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DEVELOPING A DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND
PROTOCOL FOR THE VILLAGE CHURCH IN
FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS

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DEVELOPING A DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND
PROTOCOL FOR THE VILLAGE CHURCH IN
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To my incredible wife and best friend, Cristi; and to our amazing daughter, Sara.
Without your unwavering support, this project would not have been completed.
I love you both, more than you know.

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PREFACE

I did not choose this project; it chose me. The oppressors and the oppressed whom I have counseled in my private counseling practice and at The Village Church helped me understand the great need for this work. To those perpetrators and victims who have taught me so much by allowing me to care for them in the midst of their sin and suffering, I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

With Paul the apostle, I want to “thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service” (1 Tim 1:12). The God who rescues those who formerly persecuted, blasphemed, and insolently opposed him gives hope to those in destructive relationships. I am grateful that Christ saved me, that he has judged me faithful even in my faithlessness, and that he has appointed me to his service. My prayer is that he will continue to find me faithful.

I have learned so much about being a man from the women in my home. No words can describe the gift that the Lord has given in my wife, Cristi. Her love for Jesus is consistent and true. She is my best friend and closest confidant—the “excellent wife” described by Solomon who is “far more precious than jewels” and in whom “the heart of her husband trusts” (Prov 31:10-11a). I have no lack of gain in her. Another sweet gift is our teenage daughter, Sara. She truly is “a heritage from the Lord” (Ps 127:3). She keeps us laughing, thinking, and refusing to take ourselves too seriously. Finally, my 92-year-old mom, who lives with us and is growing more dependent upon us in these waning years of her life, reminds us that this life is not about us and that our lives are not our own. “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Dr. Jeremy Pierre and Dr. Eric Johnson have been mentors to me during my time at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary while working on this project. I cannot thank them enough for the hours that they have selflessly given for conversations about this project and the TVC care initiative project, both in Louisville and in Dallas, over the past three years.

Greg Wilson

Highland Village, Texas

December 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015, a member care case at The Village Church (TVC) publicly exposed systemic weaknesses in TVC’s approach to care and correction of covenant members. Specifically, the elders determined that the church had not given enough consideration to the intricacies and nuances of member care and correction related to cases involving care for and correction of women. On May 31, 2015, Matt Chandler, TVC’s lead teaching pastor, preached a sermon titled “Wanderer/Restorer,” in which he asked the congregation for forgiveness for five specific types of sins he believed that the elders had committed: letting counsel turn into control, failing to recognize the limits and scope of elder authority, putting processes and policies over people, treating members transactionally instead of tenderly, and failing to empathize with the victims of another person’s sin. At the end of that sermon, Chandler issued an invitation:

If you find yourself, your situation, your story under one of those [sins], will you come in and let us own that? I know that might sound like a terrifying proposition to you. Here's what I would lay before you. Whatever you need to do to feel comfortable, you set the rules. I can tell you this. Our only motive is to hear and to learn so that [sin] might not ever happen again. This isn't an opportunity for us to correct or save face. I'm not trying to save face today. I'm trying to own sin before God. Will you come in? Let us hear where we've failed you. Let us own it personally, directly to you. You can contact one of the lead pastors. You can contact one of the campus pastors. We'll sit down. We'll hear you out.¹

Numerous covenant members and regular attenders of TVC responded to the elders’ invitation to share their stories. In the year that followed that sermon, the elders met personally with dozens of members and attenders and began to see some disturbing

¹ Matt Chandler, “Wanderer/Restorer” (sermon delivered at The Village Church, May 31, 2015), accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/sermons/wanderer-restorer>.

themes emerge. One of the consistent themes was that TVC did not handle cases of domestic abuse well. Specifically, the church's theology of complementarianism and high view of marriage were being misapplied to the detriment of her people.

Context

TVC began in 1978 in Highland Village, Texas, as Highland Village First Baptist Church (HVFBC). Highland Village is a bedroom community on the shores of Lake Lewisville in the northern suburbs of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. HVFBC was planted by Lakeland Baptist Church in neighboring Lewisville, Texas. After nearly 25 years of ministry, a significant shift in theology, ministry philosophy, and ministry practice occurred at HVFBC in 2002, when Matt Chandler became the church's lead pastor and it became known as The Village Church. The years that followed brought significant numerical growth, and TVC responded in ways that reflected a commitment to its members along with a passion for reaching the unchurched.

Today, TVC is a multisite church consisting of five campuses, each with locally based campus elders. These men serve alongside a central elder body comprised of elders from each campus. While TVC shares a united theological vision, each campus is largely decentralized. Each campus maintains its own staff, who in turn lead ministries and serve the members of each campus. The result is a church that reflects significant geographic and demographic diversity. Theologically, however, there is much less diversity. Preaching, teaching, and counseling at TVC are unapologetically marked by five doctrinal distinctives: divine sovereignty, continuationism, complementarianism, credobaptism, and Christian hedonism.² These distinctives mark TVC as a church and are strongly held by leadership, both lay and staff.

² TVC's understanding of these distinctives is described more fully at The Village Church, "Statement of Faith," accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/articles/statement-of-faith>.

Complementarianism

One doctrinal distinctive of TVC, complementarianism, is described in TVC's Statement of Theological Distinctives:

Men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value and are different by divine design. As part of God's good created order, men and women are to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the home and church, especially as it comes to teaching and authority. These role distinctions are God's grace to man and woman and are to be protected, preserved and practiced for His glory and our joy.³

TVC believes that men and women both flourish when they are living out this "beautiful design"⁴ of God. Furthermore, the leadership understands that our flourishing is not for ourselves, but to fulfill our mandate as image-bearers—to showcase and extend God's just rule and reign in our community and among the nations. To neglect the clear teaching of Scripture that the genders are created with absolute equality in essence (Gen 1:27; Joel 2:28; Gal 3:28; 1 Pet 3:7), dignity and value would result in a distorted and dysfunctional relationship between the sexes in marriage and in community, and further destroy God's intended design for human flourishing among his people. Likewise, to ignore the Scriptures which reveal that men and women have been created with distinct roles and responsibilities in the home (1 Cor 11:2-3, 8-9; Eph 5:22-25; Col 3:18-19; Titus 2:3-5) and in the church (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:9-14) would equally miss the design God intended. To disregard Scripture's teaching on roles as "cultural" and "sexist" would be to deny the authority of Scripture and elevate current human reasoning over the timeless and purposeful revelation of the Designer.

A High View of Marriage

TVC unapologetically holds a high view of marriage. Until recently, the

³ The Village Church, "Theological Distinctives," accessed March 23, 2016, <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/about/beliefs/>.

⁴ "A Beautiful Design" is the title of a sermon series on God's design for men and women and human flourishing. Matt Chandler, "A Beautiful Design" (sermon series at The Village Church, Fall 2014), accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/by-series/a-beautiful-design>.

church's membership covenant required members to walk through specific steps of marriage reconciliation before filing for divorce. However, there is no one set of "steps of marriage reconciliation" at The Village, or at any church, as almost every situation of marriage irreconciliation is different. Furthermore, keeping a woman in an abusive marriage while any set of steps are being completed would be counterproductive at best, and extremely dangerous at worst. Legal separation does not exist in the state of Texas. Until a divorce petition is filed, the spouse and children of an abusive spouse have little economic or restraining protection under the law. Well-meaning pastors and leaders, desiring to maintain a high view of marriage and hopeful of the Holy Spirit's intervention, may counsel a victim of abuse to remain in an unsafe marriage, thus endangering herself and her children. Meanwhile, the abuser remains in power, and although he may be remorseful and promising to change, does not see himself and his heart as the core of the problem. Where marital strife becomes abusive, a plan is needed that focuses first on the protection of the abused and the heart of the abuser, before considering the reconciliation of the marriage.

Care Ministry at TVC

When Matt Chandler became the lead pastor of Highland Village First Baptist Church in 2002, the church had attendance of less than 200 people and was led by a combined lay and staff leadership team that essentially functioned as elders. Biblical care was led by this group and primarily consisted of hospital visits and some pastoral counseling. In 2004, TVC launched a Celebrate Recovery⁵ ministry to address issues of sin and suffering in its members and the community. As TVC began to grow, the leaders of this ministry grew in their understanding and appreciation of the biblical counseling movement and began shaping TVC's own biblically-based, gospel-centered, discipleship-

⁵ Celebrate Recovery is a national Christ-centered recovery program based on the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous birthed out of Saddleback Church in southern California.

focused, repentance and reconciliation ministry. By 2007, a Recovery and Reconciliation Pastor was added to lead a new recovery groups ministry, Recovery at The Village, committed to helping participants acquire a comprehensive biblical perspective on sin and suffering. In 2005, TVC added a Pastor of Care to its staff, who trained lay counselors regularly to care for members. Until 2012, pastoral care at a constantly-growing TVC was coordinated by the Recovery and Reconciliation Pastor and the Pastor of Care and involved a combination of pastors, ministers, and lay leaders in group and individual environments.

As TVC continued to grow rapidly, not only were the suffering receiving care and sinners repenting and being reconciled to God and to others, but the need for biblical correction for the unrepentant and those mired in sin was also growing. Although TVC had adopted an elder-led ecclesiology under Chandler's leadership, the church's elder board was focused on managing growth at the rate of 1,000 new attenders per year, in addition to handling all the attendant church discipline cases.

In 2012, in a strategic move now known as "the shift," TVC elders made the decision to make groups (Home Groups and Recovery Groups) the primary vehicle for discipleship at The Village Church. As a part of the shift, the position of Pastor of Care and the position of Reconciliation and Recovery Pastor were both eventually eliminated and the individuals occupying those positions were made Groups Ministers. Thus, care and correction at The Village Church currently occurs primarily through group life, escalating from group leaders, to group coaches, to pastors/ministers and eventually campus elders, as necessary. Cases of escalated care and correction are coordinated by the campus elders of each campus.

Rationale

The experience of hearing from members who have been sinned against by elders and staff in the previously mentioned ways has called the leadership of TVC to action. While a variety of individuals and couples came forward to voice a variety of hurts they had experienced, it became clear to the elders that TVC did not have the

policies and processes in place to adequately address domestic abuse among her members. It also became obvious that the problem was systemic in nature. Complaints involved multiple staff across campuses and ministries. The views and practices among pastors, ministers, and volunteers varied greatly, not only between campuses, but within them. In a church as large as TVC, the staff and elders find the needs to be great within their respective ministry scopes, and often there is little time for collaboration or communal insight. The elders of TVC recognize a need for clear and centralized policies, processes, and pathways for care for cases of domestic abuse, across all campuses,

Recently, churches that espouse a complementarian theology of gender roles in the home and the church are realizing that there are grave misunderstandings among some in their congregations, sometimes even among their leadership and staff, regarding the nature of these roles. In some cases, a type of “hyper-headship”⁶ exists that actually contributes to domestic violence by creating a culture in which abusers feel justified in their abuse and abuse victims feel unsafe or unwelcome to discuss their abuse with church leadership. Jason Meyer has defined hyper-headship as

a satanic distortion of male leadership, but it can fly under the radar of discernment because it is disguised as strong male leadership. Make no mistake—it is harsh, oppressive, and controlling. In other words, hyper-headship becomes a breeding ground for domestic abuse.⁷

This heartbreaking hyper-headship strand of complementarianism highlights the danger that is inherent in the discipline of theology. Good theology, properly understood and applied, contributes the flourishing of humanity. Complementarian churches, where men believe it is their role to love and sacrifice as Christ loved the

⁶ Hyper-headship is a term coined by Jason Meyer, Pastor for Preaching and Vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Jason Meyer, “Fooled by False Leadership” (sermon delivered at Bethlehem Baptist Church sermon, April 25, 2015), accessed October 8, 2018, <https://bethlehem.church/sermon/fooled-by-false-leadership/>.

⁷ Ibid.

church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25) should be the safest place on earth for women and the least safe place for abusive men to hide. Jeremy Pierre explains,

If we understand godly authority as the responsibility to direct those under it through self-emptying service, then we will practice church discipline in such a way that protects women from the abuse of ungodly authority. The godly authority of church leadership should, by powerful contrast, crush any ungodly authority by men in the church. No abuser will be comfortable in the kind of church that exercises godly authority.⁸

On the other hand, bad theology, or theology that is misunderstood and misapplied, leads to oppression, injustice, and death. It is the task of the church to teach and model orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a way that leads to human flourishing and not injustice. A recent study by W. Bradford Wilcox underscores this point. In his study of conservative Protestants (who tend to be complementarian) and mainline Protestants (who tend toward egalitarianism), Wilcox found that the conservative Protestant men were *both* the most likely to commit domestic violence *and* the least likely to commit domestic violence, depending on how active they were in their faith. The nominal conservative Protestant men⁹ were significantly the most likely in his study to commit domestic violence. The active conservative protestant men were statistically least likely to commit domestic violence.¹⁰ The idea of continuing past practices is intolerable to the leadership of TVC; they take their sins seriously. The way forward must include clear

⁸ Jeremy Pierre, “An Overlooked Help: Church Discipline and the Protection of Women,” *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 18 (Spring 2013): 12.

⁹ “Nominal conservative Protestants” was loosely defined by Wilcox in response to a question in his Norton Lecture at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on November 2, 2010, as one who attends church only a few times a year on holidays. According to Wilcox, “active conservative Protestants” are those who attend more regularly and become more integrated into church life. W. Bradford Wilcox, “Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary lecture, November 2, 2010, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://www.sbts.edu/resources/norton/soft-patriarchs-new-men-how-christianity-shapes-fathers-and-husbands/>.

¹⁰ The percentage of “active conservative Protestants” who commit abuse was 2.8 percent, compared with 7.2 percent of “nominal conservative Protestants,” with this difference being statistically significant. These statistics are derived from Wilcox’s regression analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH2, 1992-1994), and breaks out the original results by church attendance in addition to religious affiliation. W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 181-83.

policies, processes, and pathways of care for both the oppressed and oppressors. The way forward must include effective training of church leaders at all levels in ministering to abused and abusers alike. The way forward must include steps toward making TVC a place where women feel safe and supported in disclosing abuse, where violence is not tolerated and abusers are not allowed to continue abusing, and where the just rule and reign of God is manifested in the flourishing of her people, both women and men, and the eradication of injustice and oppression. The hope of this project was to develop a consistent methodology of care and correction in cases of domestic abuse at TVC that leads to flourishing and not to further abuse.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a policy, process, and training resource to guide leadership at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, in care and correction cases related to domestic abuse.

Goals

Because abuse is so devastating to the body of Christ, and because care is so important to the heart of God, this project was aimed at creating a clear policy for domestic abuse care and correction through four goals:

1. The first goal was to increase baseline knowledge of all ministry staff, elders, and deacons in the care and correction of domestic abuse cases by bringing in expert master teachers to do an extensive initial training.
2. The second goal was to develop a domestic abuse policy and protocol for TVC, including specific processes and pathways of care.
3. The third goal was to develop a training resource to regularly train new pastors-elders, ministers-deacons, and key lay leaders in the fundamentals of care and correction in cases of domestic abuse.
4. The fourth goal was to train key lay leaders in caring well for those who have been abused and those who have perpetrated abuse through the domestic abuse care and correction curriculum.

Each goal built upon the previous one and was defined by a particular measure of success, detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to increase baseline knowledge of approximately 150 ministry staff, elders, and deacons in the care and correction of domestic abuse cases by bringing in expert master teachers to do an extensive initial training. Chris Moles, a pastor and batterer intervention specialist, and Leslie Vernick, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, both of whom have counseled, consulted, and written¹¹ on the topic of domestic abuse, trained the staff, elders, and deacons of all TVC campuses in an extensive two-day training. Prior to the training, a Domestic Abuse Response Assessment¹² was administered to each attendee to determine their baseline knowledge and confidence level in responding to cases of domestic abuse. This assessment covered types of abuse, how to recognize that abuse is occurring, and basic response protocols for the abusive spouse and the abused spouse. At the end of the training, the same assessment was administered to measure how much each attendee learned. Domestic Abuse Response Assessments were only graded for those staff, elders, and deacons who participated fully in the training. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-assessment scores. A *t*-test for dependent samples compares the means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between pre and post-assessment results.¹³ The *t*-test is used to ensure that the variations in score are not due to chance, but that actual learning has occurred.¹⁴

¹¹ Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2015); Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2013).

¹² See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were reviewed and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the project.

¹³ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 189-91.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The second goal was to develop a domestic abuse policy and protocol for TVC, including specific processes and pathways of care. The goal was considered successfully met when the elders of TVC approved the policy and protocol documents.¹⁵

The third goal was to develop a two-hour Domestic Abuse Awareness Training to regularly train pastors-elders, ministers-deacons, and key lay leaders in the fundamentals of care and correction in cases of domestic abuse. This training needed to include warning signs of an abusive relationship, assessment of severity, dynamics of power and control, and TVC pathways of care for victims and perpetrators. This goal was considered successfully met when the Domestic Abuse Awareness Training was developed.¹⁶

The fourth goal was to train key church leaders in the Domestic Abuse Awareness Training, developed in goal 3, per the domestic abuse policy and protocol. This goal was measured by administering the Domestic Abuse Response Assessment to at least 75 key leaders, before and after they participated in the Domestic Abuse Awareness Training, to measure their level of knowledge of domestic abuse and confidence in ministering to victims and perpetrators. These leaders were comprised of home group leaders and coaches, recovery group leaders and coaches, additional lay leaders, and any staff, elders, or deacons at the Flower Mound campus who are unable to attend the initial training. Only those who participated fully in the Domestic Abuse Awareness Training participated in the Domestic Abuse Response Assessment. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment scores.

¹⁵ See appendices 2 and 3.

¹⁶ See appendix 6.

Definitions

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Abuse. Abuse is defined in this project as the desecration of the *imago Dei* in another person through patterns of the intentional misuse of power, covertly or overtly, in words or actions, to gratify self.¹⁷ Steven R. Tracy observes that “abuse is invariably about the abuse of power over another individual – an abuse that perverts the divinely ordained image of God.”¹⁸ John Henderson calls abuse “a godless pattern of abusive behavior among spouses involving physical, psychological, and/or emotional means to exert and obtain power and control over a spouse for the achievement of selfish ends.”¹⁹

Domestic abuse. Simply put, domestic abuse is defined as abuse against a spouse or intimate partner. In the literature, the terms “domestic abuse” and “domestic violence” are used interchangeably. For example, the US Department of Justice defines “domestic violence” this way:

We define domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.²⁰

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb define it similarly:

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive, controlling, or abusive behavior that is used by one individual to gain or maintain power and control over another individual in the context of an intimate relationship. This includes any behaviors

¹⁷ This is my definition of abuse, which was also adopted by TVC during this project.

¹⁸ Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), loc. 449, Kindle.

¹⁹ John Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel: A Training Program in Biblical Counseling—Leader Manual* (Euless, TX: Association of Biblical Counselors, 2008), 298.

²⁰ United States Department of Justice, “What Is Domestic Violence,” accessed July 4, 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/domestic-violence>.

that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, exploit, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound an intimate partner.²¹

Limitations and Delimitations

Three limitations applied to this project. First, the initial training provided to the staff and elders (goal 1) differed in length and depth from the ongoing Domestic Abuse Awareness Trainings (goal 4). Limitations of time and resources prevent TVC from regularly providing a two-day training with outside experts on a regular basis. To mitigate this limitation, the Domestic Abuse Awareness Training was developed based upon the learnings from the pre- and post-training results of the Domestic Abuse Response Assessment from the initial training, to focus on the most critical guidelines for care. Second, these Domestic Abuse Awareness Trainings varied according to audience and time constraints. In order to ensure that the quality and content of these training are consistent, these trainings closely adhered to the training developed in goal 3. Third, the initial intensive training took place several months prior to the rest of the project. This timing was constrained by the schedules of the external experts, as well as the schedules of the TVC staff and elder teams.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, while the initial training in goal 1 was provided to staff and elders from all TVC campuses, the ongoing Domestic Abuse Awareness Training was initially only provided at TVC's central Flower Mound Campus for the purpose of this project. My position as Deacon of Care at the Flower Mound campus made that campus the best context for this project. Furthermore, because Flower Mound is the central campus, initiatives such as this are typically developed and tested there prior to being implemented at the other campuses. Second, while it was the desire of TVC that all staff, elders, deacons, and lay leaders be trained to minister in abuse situations, only staff and elders were invited to the initial intensive two-day training.

²¹ Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 57.

Current ministry staff and elders at TVC have been the most significant influencers of TVC's domestic abuse response, and therefore were most in need of training.

Conclusion

Domestic abuse is ungodly oppression and has no place in Christ's church. It is wrong and sinful for church leaders to ignore or mishandle domestic abuse. The church has grown in its understanding and sensitivity to child abuse, and it is considered normative and essential to have policies and protocols in place to prevent and respond to child abuse. Abuse perpetrated against one's spouse or intimate partner is no less sinful or destructive. This project demonstrated the need for, developed, and implemented a policy and protocol for responding to domestic abuse at TVC. Chapter 2 provides a biblical and theological understanding of domestic abuse, including how the Scriptures demonstrate that God understands abuse and responds to both the abuser and the abused person.

CHAPTER 2
A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop a policy, protocol, and training process to guide leadership at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, in care and correction cases related to domestic abuse. In chapter 1, I discussed the history of care ministry at TVC, including how various theological and methodological errors have led to unwise counsel in cases of domestic abuse. In this chapter, I provide a biblical and theological understanding of domestic abuse, including how the Scriptures demonstrate that God understands abuse and responds to both the abuser and the abused person. The thesis of this chapter is that abuse is a desecration of the *imago Dei* in both the abuser and the abused person, and a desecration of the creation mandate, requiring a God-like response by the church toward both the abused and the abuser for the advancement of God's kingdom.

To develop this thesis, I examine four scriptural texts that form a biblical and theological basis for rightly understanding the oppressive nature of domestic abuse. First, an overview of Genesis 1-2, combined with a study of James 3:7-9, provides the context for one's identity as an image-bearer of God, both in intrinsic, sacred worth and holy mission to represent and extend God's reign upon the earth. Because both the abuser and the abused person are image-bearers, the sacred image of God is at stake in discussing domestic abuse in the church. Second, an examination of Psalms 9 and 10 reveals that God responds to abuse by seeing, hearing, and protecting the abused, while dealing justly with those who oppress and violate others. Third, an exegesis of Ephesians 4-5:21

establishes that the church is called to respond to abuse as God does. Paul exhorts the church to fulfill her mission of extending the just rule and reign of God. As imitators of God, believers refuse to ignore the darkness of abuse, but instead expose it.

