

Clergy Responses to Domestic Violence

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Of all the social problems confronted by the church, domestic violence is surely one of the most misunderstood and mismanaged by church leaders. I still look back with deep embarrassment on the time when, as a young pastor, I was offended that our women's ministry had invited a special speaker to address the topic of domestic violence at the mid-week women's Bible study. I was certain they were simply stirring up trouble where no real problem existed. After all, we were an evangelical church and abuse did not happen in *our* church. In my youthful naiveté (and chauvinism), little did I realize that abuse does happen in evangelical churches. In fact, at that very time, one of the church elders had been beating his wife for years and had put her in the hospital several times. I also did not realize that one of our pastors was about to be arrested for child abuse. Like most clergy, I had gone into the ministry with a deep and genuine desire to serve and help others, but because I was clueless regarding the reality and dynamics of domestic violence, I was unable to minister to abusers and their families. In fact, I made matters worse.

Definitions

Before we can specifically address clergy responses to domestic violence, we must define the problem. Domestic violence (DV) is the use or threat of physical violence to control a family member or intimate partner. In other words, it is the use of force to control someone who should be treated with great love and respect. This dynamic helps to explain why domestic violence is so damaging to its victims. Domestic violence covers a broad range of behaviors, from extreme physical violence such as punching, choking, kicking, or assaulting with weapons, to less violent acts such as slapping, holding someone down, punching the wall, throwing objects at someone, or deliberately injuring someone's property or pets. It is important to understand that, while many victims of domestic violence experience significant, and, in some cases, severe physical injuries, domestic violence involves much more than just acts that cause physical injury. It involves both the use of physical force and the threat of physical force to control another. So, if someone (most often a child or a woman) feels threatened by a husband, father, or boyfriend raging, punching the wall, destroying their personal possessions, threatening to injure them or their other family members, etc., that person has suffered domestic violence. And domestic violence that does not cause actual physical injury does cause emotional/psychological injury. This is a very important point because often victims of DV, as well as their family members and friends, believe they have not experienced DV unless they have suffered visible physical injuries. This leads to the minimization of physical abuse and of the seriousness of the abuser's behavior.

Clergy misunderstandings and mismanagement of domestic violence disclosures help us understand why surveys of victims of domestic violence reveal that victims often feel clergy were of little help. In spite of their desire to help abused parishioners,

clergy often minimize the frequency and damage of domestic violence, are mistakenly optimistic about abusers, and often give harmful advice to victims. This helps us understand the mixed results of a study by Lee Bowker of one hundred forty-six battered wives.¹ Bowker found that 40 percent of the women sought help from the clergy after they were abused, one-third of the women indicated the clergy had given them some help, and yet these abused women rated clergy as a group lower than almost all other categories of helpers. Some recent research is even more pessimistic regarding the ability of clergy to help victims of domestic violence. A recently survey of six hundred women in Maricopa County, Arizona, where I live, revealed that, among women presently in abusive relationships, 62 percent practice their religion either strictly or moderately, 42 percent attend religious services weekly or almost weekly, and yet only 7 percent would confide in their clergy if they felt unsafe.² The following clergy responses to abuse help explain why such a high percentage of women do not view clergy as a source of help for victims of domestic violence.

1. *Clergy often tell abused women that they should be more submissive to their abusive husbands.*³

Some pastors simply emphasize that abused wives should stay and trust God. For instance, one well-known megachurch pastor argues that the Bible unequivocally teaches wives to submit, even to abusive husbands. In the context of women fearing to submit because the husband might take advantage of her, he argues that godly women, like Sarah, should simply trust God: "If there was an abuse, they knew God would take care of the results."⁴ Other clergy imply or assert that the submission mandate essentially strips wives, apparently even abused wives, of their personal rights, but not of their responsibility to submit. For instance, the pastor of the church that for many years has proclaimed it has *the largest Sunday School in the world* writes that a wife has no rights *whatsoever* until she submits to her husband, and, furthermore, it is a far greater sin for a woman to fail to submit than for a husband to fail to love his wife.⁵

Other Christian leaders are even more explicit in telling abused wives they must submit to abuse. The daughter of a famous southern evangelist and minister states that Scripture commands wives to be submissive to abusive husbands, even to evil husbands who beat their children and force their wives to participate in group sex orgies.⁶ While these authors' views may be more extreme than those of most clergy, it is common for pastors to tell abused wives that they must be more

