usually too embarrassed to seek help because they fear ridicule

Are sometimes targets of revenge by wives whom they’ve previously abused

Are entitled to the same legal protection from civil authorities as wives who are abused

Are provided the same rights as women to take the same courses of action

Are often victimized by women who were previously abused in childhood by males

Wives/women who abuse men:

Are often still angry at males who abused them in childhood

Are often still angry at their husbands for previously abusing them

Women who overgeneralize—who say, “*All men are alike*,” who only have negative things to say about men—fail to live in line with the following scripture:

*“Do not accuse anyone for no reason—
when they have done you no harm.”*

(PROVERBS 3:30)

What Is God’s Heart on Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence—two words that should not exist together.

The home, by God’s design, is meant to be a safe and secure place marked by love, respect, support, and growth. But in our broken, sin-sick world, abusive violence not only exists, but frequently occurs more than we realize. It doesn’t just happen “out there” (in the world), but all too often happens in the home. Abuse in all its forms tears apart the fabric of the family—destroying relationships and damaging lives. But even in the darkness of abuse, hope can be found.

God cares about your home, about your family, and about *you*. His Word speaks to both ends of the spectrum: in His strong condemnation of violence and abuse, but also in His compassion and care for those who have experienced it. God is a refuge for you and can help you move forward with your life.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

(PSALM 46:1)

God's Heart on Domestic Violence

God cares for those who have experienced abuse.

"You have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul"
(PSALM 31:7 NLT).

God understands the pain of abuse.

"He [Jesus] was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain" (ISAIAH 53:3).

God hates violence and will judge the violent.

"The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot" (PSALM 11:5–6).

God calls for the abuser to change.

"Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right"
(EZEKIEL 45:9).

God does not want you to associate with those prone to anger and violence.

"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered" (PROVERBS 22:24).

God wants husbands to love their wives and not mistreat them.

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (COLOSSIANS 3:19).

God wants husbands to treat their wives with honor, care, understanding, and respect.

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 PETER 3:7).

God offers healing for those who have experienced the pain of abuse.

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (PSALM 147:3).

God wants you to help those who are experiencing abuse.

"Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked"
(PSALM 82:4).

God will end all violence and abuse one day.

“No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders . . . the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory . . . I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly” (ISAIAH 60:18–19, 22).

Anger toward God

Question: “I am angry at God. If He is just and hates violence, why does He allow abuse?”

Answer: Beware of misplacing anger or blame. While God loves righteousness and hates violence and all other forms of sin, He allows people to choose how they will behave, whether it be righteously or violently. God does not create human beings to be puppets to do His will, but rather He gives all people free will—the freedom to choose right or wrong—even those who go against His will. However, the day will come when all will be accountable to Him for every word they have spoken and every action they have taken.

- Don’t blame God when people choose to abuse.
- All guilt resides with abusers—not with God.

Rest assured, God is just and He will deal rightly with those who abuse you.

“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.”

(2 THESSALONIANS 1:6)

God’s Heart for the Victim of Violence

Any victim continually abused by a spouse, parent, sibling, offspring or other relative needs to remember: Never mistake the silence of God for His absence. God has taken note of *every* abusive incident. As you pour out your heart to Him, He will always be with you, even during times of suffering.

God hears the cry and keeps track of the tears of the victim.

“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book” (PSALM 56:8 NLT).

God sees the pain of the victim.

“You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me” (GENESIS 16:13).

God holds the hand of the victim.

“I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (ISAIAH 41:13).

God confirms the worth of the victim.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (LUKE 12:6–7).

God avenges the victim.

“For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted” (PSALM 9:12).

Taking Action against Abuse

Question: “Should I take action when I or someone I know is a victim of abuse?”

Answer: Whenever anyone—yourself included—is being abused, you should always take some sort of action, even if it does not involve confronting the abuser. A safe rule of thumb is to never confront an abuser in a way or at a place that would put you in harm’s way.

- If you know *you are not* being led to confront, then do not feel guilty about not confronting, but you should still report the abuse.

- If you think *you are* being led to confront but it is not safe to do so alone, take someone with you who can keep the situation physically and emotionally safe for you. Generally speaking, there is safety in numbers.
- If someone is being abused and the person is powerless to stop the abuse, intervene on the person’s behalf. Either confront the abuser yourself, report the abuse to someone who can confront, or direct the victim to someone for counseling and protection.
- If the victim is a minor, the abuse must *always* be reported to legal authorities. Even if it is not required by law, it should still be reported.
- If the abused has not directly asked for your help, a good first step is to simply and kindly let the person know that you are available should they ever want to talk or need anything else. This may be all they need—to realize that someone cares, and that they can find help.

Righteous Job spoke of the role and reputation he had as a *rescuer*:

*“Whoever heard me spoke well of me,
and those who saw me commended me,
because I rescued the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to assist them.”*

(JOB 29:11–12)

The All-American Abuser: The O.J. Simpson Story¹⁵

Taken from: HOW TO RISE ABOVE ABUSE
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He could be charming . . . and *chilling*.

He could bedazzle the crowd on the football field, yet belittle, berate, and beat his wife behind closed doors. Local police reports documented numerous trips to their home for incidents such as hitting her, kicking her, smashing family photos, throwing her to the ground, pushing her out of a moving car, throwing her clothes out of the house, bashing her car with a baseball bat, repeatedly stalking her.¹⁶

In 1994, Orenthal James Simpson—the all-star running back and pro football Hall of Famer more commonly known as O.J. or “The Juice”—stunned the world when he was arrested on the charge of murdering his ex-wife Nicole and her friend Ron Goldman.¹⁷

A pretrial hearing disclosed that Nicole had been victimized by O.J. for 17 years, with more than 50 allegations of spouse abuse. In 1989, for example, O.J. pleaded no contest to beating his wife and threatening to kill her. He was sentenced only to probation, fined \$700, and ordered to perform community service.

Two years before her murder, Nicole filed for divorce from O.J., citing an abusive relationship. She was hoping that by no longer living under the same roof with O.J., the brutal cycle of abuse would stop. While divorce papers and restraining orders were legally designed to “shut the door” to Nicole, the legendary running back believed he had the right to bust through the door anytime he wanted.

On one such occasion, police officers were summoned to Nicole's home. They found her cowering in the bushes in her front yard—bloodied and terrorized—wearing nothing but a bra and sweatpants. Nicole wanted the police to charge O.J. with breaking and entering. Instead, they assured him they would keep the incident as quiet “as legally possible”—after all, he was their hero.

Nicole's words to the officers that day revealed her all-too-frequent and frustrating plight: “You never do anything. You always come here and you never arrest him.”¹⁸ Nicole actually found herself caught in two cycles of abuse: She was suffering first at the hands of an unpredictably violent ex-husband, and second at the hands of an apathetic, neglectful police force.

On October 3, 1995, following what was described as the most publicized criminal trial in history—the stunning verdict reverberated around the world: O.J.—acquitted! A virtually airtight case, plus a sordid police record of wife battering, convinced countless millions who watched on television that a guilty verdict was assured. Instead, Simpson walked out of the Los Angeles County courtroom a free man.

Free? Just 20 days later the civil trial began. It concluded on February 4, 1996, with the jury finding that O.J. willfully and wrongfully caused the death of Ron Goldman and that he had committed battery with malice and oppression against the two victims. The jury found O.J. liable and awarded the plaintiffs \$8.5 million dollars in damages.

At the root of O.J.'s abusive nature was jealous possessiveness. The beatings were intended to rein in Nicole—to control her, to show her who was really in charge of her life. Experts in domestic violence believe this possessiveness manifested itself in the methodology employed in the murders: Ron's body was marked with torturous taser wounds, and ultimately both he and Nicole were viciously slashed across their throats.¹⁹

The Bible says husbands are to love their wives sincerely and sacrificially. But O.J.'s interpretation of love justified his violence as revealed by his own words. In an inconceivably bizarre quote in a Florida newspaper, O.J. said, "Let's say I committed this crime . . . Even if I did do this, it would have been because I loved her very much, right?"²⁰

While this infamous criminal case did little to stir O.J.'s conscience, other men were deeply impacted—and perhaps just in time. One fax received by Simpson's prosecutors simply read, "You may have just saved my wife's life, for as I listened to you describing Simpson's abuse, I recognized myself."²¹



CHARACTERISTICS



*“For the cycle
of abuse
to be broken,
one person
in the relationship
must change.”*



They're all around us, but seldom do you know it, because they are masterful at masking their pain.

Sadly, one out of every three women worldwide is a victim of domestic violence.²² And these women come from all walks of life—yes, *all!* Whether rich or poor, young or old, whether educated or not, employed or not, religious or not—abuse abides by no boundaries.

A victim can be your favorite aunt or your much-loved friend sitting with you at lunch. Someone you know could have been dragged to the floor and beaten just last night. Those long sleeves she's wearing—year round—could be a hint of horrific abuse at home.

Abused women shroud themselves in secrecy, covering up painful bruises . . . and emotions. However, God not only sees the abuse, but will also hold the abuser accountable for degrading and violent behavior. To the unrelenting abuser, God says:

*“Because of your stubbornness
and your unrepentant heart,
you are storing up wrath against yourself
for the day of God’s wrath.”*

(ROMANS 2:5)

What Is the Cycle of Abuse?

Like a volcano, abuse doesn't start with a sudden outburst of physical force, but rather with intense, internal pressure that builds to the point of eruption. Abusive patterns develop in three stages that are cyclical, becoming increasingly violent with each progressive stage.

Family members who have fallen victim to the repercussions of these stages feel traumatized even in anticipating a violent outburst. Unfortunately, the escalating nature of abuse is not curbed without intense intervention and appropriate accountability. From the psalmist comes a clear call to action:

*“Call the evildoer to account for his wickedness
that would not otherwise be found out.”*

(PSALM 10:15)

The Cycle of Abuse²³

Agitated Stage

- Anxiety and tension mark the beginning phase of abuse. An abusive husband communicates dissatisfaction over something small and blames his wife. Then, by inflicting verbal and emotional abuse, he maintains *passive psychological* control over his wife, thus creating a fear of some type of pain.
- During this stage, many victims buy into the lies spoken to them and accept responsibility for an abusive mate’s unhappiness. Therefore, they try to adjust their own behavior in an effort to appease the abuser and thereby relieve the tension in their homes. However, these efforts only provoke more anger because the abuser does not want to be appeased, but rather to explode.

“From the fruit of their lips people enjoy good things, but the unfaithful have an appetite for violence” (PROVERBS 13:2).

Acute Stage

- In this phase, the pressure becomes so intense that the abuser erupts and gives full vent to rage. When violent behavior is unleashed, family members, outsiders, or police are often called on to defuse the rage.
- This acute stage of *aggressive* behavior doesn’t last long, but over time these overpowering outbursts become more frequent and more dangerous.

“An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins” (PROVERBS 29:22).

Apologetic Stage

- During this “honeymoon phase,” the abuser becomes contrite, even sweet, and the abused feels soothed by these outwardly loving actions. With renewed hope for change and the deep desire to have a successful relationship, the abused views these overtures as genuine, heartfelt apologies and extends forgiveness. But, as with all honeymoons, they don’t last, and the cycle of anger occurs again and again and again.
- This temporary honeymoon phase is characterized by the victimizer’s dramatic transformation from being villainous to virtuous. This transformation is generally demonstrated by some or all of the following behaviors:
 - ♦ Accepting responsibility
 - ♦ Penitence
 - ♦ Apologies
 - ♦ Pleading
 - ♦ Bargaining
 - ♦ Promises
 - ♦ Gifts
 - ♦ Remorse
 - ♦ Helpfulness
 - ♦ Romance
 - ♦ Peacemaking
 - ♦ Tears

However, God says there is a vast difference between remorse and repentance, between regretting past behavior and changing future behavior.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

(2 CORINTHIANS 7:10)

What Is the Situational Setup for Abuse?

In an abusive marriage, both spouses bring emotional deficits into the relationship, creating an unhealthy dynamic. For the cycle of abuse to be broken, one person in the relationship must change. Either the abuser must stop abusing or the abused must stop accepting abuse.

The abusive husband needs to stop perceiving his wife as a piece of property and instead recognize that he is inflicting pain on a precious *person* created in the image of God—a person highly valued by God. This change of mindset will make a real difference in the relationship.

The abused wife needs to place her dependence on God rather than falsely believing she cannot function without her abusive husband. A change in mindset will help bring change in an abusive relationship.

It takes only one person to break free from the painful cycle that keeps them both in a downward spiral. Though difficult, release is possible, especially through the power of the Lord.

*“My eyes are ever on the LORD,
for only he will release my feet from the snare.”*
(PSALM 25:15)

The Setup for Abuse

Notice the relationship between the couple within an abusive relationship:

The Abusive Husband

Low self-worth
Emotionally dependent
Emotionally depressed
Feels powerless or impotent
Believes in gender supremacy
Views her as an unworthy object
Insatiable ego
Short fuse
Explosive emotions
Lives with suspicion

The Abused Wife

Low self-worth
Emotionally dependent
Emotionally depressed
Feels powerless or impotent
Believes in family unity
Views him as a powerful person
Insecure ego
Long fuse
Stifled emotions
Lives with fear

The Abusive Husband

Fears being betrayed
Uses sex to establish dominance
Often abuses alcohol
Displays anger
Blames her for abuse
Believes she is the problem
Stressful work environment
Possesses weapons
Exaggerated jealousy/
possessiveness
Afraid of losing her

The Abused Wife

Fears being abandoned
Uses sex to establish intimacy
May or may not abuse alcohol
Denies anger
Accepts blame for abuse
Believes she is the problem
Stressful home environment
Avoids weapons
Exaggerated guilt/shame
Afraid of losing financial/
emotional security

The psalmist accurately describes the anguish of the abused:

*“If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me,
I could hide. But it is you . . .
my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship.”*
(PSALM 55:12–14)

Changing Abusive Behavior

Question: “Can people ever really change?”

Answer: Yes. God would never tell people to change if they couldn’t change. However, for people to actually change, they must not only be able to change, but they must desire to change and have a willingness to change.

Jesus' death paid the penalty for our sins. His resurrection broke the power of sin over us. And His Spirit within us provides the power to overcome sinful patterns. Jesus became a man so that He could die for us, but He also became a man so that He could be an example for us. Changing from the person you are to the person God created you to be involves your mind, will, and emotions, with the Holy Spirit providing the power.

*“His divine power has given us
everything we need for a godly life
through our knowledge of him
who called us by his own glory and goodness.
Through these he has given us his
very great and precious promises,
so that through them you may
participate in the divine nature,
having escaped the corruption
in the world caused by evil desires.”*

(2 PETER 1:3–4)

What Is the Cost of Being Constantly Abused?

There is always a price to be paid for pain, a loss to be suffered by the recipient of abusive words and hurtful acts. The cost is often unseen—an extensive, inner deprivation that can continue to damage the soul for a lifetime. How ironic that the tongue can be both an instrument of healing and an inflictor of heartache.