Desecration of the *Imago Dei* in Genesis 1-2 and James 3

Before the church can effectively minister to an abuser or an abused spouse, it is essential to determine what constitutes abuse so that it can be recognized. In Psalm 36, David reminds that sin cannot be “found out and hated” until one is aware that it is derived from too low a view of God (“there is no fear of God before his eyes”) and too high a view of oneself (“For he flatters himself in his own eyes”) (vv. 1-2). In no case is this lack of understanding of self and of God more evident than in the scourge of marital abuse. As David has taught in Psalm 36, sin is meant to be understood in relation to man’s view of God and man’s view of self. Thus, one cannot adequately counsel either an abuse victim or an abused person without understanding abuse as primarily a desecration of the image of God in the other person.

Spousal abuse can be defined as the desecration of the image of God in one’s spouse through patterns of intentional misuse of power, overtly or covertly, in words or in actions, to gratify self.¹ In the beginning, the Creator formed humankind in his own image (Gen 1:26-27). God breathed a soul having intrinsic worth and dignity into the man of dust (Gen 2:7), formed the woman from his side (Gen 2:21-23), blessed the man and the woman, and gave to them both dominion over the rest of the created order (Gen 1:28). As a desecration of the *imago Dei*, abuse is a violation of the inherent worth and dignity of the God-breathed human soul.

¹ This is my definition, informed by study of the Scriptures and the literature on domestic violence from a biblical perspective. In the process of this project, TVC adopted this definition.

Created to Reflect and Reveal God

From the Genesis account of its creation, humankind derives its value, worth, and sanctity. Unlike any of the creatures prior, humankind was made in the image and likeness of God. Exactly what bearing God’s image entails has been the subject of many books and much debate, but this much is certain: humans are intrinsically “like God” in ways that other creatures are not. Derek Kidner notes that the phrases “in our image” and “after our likeness” have no conjunctive “and” between them, explaining that the terms do not speak of differing elements, but instead reinforce each other. The whole man and the whole woman, the psychosomatic unity which is the thinking, feeling, and acting human soul and body, is “an expression or transcription of the eternal, incorporeal creator in terms of temporal, bodily, creaturely existence—as one might attempt a transcription of, say, an epic into a sculpture, or a symphony into a sonnet.”²

By nature, humans are created to reflect and reveal God. “Whatever else the *imago Dei* might mean,” writes Richard Lints, “there can be little doubt that it stands as paradigmatic of all creation in its calling to reflect and mirror God.”³ Herman Bavinck explains,

All that is in God—his spiritual essence, his virtues and perfections, his immanent self-distinctions, his self-communication and self-revelation in creation—finds its admittedly finite and limited analogy and likeness in humanity. . . . Among creatures, human nature is the supreme and most perfect revelation of God.⁴

Being thus made in the image of God sets humanity apart as sacred beings who reflect and reveal the divine and holy God in the world.

² Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1967), 50-51.

³ Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015), 32.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 561.

Created to Represent God and to Extend His Rule

In the ancient Near East, when a conquering king took over a nation, he posted “images” of himself throughout the kingdom, as a way of saying, “I am king over this territory.” The use of the term “image” bears this connotation. Humanity represents God; men and women are not only like Him (as a statue would bear resemblance to the king), but are representatives of his rule and reign in the earth, as his co-regents. This was the idea behind reproducing and filling the earth and subduing it—that these image-bearers would extend the just and merciful reign of God throughout His creation. Thus, humans are not only made in God’s image, but also *are* his image in the world and are given the responsibility to have “dominion” over all God’s other creatures. Simply put, as God’s image-bearers, men and women are to represent him and rule in his stead. To be human, both male and female, is to rule. Cornelius Plantinga states it well: “Humans rule. Though servants to God they are landlords to the rest of creation. They are at once God’s agents and patented images. And their dominical agency is a part of the image of God.”⁵

God intended that this rule would eventually result in blessing for all the nations of the earth. Humankind’s original role, “to fill the earth and subdue it,” is echoed in God’s charge to Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, when he covenants with him that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). Abraham’s (the nation of Israel’s) calling was to bless the entire planet. Furthermore, this theme of bringing blessing and the shalom of God to the world is seen again when, after the miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh, the Lord God recommissions his people to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). Such words evoke a calling to mediate and bring the blessings and ways of God to the world. This calling is again reinforced by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he calls his disciples to re-orient their lives to reflect the kingdom of God in the world. As God’s image-bearers and

⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Images of God,” in *Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 55.

vice regents, humans are to be like salt, preserving and flavoring the world with a taste of God, and like a city on a hill and a light to the nations (Matt 5:13-16). Peter fuses both the Exodus and Matthean language to describe humanity's role in the world in I Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Abusive Image-Bearers Violate God

To "desecrate" is "to treat (a sacred place or thing) with violent disrespect."⁶ Because the image of God is sacred, an assault upon one of his image-bearers is an attack upon God himself. God takes a strong stand against violating the *imago Dei* in Gen 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." On this verse, John Calvin comments,

God declares that he does not respect human life without very good reason. Men are indeed unworthy of God's care, if respect be had only to themselves. But since they bear the image of God engraven on them, He deems himself violated in their person. Thus, although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favor of God, he looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and to care for them. This doctrine, however is to be carefully observed that no one can be injurious to his brother without wounding god himself. Were this doctrine deeply fixed in our minds, we should be much more reluctant than we are in inflict injuries.⁷

That verbal assault is an assault upon the image of God, and therefore upon God himself, is also evident in James 3. Speaking of the tongue and its power, James asserts:

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (Jas 3:7-9)

⁶ *English Oxford Living Dictionary*, "desecrate," accessed February 17, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/desecrate>

⁷ John Calvin, *Genesis*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 90.

One can see the use of Genesis 1-2 language in James 3: “beast and bird,” “reptile and sea creature.” James recalls the creation mandate given to humanity as image bearers who fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the rest of God’s creatures. Indeed, humankind has tamed and subdued the creatures of the earth successfully. James’ argument is that men and women have weaponized the tongue, this very powerful gift, which God has given to humanity for blessing, by using it to verbally assault and curse those whom God has created in his likeness. James points out the hypocrisy of people praising God while simultaneously denigrating the crown of his creation. Indeed, “these things ought not to be so” (Jas 3:9).

Verbal abuse is a desecration of God’s image in a human person whom he created. Hence, abuse, whether physical, verbal, or any other kind of violence, is a desecration of the *imago Dei* in another person. This affront is made more abominable when abuse takes place within the context of intimate relationships, such as between husband and wife, or parents and children. These relationships are especially designed to mirror the relationship of God and his people (father/child) and Christ and his bride (husband/wife).

The consequences of the Fall of humankind brought both pain and bondage for all, even for creation itself (Rom 8:20-23). John Henderson writes, “None of us can escape the brokenness of our world. We are sinful, hurting people in a universe groaning under the curse of sin. The reality of physical and sexual abuse in our world provides a blatant and painful proof of this brokenness.”⁸ While every consequence of the Fall sets the stage for abuse to occur—suffering, hardship, toil, pain—it is instructive to note the Lord God’s words to Eve: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). The marriage relationship becomes a struggle, where power and desire are put at odds with one another. These same words “desire” and “rule” are used when

⁸ John Henderson, *Abuse: Finding Hope in Christ*, The Gospel for Real Life Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012), 6.

God speaks to Cain in Genesis 4:7, saying that sin is “crouching at the door” and its “desire” is for him, but he must “rule” over it and conquer it. Kidner states, “‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate.’ While even pagan marriage can rise far above this, the pull of sin is always towards it. An echo of the phrase, in 4:7b, conjures up still more vividly its suggestion of the jungle.”⁹

From these initial chapters in the Bible come some important insights that profoundly influence the church’s counsel in cases of spousal abuse. First, God created men and women to reflect and reveal himself, and stamped upon humankind alone his image, that these image-bearers might reflect his perfections uniquely amidst his creation. Second, he created humankind, both female and male, to represent him and rule as his vice-regents upon the earth, filling the earth and subduing it as extensions of his just and merciful reign. Third, the garden gives a picture of what it was like to dwell together with God and in mutual humility, harmony, and esteem, otherwise known as the shalom of God. This is the starting point, and it is from this that humankind falls in Genesis 3. Likewise, it is this very image of God that abuse desecrates, and it is this very authority and position that has been distorted by the misuse of power that is abuse. Lastly, it is back to this very state, purpose, and shalom that God’s people are called as men and women are re-born and conformed to the image of Christ and into His kingdom.

God’s View of Perpetrators and Victims in Psalms 9 and 10

Since abuse is a desecration of God’s creative design, roles, and purpose for humankind, how does God think about abuse? God’s perspective informs the believer’s perspective of sin and suffering, and of the oppressor and the oppressed. Psalms 9 and 10 give a particularly clear view into God’s understanding of oppression and its consequences in a fallen, Genesis 3 world. Psalms 9 and 10 are placed in Book 1 of the Psalter, which

⁹ Kidner, *Genesis*, 51.

is composed primarily by David and corresponds to his life and reign. Book 1 begins with the Hebrew word *asre*, which means “content” (“blessed is the man”) and instructs the hearer to live by the Torah, to walk in God’s way. Psalm 2 addresses the companion theme of God’s sovereign reign over and judgment of the nations. The end of Book 1 (Ps 41) uses this same word, *asre*, in the context of being content amidst conflict because God is the sovereign King over all. The theme of Book 1, then, is living according to the Torah, which leads the reader/follower to be content (*asre*) amidst conflict, knowing that the LORD is King over all.¹⁰ Psalms 9 and 10 embrace this theme.

Together, Psalms 9 and 10 roughly form an acrostic poem and are often seen as one psalm instead of two. Both the Septuagint and the Vulgate treat these two Psalms as one. Furthermore, the Psalms are tied together not only by the acrostic, but also through repeated words and phrases, some of which are specific to these two psalms.¹¹ Kidner states that the change in mood in Psalm 10:1 may be the reason for the separation, but understands them, then, as “companion pieces to complement one another, concerned as they are with twin realities of a fallen world: the certain triumph of God and the present, if short-lived triumphing of the wicked.”¹²

Both Kidner and deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner see four structural divisions in these two psalms: Psalms 9:1-12, 9:13-20, 10:1-11, and 10:12-18.¹³ This exegesis will follow Kidner’s understanding that Psalm 9 primarily focuses on God as Judge and King, the Champion of the oppressed, and that Psalm 10 primarily focuses on

¹⁰ Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 29-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 85.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 85-89; deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 130.

man as predator and prey.¹⁴ Some see the term *Muth-labben* in the inscription to mean “concerning the death of the Son” or “concerning the death of the Champion who went out between the camps.”¹⁵ Thus, these Psalms might be prophetically pointing to Jesus, the Son, the Champion of all who look to him for salvation. When viewed this way, what comfort to the oppressed to imagine Jesus the Savior saying these words as he suffered at the hands of wicked and abusive humanity. One last thing to note about the protective heart of God in the Psalms is that the Psalms are covenantal in nature—meaning that they describe a particular relationship between God and the people who are bound to him by faith. His protective heart is for his own in particular. Yet, one also sees that God invites all people into this covenant. Thus, one can understand the protective heart of God for the oppressed as part of his universal call to all people. To put it simply, he cares for all who are abused and oppressed, and invites them into the type of relationship where his protective power is *for them*.”

Psalm 9:1-12—God the Judge of the Oppressor and the Protector of the Oppressed

Psalm 9 focuses first on God—his sovereignty over those who oppose him and his help toward the oppressed who trust in him. God’s people defend the oppressed because God defends them. In his distress, David is whole-heartedly grateful for the Lord’s mighty acts on his behalf, resulting in gladness and praise (vv. 1-2). Such a glad-hearted gratitude belongs to God because he sits on a throne and judges righteously, causing oppressors to turn back, stumble, and eventually perish (vv. 3-4). While a perpetrator may wield temporary power over his victim, he is weak in comparison to God Most High. Though David was far from perfect, in this situation he understands that his cause is just. His

¹⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 85-89.

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms 1-57, The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 96.

confidence is not in his own righteousness, but in the fairness and justice of God to uphold him. There is no question that God stands against oppression and violence. God is on the throne of the cosmos, and he is on the side of the oppressed. Commenting on verse 9:4, Spurgeon explains,

If we seek to maintain the cause and honor of our Lord we may suffer reproach and misrepresentation, but it is a rich comfort to remember that he who sits in the throne knows our hearts, and will not leave us to the ignorant and ungenerous judgment of erring man.¹⁶

Oppressors are not primarily acting against those they harm; they are acting in opposition to God. As David continues to consider the fate of his enemies, Kidner notes that the Lord's actions in 9:5-6 are "prophetic perfects," which "describe coming events as if they have already happened, so certain is their fulfillment and so clear the vision."¹⁷ According to these verses, God "rebukes the nations." He makes "the wicked perish." He has "rooted out" their cities; "the very memory of them has perished." These phrases speak not only of God's judgment against the present oppressor, but also of the future day in which all oppression will end.

In contrast to the ultimate insignificance of the enemy, "the Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness" (vv. 7-8). Though a victim of abuse may feel powerless over her oppressor, God reigns unchallenged and his rule is just. Verse 8 is reminiscent of Isaiah 11:3-5 speaking of the reign of Christ: "He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth." These words give confidence, not in the justice of this world, but in the ultimate and certain justice of God on behalf of the meek and oppressed. Pastors, elders, and counselors may be fooled

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *Psalms 1-57*, 97-98.

¹⁷ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 86.

by what they see and hear, but not Christ. Those with more authority will be held accountable for their oppression of the weak.

To the oppressor, God is a judge; to the oppressed, he is a refuge (9:9-10). God protects the abused. DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner note, “God’s sanctuary and protection are explicitly for the needy, for those who have been figuratively crushed by the realities of fallen human community.”¹⁸ God’s promise of refuge is coupled in verse 10 with the promise of his compassionate presence. He will not forsake those who call out to him in faith. Those who experience abuse are often forsaken—by their oppressors, by friends, by society, and, sadly, often even by God’s people—exacerbating feelings of shame. It may seem like there is no one to whom they can turn to and rely on “in times of trouble.” The world is typically silent in such cases, and even those who help do so timidly, with little assurance of help for the long haul. Not so with the Lord; when the oppressed seek him, he welcomes their cries and does not forsake them.

Verses 11-12 provide the perfect close to this section, returning to the singing of praises that began the psalm. God is praised because he is enthroned in Zion and the “avenger of blood,” or “the One who calls to account for bloodshed.” In Numbers 35, God appoints an “avenger of blood” to punish the violent, but here, God himself takes on this role.¹⁹ The same Hebrew word for “avenge” can also be translated “seek” or “require,” and is used in 10:13b for the very thing the abuser denies about God.²⁰ David counts on the character of God to “not forget the cry of the afflicted” (9:12). This stands in contrast to the end of the wicked in verses 5-6—while God will erase their memory from the face of the earth, he will not forget the cries of the afflicted.

¹⁸ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 136.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁰ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 86.

In summary, Psalm 9:1-12 depicts God as the most powerful Sovereign enthroned who metes out a robust and thorough justice to the wicked, while providing protection and compassionate presence to the afflicted who cry out to him.

Psalm 9:13-20—God Sees, Knows, and Acts

In Psalm 9:1-12, God is praised as the judge of the oppressor and the protector of the oppressed, as Kidner explains, “not merely as the best antidote to his suffering but as being genuinely more important than his own concerns.”²¹ It is in that context that now, in Psalm 9:13-20, David petitions God for grace in his own oppression, recognizes the Lord as his only source of help, and pledges to praise Him for his rescue.

Two petitions comprise verse 13. deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner write that “be gracious to me” is “a plea for God’s merciful intervention.”²² They explain that “see my affliction” is not merely a request for God to notice, but also to respond, “for God to see is for God both to know and to take action.”²³ When God’s people are afflicted, he sees, knows, and acts. In Exodus 2:25, God sees Israel’s affliction under the Egyptians, and he knows. In Exodus 3:1-10, God acts by calling Moses to deliver his people out of their affliction. It is God’s nature to act on behalf of those enduring abuse. It is important to note that David asked the Lord to act on his behalf so that the Lord would receive the praise (9:14). David’s chief concern is on God and his glory, rather than himself and his suffering.

In 9:15-17, the psalmist envisions the end of those who oppose God and oppress his people. They are caught in the very traps they set. Everything they do now will backfire on them. The verb tenses would indicate that this is so certain that it is as if

²¹ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 87.

²² deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 137.

²³ Ibid.

it has already happened (“the nations have sunk,” “their own foot has been caught,” “the Lord has executed judgment,” “the wicked are snared”). Kidner comments, “A revealing nuance in the sentence pronounced on the wicked is that they will return to Sheol (v. 17), not merely *depart* there. Death is their native element.”²⁴

The psalmist looks to a future hope for the needy and poor in verse 18. While the nations forget God (v. 17), those whom they afflict shall not always be forgotten; there is a hope that endures for them. Craigie and Tate write, “The word ‘poor’ is synonymous with the word ‘afflicted’” in this verse.²⁵ Those who perpetrate abuse and oppression may forget God, but God will not forget those whom they have harmed. The final two verses of Psalm 9 foreshadow the description of the oppressor in Psalm 10. “Let not man prevail” (9:19a), and “Let the nations know they are but men” (9:20b). In the abusive man, pride places him above God and his needs/desires above the laws and commands of God. His appetites and not the law of God rule the perpetrator of abuse. He sees himself as his best god, controlling and manipulating others to get what he wants. He is intensely focused on gaining his desires at the expense of the image of God in the other person. He has forgotten that he is “but dust.”

Psalm 10

Psalm 10 looks upon the matter with a different gaze. Now, the wicked ways of those who oppose God and oppress his image-bearers are detailed. In his commentary on the first twenty-two psalms, Luther gives the following introduction to his comments on Psalm 10:

There is not, in my judgment, a Psalm which describes the mind, manners, the works, the words, the feelings, and the fate of the ungodly with so much propriety, fullness, and light, as this Psalm. . . . This Psalm, therefore, is a type, form, and

²⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 87.

²⁵ Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 120.

description of that man, who though he may be in the sight of himself and of men more excellent than St. Peter himself, is detestable in the eyes of God.²⁶

The psalm begins with familiar cry of the abused and afflicted: “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Ps 10:1) God does often seem distant and hidden in such times. The phrase “times of trouble” is unusual,²⁷ found only here and in Psalm 9:9, where God is praised for being a refuge for the oppressed “in times of trouble.” David grapples with those “twin realities”: while God sometimes seems distant from the scene of oppression (Ps 10:1), he is yet a stronghold for those “who know his name and trust him” (Ps 9:9). Clearly, the difference is one of perspective. When one looks upon the situation of abuse, God appears to be nowhere near; when one looks to heaven, God is enthroned and attentive to what is happening and providing support to those who call upon his name.

Psalm 10:1-11—An Anatomy of Abuse

In this first section, the psalmist thoroughly and with chilling accuracy dissects destructive behavior. This is a poetic, powerful, and thorough description of the mission, master, and means of the chronically self-centered abuser. As previously noted, abuse is the desecration of the image of God in another person through patterns of intentionally misusing power, overtly and covertly, in words and actions, to gratify self. Every aspect of this definition is seen in verses 2-11.

The abuser’s mission. Abuse is motivated by the arrogant pursuit of self-gratification. “In arrogance, the wicked hotly pursue the poor” (Ps 10:2a). For what purpose? “For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord” (Ps 10:3). The wicked person’s mission is to satisfy the “desires of his soul” and his greed for gain. In his pursuit of his desires, the perpetrator of

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Select Works of Martin Luther: An Offering to the Church of God in the Last Days* (London: T. Bensley, 1826), 3:318.

²⁷ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 86.

abuse hurts others to get what he wants. He sees his success as validation of his efforts (Ps 10:5). Any future judgment is not contemplated in the least. Any person who dares to confront him (his wife, kids, small group leader, pastor, or elder) is “puffed at” and dismissed, as he is determined to continue and is confident he will get what he wants.

The abuser’s master. While a perpetrator of abuse might even claim to follow God, his functional god is himself. Abusive people are like those “enemies of the cross of Christ” whom Paul describes this way: “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (Phil 3:19). Goldingay comments that these people are “robbers who treat their inner desires as if these were God.”²⁸ Such a man trusts himself only, he does not seek God or inquire as to his ways. He is a functional atheist. David uses these words to describe such a person: he “curses and renounces the Lord” (Ps 10:3b); he “does not seek [God]” (Ps. 10:4a); “all his thoughts are, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 10:4b); “he says in his heart, ‘God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it’” (Ps 10:11). Kidner comments,

His blasphemy (3b) and his repeated assurances to himself of his impunity (4,6,11,13) betray a basic disquiet. The bold words, “There is no God” (4), are bravado, for his inner dialogue contradicts them (verses 11,13). Yet they are the language of his choices and actions, since *thoughts* in verse 4 means “schemes” in verse 2. He is a practicing atheist, if hardly a convinced one.²⁹

In his words and in actions, the abusive person is a godless person. Thus, he is willing to desecrate the image of God in another person to get what he wants.

The abuser’s means. The abusive person commits this desecration of the *imago Dei* through patterns of intentionally misusing power, overtly and covertly, in words and actions. He “hotly pursues” (Ps 10:2a), devises “schemes” (Ps 10:2b), says in his heart, “I shall not be moved,” (Ps 10:6a) and “the helpless are crushed, sink down,

²⁸ John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 185.

²⁹ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 88.

and fall by his might” (Ps 10:10). These phrases describe intentional patterns of misusing power. David Powlison agrees that abuse is intentional, writing, “People think about using and abusing others. They follow the ‘devices’ of their hearts. . . . They pursue a plan of action: schemes and plots. Violence and betrayal are not accidental, but devised.”³⁰ Abuse is intentional and typically follows predictable pattern.

Sometimes, as in verse 10, the misuses of power are more overt. Other times, such as in verses 8-9, the actions are more covert: sitting in ambush, in hiding places, stealthily watching with his eyes, lurking. Commenting on those described in verse 9, Powlison states, “They are stalkers, literal or figurative. They don’t live out in the open. They conceal what they do, creeping low to the ground like a hunting lion, seeking to trap the innocent.”³¹ Goldingay adds that abusive people “work by combining fraud and oppression, using legal but underhanded means to achieve oppressive ends.”³² Such is the predatory nature of abuse.

Sometimes the abuse is verbal instead of physical. Note in verse 7 what comes out of the mouth of the wicked oppressor: cursing, deceit and oppression, mischief and iniquity. What apt descriptions of verbal abuse! With his words he curses his victim, deceives her, talks down to her and minimizes her, perhaps threatens her, toys with her, calls her crazy, and all other manner of sinful, untruthful, ungodly manipulations.

After carefully describing the mission, master, and means of his abuser, the psalmist now returns his gaze to the Lord and pleads with him to come through as the Judge and Protector praised in Psalm 9.

³⁰ David Powlison, “Predator, Prey, and Protector: Helping Victims Think and Act from Psalm 10,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 185.

