

From Broken to Beautiful
A Primer on Marriage Counseling
Week 5 – Dynamics of Domestic Abuse

Introduction:

Why doesn't she just leave?

This morning we're going to talk about some common dynamics associated with domestic abuse and that's, perhaps, the most common question asked of women in domestic abuse situations. If it's so bad and if she's really being abused, she would just leave. The question itself fails to understand the relational and emotional components of abuse.

Case Study:

We had a situation play out here many years ago where a family came to the church on a Saturday morning saying their power was cut off and they asked if they could use the bathrooms to get cleaned up. They were allowed in, and because they appeared to be married, they were directed to the same bathroom to use the showers. It turns out they were not married, and the man raped her in our bathroom. We didn't find that out for six months or more.

The young woman was in her 20's and the man was in his 40's and he had groomed her as a teenager. Her oldest daughter was being raised by her mother, and she had two more younger children with this man. They started attending the church but in the course of time, the physical, sexual, emotional, psychological abuse was made known to us and pastor Mike became the active participant to help this young lady and her children.

We helped her relocate multiple times because she would leave and allow this man back in her life. He would manipulate her, abuse her, and the cycle of control would begin again. I can remember getting frustrated with her willingness to give in to this man. It was in this season that I learned that the average number of times an abused woman would leave and return to her abuser before she finally had the courage to actually leave, or he would kill her was seven times.

I got an education, through her pain, and began to understand the fear surrounding staying and leaving, the psychological dismantling of a person's self-worth, the manipulated dependence on the abuser that is created, and how many abused women will train themselves to disassociate during seasons of stress or abuse so they aren't really present during the abuse or they do not perceive that the abuse is happening to them. Even long after we no longer allowed him on church property, we would find her in a corner somewhere in an almost paralyzed state.

In the end, Pastor Mike faithfully served and taught this young lady. We helped her relocate to another state and go through intensive residential counseling, and now she's married to someone else, and appears to be doing well.

If you fear getting involved in these types of marital situations because you don't know what to do or that you might make a mistake, fear not, you **WILL**. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to help both the abused and the abuser, though they will need to be helped in **DIFFERENT** ways.

Dynamics of Domestic Abuse:

See Romans 12:9-13

There is great wisdom here in seeking to help someone in domestic abuse.

1. Genuine love requires that we **HATE** that which hurts who and what we love. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12) but we must hate **EVIL** and we, as Biblical counselors, are required to address problematic behaviors (vs.9).

We don't hate the abusive person. Often there is a history of abuse that they are acting out of, but we must hate their sin enough to be intolerant of the status quo. The church, as a whole, has a history of ignoring domestic abuse and giving advice that sounds like, "Try not to anger him and he won't punch you in the face so much."

2. Love requires that we love them in the **SAME WAY** as we would want to be loved, if we were in their situation (vs.10).

Loving your neighbor as yourself is nothing less than taking the skin off your body and wrapping it around their body so that you feel what they are going through as if it is happening to you. And then, doing for them what you would want someone to do for you in that situation.

3. Loving people in a domestic abuse situation will be a **LONG-TERM** commitment (vs.11).

Change is always slow and the person may return to their abuser against your pleading and encouragement. You will be frustrated but both parties will need long-term help to change and they may not be cohabitating during this time, and "rehoming" the abused spouse should not be the immediate goal.

4. Our collective hope is always in God to **HEAL** the abused and to **CHANGE** the abuser (vs.12).

The Holy Spirit is always the change agent, but some people don't want to be helped and see no need to change. Last week I talked about my father rejecting my offer of forgiveness. In that moment, I realized that he had not changed, therefore, it wasn't safe for my family to be exposed to him.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

5. There will often be a **FINANCIAL** component and **TIME** commitment to the help we must provide (vs.13).

This is where advocacy becomes essential. We need to build a team around both parties to encourage, challenge, and help them. Life doesn't unfold conveniently and one hour a week of formal counseling will often not be enough to meet the initial needs. One spouse or the other may need to be relocated and may need financial help with transportation, food, and rent until government agencies can get up to speed.

Pastors, deacons, and Biblical counselors are **NOT** the police. Physical and sexual abuse will almost always involve the committing of a **CRIME**. Law enforcement and CPS may need to be involved.

Question:

What questions do you have at this point?

[Allow for questions]

Definition of Abuse:

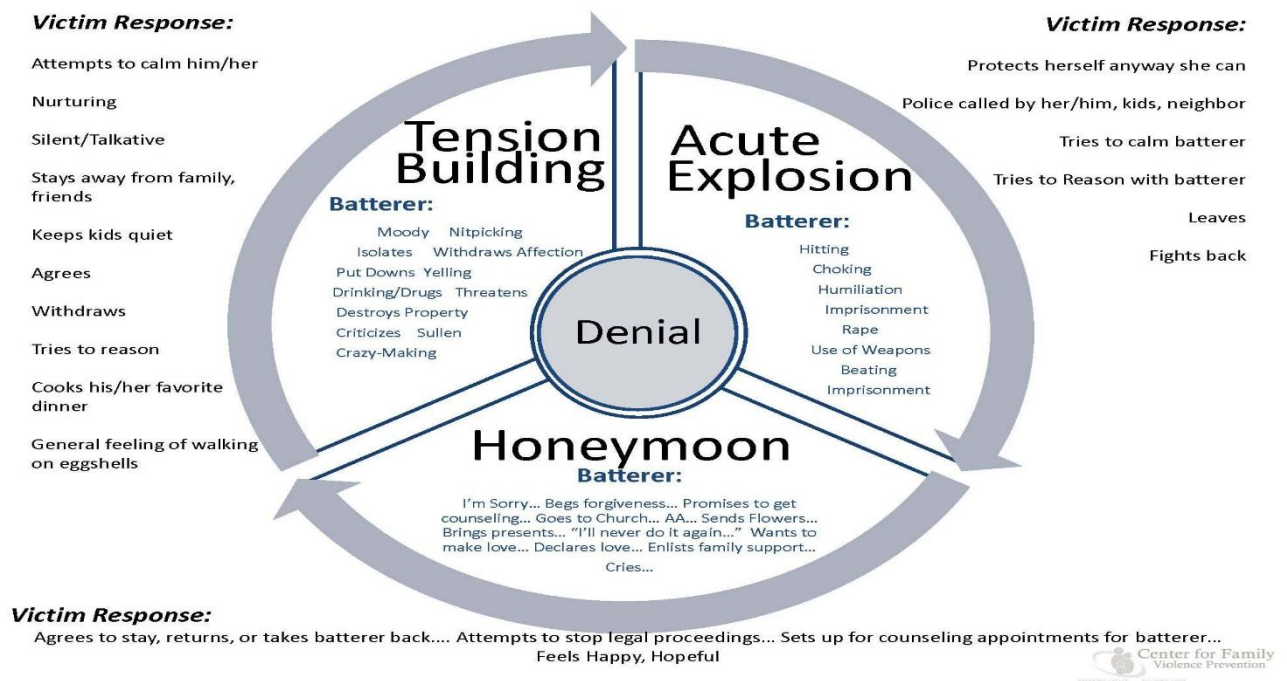
Abuse is a sin that affects personhood, as God designed it...Abuse occurs as a person in a position of greater influence uses his personal capacities to diminish the personal capacities of those under his influence in order to control them. Abuse is identified from two directions: (1) the manipulative intent and behavioral forcefulness of the one in position of influence, and (2) the diminishing effect on those under his influence (J. Pierre and G. Wilson, When Home Hurts, pg.39-40)

So the abusive person uses his personal capacity (money, strength, intellect, etc.) to force people to fulfill his desires. That force inflicts damage on the personhood of the abused making them easier to control. It is not a problem of authority or influence. It's the misuse of authority and influence.



Cycle of Domestic Abuse

First identified by Lenore Walker, 1979



Abuse is as much about **PERSPECTIVE** as it is behavior. The abusive person will not see God, himself, or others in a Biblical way. The Biblical idea is **OPPRESSION**. Oppressive people will:

- Feel **ENTITLED** to get what they want.
- Seek to **DOMINATE** others to get what they want.
- Use **THREATS** to manipulate and control others.
- **PUNISH** others through violence or some other form of retaliation to maintain control.
- Generally, be blind to the destructive nature of **THEIR OWN** actions.
- Generally, feel **JUSTIFIED** in their actions.
- Generally, view themselves as the **VICTIM**.

(Darby Strickland, Domestic Abuse, pg.28)

Most marital conflicts will have a selfish element to them and one spouse or both may function out of a “me before you” mentality. That isn’t, necessarily, an indication of abuse. In an abusive dynamic one spouse or both will function out of a “me over you” mentality. That is very different. It’s not just about competition and the normal dynamics of the heart. It’s about severely disordered affections leading to a desire to dominate and control others. So, it’s not about whether they intended to cause harm. It’s about whether they intended to gain control.

Questions to ask if you suspect abuse:

- Do you have the freedom to give your input in decisions at home?
- What happens when you disagree with your spouse?
- Do you ever feel fearful around your spouse?
- Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in your relationship?

- Have you ever participated in a sexual act against your will?
- Does your spouse blame you for things that go wrong or for their mistakes?
- Does your spouse monitor or limit your interactions with friends or family?
- Do you have a say in how money is spent?

(Ibid, pg.4-5)

Question:

What questions do you have at this point?

[Allow for questions]

How to Help the Abused:

FEAR is often the dominating factor in the life of the abused. They need to be helped or taught in the following ways:

- Get them somewhere **SAFE** and encourage them to establish an Order of Protection.
- Address any physical and spiritual **WOUNDS**.
- Marriage is meant to reveal Christ's **UNION** with the Church.
- God does not **CONDONE** abuse, and He is a God of **JUSTICE**.
- They have been created with **DIGNITY**.
- Their **IDENTITY** is rooted in Christ, and they are more than their abuse.
- The Gospel takes her **SHAME** away.
- She must work through **FORGIVING** her abuser.

(Heather Nelson, Help for Victims, pg.10-20)

Forgiveness doesn't always mean rehoming and full marital reconciliation. That will largely be dependent upon the transformation of the abuser and other legal, moral, and practical considerations.

How to Help the Abuser:

As stated before, **CONTROL** is often the dominating factor in the life of the abuser. They need to be confronted with:

- Their sense of **ENTITLEMENT**.
- Their sense of **IDENTITY** and who they think they are, and who they think they are in Christ.
- Their view of **GOD** and others.
- The fact that their sin has caused real **HARM** to others.
- The **ROOTS** of their oppressive behaviors and desire for control, respect, etc..
- A Biblical call to **REPENTANCE** that must include seeking forgiveness from those he has hurt and a detailed process of change.

(D. Strickland, pg.29-34)

Question:

What questions do you have at this point?

[Allow for questions]

See Included Documents:

- Domestic Abuse: Power and Perspective, Family Services of Chemung County
- Faith Church's policy on Divorce and Remarriage, adopted by Breesport Baptist Church

Conclusion:

Has wise Biblical counselors, we want to avoid both ditches in marital counseling. That is to see **NOTHING** as abuse and the other is to see **EVERYTHING** as abuse. All abuse is sin, but not all sin is abuse. We need discernment and sound counsel ourselves. That's why absolute confidentiality should never be promised.