

2018 May 19
Counseling Forum
North Hills Church
Taylors, SC

Domestic Abuse

Mike Wilkerson, in *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*. (2011, Crossway); emphasis original.

Even the word *abuse* is sometimes granted almost magical explanatory power, as if labeling something as abuse unlocks the deep meaning to explain what's wrong in our lives. Some reach for this word to label virtually any kind of suffering at the hands of another. Yet, as one biblical counselor cautions, "if *everything* is abuse, then nothing is abuse."¹⁰ Using the term too broadly can trivialize the tragic reality of real abuse. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't find the right words to describe the suffering we *have* endured. We need to be able to talk about it, grieve it, and find grace and mercy in our time of need.

David Powlison suggests that we identify *abuse* as one particular evil among many. He asks: "Were you used? misused? abused? mistreated? betrayed? sinned against? done evil?"¹¹ Abuse, when seen in this context, is not an "all-determining, all-damning, all-condemning, all-controlling force."¹² It is, rather, one particularly terrible evil among many other evils that befall us in a broken world.

¹⁰. John F. Bettler, "Counseling and the Problem of the Past," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 7 (Winter 1994): 10; emphasis original.

¹¹. Powlison, "Broken through Child Abuse."

¹². Ibid.

Abuse or Not?

1. If your spouse complains about how you fold the laundry
2. If your spouse routinely tells others in your presence how you fail at simple chores...using sarcasm, humiliating terms, and then saying, "I was just kidding."
3. If your spouse gets frustrated sometimes and slams a cabinet door or curses
4. If your spouse uses anger to control or hurt you emotionally or physically
5. If your spouse calls to check on why you aren't home when you've been delayed
6. If your spouse routinely requires you to prove your whereabouts and/or tracks your whereabouts electronically
7. If your spouse decides frequently not to attend church with you
8. If your spouse refuses to allow you to attend church or church functions because he is jealous of your friendships
9. If your spouse gets hurt or upset when you don't do what he asked you to do
10. If your spouse demands that you submit, citing scripture and stating that your role as his wife is to bring him pleasure, satisfy his needs, and make him feel important
11. If your spouse expresses frustration periodically over your excessive spending
12. If your spouse gives you a small allowance which barely covers household needs, refuses to give you access to the bank account, and doesn't tell you where all the rest of the income is going

Biblical Examples of Abuse

Judges 19:25

But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.

Psalms 57:4

My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts – the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

Proverbs 12:18

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 29:22

A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Proverbs 9:7

Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Ephesians 4:29a

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up...

2 Timothy 3:1-8 (NASB)

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.

James 3:10

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Psalm 10 NIV

- ¹Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
²In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises.
³He boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.
⁴In his pride the wicked man does not seek Him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.
⁵His ways are always prosperous; Your laws are rejected by him; he sneers at all his enemies.
⁶He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me." He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."
⁷His mouth is full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.
⁸He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims;
⁹like a lion in cover he lies in wait. He lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.
¹⁰His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength.
¹¹He says to himself, "God will never notice; He covers His face and never sees."
¹²Arise, Lord! Lift up Your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.
¹³Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"?
¹⁴But 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.
¹⁵Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.
¹⁶The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from His land.
¹⁷You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry,
¹⁸defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

Psalm 140 NIV

Deliver Me, O Lord, from Evil Men To the choirmaster, A Psalm of David.

- ¹Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; preserve me from violent men,
²who plan evil things in their heart and stir up wars continually.
³They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps.
Selah
⁴Guard me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from violent men, who have planned to trip up my feet.
⁵The arrogant have hidden a trap for me, and with cords they have spread a net; beside the way they have set snares for me. Selah
⁶I say to the Lord, You are my God; give ear to the voice of my pleas for mercy, O Lord!
⁷O Lord, my Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle.
⁸Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted! Selah
⁹As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!
¹⁰Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise!
¹¹Let not the slanderer be established in the land; let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!
¹²I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.
¹³Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence.

How Do We Address Abuse Biblically?

Proverbs 22:24-25

Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

Proverbs 9:7

Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Proverbs 22:10

Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

Matthew 18:15-17

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Jesus.

Luke 6:28

“... bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Jesus.

Romans 13:1-5, 8-10

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience...** Owe no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Ephesians 5:6-11

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them, for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

2 Timothy 3:1-8 (NASB)

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; **Avoid such men as these.** For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.

A Brief Biblical Overview of What Change Looks Like

(Attributes of Brotherly Love)

Romans 12:10, 14, 16a, 17-21

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.... Live in harmony with one another.... Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God (see Romans 13), for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Galatians 5:13-14