Psalm 10:12-18—Arise, O Lord

Having praised God as a God of Justice and the Protector of the oppressed in Ps 9:1-12, petitioning to see, know, and act in accordance with his character in Psalm 9:13-20, and detailed the mission, master, and means of the abusive person in Psalm 10:1-11, the psalmist again pleads with the Lord to arise and act on behalf of the afflicted (Ps 10:12). In verses 12-18, the helpless victim cries out to the Lord to act, while at the same time recounting God's faithfulness and attentiveness. Kidner rightly observes that this prayer is "notable for the faith that keeps breaking through,"³³ and this is exemplified in verse 14: "But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless." Although the wicked seem to have the upper hand, the psalmist reminds himself that God sees their "mischief" (the outward circumstances of the abuse) and "vexation" (the victim's grief and inward pain). Contrary to sinful human beings who often wait to see who is going to win before choosing sides, Spurgeon comments that God "loves to take part with the best, though the weakest, side. Now if there be any consideration (besides the cause) that draws or engages God, it is the weakness of the side."³⁴ God hurries to the side of the oppressed.

In verse 15, the victim asks God to "break the arm of the wicked and evildoer." It is not for the victim to retaliate against the oppressor. Justin and Lindsey Holcomb assert, "Victims can trust God to make all wrongs right so they can get on with their lives and not fixate on bitterness and hatred."³⁵ The victim pleads with the Lord to "call his wickedness to account till you find none" (i.e. to the last trace).³⁶ The victim asks the

³³ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 88.

³⁴ Spurgeon, *Psalms 1-57*, 126.

³⁵ Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 139.

³⁶ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 89.

Lord to do that which the abuser in verse 13b has boastfully assured himself will never happen.

In verses 16-18, the psalmist returns to the theme of God's sovereignty and justice. Phrases that denote God's stance toward the afflicted and oppressed and defenseless include "you hear [their] desire," "you will strengthen their heart," and "you will incline your ear to do justice" (Ps 10:17-18a). Such is God's inclination toward the oppressed. He listens, encourages and gives hope, and is attentive with the goal of bringing about justice and ending the oppressor's reign of terror. At no point does the Lord question the oppressed or accuse the afflicted. Victims are not without sin themselves; yet, the Lord places himself staunchly on their side, not because they are deserving, but because they are oppressed, weak, fatherless, poor, or helpless. Significant to note is the last clause of these two psalms: "So that the man who is of the earth may strike terror no more" (Ps 10:18b). Once again, an emphasis is placed on the fact that the oppressor is merely a man, made from earth, in contrast to "the man of heaven," who is the Savior and God Most High, who is the King. Holcomb and Holcomb write, "God's wrath is a source of positive hope for the victim. You know that God loves you and will destroy the evil that has harmed you. God is the refuge of his people and shows steadfast love by destroying those who 'strike terror.'"³⁷ The Lord will often employ his redeemed people, his church, to be his instruments of compassion, protection, and justice.

The Church's Response to Perpetrators and Victims in Ephesians 4:1-5:21

Having seen in Genesis 1-2 the dignity God bestowed upon his image-bearers, the calling he has given humankind to reveal and reflect him and to represent his just and kind rule over creation, and witnessing the Lord's compassionate protection for the oppressed and judgment of the oppressor in Psalms 9 and 10, this section turns to the role

³⁷ Holcomb and Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace*, 139.

of the church, the body of Christ, in cases of domestic abuse. The church is God’s chosen people (1 Pet 2:9), rescued to reflect and represent the just and merciful rule and reign of God upon the earth. The church is called to spread the *shalom* of God in this broken and crooked world. This is the “calling to which you have been called” that begins Ephesians 4.

Paul spent the first three chapters of Ephesians describing the cosmic nature of the kingdom of God. He emphasized the sovereignty of God in all things, from “before the foundation of the world” (1:4), “throughout all generations, forever and ever” (3:21). He showed God’s sovereign work in both the salvation of the individual believer (2:1-10) and his salvation of the Gentiles (2:11-22). He established that the church is now “the dwelling place of God by the Spirit” (2:22), prayed for the Father to strengthen the Ephesian believers through the power of his Spirit (3:14-16) that they would abide in his Son and be filled with all the fullness of God (3:17-19) and that they would know that God is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (3:20).

The final three chapters of Ephesians are devoted to describing *how* the church is to act in the world, thus fulfilling her purpose of extending the just and merciful kingdom of God in it. Within those final three chapters, Ephesians 4:1-5:21 gives a beautiful and detailed picture of how God’s people are to walk together “in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1), in the *shalom* of God, while awaiting the fulfillment of his kingdom and the full inheritance promised them. This text can also help believers understand how a church should walk with and care for a couple experiencing marital abuse. To this end, I slightly modified Harold Hoehner’s division of this text into five “walks”;³⁸ walking in unity toward maturity (the aim of care), walking differently than the world (the distinctiveness of care), walking in love for both the

³⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 500.

perpetrator and the abuser (the motivation of care), walking in the light (the fruit of care), and walking carefully (the urgency of care).

The Aim of Care—Walking in Unity toward Maturity (Eph 4:1-16)

God’s people are called to walk in unity on the issue of domestic abuse toward the end of greater maturity in Christ—for the abused, for the abuser, and for God’s people who are walking with the couple. Paul begins by using five terms to describe the fundamental qualities necessary for walking with one another in unity: humility and gentleness, patience and forbearance, and love (Eph 4:2-3).

For those counseling and walking with others through domestic abuse situations, humility (*tapeinophrosynē*) is perhaps the most critical of these qualities, and it is significant that Paul lists it first. Church leaders may become indignant, self-righteous, angry, and reactive toward the perpetrator or the victim, or they may simplistically and naively assume that they understand all the dynamics involved. Andrew Lincoln reminds that humility “assumes a proper sense of self-worth, not weakness of character, and that a proper evaluation of oneself is based on a realization of one’s own dependence on the grace of God and on the worth of one’s brothers and sisters in his eyes.”³⁹ God’s people must engage their brothers and sisters with humble hearts, seeking understanding that may seem elusive, but asking for wisdom to unravel the stories of the people involved. “Gentleness” (*prautēs*) is the next quality needed, and closely related to humility. The modern-day conception of what this word means will not suffice. Rather than defining it as “mildness of manners or disposition,”⁴⁰ this word instead connotes a self-controlled response that was neither hot-headed and rash, nor apathetic and unmoved. It implies a

³⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, The Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 236.

⁴⁰ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, “gentleness,” accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentleness>.

self-restraint that prevents over-reaction or harshness. Hoehner points out that this word is used of Jesus (Matt 11:29) and “implies the conscious exercise of self-control, exhibiting a conscious choice of gentleness as opposed to the use of power for the purpose of retaliation.”⁴¹ When it comes to abuse, believers cannot sit calmly by and shake their heads; there is a time to be angry. Yet, in anger Christians cannot sin (Eph 4:26) or seek retaliation (Rom 12:19-21). God’s people must exercise restraint; Christians must be “gentle.” This same word is used in Galatians 5:23 as a fruit of the Spirit. Barclay writes, “Only the person who is controlled by the Spirit of God can truly be gentle—angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time.”⁴² The people of God are called to act gently with perpetrators and victims alike. It is also noteworthy that this attitude of gentleness stands in stark contrast to the abuser; abusers are notoriously angry at the wrong things, harshly over-reacting to perceived threats against their power, using threats and retaliation to get what they want. The church body must be careful not to act in this way, but to be thoughtful and measured, firm, yet not harsh or retaliatory. For the victim of abuse, gentleness may be the key to engaging the heart, because she has come to expect harshness and heavy-handed responses from her husband. The church must image God’s gentleness to her.

Like humility and gentleness, patience and forbearance are related terms that help unpack the walk of unity toward maturity. Patience (*makrothymia*) connotes long-suffering, while forbearance (*anechomai*) connotes bearing with, enduring, putting up with, or accepting. Hoehner writes, “For the believer, patience is that cautious endurance that does not abandon hope. It pertains to waiting patiently without immediate results, like the farmer who waits for his harvest and the OT prophets who waited for God’s

⁴¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 507.

⁴² William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit: An Examination of Galatians 5:19-23* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 120.

action (Jas 5:7-11).”⁴³ Such long-suffering is required in ministering through circumstances of abuse. Additionally, Wood states that this term is commonly used in the NT to describe “reluctance to avenge wrongs.”⁴⁴ Exhibiting patience when walking with perpetrators and victims means being present and holding on to hope for the long haul, putting care before correction. Citing Abbott and Meyer, Peter O’Brien states, “Mutual forbearance is the practical expression of patience.”⁴⁵ The abused need special care and attention, and the heart of the abuser most often takes a long time to turn. There are no quick fixes. Lincoln explains, “Bearing with others means fully accepting them in their uniqueness, including their weaknesses and faults, and allowing them worth and space.”⁴⁶ According to A. T. Robertson, this phrase carries the idea of “holding yourselves back from one another.”⁴⁷ Believers must not be constantly offended by their differences with one another, but instead are to put love for Christ and unity ahead of those differences. O’Brien writes, “This kind of behavior can only spring from God’s *agapē* love.”⁴⁸ Hoehner explains that this is a kind of love that “seeks the highest good in the one loved.”⁴⁹

Humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love are the qualities needed by the body as God’s people seek “to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Abuse tears at the fabric of the body, ripping families, home groups, and ministries apart and often resulting in ripple effects for generations. The church must

⁴³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 508-9.

⁴⁴ A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 55.

⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 278.

⁴⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 237.

⁴⁷ A. T. Robertson, quoted in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 509.

⁴⁸ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 278.

⁴⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 510.

be eager to preserve and protect the image of God in each person, even if reconciliation of the marriage cannot be achieved.

Unity within the body is meant to lead to a maturing body made up of members with varying gifts that perpetually builds itself up in love (Eph 4:16). Though views on the interpretation of Paul's inexact quotation of Psalm 68:18 (Eph 4:8-10) abound, I concur with Peter O'Brien's understanding that this text parallels the exaltation and enthronement language of Eph 1:20-21:⁵⁰ "The building of the body is inextricably linked with his intention of filling the universe with his rule, since the church is his instrument in carrying out his purposes for the cosmos."⁵¹ It is now up to the church to fulfill the creation mandate that God gave to his image-bearers in Eden—to reflect and reveal him and to represent him and extend his rule.

"What does the exalted Christ give to the Church?" asks Andrew Lincoln. "He gives people, these particular people who proclaim the word and lead . . . he gives not just grace to people, but he gives specific people to people."⁵² God gave his church anointed men and women to fulfill this mandate—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, among others⁵³ (Eph 4:11). It is the responsibility of these men and women to, in Lincoln's translation, "bring the saints to completion. . . . It is the notion of making complete, which can include making complete by restoring or training."⁵⁴ In equipping the church to minister to those in her body who have perpetrated or been victimized by abuse, it is critical for those gifted in care and counsel to take the lead in developing

⁵⁰ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 296.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁵² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

⁵³ Although none of the lists of spiritual gifts in the Scriptures claim to be exhaustive, see Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11, and 1 Pet 4:10-11 for other lists of gifts.

⁵⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254.

policies and protocols for the equipping the saints to carry out this ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ, “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14). Lincoln explains that, in this verse, Paul contrasts the maturity, which is the aim, with the immaturity of a little child, “evidenced in instability, rootlessness, lack of direction, and susceptibility to manipulation and error.”⁵⁵ Bruce further elaborates, “Infants are defenseless, unable to protect themselves; in the spiritual life they are an easy prey for false teachers and others who would like to lead them astray from the true path.”⁵⁶ Abusive individuals in the church tend to foster and prey upon such traits in their victims. Often, perversions of the doctrines of headship and submission are used to control and coerce. They misuse power to confuse and control their victims with the intent of getting what they want. Victims are vulnerable to all kinds of false doctrine, not only from perpetrators, but also sometimes from the Christian community itself. Christians must respond to such false teaching with truth, spoken in love (Eph 4:15), so that they may “grow up in every way into him who is the head.” Wrong ideas of “hyper-headship” must be deconstructed for victims and perpetrators, as well as for the entire church body, so that right understandings of complementarity in the body of Christ can be, over time, reconstructed. Only then can the body work properly and build herself up in love (Eph 4:16).

Church leaders must respond to abuse with both self-control and strength, gentleness and power. While they seek understanding, they also compel change for the good of the victim and the perpetrator. The aim of care in the church is that all parties grow in spiritual maturity. The oppressed grow in Christ as they are listened to, believed, and gently cared for. Oppressors have the opportunity to grow in Christlikeness as God’s

⁵⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257.

⁵⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 351.

people courageously and humbly call them to repentance. All God’s people grow in unity and maturity as they see the people of God doing the work of God for the glory of God.

**The Distinctiveness of Care—
Walking Differently Than
the World (Eph 4:17-32)**

Having examined the attitudes that are to pervade the church’s response to abuse, and the goals of unity and maturity of the body of Christ, Paul now turns to the second “walk” imperative in this section: “you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do” (Eph 4:17). Lincoln explains that the Gentiles here are a reference to “non-Jewish outsiders to the Christian community.”⁵⁷ Ephesus was a center of pagan worship, particularly of the goddess Artemis (Acts 19:25-28). While Paul himself was in Ephesus, many signs and wonders were performed and many from pagan backgrounds, including witchcraft and sorcery came to faith (Acts 19:11-20). In Ephesians 2, Paul makes it clear that these two races have now become one through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul is particularly addressing the leaders and members of the church to walk differently than they did prior to knowing Christ. This is the second time in the epistle that Paul specifically addresses those of Gentile background, the first being in 2:11 when he reminded those who were “Gentiles in the flesh” of their new race-defying identity in Christ. Paul then gives several detailed descriptors of the former manner of life of the Ephesians in 4:17-19, calls them to “put off” their old selves, “be renewed” in the spirit of their minds, and “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God” in verses 4:20-24 and then shows the contrasting new manner of life in 4:25-32.

Ephesians 4:17-24 is somewhat reminiscent of Psalm 10’s description of godless oppressors: their thoughts are futile, “they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their

⁵⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 276.

hardness of heart,” “they have become callous,” “greedy to practice all kinds of impurity” (Eph 4:17-19). O’Brien notes that Paul “goes out of his way to emphasize the perceptive and mental dimension in the human estrangement from God.”⁵⁸ The fall has pervasively affected every area of the human experience. Hardness (*pōrōsis*) of heart (Eph 4:18), can be compared to petrification. Wood writes, “It is used medically to denote the callus formed when a bone has been fractured and reset. Such a callus is even harder than the bone itself.”⁵⁹ Work with abusers must include a call to salvation, as Paul also questions the salvation of those who continue to walk like Gentiles. It is possible that an abusive person is just a very immature believer, but Paul notes that this way of life is not consistent with how the believer has “learned Christ,” “heard about him,” and been “taught in him” (Eph 4:20-21). Is he simply unwilling or is he unable to “put off his old self”? Does he desire to renew his thinking, “put on the new self” and claim his rebirth in the image of God, pursuing his role as an image bearer, pursuing righteousness and holiness and extending this in the world? Church leaders need much patience, long-suffering, and truth-telling, along with much prayer and work of the Holy Spirit, in helping perpetrators of abuse discern where they stand spiritually. Church leaders should also remember and be encouraged by James 5:20: “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

For abuse victims, perpetrators, and those who walk with them, Ephesians 4:25-32 provides helpful instruction in how to walk distinctively as Christians. God’s people must hold firmly to the truth (Eph 4:25). Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44), but Jesus is the embodiment of truth (John 14:6), and God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). Deception is one of the chief instruments the enemy uses to destroy

⁵⁸ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 320.

⁵⁹ Wood, *Ephesians*, 61.

relationships (1 Tim 6:5) and enslave people to sin (2 Cor 4:1-6). Truth is one of the chief instruments the Lord uses to restore and reconcile relationships (Eph 4:15-16) and bring freedom (John 8:32). Thus, truth-telling is essential for victims, perpetrators, and caregivers alike in breaking the cycle of abuse. Sin should anger God’s people, as it angers God. However, believers must avoid unrighteous anger and refuse to let it linger, because this gives opportunity to the devil (Eph 4:26-27). F. F. Bruce writes, “‘Nursing one’s wrath to keep it warm’ . . . magnifies the grievance, makes reconciliation more difficult, and destroys friendly relations.”⁶⁰ Believers also must avoid self-indulgent shortcuts (Eph 4:28). Unlike the thief who takes what he did not earn to use for his own pleasure, God’s people are to work hard to gain good things to share with those who need them.⁶¹ Christians must use words carefully—believers’ speech must not be “corrupting,” but rather build up, fit the occasion, and give grace to the hearer (Eph 4:29). “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph 4:30) calls to mind Isaiah 63:10: “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.” God is hurt and offended when believers hurt one another,⁶² and the primary victim of one’s sin against another is always God himself (Ps 51:4). God’s people must guard against bitterness and clamor and slander and malice (Eph 4:31). While standing firm against further abuse and drawing boundaries to protect and provide flourishing, church leaders and victims must forgive and be kind-hearted to perpetrators (Eph 4:32), who are also made in God’s image and who are ensnared in sin. The church does not help the perpetrator by enabling him to continue walking like a Gentile husband, so boundaries and safeguards to protect are crucial. The perpetrator must experience the consequences of his actions, but church leaders and victims must guard against smug satisfaction, malice,

⁶⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 361.

⁶¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 628.

⁶² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 307.

or bitterness. Because God is tenderhearted toward his rebellious people who rail against his boundaries and experience his loving consequences, so God's church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, must exhibit tenderheartedness toward the abuser.

Believers and church leaders must walk with perpetrators and victims in distinctively Christian ways. As mentioned previously, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love should stand certainly out. However, there are many other ways in which God's counsel differs from that of the world. In contemporary Western culture, many believe that the primary solution to an abusive marriage is divorce. Blind to the power of the Holy Spirit and the hope of the gospel, the typical belief is that most abusive people are incapable of change. While many abusive marriages, even within the church, may end in divorce and many abusers may never see themselves clearly and repent, and many victims will pay the price for decades to come, the church's work in this dark space should be fueled by hope in the power of God to transform and redeem. God's people must combat the futility that the world proclaims over this space. Christians must remain tenderhearted and forgiving, always humbly remembering the forgiveness and long-suffering of Christ. The church must imitate God as image-bearers, bringing the righteousness and mercy of God to each situation of abuse we encounter. The motivation for this radical way of life that Paul suggests is the scandalous forgiveness that the believer has been offered in Christ, "as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32). While divorce may be a consideration in some situations as the sad recognition of living in a sinful situation, Scripture discusses divorce in a fundamentally different way than is typically done in literature on abuse and marriage. God's confrontation of abuse is deeper, harder, and more redemptive than people often assume.

The Motivation of Care—Walking in Love (Eph 5:1-2)

Believers are to imitate their Father because that is what beloved children naturally do. Believers walk in love because they are beloved (Eph 5:1-2a). God's people

love others because God first loved them (1 John 4:19). The gospel not only requires imitation, but also enables it.⁶³ Christ’s followers sacrifice for others because Christ “gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2b). Imitating Christ’s sacrificial love will cost the victim, the perpetrator, and the church. The victim loses the right to hold the perpetrator’s sin against him or to take vengeance. The perpetrator must abandon his pursuit of self-gratification and selflessly serve instead. In addition, the church that wants to love both victim and perpetrator well will spend resources, time, and energy to walk in love alongside the victim and the perpetrator, and to point both to the gospel and to the best care available. These are gospel choices; these are the ways the church imitates God.

The Fruit of Care—Walking in the Light (Eph 5:3-14)

The stunning good news of God’s extravagant love for his children compels believers to respond with fruitful lives. God’s people are commanded to walk in the light as he is in the light (1 John 1:7). The familiar theme of light and darkness echoes throughout the Scriptures. God dispels the darkness with light (Gen 1:2-3; Ps 18:28), God called Israel to be a light to the nations (Isa 42:6, 49:6, 60:3), and Jesus and the church, his body, are both called “the light of the world” (John 8:12; Matt 5:14-16). Believers have been called “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Moreover, one day, “night will be no more” and God will be the only light his redeemed need forever and ever (Rev 22:5). In Ephesians 5:3-14, God’s people are called to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph 5:11). These “unfruitful works” include sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking, almost all of which are involved in various manifestations of domestic abuse. Those who practice such things have “no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and

⁶³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 310.

God” (Eph 4:3-5). It is interesting that what Paul states should replace such vices is a heart of gratitude. O’Brien writes, “Thanksgiving is almost a synonym for the Christian life. It is the response of gratitude to God’s saving activity in creation and redemption, and thus a recognition that he is the ultimate source of every blessing.”⁶⁴ Clearly, such an attitude is the antidote to the heart of self-gratification manifested in the perpetrator of abuse. The church has been commanded to not let abusive people deceive her with empty words (Eph 4:6). However, unfortunately and not infrequently, believers have inadvertently become partners with abusive men by siding with them against their wives. In this way, the church sides with darkness instead of the light, which is “good,” “right,” and “true” (Eph 5:8-9). Wood observes, “Light is known by its effects” and that the effects of goodness, righteousness and truth “counteract the dark influence of malice (Eph 4:31), injustice and falsehood (Eph 4:25).”⁶⁵ All of these are principal dynamics of abusive relationships. The fruit of the church’s care for victims and perpetrators is that they are no longer taking part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but are exposing them, and that they are walking as children of light, the fruit of which is all that is good, right, and true. One of the goals of this project at TVC is to make domestic abuse visible by exposing it to the light (Eph 5:13-14).

The Urgency of Care—Walking Carefully (Eph 5:15-21)

In addition to walking in unity toward maturity, distinctively, in love, and in the light, the church must also walk carefully, in keeping with the urgency of the need, in caring for abuse victims and perpetrators. Paul instructs the Ephesians, “Look carefully then how you walk” (Eph 5:15a). Paul is exhorting the church to exercise extreme care in walking with members and attenders. This injunction to “be careful” is especially critical

⁶⁴ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 361.

⁶⁵ Wood, *Ephesians*, 69.

when caring for the oppressed and correcting the oppressor. Wood notes that the adverb rendered “carefully” “signifies something done accurately, precisely, or after close attention has been given. Together with the imperative ‘watch,’ it indicates that this admonition regarding Godly behavior is both important and urgent.”⁶⁶ Paul unpacks walking carefully by drawing three contrasts: “not as unwise, but as wise” (Eph 5:15b), “do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17), and “do not get drunk . . . but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). First, church leaders must exercise care by exercising wisdom, particularly regarding the wise use of time. “The days are evil” (Eph 5:16b), writes the apostle.