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submissive. To quantify clergy beliefs about domestic violence and divorce, a questionnaire was sent to more than five thousand Protestant ministers in the United States. A full 27 percent of the clergy who responded said that, if a wife would begin to submit to her abusive husband, God would honor her obedience and the abuse would stop (or God would give her the grace to endure the beatings).⁷

Sadly, submission does not stop abuse. In fact, it often serves to intensify the abuse, because it gives an abusive husband a greater sense of power and helps him circumvent painful consequences for his evil behavior. For example, a 1986 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey concluded that women who reported their abuse to authorities were far less likely to be reassaulted than the wives who submitted to the abuse and did not contact the authorities.⁸ Specifically, the survey found that 41 percent of wives who did not report their abusive husbands to the police were attacked again within six months, whereas only 15 percent of abused wives who reported the abuse to authorities were reassaulted.

2. Clergy rarely condemn domestic violence from the pulpit.

While some clergy say very incorrect and harmful things in response to abuse, they are often silent about what does need to be said, namely, that God hates abuse and that domestic violence is sinful and unacceptable. This message is not only urgent for entire congregations, but it can be particularly empowering for abuse victims. In one study of battered Christian women, when asked what they most needed from the church, abused women indicated two primary needs. They said they needed (1) the church's recognition that violence against women and children is a problem even in the church and (2) a straightforward condemnation of domestic violence from the pulpit.⁹ According to Rev. Al Miles, who interviewed one hundred fifty-eight clergy regarding domestic violence, all of them condemned domestic violence, and yet only twenty-five ministers specifically addressed it in their congregations.¹⁰ In my own informal polling of hundreds of seminary and college students regarding whether they have ever heard a sermon on domestic violence, I have never had more than 10 percent of the group indicate they had heard such a sermon.

This failure to condemn physical abuse from the pulpit is particularly puzzling in evangelical churches, who by definition believe the Bible is the trustworthy word of God, and God intends it to guide and govern all of life. The condemnation of physical abuse is a dominant theme of Scripture, particularly in the Hebrew prophets. There are hundreds of Scripture passages that condemn abuse and proclaim God's particular judgment on physical abusers.¹¹ For instance, one of the seven sins God hates is "hands that shed innocent blood" (Prov. 6:17 NIV). The psalmist declares hatred of abuse by noting God's posture on physical abusers: "those who love violence his soul hates" (Ps. 11:5). Repeatedly, God declares judgment on abusers, whether they were

part of the covenant community (Ezek. 9:9–10) or whether they were pagans (Amos 1:3–15).

3. Clergy often minimize the prevalence and gravity of domestic violence.

While recent research suggests that clergy are becoming considerably more informed regarding domestic violence, clergy consistently underestimate its prevalence, particularly in their own congregations. Various research studies reveal that physical and

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sexual abuse rates are not appreciably lower among the churchd than the unchurched, but are shockingly high. For instance, in 1989, the Christian Reformed Church commissioned a research study to determine prevalence of abuse in its denomination. The findings were based on adults' self-reports

of previous abuse. Given what we know about abuse victims' tendency to deny and minimize abuse, these prevalence findings are undoubtedly lower than actual abuse rates experienced. In this study, 12 percent of the respondents reported having experienced physical abuse or neglect, 13 percent reported having been sexually abused, 19 percent reported having been emotionally abused (seeking to control another person through words, threats, and fear), and 28 percent reported having experienced at least one of the three types of abuse.¹² In terms of lifetime abuse rates, various studies show that 22–33 percent of American women will be assaulted by intimate partners in their lifetimes.¹³ And domestic violence is not only a problem for adult married couples. A recent study of adolescents found that 13 percent of teenage girls in a relationship admit to being physically hit or injured; nearly one in five teenage girls who have been in a relationship said a boyfriend threatened violence or self-harm if they broke up; one in three teens reports knowing a friend or a peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, or physically injured by a partner.¹⁴