*“The soothing tongue is a tree of life,
but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.”*

(PROVERBS 15:4)

The Cost of Being Abused

Loss of self-worth	increased self-doubt
Loss of self-confidence	increased self-consciousness
Loss of self-perception	increased self-criticism
Loss of happiness	increased emotional flatness
Loss of freedom	increased vigilance
Loss of inner peace	increased “peace-at-all-costs” mentality
Loss of self-assurance	increased anxiety
Loss of security	increased insecurity
Loss of trust	increased distrust
Loss of sexual identity	increased sexual confusion
Loss of a clear conscience	increased guilt or shame
Loss of friendship	increased isolation
Loss of faith	increased fear
Loss of safety	increased desire to escape
Loss of self-respect	increased self-abasement
Loss of optimism	increased pessimism
Loss of personal pride	increased self-hatred
Loss of hope	increased despair

Those who suffer the damaging effects of abuse can find hope and healing as they cling to the promise of God stated by the apostle Paul:

*“Those God foreknew he also predestined
to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”*

(ROMANS 8:29)

What Is the Cost of Being Constantly Abusive?

Just as there is a price for enduring unjust pain, there is a price to be paid for inflicting pain. As with the abused, the abuser pays in ways that often escape the physical eye because the payment is extracted from the unseen soul of the abuser—from the mind, will, and emotions—as a result of a hardened heart. Proverbs 28:14 says:

“Whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.”

The Cost of Being Abusive

- Loss of self-control** increased abusive behaviors
- Loss of clear conscience** increased guilt, shame, and blaming
- Loss of empathy** increased selfishness and self-centeredness
- Loss of compassion** increased hardness of heart toward others
- Loss of sound judgment** increased denial and rationalization
- Loss of inner restraint** increased anger and rage toward others
- Loss of faith** increased fear and rebellion toward God
- Loss of self-esteem** increased boasting and belittling of others
- Loss of self-worth** increased self-doubt and criticism of others
- Loss of self-respect** ... increased self-loathing and disregard for others
- Loss of perception** increased self-focus and dominance over others
- Loss of confidence** increased uncertainty and control of others
- Loss of personal pride** increased abasement of self and others
- Loss of joy and happiness** increased sullenness and depression
- Loss of freedom** increased bondage to being abusive to others
- Loss of peace** increased restlessness and agitation toward others
- Loss of security** increased insecurity and power plays
- Loss of friendship** increased isolation and emotional withdrawal

A classic example of the cost of being an unrepentant abuser is seen in the life of the Egyptian Pharaoh, the overbearing master of the ancient Israelites. Every plague God sent to Egypt was followed by an appeal to Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. And after every appeal, Pharaoh's heart hardened and the Israelites were treated even more harshly than before. Finally, Pharaoh's hardened heart resulted in not only the death of his own son, but also the deaths of the firstborn in every Egyptian home throughout his kingdom, along with the destruction of his awesome army.

The cost of being constantly abusive proved to be catastrophic, just as it can be for abusers who fall under the disciplining hand of God. The Bible says:

*“Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go,
just as the LORD had said through Moses. . . .
When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us [Israel] go,
the LORD killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. . . .
When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea,
the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them,
but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.”*
(EXODUS 9:35; 13:15; 15:19)

What Choices Do the Abused Have?

Years ago, women had few or no options for fleeing an abusive spouse. That scenario is changing considerably with the availability of more residential shelters for battered women and children, as well as nonresidential, temporary shelters. There are also telephone hotlines and websites with live chat features to aid women in crisis. (For a short list of helpful resources and hotlines, see Appendix A.)

Where these options are not available or easily accessible, women should compile a list of “safe homes,” a network of people in the community who will provide a haven when they’re in harm’s way. Some areas also designate local places of worship as temporary shelters.

The Bible encourages us all to: *“Seek justice. Defend the oppressed”* (Isaiah 1:17).

Staying with an abuser only to wait for the next violent episode is not your only option. You have more than one viable choice. Safety should be paramount, because until a safe haven is found, you will not have the emotional stability or state of mind to make sound decisions concerning how to get help for your abusive situation.

People in abusive relationships adopt various ways of responding to their mates, but you need to know that you have a God who not only watches over you, but who also will guide you in the way you should go. Take refuge in Him.

*“You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”*

(PSALM 32:7–8)

Common Responses to Abuse

Those wounded by domestic violence typically choose to respond to their abusers in one of the following ways:

The Ostrich Outlook

The ostrich chooses to deny the situation, minimize its seriousness, or rationalize the abuser’s behavior, even to the point of self-blame. “If I just did everything right, my mate wouldn’t be this way. It’s all my fault!” This choice leads to an even greater loss of self-respect.

The Martyr Mate

The martyr decides to be a “silent sufferer” in a destructive relationship. This is a dangerous choice. To survive, this person must sacrifice the voice of truth in order to avoid contradicting the marriage partner and risking a violent reaction.

The Puppet Partner

The puppet opts out by disowning personal feelings, denying personal anger, and living emotionally detached. This choice also leaves the person vulnerable to potential danger. Abusive relationships do not remain static; abuse that goes unchallenged becomes increasingly violent.

The Merry-Go-Round Mate

The “merry-go-rounder” may have already left several abusive relationships and is still looking for another partner to provide love and support. With these choices, this person keeps going in circles. Until insight is gained into the reasons for accepting abusive behavior and there is a willingness to take steps to protect self and children, the pattern of abuse will continue. More than likely, this person will marry yet another abuser.

The Boundary Builder

The boundary builder chooses to set healthy boundaries. Only behavior that is acceptable and nonviolent is tolerated. This positive choice offers the possibility of permanent change. This person prays for God to give the wisdom and courage necessary to stand up to the opposition that will inevitably come. They also pray for the strength and resolve to follow through with consequences as new standards are established for the way the couple will relate to one another.

The Departing Dove

The departing dove leaves—at least for a while—to show the seriousness of the abuse. This choice is an attempt to force the abusive marriage partner to either deal with the abusive behavior or to suffer the consequence of losing a mate. While the abused mate seeks personal counseling, the abusive mate is also encouraged to get professional help. If that help is refused, the couple will remain separated from one another.

In every response to abuse, each bears a common silent cry:

*“My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on me.*

*⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.*

*⁶ I said, ‘Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.*

⁷ I would flee far away and stay in the desert;

*⁸ I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm.”*

(PSALM 55:4–8)

Allowing an Abuser to Return Prematurely

Question: “I’ve helped a physically abused woman obtain a restraining order, but she allowed her husband to return home prematurely. Why did she—like so many others—allow him to come back when she knew that the violence would be repeated?”

Answer: She will likely continue to return to the abuser until she is convinced that:

- She can keep the family safe and secure apart from the abuser.
- She is worthy and deserving of a better life and better treatment.

Therefore, there must be a double safety net of both community services and individual support that is perceived as reliable. This means we all need to:

*“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)



CAUSES



*“Most behavioral
patterns—
both positive
and negative—
are learned.”*



The way couples relate to each other often mirrors the way their parents related to one another. Most behavioral patterns—both positive and negative—are learned.

Typically in abusive marriages, the husband, the wife, or both grew up in an abusive home where conflict resolution skills were not practiced. Therefore, a hostile, abusive environment was “normal” to them.

They didn’t realize that their normal wasn’t truly normal, and they don’t realize that their normal now isn’t normal either. Sin patterns can be generational, but every succeeding generation has the ability to stop the cycle of abuse—with God’s help. The God of the Bible says:

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

(HOSEA 4:6)

Why Do Abusers Do It?

Behavior does not come out of a vacuum, but out of a person’s heart, environment, and personal experience. Each person is born with a propensity toward self-will and is raised in an environment that either promotes violence and abuse or promotes love and respect. Beliefs about God, self, and others are formed, and behavior naturally follows.

Research indicates that boys who witness violence between their parents triple their chances of becoming abusive husbands. The home where a woman is devalued and traumatized becomes a more impactful model for inciting violence in boys than does being assaulted as a teenager. More than three million children are estimated to be witnesses to spousal abuse in the United States each year.²⁴ Too many parents fail to heed the wise words of the book of Proverbs:

*“Start children off on the way they should go,
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”*

(PROVERBS 22:6)

Abusers abuse because:

- They grew up watching abuse between their parents.
- They experienced abuse as children.
- They view people as possessions rather than persons.
- They “love things and use people” instead of loving people and using things.
- They have not been taught how to love.
- They understand love to be conditional—if their mates please them, wrath and vindictiveness will be avoided.
- They think they have the right to control others.
- They think they have the right to use force.
- They fear their mate will be unfaithful.
- They fear losing their spouse.
- They become angry when their mate shows weakness or disrespect.
- They see themselves as victims.
- They think power has been taken from them.
- They blame others for their own low self-esteem.
- They believe power demonstrates superiority.
- They want to feel significant and in control.
- They possess an unbiblical view of submission and authority.
- They handle stress immaturely.
- They have few or no coping skills.
- They think violence is the way to get even or to retaliate.
- They have learned that violence and other forms of abuse work.
- They haven’t suffered strong enough repercussions to deter their behavior.

The writer of Ecclesiastes explains the impact on an abuser’s heart when consequences are delayed:

*“When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out,
people’s hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 8:11)

Generational Sin

Question: “If sinful patterns are passed down from generation to generation, how can a person change?”

Answer: Abuse is not just a result of learned behavior, it is also a matter of the heart! Matthew 12:35 says, “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.”

God Himself promises that those who come to Him will be given a new heart with the power to change any generational pattern of sin.

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you
and move you to follow my decrees
and be careful to keep my laws.”*
(EZEKIEL 36:26–27)

What Do Abusers Believe?

The beliefs that people carry actually “birth” their behaviors. The problem, then, is: Abusers and those they abuse have *faulty beliefs* about their relationships. Therefore, they both engage in *faulty behaviors* toward one another.

Of all the distorted beliefs swirling around in the heads of abusive husbands, two primary factors agitate those distortions and spawn violent behavior. *Anger*: His wife fails to “measure up” on any number of fronts, thus fanning the flames of fury. *Blame*: His wife is alledged to be *the cause* of his unhappiness, his losses, his failures, and the list goes on and on.

Distorted beliefs, a dangerous mindset, and a difficult situation are all it takes to light the fuse for abuse and cause an explosion. False accusations and out-of-control anger are not the ways of God; however, they do reflect the ways of abusers:

*“They do not speak peaceably,
but devise false accusations.”*

(PSALM 35:20)

Abusers distorted beliefs include:

- Abuse is “normal” in relationships.
- Jealousy and possessiveness are characteristics of love.
- Physical punishment demonstrates “concern.”
- Sex is better after a fight.
- Men need to prove their masculinity and must always be in charge.
- Women need to be controlled and kept “in line.”
- Husbands have the right to control their wives.
- Women deserve to be mistreated.

These erroneous beliefs can be countered with God’s truth and by praying.

*“Teach me knowledge and good judgment,
for I trust your commands.”*

(PSALM 119:66)

Why Don’t the Abused Leave?

Those who grew up in healthy, non-abusive homes have no frame of reference for those who bow to abuse. But those who grew up in abusive homes know all too well the reasons why the abused not only allow abuse, but also stay with their abusers. They understand the mentality because it is *their mentality*. They lived it as children, and now they live it as adults. They are caught in the snare of abuse.

However, the Bible makes it clear that . . .

*“Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”*

(PROVERBS 29:25)

An abused wife chooses *not* to leave her husband for a variety of reasons—reasons understood by all who have stood in her shoes, walked down her street, and shared in her sorrows. She doesn’t leave because of what she firmly believes and falsely feels.

The abused don’t leave because of:²⁵

What the abused fully believe:

- They believe they don’t have a biblical right to separate in order to achieve a healthy relationship.
- They believe abuse is normal and must be accepted.
- They believe they must protect the family image at all costs.
- They believe family problems are private and should not be shared.
- They believe they have to stay because of what they’ve been told by spiritual leaders.
- They believe the promises of the abuser who tells them they will “never do it again.”
- They believe being a peace-at-any-price person is being loyal and godly.
- They believe their spouse and children are all they have.
- They believe biblical submission in marriage permits abuse.
- They don’t know there are organizations or services available to help them.

What the abused falsely feel:

- They feel helpless, without the power to leave or make it on their own.
- They feel they have no real worth or value.
- They feel manipulated by threats of suicide.

- They feel they deserve to be abused and blame themselves.
- They feel isolated from supportive people.
- They feel too much shame to tell about the abuse.
- They feel others don't want to hear about the abuse.
- They feel that explaining the details of the abuse costs too much emotionally and physically.
- They feel they are not heard or understood when they do share about the abuse.
- They feel that having two parents in an unhealthy relationship is better for children than having only one healthy parent.

What the abused firmly fear:

- They fear if they tell and then the abuser changes, people won't understand or forgive the abuser.
- They fear what the abuser will do if they leave.
- They fear losing their children.
- They fear being divorced and/or being a single parent.
- They fear the financial consequences of separation or divorce.
- They fear living alone.
- They fear being dependent on others for help.
- They fear the stigma of people learning about the abuse.
- They fear they are "crazy" because they are continually told they are crazy.
- They fear not being able to manage household responsibilities on their own.

The abused need to cry out to God:

*"Ensure your servant's well-being;
do not let the arrogant oppress me."*

(PSALM 119:122)

Separation without Divorce

Question: “If a wife separates from her husband, is she not ultimately divorcing her husband or at least opening the door to divorce?”

Answer: No, the husband is the one who has opened the door to separation by his violence, not the wife. He is accountable to God for his own sin as well as the consequences of his sin.

Separation is not divorce and does not necessarily open the door to divorce, but instead opens the door to safety and obedience to God.

“Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man” (PROVERBS 22:24 NASB).

Separation is siding with God regarding His hatred of violence.

“The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion” (PSALM 11:5).

Separation from an abusive husband is trusting God to do what is best for their marriage rather than trusting in anything she might do. She takes this biblical promise to heart:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (PROVERBS 3:5-6).

Why Do the Abused Finally Leave?

One of the most difficult things she will ever do is one of the best things she could ever do.

Leaving—taking that crucial step to curtail the cycle of abuse—benefits everyone involved and ushers in the opportunity for a fresh new beginning. The wife no longer lives in fear or faces abuse in her own home. The husband can better grasp the gravity of the abusive situation and seek biblical counseling. The children are protected and spared further trauma from witnessing their father abuse their mother.

But it is by no means easy to walk away from an abuser. Enlisting a supportive circle of friends can help you maintain your resolve and help meet your needs during such a vulnerable time. Above all, seek the guiding, protective hand of God to give you the grace and strength to take that first step toward safety.

*“I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”*
(ISAIAH 46:4)

The abused leave because:

- They finally realize their abuser won’t change if circumstances remain the same.
- They understand that leaving may be the only way to motivate change.
- They can now see their abuser acting on threats of severe physical, mental, or emotional abuse.
- They see the abuse is occurring more frequently.
- They see their abuser has begun to abuse the children.
- They want to prevent their children from adopting abusive mindsets and behaviors.
- They have found help through friends, family, church, or professional organizations.
- They realize it is not God’s will for anyone to be abused.
- They are afraid for their lives or for the lives of their children if they stay.
- They realize there is a thin line between threats and homicide.