In times in which husbands would inflict harm upon the wives that they have been charged to protect just to satisfy their own selfish desires, the days are truly evil and a sense of urgency about the time is imperative. The church must move faster to help assess and provide for care for victims, including professional counseling. In addition, with the advice and consent of the victim, after her safety has been secured, the church must proceed with due haste in correcting violent and abusive men. Also, to prevent further abuse in churches, leaders should urgently correct the theological misunderstandings that often contribute to domestic abuse in evangelical churches—a view of marriage that makes it more important than the glory of God or the safety of his image-bearers in the marriage, and a misunderstanding or misapplication of complementarity in marriage. Second, church leaders must exercise care by not being foolish, but understanding the will of the Lord (Eph 5:17). Hoehner clarifies that the Lord’s will here is the mystery (Eph 1:9) that he has made known to his children: his unfolding plan for the redemption of the world. Church leaders are to walk carefully with those in their care, “not as ones who walk without true insight into God’s plan for their lives . . . but in a new lifestyle in conformity to God’s

⁶⁶ O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 380.

wise plan.”⁶⁷ Walking with church members and attenders through difficult care situations such as abuse requires an ability to point both the victim and the perpetrator to God’s faithful and true promises and his over-arching redemptive plan for his people. That is their only hope. Finally, church leaders must be filled with the Spirit of God in the exercise of their care (Eph 5:18). Paul provides four evidences of the fullness of the Spirit in a person in the participial phrases “addressing one another,” “singing and making music,” “giving thanks” and “submitting to one another” (Eph 5:19-21). The Spirit-filled life is evidenced when believers address one another spiritually, worship and give thanks to the Lord, and submit to one another mutually. Since being filled with the Spirit means praising Christ and thanking the Father together, as well as speaking spiritual words and submitting to one another, Lincoln maintains, “The fullness of the Spirit can only be properly experienced in community.”⁶⁸ The need for a redemptive community to walk alongside those who have experienced or perpetrated abuse (if repentant) cannot be overstated. There is greater need for specialized church recovery and care ministries to take up the mantle of caring for the abused and lovingly confronting perpetrators with their sin. The hope for this project is to make a significant impact in helping to address that need.

Conclusion

Abuse is first and foremost an offense against God. To understand the true horror of domestic abuse, those who are perpetrating it and have suffered under it, as well as those walking alongside them, one must begin with the first man and the first woman in a garden. Genesis 1-2 reveal that humankind was created to reflect God and to be his images, his vice-regents, throughout the world. Against the backdrop of this high and beautiful calling, the perversion that is abuse can be seen clearly for the desecration that it is. Nothing is further from the nature of God than an oppression or abuse of a weaker soul

⁶⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 692.

⁶⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 349.

by a stronger one for selfish gain. This is manifested clearly in God's response to such desecration, as seen in Psalms 9 and 10. God responds with compassion and care for the abused and oppressed and with anger and punishment toward the abuser. This response exemplifies the holiness of God, both his love and his justice. With both in mind (our original purpose and God's response to its perversion), the church can come alongside victims and perpetrators with the wisdom and godly perspective needed. By examining Ephesians 4-5, which also begins with our high calling, church members and leaders can glean more specific and practical instruction regarding their stance toward both the abused and the abuser (humility, gentleness and long-suffering), their actions (speaking truth, bearing with, being trained, enacting the gospel), and their goals (maturity and flourishing for both members of the couple as well as for the body). May the church both reflect the character of God and extend his kingdom reign as she encounters abuse within her walls. May she grow in holiness and peace in the process. To accomplish this mission, church leaders should have a policy and protocol for recognizing and responding to domestic abuse in the church. Chapter 3 addresses critical elements for a church domestic abuse policy and protocol.

CHAPTER 3
CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF A CHURCH DOMESTIC
ABUSE POLICY AND PROTOCOL

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that God opposes oppression as a desecration of the image of God in both the victim and the perpetrator, and he responds by caring for the oppressed and by correcting oppressors. As God's people, the church must do likewise. However, the church lacks the knowledge necessary to care and correct well. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders are often unable to recognize abuse, and they do not know how to wisely respond to it in ways that protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable without causing further damage to the relationship and the people in it. The church must clearly articulate and execute a policy and protocol for domestic abuse that accurately defines it and guides church leaders to respond compassionately toward the abused and courageously toward abusers.

While child and student ministry resource organizations have labored tirelessly to help churches understand the need to make child protection policies and procedures, such as volunteer applications and screenings, check-in systems, two-volunteer rules, and visibility guidelines standard practice, very few argue for similar policies and protocols for responding to the disclosure or discovery of emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, psychological, and/or physical abuse between spouses or intimate partners. Yet, this type of abuse is prevalent within both society and the church, often bolstered by systemic factors unique to and highly valued by Christian churches, such as a high view of marriage, a theology of suffering unaccompanied by a corresponding theology of oppression, and a complementarian theology that is often misunderstood and misapplied. To fully protect

families in the church from oppression, every church needs a domestic abuse policy as well as a child protection policy. A domestic abuse policy helps leaders protect families by answering two questions: “What is domestic abuse?” and “How do I respond lovingly and competently to a disclosure or discovery of domestic abuse?”

In *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church*, Deepak Reju defines a child protection policy as “a set of self-imposed guidelines that describes how a church intends to protect and care for the children under its care.”¹ In developing a similar set of self-imposed guidelines for recognizing and responding to domestic abuse at TVC, I considered what the literature asserts about those who have been victims of abuse, those who perpetrate abuse, and best practices for the church in recognizing and responding to domestic abuse. A church policy and protocol for domestic abuse must address the protection of victims—knowing the warning signs, ensuring victims’ safety and helping them receive the care that they need. Similarly, the policy and protocol must also address the correction of abusers—the motives and false beliefs behind their abuse, their patterns of abuse, and how to best engage them toward repentance. Church leaders must provide clear pastoral guidance to aid the church in recognizing abuse and responding biblically to both victims and perpetrators, as well as how the church’s own structural systems and theological misconceptions sometimes embolden abusive people and increase the likelihood that churches will become safe places for them to abuse. The church must always be a safe place for victims to share their stories and receive protection and care, and for abusers to confess their sin and repent, but the church should never be a safe place for a controlling, manipulative, destructive persons to continue to wreak havoc in relationships and sow discord within the body of Christ. Writing and implementing a church domestic abuse policy and protocol can aid church leaders in making the church a place of peace. This chapter outlines and describes critical elements of constructing a

¹ Deepak Reju, *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014), 49.

domestic abuse policy and protocol such as the one that TVC developed and implemented in this project.

Prevalence in the Culture and the Church

Like the church, the home is not as safe as many would like to believe. Precise statistics are elusive for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of definitional consensus, the hidden nature of abuse, the manipulative nature of abusive people, and the unwillingness or inability of victims to report abuse.² However, even what is known is alarming. The most quoted and most up-to-date study on the cultural plight of intimate partner violence (IPV) is the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), first launched in 2010, by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The NISVS is an ongoing, nationally representative, random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey that assesses sexual violence, stalking, and IVP victimization among adult women and men in the United States.³ In the 2015 NISVS Data Brief, the most recent data set available, published in May 2018, researchers found that “about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner and reported an IPV-related impact during their lifetime.”⁴ The same 2015 data reported that an estimated 1 in 18 (5.4 percent or 6.5 million) women and about 1 in 20 (5.1 percent or 5.7 million) men in the United States had experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking

² Ola W. Barnett, Cindy L. Miller-Perrin, and Robin D. Perrin, *Family Violence across the Lifespan: An Introduction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 2.

³ Michele C. Black et al., *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report* (Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011), 1.

⁴ Sharon G. Smith et al., *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief* (Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control, 2018), 7.

by an intimate partner during the twelve months preceding the survey.⁵ Over one-third of both men and women have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner during their lifetime.⁶ The term “psychological aggression” was defined by the researchers as including both “expressive aggression” (such as name-calling, insulting, or humiliating an intimate partner, which might also be called verbal abuse), as well as “coercive control” (including behaviors intended to monitor, control, or threaten an intimate partner, sometimes also referred to as emotional or psychological abuse).⁷

It is generally accepted that, overall, far more women than men are victims of IVP. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over 80 percent of criminal IPV victims were female,⁸ and some of these attacks turned fatal. Of the 3,032 homicide incidents involving females in 2010 when the offender relationship was known, 39 percent were committed by an intimate partner.⁹ For that reason, it is generally standard practice in the literature to use the feminine personal pronouns (she, her, hers) to refer to abused person and the masculine personal pronouns (he, him, and his) to refer to the abuser, though it is absolutely recognized that men are sometimes the abused and women sometimes the abusers. It is also common practice in the literature to use the terms “domestic abuse,” “intimate partner abuse,” “domestic violence,” and “intimate partner violence” interchangeably. The terms *violence* or *batterer* do not apply in the literature exclusively to physical abuse or sexual abuse, but to the full spectrum of abusive words and actions.

⁵ Smith et al., *NISVS*, 8-9.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Shannan Catalano, *Intimate Partner Violence: Attributes of Victimization, 1993-2011* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2013), 3.

⁹ Ibid.

The Domestic Abuse Policy and the Domestic Abuse Protocol for TVC follow this standard practice.

Because domestic abuse is so prevalent in the culture, it is either naïve or arrogant to presume that it is not a serious problem in the church as well, especially given the systemic factors mentioned earlier. Misunderstandings and misapplications of important biblical doctrines such as a high view of marriage, gender complementarity, and a theology of suffering without a corresponding theology of oppression actually make some churches a breeding ground for domestic abuse. Nancy Nason-Clark and her team of researchers conducted a study of evangelical pastors in which they found that 83.2 percent of the pastors surveyed had counseled a woman who had an abusive husband or partner during the past year, and found in another study that 29 percent of pastors surveyed “had direct ongoing counseling experience with a woman in the congregation who was a victim of repeated, and severe, physical violence at the hands of her intimate partner.”¹⁰ Yet, in a 2016 Lifeway Research study, only 37 percent of 1,000 protestant pastors surveyed were able to answer “yes” to the question, “Has an adult in your church experienced domestic or sexual violence in the last three years?”¹¹ Of the Lifeway survey respondents, 47 percent answered, “Not that I know of.”

Pastor and counselor John Henderson reminds the church that there is no escaping the all-encompassing brokenness of a universe groaning under the curse of sin; and that the reality of abuse is a “blatant and painful proof of this brokenness.”¹² Church leaders will likely not be motivated to develop a church policy and protocol for domestic violence until they wake up to the painful reality that there is a high probability that the

¹⁰ Nancy Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 44.

¹¹ Lifeway Research, *Domestic Violence and the Church: Survey of Protestant Pastors* (Nashville: Lifeway Research, 2017), 6.

¹² John Henderson, *Abuse: Finding Hope in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012), 6.

brokenness of domestic abuse extends to *their* church. “An alarming number of clergy persons actually believe there are no abused women in their congregations,” mourns Rev. Robert S. Owens, pastor emeritus of the First Presbyterian Church in Honolulu, “but those of us who have been involved in the effort to help end the vicious cycle of spouse abuse know better.”¹³ A church domestic abuse policy should affirm to church leaders the statistical probability that this issue exists, or will exist, in their specific congregation. Once church leaders understand that domestic violence has touched their church already, or that it inevitably will, then the church domestic abuse policy must outline how leaders can recognize domestic abuse, so that they can respond to it with compassion, courage, and competence.

Recognizing Abuse

The reason many churches do not respond well to domestic abuse is because most church leaders do not know what it is. The church cannot effectively respond to abuse without accurately recognizing it. A church’s domestic abuse policy must define domestic abuse in such a way that volunteer and staff church leaders clearly know how to ascertain when it is occurring.

As mentioned in chapter 2, this project defines domestic abuse, or intimate partner abuse, as “the desecration of the image of God in one’s spouse (or intimate partner) through patterns of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or in actions, to gratify self.” This definition of domestic abuse was adopted by the elders of TVC in their Domestic Abuse Policy (see appendix 3). The implications of abuse as a double-desecration of the *imago Dei* in both the perpetrator and the victim, as well as a desecration of the creation mandate, have already been described. This section will

¹³ Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 6.

expound on the rest of this definition and explain how it can help church leaders recognize abuse.

Abuse Is Patterned Behavior

While few would argue that even one incident of a husband punching his wife with his fist, or forcing her to have sex with him, is abusive, many pastors and church leaders struggle to understand how the emotional, psychological, verbal, and economic forms of abusive behavior are differentiated from general sinfulness, human weakness, or spiritual immaturity. Many spouses are critical, harsh, sarcastic, jealous, defensive, or angry at times, but are not abusive. Abusive people exhibit a discernable and, eventually, quite predictable, pattern of behavior that is intended to manipulate and control another person for selfish ends. This pattern of controlling, coercive, destructive behaviors is one of the critical elements in recognizing abuse.

As with every important issue, a wide range of perspectives exist on how to define abuse—but a consistent theme in recognizing abuse is its ongoing nature that hardens into a pattern. Counselor and victim advocate Leslie Vernick asserts, “An emotionally destructive marriage is not usually diagnosed by looking at a single episode of sinful behavior (which we’re all capable of), but rather repetitive attitudes and behaviors that result in tearing someone down or inhibiting her growth.”¹⁴ Christian psychologist Diane Langberg also recognizes “a *pattern* of assaulting, coercing behavior or a pattern of obsessive, controlling behavior.”¹⁵ Likewise, Darby Strickland, a biblical counselor with the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF), observes “a pattern of coercive, controlling and punishing behaviors.”¹⁶ Henderson similarly

¹⁴ Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage: How to Find Your Voice and Reclaim Your Hope* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2013), 11.

¹⁵ Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2015), 256.

¹⁶ Darby Strickland, “Identifying Oppression in Marriages,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 30,

points out, “A godless pattern of abusive behavior.”¹⁷ This pattern of abusive behavior was first described by Lenore E. Walker in her groundbreaking 1979 book *The Battered Woman*, as “the cycle of violence.” In Walker’s pattern, abusive behavior tends to follow a fairly predictable three-phase cycle: a *tension-building* phase during which less severe forms of abuse occur as tensions escalate, an *acute* or crisis phase in which the abuser gives full expression to the tensions that have been building, and finally a calm or “honeymoon” phase characterized by *kindness and contrite loving behavior*, consisting of remorse (but not repentance), apologies, promises, and gift-giving.¹⁸ It is common for church leaders to mistake Walker’s tension-building phase for typical marriage conflict and to mistake her “honeymoon” phase for repentance. Both mistakes can be dangerous, and potentially even deadly, ones. Without intervention, the frequency and severity of the abuse tends to escalate with each repetition of the cycle.

In recent years, Shahida Arabi and other interventionists in domestic violence work have observed an alternative three-phase cycle (idealization-devaluation-discard¹⁹) among some chronically self-absorbed abusers. In this alternative cycle, the perpetrator initially idealizes his spouse, putting her on a pedestal. When the perpetrator’s sense of entitlement and control become threatened, he casts her off the pedestal and begins to devalue and belittle his partner. The acute abuse occurs in the discard phase—in which the abuse is most pronounced, and the victim becomes convinced of her worthlessness in the eyes of the abuser. Instead of apologizing and promising to change his behavior, the chronically self-absorbed person bullies the victim until the victim fights back. The abuser

no. 2 (2016): 11.

¹⁷ John Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel—Leader Notebook* (Mustang, OK: Dare 2 Dream, 2008), 294.

¹⁸ Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 55-70.

¹⁹ Shahida Arabi, *Power: Surviving & Thriving After Narcissistic Abuse* (Brooklyn, NY: Thought Catalog Books, 2017), 8-13.

then seizes the opportunity to play the victim and make the victim believe that she is the abuser. Thus, in this pattern, the victim is usually the one who apologizes, empowering the perpetrator until the next time control is threatened. As with Walker's cycle, professionals in the field have noticed that the abuse tends to escalate in frequency and intensity over time.²⁰

These general patterns certainly do not fit all experiences of abuse. The old adage applies, "If you've seen one case (of abuse), you've seen one case."²¹ Every abusive relationship is unique. However, it is helpful for church leaders to understand abuse as a pattern of behavior that tends to follow somewhat predictable cycles and that typically escalates over time. Church leaders often look at isolated behaviors instead of the broader context and see normative marriage conflict instead of tension-building, repentance instead of a honeymoon phase, and two-way abuse instead of blame-shifting and playing the victim. Misunderstanding the symptoms, church leaders often misdiagnose the malady and give deleterious advice. Listening to victims, believing them, and helping them see and recognize the patterns of abuse sooner saves lives and alleviates unnecessary suffering.

Abuse Is Intentional Behavior

Since abuse is about misusing power and control to get what one wants at the expense of another person, it is always intentional. Pastor and domestic abuse expert Al Miles claimed that every pastor needs to know that domestic abuse "is caused by the

²⁰ One such professional, Jeffrey Black, a licensed psychologist, said, Domestic violence is always on an escalating pattern. It always gets worse. . . . Whatever my gut instinct is about a particular marriage or a particular husband, I can never say to a woman, "well you won't be a statistic, or your husband is a non-escalating sinner." I must look at each woman I counsel as a statistic in the making. (Jeffrey S. Black, "Breaking the Silence of Domestic Violence," [Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation National Conference, Hope for the Suffering, Philadelphia, November 25, 2003])

²¹ Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Control and Violence in the Home* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2015), 117.

conscious decision and willful choice of perpetrators to use abusive tactics.”²² Ellen Pence, co-founder of Minnesota’s nationally-recognized Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, agrees. Pence asserts that abusive behaviors are not unintentional, but that each abusive act can be traced back to an intention of the abuser’s.²³ Consider from Psalm 10 how the oppressor “hotly pursues” (2a), devises “schemes” (2b), and “sits in ambush” (8a). His eyes “stealthily watch” for the helpless (8c). He “lurks in ambush” that he may seize the poor; he “seizes the poor when he draws them into his net” (9). Elsewhere in Scripture, abusive people “devise wrongs” (Ps 58:2) and their hearts “devise violence” (Prov 24:2). The heart of an abusive person devises and executes violence with intentionality. In the words of Powlison, “People think about using and abusing others. Violence and betrayal are not accidental but devised.”²⁴ Dark intentions lurk deep within the heart of abusive people and drive their harmful behavior. The abuser often lacks the self-awareness to recognize those dark intentions, for “God alone knows the hearts of all the sons of men” (1 Kgs 8:39), but they remain nevertheless.

Abuse Is Misusing Power

Powlison writes, “Whenever power is used to exploit the vulnerable abuse has occurred.”²⁵ It is almost universally agreed that one of the most important defining characteristics of abuse is a misuse, exploitation, or imbalance of power. Lundy Bancroft, probably one of the most articulate secular voices in the field of domestic abuse today, offers, “The term *abuse* is about *power*.” He goes on to explain, “The defining point of

²² Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 3.

²³ Ellen Pence, “Batterer Programs: Shifting from Community Collusion to Community Confrontation,” in *Treating Men Who Batter: Theory, Practice, and Programs*, ed. P. Lynn Caesar and L. Kevin Hamberger (New York: Springer Publishing, 1989), 36.

²⁴ David Powlison, “Predator, Prey, and Protector: Helping Victims Think and Act from Psalm 10,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 30.

²⁵ Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 197.

abuse is when the man starts to exercise power over the woman in a way that causes harm to her and creates a privileged status for him.”²⁶

Even the term *power* can seem like a vague notion. That is, unless one conceives of it as an element of the doctrine of the image of God. Understood as an aspect of human personhood, one could say that power is simply the capacity to control one’s context through use of one’s God-given personal capabilities. Power, then, is not morally bad. In fact, God originally commanded the man and woman to use their capabilities to have *dominion* over creation—using their unique capacities to arrange their physical environment according to the character and purposes of God (Gen 1:26). However, mankind’s fall into sin means those personal capabilities are now used to control their context for their own self-centered purposes. The *dominion* function is now misused. Instead of using influence for God’s loving purposes, abusers use their influence for selfish ends.

From their study of severe violence in intimate partner relationships, University of Washington professors, researchers, and clinicians Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, report, “Battering is always about the establishment of control, and batterers are men who not only have an extraordinary need for control, but who grow up convinced that whatever they need to do to control their partner is justified, including battering.”²⁷ Though Jacobson and Gottman note that “not all men who abuse their wives are batterers,” they also state that “virtually all batterers also abuse their wives emotionally,” and that “emotional abuse can act as a proxy for physical abuse by reminding battered women that they can be beaten at any time.”²⁸ It is hard to find a definition of domestic abuse given

²⁶ Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2002), 123-24.

²⁷ Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

by a subject matter expert that does not include this power-control dynamic. Pastor and biblical counselor Chris Moles writes, “Abuse is the result of a heart of pride which uses power as a means of gaining or maintaining control.”²⁹ Likewise, Darby Strickland observes, “One spouse seeking to control and dominate the other.”³⁰ Henderson elaborates that abusers use “physical, psychological, and/or emotional means to exert and obtain power and control over a spouse.”³¹ Justin and Lindsey Holcomb further delineate

a pattern of coercive, controlling, or abusive behavior that is used by one individual to gain or maintain power and control over another individual in the context of an intimate relationship. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, exploit, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound an intimate partner.³²

Although every case is unique, domestic abuse typically involves a misuse of power to gain and maintain control, and church policies and protocols must recognize and address this power-control dynamic.

Abuse Can Be Overt or Covert

Abuse comes in a wide variety of forms: physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, economic, spiritual, and psychological—and these forms typically overlap and co-occur in an abusive relationship. All are misuses of power. Some are overt, while others are more covert. Examples of overt misuses of power include: threats to incite fear (1 Kgs 19:2; Ps 73:8), limiting friendships or outside relationships, breaking treasured objects of the victim, restricting access to finances, public humiliation to degrade the victim (Matt 27:28-29), and forcing the victim to have sex (Jdg 19:22-27, 2 Sam 11:1-4, 2 Sam 13:1-22).

Church leaders need to also know that many abusers use more insidious, subtle, and covert means to reorder and control their victims. Proverbs 10:11 reminds, “The mouth

²⁹ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 28.

³⁰ Strickland, “Identifying Oppression in Marriages,” 11.

³¹ Henderson, *Equipped to Counsel*, 294.

³² Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 57.

of the wicked conceals violence.” David described an abusive man this way: “His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Ps 55:21). Covert abuse is often considered more damaging than overt abuse because, as Shahida Arabi writes, “There are no visible battle wounds to verify the abuse—only the aftermath of psychological terror. They will cultivate doubts that never existed, manufacture insecurities that were never present, rub salt on the wounds they know you don’t want opened.”³³ Covert forms of abuse include withdrawing (Prov 18:1), giving the silent treatment, and such creative terms as “gaslighting,” “hoovering,” triangulation, smear campaigns, and projection. Gaslighting is a technique named after a 1944 film, *Gaslight*, in which Charles Boyer convinces Ingrid Bergman that she is going insane. Jacobson and Gottman define *gaslighting* as “a systematic attack on the wife’s perception of reality.”³⁴ *Hoovering*, named after a popular brand of vacuum cleaner, is a tactic in which the abuser manipulatively attempts to draw the victim back into the abusive relationship when she is trying to get out of it. *Triangulation* is attempting to bring another person—a relative, a friend, a mistress, a pastor, or even a professional counselor—into the dynamic of the relationship to either create an ally or to incite jealousy.³⁵ Abusers sometimes conduct *smear campaigns* to depict the victim as the abuser.³⁶ Similarly, *projection* is shifting the blame for the abuse onto the victim.³⁷ Another common tactic is “word-twisting”³⁸ (Ps 56:5), sometimes followed by claiming he was “only joking” (Prov 26:18-19). All these covert tactics are intentional means, well recognized in the literature,

³³ Arabi, *Power*, 25.