And, yet, clergy, especially conservative clergy, almost always assert that abuse rates are lower in Christian families than in society at large. For instance, in one study of Canadian clergy, the clergy estimated that one in four couples in Canada had experienced domestic violence (research in Canada reveals that 25–33 percent of Canadian couples had experienced domestic violence), and, yet, they believed, with no supporting evidence, that only one in six couples in their own congregations had experienced domestic violence.¹⁵ Other studies of clergy, including Jewish and Muslim clergy, report very similar findings—clergy believe that domestic violence is a problem, but not in their religious group.¹⁶

Not only do clergy often minimize the prevalence of domestic violence, they often minimize its gravity. This is particularly true for male clergy, most of whom have no experiential understanding of the fear and helplessness that women feel from abusive male partners who are much more powerful physically and often socially. Sadly, I have heard clergy respond to reports of physical abuse by stating, "All couples have their arguments. What's the big

deal?"; "Many women exaggerate about their husbands' anger"; "All he did was give her a little bruise"; etc. In fact, domestic violence is very damaging and is a very "big deal." For instance, the Surgeon General has reported that domestic violence accounts for more adult female emergency room visits than traffic accidents, muggings, and rapes combined, and is the greatest single cause of injury to American women.¹⁷ The U.S. Department of Justice reports that approximately one-third of murdered women are killed by an intimate (husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend), and most victims of intimate partner homicide are killed by their husbands.¹⁸ Domestic violence is prevalent, and it is extremely damaging.

4. Clergy are often so concerned to preserve marriage that they advise against separating, let alone divorcing from an abusive husband. This is largely the result of naiveté regarding the challenge of getting abusive men truly to change their behavior.

To quantify clergy beliefs about domestic violence, a questionnaire was sent to more than five thousand Protestant ministers in the United States.¹⁹ Four-fifths of the clergy who responded indicated that they had confronted domestic violence in their ministries and had counseled a wife abused by her husband. In spite of the fact that most of these clergy had some experience with wife abuse and had seen some of the damage it causes, 27 percent said that, if a wife would begin to submit to her abusive husband, God would honor her obedience, and the abuse would stop (or God would give her the grace to endure the beatings); almost one-fifth indicated that no amount of violence from an abusive husband would justify a wife leaving, and only 2 percent of the pastors said they would support divorce due to domestic violence.

To illustrate common clergy naiveté regarding abusive men and clergy insistence on the sanctity of marriage in spite of violence, one battered wife shared that, after her husband beat her:

I went to my minister then and his reaction was "What's your husband's favorite food?" and I said "Pork chops and scallop potatoes." "What's his favorite dress?" I told him and he said "I want you to go home and put on that dress and make him pork chops and scallop potatoes and honor your marriage vows."²⁰

Another battered woman said that when she told her pastor that her husband was beating her, he completely minimized the damage she was experiencing as well as her husband's entrenched patterns of violence by patronizingly stating to her, "Let's talk to him, we'll get this straightened out because I want you two together, you're such a lovely couple."²¹ Similarly, another woman who attempted to report that her husband had been beating her severely was told by her minister, "Go home. He's probably calmed down now. And come in for counseling . . . you married him, you made a commitment, so you have to work this out. Pray more. Submit more."²² Unfortunately, while these women tried to follow the well-meaning but misguided advice of their ministers, the beatings continued.

5. Clergy often state or imply that the woman is partially responsible for the abuse.

For instance, one well-known Christian physician and author suggests that, in a "severely troubled marriage," the wife is responsible to mollify an abusive husband: "You have to be perfect in your behavior toward your partner . . . and you must be very sensitive to avoid anything that will set your partner off."²³ In one study of one hundred eighty-seven battered women, one-hundred sixteen were found to be religious, and sixty-three of the women went to clergy for help. Ninety-six percent of these battered women had experienced one or more incidents of severe physical abuse at least once during the relationship, and 34 percent of the victims had attempted suicide.²⁴ In spite of the extreme, even life-threatening, damage these women had experienced from their abusive husbands, twenty-five of the religious victims who went to their ministers reported that the pastor focused on their behavior, and what they should change. The ministers said things such as "Wear him out with sex," "Cook more appetizing meals," "Try harder not to provoke him," and "Don't talk."

