I met Catherine Clark Kroeger over a ball of yarn, so to speak. The year was 1996. We had both been invited to a think tank on abuse. At the opening event, the twenty or so women present introduced themselves with a sentence or two and threw a ball of yarn to another woman who would then take her turn. As personal introductions were made by one woman after another, a web began to form in the midst of our circle. We were knitted together—the twenty of us present—by our interest in helping the Christian church wake up to the reality of abuse in our midst. I introduced myself as an evangelical by persuasion and a social scientist by vocation; I think I said something about teaching at a secular university and researching issues of abuse in families of faith. At the first break that followed our web-making, Cathie marched over to me, smiled broadly, and said in words I will never forget, “We need to work together!” And her words came to pass.

Our first book together, No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence, was published by InterVarsity Press in 2001 and launched at the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We had been serving together with the WEF task force on abuse. Here, we were prompted by the others on the task force to move quickly to get our ideas in print—prompted by the urgency that many women from around the world were anxious to get resources into their own hands and the hands of their pastors. Our sisters on the task force from Africa, the Caribbean, and India were especially enthusiastic about the project and encouraged our efforts.

A few years later, we wrote a second book for the suffering Christian woman, Refuge from Abuse: Hope and Healing for Abused Christian Women, published by IVP in 2004. Whereas No Place for Abuse was written primarily for pastors and those who walked alongside the women, men, and children who were hurting, Refuge from Abuse was intended as a resource for a woman as she journeyed from despair to hope. It outlined steps on the road to healing and wholeness with a particular emphasis on her journey of faith.

As soon as we finished writing the second book, Cathie was eager for us to bring together a small group of interested partners to launch a new organization devoted exclusively to highlighting the issue of woman abuse and other forms of family violence within the Christian community. In January 2004, a new evangelical organization was formed, called PASCH, denoting both the Passover, or time of new beginnings, and Peace and Safety in the Christian Home. In February 2005, PASCH held its first international conference in Newport Beach, California. Attended by 250 men and women, the conference sought to sound a call that would bring those interested in creating peace and safety in Christian homes across North America to one place at one time. A second conference was held in the spring of 2006 at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. Based on several plenary sessions and workshops at these two conferences, an edited collection entitled Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger, Nancy Nason-Clark, and Barbara Fisher-Townsend, was published in 2008 under the imprint of the House of Prisca and Aquila series of Wipf and Stock.

Cathie’s desire to put into print what was transpiring at these conferences would not rest. She wanted to give authors who perhaps had never published before an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Her desire for more resources on domestic violence was only matched by her desire to mentor the next generation of evangelical voices for change—especially change in the lives of women and men who had been silenced for too long. As a result, a second edited collection has just been published, Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and their Leaders. In fact, when I received word from Cathie’s grandson of her passing from this life to the next, Barb Fisher-Townsend and I were actually sitting at my kitchen table reading the page proofs of this latest edited book. In typical Cathie fashion, only days before her death, she had raised the topic of our next writing project. Cathie was always keen to be working on the next venture before the ink had dried on the last.

**Catherine Clark Kroeger’s contribution to the literature on Christianity and abuse**

In total, Catherine Clark Kroeger wrote or edited, together with others, six books on abuse and dozens of chapters and articles. That is an amazing legacy on a topic for which there has been such a concerted *holy hush*. She was adamant that the Scriptures taught peace and safety in the home and that God was on the side of the victim/survivor. By her words and her actions, she lived out the principle of the primacy of the Scriptures.

In Cathie’s mind, the Bible was clear: abuse was wrong, it was not part of God’s design for family living, and those who resorted to violence of any kind would be held accountable.

For her, peace and safety in the home was intricately linked to notions of manhood, womanhood, gender equality, and marital bliss. Cathie was so convinced of the centrality of God’s egalitarian-

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ian message—good news to women and to men—that she felt that, if only pastors and laypeople could be shown the Scriptures, and then believe them, that errant, abusive behavior would change. But interweaving Cathie's strong belief in the primacy of the biblical message was her pragmatic approach to life. She was a doer. She was a voracious reader of the Bible and other scholarly material. She prayed. She listened to God's call. And then she acted.

The various strategies that Cathie employed to advance the message of egalitarian biblical teaching, harmonious family relations, and God's call to a changed life impacted her teaching, her writing, and her personal life. Her home was frequently a safe haven for someone in need of temporary refuge; her phone a place to receive comfort, referral suggestions, and prayer; her email a resource to those who were suffering, and the visits she made to prison, women's shelters, and other meeting places evidence that Cathie "walked the talk." Like the Methodists of old, the world was really Cathie's parish. Women and men from many locations around the globe sought inspiration from her teaching, her writing, and her personal life of commitment and social action.