The abused need to continuously pray:

*“O Most High. Bring to an end
the violence of the wicked
and make the righteous secure.”*

(PSALM 7:8–9)

Scripture reveals that many times godly people did separate physically from their ungodly authorities because submission would have caused them to violate God’s standard or His revealed will.

Biblically, we are to submit to our governing “civic” authorities, *unless* doing so would lead to sin or lead to harm. Note these biblical examples:

Jesus escaped the murderous plots of the religious leaders. (See John 7:30, 10:39.)

The disciples of Jesus defied the mandate from the religious leaders that they stop preaching about Jesus. (See Acts 5:29.)

David fled King Saul with God’s blessing. Although David was one of the king’s subjects, when Saul’s actions became violent, David escaped. (See 1 Samuel 18:6.)

*“The LORD was with David but had departed from Saul. . . .
Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear,
but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall.
That night David made good his escape.”*

(1 SAMUEL 18:12; 19:10)

Submission

Question: “Since the Bible teaches ‘*submit to one another*,’ isn’t leaving an abusive relationship against the teaching of the Bible?”

Answer: The Bible teaches *mutual* submission in a loving relationship, not *one-way* submission in an abusive relationship. The specific biblical instruction to anyone around a hot-tempered person is separation—get out of harm’s way. Even a temporary separation could help bring about a permanent resolution and hopefully eventual reconciliation. A person with out-of-control anger must be willing to stop the abuse and get help. Many times, temporarily removing yourself from a volatile situation will prompt your abuser to seek help for fear of losing you. The Bible gives this instruction:

*“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,
do not associate with one easily angered.”*

(PROVERBS 22:24)

And the very next verse explains why you should not stay in a volatile situation:

“You may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.”

(PROVERBS 22:25)

Why Do the Abused Feel Guilty?

There is an emotion associated with domestic violence that transcends all geographical boundaries, blinding victims from seeing the truth about the abuse they suffer. That emotion is *false guilt*. It deceives a woman into believing that the beatings, the bruises, the slaps, the sexual violations *really are all her fault*, not his.

*“My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.”*

(PSALM 38:4)

Blame-shifting by the berating husband who claims his abusive actions are the result of his wife’s missteps can lead to her forming a “false guilt mindset” if she believes his lies and accepts responsibility for *his* abusive actions. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to the already wounded emotions of an abused wife.

The abused feel guilty because of their abusers’ accusations:

- The abused disobeyed the abuser.
- The abused argued with the abuser.
- The abused questioned the abuser about how money was spent.
- The abused questioned the abuser about who he spends time with or his activities.
- The abused didn’t prepare the abuser’s meal on time.
- The abused wasn’t sufficiently caring for the home or the children.
- The abused didn’t have the abuser’s clothes ready.
- The abused refused to have sex with the abuser.

Thus a guilt-ridden, falsely accused wife mentally and emotionally beats herself up, suffering needlessly as she says to herself:

“My life is consumed by anguish.”

(PSALM 31:10)

How do the innocent come to bear the guilt of the guilty? Although this seems illogical, it is common among those who are continuously abused. In seeking to understand this painful phenomenon, it is helpful to define some relevant terms. As the Bible says:

*“Blessed are those who find wisdom,
those who gain understanding.”*

(PROVERBS 3:13)

Why should the abused not feel guilty about moving out of harm's way?

Recognize the difference between true guilt and false guilt.

- *True guilt* is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the perfect will of God—and refers to the *fact* of being at fault.
- *True guilt* is a *fact*, not a *feeling*. *False guilt* is a self-condemning *feeling* not based on fact.
- *False guilt* is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues after having committed a sin even though the sin is confessed, repented of, and no longer a part of a person's life.

The prophet Isaiah explains true guilt by saying:

*"We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way."*

(ISAIAH 53:6)

False guilt keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: *shame, fear, and anger.*²⁶

False guilt is based on self-condemning *feelings* that you have not lived up to your own expectations or the expectations of someone else.

- *False guilt* is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- *False guilt* is resolved by rejecting lies and believing truth. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the "*accuser of our brothers.*" He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The apostle John describes the aim of Satan and his eventual destiny.

*"The accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down."*

(REVELATION 12:10)

Guilt and Shame

Question: “How can I overcome the guilt and shame I feel as a result of being blamed for the abusive things done to me? Did I deserve this abuse—was it really my fault?”

Answer: Abusers are notorious for blaming their actions on those whom they abuse. Blame-shifting is a means of controlling others and breaking down resistance.

Blame-shifting is effective with those who:

- Have a history of being abused and have been repeatedly told it is their fault
- Believe “bad things happen to bad people,” so they must be responsible for the abuse
- Are children, because they are especially vulnerable to false guilt and shame heaped on them by those in authority over them

But the truth is:

- No one deserves abuse.
- No one makes another person sin.
- Abusers alone are responsible for their abusive acts. You are not to blame for what any abuser chooses to do.

Blame-shifters not only blame their victims but also shame them.

- Shame attacks your identity. (Guilt says, “I’ve *done* something bad,” whereas shame says, “I *am* bad.”)
- Shame does not focus on *what* you’ve done, but on *who* you are.
- Shame will cause you to feel defective, which, in turn, causes a deep sense of unworthiness and a continual fear of rejection.

– Shame belongs to the abuser alone—not to those who have been abused.

Because shame attacks self-worth and produces self-loathing, it must be rooted out and replaced with a biblical view of how God sees you. It must be replaced with the truth.

*“No one who hopes in you [God]
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those who
are treacherous without cause.”*

(PSALM 25:3)

What Is the Root Cause of Domestic Violence?

Some people can't comprehend the *why* questions about abuse. “Why do abusers do it?” “Why do victims accept it?” Within the heart of every person are inner needs—the needs for love, significance, and security.²⁷ At times we attempt to meet these needs illegitimately.

Abusers abuse their victims in order to *feel significant*. Those who are *abused* stay in abusive relationships in order to *feel secure*. Separation feels unbearable or they feel terrified that the violence will escalate if they leave. God's solution is that both the abused and the abuser look to the Lord to meet their deepest inner needs.

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.²⁷

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me” (PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

WRONG BELIEF:

The Abused—Accepts abuse in order to feel secure

“I’m to blame for what has been done to me. I must be doing something wrong. If I just try harder to do what is expected of me, things will get better. If I don’t do better, I could lose my marriage along with my security. Pleasing my spouse is my only hope for survival and security.”

RIGHT BELIEF:

The Abused

“I’m not to blame for being abused, and I have been wrong in thinking my happiness will come from a human relationship. I can choose whether or not I am willing to be around anyone who mistreats me, including my spouse. Even if I lose my marriage, I will never lose Jesus, who lives in me. Because the Lord promises to be my provider, I will depend on Him to meet all of my needs. The Lord is my source of security.”

*“Your Maker is your husband—
the Lord Almighty is his name.”*
(ISAIAH 54:5)

WRONG BELIEF:

The Abuser—Abuses in order to feel significant

“My wife is to blame for what’s happening. I have the right to expect certain things from my marriage partner who, after all, belongs to me. If I do not control my wife, I could lose her, so I’ll do whatever it takes to remain in control.”

RIGHT BELIEF:

The Abuser

“I alone am responsible for my abusive behavior and the way I respond to people and circumstances. No one else is to blame, because no matter what anyone else does, I have a choice in how I treat others. Even if I lose my marriage, I’ll never lose God. He is my true source of significance and promises to meet my needs.”

*“My God will meet all your needs according to
his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:19)

How to Seek Significance and Find Security in God

Domestic violence does more than damage your body and disturb your thoughts. The pain goes much deeper, breaking your heart. You may feel hopeless and think, *I’ll never be able to trust anyone again*. Unfortunately, this kind of heartache cannot simply heal itself over time. The wounds are too deep to restore your sense of significance or security after being abused by the person you loved and trusted the most.

But the Lord offers hope and healing to all who are weary and broken. His path to healing will take time—you may not feel immediate physical safety, but God promises to give His presence, power, and protection to you. If you entrust your heart to Him, He will always walk beside you. You will never again face another day of fear, pain, or torment alone because the Lord says:

*“Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid or terrified because of them,
for the LORD your God goes with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
(DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

How to Have Significance and Security That Lasts Forever 4 Points of God’s Plan

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, "*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway*" (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, "*Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God*" (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, "*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: Surrender

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“Homes should
be safe havens.”*



Arms that once sweetly embraced you now swing wildly toward you. Arms that once tenderly held you now seek to harm you. You feel devastated, devalued, distraught.

Wives of domestic abuse feel submerged in pain both physically and emotionally. They are traumatized and terrorized by men who fail to heed this command of God: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (Ephesians 5:25). Arms where you once sought protection now terrify you.

But there are other arms—strong arms, opening wide to you—longing to hold you, wanting to convey your worth. To God, you are His precious lamb. He wants to lead you like a shepherd to a place of peace. Turn to Him, ask for His help, seek His wisdom. Find refuge and rest in the loving arms of the Lord.

*“He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart.”*

(ISAIAH 40:11)

Key Verse to Memorize

Oh, that the abusive husband would heed the model set forth by the Lord Jesus, treasuring and tenderly caring for what has been entrusted to him!

In the Bible, we see a bridegroom and a bride, a beautiful portrayal of sacred and sacrificial love. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the church—all who have trusted in Him as Savior and Lord—is the bride. Scripture testifies to the deep, abiding love Jesus has for His church—His bride, His people—ultimately evidenced by His sacrificial death on their behalf.

Jesus would never assault His bride’s worth. He would never hurt or harm her in any way. As the bridegroom, He laid down His own life for His bride.

*“This is how we know what love is:
Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”*
(1 JOHN 3:16)

Key Passages to Read for the Abused

God Almighty sees and knows.

Everything done behind closed doors, even in the darkest night, glares exceedingly bright before the eyes of God. He sees the secret assaults. He sees the bruises. He collects the tears.

For the abused: *Find peace in God.* Rest in His protective arms. He will help you and rescue you. Never is it His will for a beloved child of His to be harmed by another.

*“He is the God who pays back those who harm me;
. . . and rescues me from my enemies.
You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies;
you save me from violent opponents.”*
(PSALM 18:47-48 NLT)

For the Abused

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
² I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge
and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’
³ Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
⁴ He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge,
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. . . .*

⁹ *If you say, 'The LORD is my refuge,'
and you make the Most High your dwelling . . .*
¹¹ *He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways . . .*
¹⁴ *'Because he loves me,' says the LORD,
'I will rescue him; I will protect him,
for he acknowledges my name.*
¹⁵ *He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.'"*
 (PSALM 91:1-4, 9, 11, 14-15)

Psalm 91

God Is . . .

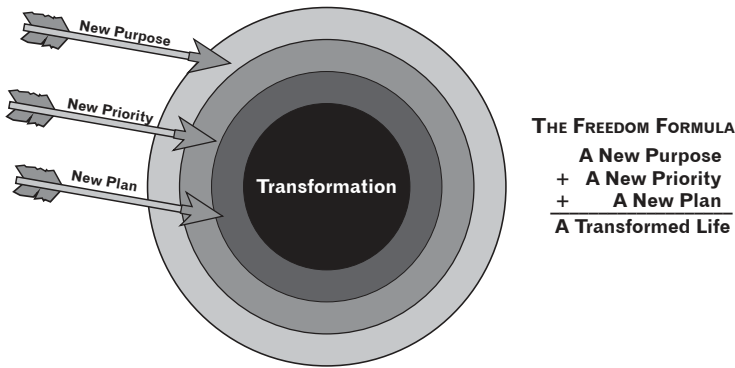
Your shelter.....	v. 1
Your resting place	v. 1
Your refuge	v. 2
Your fortress	v. 2
Your God.....	v. 2
Your Savior	v. 3
Your cover.....	v. 4
Your shield.....	v. 4
Your rampart	v. 4
Your dwelling.....	v. 9
Your guardian.....	v. 11
Your rescuer.....	v. 14
Your protector.....	v. 14
Your answer	v. 15
Your deliverer	v. 15
Your salvation.....	v. 16

How to Have a Transformed Life

The brokenness experienced by those who have been abused can impact every area of life. The wounds can linger and even last a lifetime. Picking up the pieces and moving forward may be difficult, but hold on to hope. Healing is possible and God promises to be with you every step of the way.

*“So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*
(ISAIAH 41:10)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



Target #1—A New Purpose

God’s purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

Target #2—A New Priority

God's priority for me is to change my thinking.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

Target #3—A New Plan

God's plan for me is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

My Personalized Plan

One of the saddest aspects of domestic abuse is that it violates the trust and love relationship that is naturally ascribed to those joined together in a family. Homes should never be a place of abuse, violence, hatred, or fear. They should be safe havens where husbands and wives and their children draw together in life and love.

The marriage relationship is designed by God to model Jesus’ love for the church and should be an example of His sacrificial love and commitment to us. Domestic violence damages precious people and ruins relationships. Whether it is physical, emotional, or verbal abuse, it is never acceptable and should never be excused or tolerated.

*“In my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes,
I prayed to my God for help.
He heard me from his sanctuary;
my cry to him reached his ears. . . .*

*¹⁶ He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
he drew me out of deep waters.*

¹⁷ *He rescued me from my powerful enemies,
from those who hated me and were too strong for me.*

¹⁸ *They attacked me at a moment when*
¹⁹ *I was in distress, but the LORD supported me.
He led me to a place of safety;
he rescued me because he delights in me.”*

(PSALM 18:6, 16–19 NLT)

For the Abused

As I seek to overcome the painful experiences I’ve endured and find wholeness and peace, **I will:**

Recognize that domestic violence is contrary to God’s will. Mistreatment, hurt, or injury is never acceptable. Domestic violence and abuse should never be ignored or dismissed, but confronted and stopped.

- I will seek help and counseling on how to best protect myself and my children from any and every abusive family member. If necessary, I will also seek and engage the help of the police. I will file a restraining and/or a protective order when necessary.
- I will physically move my children and myself to a safe place. I will no longer allow myself or my children to be abused in any way. Abuse and violence are not a part of love.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8).

Realize that it is healthy and appropriate to set healthy boundaries while seeking wisdom from the Word of God and a wise and well-trained counselor.

- I will not ignore or deny the gravity of my abusive situation. I will not minimize its seriousness or rationalize my abuser’s behavior. I will not suffer in silence about what is happening in my life.

- I will not disown or deny my feelings and emotions. I am not to blame for what another person does. I will pray for my abuser. I will also pray for the strength to follow through with consequences as new boundaries are established.

“My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (ISAIAH 32:18).

Relinquish any shame I feel to God, recognizing that it comes from wrong beliefs and not from Him.

- I will learn how to value myself, realizing I do not need to feel ashamed of what someone else has done. I bear no blame for the abuse and thus I have no shame.
- I will rely on God’s truth to lead me, reading His Word for instruction and strength each day. I will put my confidence and trust in God.