Another abused woman recounted what happened when she went to her pastor for help:

He put the guilt on my shoulders. . . . He blamed me for not submitting to my husband and said that my husband would change because he had asked for forgiveness. But after counseling I realized he would never change; he was more abusive than ever. In a sense that pastor was on my husband's side. I was showing little faith, he said. This minister even knew that my husband was making sexual advances to my daughter.²⁵

Research on domestic violence in fact reveals that the woman's behavior actually has little bearing on the abuse.²⁶ That is, abusive men ultimately do not abuse because of what their wives do or do not do; they abuse because of complex internal pathologies beyond the wife's control or responsibility.²⁷

Positive suggestions for clergy

While the clergy responses we have noted show how clergy often fail to help victims of domestic violence, it must be recognized that clergy have tremendous power to encourage and help victims heal. As clergy become educated regarding the dynamics of domestic violence, the damage to victims, and the patterns of violence exhibited by abusers, they are able to offer wise counsel and assistance. Some of the most important things clergy can do are to listen humbly to battered women, hear what they have experienced, and ask what they need from the church. Such a response is essential because clergy who have not experienced abuse will not intuitively recognize many of the needs of battered women. Furthermore, since battered women have been systematically devalued, demeaned, and stripped of power, it can be very affirming for clergy humbly to seek out the opinions and needs of abused women. Humility is critical here, since abuse victims have very fragile egos and tend to be filled with debilitating shame. Humility is also essential because research shows that clergy and

non-abused parishioners perceive that the church provides far more support for battered women than battered women in that same church perceive that it provides. For instance, 51 percent of battered women believed the church's teachings contribute to domestic violence, whereas only 24 percent of parishioners believed this, and 30 percent of parishioners believed the church offered financial support to battered women, whereas only 16 percent of battered women believed this.²⁸

In particular, clergy can aid victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in five essential ways.

1. Clergy can become well educated on the nature and dynamics of abuse and the characteristics of abusers.

Clergy devote their lives to helping others and developing the God-given potential in their parishioners, so, unless they are well educated about abuse, they will often minimize abuse and give naïve and even dangerous advice to abusers and to their victims, wishing to think the best of all involved. For instance, one minister, when challenged to address domestic violence proactively in his congregation, stated, "We all have arguments. How would you like it if someone stuck their nose in your private life?"²⁹ Clearly, this minister had no understanding of the qualitative difference between a respectful verbal disagreement and a punch in the face, nor did he understand the difference between respecting legitimate privacy and the divine mandate to protect the oppressed. Thus, it is critically important for clergy to educate themselves regarding abuse and abusers.

I believe it is particularly important for clergy to understand the characteristics of abusive men.³⁰ One of the greatest misconceptions about abusers is that they look a certain way, so "you'll know one when you see one." Thus, clergy often are in deep denial when one of their members is charged with abuse, for the accused seemed like such a nice person and did not look like anyone who could abuse. In fact, abusers cannot be visually identified, but they do have some notable behavioral characteristics. The first and most consistent characteristic of physical abusers is a pervasive denial of responsibility. They simply refuse to own their destructive behavior. They do this by shifting the blame for their abuse and/or by minimizing the abuse itself. For example, in one study of physically abusive men who were in mandated counseling, researchers who interviewed these men cataloged dozens of rationalizations and minimizations for their abuse such as: "The booze made me do it"; "My wife verbally abused me."; "She was the provoker and I had to defend myself."; "I never beat my wife. I responded physically to her."; "Women bruise easily too. They bump into a door and they bruise."³¹

Over the years, I have heard every imaginable excuse and minimization for abuse, yet rarely have I found abusers to condone abuse in general. They say that abuse is wrong, but what they did was not abuse. Or they say that their wives forced them to hit by being such a nag, by disrespecting their authority, by not meeting their sexual needs, etc. Pervasive denial of responsibility is exactly what we see in the life of King Saul, a physical abuser whose heart so displeased God that God rejected him from being king. The

event that precipitated divine rejection was Saul's flagrant disobedience of God's command to destroy the enemy Amalekites and to take no spoil (1 Sam. 15:1–35). When Samuel confronted Saul for disobeying a straightforward command of God, Saul at first denied that he had disobeyed ("I have carried out the command of the Lord," v. 13). Then, when confronted with undeniable evidence of his disobedience, he deceitfully rationalized and shifted the blame ("the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord," v. 15). When Samuel did not accept this rationalization, Saul blamed it on the people ("I did obey . . . but the people took some of the spoil" vv. 20–21). But Samuel did not accept any of Saul's excuses or rationalizations ("because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king," v. 23)—nor should modern-day clergy when they deal with abusive men in their congregations.