On several occasions, I accompanied Cathie on teaching ventures abroad—to Croatia and to India. There was a myriad of highlights for me while traveling with Cathie, but morning devotions topped them all. Almost every day, we would begin by reading the Scriptures together—well, to be honest, Cathie read and translated, and I listened with more intensity than I ever had in my whole life. She would get out her Greek Bible, and I would urge her to translate as she went. I knew this was something that very few people anywhere in the world could do with the same grace and ease as Cathie. I always felt that I was close to hallowed spiritual ground when this occurred. Cathie saw it as ordinary—couldn't any self-respecting Christian woman do likewise?—but I did not. I knew that her love and understanding of what was being read was just a little deeper because she felt the language. I cannot imagine anyone anywhere in the world with whom I would rather share morning devotions than our beloved Catherine Clark Kroeger.

There were some minor challenges in travelling with Cathie. She believed in little sleep, for example. Allow me to share a couple of stories. On our first trip to India, we had a very busy speaking schedule. But Cathie wanted to ensure that we were also writing—not wasting any time. Since she went to bed rather early, she would often wake up in the early hours of the morning. On one occasion, at around 3:00 a.m., she whispered to me, as I was sleeping in the next bed, "Nancy, are you awake?" "I am now," I replied. "Let's see if we can write for an hour or so before the sun rises," she suggested. I got my notepad, and we began to brainstorm about a chapter for our next book. Forty-five minutes later, her eyes began to droop, and she fell back to sleep. This is how Cathie lived her life: every waking moment was to be harnessed for good and for God. This lesson, though I have never fully practiced it as she did, I will take to my grave.

One story from our Croatian travels stands out. It involves a meeting that Cathie and I had with several people from the University of Zagreb, including the dean of law and the chair of the department of sociology. A Roman Catholic sister also joined the group, but, since she did not speak English, conversation with her was rather difficult. Cathie spoke German and then French in an attempt to discover a common set of linguistic tools with which to communicate with the sister. Then, she turned to me—quite astonished that she had not thought of this before—and said, "I shall try Latin. Surely, this is a language with which every nun has competence." Without a strain, Cathie began to speak in Latin.

Catherine's love of language and its written form—books—could not be overstated. Her expansive surroundings on Cape Cod included a separate library—replete with artifacts and more than 10,000 volumes. Cathie told me that, as a young girl, she learned to conjugate verbs as she baked bread with her mother. Never wasting a moment was clearly part of her cultural and family heritage. Time was precious. A person was accountable for how she spent her days.

The concept of accountability permeated much of Cathie's writing on abuse. In particular, she felt that pastors—the spiritual shepherds of God's flock on earth—were accountable for how they spoke about family living, how they conceptualized family and gender relations within it, and how they responded in the aftermath of domestic violence.

Catherine Clark Kroeger's own words

I have included an excerpt below from our 2011 book Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and their Leaders. It highlights several features of Cathie's thinking about the Bible and her passion to help others understand what Scripture says about violence that occurs at home. Hear her words:

As we deal with delicate issues of domestic abuse, it is important to deal carefully and faithfully with the Word of God.


Commencing in the seventies, there began to be a growing awareness of the widespread existence of domestic abuse. Originally many of us maintained that no such evil was to be found among those who had been born again; but the evidence proved us wrong. It was evident that the gospel called us to minister to both victims and perpetrators inside and outside of the fold of faith. All too often there has been a vast gulf between those grappling with a profound social problem and the voice of the church.

Clearly Christians needed to rethink what the scriptures and the Fathers of the church were telling us about family relationships. Misconceptions have led to tragic forms of abuse and misery that call for correction. None are more susceptible to misinterpretation than the biblical statement that man is the head of woman. How often it has led to abuse! This was recognized very early in the life of the church. One such voice was that of the greatest early biblical exegete, St. John Chrysostom. He perceived that women are often wonderfully attuned to the concerns, needs, and emotions of those around them, and have a gift of responding sensitively and sympathetically. Their gifts enable them to create an environment of care and
loving support for the entire family. But abuse and brutalization deprive a wife of the ability to give freely of herself to those around her. Chrysostom wrote:

“For when she has been subjected to her husband through force, fear, and violence, it will be more unbearable and unpleasant than if she commands him with total authority. Why do you suppose this is? Because this force drives out all love and pleasure. If neither love nor desire is present, but instead fear and duress, how valuable can the marriage be henceforth?”