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Ephesians 5:4

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Colossians 3:12-14

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:19

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

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

James 3:17

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

Power and Control Wheel

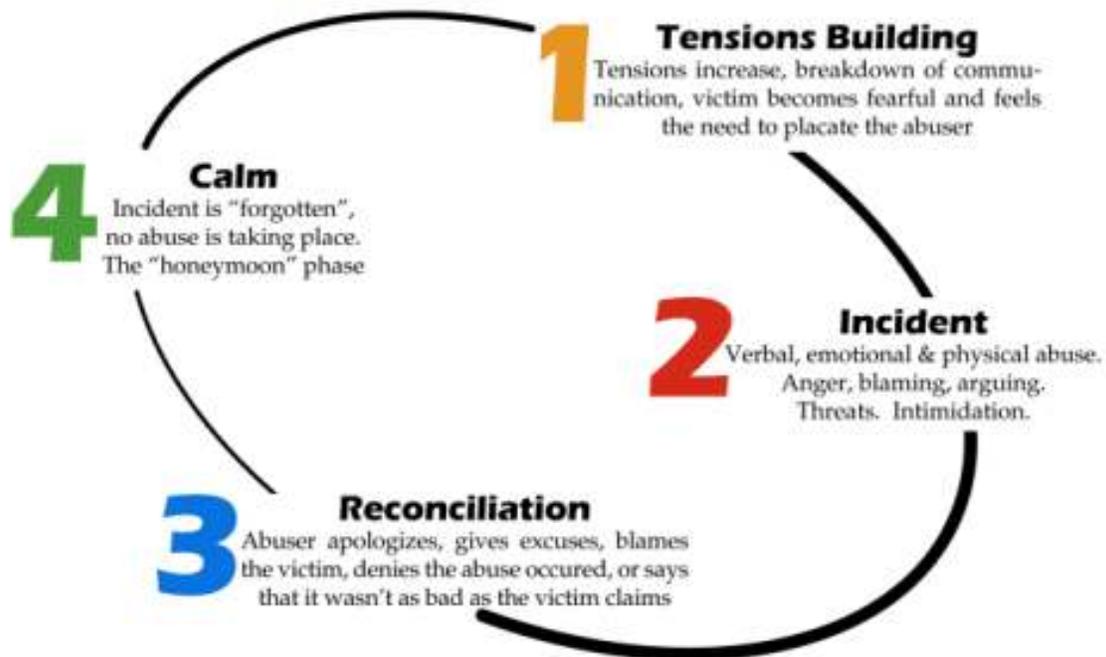


Using the Power and Control Wheel:

Help the counselee figure out what's happening in their situation. Work through the wheel asking them to highlight the words or phrases that coincide with their situation Encourage them to highlight things that have ever happened to them in this relationship, not just the recent things. Discuss the items highlighted. Explain that these things are not God-honoring. Ask them for examples and descriptions of the things they have highlighted.

Feel free to contact the Counseling Office for help.

Cycle of Abuse



Phase One: Tensions Build

- The victim can sense tension mounting.
- Struggle for dominance and control increases.
- Warning signs appear (i.e. words, glances, intimidating gestures).
- Victim may avoid or prepare for the violence; especially if there have been previous attacks.
- Victim may become compliant or nurturing or provoke the attack.

Phase Two: Incident of Abuse/Violence

- An explosion leads to a violent incident (including physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse).
- Phase Two can be the shortest phase.
- Abuser (and sometimes victim) may minimize the extent of the injury or abuse.
- Violent incident followed by feelings of embarrassment, shock, confusion, numbness, or disbelief.
- This is the most dangerous time for a victim.
- This pushes the victim away from the relationship.

Phase Three: Reconciliation

- The calm after the storm
- Courtship behaviors return.
- Batterer may express contrition, guilt, and/or show extreme kindness.
- This phase is designed to pull the victim back in to the relationship.
- This phase is the safest time to leave for a victim, however, it is also the most difficult time to leave.

Phase Four: Calm (or Honeymoon or "Back to Normal" Phase)

- Batterer and victim behave "normally" - no extreme behavior on batterer's part (either violent or non-violent)
- Strong motivation for the victim to remain in the relationship, because it provides hope for a normal life.
- Eventually, old habits and behavior will begin to resurface.
- In the distance, another storm looms.

** Unless non-abusive/healthy behavior is learned, the abuse, dominance, control of the abusive cycle continues.

** Over time, Honeymoon and Normal Phases may disappear, with behavior swinging from tension to violence with rapid intensity.

4 Myths about Responding to Spousal Abuse

Myth 1: By advocating separation, I am undermining the institution of marriage.

Myth 2: I must confront the abuser right away.

Myth 3: If a victim of abuse is not yet ready to act, things must not be that bad.

Myth 4: As a pastor, I'm the best person to solve this problem.

Responding to Domestic Abuse in the Church: Starting the Conversation

*"Each year more abuse victims, perpetrators, and family members seek help from clergy and religious leaders than all other helping professionals **combined**".*

How will we respond when a victim or survivor is in need of our guidance and support?

1. **Listen**
2. **Believe**
3. **Support**
4. **Stay Connected**
5. **Learn**



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Listen & Believe

1. Listen to the victim

- Hear the concerns the victim is sharing.
- Learn to read between the lines. Develop trust. An individual may not identify as a victim – or see their abuser as an abuser, but they may share information that provides you with the opportunity to recognize red flags.

2. Believe

- **Start by believing.** Avoid asking questions that could cause someone to believe you distrust what they are sharing.
- Due to trauma someone may be experiencing, they may struggle to remember details of the story or a sequence of events.
- Validate her choices. Ask how you and/or the church can support her.



