

**Wiping the Tears: A Caring Response to Abuse**  
**Pastoral/Leadership Training**  
**November 8, 2008**  
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- I. God's Word regarding violence and rescuing the oppressed
  - A. God's hatred of violence: Genesis 6:11-13, Psalm 11:5-6
  - B. The Call of God to deliver the oppressed from violence and to bring healing to victim/survivors: Luke 10:30-37; Jer. 8:21-22, 9:1, 21:12; Isaiah 58:5-12, 61:1-3
- II. Why do we need to talk about abuse in the church?
  - A. Christians should not be ignorant about the nature, prevalence, and severity of abuse that exists in our churches, neighborhoods, and our world.
  - B. Violence against women exists in every country and among all people groups. Abuse occurs within every faith community and every socioeconomic group.
  - C. Research consistently indicates that the rates of family violence (domestic violence) inside and outside the church are similar.
- III. Some statistics
  - A. Around the world, at least 1 woman in every 3 has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most often the abuser is someone in her own family (Populations Reports, 2000)
  - B. One-third of American women (31%) report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives (The Commonwealth Fund, 1999)
  - C. Physical violence in an intimate relationship almost always is accompanied by psychological abuse, and in one-third to over half of cases by sexual abuse (Population Reports, 2000).
  - D. Nearly one-third of all women murdered in the US in 1998 were killed by a current or former intimate partner; guns were used in almost two-thirds of the homicides (Homicide Trends in the US, 2001).
  - E. Every day, at least three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in this country (Rennison and Welchans, 2000).
  - F. During their lifetime, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience a sexual assault (National Institute of Justice, 2000).
  - G. Nearly 7 in 10 rape victims knew their attacker prior to the assault (National Institute of Justice, 2000)
  - H. One in five female high school students report being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner.
  - I. Over 13% of college women indicated that they had been forced to have sex in a dating situation (Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2000).
  - J. Rape or sexual assault was the violent crime least often reported to law enforcement (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000)

- K. The abuse of women who are unwilling to admit to themselves what has happened, or unwilling to disclose their pain to an outsider, simply goes unreported.
- IV. Two major categories of violence against women
  - A. Sexual abuse/sexual assault/rape is a problem rooted in the very fabric of our society. It is a crime of violence that affects women, men, and children. While it is perpetrated mostly by men against women, anyone can be a victim or a perpetrator. Rape and sexual assault are not sexually motivated crimes; they are crimes of violence and control, using sex acts as a weapon.
  - B. Domestic violence/abuse, sometimes called battering, is a pattern of behavior where one person tries to control the thoughts, beliefs, or actions of a partner, friend, or any other person close to them. While the violence causes injury, it does not have to be physical. Domestic violence also takes the form of emotional, verbal, mental, sexual and economic abuse. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that more than 90% of all domestic violence victims are female and that most abusers are male.
- V. Handouts
  - A. The Power and Control Wheel/Equity and Healthy Relationship Wheel
  - B. The Cycle of Domestic Violence
  - C. Myths about Domestic Violence
  - D. Effects of Domestic Violence on Children
  - E. Myths and Stereotypes that revictimize survivors of sexual violence
- VI. Why do victims of domestic violence allow themselves to be treated this way? Why don't they "just leave?"
  - A. Fear – she fears for her future, fears further violence, and fears for her children. Fear permeates her life and is often experienced as a paralyzing terror. Fear makes women lie about the reality of abuse. Fear hampers the victim's ability to see the choices she could make.
  - B. Finances – economic dependency keeps women from perceiving that there are any options to life without their violent partner.
  - C. Shame – many women come to believe that they deserve the abuse. They expend their energy keeping the secret. They fear they won't be believed or they will be judged if they disclose the secret.
  - D. Fantasy of change – after the violence there may be pleas for forgiveness and promises that it will not happen again. Although evidence shows that few batterers do alter their abusive ways, many women, especially religious women, cling to that hope year after year.
- VII. Why can't someone who has been abused just put it behind them and go on with their life?
  - A. Violence may or may not produce physical wounds, but it always causes emotional wounds and spiritual confusion. The effects of abuse on one's spirit and sense of self are more difficult to heal than physical wounds and have a greater potential for long-term negative effects on the lives of those victimized.