“For someone can subdue a slave through fear, but even he will soon try to escape. But your life partner, the mother of your children, the source of every joy, must not be bound through fear and threats, but by love and a kind disposition.”

Christianity is not a faith about who should be the boss, but about each one of us assuming the role of a servant (Phil 2:3–8). How often we fail to notice that the practice of Christianity requires mutuality. We are told to be subject one to another (Eph 5:21). Indeed, the word allelos (one another) occurs no less than one hundred times in the New Testament! Our trademark is to be meekness, humility, and a concern for others. We might think of Jesus’ declaration:

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:42–43, cf. Matt 20:25–28, Luke 22:24–27)

Jesus said that we would know a tree by its fruits and that we must beware a message based upon a mistaken ideology (Matt 7:15–20, 12:33, Luke 6:44). He called for a differentiation to be made between those commandments that are truly given in the scripture and those that develop from human misconception (Matt 15:6–9). If we have embraced a theology that requires further development, now is the time to get on with the work of reconsideration.

Later in this same chapter, Cathie picks up the theme of authority. She writes:

Sometimes we have been guilty of claiming over others an authority that is not biblically sanctioned. In particular there has often been an emphasis on the exercise of power by the male over the female. All too often that has led to methods of control that destroy family life. The Scriptures caution us against the dangers of distorting the words of Paul. Peter wrote:

“Some of his [Paul’s] comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do other parts of Scripture and the result is disaster for them. I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the errors of these misguided people. I don’t want you to lose your own secure footing.” (2 Pet 3:15–17)

Peter warns as well not to use honest biblical values as a cover-up for evil (1 Pet 2:16) nor as a selfish occasion to serve one’s own flesh (Gal 5:13).

“O members of the household of God, you have been called to liberty, but not as a starting point for gaining your own selfish objects. Rather serve one another out of love. Indeed, the entire law is fulfilled in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ For if you bite and gnaw at one another, watch out that you are not totally destroyed by one another.” (Gal 5:13–15)

How very often we see this scenario played out among those who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! In the above text, I have translated the Greek word aphormē as “starting point,” though it is often translated as “pretext” in this verse. Two of its essential meanings are “a military base of operations” or “a means of war.” The terminology led me to contemplate instances of other military and violent images that were used by evangelicals in the last half century. Do we not need to deal with a doctrine that in many instances has inappropriately become a springboard for injustice and abuse?

Cathie believed in the power of the scriptural witness. That is precisely why, in our joint work, she spent so much space quoting the biblical passages that for her gave an imperative for Christians to abhor violence and offer respite, safety, comfort, and practical advice to its victims. Listen to the way she frames the issue in a chapter entitled “Searching the Scriptures” in our 2010 book, No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence.6

We are told that batterers abuse those in their family because in this manner they achieve the results that they are seeking. Frequently the abuser convinces his family that his treatment of them stems in response to their own misdeeds. Victims are humiliated, degraded, shame, reproached, made to feel inadequate, and guilt-ridden.

Thus, they are coerced into compliance with the perpetrator’s wishes. Whether by physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, they are able to exercise control over the household. The harm done to individual members is ignored or justified. Frequently the reproach falls upon the victims rather than on the offender. If they had only been more prayerful, more submissive, more careful not to arouse anger, the problem would not have arisen. But this is not where the Bible puts the responsibility. The Bible says that the offender is at fault: “In your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth” (Ps 58:2). We fail to understand that abuse hurts the abuser. “The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head” (Ps 7:16). Their own spiritual lives are drastically imperiled (Prov 2:6–14, Isa 58:4, 1 Pet 3:7).

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The power of the Spirit works not only to restrain evildoers, but also to empower those who would obey the biblical command to deliver the helpless from the hand of the violent, to correct those of the family of faith who fall into sin, to set free those who are oppressed, to rebuke, admonish and instruct. Let us, the people of God, be instructed by the Scriptures.