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Offer Support

3. Offer support

- Offer options and referrals without coercion.
- Know when to make referrals to community resources that can assist both the victim and the abuser.
- Avoid couples/marriage counseling.
- Ask for support from other church leaders.
- Set boundaries to avoid being manipulated or serving as a mediator/messenger between the couple.
- Consider the victim's safety. Do not disclose confidential information.
- Think about how to minister to both individuals in the relationship, considering the victim's physical and emotional safety.
- Explain that it is the abuser's behavior, not the victim's choice to leave, that breaks the marriage covenant. **Assure her that she is not at fault.**



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Stay Connected & Learn

4. Stay Connected

- Be intentional about the ways you check in with the victim and their family.
- Continue to offer support and resources as needed.
- Follow up with next steps that you and/or your church can take to assist the victim in attaining their personal goals and in feeling safe and connected to the church.

5. Learn & Continue to Educate Others

- Talk, teach, preach and pray about this issue with your congregation.
- Consider how what you say (and your actions) may be perceived by a potential victim or used by an abuser.
- Educate yourself about domestic violence and your community's local resources for help.
- Recognize that you don't have to be the expert; know when to make referrals (to Safe Harbor shelter/counseling/advocacy for victims).



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Safe Harbor:

www.safeharborsc.org

24-hour crisis line: 1-800-291-2139

Business number: 864-467-1177

Q&A Notes:

These are notes from some of the questions that participants asked during the forum on May 19, 2018.

1. Should we call authorities? Not necessarily. If a crime has been committed, we should encourage the victim to make a report with law enforcement. If a child has been abused or neglected, we are mandated reporters and must call. Note that, if a child witnesses abuse, it is considered, by the law, a form of neglect, and falls under mandated reporter laws. If you are uncertain what to do in these situations, please contact the counseling office immediately.
2. Does NHC consider continued abuse a form of abandonment, and therefore biblical grounds for divorce? Elders review abuse situations in marriage on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the situation, it could be considered biblical grounds for divorce. If you have a question about this, please talk with an elder.
3. Do we tell an abused spouse that they “need to leave?” No. We do not tell them to leave or to stay. We may advise them to consider leaving. The abused person knows the situation best and is a better judge of what might happen should they leave. The counselor should review their options with them and help them identify the pros and cons of leaving or staying. The counselor should help the abused process through their options.
4. It is helpful to encourage the abused to make decisions about their relationship. Typically their control is very limited by their abuser, so learning these skills is a gift to them.
5. Is there liability if we tell them to leave and something bad happens? Yes, potentially. But more importantly this is a decision that should be made by the abused rather than someone outside looking in - with limited knowledge.
6. It is important to help the abused without hurting the abused, and to advocate for the Holy Spirit to change the heart of the abuser. But we also do not tell the abused to stay in the situation while they wait for that to happen.
7. How long does it take for the abuser to show real change? Abuse patterns of power and control tend to be deeply ingrained and take a lot of time to change. Sadly, many abusers never make the bend. We must be persistent in prayer and diligent in counsel, and when appropriate referring them to appropriate community help.
8. Determining abuse - ask yourself, “Am I seeing a pattern of power and control repeated in the relationship?” If so, it could be an abusive situation.
9. I read on the internet that most abusers are narcissists and narcissists don’t change. Is that true? Abuse is primarily a learned trait. And frequently, abusers were abused or neglected themselves as children. Personality style or a combination of personality types in the relationship may also contribute to abusive behavior.
10. In South Carolina, it is very easy to get conviction for domestic violence expunged from record ... and therefore, get the minimum sentence each time.

RESOURCES:

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Articles Included:

[Statistics From NCADV:](#)

[What Is Domestic Abuse?](#)

[4 Myths about Responding to Spousal Abuse](#)

[God Hates Abuse](#)

**[Southern Baptist leader pushes back after comments leak urging
abused women to pray and avoid divorce](#)**

[‘A satanic distortion’](#)

Statistics From NCADV: (National Coalition against Domestic Violence)

<https://ncadv.org/statistics>

- On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men.¹
- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have been victims of [some form of] physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime.¹
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.¹
- 1 in 7 women and 1 in 18 men have been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime to the point in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed.¹
- On a typical day, there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide.⁹
- The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%.¹⁰
- Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime.²
- Women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner.²
- 19% of domestic violence involves a weapon.²
- Domestic victimization is correlated with a higher rate of depression and suicidal behavior.²
- Only 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries.²

What Is Domestic Abuse?

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-what-is-domestic-abuse#1>

Domestic abuse is more than just hitting, shoving, and other physical attacks. It's a pattern of controlling behaviors. The goal always is to get and keep power over an intimate partner.

You may not realize you're in an abusive relationship. Not even if you're the abuser. Abuse can happen to anyone, anywhere. It happens to married, unmarried, and same-sex couples. Abusers and their partners can be rich or poor, and come from any race and ethnicity. Men can abuse women. Women can abuse men.

You may think the troubles in your relationship are no big deal. Your partner slaps you only during huge fights. Or insults you only after a bad day at work.

It all counts as domestic abuse. And chances are it will only get worse as time passes.

Types

Domestic abuse is any behavior that scares, intimidates, humiliates, isolates, and controls another person.