“We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield” (PSALM 33:20 NLT).

Recognize my worth.

- I refuse to believe lies about my value and identity. I am loved by God, I am His child, and He considers me to be of great worth.
- I will seek the support of friends, family, neighbors, and others to help me and my family not be in isolation. I will be involved in a local church where I am loved and can love others. I will remember that I am very precious in God’s sight.

“You are precious and honored in my sight, and . . . I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4).

Rebuild my life in the light and knowledge of what is good and healthy. I will rely on the Lord to guide my steps and my life.

- I will trust the Lord for my future, because He cares for me and wants to help me. I will not rush to make decisions based on my emotions. If my abuser has not gotten help and changed completely, I will secure a new place to live. I will not return to a spouse who mistreats my children or me.
- I will discover what community resources and support groups are available to help me and my family move forward. I will overcome my painful past through Christ

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (PSALM 147:3).

Rest in the Lord continually.

- I will acknowledge that true happiness comes from my relationship with Christ. I will yield myself to Him—fleeing and resisting the false beliefs that formerly kept me in the bondage of abuse.
- I will replace the lies I believed with the truth of God’s Word, refusing to entertain unhealthy thoughts. I will avoid destructive patterns and learn to rejoice in God, even in the difficult times. He has the power and strength to help me.

“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him” (PSALM 40:2–3).

For the Abuser:

A Personalized Plan and more information for abusers seeking help, hope, and healing is available in Appendix C of this resource.

How to Correct the Confusion

The woman who sincerely wants to please God but who is not grounded in the Word of God can become captive to an incorrect understanding of biblical submission. She associates submission with accepting abuse, believing it’s her call as a wife to suffer through kicks and punches. But nothing could be further from the heart of God, who never approves of a husband’s abuse.

One key to correcting the confusion is seeing Scripture in light of its context. Yes, the Bible reads, “*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands*” (Ephesians 5:22), but it also reads, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church*” (Ephesians 5:25), which is a clear mandate for husbands to treat their wives with compassion and tender care. Here are three helpful steps for examining Scripture accurately and contextually:

Look at the surrounding verses.

Look at the purpose of the passage or book in which the verse is found.

Look at the whole counsel of God's Word on submission and love.

Look at how we are to relate to one another:

*“Do your best to present yourself
to God as one approved,
a worker who does not need to be ashamed
and who correctly handles the word of truth.”*

(2 TIMOTHY 2:15)

Arguments and Answers

Argument: “When Jesus said to ‘turn the other cheek,’ He meant that you should submit to abuse.”²⁹

Answer: When you look at these words of Jesus, the context is the issue of rejecting retaliation: Refuse to retaliate evil for evil. Jesus was not advocating submitting to abuse.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (MATTHEW 5:38–39).

The backdrop of “turning the other cheek” was refusing to take personal revenge rather than promoting or accepting abuse.

Argument: “Because Jesus submitted Himself to abuse, if you want to be Christlike, you must also submit to abuse.”

Answer: It is important to notice that on numerous occasions when the enemies of Jesus sought to harm Him, He eluded them and escaped. However, when the time came for Him to take away the sins of the world, Jesus allowed His blood to be the payment price to purchase our forgiveness. Clearly, Jesus did not submit to abuse without purpose.

“Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. . . . Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp” (JOHN 7:1; 10:39).

Argument: “First Peter 2:19 says we are called to endure ‘*unjust suffering*.’ Therefore, we are to take such suffering as being commendable before God.”

Peter wrote, “*It is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God*” (1 PETER 2:19).

Answer: This passage is not dealing with husbands and wives; rather it speaks to first-century slaves who suffered under the hand of cruel masters. Twisting this passage to condone or justify marital or family abuse is a deceptive mishandling of the Word of God. We can learn from this passage that God gives grace to those who endure unjust suffering. However this is not a call from God for wives to endure abuse by their husbands.

The context of 1 Peter 3:7 refers to suffering because you are “*conscious of God*,” which means suffering ridicule, criticism, and rejection because of your faith—not because you are a woman or you haven’t met a husband’s particular or unreasonable expectations. God does not call wives to be abused by their husbands. To the contrary, men who abuse their wives do so because of their own ungodliness. In fact, God specifically calls husbands and wives to sacrificially love each other and treat each another with respect.

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 PETER 3:7).

Argument: “An abused woman should view suffering as her legitimate ‘cross to bear.’”

As Jesus said, “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (MATTHEW 16:24).

Answer: Nowhere does the Bible indicate that the cross is an instrument of physical and emotional pain to be inflicted upon a woman by an abusive husband. It is not self-centered for a woman to escape or stop abuse. In context, Jesus was saying the cross is a symbol of death—death to self-centered living, death to self-rule so that the Lord can rule our hearts and lives. The very next verse confirms that the cross stands for yielding our lives to the Lord, not to abuse.

“Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (MATTHEW 16:25).

Argument: “God made men superior to women.”

Answer: God made women and men different from one another, with different roles and functions. The Bible does not say that God regards one gender as superior and the other as inferior, but rather He regards them as equal.

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (GENESIS 1:27 NLT).

Argument: “Since Ephesians 5:24 says **wives should submit to their husbands in everything**, a wife must submit unconditionally—even to abuse.”³⁰

Answer: This conclusion contradicts other scripture passages. A “hierarchy of submission” was demonstrated when the apostles refused to obey the high priest and instead obeyed Jesus, who gave them the Great Commission to continue to teach about Him (Matthew 28:19–20). The disciples could have been severely punished by disobeying the high priest in order to submit to God.

Similarly, if a husband tells a wife to do something that God says is wrong, she is not to submit to her erring husband, but instead is to submit to God.

God clearly states His opposition to violence and that husbands are to treat their wives with respect. In all things . . .

“We must obey God rather than human beings!” (ACTS 5:29).

Argument: “Because the Bible says **the husband is the head of the wife**, a wife must not resist being abused by her husband.”

Answer: A wife is to submit to the *headship* (or leadership) of her husband, but nowhere does the Bible imply she is to submit to the *abuse* of her husband. She is to respect his position, not be victimized by his power.

In Ephesians 5:23, the husband and wife relationship is compared to the relationship of Christ and the church. Christ is the head of His church, “*his body*.” Although the husband is the head of his wife, no head abuses its own body. A husband never chooses to beat his body with a hammer—unless, of course, he is out of his mind (mentally ill). Instead, he does whatever he can to protect and provide for his own body. A godly man will treat his wife in the same way that Christ cares for the church.

“The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. . . . Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church” (EPHESIANS 5:23, 28–29).

Submission vs. Your Conscience

Question: “My husband says that because I am a Christian, I must submit to whatever is asked of me. Must I submit when pressured to do things that violate my conscience?”³¹

Answer: No, never violate your conscience. Keeping a clear conscience is an issue of your integrity. In the Bible, a “hierarchy” of submission exists to guide our decision making:

- First, we are to “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*” (Ephesians 5:21). This is *mutual submission* and includes both husbands and wives deferring to the appropriate desires of each other.
- Second, the verse that immediately follows says, “*Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands*” (verse 22), which should be read with the corollary verse, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (verse 25). *However*, if a husband asks his wife to rob a bank with him, she should not submit to him because . . .
- Third, the Bible also says we are to submit to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1). *However*, if the government instructs you to gas multitudes of people (as happened in Nazi Germany), you should not submit because . . .
- Finally, one of God’s Ten Commandments states, “*You shall not murder*” (Exodus 20:13). Ultimately, “*We must obey God rather than human beings!*” (Acts 5:29).

Clearly the highest authority is God, next is the governing authorities, and then the family. Thus, if your mate's request is illegal or against God's will, you must not submit.

"This is love for God: to keep his commands."
(1 JOHN 5:3)

How to Know Whether Your Husband Has Really Changed

Habitual patterns of abusive behavior rarely change unless there is significant intervention, professional guidance, or both. Sometimes, however, an abuser becomes convicted of his harmful ways and the Lord gives the person a new heart, new desires, and the power to change.

While restoration and healing are possible for the abuser, this does not mean that the abused person must stay in the relationship or try to reconcile with their abuser. Reconciliation should only be pursued once the abusive person consistently exhibits the characteristics of repentance, recovery, and restoration for a significant period of time.

If your mate promises that change has occurred, you need to ask the Lord for wisdom and talk with others who know you and your husband to carefully discern whether the change is temporary and manipulative or whether your husband is truly taking personal responsibility for his abusive behavior. As Proverbs 2:12 says:

*"Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse."*

As you seek to determine the genuineness and reliability of your mate's professed changes . . .

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I no longer have a sense of fear when I am with my husband?
- Has my husband learned to control his anger without being verbally or emotionally abusive?
- Does my husband respect my right to disagree?
- Is my husband able to express feelings of anger in a calm, nonthreatening way?
- Does my husband communicate feelings other than anger?
- Does my husband take personal responsibility for inappropriate behavior and no longer blame me or others?
- Do I feel I am being treated with respect?
- Does my husband show consistent love and refuse to harbor bitterness toward me?
- Does my husband include me in decision making?
- Does my husband ask for my opinions and listen attentively to them?
- Does my husband share his heart with me?
- Does my husband express interest in my thoughts, feelings, and desires?
- Does my husband have an accountability group I can contact?
- Does my husband respect my need for other relationships?

Scripture is clear about the husband’s role:

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

(COLOSSIANS 3:19)

How to Build Healthy Boundaries

If you are experiencing abuse from your spouse, you need to draw a line in the sand—to stand against abuse by establishing and enforcing boundaries.

Abusers need to know you will not tolerate their abuse. And if the line is crossed, a repercussion will follow. Perhaps you will leave the home with the children, or you will notify the police, or you will call the pastor, or you will have certain individuals come and escort your abusive spouse out of the house.

Just as important as drawing a line in the sand is this: Ensure that the boundary doesn't get blurred by compromises or by a lack of resolve to enforce it. The only way to prevent abuse in the future is to stop it in the present. What you say you will do, *you must do*—every time—or the cycle of abuse will continue. Scripture reflects God's perfect will regarding violence:

"No longer will violence be heard in your land."
(ISAIAH 60:18)

How to Build Healthy Boundaries (an acrostic for the word BOUNDARIES)

This is how to lay a firm foundation of healthy boundaries with your abuser:

- B—Begin** a new way of thinking about yourself, God, and about abuse.
- God loves you and He created you in His image.
 - Abuse is a sin against God's creation. God did not create you to be abused.
 - Don't think that abuse is normal—line up your thinking with God's thinking.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (ROMANS 12:2).

- O—Overcome** your fear of the unknown by personalizing, memorizing, and speaking God's Word to yourself.

- **God is my companion:** *“The LORD himself goes before [me] and will be with [me]; he will never leave [me] nor forsake [me]. [I will] not be afraid; [I will] not be discouraged”* (Deuteronomy 31:8).
- **God is my strength:** *“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10).
- **God is my deliverer:** *“I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”* (Psalm 34:4).

“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock” (PSALM 27:5).

U—Understand the biblical mandate to hold abusers accountable.

- Confrontation is biblical. (Remember, you don’t have to be the one to confront them.)
- Confrontation can be used by God’s Spirit to convict the abuser.
- Confrontation can stop abuse by not enabling abusers to continue abusing others.

“Call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out” (PSALM 10:15).

N—Notify people of your needs (supportive friends, relatives, or others).

- They must believe you.
- They must be trustworthy.
- They must not divulge your new location to your abuser if you leave.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (GALATIANS 6:2).

D—Develop God’s perspective on biblical love, submission, and authority.

- Neither love, submission, nor authority ever gives license for abuse.
- Neither love, submission, nor authority is to be imposed or demanded, but is to be voluntary.
- Love, submission, and authority are designed by God to be a way of life for everyone.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (EPHESIANS 5:21).

A—Admit your feelings.

- Take time to grieve and process your emotions.
- Talk with someone about your experience and how you feel.
- Tell God what you’ve honestly felt and ask Him to help you move forward.

“Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8 NLT).

R—Recognize your own codependent patterns of relating and change the way you respond.

- Don’t respond fearfully, hiding the truth from your abuser.
- Don’t believe you can change your abuser.
- Don’t take responsibility for your abuser’s behavior.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (GALATIANS 1:10).

I—Identify healthy boundaries for yourself and commit to maintaining them.

- Communicate your boundaries.
- State what you will do if your abuser crosses your boundaries.
- Follow through when your boundaries are crossed.

For example, state firmly: “The next time you use any force against me (or block me from leaving, etc.), I will:

- Call the police,
- Leave with the children, and/or
- Demand that you leave our home.”

Then—follow through with the promised action.

“A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; if you rescue them, you will have to do it again” (PROVERBS 19:19).

E—Ensure your personal safety (and that of your children) immediately.

- Know what you will do the next time your safety is threatened—have an action plan in place.

- Know the contact information for someone at your church or in your neighborhood or community who can help you.
- Know ahead of time where you will go and whom you will call. Have necessary phone numbers easily accessible.

“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety” (PSALM 4:8).

S—See your identity as a precious child of God—an identity that cannot change even though your role as a spouse may change.

- God chose you.
- God redeemed you.
- God adopted you.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 JOHN 3:1).

Upholding Boundaries

Question: “Because my husband has been abusive, I know that I must leave to protect myself and our children. I still love him, but I’m afraid. How do I uphold boundaries so we can be safe?”

Answer: All important is *what* you say and *how* you say it (with compassionate strength). If you are certain you would not be safe, do not directly confront your spouse. If you feel your relationship is somewhat stable and peaceful, you might consider approaching your mate. If you do not feel safe approaching him alone, ask someone you both respect to be present.

Tell your husband:

- “I love you and want our marriage to work.”
- Ask, “Do you want us to have the best relationship possible?”

- “Just as there are penalties for crossing boundary lines in sports, there are penalties for crossing boundary lines in marriage. And you’ve crossed a boundary line in our marriage by being abusive.”
- “I cannot and will not live with abuse. So, either the children and I will leave or you need to leave for us to feel safe.”
- “Ultimately, you will decide whether we reconcile our marriage.”
- “If you want us to live together again as a family, you *will* get help. I will know you have changed by the respect you show me and by the way you treat me.”
- “You have the power to make or break our marriage through your actions. *The choice is yours.*”

Give careful thought to the wisdom of parting ways, even temporarily. Follow through with the consequences you establish.

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways.”

(PROVERBS 14:8)

How to Prepare a Safety Plan for Leaving

Battles on the home turf can turn into a full-scale war when an abused spouse chooses to leave. It is vital that you surround yourself with an army of people who will support and help protect you, as well as devote the necessary time to make critical preparations (legally, financially, etc.) for independent living.

Recognize and understand that threats of harm can escalate when an abusive husband realizes his wife is finally going to take decisive action. For that reason, comprehensive preparation as well as support

and help from friends, family, counselors, pastors, and even legal authorities are desperately needed. As much as you are able, do not attempt to leave an abusive situation on your own. Enlist the help of trusted individuals. Reach out to agencies and organizations whose primary objective is protecting you.