Both Old and New Testaments vigorously condemn violence of many sorts. A major theme is God’s abhorrence and denunciation of violence. Such behavior is a characteristic of sinful people and brings the judgment of God (Ps 11:5–6, Ezek 7:11, Joel 3:19, Amos 3:10, Obadiah 10, Hab 2:17, Zeph 1:19). Because of violence the earth was destroyed:

“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence . . . And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them.’” (Gen 6:11, 13)

Violence is associated with Satan (Ezek 28:16). It is accompanied by many sorts of wrong attitudes and conduct (Isa 59:6–8; Jer 6:7, 22:17; Jon 3:8). The wicked drink “the wine of violence” (Prov 4:17), and the unfaithful “have a craving for violence” (Prov 13:2). Offenders develop a way of life sustained by their violence (Ps 73:4–8). Hebrew law made special provision to prevent violence within the home. Even a household slave was not to be treated abusively:

“If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.” (Exod 21:26–27)

Proverbs, too, addresses violence in the home:

“Those who trouble their households will inherit wind. . . . The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes lives away.” (Prov 11:29–30)

“Do not lie in wait like an outlaw against the home of the righteous; do no violence to the place where the righteous live.” (Prov 24:15)

The New International Version offers an interesting alternative translation for a famous passage on divorce: “I hate a man’s covering his wife with violence as well as with his garment,” says the Lord Almighty’ (Mal 2:16 NIV mg.). According to the New Testament, violent persons are not eligible for church leadership (1 Tim 3:3, Titus 1:7).

Thinking about Cathie’s legacy

Cathie’s work on violence was informed by the voices of the victims she met, helped, and called her friends; the strength of survivors from around the world; the importance of networking; the call of God to comfort and to challenge; the promise of new life; and the potential of change. She was a person who never stopped learning and never stopped listening to others or that still, small voice—heard amid the noise among us or in our own private prayer closet.

She had an expansive view of others and a modest view of herself.

Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger’s work will live on—through her writing and in the lives of people in whom she invested time and personal energy. I would like to close this tribute to Cathie with four lessons I have learned by working with her and watching how she lived life right to the finish line. Hers was a life well lived!

1. The bidirectional link between scholarship and compassion. Cathie was a servant/scholar before the term gained popularity in contemporary evangelical circles. She learned, and then she put her knowledge into practice. Sometimes, it operated in the other direction. She was moved by someone’s story and then set about to learn why it might be so.

2. Do not be put off by your detractors. Cathie had a remarkable level of energy for the good she sought to do. And she did so in the face of those who wished to stop her. She gave of her resources—material, intellectual, and emotional. At times, it took its toll. It is never easy to give generously and without ceasing.

3. The power of the printed word. Words are powerful. Cathie read and she wrote, convinced that knowledge produces power even in the most impoverished among us. Her passion for education at all levels was unmatched.

4. Harnessing your personal resources. Cathie believed that the world could be changed, under the power of the Holy Spirit, one person at a time. And it was the responsibility of the church to rise up to the challenge.

She had a word or a funny song for almost every occasion—her good humor ensured that she did not take herself too seriously. During one of our trips to India, we were speaking in front of a large audience of mostly women who had gathered to talk about issues of abuse and the church. Some of the women wanted a time to sing before we began to teach. Cathie simply turned and asked me to play the piano—no prior practicing, no music, no music leader. I had no choice, really, but to walk to the piano and remember the words we were taught in Sunday school—to be ready to preach, pray, sing, or testify at a moment’s notice. Later, some of the women were highlighting their cultural traditions, and we had no one present to offer a funny song about American culture. Cathie sang impromptu “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.” She could always laugh at herself and her own foibles. At the same time, she took the questions of others very seriously. Once, one of my daughters had a question about angels—I sent it along to Cathie at the end of a “work-related” email. Early the next day, I received a two paragraph response complete with references! That was vintage Cathie—harvesting every occasion to educate and empower others.
Without a doubt, Cathie was a storyteller. And the Bible came alive as she told its stories in front of an audience or in print. She was particularly skilled at using the characters of the Bible to highlight features of the journey in the aftermath of domestic violence: the unrepentant heart of Cain, the well of hope for Hagar, the image of God’s marriage to Israel, the charge to those in leadership, and the long road toward forgiveness as experienced by Joseph and his brothers. She highlighted God’s angst with those who employed violent words or acts, and the mandate of the New Testament to live in a way set apart from the world. She knew the stories of the Bible and could draw out both the original meaning and its contemporary implications. She never hesitated to encourage others to search the Scriptures as she herself had done and to draw inspiration from the very good news it contained for those whose lives were in turmoil or replete with angst.

Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger’s work was bathed in the Scriptures, comforting to victims and survivors, challenging to religious leaders, and calling all of us—men and women alike—to live according to the biblical mandate of peace and safety in our homes.

Notes
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Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—

for he has done it.

– Psalm 22:30–31

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