Physical violence. The abuser may:

- Hit
- Grab hair
- Shove
- Bite
- Force [drugs](#) or [alcohol](#)
- Deny medical care

Sexual abuse. It's a type of physical abuse. Anytime you feel forced into any sexual act you don't want, because you're not in the mood or for any other reason, that's sexual abuse.

Emotional or psychological abuse. This can be verbal or nonverbal. The aim is to lower your sense of self-worth and chip away your independence. Your partner may:

- Call you names or yell at you
- Shame you
- Blame you

- Constantly criticize
- Damage your relationship with others and isolate you
- Threaten to hurt you, themselves, or others
- Hurt your pets or destroy property

Economic abuse. This isn't about one person managing the household finances. It's when the abuser keeps their partner financially dependent by controlling the money. They also may not allow you to have a job or attend school.

4 Myths about Responding to Spousal Abuse

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2018/may-web-exclusives/4-myths-about-responding-to-spousal-abuse.html>

Despite our good intentions, these misconceptions can turn a bad situation worse.

Bruce Ashford, J. D. Greear, and Brad Hambrick



Image: Getty Images

Ashley was scared. Things had been bad for a while. She hadn't felt safe at home for some time, but now her kids were getting old enough to understand what was happening. She didn't feel safe confiding in friends. Her world was small because it was easier to keep things hidden with fewer eyes aware of her home life.

She went to the one place she felt safe, her church, to speak with her pastor. Still, she wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing. She trusted her church and appreciated her pastor, but she had always managed the situation by keeping information hidden. Talking to anyone went against her every instinct. But she couldn't stay silent any more.

Ashley told her pastor about three episodes in the last year that left her bruised when her husband "lost his cool." She talked about how her husband insisted on knowing exactly where she was at all times, who she talked to, and what she said. Simple conversations became combustible quickly if she didn't give the "right answer." While sharing these things, she spoke softly and apologized frequently.

As Ashley finished her story and the pastor felt his turn to speak approaching, he felt uncomfortable for several reasons. Even though Ashley had not asked him to do anything yet, he was unsure how best to counsel her. He felt the highest sense of duty to protect Ashley, but his thoughts were complicated by several internal tensions.

This hypothetical story, based on numerous encounters we've experienced with victims of domestic abuse, represents a challenge many pastors will face at some point in their ministry. Indeed, recent national events have revealed the widespread prevalence of physical and sexual assault in the workplace and at home.

Pastors who wish to support, protect, and counsel survivors of abuse are often left wondering how best to minister to them. They know abuse is a multi-faceted evil. They

want to provide the best counsel possible. But several misconceptions around the issue can cloud the thoughts and guide the actions of well-intentioned church leaders.

Myth 1: By advocating separation, I am undermining the institution of marriage.

For pastors, saying “make sure you’re safe” may feel uncomfortably close to counseling “leave your marriage for good.” Pursuing safety and honoring the covenant might seem like either-or concepts instead of both-and realities. In fact, victims of abuse have been living in this tension for years.

Any steps taken to protect victims of domestic abuse are steps towards fulfilling God’s will for marriage.

God hates divorce *because* he loves marriage. But that is also why he hates abuse. Paul says marriage should reflect the order and commitment within the Godhead, and thus should depict Christ’s sacrificial love for the church. Abuse is in diametric opposition to God’s design for marriage. Any steps taken to protect victims of domestic abuse, therefore, are steps towards fulfilling God’s will for marriage. By intervening on behalf of those afflicted by slander (abusive speech) or violence (abusive actions), we serve as God’s arm for executing justice for the needy (Ps. 140:11-12).

When people try to control outcomes rather than responding wisely to present situations, this can lead to unhealthy and harmful dynamics. Victims hide their abuse for years because they want to prevent their spouses from getting upset. And sometimes pastors hesitate to advise a separation because they want to prevent separation from becoming divorce. When we don’t do what we *should* because we are trying to prevent someone else from doing what they *shouldn’t*, we allow that person’s folly rather than godly wisdom to dictate our actions.

Myth 2: I must confront the abuser right away.

When pastors first hear stories of abuse, their initial instinct is often, *This is bad. Something needs to be done quickly.* But just because a victim speaks up, it doesn’t mean she is ready to confront her abuser. In [*Is It My Fault?*](#) Justin and Lindsey Holcomb point to numerous studies that highlight an unfortunate reality: “Many victims believe clergy have the most potential to help them, when in reality they are too often the least helpful and sometimes even hurtful.”

When church leaders act too quickly, questioning or confronting the abuser before the victim is ready, they can cause more harm than good, even putting the victim in greater danger. The victim may be silenced and punished by the abuser who now knows she spoke to an outsider. Ensuring the immediate safety of the victim is essential, but so is securing her long-term safety. If pastors sometimes err by hesitating in the face of the first myth, we also err by trying to bring final resolution too quickly.

Myth 3: If a victim of abuse is not yet ready to act, things must not be that bad.

Disclosing abuse and processing its implications can be overwhelming, and victims are often unclear about what actions, if any, they want you to take. Don’t take hesitancy as a sign that nothing needs to change. Unless there is risk of imminent harm or minors are involved—both require mandatory reporting—it is best to:

- Develop a safety plan.
- Connect with a counselor experienced in working with abuse victims.
- Clarify the central actions that need to change so that when the victim is ready for a direct conversation with the abusive spouse, the message is clear and consistent.