Above all, seek refuge in the arms of the Lord, your deliverer, asking Him to guide and protect you as you walk away from the war zone.

*“Praise be to the LORD my Rock,
who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.
He is my loving God and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield,
in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.”*

(PSALM 144:1–2)

Violent outbursts can occur at any time. A violent spouse may enter a blind rage when he discovers a different dynamic in the relationship. He begins to fear losing control of you and losing the family. The greatest danger can come when a husband learns his wife has intentions of leaving. A person who is wise will have prepared for the worst by having a safety plan for leaving.

*“The prudent see danger and takes refuge,
but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”*

(PROVERBS 22:3)

Safety Strategies

As you prepare your strategies for safety³² . . .

Create a list of phone numbers you may need for emergencies. (For a short list of helpful resources and hotlines, see Appendix A.)

– Local emergency numbers (example: 9-1-1, the local hospital):

– Local police: _____

– Women’s shelter: _____

- County Registry of Protective Orders: _____
- Salvation Army: _____
- Work number: _____
- Employer’s/supervisor’s home and/or cell phone number:

- Church number: _____
- Minister’s home and/or cell phone number: _____
- Hotline for domestic violence: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Friends: _____

Pray: *“Keep me safe, LORD, from the hands of the wicked”* (Psalm 140:4).

Share the seriousness of your situation with trustworthy people.

- Ask whether you could stay with them at a moment’s notice if the need arises.
- Ask trusted neighbors to call the police if they hear screams or hitting.
- Select a code word or phrase (such as “blue eggs”) or a signal (turning on a certain light) to use as a sign for your neighborhood friends and family to call the police.
- Store a bag of extra clothing and money at a confidant’s house.
- Talk with a doctor and/or nurse about the violence. (Ask them to take photographs of your injuries and to document the abuse in your medical records.)
- Contact a local shelter to discuss your options and ask them to help you make a safety plan.

Pray: *“Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble”* (Psalm 41:1).

Plan an escape route.

- Identify which emergency exits you can use (doors, windows, elevator, stairwell) and practice getting out safely.
- If an argument begins, move away from any room containing objects that could be used as weapons (such as the kitchen).

- Move to a room that has an exit (not a bathroom, a closet, or a small space where the abuser could trap you).
- Rehearse your escape plan with your children.

“Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways” (PROVERBS 4:26).

Teach your children “safety secrets.”

- Teach them not to get into the middle of a fight, even if they want to help you.
- Teach them to stay out of the kitchen (away from knives).
- Teach them how to give your address and phone number to trusted and known adults.
- Teach them how to call the police.
- Teach them how to call for help.
- Teach them how to quickly and quietly escape (through a back door or window).
- Teach them when to escape (such as when violence erupts or when they feel threatened).
- Teach them where to go for safety.

“Through knowledge the righteous escape” (PROVERBS 11:9).

Place physical evidence of violence with a trusted confidant or in a safety deposit box.

- Documentation of physical injuries done to you and your children
- Pictures of damaged property (such as broken furniture, doors, and walls)
- A log of the abuse by date, time, place, and event
- Physical evidence of your mate’s threats from letters, e-mails, voice mail, and text messages

“They do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me” (HOSEA 7:2).

Identify essential or meaningful items you can gather quickly (but remember, safety must always be your first concern).

- Address book

- Children’s favorite toys and blankets
- Medicines
- Pictures
- Sentimental items
- Your pets

“Gather up your belongings to leave the land, you who live under siege”
(JEREMIAH 10:17).

Keep important papers and documents easily accessible and together in one place. Many of these items can be scanned or photographed and kept digitally. But remember, everything on this list can be replaced if needed.

- Bank books, money, credit cards
- Birth certificates
- Current unpaid bills
- Deeds and other legal records (lease/rental agreement, house deed, mortgage payment book)
- Driver’s license and registration
- Family medical records
- Insurance papers (health, car, house)
- Passport, green card, visa, work permit
- Protective order/restraining order (keep with you at all times)
- Divorce papers, court documents, custody agreements
- School records (K-12)
- College diploma
- Social security card(s)
- Welfare identification
- Résumé
- Transcripts of children in college

“Wisdom reposes in the heart of the discerning” (PROVERBS 14:33).

Cover your bases before leaving.

- Accumulate some emergency cash and keep it hidden or give it to a trusted confidant for safekeeping.

- Transfer important digital files to external media and then delete them from the computer.
- Hide an extra set of car keys (also house and office keys).
- Open a checking and/or savings account in your name.
- Cancel any shared bank accounts or credit cards.
- Change passwords to online accounts that you’ll need to access.
- Open a post office box in your name.
- Set aside jewelry, silver, or other valuables your husband would not likely miss which you can quickly sell for cash.

“If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you” (PROVERBS 9:12).

Restraining Order and God’s Will

Question: “If I get a restraining order, am I going against the will of God based on 1 Corinthians 6:1–8?”

*“If any of you has a dispute with another,
do you dare to take it before the ungodly for
judgment instead of before the Lord’s people?
. . . Why not rather be cheated?”
(1 CORINTHIANS 6:1, 7)*

Answer: No, the context of 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 is this: Avoid looking to nonbelievers to settle a dispute that has happened between believers.

The purpose of a restraining order is not to settle a dispute regarding unjust harm or loss, but rather protection *from* unjust harm or loss—possibly even loss of life.

The intent of a restraining order is to physically protect people from harm, not to settle a dispute between Christians.

God established governing authorities (from government officials and police officers to court and civil authorities) to be a blessing to people by promoting order, justice, and good conduct and by punishing evil and wrongdoing (see Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–14).

We are called by God to submit to our governing authorities, and domestic violence is against both the civil law and the law of God.

*“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities,
for there is no authority except that which God has established.
The authorities that exist have been established by God.
Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority
is rebelling against what God has instituted,
and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”*

(ROMANS 13:1–2)

How to Protect Yourself Outside the Home

Even if an abused wife no longer lives under the same roof with her husband, she may not be out of harm’s way. An abuser may find it difficult to inflict harm after a victim leaves the home, but some abusers may be relentless in their pursuit for revenge.

Safety can be a constant challenge for you whether alone or in a crowd, at home or at work, in a subway or in a car. There is some comfort to be found behind locked doors and bolted windows, but those aren’t available in public places. So how do you live without fear and a sense of constant vulnerability?

Thankfully, safety steps can help reduce the risk of further abuse, but always remember that the Lord God Almighty—not your abuser—is sovereign over your life. Seek refuge in Him.

*“The name of the LORD is a fortified tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe.”*

(PROVERBS 18:10)

Safety steps for being out and about:

- Change your regular travel habits and routes.
- Try to get rides with different people.
- Shop and bank in different places.
- Keep your court order and emergency numbers with you at all times.
- Notify your children’s school or day care and ask for help in keeping you and your children safe.
- Program a cell phone to call an emergency number or the police. (Keep it with you at all times.)

“The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life” (PSALM 121:7).

Safety steps for being at work:

- Confide in a coworker information about your unsafe situation.
- Explain your situation to the head of security where you work.
- Give a picture of your abuser to security, your supervisor, and friends at work.
- Ask your supervisors if they can make it harder for your abuser to find you at work.
- Keep a copy of your court order at work, if you have one.
- Ask someone to screen your calls, if possible.
- Save abusive voice mails and e-mails you receive.
- Don’t go to lunch alone.
- Ask a security guard, friend, or coworker to walk you to and from your car, bus, or other mode of transportation.
- Ask your employer to help you find community resources.

“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10, 12 NLT).

How to Use the Law in the United States

Sadly, many who have been abused are so beaten down they feel powerless to do anything to free themselves from the bondage they mistakenly believe is unbreakable. In truth, it is not only their abusers who keep them in bondage but also their own passivity, rooted in fear and insecurities. Many choose to stay in abusive relationships rather than definitively act to bring about an end to their violent home life.

But today, you can choose differently. With the help of the legal system and other strong community support networks, you can begin developing a plan to break the cycle of abuse once and for all. Do not believe the lies that you have to stay and endure abuse or that no one can or wants to help you. Help is available from those around you and from God above.

*“Rulers hold no terror for those who do right,
but for those who do wrong
Do what is right and you will be commended.
For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.
But if you do wrong, be afraid,
for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason.
They are God’s servants, agents of wrath
to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”*
(ROMANS 13:3–4)

Take Action!

Take action if you stay in your home, and obtain a restraining order/protective order.

- Inform family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers of any court order. Ask them to be ready to call the police if your abuser appears and refuses to leave.
- Get an unlisted phone number.
- Take a good self-defense course.
- Keep a phone in a room you can lock from the inside.

- When you need to call the police, do so quickly.
- If police officers come, tell them what happened and get their names and badge numbers.

To those in law enforcement, the Bible says:

“Let the fear of the LORD be on you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery” (2 CHRONICLES 19:7).

Take action if your home is not safe and secured.

- Install new locks on outside doors.
- Install deadbolt locks.
- Install locks on the windows and on the inside of your bedroom door.
- Install a security system, including cameras.
- Install outside motion sensors.
- Install an outside lighting system.

“You will know that your home is safe” (JOB 5:24 NLT).

Take action to protect your children and yourself by having a judge issue protective orders:

- Have a judge order your abuser to stay away from you and/or your children. Have a judge order you to take temporary custody of your children and that your abuser pay you temporary child support.
- Have a judge order your abuser to leave your home. Have a judge order the police to come to your home while your abuser picks up personal belongings.
- Have a judge order you to take possession of the car, furniture, and other belongings.
- Have a judge order your abuser to go to a batterers’ intervention program.
- Have a judge order your abuser not to call you at work.
- Have a judge order your abuser to turn over any guns or other weapons to the police.

“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly” (1 TIMOTHY 1:8).

Take action if you are receiving harassing phone calls.

- Consider changing your number.
- Consider getting caller ID/tracking.
- Consider rejecting anonymous calls.
- Consider call-screening, call-blocking, call-tracing, call-waiting/caller ID.
- Consider setting up a do-not-disturb function on your phone.
- Consider obtaining priority ringing.

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways’”
(HAGGAI 1:5).

Take action if you are worried about your safety or the safety of your children during scheduled visits.

- Show the judge pictures of your injuries.
- Tell the judge you do not feel safe when your abuser comes to your home to pick up the children to visit with them.
- Ask the judge to order your abuser to pick up and return the children at the police station or some other safe place.
- Ask that your abuser’s visits be only at very specific times so the police will know by reading the court order whether your abuser is there at the wrong time.
- Tell the judge if your abuser has harmed or threatened the children; ask that visits be supervised; think about who could do that for you.
- Get a certified copy of the court order.

“Rescue me, LORD, from evildoers; protect me from the violent” (PSALM 140:1).

Take action if you are concerned about your safety during any criminal proceedings.

- Show the prosecutor your court orders.
- Show the prosecutor medical records containing your injuries or pictures, if you have them.
- Show the prosecutor any photographs and/or documentation detailing the abuse and your injuries

- Tell the prosecutor the name of anyone who is helping you (a victim advocate or a lawyer).
- Tell the prosecutor about any witnesses to your injuries or abuse.
- Ask the prosecutor to notify you ahead of time if your abuser is released from jail.

“You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies; you save me from violent opponents” (2 SAMUEL 22:49 NLT).

Take action if you fear for your safety at the courthouse.

- Sit as far away from your abuser as you can; you don’t have to look at or talk to him; you don’t have to talk to his family or friends if they are present.
- Bring a friend or relative with you to wait until your case is heard.
- Tell a bailiff or sheriff that you are afraid of your abuser, and ask them to look out for you.
- Make sure you have your court order in hand before leaving the courthouse.
- Ask the judge or the sheriff to retain your abuser for a while when court is over so that you can leave quickly without having to deal with any unwanted interference by the abuser. Call the police immediately if you think your abuser is following you when you leave.
- Take your protection order with you if you have to travel to another state, either for work or for safety. It is valid everywhere.

“You will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble” (PROVERBS 3:23).

What Recourses Do Women Have?

Question: “My friend’s husband continues to be physically violent toward her. Other than leaving with their children, what recourse does she have?”

Answer: A wife who has been physically or sexually victimized by her husband should not be doubly victimized by having to leave her own home. Though he is the violator, don't assume that she should be the one to leave.

She could first call a legal official (such as a District Attorney) to inquire about the laws governing where she lives, protective orders, and court orders that can force her husband to leave the premises.

If she has difficulty getting information, she can call a shelter for battered women, a hotline for domestic violence, the Salvation Army, or an attorney who specializes in family law who can recommend legal ways to protect her family. (See Appendix A for a short list of helpful resources and hotlines.)

Great comfort and assurance will come from those who are wise.

"The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure."

(ECCLESIASTES 8:5)

Protection through the Legal System

Question: "What protection is available through the legal system in the United States?"³³

Answer: In the absence of a divorce action, a *peace bond* is issued before a justice of the peace in a civil court. This legal instrument is mainly used for domestic violence. In a divorce action, the attorney requests a *restraining order* to protect the abused from further harassment and violence. Such an order is issued routinely by a family court judge.

Suspicion of violence or threats of violence are not enough to warrant the issuing of any order by a judge.

Before a judge will consider issuing any order, police reports must contain documented physical contact.

God blesses those who convict the guilty. Proverbs 24:25 says, *“It will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come on them.”*

If you live in a place where the legal system does not offer protection against domestic abuse, find help through local churches, community centers, or seek refuge with empathetic friends or neighbors. God is aware of your situation, and He will guide you to a place of safety.

*“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn
of my salvation, my stronghold.”*
(PSALM 18:2)

How to Realize Your Biblical Bill of Rights

The U.S. Bill of Rights, which comprises the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, stands as a fundamental symbol for individual freedoms. Among other constraints, Congress can pass no law that prohibits the free exercise of religion, nor can it deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

And so it goes within the marriage relationship. Know the rights you have that are firmly embedded in an even more trustworthy document—*the Bible, the Word of God*. Rights to operate by faith, not by fear—rights to seek to live a holy life, not a harsh one marked by abuse.

“God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:7)

Some people claim that when you come into a relationship with Christ, you give up all of your rights. This simply is not true. You always have the God-given right to live your life according to God's Word in order to accomplish God's will. For example, if your marriage partner tries to pressure you to commit a sinful act by using Scripture out of context (perverting the purpose of "*Wives, submit to your husbands*"), God's will is that you *not* do it. Instead, you "*must obey God rather than human beings!*" (Acts 5:29).

Biblical Bill of Rights

Within the marriage relationship . . .

I. God's will is that you treat one another with respect.

"The wife must respect her husband" (EPHESIANS 5:33).

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect" (1 PETER 3:7).

II. God's will is that you experience mutual submission.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (EPHESIANS 5:21).

III. God's will is that you speak truth and have truth spoken to you in a loving manner.

"Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" (EPHESIANS 4:15).

IV. God's will is that you express anger and have anger expressed toward you in appropriate ways.

"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (EPHESIANS 4:26).

V. God's will is that you both spend personal time alone.

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (MARK 1:35).