At the end of this article, several resources are given to help clergy (and others) gain valuable insights into the nature of domestic violence and abusers. In particular, these resources will help clergy answer the following critical questions:

1. What are the characteristics of abusive men?
2. What are some of the most common effects of domestic violence on wives and children?
3. What specifically does Scripture have to say about physical abuse?
4. What does the healing process look like for survivors of domestic violence?
5. What do abusive men need from churches and from society?
6. Once an abusive man says he is sorry and wants to change, what would real repentance and change look like?

2. Clergy should condemn abuse from the pulpit and broadly educate the congregation on abuse.

This is one of the most significant ways that clergy can encourage abuse victims, lay the foundation for parishioners to get help, and create a climate for healing.³² It is thus very empowering and encouraging for abuse survivors to hear their ministers declare from the pulpit: "God hates abuse"; "God promises to judge harshly all unrepentant physical abusers"; "There is never any excuse for touching your girlfriend or wife in anger." These statements are solidly biblical³³ and need to be proclaimed from the pulpit.

Churches also need education on various aspects of domestic violence, including what constitutes domestic violence, the signs of domestic violence, characteristics of abusers, the nature of dating violence, God's perspective on violence, what Scripture teaches about gender equality, the dignity of women, and how believers can respond to domestic violence. This education can profitably occur in various church settings, including Sunday sermons, premarital counseling, women's ministry events, men's discipleship groups, and the youth group.

3. Clergy should humbly recognize their own limits as well as the complexities of domestic violence and begin gathering various church, community, and professional resources to address domestic violence and assist abuse victims and perpetrators.

One of the most common mistakes clergy make when confronted with abuse is to try to “take care of everything in house.” Domestic violence is an astoundingly complex problem which defies quick, simple solutions. Abusers have deep-seated wounds and pathologies that have existed for many years, as do battered wives. The dynamics of abusive families are complex and well hidden, making it very difficult for outsiders to know the truth, let alone offer a wise response. Hence, working with violent families calls for a partnership with various agencies, wise leaders, and professionals. A major part of this action step is to help victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in getting professional counseling.³⁴

4. Clergy must refuse to be deceived by perpetrators of domestic violence and work with other church and civic leaders (including legal authorities) to hold batterers fully responsible for their actions.

Before I clarify this point, I should note the seriousness of clergy overlooking violence or absolving abusers of their sin. Scripture declares, “acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both” (Prov. 17:15 NIV). God severely judged the prophet Eli because he refused to stop his sons from abusing men and women in the temple (1 Sam. 2:16, 22; 3:13).

Holding abusers fully responsible means refusing to accept any excuses or minimizations for violence whatsoever. If clergy accept abusers’ blame-shifting or minimizations, this inevitably serves as stronger reinforcement for the abusers’ pathological beliefs and actions. It is also profoundly harmful to battered wives. I have known several instances in which a minister was told about abuse in one of his or her church families, confronted the abusive husband, but then largely or entirely accepted the husband’s version of the story. This resulted in the wife deciding that she would never report the abuse again to anyone (either because it was hopeless to report it or because she must be the one with the problem). In several instances, these very women were later murdered or seriously injured by their abusive husbands.

Holding batterers fully responsible and accountable for their violence is not only necessary for the sake of the victim, but also for the sake of the abuser. Pastoral counselor and abuse expert Carol Adams argues that abusers batter their wives because it works. They will often attempt to manipulate their ministers, counselors, and friends to avoid something worse (such as jail time or having their wives leave). So the best potential for abusers to repent genuinely and avoid the judgment of God is when clergy (and others) hold abusers fully responsible and accountable for their actions.³⁵ In the context of holding batterers responsible, clergy can then begin to consider others ways of ministering to abusers.³⁶

5. Prioritize the protection of abuse victims and their children.

Scripture makes it very clear that God hates violence and calls his people, particularly spiritual leaders, to be assertive in protecting

the abused and the vulnerable (Prov. 24:11–12, Isa. 1:17, Jer. 22:3). Thus, clergy must take seriously all reports of domestic violence, must never minimize abuse victims’ concerns, and must be willing to confront abusers boldly and offer practical assistance to victims. This includes helping victims of domestic violence develop a safety plan and access safe housing (community shelters or a family in the church) and assisting with financial needs.