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb reveal that *direct intervention helpers* (pastors, police, lawyers) are initially less helpful to those in harm's way than *less direct intervention helpers* (hot lines, social workers, counselors). When abuse victims are asked to make changes for which they are unprepared, even healthy changes, the situation actually gets worse.

For assistance to result in a positive outcome, the abuse victim must be ready to live out the implications. This is why involving an experienced abuse counselor is so important. If the abuse victim is not prepared and has no viable plan, emotional or financial pressure often leads her back home prematurely, and it may be years before she reaches out for help again.

This leads us to the fourth myth.

Myth 4: As a pastor, I'm the best person to solve this problem.

When legal authorities get involved, the church often feels hampered in its ability to engage in restorative church discipline, which can go against a pastor's shepherding impulses. A restraining order or an attorney's request for the abuser not to make any incriminating statements can delay a church's actions for months. When this happens, it means the offenses were significant enough to merit this kind of legal process.

It can be difficult for many church leaders to understand why the actions and processes of the church should be postponed so legal processes can unfold. But in Romans 13, Paul makes it very clear that in criminal matters, the state is God's agent of justice. Deferring to legal processes is not putting God second; it is recognizing who God asked to take the lead when a crime has been committed. By putting the needs of the victim first, you are not minimizing the offenses of the abuser. Rather, you are preparing the victim to walk a difficult journey after her abuse becomes public knowledge.

We know that the vast majority of pastors genuinely love the members of their congregations and want to protect them. But as in all relationships, love alone is not enough. We must respond and act with biblical wisdom. With a combination of Christian love and wisdom, therefore, we will be able to glorify God and advocate effectively for his children in need.

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God Hates Abuse

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/may-web-only/patterson-sbc-divorce-god-hates-abuse.html>

There's more to the scriptural picture behind "I hate divorce."

CHAD ASHBY | MAY 11, 2018



Image: Anaimd / Getty Images

I have never recommended or prescribed divorce. How could I as a minister of the Gospel? The Bible makes clear the way in which God views divorce. I have on more than one occasion counseled and aided women in leaving an abusive husband. -Paige Patterson

I, too, am a Southern Baptist, and although I respect Dr. Patterson's right to disagree, I doubt that this is the presiding opinion among all SBC pastors. Patterson's refusal to acknowledge abuse as a legitimate breach of the marriage covenant convinced a battered wife to stay in an abusive home. Domestic abuse is cyclical. Even when pastors, counselors, and victim's advocates intentionally intervene, abused women often find the fear of isolation, financial struggle, single parenting, violent retribution, and a host of other factors to be a hill too steep to climb. So they return home.

Women and children are being oppressed by their husbands and fathers across our nation. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011 survey of more than 12,000 women, 22 percent of women in the US have experienced severe physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner. That's one in four women across our nation experiencing "severe" physical oppression. (Fourteen percent of men also experience abuse during their lifetimes.) Which is why pastors have to refuse the simple, proof-texted answer. Patterson insists, "The Bible makes clear the way in which God views divorce." That is true.

Exhibit A: Malachi 2:16a—“For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel ...” (NASB)

However, the Bible also makes clear the way in which God views abuse and oppression.

Exhibit B: Malachi 2:16b—“...and [I hate] him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.’”

Let us take heed together, lest we be joined with those who deal in treacherous acts.

1. God will crush all oppressors.

The defining act of the Old Testament is the Exodus: a deliverance from oppression. The fearful plagues that befell Egypt were in direct response to the ruthless enslavement Pharaoh inflicted on the people of Israel (Ex. 1:13). We even see the hardhearted cycle of abuse as Pharaoh feels remorse and promises reform, only to tighten his grip. Ultimately, God crushed Pharaoh and his army between the walls of his judgment. If abusers want to know how God feels about them, they need only look at Pharaoh’s fate.

What is more, God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He is just as offended by abuse within the people of God. Read the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. God explicitly tells his people the reason for their judgment: oppression and violence (cf. Isa. 10:1-4; 30:12-14; Jer. 6:6-8; 9:6-11). The Lord freed his people from slavery and gave them a veritable Garden of Eden, a land to fill with the beautiful fruit of brotherly love. Instead, they turned the Promised Land into the New Egypt. This time, God’s people were the oppressors:

It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?” declares the Lord God of hosts. (Isa. 3:14b-15, NASB)

Jeremiah did not mince words when he confronted King Jehoiakim: “You have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence” (Jer. 22:17, ESV). He tells the king that God will use his dead carcass to demonstrate to the whole world how he feels about the abuse taking place on his holy hill: “With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried, dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (22:19, ESV).

If God is determined to save a spouse, he is more than capable to accomplish it without the degrading of his beloved daughter.

When pastors counsel quick reconciliation in marriages ravaged by abuse, the Lord says, “They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14, ESV). The primary message an abuser should experience from the minister of Christ is that the eternal wrath of the Lord burns hot against those who heap up violence and oppression. Their abuse has not escaped the watchful eye of the One who declares, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19, ESV). The first step in putting God’s justice on full display is getting the proper authorities involved.