- B. Some initial effects of being abused: fear, anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks, sleeping and eating difficulties, depression, self-hatred, withdrawal, anger, hostility, aggression.
  - C. Some long-term effects: depression, PTSD, self-injurious behaviors, suicidal thoughts and gestures, alcohol and drug use, isolation, low self-esteem, intense feelings of shame and guilt, difficulty in relationships, trusting others and intimacy (including with God), or relentless perfectionism in an attempt to prove themselves worthwhile.
  - D. Healing from abuse is a courageous and worthwhile endeavor, and it takes time. The journey of healing involves the difficult processes of remembering and speaking about the abuse, experiencing the sorrow, the grief and times of depression, mourning the losses, giving voice to feelings of anger, facing and resolving spiritual and life questions related to a world in which such horrors take place, and finally moving on to a sense of acceptance and, with God's grace and help, moving on to the miracle of forgiveness.
  - E. The subject of forgiveness is a very difficult for victims/survivors of abuse. It is not because they don't want to forgive, but that true forgiveness is part of the healing process. Arriving at this point is not without struggle. It involves coming to a realization of all that has been taken from her: innocence, trust, security, stability, love, identity, and often a relationship that was not supposed to hurt. A victim/survivor should not be pushed into forgiving. The Holy Spirit will set the pace and enable and empower her to forgive at the right time, not for the sake of the abuser, but to free her from bitterness and despair.
- VIII. Beginning to respond: How churches can answer God's call
- A. Awareness
    1. Recognize the prevalence of family violence and sexual violence in our community and our world and also in our churches.
    2. Be committed to increasing the awareness in our churches about the prevalence of abuse, both outside and inside the church.
    3. Use illustrations in sermons and other teaching materials that make it safe for someone to come forward and disclose abuse in his/her own life.
    4. Recognize that perpetrators of abuse need long-term, specialized batterer's treatment and that change does not come easily or quickly.
    5. Recognize that although God is very concerned about divorce, He is equally concerned about His people living in violent, soul-deadening and possible life-ending relationships. Separation and/or divorce are preferable and acceptable when the marital covenant has been broken by the unfaithfulness of damaging control and abuse. (Malachi 2:13-16, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
  - B. Condemnation of violence/abusive behavior
    1. Speak out against abusive behavior whenever an opportunity arises.

2. Make it clear to church people that God hates violence and God's Word does not condone battering or abuse (twisted use of scriptures on submission, etc).
3. Make it known to governmental and nongovernmental agencies that the church stands firm against abuse and in providing support for victims.

C. Education

1. In Bible studies, Sunday school classes, youth groups, and pre-marital counseling emphasize how important it is to deal with frustrations and disappointments in nonviolent ways. Teach about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships.
2. In training lay leaders and church workers, alert them to the prevalence of violence and teach them how to respond to victims.
3. Provide education and support for developing and maintaining healthy marriages and families

D. Prevention

1. Model loving, nonabusive behavior in the families of pastors and other leaders. (Titus 1:7)
2. Be explicit in letting individuals, families and couples know where they can turn for help.
3. In youth groups, encourage young men and women to treat each other well and to respect other's abilities and points of view. Educate youth about domestic and sexual violence.

E. Empathy

1. Help believers to learn to listen to each other and to be interested in the lives of those in the church and their communities.
2. Offer safe places to talk and share about their lives, their disappointments and problems (i.e. small groups, etc.).
3. When you promise someone confidentiality, keep your promise.
4. Teach believers to rejoice with those who are happy and to weep with those who are sad and hurting.
5. Develop networks of believers in your church and among churches in your community with whom you fellowship to provide practical service and emotional support for victims to escape from violence and to provide the ongoing support necessary for survivors to recover and heal.
6. Develop support groups for victim/survivors of abuse that provide Christ-centered help and healing.

F. Referrals

1. Know the resources in your community (i.e. crisis hotlines, shelters, counseling, legal, medical, economic, housing, support groups, child protective services) and how to access help there (see list of area resources provided in your packet)
2. Publish the church's mission to abuse victims at local shelters or other community agencies and reach out to them.