³⁴ Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, 129.

³⁵ Arabi, *Power*, 15-17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

³⁸ Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010), 110-11.

to subtly manipulate by causing the victim to second-guess herself and doubt her own perception of reality. Like the fool who alternately rages and laughs (Prov 29:9), the abuser constantly throws the victim off balance with his unpredictable behavior.

Abuse Can Be Demonstrated in Words or Actions

James 3:9-10, referenced in chapter 2, asserts that words are often used to desecrate the image of God. Jesus also described verbal abuse in the Sermon on the Mount: “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt 5:22). Examples of verbal abuse include name-calling, guilt-tripping, put-downs, criticism, threats, and condemning speech. Solomon declared, “A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul” (Prov 18:7).

But abuse also takes the form of actions, which are typically consistent with the better-known physical and sexual forms of abuse: slapping, scratching, biting, blocking, kicking, shoving, choking, hitting, stabbing, shooting, assuming an aggressive stance or posture, and all forms of sexual assault.

The Motive of Abuse Is Self-Gratification

The motive of abuse is ultimately self-gratification and self-glorification: to get what one wants at the expense of the image of God in himself and in another person.

Domestic abuse is the most extreme expression of James 4:1-4:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

All human conflict, James says, is the result of the passions of the heart waging war. Personal desires can become so strong that a person is willing to sin against another person (and therefore God) to get them, to keep them, or to punish or retaliate when denied

them. This willingness to sin can be expressed in a variety of ways, including speaking angrily, hurtfully or spitefully, isolating or withdrawing, rejecting correction or rebuke, blaming, judging—all with the goal of getting what one wants. Chris Moles says, “we do what we do because we want what we want.”³⁹ Al Miles takes it a step further: “The violator’s goal is to get what they want, when they want it.”⁴⁰ Desires have become demands, which signals entitlement. Darby Strickland states that the abusive person is mastered by his entitlement in such a way that he “routinely feel justified in their demands and believe that what they want trumps everything else.” The core attitude is “I have a *right* to the things I want, and I will *punish* whoever stands in the way of my desires.”⁴¹ This core attitude of the oppressor is truly James 4:1-4 taken to the extreme. In the most severe cases, an oppressor will literally kill to get what he wants. And even if he does not kill the body he will often kill the soul, in an endless pattern of covert and overt words and actions that systematically desecrates the *imago Dei* in his spouse or intimate partner, and in himself.

A church must have a working definition of domestic abuse that includes each of the elements described in this section. The church domestic abuse policy must explain clearly to all who are charged with implementing the policy—members, lay leaders, elders, deacons, staff—what meets the requirements for domestic abuse and to be able to recognize perpetrators and victims in their midst. It should also provide for ongoing training in how to recognize these characteristics of abuse. Included in TVC’s Domestic Abuse Protocol is a compilation of markers of relational abuse from John Henderson, Bethlehem Baptist Church, and TVC (see appendix 4).

³⁹ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 36.

⁴⁰ Miles, *Domestic Violence*, 3.

⁴¹ Darby Strickland, “Entitlement: When Expectations Go Toxic,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 29, no. 1 (2015): 20.

Responding to Abuse

Recognizing domestic abuse in the church calls for an effective protocol for response. What should God’s people do in response to what has been revealed? The Domestic Abuse Protocol adopted by TVC elders visualizes the appropriate care protocol proceeding in three overlapping stages, once domestic abuse has been disclosed or discovered. The process is illustrated in figure 1.

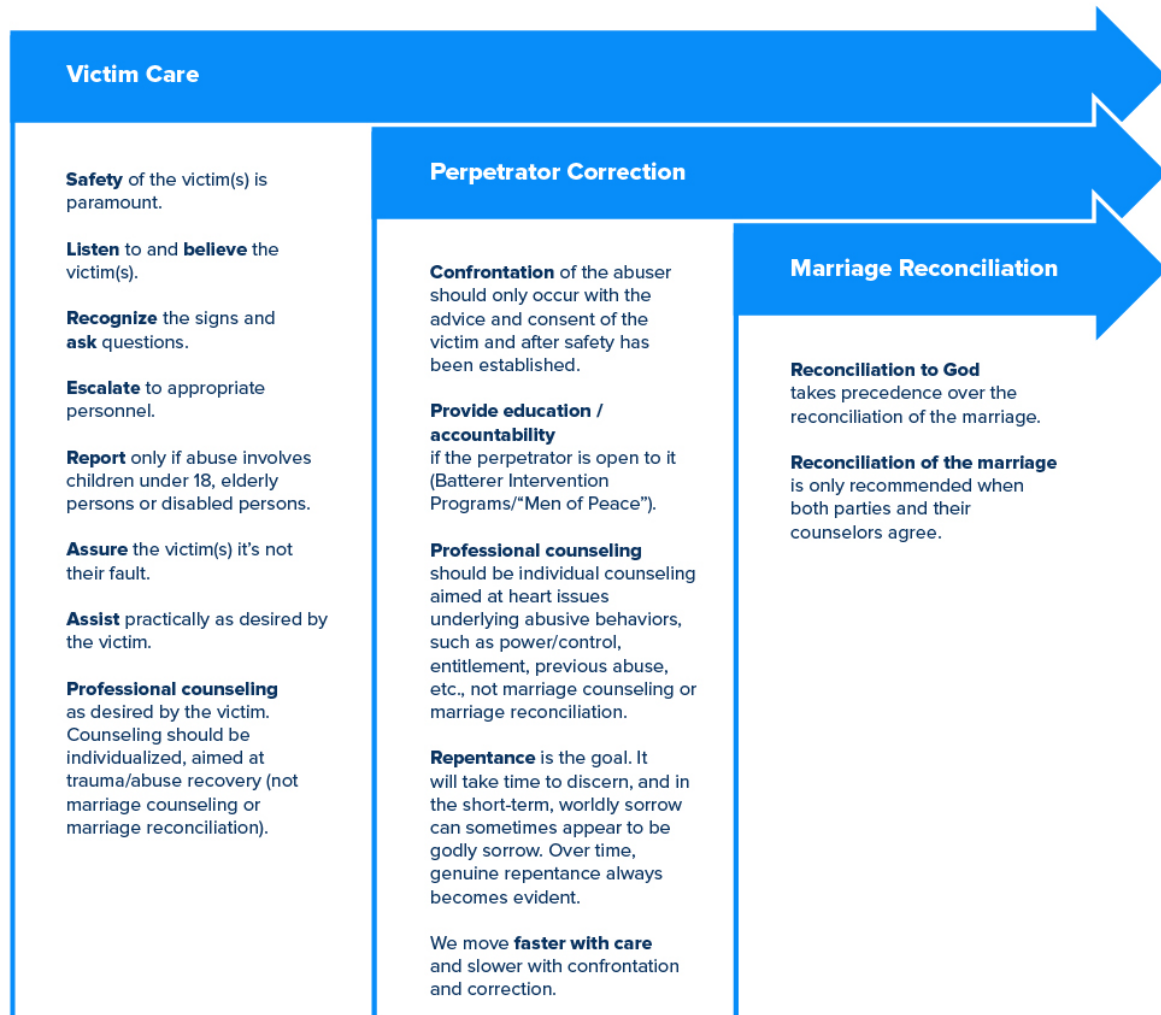


Figure 1. Domestic abuse response protocol

Figure 1 illustrates that the church’s response to domestic abuse should always begin with caring for the victim, followed in due course by correcting the perpetrator, while

continuing victim care. The final stage of the process, while continuing to care for the victim and correct the perpetrator, is the reconciliation of the relationship, if possible. Each subject matter expert and reference work consulted recommend essentially this same process.

Victim Care

The elders of TVC have affirmed that domestic abuse care at TVC should always begin with the victim. Victim care starts with ensuring the safety of the victim. Church leaders should listen to victims and believe their stories. Church leaders should escalate disclosures of abuse or concerns about potential abuse to the appropriate domestic abuse care leader at their campus immediately for further direction, including direction on further reporting requirements. Additionally, church leaders should assure the victim verbally and behaviorally that the abuse is not her fault. Practical assistance should be offered as resources are available and as desired by the victim. Finally, the victim will likely need to consult with a professional counselor with experience in trauma and abuse recovery.

Safety. Domestic abuse response always begins with the victim. Victim safety is paramount⁴² during this initial stage and should be the overarching principle guiding every action taken.⁴³ Protection of the vulnerable is part of the essence of “pure and undefiled religion” (Jas 1:27). In an abusive home, the vulnerable include children, the elderly, and any disabled adults that live in the home as well. In fact, many jurisdictions have mandatory reporting laws specific to those populations. So, church leaders should ask about other family members who may be in harm’s way. Abuse victims need to hear from

⁴² Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 260.

⁴³ Cathy Holtmann, “Calling Women to Safety,” *Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes: A Challenge to Churches and Their Leaders*, ed. Nancy Nason-Clark, Catherine Clark Kroeger, and Barbara Fisher-Townsend (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 73.

church leaders that it is biblical to protect oneself from violent people (1 Sam 21:10). As soon as possible after a disclosure, someone should work with the victim to develop a “safety plan”; a plan that details specific action steps the victim will take to protect herself and her children (as well as other vulnerable family members), while they remain in the home, in the event that they decide to leave the home, or in the event that they find themselves in an emergency. Insofar as possible, a trained subject matter expert⁴⁴ should assist the victim to develop a safety plan as soon as possible after a disclosure.⁴⁵ A safety plan would typically include such specifics as safe places where the person could go (shelters, or homes of relatives or church members) if they need to spend a few days, a few weeks, or an even longer period of time outside of the home, as well as other important logistical considerations, such as how to obtain necessary financial resources, legal counsel (including reporting options and protective orders), and medical and psychological care.⁴⁶ If the victim has children, a safety plan would typically include provisions for the children, including sometimes packing a bag for each child with a few essentials in case mom and children need to leave the home quickly. It is well known that leaving is the most dangerous time for an abuse victim. Holcomb and Holcomb observe that over 75 percent of separated women suffer post-separation abuse. Approximately 75 percent of all domestic homicides occur while the victim is trying to leave their abuser or has just left the

⁴⁴ Trained experts will obviously vary in their approach to counseling, to marriage issues, and to many other factors at play in such a complex situation. This variance should not prevent church leaders from making use of their expertise on how to protect victims of abuse. So long as the limitations of their expertise are recognized, such advice can be a vital aspect of an overall biblical strategy of care and guidance.

⁴⁵ Safety-plan templates can be found in the following resources: Holcomb and Holcomb, *Is It My Fault?*, 187-97; Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 119-22; and Brad Hambrick, “How to Develop a Safety Plan for Domestic Violence,” accessed on July 7, 2018, <http://bradhambrick.com/safetyplan/>.

⁴⁶ Terri S. Watson, “Assessment and Treatment of Intimate Partner Violence: Integrating Psychological and Spiritual Approaches,” in *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, ed. Heather Davediuk Gingrich and Fred C. Gingrich (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 150.

relationship.⁴⁷ A safety plan can help mitigate the danger of this courageous and difficult decision. Because of the trauma of suffering abuse, trauma counselor Shannon Thomas encourages assessing victim's potential of self-harm or suicide as part of safety assessment and planning.⁴⁸

Listen and believe. Either the victim has disclosed abuse to someone in the church, or someone in the church who has been trained to recognize domestic abuse has approached the victim with some questions or concerns regarding the potential of abuse. A common mistake that church leaders often make is to initially “investigate” a victim's disclosure of abuse by immediately engaging the alleged abuser. This is a very dangerous practice that could further imperil the victim.⁴⁹ Prior to being trained, half of TVC's elders, staff, and lay leadership answered this question affirmatively: “When abuse is reported, it is important to talk to the other spouse/partner to investigate the truth of the report.” This response provokes a few questions. Are church leaders, unless they possess professional credentials, qualified to investigate cases of domestic abuse? If abuse is occurring, what would a church leader expect to hear from the alleged perpetrator? How might he respond to his spouse for bringing his abuse to light? But perhaps the most pertinent question is this: why not simply believe the one who has come forward, usually at great personal risk, to state that she is a victim of domestic abuse? Certainly, the victim would know more from being inside the marriage than one who is peering into the relationship from the outside. Because of the hidden and sinister nature of abuse, the person committing the abuse is not the person church leaders think they know; and he may be capable of far more than church leaders can imagine. The victim knows all too

⁴⁷ Holcomb and Holcomb, *Is It My Fault?*, 65.

⁴⁸ Shannon Thomas, *Healing from Hidden Abuse: A Journey through the Stages of Recovery from Psychological Abuse* (Southlake, TX: Mast Publishing, 2016), 65.

⁴⁹ Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence*, 17.

well who her partner is behind closed doors. Experts in the field overwhelmingly urge church leaders to listen to victims, to believe them, and to validate their experience when they disclose that abuse is occurring.⁵⁰ After training on these dynamics, the elders of TVC wanted to clarify in their Domestic Abuse Protocol that they expect all church leaders to listen to victims of abuse, to believe their story, and to act accordingly.

Recognize and ask. Domestic abuse is often discovered through a process of care, rather than directly disclosed. TVC leaders are given training in domestic abuse awareness, with the goal that they might more quickly spot signs of potential abuse and ask about it. The presenting problem might be depression, anxiety, her husband’s anger problem, general marriage conflict, or any number of other issues. Branson and Silva advise that the victim may be trying to cover for the perpetrator out of a sense of duty, fear, or love, and therefore hesitant to mention abuse.⁵¹ Others may not be sure if what they are experiencing is abusive. Holcomb and Holcomb maintain that very few victims self-identify as experiencing abuse.⁵² In such situations, abuse may come to light because church leaders have been taught to recognize it through a well-crafted policy and frequent training and have asked some caring questions regarding the relationship. Leslie Vernick suggests six helpful questions church leaders can ask—followed by the “When? Where? Why?” questions to gain more information:

1. Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in this relationship?
2. Have you ever been an unwilling participant in a sexual act?
3. Have you ever felt fearful around your partner?
4. Are there times you don’t trust your partner’s honesty?
5. Do you have the freedom to be yourself, make decisions, give your input and say no to things? If not, what happens when you try?

⁵⁰ Nason-Clark, Kroeger, and Fisher-Townsend, *Responding to Abuse in Christian Homes*, 172.

⁵¹ Branson and Silva, *Violence among Us*, 69.

⁵² Holcomb and Holcomb, *Is It My Fault?*, 31.

6. Can you respectfully challenge and confront the attitudes, decisions or behaviors of your partner? When you try, what happens?⁵³

To go deeper, and potentially expose any patterns of abuse that may exist, the pastor or church leader can ask the following four crisis-intervention questions from Lenore Walker's Survivor Therapy approach:

1. Can you remember the first time this happened?
2. Can you tell me about the last time?
3. What is a typical time like?
4. What was the worst time?⁵⁴

Questions like these can be very helpful to expose patterns of misuse of power and control in a relationship and to help determine the presence and extent of relational abuse. To determine the potential presence of abuse in the relationship, church leaders are listening for an imbalance of power and control in the relationship, a consistent lack of mutuality, lack of freedom to have one's own opinions or make one's own choices, a consistent indifference to the other's needs, feelings, desires, or thoughts, blame-shifting, minimizing, or denying on the part of the abuser, or an attitude of entitlement on the part of the abuser.⁵⁵

Escalate and report. It is also critical for the first responder to confidentially report the abuse both internally within the church (based upon whatever escalation protocol the church has established, generally to the internal subject matter expert) and externally to the appropriate civil authorities if appropriate or required by law. It is important to train church leaders that confidentiality cannot ever be guaranteed, as certain issues require reporting—either internally, externally, or both. However, church leaders must also

⁵³ Leslie Vernick, "Three Common Mistakes People Helpers Make When Working with Destructive Marriages," accessed on July 7, 2018 at <https://www.leslievernick.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Three-Common-Mistakes-Workshop-Handout.pdf>. She has provided a list of sixty-one similar questions in Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, 17-25.

⁵⁴ Lenore E. A. Walker, *Abused Women and Survivor Therapy: A Practical Guide for the Psychotherapist* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1994), 404.

⁵⁵ Vernick, "Three Common Mistakes," 2-3.

recognize that an abuse victim places herself at significant risk, perhaps even grave danger, making such a disclosure in the church. It is wise to handle such a disclosure with great discretion, on a need-to-know basis only, within the church. Unless a child, elderly person, or disabled adult living in the home is endangered by the abuse, there is typically no duty to report the abuse to authorities. Unless there is a mandatory duty to report, church leaders should discuss options for the victim and stand with the victim in whatever decision she wants to make, as reporting the abuse can also put the victim in extreme danger. If there is a mandatory duty to report (a child in the home is also in danger, for example), the church should advise the adult victim that they are legally-bound to report the abuse and assist her (in whatever ways she desires) to adequately plan for her safety.

Assure and assist. Whether the abuse is disclosed by the victim, or recognized by a caring friend, pastor, or church member, it is important for the first responder to listen to and believe the victim, while assuring her that the abuse is not her fault and offering any practical assistance that they are able to give (Jas 2:15-16), including local shelters, counseling centers, and domestic abuse agencies.⁵⁶ Church leaders should give the victim options for assistance and ask what kind of assistance would be most helpful, rather than insisting on helping in certain ways.⁵⁷ Many people believe that insisting or strongly suggesting a certain kind of help is the best way to show someone how much they really care. But for someone who has been controlled and belittled for many years, this kind of well-intentioned gesture only reinforces the belief that they are not able to make good personal life decisions on their own. It is important when working with abuse victims to constantly bear in mind the power imbalance that has reordered this person's relational world for years, and to do everything that they can to assist the domestic violence victim in making his or her own decisions.

⁵⁶ Branson and Silva, *Violence among Us*, 75-78.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

Counseling. Individual counseling can be very helpful for the victim of abuse if the resources are available to provide it. A professional counselor with experience and specialization in treatment for abuse and trauma would be ideal. Most jurisdictions have abuse shelters or agencies that can provide free or low-cost counseling for victims, or referrals to other agencies that can. However, marriage counseling or church couples-oriented programs are not recommended in the early stages in cases of domestic abuse for a variety of reasons, which will be explained later.

In Scripture, when the oppressed cry out to God, he hears them, and he does something about it. God sees the oppressed. He hears the oppressed. And he acts on behalf of the oppressed to deliver them. When Sarai oppressed Hagar in Genesis 16, the angel of the LORD found her (v. 7), promised to multiply her offspring, provided protection and provision for her (v. 10), and told her that the LORD has listened to her affliction (v. 11). In response, Hagar calls him “a God who sees me” and says, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me” (v. 13). Of Laban’s oppression of Jacob in Genesis 31, Jacob said, “God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands” (v. 42). In response to Egypt’s oppression of Israel, Exodus 2:23-25 says,

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

TVC domestic abuse victim care protocol is designed to redeem the desecrated image of God by seeing, hearing, and acting as He does—extending compassion, protection, and care to the oppressed in our midst.

Perpetrator Correction

David soberly declares that God “hates the wicked and the one who loves violence” (Ps 11:5). Because the Lord is holy, he loves righteous deeds (Ps 11:7a), but his judgment of the wicked and those who love violence is so severe it is compared to a rainstorm of coals, fire, and sulfur, and a scorching wind (Ps 11:6). The church images

God's justice to a perpetrator of abuse through corrective care (church discipline) for the good of his soul (1 Cor 5:5). TVC's protocol for domestic abuse outlines four elements of correction for perpetrators—confrontation, education and accountability, counseling, and repentance. Repentance is always the hoped-for goal of corrective care in the church. However, as will be discussed later, repentance takes time to discern, particularly when an abuser is using covert tactics to hide the abuse. Often, the first instinct of church leaders when abuse is disclosed or discovered is to engage the perpetrator, but premature confrontation can be dangerous for the victim until she is safe. Thus, TVC has chosen to not engage the perpetrator about abuse without the consent and advice of the victim. Once the perpetrator of abuse is confronted, the church is responsible to teach him and hold him accountable through the church's corrective care (church discipline) process. Professional counseling or a Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) can be one means of education/accountability, along with church pastoral involvement, if the perpetrator of the abuse demonstrates motivation to repent. If the perpetrator does not initially demonstrate conviction of sin, professional counseling or a BIP program may be the only viable ministry to him until he is broken over his sin.

Confrontation. Drawing on over ten years as a domestic violence interventionist as well as a pastor, Chris Moles warns that those who confront an abuser should not only expect resistance, but “absolutely count on it.”⁵⁸ When, with the advice and consent of the victim, the church does engage the perpetrator of abuse, church leaders can and should expect resistance for several reasons. First, because abusive behavior is inherently manipulative, perpetrators of abuse tend to defend their behavior by denying it, minimizing it, and blaming others.⁵⁹ According to Nason-Clark et al., the following

⁵⁸ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 34.

⁵⁹ Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model* (New York: Springer, 1993), 50.

responses are common: “I am not violent.” “I want my family back.” “I want things to return to normal.” “Why won’t anyone listen to me?” “Why won’t my wife just do as I say and then everything would be fine?” “Why were the police called?” “Why do I have to come to group?” “Why am I being asked to change?” “Why won’t everybody just leave me alone?”⁶⁰ Church leaders can expect to hear the church version of some of these responses, such as “Why is the church getting involved?” and “Are you talking to her about her sin in the relationship as well?” These responses demonstrate the truth of Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,” but even a more contrite response cannot be trusted, given the level of deceit and subversion that is often the case in domestic abuse.

Second, because abuse tends to thrive in an atmosphere of chaos, church leaders will find walking with perpetrators of abuse to be very confusing. In his work with destructive men over a period of fifteen years, Lundy Bancroft and his colleagues observed the five puzzling phenomena:

His version of the abuse is worlds apart from hers, he gets insanely jealous, but in other ways he seems entirely rational, he succeeds in getting people to take his side against her, during some incidents he seems to lose control, but certain other controlling behaviors of his appear very calculated, and sometimes he seems to be really changing, but it tends to vanish.⁶¹

Finally, because perpetrators of abuse tend to lack self-awareness, many are sincerely self-deceived about their behavior. In *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, Cornelius Plantinga compares self-deception about sin to a narcotic that tranquilizes a person’s spiritual central nervous system:

What’s devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong notes in our lives, we cannot play right ones or even recognize them in the performances of others. Eventually we make ourselves religiously so unmusical that we miss both the exposition and the recapitulation of the main themes God plays in human life.⁶²

⁶⁰ Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence*, 94.

⁶¹ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 11-20.