The most unloving thing a pastor could do in a situation of abuse is to dampen the severity of God’s retribution by offering cheap grace. Perhaps God will bring true repentance in the life of an abuser. But it will never happen until he stands condemned in his sin before the burning anger of the eternal Creator. Then and only then is he ready to receive forgiveness at the Cross.

The primary message an abused woman should hear from a minister of Christ is that the Lord is the protector of the weak. He is our Boaz, the gentle, kind, and strong Redeemer who spreads his wing of protection over us (Ruth 2:12). Like Naomi spoke to Ruth, the

voice of the church should unequivocally call a vulnerable woman to the safety of Jesus Christ: “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted” (Ruth 2:22, ESV). We make that safety tangible by surrounding a victim with advocates, counselors, and resources to help her make the difficult choices that lay ahead.

2. Jesus taught against the oppression of divorce.

This heart for the downtrodden and abused is what pours forth in the opening words of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). As we approach Jesus’ teaching on divorce later in the chapter, we enter through the doorway of this blessing.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus attacks the stronghold of self-righteousness. He uses the law to destroy those who would seek to be justified by the law. He came to fulfill the law by driving it into our hearts:

It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matt. 5:31-32, ESV).

To the one who would wish to justify his divorce saying, “Well, the Law of Moses says I can,” Jesus responds, “True. But if you do, her adultery and the adultery of the one she marries will be credited to *your account* before God, not theirs.” That’s what he means when he says, “[He] *makes* her commit adultery.” Jesus’ teaching is not meant to trap women in abusive marriages. It is meant to trap abusive men in the heartless trading of their wives like playing cards.

I’m not alone in this reading of Christ’s teachings. John Calvin speaks frankly:

That man ... who puts away his wife, and gives her a bill of divorcement, shelters himself under the pretense of the law: but the bond of marriage is too sacred to be dissolved at the will, or rather at the licentious pleasure, of men. ... The man who, unjustly and unlawfully, abandons the wife whom God had given him, is justly condemned for having prostituted his wife to others.

Later in Matthew 19, Jesus responds to an egregious question: “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” Knowing the hard hearts scattered in his audience, he confronts them in their sin: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. ... And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (19:6, 9, ESV). Once again, Jesus draws reckless men under the condemnation of the law—this time for their own adulterous hearts.

The point is that all of Jesus’ teachings on divorce are directed at people who are looking to justify themselves when there are no grounds for divorce. In Mark 10, Jesus makes it clear that all mankind—both men and women—are accountable to uphold their marital vows: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12, ESV).

3. Paul clarified Christian marriages.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul directly cites Jesus' teaching: "To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband. ... The husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10, 11, ESV). Likewise, he commands believers to build happy marriages even with their unbelieving spouses. However, Paul writes, "If the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15, ESV). This is the same concession Jesus made. While Christians should never break the marriage covenant, they can acknowledge when their spouse has broken it—either by sexual immorality or abandonment.

Ultimately, Christians have to be people who are concerned with saving people even more than they are with saving marriages.

It is beneficial to a non-believer if they can preserve a marriage with their believing spouse. Paul explains, "For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" (v. 16). However, it is a disastrous interpretation of this passage to guilt wives into enduring "minor non-injurious abuse," as Patterson terms it, or financial abuse, verbal abuse, or any other kind of abuse as though their husband's eternal destiny hangs on them being able to stick it out. If God is determined to save a spouse, he is more than capable to accomplish it without the degrading of his beloved daughter.

The Importance of Wise Counsel

At this juncture, it's important to clarify what we mean by the word *counsel*. Counseling does not mean telling a person what to do. Proper counseling, in my estimation, is providing an individual with all of the God-honoring choices available and helping that individual to make the wisest choice.

When a pastor insists that divorce is a nonstarter for Christians, he limits the options of a vulnerable woman in a way neither Jesus nor Paul did. Simply because he wishes every broken marriage would result in reconciliation does not give him the right to strong-arm women, using his spiritual authority effectively to make the decision for her. It is a valiant, humbling display of gospel love when a woman chooses to fight for her marriage despite her husband's sexual immorality, abuse, or abandonment. However, that is a choice she alone must make. And when there are biblical grounds for divorce, it is pastoral malpractice to make a woman feel guilty for choosing to depart a broken marriage covenant. Paul made it abundantly clear: She is not *enslaved*.

Is abuse a biblical grounds for divorce? Perhaps we should ask the Lord. After all, he's been divorced before: "For all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce" (Jer. 3:8, ESV). And what did these adulteries look like? "Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor" (Jer. 2:34, ESV). This vivid image symbolizes the way the strong trampled the weak through oppression, financial enslavement, bribery, violence, and gross injustice. If the Lord divorced his covenant people for their abuse of the vulnerable, surely it is grounds for those who have trusted in the God and Savior who cares for the poor in spirit.