Prioritizing protection certainly includes encouraging and supporting women to separate from abusive husbands.³⁷ While an abused woman with no children has strong biblical

warrant to flee an abusive husband, she has additional warrant (even a mandate) to do so if she has children. Jesus pronounced the most severe judgments on those who cause one of the little ones (children) to stumble (Matt. 18:1–10). Abusive husbands cause tremendous long-term physical, emotional, and spiritual damage to children, even if they only physically abuse the mother (and roughly half of men who physically abuse their wives also abuse their children³⁸). Dr. Bruce Perry, one of the top neurological trauma researchers in the world, has conclusively shown that, when young children merely witness domestic violence, this trauma exposure creates long-term physiological changes, including permanent structural alteration and damage to the brain.³⁹ We also know that the most common factor among men who abuse their wives is that they experienced (received or witnessed) domestic violence themselves in childhood. Additionally, we know that girls who grow up in physically abusive homes are several times more likely to be physically and sexually victimized in adulthood due to the emotional damage of childhood abuse (even simply witnessing it). All of this shows that growing up in a physically abusive home, whether or not one is actually beaten, is extremely damaging long-term and certainly “causes little ones to stumble.”

Separation from an abusive husband is also ethically important for the wellbeing of the woman, because domestic violence creates serious physical, emotional, and spiritual damage.⁴⁰ And Scripture does not commend enduring avoidable suffering. Christ repeatedly avoided physical assault by hiding (John 8:59), by maintaining physical separation from his abusers (Matt. 12:14–15, John 11:53–54), and by eluding them (John 10:31, 39). Other godly individuals in Scripture, such as Paul and David, also repeatedly fled physically abusive civil and religious authorities (1 Sam. 19:12, 27:1; Acts 9:22–25, 14:5–6, 17:8–10, 14). Following the example of godly individuals in Scripture, clergy should advise battered wives to flee from their abusive husbands and should assist them in every way they can to find safety and physical security.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a very complex, destructive reality in many Christian homes. Clergy have not always responded in helpful ways to domestic violence in the past, but this can change. Clergy have tremendous influence for healing and protection. If they

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Resources on Domestic Violence

1. Helpful Christian books on domestic violence

- Adams, Carol J. *Woman-Battering*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1994. This is an excellent resource on domestic violence for clergy. It is very practical and readable and covers a wide variety of issues.
- Alsduf, James and Phyllis. *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989. This is a landmark study of domestic violence in the church.
- Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Nancy Nason-Clark. *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001. This is also an excellent practical resource for churches and domestic violence victims.
- . *Refuge from Abuse: Healing and Hope for Abused Christian Women*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004. This is a practical guide to help abused Christian women heal.
- Livingston, David. *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Community*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2002. This is one of the few books on how the church should relate and minister to batterers.
- Miles, Al. *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 2000. This is one of the best books in print for clergy on domestic violence.
- Nason-Clark, Nancy. *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997. This is a thoroughly researched work by one of the most respected Christian domestic violence scholars.
- Tracy, Steven. *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005. This is a comprehensive, practical treatment of all forms of abuse, including domestic violence. It integrates biblical, theological principles with social science research.

2. Helpful secular books on domestic violence

- Bancroft, Lundy. *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002. This is a very thorough but non-technical overview of abusive men. It also has a very helpful section on helping abusers change.
- Dutton, Donald G. *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1995. Dutton is one of the country's leading experts on batterers. This is an excellent psychological treatment of the characteristics of batterers.
- Gelles, Richard J. *Intimate Violence in Families*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997. This is one of the best readable overviews of family violence by one of the most respected psychological experts in the field.

Jacobson, Neil and John Gottman. *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships*. New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1998. This book offers a practical summary of a landmark study on violent relationships conducted by two of the country's leading psychological experts.

Walker, Lenore. *The Battered Woman*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979. This is one of the classic treatments on domestic violence. It is very readable and insightful, particularly Walker's three-phase model of the abuse cycle.

3. National domestic violence resources for families and churches

National Child Abuse Hotline—1-800-222-4453

National Domestic Violence hotline—1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

4. National resources for professionals and students

Communities Against Violence Network (CAVNET)—www.cavnetz.org. This is an international network of anti-violence experts and advocates.