⁶² Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids:

While Plantinga’s words apply to all sinners to some extent, most who have worked with domestic violence perpetrators would claim that their ears are even less sensitive to the wrong notes in their lives than most. “They have little self-awareness and are profoundly self-deceived about their own behavior and intentions,”⁶³ writes Darby Strickland. She has identified three aspects to abuser self-deception: they are blind to the destructiveness of their behavior, they feel justified in the way they treat others, and they view themselves as blameless.⁶⁴ Bancroft agrees: “An abuser almost never does anything that he himself considers morally unacceptable. He may hide what he does because he thinks other people would disagree with it, but he feels justified inside.”⁶⁵ Churches that do not confront perpetrators of abuse and hold them accountable for their behavior collude with the abuser and minimize the abuse. But in their confrontation and accountability, church leaders must consider the safety of the victim and the high likelihood that the abuser they confront will be defensive, manipulative, and profoundly self-deceived.

Education/accountability. In working with perpetrators of abuse, experts agree that holding the abuser accountable for change is critical.⁶⁶ When perpetrators of abuse are resistant to engagement by the church, the church must continue to support the safety of the victim through whatever means are available while holding the perpetrator accountable through the church’s corrective care process. Every church’s process is unique, and the process would likely vary based upon the particular circumstances of the abuse, the membership status of the perpetrator, and the perpetrator’s motivation to change. At TVC, one or more elders are assigned to the case and continue to call the perpetrator to

William B. Eerdmans, 1995), xiii.

⁶³ Strickland, “Identifying Oppression in Marriages,” 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17-18.

⁶⁵ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 34-35.

⁶⁶ Jacobson and Gottman, *When Men Batter Women*, 210.

repentance for the abuse, as well as various sin issues underlying the abuse, such as defensiveness (minimization, denial, and blaming), entitlement, misuse of power, and false beliefs about headship and marriage. The elders and other church leaders are trained to help the perpetrator identify the heart motivations for his abuse, using questions like the following offered by Chris Moles: “What did you want to see happen? What did you want to avoid? How has your behavior benefitted you? What could you have done differently?”⁶⁷ Until the perpetrator is willing to take responsibility for his sin, the church’s corrective care process must continue along a 1 Corinthians 5 or Matthew 18 path, depending upon the situation.

If the perpetrator demonstrates a desire to repent, the elder(s) and TVC’s care department continues a process of individual discipleship and accountability that could include the member being asked to join a men’s group through TVC’s Recovery ministry, a secular BIP, and professional counseling. BIP programs are based on the social-learning theory of aggression—the theory that violence is a learned behavior that can be changed as perpetrators learn nonviolent methods of coping with anger and stress.⁶⁸ It is important that the church be willing to work with community counselors and agencies who have greater experience in responding to domestic abuse. These programs will generally be secular in nature and thus void of the gospel of Jesus Christ; therefore, they are not an adequate replacement for the personal care of the church. Rather, church leaders should see this as behavioral reinforcement for the goal of reducing patterns of oppression and violence. These programs cannot change the heart, but for church leaders, that is not the goal in using these programs. The goal is the increased safety of the victim and the community through greater awareness and accountability for the perpetrator. Ellen Pence,

⁶⁷ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 34.

⁶⁸ Albert R. Roberts, “Intervention with the Abusive Partner,” in *Battered Women and Their Families: Intervention Strategies and Treatment Programs*, ed. Albert R. Roberts (New York: Springer, 1984), 89.

creator of the “Duluth Model” of intervention in domestic abuse cases, is also credited with originating the idea of Coordinated Community Response (CCR) for domestic abuse. Pence maintains,

When batterer counseling programs are not tied to a much larger community system of controls and accountability, they are used by abusers to get back into their homes, to win court and custody battles, to avoid criminal and civil court sanctions and proceedings, and to convince their partners that they are changing when, in fact, there has been no true altering of the power dynamics in the relationship.⁶⁹

Churches that are effective in preventing and responding to domestic abuse are churches that are willing to embrace and contribute to coordinated community response efforts and bring the gospel into those efforts.

In exercising corrective care, the church demonstrates a proper use of power toward those who have been committed to its improper use. “Power is for flourishing” asserts Andy Crouch in *Playing God*,⁷⁰ while abusers use it for tyranny. Goggin and Strobel apply James 3:13-18 to describe these two ways of power: “the way from above and the way from below.”⁷¹ Crouch describes a similar concept—the two dimensions of power: authority and vulnerability—in *Strong and Weak*. “Flourishing,” argues Crouch, “requires both authority *and* vulnerability in equal measure.”⁷² Thus, helping perpetrators of abuse grow in vulnerability and relinquish authority (to church leaders, to a counselor, to their spouse) can be significant. Men need a redeemed view of power, position, and authority, described in texts such as Matthew 20/Mark 10, Ephesians 5:21-33, Philippians 2:1-11, Colossians 3:19, and 1 Peter 3:7, and demonstrated by the church’s exercise of her

⁶⁹ Pence, “Batterer Programs,” 35.

⁷⁰ Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 37

⁷¹ Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, *The Way of the Dragon or The Way of the Lamb: Searching for Jesus’ Path of Power in a Church That Has Abandoned It* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 8.

⁷² Andy Crouch, *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk, and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 94.

God-given power for the flourishing of God’s people. As Martin Luther King astutely observed shortly before his assassination,

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.⁷³

Counseling. Counseling domestic abuse perpetrators is complex and should wherever possible be conducted by a professional or an individual trained in working with perpetrators. As with victims, couples’ counseling is not recommended until much later in the process. Pastors and church leaders should understand best practices in counseling perpetrators of abuse, as well as the nuances involved, so that they can make intelligent referrals. In the literature, the most common therapy modality is individual counseling, and the treatment of choice for perpetrators of domestic violence is an approach that focuses the abuser’s thought patterns (cognitions), as well as his behaviors. This is owing to a long-standing theoretical belief that domestic abuse “consists of several covert (cognitive) and overt (behavioral) components.”⁷⁴ Bancroft, Silverman, and Ritchie reiterate that the “overarching behavioral characteristic of the batterer is the imposition of a pattern of control over his partner,” carried out through an array of tactics.⁷⁵ They also point out that the overarching cognitive characteristic is entitlement.⁷⁶

Elaborating on the pattern of entitlement, Branson and Silva assert, “[The abuser] sees his rights, opinions, and desires as more important than those of his wife or

⁷³Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 38.

⁷⁴ L. Kevin Hamberger and Jeffrey M. Lohr, “Proximal Causes of Spouse Abuse: A Theoretical Analysis for Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions,” in Caesar and Hamberger, *Treating Men Who Batter*, 55.

⁷⁵ Lundy Bancroft, Jay G. Silverman, and Daniel Ritchie, *The Batterer as Parent*, 2nd ed., *Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

children. He is so preoccupied with getting his needs met (narcissistic) that he feels misunderstood, not wrong.⁷⁷ Bancroft states flatly, “An abuser who does not relinquish his core entitlements will not remain nonabusive.”⁷⁸ In the evangelical church, two core entitlements for many abusive husbands are marriage (that they are entitled to be married, and to have a certain type of marriage) and their role as head (that this position entitles them to power over their wives). In fact, research has confirmed that relationships in which abuse is present “have more stereotyped sex-role attitudes and more traditional views on marriage.”⁷⁹ Relinquishing these core entitlements, as well as developing a kingdom view of power, position, and authority, are often important goals for a perpetrator in counseling.

The etiology of domestic abuse also consists of a constellation of other factors that trained clinicians can observe and treat, although only the Lord can produce the necessary motivation to change. Donald G. Dutton’s research on perpetrators reveals issues such as

exaggerated needs for dominance vis-à-vis their wives, poor verbal skills to enable them to establish such dominance, poor access to their emotions, exaggerated anxiety about relationship issues, and a learning history that reinforced the use of violence as a means of establishing control.⁸⁰

In addition to the factors previously mentioned, Murphy and Eckhardt have observed the following clinically-relevant issues in counseling perpetrators of abuse: depression and anxiety, negative emotions, attachment issues, personality disorders, and substance use and abuse.⁸¹ Evidence-based best practice for individual therapy for IPV perpetrators

⁷⁷ Branson and Silva, *Violence among Us*, 34.

⁷⁸ Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?*, 345.

⁷⁹ Christy F. Telch and Carol Ummerl Linnquist, “Violent versus Nonviolent Couples: A Comparison of Patterns,” *Psychotherapy* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 247.

⁸⁰ Donald G. Dutton, *The Domestic Assault of Women: Psychological and Criminal Justice Perspectives* (Newton, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1988), 68.

⁸¹ Christopher M. Murphy and Christopher I. Eckhardt, *Treating the Abusive Partner: An*

generally recommends a cognitive-behavioral approach that can address this multifactorial etiology, while also addressing the cognitive distortions underlying the abuse.⁸² Murphy and Eckhardt have advanced a four-phase individualized cognitive-behavioral treatment model for abusive partners that includes enhancing motivational readiness to change, enhancing safety and stability to prevent future conflicts from escalating into abuse, enhancing relationship skills, and relapse prevention and trauma recovery.⁸³ Additionally, Stephens and Walker wisely urge that “cognitive behavioral treatment for male Fundamentalist and Evangelical perpetrators of IPV also incorporate the use of scriptural reframing of passages that such men have used in support of committing abusive acts.”⁸⁴ A competent pastor or church leader could certainly come alongside the counselor and the counselee to facilitate this teaching, as part of the “education and accountability” component of correction. Education, accountability, and professional counseling initiatives all have repentance as their ultimate goal.

Repentance. Most experts agree that any possibility of change hinges on the perpetrator admitting (owning) that he alone is responsible for the abuse.⁸⁵ Many respected interventionists report that change is possible.⁸⁶ Men acting abusively rarely change in

Individualized Cognitive-Behavioral Approach (New York: Guilford, 2005), 19-49.

⁸² Christopher M. Murphy, Laura A. Meis, and Christopher I Eckhardt, “Individual Services and Individual Therapy for Partner Abuse Perpetrators,” in *Psychological and Physical Aggression in Couples: Causes and Interventions*, ed. K. Daniel O’Leary and Erica M. Woodin (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009), 211-31.

⁸³ Murphy and Eckhardt, *Treating the Abusive Partner*, 7.

⁸⁴ Rachel L. Stephens and Donald F. Walker, “Addressing Intimate Partner Violence in White Evangelical and Fundamentalist Churches,” in *Religion and Men’s Violence against Women*, ed. Andy J. Johnson (New York: Springer, 2015), 218.

⁸⁵ Sara Elinoff Acker, *Unclenching Our Fists: Abusive Men on the Journey to Nonviolence* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2013), 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

isolation. Breaking the silence, taking responsibility, and being challenged by others is critical.⁸⁷ As long as patterns of abuse continue, the abuser's sorrow is worldly sorrow, not godly sorrow (2 Cor 7:9-10). Only genuine heart change, resulting in fruit-bearing repentance, can interrupt these patterns of abuse. Godly sorrow takes time to become evident.⁸⁸ One should be skeptical of change that seems to happen too quickly (Prov 26:24-26). Phil Munroe offers the following questions to help assess an abuser's repentance.

Does the abuser: openly acknowledge abusive behavior and its impact on the victim? accept full responsibility for actions without excuse? accept the consequences of the abuse without demand for trust or forgiveness? spontaneously seek to make restitution or to offer economic support without demand for things in return? give physical and emotional space for the victim to receive help from others? accept the ministry of discipline, accountability, counseling, etc. with joy? acknowledge that the fruit of change takes time to develop and so sees discipleship as a lifelong project? show evidence of a growing life of prayer, reading of the Word, and increasing measure of the fruits of the Spirit?⁸⁹

Abuse is not primarily a criminal problem, an anger problem, a marriage problem, or the spouse's problem. Abuse is a sin problem residing in the heart of the abusive person.⁹⁰ Author and pastor Richard Phillips writes, "the main threat against which a man must protect his wife is his own sin." Phillips quotes a friend:

I used to think that if a man came into my house to attack my wife, I would certainly stand up to him. But then I came to realize that the man who enters my house and assaults my wife every day is me, through my anger, my harsh words, my complaints, and my indifference.⁹¹

Repentance is the only true and lasting answer for such sin.

⁸⁷ Acker, *Unclenching Our Fists*, 33.

⁸⁸ Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God*, 263.

⁸⁹ Phil Munroe, "Abusers and True Repentance," *Christian Counseling Today* 13, no. 3 (2005): 48-49.

⁹⁰ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 9-17.

⁹¹ Richard D. Phillips, *The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2010), 118-19.

Marriage Reconciliation (If Possible)

God's people love reconciliation because God loves reconciliation. In Christ, God has reconciled his people to himself, is reconciling the world to himself, and has entrusted this message of reconciliation (the gospel) to his people (2 Cor 5:18-19). Thus, the primary goal of gospel ministry to parties in an abusive relationship is that all parties would be reconciled to God. Reconciliation of the marriage (where possible) always must be a desirable, but secondary, goal.

Reconciliation to God. During the initial stages of care and correction in the wake of domestic abuse, some form of marital separation is often necessary and helpful. Separation might take the form of physical separation, with one party moving to another location or another bedroom within the home, or it may take the form of abstinence from physical intimacy. Separation is often necessary to stop the abuse long enough for the victim(s) to find safety and a measure of healing. Separation may be helpful in giving both parties space to pursue their relationship with the Lord without distraction (1 Cor 7:5), or even for parties who are not believers to see their need of him. One or both parties may have loved the marriage, or the idea of being married, more than God. One or both parties may have believed lies about God and the gospel that have led them to this place.⁹² Healing in such cases necessarily involves setting aside the marriage temporarily for the spiritual health of both parties. David Livingston points out the irony: "Our notions of the sacredness of marriage may need to dissolve in many cases, ironically, to make room for the genuine healing power of the divine."⁹³ During this season, both spouses' reconciliation to God takes priority over the reconciliation of their marriage.

⁹² Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, 198-200.

⁹³ David J. Livingston, *Healing Violent Men: A Model for Christian Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 57.

One aspect of separation already mentioned is abstaining from conjoint counseling that is marriage-focused. “It’s too dangerous to discuss problems of marriage until everyone is safe,”⁹⁴ writes counselor Grant Martin, specifically addressing the safety issue. Martin continues, “Any problems with conflict resolution or communication cannot be realistically discussed while the husband is blatantly abusing power. Trust and confidence cannot be developed unless safety is achieved.”⁹⁵ CCEF’s Winston Smith adds that the typical marriage counseling approach of asking each partner to accept responsibility for contributing to marital problems “can excite the blame-shifting tendency of the abuser and become an occasion for more abuse.”⁹⁶ In this case, the marriage counseling office actually inadvertently colludes with the abuser and furthers the abuse. The appropriate time for conjoint counseling is when the perpetrator demonstrates fruit of repentance and has developed healthy relational patterns that diminish the likelihood of future violence, and the victim has experienced enough healing that being in the same room with her abuser talking about sensitive subjects is not unsafe or traumatic. TVC has chosen to recommend marriage reconciliation work or conjoint counseling only when both parties and their counselors agree that these objectives have been achieved.

Reconciliation of the relationship. When both parties and their individual counselors agree, careful work can begin to repair the relationship and set it up to display the gospel. Not a lot of literature is available on reconciling a relationship after abuse, because most domestic violence literature assumes that the marriage is irreconcilable after abuse. The impulse of most practitioners in domestic violence work is to completely shut

⁹⁴ Grant L. Martin, *Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 98.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Winston Smith, “When NOT to Do Marriage Counseling,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 74.

down the conversation about marriage restoration, due to the safety concerns cited earlier. A push to reconcile the marriage too early often only leads to greater abuse. Thoroughly and biblically addressing the violence in the relationship provides the best hope for reconciliation.⁹⁷ When manipulation and control are the sinful patterns operative in a relationship, the church's high view of marriage can be, and often is, weaponized by perpetrators. Thus, it is wise to move slowly and carefully.

Leslie Vernick suggests four "mile markers" along the journey to restoration of the marriage: safety, sanity, stability, and security.⁹⁸ Vernick maintains that the appropriate time for marriage counseling is after safety has been established and sanity is well underway.⁹⁹ She defines safety as both parties feeling safe to speak up and disagree without fear of physical, emotional, sexual, financial or spiritual retaliation.¹⁰⁰ She defines sanity as uprooting, exposing, and refuting the lies about the relationship that both partners are believing.¹⁰¹ The cognitive distortions perpetuating unhealthy relational dynamics have to be recognized, challenged, and changed before marriage reconciliation work can be helpful.¹⁰² In Vernick's vernacular, sanity is well underway when the victim has built four "CORE" strengths (committed to truth and reality, open to growth, instruction, and feedback, responsible for self and others, and empathy and compassion without enabling further abuse)¹⁰³ and the perpetrator has accepted the "five Cs of change" (clarity about the abuse, commitment to be accountable and teachable, community speaking into his

⁹⁷ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 14.

⁹⁸ Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, 193-206.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 198-99.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 105.

life, confession of sin instead of excusing or defending it, and consequences—accepting them and making restitution where necessary).¹⁰⁴ Creating stability and security in the relationship is the domain of marriage counseling and includes the usual marriage counseling tasks of rebuilding trust, developing godly ways to communicate and resolve conflict with each other, building a new history together, and rebuilding the marriage on a biblical Genesis 2:24-25 foundation.¹⁰⁵

Because of the severe damage that abuse causes in the relationship, restarting marriage counseling after a potentially long period of separation may feel like starting over. TVC encourages these couples to celebrate that, in making it this far, they actually have the chance to start the marriage over. If the marriage had continued on the trajectory it was headed, it likely would have ended in either further and more severe violence, perhaps even death, or divorce. Those who persevere can see the power of the gospel give new life to a marriage that was facing certain death.

Conclusion

Domestic abuse is pervasive in today's culture, and statistics provide little reason to believe it is less pervasive in churches. Because abuse is the desecration of the image of God in both the abused and the abuser, church leaders must know how to recognize abuse, and must know how to respond so that the gospel of peace is embodied in God's people. This chapter argued that churches need a policy and protocol, similar to a child protection policy that many churches have, for recognizing and responding to domestic abuse so that those inclined to abuse know that the church is not a safe place for them to abuse and so that those vulnerable to abuse know that the church is a safe place for them. Church leaders and church members should know how prevalent domestic abuse is, what constitutes domestic abuse, and how the church intends to respond to domestic abuse.

¹⁰⁴ Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage*, 201.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

At the beginning of this project, the elders and staff of TVC undertook a process of education and awareness about domestic abuse that eventually led to the elder's approval of the TVC Domestic Abuse Policy (see appendix 2) and Protocol (see appendix 3). An ongoing leader training was developed to teach the policy and protocol, and leaders are being regularly trained on it. Chapter 4 provides a description of the process that TVC undertook over the past two years to educate and create awareness among the elders, staff, and lay leaders about domestic abuse.

CHAPTER 4
WRITING AND IMPLEMENTING A DOMESTIC
ABUSE POLICY AND PROTOCOL:
TVC'S JOURNEY OF GROWTH

Introduction

As mentioned in chapter 1, this project was birthed out of hurt and heartbreak. TVC's Lead Pastor for Teaching, Matt Chandler, had publicly apologized on behalf of himself and other TVC elders for a general lack of love, care, compassion, and mercy in the church's approach to care and correction.¹ That sermon, and the elders' determination to learn from the mistakes that prompted it, led TVC to learn and grow through several initiatives. In the following three and a half years, TVC's elders studied domestic abuse through this project, the church's process for care and correction, and the church's application of complementarianism. The previous chapter developed critical elements of a church domestic abuse policy and protocol based on a thorough review of the applicable literature. This chapter will chronicle TVC's journey from unawareness to awareness and from substandard practices to better practices, through the lens of this project.

Progress, Not Perfection

Matt Chandler's "Wanderer/Restorer" sermon, delivered in May of 2015, has become known at TVC as his "apology sermon," and still evokes a flood of emotions among TVC leaders over three years later. That sermon was the thirteenth and final sermon in a series on James, entitled "Faith/Works." Throughout the series, Chandler frequently observed that James calls believers to "progress, not perfection," because "the book of

¹ Matt Chandler, "Wanderer/Restorer" (sermon delivered at The Village Church, May 31, 2015), accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/sermons/wanderer-restorer>.

James is going to reveal every time you read it that God is still actively at work in you because you will not be where it's asking you to be.”² Chandler emphasized that the believer does not get to “arrive” in this life. God is performing his sanctifying work, and “the promise of grace is that he never grows weary of how slowly I seem to develop.”³ This theme of “progress, not perfection” is also an apt description of TVC’s journey to better understand the dynamics of domestic abuse, to better care for those who have been harmed by it, and to more helpfully correct those who have perpetrated it. At the completion of this project, TVC has certainly not arrived at her intended destination. Rather, this project served to provide TVC (and, hopefully, other churches) a roadmap toward the destination of becoming a place of redemption for the abused and abuser alike. This chapter describes the cartographic process TVC took to draw that map.

The final two verses of James 5 formed Chandler’s biblical text for his “Wanderer/Restorer” sermon on May 31, 2015: “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (vv. 19-20). When Chandler outlined the sermon a year earlier, he had no idea how timely it would be in May of 2015. Several months earlier, by the Lord’s grace, a few members had graciously and lovingly approached the elders with concerns about the health of the church’s discipline process, specifically relating to the way women were affected. Upon further examination, the concerns were deemed valid. The wanderer needing restoration was the TVC elder board; Chandler had an apology to make on behalf of all the elders to all the covenant members of TVC. “Some of you have borne the brunt of our

² Chandler, “Wanderer/Restorer.”

³ Ibid.

lack of love, care, compassion, mercy. Those are acts that are built into the role of elder. We've failed to walk in that with you, and you have borne the brunt of our foolishness.”⁴

Repentance Prompted Aggressive Action

Chandler's "Wanderer/Restorer" sermon was catalytic at TVC, driving three separate but related initiatives on care and correction, complementarity, and domestic abuse. I, along with Matt Chandler and Jen Wilkin, Director of Classes and Curriculum, led the care and correction initiative. TVC's Director of Training, J. T. English, Jen Wilkin, and Josh Patterson, Lead Pastor for Ministry Leadership, led the complementarity initiative. I led the domestic abuse initiative, in the form of this project, with the help of several staff, elders, and deacons, including all those named above. The focus of the care and correction initiative was to develop a theology, philosophy, and practice (process and structure) of care at TVC. The focus of the complementarity initiative was to produce a document that clearly describes how TVC applies its theology of complementarianism. The focus of this project was to develop a policy and protocol for care and correction in cases of domestic abuse at TVC. The synergies between the three initiatives are clear. This project was an integral component of the care and correction initiative, which I was also leading. It has already been explained in this project that misunderstandings and misapplications of complementarianism, especially in the practice of care and correction, often lead churches to misdiagnose and mistreat victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse. Since the care and correction and complementarity initiatives are beyond the scope of this project, I will not describe them in depth. However, they will be referenced in this chapter due to the symbiotic relationship between them.