But what constitutes abuse? I would put it this way: Abuse is when a marriage crosses the line from relationship to enslavement. Marriage is meant to reflect Christ and the church

(Eph. 5:32). However, when the picture begins to look like Pharaoh and the Israelites, there is a serious problem. A woman beaten, verbally assaulted, cut off from friends, and/or financially isolated is no longer a wife but a slave. Abuse can be hard to discern, which is why pastors absolutely must get other counselors, authorities, and victim's advocates involved.

Divorce is a painful reality in any circumstances. As Christians, we believe in the power of forgiveness, we believe in the reconciliation found in Christ Jesus, and we have all witnessed the gospel's power to turn bad marriages around. But ultimately, Christians have to be people who are concerned with saving people even more than they are with saving marriages.

Chad Ashby is a pastor at College Street Baptist Church in Newberry, South Carolina, and chairman of LifeBridge. He is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Grove City College. He writes regularly at After+Math.

Southern Baptist leader pushes back after comments leak urging abused women to pray and avoid divorce

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/may-web-only/patterson-sbc-divorce-god-hates-abuse.html>

By [Michelle Boorstein](#) April 29 at 8:22 PM [Email the author](#)



Paige Patterson, president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is pictured on Oct. 12, 2010. (Paul Moseley/Fort Worth Star-Telegram via AP)

The leader of a major Southern Baptist seminary [issued a statement Sunday](#) pushing back after a 2000 tape surfaced purporting to quote him saying that abused women should focus on praying and “be submissive in every way that you can” and not seek divorce.

Paige Patterson is president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Fort Worth school whose Web site says it is one of the largest seminaries in the world. About 15 million people are part of Southern Baptist churches, the largest Protestant group in the United States. Patterson is slated to deliver the primary sermon — a high-profile honor — in June at the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting in Dallas.

Patterson, who declined to comment Sunday, is heard [on an audiotape](#) being interviewed in 2000 about what he recommends for women “who are undergoing genuine physical abuse from their husbands, and the husband says they should submit.”

“It depends on the level of abuse, to some degree,” Patterson says. “I have never in my ministry counseled anyone to seek a divorce and that’s always wrong counsel.” Only on an occasion or two in

his career, he says, when the level of abuse “was serious enough, dangerous enough, immoral enough,” has he recommended a temporary separation and the seeking of help.

He goes on to tell the story of a woman who came to him about abuse, and how he counseled her to pray at night beside her bed, quietly, for God to intervene. The woman, he said, came to him later with two black eyes. “She said: ‘I hope you’re happy.’ And I said ‘Yes ... I’m very happy,’ ” because it turned out her husband had heard her quiet prayers and come for the first time to church the next day, he said.

[\[In an age of Trump and Stormy Daniels, evangelical leaders face sex scandals of their own\]](#)

Patterson has huge stature in the Southern Baptist Convention because he was one of the leaders, starting in the late 1970s, of what his supporters would call “the conservative resurgence” (more liberal Protestants would call it the “fundamentalist takeover”). It was a planned political takeover of the Convention and its institutions by those who believe the Bible is totally free of error. However, enrollment at Southwest seminary has nose-dived in the past 20 years — something Patterson had vowed to stop when he arrived in 2003.

The original source of the tape wasn’t clear. The excerpt appeared on the site [the Baptist Blogger](#) on Saturday.

The author of that blog told The Washington Post that the tape has surfaced several times since 2000 on church watchdog sites. That author said it was published last week in light of “the new season” of the #MeToo movement and a “reckoning” that appears to be happening in society around abuse, the person said. The author spoke on the condition of anonymity because the person is no longer part of the Southern Baptist community and doesn’t want to become a central part of the story.

According to the author, Patterson in the tape was being interviewed by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an evangelical organization that promotes the idea that men and women have different traditional roles. Efforts to confirm that with the council late Sunday were not successful.

The spreading of the tape over the weekend set off discussion among conservative Christians on social media, including many in roles of leadership. Most were eager to condemn abuse but many also declined to directly name Patterson or address the issue of divorce.

The Southern Baptist Convention has agonized in the past decade over how to respond to rising rates of divorce among its members. Entwined through that issue is gender equity, as women are not allowed to be pastors in SBC churches.

Evangelical Christians have higher-than-average divorce rates in the United States, according to [research by Baylor University](#), a prominent Baptist school.

Among those who publicly commented over the weekend were Bruce Ashford Jr., provost of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the seminary's president, Daniel Akin. The seminary is another Convention school in North Carolina, where Patterson was the past president.



[Bruce Ashford](#)

✓ [@BruceAshford](#)

Lots of social media convo this afternoon about spousal abuse. As the Provost of a SBC seminary and pastor at a SBC church, let me be clear: a physically abused woman should separate from her husband and have him put in jail.

[7:36 PM - Apr 28, 2018](#)

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](#)

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood tweeted [a statement it adopted](#) in March that said physical, sexual or emotional abuse is “not only a sin but is also a crime ... that must not be tolerated in the Christian community.”

“We believe that the church must offer tender concern and care for the abused and must help the abused to find hope and healing through the gospel. The church should do all it can to provide ongoing counseling and support for the abused,” the statement read.