David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages—www.trauma-pages.com. This is an award-winning site hosted by a psychologist and author. It offers a wealth of information on trauma and traumatic stress.

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information—<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>. This service of the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is one of the best national sources for abuse publications, statistics, and research.

United States Department of Justice—www.usdoj.gov. This site provides national crime statistics, including sexual assaults and domestic violence.

5. Christian ministries

Faith Trust Institute—www.faithtrustinstitute.org. This ecumenical nonprofit organization offers a broad range of services and resources to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse. The site offers many excellent faith-based resources.

PASCH (Peace and Safety in the Christian Home)—www.peaceandsafety.com. This is a coalition of professionals, clergy, theologians, and laypeople whose mission is to address and decrease abuse in the Christian home. Catherine Kroeger is on the board.

Mending the Soul Ministries—www.mendingthesoulministries.org. This is an evangelical abuse prevention and education ministry designed to help churches and community organizations prevent and respond to abuse. MTS offers abuse healing curriculum, training for abuse healing ministry, and abuse education. It is based in Phoenix, Arizona. Bill Harbeck is the executive director (billhmts@yahoo.com), and Steve and Celestia Tracy are the founders of the ministry.

educate themselves, have the courage to condemn domestic violence from the pulpit, and develop ministries to abuse victims and even to perpetrators, then the cycle of violence can be broken and the body of Christ can be a place of safety and divine healing.

Notes

1. Lee H. Bowker, "Battered Women and the Clergy: An Evaluation," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 36 (1982): 226–34.
2. "Domestic Violence Survey: Executive Summary," Wirthlin Worldwide, 1999. This survey and executive summary was provided to me by Ms. Peggy Bilsten, City of Phoenix Councilwoman.
3. For a detailed discussion of the way Christian leaders often mistakenly argue that Christ's suffering and passive acceptance of abuse means that victims of domestic violence should simply submit to abusive husbands, see Steven Tracy, "Domestic Violence in the Church and Redemptive Suffering in 1 Peter," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 279–96.
4. John McArthur, *The Family* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody, 1982), 31.
5. Jack Hiles, *Woman the Completer* (Hammond, Ind.: Hiles-Anderson Publishers, 1981), 36, 61. While this is an older work, more recent publications by church and school leaders make it clear that this perspective on submission and marriage has not changed at First Baptist Church or Hiles-Anderson College. For example, see Marlene Evans, *Marriage without Divorce* (Crown Point, Ind.: Christian Womanhood Publications, 2000), who argues that divorce can never be considered, wives must never correct their husbands even in private, and wives must always obey their husbands, 51–56, 93.
6. Elizabeth Rice Hanford, *Me Obey Him?* rev. ed. (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1994), 60, 90.
7. James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 153–56.
8. Cited by Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 85.
9. Nancy Nason-Clark, "Conservative Protestants and Violence against Women: Exploring the Rhetoric and the Response," *Religion and the Social Order* 5 (1995): 123–24.
10. Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 2000), 153–58.
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12. Ann W. Annis and Roger R. Rice, "A Survey of Abuse Prevalence in the Christian Reformed Church," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 3 (2001): 7–40.
13. Helen M. Eigengerg, *Women Battering in the United States: Till Death Do Us Part* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2001), 62–85. One of the largest and most cited surveys of domestic violence is the "Violence against Women Survey," which was a joint effort by the National Institute for Justice and the Centers for Disease Control. It involved a random sample survey of 8,000 men and 8,000 women. This survey found a lifetime intimate assault rate for American women of 22 percent (25 percent if sexual assaults are included), P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). This report is available at: <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>. Using a screening tool recommended by the American Medical Association, researchers in another study found a 31 percent lifetime prevalence for domestic violence among adult American women, R. M. Siegel, et al., "Screening for Domestic Violence in a Community Pediatric Setting," *Pediatrics* 104 (1999): 874–77.
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15. Nancy Nason-Clark, "Conservative Protestants and Violence against Women," 119–20.
16. Kimberly N. Ware, Heide M. Levitt, and Gary Bayer, "May God Help You: Faith Leaders' Perspective of Intimate Partner Violence within Their Communities," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 5 (2003): 55–81.
17. C. Everett Koop, "From the Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267 (1992): 3132.
18. Callie Marie Rennison and Sarah Welchans, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Intimate Partner Violence*, a special report prepared at the request of the U.S. Department of Justice. May 2000, rev. 31 January 2002.
19. James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 153–58.
20. Nicole Knickmeyer et al., "Responding to Mixed Messages and Double Binds: Religious Oriented Coping Strategies of Christian Women," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 5 (2003): 42.
21. Knickmeyer et al., "Responding to Mixed Messages," 42.
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23. Ed Wheat, *How to Save Your Marriage Alone* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1983), 24–25, 29, 31.
24. Ann L. Horton, Melany M. Wilkins, and Wendy Wright, "Women Who Ended Abuse: What Religious Leaders and Religion Did for the Victims," in *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough*, ed. Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1998), 235–46.
25. Alsdurf and Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, 22.
26. For instance, Neil Jacobson and John Gottman's extensive research with couples in abusive relationships reveals that all the factors that lead to increased or decreased violence are characteristics of the batterers, not their spouses. They note, "there was nothing battered women could do to stop the abuse except get out of the relationship." *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 183.
27. The etiology of domestic violence is quite complex, most likely involving biological (differences in brain structure, brain functioning, and hormones), intrapsychic (personality and attachment disorders), and social construct (childhood experiences of violence) factors in men's violence against women. Two of the most thorough discussions of the complex factors behind male-perpetrated domestic violence are Michele Harway and James M. O'Neil, ed., *What Causes Men's Violence against Women?* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1999) and Karel Kurst-Swanger and Jacqueline L. Petcosky, *Violence in the Home: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 30–53.
28. Ameda A. Nanetta, et al., "The Church—Does It Provide Support for Abused Women? Differences in the Perceptions of Battered Women and Parishioners," *Journal of Religion and Abuse* 5 (2003): 5–21.
29. Al Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 170.
30. The primary characteristics of abusive men are documented and developed from biblical and social science references in *Mending the Soul*, 38–48. On abusers' tendency to deny and minimize, see Lundy Bancroft and Jay Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002), 15–19.
31. Cited in James Ptacek, "How Men Who Batter Rationalize," in *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough*, ed. Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1988), 249–54.
32. When battered women were asked what services the church could provide to help victims of domestic violence, they identified edu-