During the summer and fall following Chandler's "Wanderer/Restorer" sermon, groups of TVC elders met with approximately fifty members, attenders, and former members who had accepted the elders' public invitation to discuss ways in which they

⁴ Chandler, "Wanderer/Restorer."

had been hurt by TVC's lack of care. In these meetings, the elders simply listened, apologized, and promised to make amends. During this time, I was applying to the Doctor of Educational Ministry program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and had already determined that I wanted my project to address the church's response to domestic abuse. I was admitted into the program in the Fall of 2015, and began in January of 2016. However, the elders of TVC were not able to wait to begin making the amends that they had promised to make. Earnest repentance prompted aggressive action. In the spring of 2016, TVC considered and vetted several different options for training of staff and elders at all campuses on the dynamics of domestic abuse. TVC selected Chris Moles and Leslie Vernick to conduct a mandatory training for all staff and all elders at all campuses in August of 2016.

Correcting TVC's Lack of Knowledge

The Lord spoke through the prophet Hosea: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6). The first goal of this project was to increase baseline knowledge of all ministry staff, elders, and deacons in the care and correction of domestic abuse cases by bringing in subject matter experts to do an extensive initial training. TVC leadership wanted to know what they did not know, and selected Moles and Vernick to conduct an extensive, mandatory training for several reasons. As a pastor himself, Moles spoke well to a group of mostly male church leaders. As a batterer interventionist for over a decade, Moles also brought specific experience with perpetrators of abuse. As a counselor and victim advocate, Vernick brought counseling expertise and experience working with victims of abuse. Both Moles and Vernick had recently written books on the topic of domestic abuse that had been generally well-received in the biblical counseling community.⁵ Moles and Vernick also had experience working together and presenting to

⁵ Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2015); Leslie Vernick, *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2013).

church staffs and elder boards together. Based on the apology meetings that had occurred the previous summer and fall, TVC's executive team knew anecdotally that they had much to learn, and this project corroborated the need for training.

Methodology

During August 2016, the Domestic Abuse Response Assessment was administered via email to staff members, deacons, and elders at all TVC campuses as a pre-test prior to Moles and Vernick's extensive two-day training, and the same assessment was re-administered as a post-test after the training. Pre-training assessments were distributed to participants on Monday, August 15, 2016, and were due Friday, August 19, 2016. The Moles and Vernick training took place on August 23-24, 2016. Post-training assessments were emailed to participants on Monday, August 29, 2016 and were due Friday, September 2, 2016. Many staff, elders, and deacons were on vacation or traveling for ministry purposes during this three-week period. Only those staff, elders, and deacons who participated fully in the training participated in the Domestic Abuse Response Assessment. It was determined that the training would be considered successful if a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment scores.

The Domestic Abuse Response Assessment consisted of three types of items: seven basic demographic items (including a personal identification number to keep the assessments anonymous), eighteen items assessing basic competence in domestic abuse response protocol, and six "Likert scale" items to assess participants' confidence in their ability (and the ability of the church as a whole) to effectively minister to domestic abuse victims and perpetrators. The items were chosen based on the subject matter to be covered in the training. Moles and Vernick reviewed the assessment items and made changes prior to administration of the assessment. For grading and analysis purposes, "True/False" answers were converted into "1" for the correct answer and "0" for the incorrect answer. Likewise, multiple choice responses were converted to "1" for the correct answer and "0"

for the incorrect answers. Answers to Likert scale questions were also converted to numbers using the following system: Strongly Agree = 6, Agree = 5, Agree Somewhat = 4, Disagree Somewhat = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. These numeric values should not be understood to mean that it is superior to respond with “strongly agree” rather than “strongly disagree.” The mathematical analysis performed on these responses required that responses be provided numerically, rather than alphabetically.

Demographic Information

Eighty-four participants (of approximately 150 who were trained) completed both the pre-training assessment and the post-training assessment. Of those who completed the assessments, 45 percent served at the Flower Mound campus (including central staff), 20 percent served in Dallas, 18 percent served in Plano, 10 percent served in Ft. Worth, and 7 percent served in Southlake. Of those who completed both the pre-training and post-training assessments, 18 percent were pastors/elders, 33 percent were ministers/deacons, 49 percent were non-ministerial staff. The average age of those who completed both assessments was 32.7. Of respondents, 43 percent were 30 years old and younger. TVC has always had a relatively young and inexperienced staff. Participants’ median time on staff was one year; 62 percent had been on staff for 2 years or less. Of the participants, 31 percent responded that they had received prior training in abuse and 26 percent had read one or more books on the topic of abuse. Domestic abuse or spousal abuse was not specified in the questions about training and reading (I should have been clearer in the wording of the question); and the titles of the books read revealed that most of the participants’ reading on abuse had been related to child abuse or sexual abuse, rather than spousal abuse. Prior to this training, TVC leadership had minimal training on the topic of domestic abuse/domestic violence/spousal abuse.

Domestic Abuse Awareness: Competence

The primary goal of the training was to increase the baseline knowledge of TVC's leadership regarding the dynamics of domestic abuse so that leadership might be more competent in their care. Moles and Vernick, as the subject matter experts, were asked to train on the most critical areas of domestic abuse competence for church leaders. For a first training, TVC leadership performed better than expected on this assessment. Respondents came into the training with a good grasp of several dynamics regarding domestic abuse, as evidenced by high scores on several items.

Item 13 read, "Since abuse is primarily a legal matter, the church should generally not get involved." Ninety-nine percent of respondents correctly identified the answer as "false" on the pre-test, 100 percent on the post-test. Though abuse can become a legal matter, not all forms of abuse are illegal. Since abuse is primarily a desecration of the image of God, the church can and must get involved.

Item 14 read, "Which of the following is NOT considered an abusive tactic in the context of an intimate relationship?" Ninety-five percent of respondents correctly identified that "shared responsibility" is not an abusive tactic in an intimate relationship on the pre-test, 99 percent on the post-test. The answer to this question was too obvious. The question should have been discarded or reworded.

Item 15 read, "It may be necessary for a woman in an abusive marriage to consult with an attorney about her options." Ninety-nine percent of respondents correctly stated that the answer is "true" on both the pre-test and the post-test.

Item 18 read, "Domestic abuse affects a relatively small number of people." Ninety-eight percent of respondents correctly stated that the answer is "false" on the pre-test, 100 percent on the post-test.

Item 19 read, "Domestic violence only occurs between people who are married." One hundred percent of respondents, both pre-training and post-training, correctly knew that this statement is false.

Item 20 read, “If the abuse was really bad, the victim would leave.” Ninety-eight percent of respondents pre-training and 95 percent of respondents post-training identified the correct answer of “false.” It is hard to ascertain why the number of correct answers to this question declined after the training.

Item 22 read, “After abuse is disclosed, the most important first step is:” One hundred percent correctly identified the critical first step as “safety” both before and after the training. This was attributed to some one-on-one and team trainings that occurred after the elders’ apology meetings.

Item 25 read, “It is relatively easy to spot when domestic abuse is taking place in a family.” Ninety-eight percent of respondents stated that the correct answer is “false” on the pre-test, and 95 percent reported the correct answer on the post-test. Although the number of correct responses declined after the training, the change may be due to some of the respondents feeling more confident in their ability to recognize the signs of abuse in relationships.

With the exception of item 14, which should have been discarded or reworded, these strong responses demonstrated that TVC leadership did possess some basic competence in understanding the necessity for church involvement in cases of domestic abuse, potential necessity for legal protection, pervasiveness of abuse in the culture, difficulty and danger of leaving an abusive relationship, importance of first establishing safety for the victim, and difficulty of recognizing abuse. It was heartening to see these competencies in TVC leadership, especially in the absence of any previous formal training. Nonetheless, the participants’ answers to certain other items did reveal some areas in which the leadership lacked critical competencies.

Definition and etiology. Responses to several items revealed that TVC leaders lacked critical understanding of what constitutes and causes domestic violence. Around 80 percent of respondents (78 percent pre-training and 80 percent post-training) rebuffed the normalcy of family violence in item 21: “A certain amount of violence is normal in a

family.” It was still concerning, though, that approximately 20 percent of the staff, elders, and deacons believed that some amount of violence in family life would be considered “normal.” It appeared from this and other items that the staff, elders, and deacons might need to better understand what constitutes domestic abuse/violence. Items 23 and 24 were designed to pinpoint fallacies regarding the cause of domestic abuse—that either the non-abusive partner or “an anger problem” is the issue. Item 23 stated, “In some relationships, one partner can cause the other to be abusive.” This item was designed to assess whether respondents understood that there is no legitimate provocation for abusive behavior. Both before and after the training, 89 percent of respondents gave the correct response of “false.” Though 89 percent is a relatively high score, it was somewhat concerning that the number of correct responses did not increase after the training. Similarly, item 24 stated, “Domestic violence is caused by anger management issues.” Abuse is not primarily an anger management issue,⁶ so this item was designed to assess respondents’ understanding of that concept. Eighty-three percent responded correctly prior to the training, which was encouraging, and 87 percent responded correctly after the training. Participants’ understanding of this concept did grow through the training.

“Honeymoon phase.” Prior to the initial training, 19 percent did not recognize the term “honeymoon phase” as a part of the abuse cycle. After the training, 9 percent still did not recognize this term. Respondents incorrectly chose “Reinstatement of equilibrium (“honeymoon phase”)” in answer to item 8, “Which of the following is NOT part of the typical abuse cycle?” 53 percent less often after receiving the training. While this improvement is encouraging, it is critical for caregivers to understand that domestic abuse typically follows a predictable pattern, which includes a “honeymoon phase” that usually occurs after an abusive incident. During the honeymoon phase, the abuser will experience self-centered remorse (apologies, amends, excuses, even reaching out for help), but not

⁶ Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*, 10-12.

repentance. After the honeymoon phase is over, tension in the relationship will begin to build again toward another incident of abuse, which is often escalated from the previous incident. When church leaders do not know to look for this phase of the cycle, remorse (worldly sorrow) is commonly misunderstood as repentance (godly sorrow). The Scriptures differentiate between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow (2 Cor 7:10), and God's people must also. Godly sorrow will take time to discern and will be manifested in spiritual fruit (Luke 6:43-45; 2 Cor 7:11-13).

Marriage reconciliation. Prior to the training, 24 percent of TVC leaders agreed (incorrectly) with the statement in item 9 that “marriage reconciliation is an important first step” once abuse is discovered. After the training, only 4 percent incorrectly agreed with this statement—95 percent of respondents answered correctly after the training, an improvement of 24 percentage points. Similarly, only 37.6 percent correctly agreed with the statement in item 16 that “a woman in an abusive marriage often needs to make the marriage a lower priority” prior to the training, while 71.4 percent correctly agreed with that statement after the training. Abuse is inconsistent with a high view of marriage because it desecrates the image of God in both parties and because it tells a lie about the gospel, which marriage is meant to reflect. When abuse is discovered, reconciliation of the marriage should take a back seat to reconciliation to the Lord (Ps 51:4). Therefore, in the immediate wake of abuse, the individuals in the marriage should (generally speaking) receive separate counseling. Church leaders should let the counselor(s) working with the individuals take the lead in helping the couple determine the best time to move toward reconciling the relationship.

Biblical headship. The Scriptures are clear that biblical headship is primarily about submission, humility, and sacrifice (Eph 5:21, 25; Phil 2:3-8), rather than decision making or “having the final say.” In the pre-training assessment, 17 percent of the participants agreed with item 10, that headship means that the husband has the final say

in decision-making. After the training, only 7 percent agreed with that statement. Interestingly, of those who answered incorrectly prior to the training, 71 percent were age 35 or younger. New staff members were also more likely than more tenured staff members to answer incorrectly to this question, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive onboarding process. When church leaders discuss gender roles in the church, they need to be careful about their language, considering how someone with power and control issues would hear what is being said.

Confronting abusers. Perhaps the most alarming responses related to when an alleged perpetrator of abuse should be engaged after abuse is disclosed or discovered. Even after the training, 29 percent of participants agreed (incorrectly) with the statement in item 11 that the appropriate time to confront the abuser is immediately after the abuse is discovered. This result was significantly lower than the 51 percent who agreed with that statement prior to the training, but still too high. Similarly, item 17 asserted, “When abuse is reported, it is important to talk to the other spouse/partner to verify the truth of the report.” Pre-training, 53.6 percent answered correctly that this statement is false. The training clarified respondents’ understanding of this item, taking the group from being split roughly 50/50 to answering correctly 7 out of 10 times. Confronting an abuser can result in retaliatory abuse and must be handled with the utmost care. The first steps after abuse is reported include assessing the safety of the person who has been abused and implementing a safety plan. Confrontation of the abuser should not occur until safety has been established and should never occur without the advice and consent of the person who has been abused. The safety of the victim takes precedence in the immediate aftermath of an abuse disclosure. In general, church leaders should move faster with care and slower with confrontation or correction.

Overall, the initial training was successful in increasing baseline knowledge of domestic abuse dynamics, as measured by using a *t*-test for dependent samples to compare the pre-training results to the post-training results. Training TVC staff and elders in

domestic abuse awareness made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their competence of domestic abuse care and correction. There is less than a 0.4 percent (0.004) probability that the difference between the pre- and post-training results was due to chance. Though the initial training significantly helped to correct TVC's lack of knowledge of basic principles of domestic abuse care in a positive direction, it was clear that TVC leaders still had room for continued growth as a team. The Domestic Abuse Policy and Protocol would be crafted and trained on to continue to improve and perpetuate institutional knowledge about domestic abuse. The church would continue to shore up misunderstandings of the definition and etiology of abuse, the patterns of abuse, the priority of repentance and health over the marriage, complementarity and headship, and confrontation of abusers for the next couple of years.

Domestic Abuse Awareness: Confidence

The assessment also evaluated leadership's confidence in caring for domestic abuse cases. From the stories of mismanaged care that the elders were told in the apology meetings, there was a general consensus that TVC's leadership lacked humility regarding their ability to care well for couples in abusive relationships. This came through in the assessment results, although the training also significantly increased TVC leadership's confidence in knowing next steps to take when faced with an abuse disclosure.

In response to item 26, asking staff, elders, and deacons whether they feel equipped when called upon to minister to a couple where abuse is involved, respondents after the training reported at minimum that they "agree somewhat" more than 7 out of 10 times, compared with 4 out of 10 before the training. Respondents agreed less strongly after the training that TVC is "a safe place for victims of abuse" (item 27). "Strongly agree" and "agree" dropped by 12 and 10 percentage points, respectively, from the pre-training results, while the more cautious "agree somewhat" response doubled after the training. This more circumspect response indicated a helpful growth in humility as participants learned more about the dynamics of abusive relationships. Respondents were

also more guarded in their responses to item 28 regarding whether TVC is “a place where abusive behavior is exposed and corrected.” Fifty-four percent of respondents before the training and 75 percent of respondents after the training reported either “agree somewhat” or “disagree somewhat” to this item.

TVC staff, elders, and deacons grew considerably in their confidence in recognizing abuse as a result of the training. Before the training, 62 percent reported they at least somewhat disagreed with the statement in item 29, “I feel confident in my ability to discern whether abuse is occurring in a relationship.” Afterwards, 75 percent at least somewhat agreed with that statement. TVC’s leadership have a strong belief that the gospel can change even the hardest hearts. Item 30 of the assessment stated, “I really believe that perpetrators of abuse can change.” Before and after the training, 75 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. However, only 29 percent strongly agreed before the training, while 46 percent strongly agreed after the training. A hoped-for outcome of the training would be that participants would have clarity on next steps when abuse is disclosed, discovered, or suspected. Pre-training responses were spread thinly across the spectrum from strongly agree to strongly disagree when replying to item 31, “I am clear about the next steps to take if I suspect abuse is occurring in a relationship.” After the training, 58 percent chose “agree,” and only 2 respondents chose a “disagree” response.

Clearly, the initial training also made a statistically significant difference in TVC staff and elders’ confidence in regard to caring for victims and correcting perpetrators of domestic abuse. Applying the *t*-test for dependent samples to the pre- and post-training results, there is less than a 0.2 percent (0.002) probability that the difference in scores before and after the training is due to chance.

Summary and Takeaways from the Initial Training

Overall, TVC executive leadership viewed these results as very encouraging. TVC leadership knew at the outset that one deep dive into domestic abuse awareness

would not be a panacea. The hope of the initial training was that the training would be effective. Ongoing institutional knowledge about the dynamics of domestic abuse and best practices for response would need to be codified in the form of a policy and protocol. An ongoing training would need to be developed to train lay leaders and to train new elders, deacons, and ministerial staff members. Since the assessment revealed that TVC staff tend to be young and turn over frequently, some kind of abbreviated ongoing awareness training was critical. Based on the initial training by Moles and Vernick, as well as this analysis of participants' assessments, I presented the following ten guidelines for care to the TVC executive team that would guide the rest of the project.

1. Domestic abuse is pervasive in the culture and often hidden due to fear and shame.
2. Statistically, leadership must assume that domestic abuse is pervasive at The Village Church. Leadership must be aware of it and alert to recognize it.
3. Domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men, whom God has called to display Christ through sacrificial service in the home, against the very people whom God has given these men to protect and shepherd—women and children. However, the church must not forget that violence is sometimes perpetrated against men as well. Regardless, domestic abuse is always a desecration of the image of God in another person through patterns of the intentional misuse of power, overtly or covertly, through words or actions, to get what one wants.
4. When abuse is disclosed or discovered, leadership should take all such reports seriously. Listen to the victim's story. Believe the victim's story. Be quick to assess and plan for her safety. Do not handle such disclosures alone. Treat victims tenderly, not transactionally.
5. All abuse is related to a misuse of power and control. Note this dynamic, look for it, and be sensitive to it in your response to an allegation of abuse. Men, especially, if working with a woman who has been oppressed by a man, have a trusted woman in the room and let her take the lead.
6. Confrontation of the abuser should only take place with the advice and consent of the abused and after safety has been established. This principle applies to each and every time an abuser is confronted, not just the initial time. Every time an abuser is confronted, there is an increased danger to the victim.
7. Godly sorrow will take time to discern. In the short-term worldly sorrow can sometimes look like godly sorrow, but over time genuine repentance always becomes evident.
8. TVC should always move faster with care and slower with confrontation and correction.
9. Reconciliation with God takes precedence over reconciliation of the marriage.

10. Maintain a humble confidence in the Lord and his goodness, his love for both parties, and his sovereignty over all.

Based upon these ten guidelines for response, I began working with key leaders in the church to formulate a policy and protocol that would codify what TVC believed about domestic abuse and guide future trainings.

The Development of a Formal Policy and Protocol

The second goal of this project was to develop a domestic abuse policy and protocol for TVC, including specific processes and pathways of care. After the initial training, the results summarized above were provided to the TVC executive team and elders. The Domestic Abuse Policy adopted by the elders can be found in appendix 2. The policy is a shorter document that includes statements from the elders about TVC's definition of domestic abuse, the prevalence of domestic abuse, TVC's biblical/theological understanding of abuse vis-à-vis the *imago Dei*, and generally TVC's approach to response. The Domestic Abuse Protocol adopted by the elders is attached as appendix 3. The protocol is a longer document that provides more specific direction for caring for victims, perpetrators, and the marriage relationship, while bearing in mind that every case is unique. The elders also adopted a statement on divorce in cases of abuse, which is included as appendix 4 and a statement on a theology of oppression that is included as appendix 5.

Combined, the policy, protocol, and the statements about divorce and oppression form the TVC Domestic Abuse Policy and Protocol, which was approved by the central elders on March 5, 2018, and formally codified as a part of the care playbook produced as a result of the care and correction initiative. These documents were not produced in isolation. They were developed in connection with the ongoing care and correction initiative led by Matt Chandler, Jen Wilkin, and I, along with a team that included several other elders, deacons, and staff of TVC. During this time, I also consulted with several counselors and ministry professionals with experience in domestic abuse response from around the country, many of whom are cited in this project. These statements were also

being formulated during the same period as the TVC elders were working through the complementarianism initiative, and they were informed by that work as well. As the policy and protocol were being developed, I simultaneously conducted trainings of TVC's lay leadership (home group leaders, recovery group leaders, cohort and Bible class leaders, connections leaders, etc.), utilizing the same pre-training assessment, training, and post-training assessment procedure developed for the initial staff/elder/deacon training.

Domestic Abuse Awareness Training

The third goal of this project was to develop a two-hour Domestic Abuse Awareness Training to regularly train pastors-elders, ministers-deacons, and key lay leaders in the fundamentals of care and correction in cases of domestic abuse. The hope for the training was to create awareness for leaders specifically around helping them *recognize* domestic abuse and *respond* to it helpfully, without causing further harm. Because of the need to begin training TVC lay leaders and creating awareness of the issue immediately, I did not wait until the policy and protocol documents were approved by the elders before developing a training and beginning to train.

The initial leader training relied heavily for content upon the initial training for staff conducted by Moles and Vernick, with adjustments based on the findings from the pre- and post-training assessments. The essential content of the leader training is included as appendix 8. As this project progressed concurrently with the care and correction initiative, I communicated regularly with elders, lead pastors, and members of the executive team, as well as with ministry leaders and counselors involved in domestic abuse care and correction at a national level. Each training improved through experience and participant feedback, as well as the feedback of others.

Continuing to Train Lay Leaders, New Staff, and New Elders

The fourth goal of this project was to train key church leaders in the Domestic Abuse Response Training, developed in goal 3, per the domestic abuse policy and protocol.

This goal is formidable and ongoing. Nearly 500 lay leaders provide direction to various ministries at the Flower Mound campus of TVC alone. And, because they are lay leaders and have limited availability for training opportunities, they are trained in smaller groups with others who lead in the same ministries—home groups, recovery groups, ministry teams, next generation (children and students), etc. Leader trainings at best occur monthly or quarterly in these ministries, and many important issues compete for the relatively short amount of time. The goal was, and still is, to train all TVC lay leaders in domestic abuse awareness—to train them to recognize and respond to domestic abuse when they see it in their ministry contexts.

Methodology

The first three Domestic Abuse Awareness Trainings for lay leaders took place in November 2016, March 2017, and April 2017. I distributed the pre-training and post-training assessment to each participant via email, as I had with done with staff, elders, and deacons. Participation was completely voluntary, and many chose not to participate. Of those who were trained during this period, 60 returned assessments, but only 27 were usable assessments. The remaining 33 either did not have a matching respondent personal identification number, or they returned only one of the assessments, but not both.

Demographic Information

Of the 27 respondents that were able to be analyzed, 89 percent were leaders and 11 percent were “coaches.” Coaches are trusted lay leaders who have been leading for a while and who mentor several other lay leaders. The average age of respondents was 48 years old, 15 years older than the average age of TVC’s staff, elders, and deacons at the time. Respondents’ median length of service was 3 years, which again was longer than the median tenure of the staff, elders, and deacons who participated. Also, only 15 percent had any prior training in abuse.