VI. God's will is that you use your unique talents and gifts to serve others.

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 PETER 4:10).

VII. God's will is that you enjoy freedom from fear.

"I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears" (PSALM 34:4 NLT).

VIII. God's will is that you both seek emotional and spiritual support from others.

"Let us not neglect our meeting together . . . but encourage one another" (HEBREWS 10:25 NLT).

IX. God's will is that you report abuse to governmental authorities.

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority . . . who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right" (1 PETER 2:13–14).

X. God's will is that you leave an abusive relationship to protect yourself from danger.

"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" (PROVERBS 27:12).

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Articles I, III, and V, 1948

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. . . .

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. . . .

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

How to Clarify the Church's Role and Reinforce Christlike Responses

Religion can be a *resource* or a *roadblock*, greatly depending on the *response* of the church leaders. As a *resource* it can provide the necessary safety and support for the abused to seek help and healing. As a *roadblock*, it can turn a blind eye to abuse or rationalize it, thereby contributing to the victim's sense of self-blame.

Jesus had this to say about unresponsive spiritual leaders:

*"You experts in the law, woe to you,
because you load people down
with burdens they can hardly carry,
and you yourselves will not
lift one finger to help them."*

(LUKE 11:46)

The Church's Role in Protecting Victims of Domestic Abuse

Motivating local churches to move from apathy to action regarding domestic violence is a most worthy cause, but not necessarily an easy one. In accepting this critical challenge, consider the following straightforward suggestions:

Recruit the support of church leaders to back your position and provide you with the necessary resources so that you can provide meaningful help.

- *Educate* yourself and your leaders to understand the complexity of the problem and how abusers can disguise themselves within the religious community.

Realize how difficult it is for the abused to come forward and reveal the truth about their abusers.

- *Explain* that the abused often remain shrouded in silence for fear of retaliation or not being believed.

Remember the primary importance of fully listening to the abused.

- *Listen* with your heart as well as with your ears so the abused feels sincerely heard.

Reassure the abused that your church is a safe place.

- *Keep* any information shared completely confidential, doing everything in your power to protect the abused's privacy and safety.

Recognize that women of color and different cultures are often most at risk.

- *Factor in* obstacles such as fear of deportation, lack of familiarity with the language and the legal system, cultural expectations for women to keep things private, and lack of resources or education can contribute to their silence.

Rebuke the abuser so that strong, godly leaders confront and counsel the abuser through the lengthy path of *repentance*, *restoration*, and *reconciliation*.

- *Hold* the abuser accountable to participate in a specialized recovery program, even if the pastoral team is unable to handle the counseling in-house at the church.

Refuse to allow the abuser to use Scripture (such as Ephesians 5:22) out of context to justify abusive actions.

- *Redirect* abusers to Bible passages that show the importance of loving and respecting their wives and families (such as Ephesians 5:25, Colossians 3:19, 1 Peter 3:7).

Refer the abused to trained counselors and specialized services to receive the safety and support needed for everyone in the family.

- *Provide* a list of phone numbers, services, and support people, as well as an action plan, to equip the abused with necessary resources.

Resolve to help break generational cycles of abuse. Abusers and those they abuse usually come from homes where they witnessed abuse or where they were abused themselves.

- *Engage* children in counseling because children in a violent home are more likely to become abusive or to be abused and are more likely to use alcohol or drugs.

Recommend Bible study, prayer, and fasting to both the abuser and the abused.

- *Encourage* both the abused and abuser to establish the daily habit of having a time to study God’s Word, pray, and cast every care on the Lord.

*“My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.”*
(PSALM 119:50)

How to Respond to Domestic Violence as a Pastor or a Parishioner

Church leaders need a heightened awareness of the prevalence and dangers of domestic violence. *Make no mistake—abuse is occurring within your congregation.* Therefore, you need to know how to respond when a victim needs help. Key elements of an effective response include knowing how to listen and how to respond with wisdom, as well as having a plan and programs in place.

As a church member, you are to love and encourage the abused person as well as to confront and admonish when necessary. As a pastor, you have the dual responsibility as the *watchman*, who is entrusted with the safety of his people, as well as the *shepherd*, who is to guide and support them.

These roles may call for keener eyes on the part of both the pastor and the parishioner. Domestic violence thrives in a secret world of shame, and women are usually fearful of bringing what happens in the dark into the light. They feel disgraced and degraded, so much so that they don’t even want their pastor to know what’s happening behind closed doors.

Part of learning how to minister to the abused is watching for signs of domestic violence, such as repeated bruises, wounds, or secretiveness about their home life.

The Bible emphasizes the seriousness of your role:

*“If the watchman sees the sword coming
and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people
and the sword comes and takes someone’s life,
that person’s life will be taken because of their sin,
but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood.”*

(EZEKIEL 33:6)

Practical Points for Pastors and Parishioners

Don’t listen to an abused person’s story for only a brief time and then jump to a premature conclusion.

Do listen patiently and attentively with your head and your heart.

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance”
(PROVERBS 1:5).

Don’t require hearing the “other person’s story” in order to validate what is true. This can put the abused in a potentially dangerous situation.

Do believe and support the abused person. It takes tremendous courage for a victim to come forward and seek help.

*“Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD: may your love and faithfulness
truth always protect me”* (PSALM 40:11).

Don’t place blame or guilt on the abused by inferring the victim may have done something to cause the abuse. No one makes another person sin.

Do make supportive statements to encourage and validate those experiencing abuse.

*“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and
compassion to one another.’”* (ZECHARIAH 7:9).

Don't react with disbelief and disgust over what an abused person tells you.

Do listen responsively and compassionately.

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (JAMES 1:19).

Don't be quick to recommend marriage classes or counseling, because these will not address the immediate situation. Marriage counseling may be part of the long-term solution, but not part of the initial solution.

Do produce immediate and practical solutions that will meet the needs for safety and hope.

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (ISAIAH 40:29).

Don't do anything that will allow an abused person to become overly dependent on you.

Do offer resources to equip, empower, and provide safety and security.

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (PSALM 20:7).

Don't try to “save” the situation on your own. Abusive people are complex and unpredictable. They often appear one way to their pastor yet are completely different at home.

Do consult with colleagues and experts in your community who have expertise, wisdom, and resources to support victims of domestic violence and to confront and hold abusers accountable.

“Walk with the wise and become wise” (PROVERBS 13:20).

Don't downplay the situation by suggesting an abused person simply forgive the abuser and reconcile—unless a repentant spirit has led to a radical change in behavior over an extended period of time.

Do proceed with wisdom and caution. Abusers may be sorry for what they have done and even make tearful apologies, asking for another chance. However, without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the old behaviors of the flesh will almost certainly return and repeat the abusive cycle.

“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice”
(PROVERBS 12:15).

Don’t just pray for those who are abused, then share Scripture.

Do point them to passages in the Bible that they can pray to God, verses that express their heart, their hurt, and their hope for healing.

“I call with all my heart . . . I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. . . . that I may meditate on your promises. Hear my voice in accordance with your love” (PSALM 119:145, 147–149).

Don’t let an abused person leave without having a plan of action to address the present crises or the ongoing abusive situation.

Do utilize the resources available in the church or community to provide whatever physical and emotional protection the situation requires.

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed”
(PROVERBS 15:22).

How to Promote Positive Action from the Pulpit

Sadly, the church has been silent far too long on the widespread sin of domestic violence. With this “epidemic” occurring around the world, pastors can play a pivotal role by speaking out from the pulpit against all forms of domestic violence, initiating programs that address the needs of victims, even helping the abusers receive help through qualified counselors.

The doors of churches and the hearts of church members must open wide to embrace the abused and to reach out to the abusers with the help they both so desperately need. *Transforming lives* is what true ministry is all about, and God’s heart is to transform the lives of both victim and victimizer. The pulpit has been a powerful venue for both spiritual change and societal change; therefore, pastors can be the catalyst for powerful change.

Jesus tells us that when we help those in need, it is as though we are helping Him.

*“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you something to drink?
38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in,
or needing clothes and clothe you?
39 When did we see you sick or
in prison and go to visit you? . . .
40 ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did
for one of the least of these
. . . you did for me.’”*
(MATTHEW 25:37–40)

Jesus also tells us that when we confront an abuser, we help save the sinner from death.

*“If one of you should wander from the truth
and someone should bring that
person back, remember this:
Whoever turns a sinner from the error
of their way will save them from death
and cover over a multitude of sins.”*
(JAMES 5:19–20)

Start Making a Difference

Be Proactive

- Openly address from the pulpit and in other teaching venues the topic of domestic violence. Acknowledge that abuse takes place among people within the church.
- Present messages—sermons, courses, Bible studies, and seminars—on anger management, conflict resolution, confrontation, and boundaries within relationships.

- Invite domestic violence experts to make presentations on abuse issues.
- Establish a domestic violence committee to address abuse issues within the church.
- Require premarital counseling for couples planning to marry. Specifically address domestic violence and how to handle disagreements, arguments, and control issues.
- Offer marriage counseling that includes a segment on domestic violence.
- Prepare separate programs for boys and for girls and for single men and for single women that address dangerous dating.
- Require the women’s and the men’s ministries of the church to address abuse issues separately.
- Provide phone numbers for abuse hotlines or crisis lines.
- Designate an “Abuse Prevention” day, week, or month to educate and activate church members.

The Bible says: *“These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts”* (ZECHARIAH 8:16).

Be Reactive

- Establish procedures to administer church discipline that holds abusers accountable.
- Confront abusers, offering help on how to handle conflicts and anger—both past and present.
- Train mentors to help those struggling with abuse issues.
- Utilize counselors trained in domestic violence and lawyers who specialize in family law.
- Talk and pray with victims about temporarily leaving physically abusive partners.
- Provide a temporary safe place for victims and their children who live in danger.
- Provide counselors who have expertise in domestic violence, and then arrange individual counseling sessions for abusers and for those they abuse. (Do NOT initially recommend counseling for couples together. The abused may be too intimidated.)

- Offer support groups to victims of abuse and accountability groups for abusers.
- Give financial support to shelters and other agencies for those who have been abused.
- Encourage testimonials in the church from survivors of abuse as well as from repentant abusers.

As a pastor, take to heart the biblical admonition to:

*“Rescue those being led away to death;
hold back those staggering toward slaughter.
If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?
Does not he who guards your life know it?
Will he not repay everyone according
to what they have done?”*

(PROVERBS 24:11–12)

How to Follow Do’s and Don’ts as a Friend

If the abused is candid about being abused, remember you’re talking with a *victim*.

The person before you is wounded, emotionally fragile, perhaps even traumatized. The tone and tenor of your words are essential to establishing a nurturing conversation, conducive to sharing hope. As in all cases of victimization, list do’s and don’ts to help ensure that your assistance will be positive.

Love, listen, and lend a helping hand. The Bible says,

*“Defend the weak . . .
uphold the cause of the poor
and the oppressed.”*

(PSALM 82:3)

Most victims choose to deny the severity of their situation by developing a strong defense mechanism. In addition to denial that anything is wrong, the abused tend to minimize or rationalize their abuser's behavior. If an abused person is openly and honestly discussing the abusive situation, they are displaying significant courage. This effort in itself is quite an emotional ordeal. Be prepared to respond with love and patience when your friend begins to share the secrets of a broken heart.³⁴

Don't talk in generalities if you suspect abuse.

Do specifically ask whether there has been physical harm.

"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (PROVERBS 20:5).

Don't treat the problem lightly or minimize the abuse.

Do realize that violence can be a matter of life or death and that domestic abuse is against the civil law, the moral law, and God's law.

"Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (PSALM 82:4).

Don't change the subject or act embarrassed when abuse is revealed.

Do encourage disclosure at any time about anything and be willing to listen.

"Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation you give me. Bear with me while I speak" (JOB 21:2-3).

Don't blame the victim for the abuse.

Do help the victim see that no one can make another person sin. Abuse is solely the choice of the abuser, and the abuser is solely responsible to God.

"God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (ECCLESIASTES 12:14).

Don't fear a strong display of emotions.

Do allow the victim to express fear, shame, and anger, which are often avoided, denied, or wrongly perceived to be *always* sinful.

"Be angry, and do not sin" (PSALM 4:4 ESV).

Don't advise your friend to preserve the family at all costs.

Do affirm that moving the family out of harm's way—separating—is not the same as divorcing.

"You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid" (JOB 11:18–19).

Don't send the person home when physical abuse is likely to occur.

Do provide temporary shelter and assist in discovering options.

"If anyone . . . sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? . . . Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 JOHN 3:17–18).

Don't accuse your friend of failing to be loving or submissive or long-suffering.

Do explain that it is not God's will for anyone to suffer abuse by another person for any reason. The issue is neither submission nor lack of submission, love nor lack of love.

"You are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong" (PSALM 5:4–5).

Don't merely tell the person to report injuries to a doctor or to the police.

Do accompany your friend to the hospital, and help fill out police reports.

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (PROVERBS 18:24).

Don't allow the victim to stay all alone, paralyzed in fear of further abuse.

Do learn about legal options. Accompany your friend to court to get a restraining order.

"Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed" (ISAIAH 1:17 NLT).

Don't try to provide more counseling than you are trained to give.

Do show that you care and help find counseling from someone who has experience in working with victims of violence.

“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (PROVERBS 11:14 ESV).

Don’t assume that your friend should know all the answers.

Do give assurance that God will guide and give wisdom every step of the way, especially when the way is unclear and the next step is uncertain.

“The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you” (PSALM 9:9–10).

When Anger Hits Home: The Raul and Sharon Ries Story³⁵

Taken from: HOW TO RISE ABOVE ABUSE
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It all started with a “Hi ya,”³⁶ and before long the “bad boy” had swept the “good girl” off her feet.

As Raul strolled across the high school campus, Sharon was enraptured, imagining she was gazing at a dashing Spanish conqueror. Raul’s brown skin and wavy, black hair made the wannabe missionary girl temporarily lose sight of her spiritual focus.

After high school, she knew they couldn’t marry. She had taken to heart what her Chilean missionary parents had told her: “Do not be unequally yoked.”³⁷

Yet their relationship deepened while Raul served in the Marines. Love letters, strewn with words of affection, linked their hearts from afar. And when Raul returned home, Sharon’s once-firm boundaries crumbled—and she became pregnant.

Doubt consumed Sharon. Aware of Raul’s reputation as a ladies’ man, how could she marry a man she increasingly didn’t trust?

Raul had grown up in a violent home where terror reigned. His compulsion to vent his rage led him to become a master of kung fu. During the Vietnam War, hunting Viet Cong provided a new kind of exhilaration, where killing became the ultimate thrill. When Raul returned home, he brought an all-consuming rage with him.³⁸

At age 20, Sharon stood before Raul uttering wedding vows. Because of the mess she had made of her life, she also silently recommitted herself to the Savior: “Lord, You’re the answer to my situation—You’re the only answer. I give my life to You, my child to You, and this man to You.”³⁹

Following the birth of their son and with another child on the way, restlessness dogged Raul. Sharon questioned him about his frequent late nights out. His abusive words: “Stupid . . . dummy . . . filthy witch . . . big nag”⁴⁰ . . . and a barrage of vile expletives shredded Sharon’s sense of self-worth and security. His extramarital affairs prompted more questions from Sharon and more abuse from Raul. He threw their wedding album in her face, squeezed and bruised her limbs, and did kung fu kicks to her legs. Pain and humiliation became commonplace.