cation and professional counseling as the top two services the church could provide. Nanetta, "The Church—Does It Provide Support for Abused Women?" 17.

33. For instance, see Deut. 24:5, Ps. 11:5, Prov. 1:8–19, Joel 3:19, Mic. 3:1–7, Nah. 3:1–7, and Eph. 5:25–33.

34. It is important to clarify that, initially, victims and perpetrators of domestic violence need individual and/or group counseling, not marital counseling. Experts on domestic violence note that, if marital counseling is given as the initial form of counseling, it greatly increases the potential for additional violence and inevitably communicates (implicitly or explicitly) that the woman is partly to blame for the violence, Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, 53–54, 181–84.

35. Carol J. Adams, *Woman-Battering* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1994), 88.

36. Pamela Cooper-White has an excellent chapter on how clergy can develop a church-based ministry to violent men: *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's Response* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1995), 206–28.

37. In this short article, I cannot address the theological propriety of divorce and remarriage in instances of physical abuse, but would note that Craig Keener cogently argues that physical abuse is conceptually a form of infidelity which breaks the marriage contract: *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teachings of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 105–09. In a more recent detailed study of divorce and remarriage, David Instone-Brewer argues based on 1 Cor. 7 and Exod. 21:10–11 that emotional and material abuse (neglect) are grounds for divorce: *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 275.

38. The landmark study that established this correlation was done by Murray Straus, and reported in "Ordinary Violence, Child Abuse, and Wife-Beating: What Do They Have in Common?" in *Physical Violence in American Families*, ed. Murray Straus and Richard Gelles (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transition, 1990), 403–24.

39. Bruce Perry, "The Neurodevelopmental Impact of Violence in Childhood," in *Textbook of Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychiatry*, eds. D. Schetky and E. Benedek (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 2001), 221–38.

40. One of the best treatments of the multidimensional damage that results from trauma, including domestic violence, is Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1997). For a brief survey of the specific impact of domestic violence on children and battered wives, see Kurt-Swanger and Petcosky, *Violence in the Home*, 118–21.

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