3. Volunteer church resources to assist community initiatives dealing with domestic violence and sexual violence.
  4. Develop a working relationship with community agencies.
- IX. The unique qualifications of pastors and spiritual leaders
- A. Victims report that their pastor's words condemning the violent acts they have experienced and the comforting words of Scripture and prayer for her as a victim of violence were powerful aids in their healing and recovery. This spiritual support validates her experience of pain, reminds her that God does not condone the violence she has suffered, and brings the Healing Balm of Gilead to people of faith that suffer abuse.
  - B. The experience of abuse raises questions that need spiritual answers, i.e. questions about life, the world, suffering, and God. Pastors and spiritual leaders are uniquely equipped to support survivors in their "dark night of the soul" as they wrestle with these questions and find the word of the Lord concerning them and what they have experienced.
  - C. Many people in the church turn to their pastors and spiritual leaders first when seeking help regarding violence in their homes or relationships. Many survivors report that clergy are empathetic but not always knowledgeable about how to help.
- X. Special concerns
- A. If you suspect abuse is occurring, ask direct questions of the victim. If a child or adolescent discloses abuse, you must report it to child protective services (DSS).
  - B. If you suspect domestic violence, speak to the victim separately. By meeting with her alone you may get a more thorough account of the history and circumstances surrounding the abuse. Meeting with them together or speaking with the abuser may put the victim in more danger. Confidentiality is essential to ensuring the victim's safety.
  - C. Believe and validate the victim's experiences and affirm her courage for disclosing the abuse to you. This is incredibly powerful in helping her to acknowledge what has happened to her, find safety and begin to heal.
  - D. State your concerns for her safety and the safety of her children. Ask if it is safe for her to go home. If not, provide resources. Help her plan for future safety. Help her make a safety plan. Remember that the victim is in the most danger when she is trying to leave.
  - E. Encourage her decision making ability, remembering that crisis situations and the ambivalence and confusion surrounding domestic violence make it difficult for her to make a decision.
  - F. Support her right to make her own decisions. Do not disempower her again by taking over or shaming in trying to help her.
  - G. Always consider the children's safety. If a child is living in a violent home, he/she is at risk and child protective services may need to be called if the woman is not able to make appropriate decisions protect them from violence and to ensure their safety.

- H. Be careful not to put your own life or the life of your family in unnecessary danger. Use wisdom and resources (e.g. police during an intervention).
  - I. It is very important that pastors and churches hold abusers accountable for both their past abusive behavior and their promise of change. Abusers need appropriate, professional, long-term treatment to recover from their use of violence to control (batterer's treatment, not anger management). They need to be held accountable by their pastors to demonstrate compliance with treatment and long-lasting change. Tears, apologies, promises and gifts are not a substitute for genuine, tangible, long-lasting changes in attitude, perspective and behavior.
  - J. Beware of attempts by the abuser to manipulate you to reunite the family too soon or to pressure the victim to "forgive and forget" and reconcile. Do not place women and children in danger again by encouraging premature reconciliation or insisting on reconciliation.
  - K. If a victim is in a transition home or shelter, NEVER disclose this information to an abuser. You may be putting her life and the life of others in jeopardy.
  - L. Victim/survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual assault or physical abuse have special issues regarding physical touch. Anyone praying with her or wanting to comfort her should always ask if it is okay to hold her hand, place an arm around her, hug her, etc.
  - M. All victims of abuse have experienced terror and the reality of being helpless and powerless, and have often been abused by authority figures or people they trusted and loved. Therefore, it is understandable that victim/survivors will have special difficulties with trust in relationships, especially with authority figures or those of the same sex as their abuser.
  - N. Many survivors of abuse have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Learning about how survivors experience emotional and physiological distress when triggered by reminders of abuse will help you to understand some of their emotional and behavioral symptoms in relationships.
  - O. Healing and recovery from abuse is usually a long process. Be prepared to provide the ongoing support that is necessary for the duration of the journey from victim to victor, from survivor to thriver! What a privilege we have to be an expression of God's love and healing in this world.
- XI. Q & A