Sharon prayed and persevered . . . until Raul’s abuse was unleashed toward their five-year-old son. Determined to shield him from danger, Sharon devised an escape plan. On Easter, she would leave.

Raul returned home Easter evening to an empty house and full suitcases. His wife’s plans now obvious to him, he decided to counterattack. Pulling out his rifle, he reasoned, “If I can’t have my family, nobody else is gonna have them!”⁴¹ After killing them, he’d kill himself.

Raul figured Sharon and the kids were at church—“Little Miss Christian,” he mused venomously. Awaiting the arrival of his prey, Raul turned on the television, idly flipping through the channels until a voice of reason penetrated the silence, with certain phrases catching his attention: “This is the real sign of love . . . fellowship with God . . . you can come to know that love . . .”⁴² Raul’s eyes locked on the screen. The man was talking about having a relationship with God, not just a religion. “Jesus died on the cross for your sins . . . When they drove the nails into His hands and feet, He took your punishment.”

Tears began streaming down Raul's face, then waves of sobs. "Jesus offers you forgiveness . . . you are not beyond God's love." Raul dropped to his knees and gave his life to Jesus. He received God's free gift of salvation.⁴³

With exuberant joy, Raul raced to Sharon's church, slipping in the back door just in time to hear, "Would anyone like to make a public profession of faith?"⁴⁴ Raul practically ran down the aisle. Sharon, however, was nowhere in sight. After being warmly received, Raul bounded home, eager to share the exciting news with Sharon, who had since returned. His enthusiasm was met by a door slammed in his face.

Sharon had reached a well-reasoned decision to remove her children and herself from harm's way. Sadly, harm was personified in her husband. She was serious about establishing a boundary—and Raul knew she was serious. Raul had crossed a godly boundary. This time, it would take more than words to regain her trust.

"Raul," she told him, after finally allowing him inside the living room, "it took me all of these years to make up my mind to leave you. And now, just when I've finally decided to go, you show up saying you're born again. Don't expect me to jump up and down with excitement, okay? To tell you the truth, I'm disappointed. I was looking forward to starting my life all over again."⁴⁵

His declarations of "I'm changed!" weren't believed. He'd made those professions before. Raul then responded with uncharacteristic understanding. "I don't blame you. I really don't," he said. "But just watch—I'm going to show you that I'm changed."⁴⁶

Wisely, Sharon required evidence of a changed life. She needed to see new attitudes and actions, not just a temporary change.

Indeed, there was change—Raul vacuumed the house (he had never done that before), cleaned the yard, didn't get drunk, didn't force Sharon to have sex, took time to read the Word, and attended church. But would it last?

About six months later, Raul got angry and grabbed Sharon's neck. She shrieked, "See, you haven't changed!" Immediately, he dropped his hands and ran outside. Confused and alarmed by his abusive behavior, he turned to God for help. He knew this area of his life had to change—and soon.⁴⁷

Raul found himself reading about Paul's persecution of the Jews before he became a believer. In Acts 9:4, Jesus appeared to Paul asking, "Why do you persecute me?" Immediately, Raul realized when he abused his wife, he was actually abusing Christ.

"That dramatic moment . . . was a major turning point," Raul said. "Realizing that when I hurt Sharon I was actually hurting Christ was the motivation I needed to change. I wanted to please God more than anything else. Never again did I physically abuse my wife."⁴⁸

Were there new attitudes and actions? Oh yes! And that is consistent with being a true Christian. Second Corinthians 5:17 (NIV 1984) explains, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" But what about Raul's lifelong violent habits? Raul learned to rely on the strength of Christ and His indwelling presence. He learned to claim Philippians 4:13 (NIV 1984): "*I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*"

Today Sharon—and tens of thousands of others—are sure God truly changed Raul. He has been the pastor of a church in California with more than 12,000 members and had a vibrant church-planting ministry in South America. He also hosts an international radio broadcast and has spoken at crusades where thousands of people have come to Christ.

Ultimately, Raul found victory over violence. And it all began when Sharon learned the blessing of boundaries. The two are now one, their home is now whole, and both are growing more in conformity to the character of Christ.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

Domestic Violence Resources

Below is a list of national resources to call or visit online if you are experiencing domestic violence or abuse of any kind. They exist to help and support you. These free and confidential services are available 24/7 to provide emotional support and helpful resources for those in difficult situations. You are *not* alone.

*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:8)

Note: If you are ever in immediate danger, call 911.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

- 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.thehotline.org (Live chat available)

National Sexual Assault Hotline

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

- 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- www.rainn.org (Live chat available)
- Ayuda disponible en Español

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- 1-800-799-4889 (For Deaf + Hard of Hearing)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org (Live chat available)

Shelter & Housing Directories

- www.domesticshelters.org
- www.womenshelters.org

Don't hesitate to contact these organizations and connect with real people trained to provide guidance, encouragement, and support. Remember, no matter what you're feeling or how bad things seem . . .

"There is surely a future hope for you"

(PROVERBS 23:18)

APPENDIX B

Forgiveness in Cases of Abuse

The thought of forgiving an abuser can seem unthinkable, unfair, and unequivocally *wrong* because of the lasting wounds and lingering consequences of abuse. However, forgiveness is at the heart of God’s character. It’s why Jesus came. And it’s at the heart of healing, growth, and freedom.

Choosing to forgive is not about letting your abuser “off the hook” or ignoring the pain and damage that’s been done. It’s about walking in God’s grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope.

Forgiveness is a difficult process, but you don’t go through it alone. God is with you every step as Psalm 147:3 reminds us: “*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*”

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT⁴⁹

Misconceptions about forgiveness abound. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of excusing sin—of saying that what was wrong is now right. Others think forgiveness means you *must* reconcile with the offender or trust them again. Neither of these assumptions is true.

Before you consider forgiving your abuser, it is crucial you understand what forgiveness is *not*:

Forgiveness is *not ignoring* God’s justice or letting the guilty “off the hook.”

- It is allowing God to execute justice in His time and His way.

Forgiveness is *not dismissing* appropriate boundaries or earthly consequences.

- It is maintaining boundaries and allowing appropriate consequences to occur, especially in cases where the law was violated.

Forgiveness is *not enabling* or *excusing* wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that sin is sin—that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

Forgiveness is *not the same as* reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it takes only one to forgive.

Forgiveness is *not dependent* on an apology.

- It is God’s will that we extend forgiveness, whether or not the offender ever apologizes.

Forgiveness is *not explaining away* or *denying* the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt, feeling it, and releasing it to God.

Forgiveness is *not stuffing* your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

Forgiveness is *not being weak*.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

Forgiveness is *not forgetting*.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

Forgiveness is *not a feeling*.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

Forgiveness is *not simply a one-time event*.

- It can be—but oftentimes, forgiveness is a process that needs to be worked through repeatedly.

Forgiveness is *not a natural response*.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS

A good way to think about forgiveness is to imagine letting go of the offense by releasing your offender. When you don't forgive, it's like holding on to bitterness, holding on to the pain, and holding on to the offender. When you forgive, you release your resentment, your pain, and your offender into the hands of God. As you do this with God's help, you reflect the gracious and merciful character of Christ: *"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful"* (Psalm 116:5 ESV).

To forgive means to release your resentment toward your offender.

- Release your right to hear "I'm sorry"
- Release your right to be bitter
- Release your right to get even

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (ROMANS 12:17).

To forgive is to release your rights regarding the offense.

- Release your right to hold on to the offense
- Release your right to dwell on the offense
- Release your right to keep bringing up the offense

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior . . . forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (EPHESIANS 4:31–32 NLT).

To forgive is to reflect the character of Christ.

- To forgive is to extend mercy.
- To forgive is to give a gift of grace.
- To forgive is to pray for your offender and entrust them to God.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (LUKE 23:34).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION⁵⁰

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the *offense*; reconciliation focuses on the *relationship*. Forgiveness involves a change in *thinking* about the offender; reconciliation involves a change in *behavior* by the offender. Forgiveness is extended *even if it is never earned*; reconciliation is offered to the offender *because it has been earned*. You can forgive your abuser without reconciling.

In many cases, especially when abuse is involved, it is not safe or wise to reconcile with an abuser. If you are considering reconciling with someone who has abused you or others, first talk with a trusted pastor or counselor to determine whether reconciliation is advisable in your situation. Remember: You can forgive your offender, but you should never reconcile with someone who refuses to change. The Bible says, “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (Proverbs 22:24).

THREE STAGES OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness takes time. In order to release the offender and the offense, you must first address your experience and your feelings. This can be difficult, but it’s an important step toward your freedom and healing. Remember, God is with you each step of the way: “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).

1. Face the Offense.

When you experience deep, personal pain, you have a wound that can be healed only by forgiving the one who wounded you. First, face the truth of what has actually been done and do not hinder healing by justifying what happened, rationalizing it, or focusing on false thinking.

Don’t minimize the offense by thinking: *No matter how badly I’m treated, it’s okay.*

- Truth: Bad treatment is not okay. There is no excuse for bad treatment of any kind—any time.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (EPHESIANS 5:11).

Don’t excuse the offender’s behavior by thinking: *He doesn’t mean to hurt me. I shouldn’t feel upset with him.*

- Truth: No matter what happened or how long the relationship has lasted, you need to call sin what it is—sin. Face the truth instead of trying to change it. There must first be a guilty party to have someone to forgive.

“Whoever says to the guilty, ‘You are innocent,’ will be cursed by peoples” (PROVERBS 24:24).

Don’t assume that quick forgiveness is full forgiveness by erroneously thinking:⁵¹ *As soon as it was over, I quickly and fully forgave him. That’s what I’ve been taught to do.*

- Truth: Many well-intentioned people feel guilty if they don’t extend immediate forgiveness, so they “forgive” quickly. And yet they have neither faced the full impact of the offense nor grieved over what actually happened.

Realize, the full impact of sin is rarely felt at the moment it occurs. Rather, its impact is felt at different levels over a period of time. Quick forgiveness over deep hurts may seem sufficient, but it may not be full forgiveness—not until it has been extended to each level of impact. Before complete forgiveness can be given, you must face the truth about the gravity of the offense and its impact on you.

“I have chosen the way of truth” (PSALM 119:30 NKJV).

2. Feel the Offense.⁵²

Anger or even hatred may be your true feeling in response to deep, unfair pain. Hatred toward an offender needs to be brought up out of the basement of your soul and addressed. However, not all hatred is wrong. For example, God hates evil, and we should too. The Bible says, *“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9).*

Failing to feel the offense results in . . .

Denying your pain: “I don’t blame him for always criticizing me. He’s under a lot of pressure. And besides, it doesn’t hurt me.”

– Truth: Being mistreated by someone you love is painful. You must feel the pain before healing can occur.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (PSALM 34:18).

Carrying false guilt: “I’m never supposed to have hatred. I feel guilty if I hate what was done to me.”

– Truth: God hates sin, and so can you. Hate the sin, but not the sinner.

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (PROVERBS 8:13).

3. Forgive the Offender.

God calls us to forgive. If you’ve ever thought, *I know God wants me to forgive, but how can I ignore my anger and let this person off the hook?* Be assured, you’re not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

How to Handle “The Hook”

Make a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

Imagine a meat hook curved around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then picture the pain of those offenses represented as rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Some are small, some are large, but all are heavy. Now you have a bag full of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

Ask yourself: “Do I really want to carry the weight of all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

Visualize taking the one who hurt you off of your emotional “hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

Remember, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay”* (Romans 12:19).

Release your offender to God in prayer:

Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about
how much my heart has been hurt.
You know the pain I have felt because of
(list every offense).

Right now I release all that pain into your hands.

Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me
and extending your forgiveness to me.

As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).

Right now, I move (name) off of
my emotional hook to your hook.

I refuse all thoughts of revenge.

I trust that in your time and in your way
you will deal with (name) as you see fit.

And Lord, thank you for giving me your
power to forgive so that I can be set free.

In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

A Final Note on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is possible by God's grace. His grace helps you heal from past wounds and empowers you to forgive. So when you find yourself struggling to forgive, reflect on God's grace and He will help you walk in the freedom of forgiveness.

*"The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made."*

(PSALM 145:8–9)

APPENDIX C

Hope for the Abuser

Thankfully, God offers redemption and restoration to the remorseful and repentant heart. For abusers who want to change, Jesus offers mercy and grace and provides a way for real change to occur. Certain action steps help soften a hardened heart and redirect the wrong ways of an abuser into the right ways of an overcomer.

Key Verse for the Abuser

Maybe you wonder: *Is restoration possible for me?* It may be difficult, but the answer is *Yes!* But for change to occur, your heart must be changed by the power of God through Christ.

*“God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

(ROMANS 5:8)

Key Passage for the Abuser

Have a holy fear of God. You will be held accountable for every vile word and violent act unless you confess your sin and change your ways. God is just—He must punish sin. His compassion overflows toward the one you are harming. But, His compassion can also overflow to you through Christ. The Bible makes it clear:

*“What a wretched man I am!
Who will rescue me from this body
that is subject to death?
Thanks be to God, who delivers me
through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

(ROMANS 7:24–25)

The Pathway to Recovery for an Abuser

You're on your way to recovery when your abusive ways begin to change. You must:

Admit you have a problem. Get right with God.

- Confess your sin of abuse to God, acknowledging the harm you have caused others.
- Give Christ control of your life from this point forward.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).

Take responsibility.

- Don't blame others for your bad behavior; take responsibility for your own actions.
- Seek to repay or make restitution for the damages and harm you have caused others.

“For we are each responsible for our own conduct” (GALATIANS 6:5 NLT).

Be accountable.

- Seek accountability with a group of people who can encourage, correct, and guide you.
- Share your thoughts and emotions with your accountability partner(s) regularly.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (PROVERB 27:17).

Exercise rigorous honesty.

- Don't become defensive when others who genuinely know you push against your self-deception and denial.
- Open up your heart to God and invite Him to reveal to you the unfiltered truth about yourself and your life.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (PSALM 139:23–24 ESV).

Get professional help.

- Seek help from a counselor to understand your aggressive behavior and learn new ways to handle it.
- Look into anger management programs (online or in person) to help control your anger.

“A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel” (PROVERBS 1:5 NASB).

Examine past abuse.

- Deal with the painful abuse in your past so you do not repeat unhealthy patterns.
- Commit to no longer viewing people as possessions and learn how to love unconditionally without using force, fear, or anger to motivate or manipulate others.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4).

Stop the cycle of abuse.

- Break the cycle of abuse by not allowing feelings of agitation to progress to dissatisfaction, blame, anger, passive aggressiveness, bitterness, resentment, manipulation, control, or abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, or psychological).
- Remove yourself physically from situations that trigger your anger to regain a state of peace and calm, or contact your counselor or accountability partner for help.