Others who responded included Bible teacher Beth Moore and evangelical writer Katelyn Beaty, who both spoke about divorce:



[Beth Moore](#)

✓ [@BethMooreLPM](#)

I'm pro marriage. Nearly 40 years of ups and downs to back that up. But when we as a church culture demonize divorce as the worst possible outcome - the sin of all sins - we truly have no clue on this ever loving earth what some people are enduring. We do not submit to abuse. NO.

[10:28 PM - Apr 28, 2018](#)



[Katelyn Beaty](#)@KatelynBeaty

One of the many things that disturbs me about this is the way Patterson puts ALL the responsibility on the woman to change her husband—while he’s beating her. Even if you hate divorce, this is a gross abdication of pastoral and legal responsibility. <https://twitter.com/JonathanMerritt/status/990350594425704448> ...

[8:34 PM - Apr 28, 2018](#)

On Sunday in an email to The Post, Patterson declined to comment on the audio and related conversations: “75 years of experience teaches me (though a slow learner) that no one’s life is made materially better by entering these discussions. I have said enough.”

In the statement on his seminary website, Patterson did not dispute the tape but said he was being “subjected to rigorous misrepresentation.” Patterson was president of the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1990s.

In his statement, he said that he has never been accused of abusing anyone, that he has counseled “on more than one occasion” women to leave abusive husbands, and that physical or sexual abuse of any kind should be reported “to the appropriate authorities.” He praised the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood statement and said it reflected his view.

“I have also said that I have never recommended or prescribed divorce. How could I as a minister of the Gospel? The Bible makes clear the way in which God views divorce,” he wrote.

He continued: “To all who love me and have supported me across the years and to those who have been wounded by these accusations, I express my deepest regret. I do not apologize for my stand for the family and for seeking to mend a marriage through forgiveness rather than divorce.”

Southern Baptist leaders were not elaborating Sunday evening, either about the tape, or about Patterson’s role at the convention in June.

Roger Oldham, a spokesman for the Southern Baptist Convention, responded to a request to speak by saying he was “unavailable to comment on our day of worship.”



Michelle Boorstein is a religion reporter, covering the busy marketplace of American faith. Her career has included a decade of globe-trotting with the Associated Press, covering topics including terrorism in the Arizona desert, debates on male circumcision, Ugandan royalty, and how strapped doctors in Afghanistan decide who lives and who dies.

‘A satanic distortion’

https://world.wng.org/2018/05/hidden_violence

Bethlehem Baptist Church Pastor Jason Meyer learned something shocking in 2015. Three women in his Minneapolis congregation were victims of domestic abuse. They claimed the church wasn't helping. Leaders heard whispers of victims afraid to come forward. "It was a wake-up call," Meyer said. "We didn't know this was happening."

Many pastors don't. LifeWay Research surveyed 1,000 Protestant pastors last year: Forty-seven percent didn't know of any victims of domestic violence in their churches during the previous three years. Another 15 percent said no one had experienced domestic violence.

Sociologist Christopher Ellison found that "men who attend religious services several times a week are 72 percent less likely to abuse their female partners than men from comparable backgrounds who do not attend services." With national numbers of women in physically abusive relationships hovering between 25 and 33 percent, that still leaves a lot of abuse, but few church leaders know how to handle such problems. Sometimes their help actually hurts.



Offering support to victims: Pastor Jason Meyer (Bethlehem Baptist Church)

Bethlehem elders invited Biblical counselor John Henderson, author of *Abuse: Finding Hope in Christ*, to train them. They started a Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART), led by a survivor of domestic abuse. Meyer presented the joint elders' statement in a sermon, "Fooled by False Leadership." He denounced "harsh lordship" by husbands and male leaders, called abusers to repentance, and offered help to victims. He called all forms of domestic abuse a "satanic distortion of Christ-like male leadership because it defaces the depiction of Christ's love for his bride."

Since then, Bethlehem has walked through roughly 27 cases on its three campuses. Chris Moles, a Biblical counselor and pastor who has counseled abusers for more than 10 years,

helped Bethlehem develop strategies to hold abusers accountable and avoid common missteps. Moles used an adage to describe the lack of preparation within churches to address domestic abuse: “When you hear hoof steps, you think horse, not zebra.”

Most pastors and counselors are familiar with the common “horse steps” of marital problems, but few are trained to recognize the “zebra steps” of abuse. When a woman (or occasionally, a man) approaches them with marriage turmoils, they conflate the symptoms of abuse with normal marital sins. In other cases, church leaders may endanger a victim by alerting an abuser that she is seeking help. Moles also exposes faulty theology: If pastors convey an unbalanced view of submission without requiring a husband to love his wife, abusers feel empowered and victims imprisoned.

Still, Bethlehem refuses to write off those who abuse—and this part of the program is not without its critics, says Kirsten Christianson, who manages DART cases. Statistically, few abusers will repent, but God hasn’t made us privy to who the select few are, she says. “We pursue the hearts of those who abuse until they reject being pursued.”

At Bethlehem Baptist, the learning curve has been steep, volunteer burnout is a problem, and discipleship is key. The church pairs new volunteers with experienced ones. Together they check in regularly and pray with a victim and develop a safety plan. Training is hands-on. Meyer says elders now do more pavement-pounding and know their people better: “Our elders are out there more, being shepherds. ... Not just addressing messy situations, but all situations.” —*Christina Darnell*