

## I am Not a Victim: Overcoming Domestic Abuse

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### ◆ Introduction (my story and the purpose of Called to Peace Ministries)

### ◆ Definitions:

- Domestic violence is about power and control. It is characterized by a pattern of abusive behaviors that are *intended to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner*. It can be emotional, physical, sexual, economic, or psychological, and can include any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. When one person in the relationship clearly has more power than the other and consistently uses it to promote selfish interests, that's a clear sign that the problem is far more than just a marital problem. The vast majority of domestic abuse incidents do not include physical harm.
- "An abuse of power manifested through selfishly motivated patterns of behavior intended to exercise or maintain control over one's partner." Chris Moles
- Common tactics have been identified and described on the Power & Control Wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, Duluth, MN 1984).

### ◆ Special Considerations:

- Many do not consider what they experienced abuse.
- People helpers and churches can reinforce the abuse, and their feelings of worthlessness. (We should avoid any line of counseling that infers a victim did something to provoke or cause the abuse).
  - "What struck me about that meeting were the stories of abuse. These women had not endured a single abusive event but in most cases, they had lived through decades of abusive, controlling, and violent behavior. But that was not the only thing they had in common. The majority of the women in the room were now either being disciplined or shunned by their own church."<sup>1</sup>
  - "My darkest time came after being interrogated by our church counselors. I did not realize at the time that I was suffering in an abusive relationship, and I literally came out of the interrogation believing that I was not one of God's kids. How could I be? My eyes were blinded to the apparent sin in

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<sup>1</sup> Moles, Chris, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse* (Bemidji, MN, Focus Publishing, 2015), 77.

my life that seemed obvious to the many respectable solid believers that were trying to help us. All along, through countless years of sporadic counseling, I was praying for justice and protection and help and truth to be revealed, and it had not come. In my head, I saw a black screen with the simple words, "Game Over" written on it, and I had lost. My only thought was, God's promises are not for me, and I am blind to the truth. It must mean that it's me after all...I'm not His child." Jill, TX

- CTPM's survey of nearly 200 survivors found that almost 70% had negative experiences with their churches.
- Elevating marriages above lives can reinforce empower the abuser. God's heart is for the oppressed. (Ps. 72:4, Is. 10:1-3, Pr. 17:15)

- The trauma of abuse can leave victims unstable and behaving erratically
- Domestic violence affects as many women in the church as in society at large—at least 1 in 4.

#### ◆ Impacts of Domestic Abuse

- By its very nature domestic abuse attacks a victim's identity. Abusive people use tactics aimed at erasing the personhood of their victims. Tactics include put downs, humiliation, making her/him feel bad about herself/himself, name-calling, mind games, crazy making, and making her feel guilty.
- It's as if abusive people try to remake their victims into *their* image through constant ridicule, criticism and punishment for failing to conform. Many survivors report not even knowing their own likes and dislikes after years of living in abuse.
- Victims of abuse are conditioned to feel worthless. Survivor quotes based on a 2018 CTPM survey:
  - "It was my dad who really pointed that out to me. He said, "You could be Mrs. America and it still wouldn't matter. He will still cheat. He will still lie. My dad said it has nothing to do with you and everything to do with him!"
  - "Why does it hurt so much? What did I do wrong? Am I really that ugly? Please, Lord, just make it stop hurting."
  - "I thought maybe my sins led me to this place, that I was no longer worthy of God's love because of my sins. I thought maybe the plan was for me to die."
  - "I just wanted to be found good enough for God—to be loved by Him. My abuser was a Christian, and I wasn't good enough for him, so I knew I must not have been acceptable

- enough for God to love me or to protect me. I must have been too worthless for God's love and kindness."
- "I prayed that God would change me to make it stop. I prayed to see what was wrong with me and why my husband hated me so much."
  - "I felt afraid....unwanted....ashamed....before God."
  - "I was wishing he would just hit me instead of tormenting me with all of his other mind games and attempts to make me feel worthless. He caused me to doubt myself so much that I felt like I was incapable of making decisions, to drive or take care of other simple tasks."
  - "I got to the point where I thought the only way out was to kill myself as I was so beaten down."

#### ◆ How to Help

- Early Stages:
  - *Believe them!*
  - Listen and don't try to take charge.
  - Educate them on the dynamics of abuse.
  - Connect them with resources: advocates/ DV service providers/ support groups, counselors who understand DV or who are working with those who do.
  - Don't betray their confidence. (This can endanger them more!)
  - Help them make a safety plan. (NCADV, Focus Ministries, etc.)
  - Encourage them to document the abuse.
  - Provide them with practical support: financial, legal, help with children, etc. Show them they matter.
  - Encourage them to find hope in God and reassure them of his love. Let them know He does not condemn them.
- After ensuring safety, work on Steps to Healing:
  - Recognize the Abuse—we must face the ugly truth before we can apply His beautiful truths, including the impact of trauma. (Education)
  - *Identify and reject lies!* Stop making excuses for the abuse. Correct faulty interpretations of Scripture that reinforce harmful beliefs (marital roles, identity, etc.)
  - Acknowledge our divine resources for healing—His Word and the Holy Spirit.
  - Learn to Manage Emotions Biblically: Pour them out to God and refuse to let them rule or consume you.
  - Choose to Forgive—this does minimize what happened or require restored relationship or trust. Rather it leaves justice in

God's hands (Rom. 12:9) and God hates what happened too. (Is. 58:6). Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling.

- *Understand His Love & Goodness* – CTPM Scripture Database
- *Understand your Identity in Christ*
  - Shift the focus from self to Him—True worship vs. idolatry
    - Misplaced worship can result in shame (victims) or pride (abusers)
    - Make God bigger than the abuser
  - Correct lies about identity and replace with truths from scripture
    - A new creation in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9, 2 Cor. 5:17)
    - Fully known and loved (Ps. 139, Luke 12:4-7)
    - Reconciled and beyond reproach (Col. 1:21-22)
    - Free from condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1-2)
    - His masterpiece (Eph. 2:10)
    - Chosen by the King (1 Cor. 1:26-30)
  - Not understanding identity can lead to repeated victimization
  - Must live to please God rather than people (Gal. 1:10, Pr. 29:25)
  - Self-perception (identity) is directly related to your view of God
- *Resist sinful mistreatment* (Rom. 12:21)
- *Learn Healthy Relational Patterns & Wise Trust* (Eph. 4:15-16, 25-29, John 2:24-25)

See Chapter 14 CTP, *Find Your Worth in Him* & Lesson 6 in the CTP Companion Workbook

This outline is based on the keys to healing found in *Called to Peace: A Survivor's Guide to Finding Peace and Healing After Domestic Abuse* and the *Called to Peace Workbook*.