“Give up violence and oppression and do what is just and right” (EZEKIEL 45:9).

Change your habits. Confront your addictions.

- Find new, healthy ways of controlling your negative thoughts, difficult emotions, and aggressive behaviors.
- Eliminate habits and addictions that increase the likelihood of you acting aggressively or abusively (i.e., drinking alcohol, viewing violent content, spending time with angry individuals).

“Don’t befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul” (PROVERBS 22:24–25 NLT).

Let go of your need to control.

- Learn how to handle stress so that you don't use violence or domination to exert power or control over others.
- Admit when you feel the need to control, then identify what's influencing the desire, refocus your attention using the truth of God's Word, and give control to Christ.

"Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:14–15 NLT).

Seek forgiveness.

- Make amends to those you have harmed.
- Acknowledge that those you have harmed may not want to forgive you or be reconciled to you—and that you will respect their desires.

"If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you" (PSALM 130:3–4).

Respect boundaries.

- Respect the boundaries of those you have harmed, knowing that they may choose not to interact with you anymore.
- Do not force your way on anyone but instead be considerate of other's boundaries, opinions, preferences, and values.

"Show proper respect to everyone" (1 PETER 2:7).

Grow in your walk with the Lord.

- Cultivate your spiritual life by praying, reading and meditating on God's Word, and obeying His commands.
- Seek to find your identity in Christ—in what God says about you in His Word.

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 PETER 3:18).

As impossible as transformation may seem, Jesus offers this comforting hope:

*“With man this is impossible,
but with God all things are possible.”*
(MATTHEW 19:26)

How Abusers Can Find Freedom

Although it may be difficult, abusers *can* change. Consider the apostle Paul, who sought to destroy the church, dragging men and women out of their homes to prison (Acts 8:3). While the church grew, he was “*breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples*” (Acts 9:1). Indeed, recounting his life, Paul admits he was “*a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man*” (1 Timothy 1:13).

But when the Lord confounded Paul with the truth and permeated his life, Paul abandoned his violent and abusive ways and became a man of peace. No matter how far someone has strayed, no matter how drastic the sin, this truth remains—the Lord changes hearts, minds, and lives. And the Lord can change *you* . . . just as He did Paul.

*“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.”*
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15–16)

Step 1: Honestly assess your words and actions.

Many abusers deny that they are abusive. Is it possible that you may have been abusive? Are you willing to consider that you may not be in touch with your own emotions because they have been buried or ignored for so long?

- Have you ever placed blame on another person for your own actions?
- Do you believe you are always right?
- Could you be in denial about the seriousness of your behavior?
- Have you ever been told you are emotionally insensitive or uncaring?
- Has anyone ever said your behavior is abusive or unreasonable?
- Has a loved one ever said you act nicer with others than when you're with that person?
- Has a loved one ever said that you overreact?
- Do you avoid responding or get angry when asked questions you don't like?
- Do you refuse to acknowledge or try to rationalize past negative behaviors?
- Do you have a short fuse that ignites anger?
- Do you think your personal interactions with others could be considered destructive?
- Have you previously been unable to resolve problems in relationships?

If you answered Yes to three or more of the above questions, it is likely that you have been abusive.

*“An honest witness tells the truth,
but a false witness tells lies.”*

(PROVERBS 12:17)

Step 2: You prioritize your desire to change.

Change cannot take place unless you are willing do the work of recovery and to invite God into the process. Psalm 139:23–24 says, *“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Give careful thought to how you are responding to the need for change and taking responsibility:

Don't vent pent-up anger on another person. (Anger that is bottled up needs to be resolved and dissipated, not spewed out.)

- Do understand that *feeling angry* is not a sin, but failing to handle anger appropriately results in sin, especially when it becomes abusive.

Don't say, "You're the reason I am so angry."

- Do realize that you may be using your anger to get your own way.

Don't say, "I can never please you!"

- Do begin to see things from the other person's point of view.

Don't say, "After all I do for you, it's never enough."

- Do recognize that courageous people willingly admit their weaknesses. Be courageous.

Don't use harsh, belittling, or sarcastic statements.

- Do realize that you can change. It's never too late.

Don't withdraw emotionally.

- Do be willing to enlist friends and family members to encourage you and hold you accountable.

*"Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end."*

(PROVERBS 29:11)

Step 3: Reap the benefits of reflection.

Some children grow up in abusive homes where they receive the brunt of excessive control and power. These children grow up with a negative view of the offending person, vowing never to be like the father who always broke his promises or like the mother who was strict and unaffectionate.

An adult who was abused as a child may not exactly mirror the behavior of an abuser, but an immature emotional focus may cause them to develop the same attitudes of resentment and bitterness they so disliked in the one who abused them.

*“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God
and that no bitter root grows up
to cause trouble and defile many.”*

(HEBREWS 12:15)

Ask yourself . . .

- Was anyone in your family overly controlling of others when you were a child?
- Do you harbor resentment toward anyone in your past?
- Are you still angry over the way someone you love was treated by someone else who was abusive?
- Have you learned to forgive others in spite of their faults?

*“When you stand praying,
if you hold anything against anyone,
forgive them, so that your Father in heaven
may forgive you your sins.”*

(MARK 11:25)

Step 4: Accept that anger management is mandatory.

People who have difficulty controlling anger usually express it in one of two ways. If you vent your anger at someone else, your anger is *explosive*. If you keep your anger bottled up, your anger is *implosive*.

- *Explosive* anger is *outwardly* abusive.
- *Implosive* anger is *inwardly* abusive.

Both are damaging to relationships. God does not condemn our feelings of anger, but He does require that both kinds of anger be addressed and expressed appropriately—in God-honoring ways.

“Be angry, and do not sin.”

(PSALM 4:4 ESV)

Step 5: Exercise self-control.

Discover your trigger points.

- Be aware of when you feel irritated or aggravated. Take note when you feel a sudden surge of anger.
- Watch and listen to yourself so you recognize when you are behaving badly, performing poorly, or snapping at those close to you.
- Stop! Take a few moments and give yourself time to examine the true source of your anger. Is it from hurt, fear, frustration, or injustice?

“Get wisdom, get understanding.”

(PROVERBS 4:5)

Be aware of your family background.

- Recall and reflect on your early family dynamics. Was it safe to express anger?
- Did you learn that explosive anger was a means of control?
- Have you now learned to see your family through the eyes of an adult?

*“When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.*

*When I became a man, I put the
ways of childhood behind me.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:11)

Restrain angry thoughts and actions.

- Turn your thoughts toward God and pray, “Lord, please give me your peace.”
- Breathe deeply and count backwards from ten before you respond.
- Walk away and then return after your emotions are under control. Take a “time-out” for 15 or 20 minutes, if necessary.

*“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.”*

(PSALM 37:8)

Choose the right time and the right way to express your feelings.

- Train yourself to keep a lid on your anger until your agitation is calmed. Try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view.
- If you are angry at another person, ask, “Is there a time when we could talk about something important to me?”
- If your anger has turned inward, talk with a friend and seek an objective view of the situation.

*“An angry person stirs up conflict,
and a hot-tempered person
commits many sins.”*

(PROVERBS 29:22)

Absorb truth.

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you how He sees you—the person He created you to be before abuse marred and changed you. Trust Him to do this with love.
- Pray for the Lord to reveal to you how much He loves you. Acknowledge that you have God-given worth. Don’t let others define who you are.
- Read through the book of Proverbs beginning at chapter 8. Write out all the verses that pertain to anger and are relevant to you. Memorize other verses about how to handle anger. Begin with Psalm 37:8, Ephesians 4:26, Colossians 3:8, and James 1:19–20.

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

(PROVERBS 15:1)

Step 6: Come to Christ, seeking His help with a sincere heart.

If you've hurt others with your words and actions and you want to change, know that you can do just that with God's help. Nothing is impossible with God. You can change because of His transforming power and His unwavering faithfulness.

*"Power, O God, belongs to you;
unfailing love, O Lord, is yours."
(PSALM 62:11–12 NLT)*

Confession: "My behavior has been wrong and has hurt others."

"Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord is guilty and must confess the sin they have committed" (NUMBERS 5:6–7).

Repentance: "I will rely on God's strength to change my behavior because I want to please Him."

"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (PROVERBS 28:13).

Forgiveness: "God, thank you for your willingness to forgive me in spite of my failure to honor you"

"I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin" (PSALM 32:5).

Acceptance: "Jesus, I receive you as my Lord and Savior and give you control of my life. Thank you, God, for being willing to adopt me into your family"

"To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (JOHN 1:12).

Substitution: "I give up control of my life in exchange for a new heart and a new life in Christ"

"Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit" (EZEKIEL 18:31).

Restitution: “Lord, reveal to me those to whom I owe a sincere apology. If it is appropriate and will not cause them further harm, I will go to them and ask forgiveness for my wrong and hurtful behavior. Help me know when and how to do this”

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (MATTHEW 5:23–24).

Cleansing: “God, thank you for cleansing me from my sins and unrighteousness”

“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (PSALM 51:2).

How to Pay the Price of Reconciliation

Many men who have been startled by the seemingly abrupt departure or absence of their abused wives want to know, “How do I apologize to my wife and convince her that I won’t hurt her anymore? And how do I ask her to take me back and give our marriage another chance?”

Daunting questions like these demand an answer if marriages damaged by abuse are to heal and become healthy.

If you are an abusive husband asking these questions, before approaching your wife with apologies, promises, and requests, consider what your wife needs from you and the changes you need to make to meet those needs. Once you know the *cost of reconciliation*, you need to determine whether or not you are willing to pay the price. In this way, rebuilding a marriage is like building a tower.

*“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower.
Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost
to see if you have enough money to complete it?
For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it,
everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying,
‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’”*

(LUKE 14:28–30)

Communicate Your Willingness to Change

Although restoration and healing are possible for an abuser, understand that an abused person may not stay in the relationship or even want to reconcile with their abuser. Reconciliation should only be considered once an abusive person consistently exhibits the characteristics of repentance, recovery, and restoration for a significant period of time. If you are willing to pay the price of reconciliation, then pray for God’s wisdom and His strength to share your heart of repentance.

*“Prove by the way you live that you have repented
of your sins and turned to God.”*

(MATTHEW 3:8 NLT)

Confess your sin—being open and communicate honestly.

—“I know I have deeply hurt you and grievously sinned against both you and God by abusing you.”

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (JAMES 5:16 NLT).

Seek forgiveness—offering an apology is a start, but to humbly ask for forgiveness is a necessity.

—“I know I do not deserve your forgiveness and I do not expect you to forgive me immediately, but as time passes, I hope you will extend mercy and grace to me by forgiving me. Is this something you think you can do? Will you try to forgive me?”

“God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (LUKE 18:13).

Establish accountability—being honest and vulnerable with responsible people who will hold you accountable for your attitudes and actions.

—“I’ve taken my anger out on you and blamed you, but I was wrong. I’m the one to blame. You aren’t the cause of my angry outbursts. You aren’t responsible for my anger—I am. I’m the one who chose to strike out at you rather than deal with the true root causes of my anger. For that, I am deeply sorry, and I truly apologize to you.”

- “I will join a recovery group where I will be held accountable for my actions.”

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (PROVERBS 27:17).

Aim for Christlikeness—making it your primary purpose to be conformed to the character of Christ, regardless of your wife’s response to you.

- “No matter what happens in our relationship, I’m completely committed to becoming a man of integrity and to growing in Christlikeness.”
- “With the Lord’s help, I intend to become the man He created me to be. I will do that by engaging in a men’s Bible study group, studying on my own, and learning to talk to God throughout each day.”

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him” (COLOSSIANS 3:10 NLT).

Prove yourself trustworthy—becoming a man your wife can totally trust is of utmost importance.

- “You’ve been right in not trusting me because I’ve not been trustworthy. I’ve hurt you when I should have protected you. I’ve robbed you of your self-respect when I should have honored you.”
- “I’m working hard to become someone you can trust to love and protect you, respect and care for you. I’m committed to keeping my word and doing everything I say I’ll do. I’ll be truthful with you and will not lie to you.”

“The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (PROVERBS 12:22).

Sacrifice your self-rule—choosing to be one with your wife and partnering with her as an equal.

- “I’ve tried to control you, exerting power over you in every way I possibly could. I’ve berated you, intimidated you, physically overpowered you, and withheld good from you. I was wrong to have done those things to you.”

- “I now know that God intended for us to share our resources equally and to make decisions jointly, to submit mutually and to love voluntarily, to talk openly and to listen intently, to keep no secrets and to harbor no grudges.”
- “I desire to be reconciled with you, but I want to do so on your terms. Please consider what you need to see from me in order to begin trusting me again, and I will truly take to heart your requests.”

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–7).

If your reason for reconciling is a selfish one, it won’t work! Marriages don’t change until the people in the marriages change. A relationship improves only when the people in the relationship improve. Your spouse doesn’t want more of the same unhealthy relationship and will not have a healthy relationship with you until you change. Therefore, since you now know what change will cost, decide if you truly want to reconcile and rebuild the trust you shattered in the past.

*“I know, my God, that you test the heart
and are pleased with integrity.”*
(1 CHRONICLES 29:17)

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

What is the attitude of **the Lord** toward **those who love violence**?

*"**The Lord** examines the righteous, but the wicked, **those who love violence**, he hates with a passion."*

(PSALM 11:5)

Is it wrong to report a **hot-tempered person** who may have to **pay a penalty**?

*"A **hot-tempered person** must **pay** the **penalty**; rescue them, and you will have to do it again."*

(PROVERBS 19:19)

Should a wife report domestic violence to the **governing authorities**?

*"Let everyone be subject to the **governing authorities**, for there is no authority except that which God has established."*

(ROMANS 13:1)

Why should **victims** of abuse **commit themselves to God**?

*“You, **God**, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The **victims commit themselves to** you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.”*
(PSALM 10:14)

If I feel I’m in **danger**, should I **take refuge**?

*“The prudent see **danger** and **take refuge**,
but the simple keep going
and pay the penalty.”*
(PROVERBS 27:12)

What should I do about someone in my life
who is **hot-tempered** and **easily angered**?

*“Do not make friends with a **hot-tempered** person,
do not associate with one **easily angered.**”*
(PROVERBS 22:24)

Can God **heal** my **broken heart** and
the painful **wounds** of abuse?

*“He **heals** the **brokenhearted**
and binds up their **wounds.**”*
(PSALM 147:3)

Who **will strengthen, help,** and **uphold** me
when I am full of **fear**?

*“Do not **fear**, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I **will strengthen** you and **help** you;
I **will uphold** you with my righteous right hand.”*
(ISAIAH 41:10)

Who can **protect** and **rescue** me
from those who are **violent**?

*“**Rescue** me, LORD, from evildoers;
protect me from the **violent.**”*
(PSALM 140:1)

Who can you trust if you can't trust **your own husband**?

*“Your Maker is **your husband**—
the LORD Almighty is his name.”*
(ISAIAH 54:5)



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(Jeremiah 29:11)*

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