Domestic Abuse Awareness: Competence

TVC's lay leaders, like the staff, elders, and deacons, performed well on questions related to the necessity for church involvement in cases of domestic abuse, the potential necessity for legal protection, pervasiveness of abuse in the culture, difficulty and danger of leaving an abusive relationship, importance of first establishing safety for the victim, and difficulty of recognizing abuse. Leaders also seemed to have a good understanding of the power dynamics of abuse, and that abuse is a form of oppression. This may be due to conversations that staff, elders, and deacons were having after the staff training with lay leaders they disciplined. Regardless of the reasons, the data continued to support that less time could be devoted to these concepts in future trainings since TVC leaders seem to have a good grasp of them. On the other hand, many of the same challenges surfaced with the leaders that had previously plagued the staff, elders, and deacons.

Definition and etiology. Whereas 83 percent of TVC's staff, elders, and deacons knew that abuse is not essentially an anger management issue prior to training, about half of lay leaders believed that "domestic violence is caused by anger management issues." However, after the training, 100 percent answered this item correctly. Like the staff, elders, and deacons, almost all respondents (92 percent of lay leaders) knew before the training to reject the proposition in item 23 that "in some relationships, one partner can cause the other to be abusive."

Repentance. Before the training, respondents were split 50/50 on the statement, "it usually doesn't take very long to discern if an abusive person is repentant." As already mentioned, because of the patterned nature of abusive behavior and because a "honeymoon period" is often part of that pattern, trying to discern repentance usually takes a long time and can be quite confusing. After the training, respondents were correct 93 percent of the time—a vast improvement.

Marriage reconciliation. On item 16, “A woman in an abusive marriage often needs to make her marriage a lower priority,” respondents were correct 100 percent of the time after the training, an increase of 30 percentage points. Before the training, 30 percent believed that statement to be false. Prior to the training 30 percent of respondents agreed that marriage counseling or marriage reconciliation is an *important first step* after disclosure or discovery of abuse. After the training, all respondents were clear that the statement is false.

Biblical headship. Just as it did with the staff, elders, and deacons, the statement in item 10, “Biblical headship means that a husband has the final say in all important decisions,” gave the lay leaders some pause. The word *means* implies that the rest of the statement is a definition of the term *biblical headship*. Is biblical headship primarily about decision making in the home? This item was meant to get to the heart of what the term *biblical headship* means. Prior to the training, 19 percent of lay leaders agreed with this statement, compared to 17 percent of the staff, elders, and deacons. However, after the training, all respondents agreed that the statement was false.

Confronting abusers. Another statement on the assessment that divided respondents prior to the training was item 17: “When abuse is reported, it is important to talk to the other spouse/partner to verify the truth of the report.” Like the staff, elders, and deacons before them, approximately half of respondents agreed with this statement prior to the training. In the training I simply asked, “If the report is true, what might be the response of the abuser toward the victim after church leaders confront him with this report?” Typically, all the women immediately point out the imminent danger that such an ill-advised confrontation might create for the victim. After the training, 100 percent of respondents correctly disagreed with this approach. Likewise, item 11 asserts that the appropriate time to confront an abuser is immediately after the abuse is disclosed or

discovered. Sixty-six percent of respondents answered incorrectly before the training; all answered correctly afterwards.

Training lay leaders at TVC in domestic abuse awareness made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their knowledge of domestic abuse care. A *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated that there is less than a 0.08 percent (0.0008) probability that the difference between the pre- and post-training is due to chance.

Domestic Abuse Awareness: Confidence

As with the staff, elders, and deacons, the domestic abuse awareness training increased the confidence of TVC's lay leaders in recognizing and responding to domestic abuse in their midst. For example, in response to item 26, which asked whether they felt equipped when called upon to minister to a couple where abuse is involved, while no respondent chose "strongly agree," 8 out of 10 either agreed or agreed somewhat that they felt equipped to minister in a case of abuse after the training. Overall, respondents agreed more strongly after the training that TVC is "a safe place for victims of abuse" (item 27). "Strongly agree" increased by 14 percentage points, though "agree" decreased by 4; and "disagree somewhat" increased by 4 percentage points. When asked whether TVC is "a place where abusive behavior is exposed and corrected," respondents' views essentially did not change much after the training. Agreement became slightly stronger as two responses moved to "agree" from less positive categories.

As with TVC staff, elders, and deacons, the training had a marked difference on respondents' impression of their ability to discern the occurrence of abuse; 81 percent cautiously "agree somewhat." Interestingly, though respondents overwhelmingly voiced agreement that perpetrators of abuse can change, they agreed less strongly after the training than before it. Respondents had a huge shift in their confidence related to knowing next steps to take. Eighty-eight percent chose either "strongly agree" or "agree" to this question after the training.

Training leaders at TVC in domestic abuse awareness made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their agreement with their ability to care for victims of domestic abuse. There is less than a 2 percent (0.02) probability that the difference between the pre- and post-training is due to chance, measured by a *t*-test for dependent samples.

Summary

Statistically, the lay leader training was even more effective than the Moles and Vernick staff training. In the leader training, respondents answered correctly 96 percent of the time after the training, improving their scores by 18 percentage points. By contrast in the staff training, respondents answered correctly 90 percent of the time after the training, only improving scores by 7 percentage points. More trainings have occurred since these three, all utilizing the same curriculum, most recently at a large leader conference held on August 25, 2018.

Conclusion

Progress, not perfection. It has been over three years since Matt Chandler confessed on behalf of all of TVC's elders to having "wandered from the truth" in their care and correction of some of the souls that the Lord has entrusted to them. TVC has made slight progress during that time in becoming a safer place for the abused. Through this project, TVC has grown in institutional knowledge of domestic abuse, thanks to the expertise of individuals such as Chris Moles and Leslie Vernick. TVC has developed a policy and protocol for domestic abuse that will guide the staff, elders, deacons, and lay leaders in care and correction of domestic abuse cases in the future. TVC has created a curriculum for the ongoing training of lay leaders, new elders, and new staff in how to care for victims and correct perpetrators according to that policy and protocol. TVC continues to learn, train, care and correct. Chapter 5 will provide an evaluation of the project and some concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER 5

TIME TO BREAK SILENCE

Introduction

The last chapter described TVC’s journey from treating domestic abuse as just another sin issue to understanding the delicate interplay that occurs when an abuser’s oppression results in a victim’s suffering in the context of an intimate relationship. Prior to this project, TVC staff, elders, deacons, and other lay leaders had little knowledge of best practices for recognizing and responding to domestic abuse, as attested by the research reported in chapter 4. At the conclusion of the project, as also demonstrated by the studies reported in chapter 4, leadership at all levels had grown significantly in both their competence and confidence in addressing domestic violence. This chapter will reflect on that journey of growth and look ahead at how I hope to build upon the work of this project, both at TVC and for the bride of Christ more generally, to break the church’s silence about domestic abuse.

The Fierce Urgency of Now

Exactly one year before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a major speech at Riverside Church in New York City for the group Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam. This group had earlier released a statement about the US involvement in Vietnam, the opening lines of which stated, “A time comes when silence is betrayal.”¹ In his speech entitled, “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” King

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” New York City, Riverside Church, April 4, 1967, accessed September 17, 2018, www.kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam.

distilled his cultural moment with these words: “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.”² It is already too late for the many abuse victims harmed by the church’s lack of care. Rachel Denhollander understands that all too well. In 2016, she was one of the first victims to bring to light Larry Nassar’s abuse of Olympic gymnasts.³ In an interview in *Christianity Today*, Denhollander, a self-described very conservative evangelical, said, “Church is one of the least safe places to acknowledge abuse because the way it is counseled is, more often than not, damaging to the victim. There is an abhorrent lack of knowledge for the damage and devastation that sexual assault brings.”⁴ Denhollander reported in the same interview that her advocacy for sexual assault victims in the wake of these allegations “cost me my church”⁵ because “we were told by individual elders that it wasn’t the place for us.”⁶ Subsequently, her former church publicly apologized by mishandling Denhollander’s concerns.⁷

Denhollander’s concerns about abuse in the church were echoed by the alleged victims of former White House staffer Rob Porter, accused by two former wives of

² King, “Beyond Vietnam.”

³ Tim Evans, Mark Alesia, and Marisa Kwiatkowski, “Former USA Gymnastics Doctor Accused of Abuse,” *Indystar*, September 12, 2016, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2016/09/12/former-usa-gymnastics-doctor-accused-abuse/89995734/>.

⁴ Rachel Denhollander, “My Larry Nassar Testimony Went Viral. But There’s More to the Gospel Than Forgiveness,” interview by Morgan Lee, *Christianity Today*, January 31, 2018, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-web-only/rachael-denhollander-larry-nassar-forgiveness-gospel.html>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Gryboski, “Rachel Denhollander’s Former Church Apologizes for Mishandling Ex-Gymnast’s Concerns,” *The Christian Post*, June 1, 2018, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rachael-denhollanders-former-church-apologizes-mishandling-ex-gymnasts-concerns-sovereign-grace-224568/>.

domestic assault. In an op-ed in *The Washington Post* in February 2018, Porter's first wife, Colbie Holderness, reported, "Both Willoughby [Jennie Willoughby, Porter's second wife] and I raised our cases with clergy. Both of us had a hard time getting them to fully address the abuse taking place. It wasn't until I spoke to a professional counselor that I was met with understanding."⁸ In *Time* magazine in the same month, Willoughby noted that blindness to domestic abuse is not just an issue in the church: "It's as if we have a societal blind spot that creates an obstacle to understanding. Society as a whole doesn't acknowledge the reality of abuse."⁹ Emphasizing the urgency of the cultural moment, Willoughby went on to say, "If the most powerful people in the nation do not believe my story of abuse in the face of overwhelming evidence, then what hope do others have of being heard?"¹⁰

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The stated purpose of this project was to develop a policy, process, and training curriculum to guide leadership at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, in care and correction of domestic abuse. The content of appendices 2-6 are witnesses to the accomplishment of that stated purpose. A void of knowledge and clarity existed prior to the beginning of this project. That void has been filled with much greater knowledge and clarity around this issue. In that sense, the project fulfilled its purpose.

However, behind the stated purpose lies a more fundamental purpose. TVC's leadership desires to improve their level of member care and correction. Care and

⁸ Colbie Holderness, "Rob Porter Is My Ex-Husband. Here's What You Should Know about Abuse," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2018, accessed September 17, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/rob-porter-is-my-ex-husband-heres-what-you-should-know-about-abuse/2018/02/12/3c7edcb8-1033-11e8-9065-e55346f6de81_story.html?utm_term=.fd4c3fd55ea.

⁹ Jennie Willoughby, "President Trump Will Not Diminish My Truth," *Time*, February 11, 2018, accessed September 18, 2018, <http://time.com/5143589/rob-porter-ex-wife-trump-domestic-violence/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

correction among the members of the body of Christ cannot be reduced to a policy, protocol, and curriculum. In fact, two of the sins for which Matt Chandler publicly asked forgiveness at the outset of this project were directly related to policy and process: “Putting processes and policies over people” and “treating members transactionally instead of tenderly.”¹¹ TVC had a care and correction process in the Spring of 2015 and before. That process had significant flaws because it did not account for the complex dynamics of domestic abuse. Some of the flaws in the previous care and correction process have been improved through this project. However, TVC’s elders would still be sinning against those under their care if they failed to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called: “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:1-2). TVC leadership at all levels still needs greater awareness of ways in which they are attempting to follow the policy and protocol at the expense of the image-bearers that the policy and protocol is written to serve.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

To accomplish the stated purpose of creating a policy and protocol for domestic abuse care and correction at TVC, as well as the more fundamental purpose of raising the level of care and correction in such cases, this project began with four goals:

1. To increase baseline knowledge of all ministry staff, elders, and deacons in the care and correction of domestic abuse cases by bringing in expert master teachers to do an extensive initial training.
2. To develop a domestic abuse policy and protocol for TVC, including specific processes and pathways of care.
3. To develop a curriculum to regularly train new pastors-elders, ministers-deacons, and key lay leaders in the fundamentals of care and correction in cases of domestic abuse.
4. To train key lay leaders in caring well for those who have been abused and those who have perpetrated abuse through the domestic abuse awareness curriculum.

¹¹ Matt Chandler, “Wanderer/Restorer” (sermon delivered at The Village Church, May 31, 2015), accessed June 6, 2016, <http://thevillagechurch.net/resources/sermons/detail/wanderer--restorer/>.

The Moles/Vernick training in August 2016, fulfilled goal 1 and truly catalyzed this project. It opened the eyes of elders, deacons, and staff members to the dynamics of domestic abuse of which they were previously unaware, as evidenced by the pre- and post-training assessment results. The initial training was successful in increasing baseline knowledge of domestic abuse dynamics, as measured by using a *t*-test for dependent samples to compare the pre-training results to the post-training results. TVC staff, deacons, and elders grew in their competence regarding domestic abuse care and correction, with less than a 0.4 percent (0.004) probability that the difference between the pre- and post-training results were due to chance. They also grew in their confidence regarding caring for victims and correcting perpetrators of domestic abuse, with less than a 0.2 percent (0.002) probability that the difference in scores before and after the training were due to chance. The success of this initial training at TVC, as well as the training conducted for lay leaders, further convinced me of the need in the body of Christ as a whole for more education about the dynamics of relational abuse.

The Moles/Vernick training, as well as the subsequent trainings I have conducted since, served to increase the institutional knowledge base of TVC with regard to recognition, care, and correction of domestic abuse in the body of Christ. Appendices 2-5 reflect the outcomes of the second goal of codifying our institutional knowledge in a formal policy and protocol, including statements regarding divorce in cases of domestic abuse and a theology of oppression. TVC is now accountable for the added knowledge gained. Church leaders have a definition for domestic abuse and are growing in their ability to recognize and distinguish it from normative marital conflict. Predominately male church leaders have grown in understanding the perspective of predominately female victims. Church leaders also have a better understanding of the patterned nature of domestic abuse and are already far less likely to mistake a “honeymoon phase” in a relationship for godly sorrow. As a large, influential church, TVC is now responsible to share these learnings and others with other churches in the body of Christ. Through this

project, I recognized the potential benefit to other churches of developing similar policies and protocols for their local congregations, with specific processes and pathways of care for both perpetrators and victims. These policies and protocols will vary somewhat in different contexts, but the safety of those among God's people who are being harmed should compel church leaders to be intentional about their care and correction in such cases.

Ongoing training will be essential to preserve and transfer the institutional knowledge that TVC has learned in this process. With the average age of staff, deacons, and elders being 33 years old, and with the rapid and frequent transition of staff and lay leaders that occur in a church such as TVC, it will be important that leadership continue to teach the fundamentals of recognizing and responding to domestic abuse. Appendix 6 reflects the training that I developed for ongoing training, in fulfillment of the third goal, and I have conducted that training regularly since the initial training in August 2016, in fulfillment of the fourth goal. Most of these trainings are recorded, so recorded trainings can also be utilized for those unable to make the in-person trainings. However, the commitment is to continue to make this training available 2-3 times per year for the foreseeable future. The face-to-face trainings allow for Q & A, as well as individual interaction with the teacher after the training. Each time I lead this workshop I hear more stories of ways in which TVC failed to employ best practices and I can initiate corrective measures in those specific cases. Though I have been the only trainer thus far, I anticipate that other care deacons will lead this training in the future. I can also foresee kingdom benefits to making this training available in video format to other churches in the future.

Strengths of the Project

The general feeling of ineptitude of TVC's elders and staff regarding domestic abuse, as well as a genuine desire to improve their care and correction in hard cases, drove this project and was an asset throughout the project. The importance of humility has already been underscored and cannot be emphasized enough. If TVC's elders had remained

unconvinced after listening to dozens of current and former members recount their horror stories of unloving care and correction, this project would have lacked validity and would not have received the necessary support to see it through. Because TVC's elders and staff recognized the need for the project, were humble, and were eager to learn, this project had momentum from beginning to end.

It was also helpful that this project occurred during a season of overall growth at TVC regarding care in general (as evidenced by the care and correction initiative that I also led during the same time period) and regarding the application of the church's complementarian theology (as evidenced by the complementarianism initiative also ongoing simultaneously). This project benefited from the synergy of coming alongside these other related projects. Even though these conversations were occurring separately during the same period of time, in many ways it felt like one overlapping conversation.

Weaknesses of the Project

One of the primary weaknesses of the project is related to the second strength described. Although I understood the benefit of the synergies with the care and correction initiative specifically, this project also languished at times due to physical, mental, and spiritual fatigue as I tried to manage the competing demands of being a child of God, husband, dad, and son taking care of my elderly mother, with the demands of a full-time counseling practice, while guiding both the care and correction initiative as well as this project, not to mention additional related writing projects that are discussed later in this chapter. Throughout the project, I vacillated between wishing I had more time for this project and recognizing the synergistic benefits of all the work I was doing simultaneously. It has seemed like every role in which I have been functioning over the past three years has informed, and improved, every other role. However, the demands of all those roles have often conflicted.

One of the notable casualties of those competing demands has been my time. More single-minded focus to the project would have yielded much more time for training

TVC's lay leaders and new staff members and elders. Even as I write this, I am reminded that TVC has onboarded several new lay elders at various campuses who have not received the training. It is still troubling to consider that so many at TVC remain untrained on this project, while other lay leaders may not even know that such training ever existed. The large size of TVC, as well as the finitude of my time, has slowed the progress of this project.

What I Would Do Differently

This project could have benefited from the presence of a full-time care director at the Flower Mound campus. Such a role was one of the recommendations of the care and correction initiative, and the TVC elders and executive team are in the process of onboarding that individual as I finish this work. This role is one that has been covered by me and one other care deacon at the Flower Mound campus on a lay basis for the last several years. A new care director will significantly strengthen TVC's approach to member care in the future. It would have been ideal if I could have recommended this important addition to the staff prior to beginning this project, but since both the care project and this domestic abuse project originated from the same pivotal moment of crisis at TVC, no such opportunity existed.

I speak for all in leadership at TVC in desiring that we had anticipated this moment of crisis sooner so that fewer of TVC's flock had been injured through TVC shepherds' collective lack of care. I re-experience that regret each time I sit in a care meeting at the church with a member who has been needlessly harmed. However, God has been gracious to TVC in revealing our weakness and demonstrating his strength.

Theological Reflections

Church leaders care for God's people because it is God's character to care for them. Two prominent biblical motifs guide TVC's theology of congregational care—the shepherd motif and the family motif. God is both a Shepherd and a Father. The nation of

Israel was born into the shepherding motif. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds (Gen. 13:7; 26:20; 30:36), as was Moses (Exod 3:1). God is first called a shepherd in Genesis 48:15 and 49:24. As a shepherd, God leads and guides (Ps 23:2–3; Isa 40:11), provides (Ps 23:1; Gen 48:15; Ps. 23:5-6; Hos 4:16; Mic 7:14), protects (Ps 28:9; Gen 49:23-24), saves those who are lost or scattered (Jer 31:10; Ps 119:176; Isa 53:6; Ezek 34:11-16; Matt. 18:12-14), and judges (Ezek 34:17-22; Jer 23:1; Zech. 10:2-3; 11:16; Matt. 25:32-46). Israel is referred to as God’s flock in Psalms 79:13, 95:7, 100:3 and Ezekiel 34:31. David asserted, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps 23:1).

Jesus referred to Himself as the “good shepherd” who “lays down his life for his sheep”(John 10:11), the “great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20), and the “chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4), and the church is called God’s flock (1 Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28-29). The elders of the church serve God’s people as under-shepherds of the true Shepherd. The mandate Jesus gave to Peter in John 21:15-17 is given to all who shepherd God’s flock. That mandate calls the pastor-shepherd to “feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep . . . feed my sheep.” Shepherds who do not care well for God’s people are condemned in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. God’s people represent Him, in part, by shepherding each other (1 Cor 12; Eph 4; the 59 “one anothers” of the New Testament). As shepherds care for their sheep, so God’s people—particularly those called to pastoral ministry—are to care for one another.

Not only is God a Shepherd, He is also the Eternal Father (Isa 9:6). First and foremost, the Father has existed eternally as Father to the Son (John 1:1, 14; 17:24). As Creator and Sustainer of all things, God is called the Father of all creation (1 Cor 8:6). In the Old Testament, God is called the Father of the nation of Israel (Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10), the Father of David (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 17:13), of Solomon (1 Chron 22:10; 28:6), of the fatherless (Ps 68:5), and of the promised Christ (Ps 89:26). In the New Testament, God is the Son’s own Father (John 5:18) and the

Father of all the redeemed, whom He has adopted into His family (John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:5).

Because God is both a Good Shepherd and a good Father, he cares for his sheep and his children, who then care for those God has entrusted to them in the same way God has cared for them (1 Cor 1:3-4). This project has, for me as well as many in leadership at TVC, been a healing journey of seeing how the Lord cares for his church even in the midst of the church's inconsistent care for others—his faithfulness in the midst of the unfaithfulness of God's people.

Personal Reflections

This journey has been arduous but rewarding. When I started this project, I thought it was a good idea. At its conclusion, I have come to realize that the project was indispensable, for me personally, for TVC, and for the greater body of Christ. Calvin writes, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”¹² This particular project was absolutely necessary for me personally because of what I learned about God and myself. As I considered domestic abuse as a desecration of the image of God, I began to frame everything else I was doing—marriage, parenting, caring for an elderly mom, congregational care in the church, and counseling—through that lens. I began thinking more intentionally about the person in front of me—my wife, daughter, mother, church member, and counselee—as a representative of God. I also was reminded of the *imago Dei* in myself. I began to think of myself as an image-bearer, created to look like God and act like him in each care situation that I faced. I began to consider the great love of God that he would impart such dignity and worth to creatures so undeserving, and my affections for the Lord were stirred again and again.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 1:35.

I also came to see the project as imperative for TVC. The deeper I delved into care at TVC, from my unique vantage point of care deacon, professional counselor, and leader of the care and correction initiative, the more I realized just how systemic the issues with care had become. As the church had grown exponentially over the previous 12-15 years, the care process and training had not kept up. TVC did not just need some help with care and correction relating to domestic abuse, but with care and correction in general. To that end, the care and correction initiative provided some basic structural and process recommendations, and then recommended the hiring of a director of care to own and continue to shape and guide care at TVC.

Finally, the necessity of this project for the wider church became obvious through this project. Initially, I thought that I might just talk to other large, like-minded churches and glean from their policies and protocols, though I quickly realized that many of them had not spent much time considering domestic abuse either. The more I read, studied, and taught on this topic, two follow-up projects to this project became imperative to me: a resource for the church to help Christians, lay leaders, staff, and elders recognize and respond to domestic abuse in their midst, and a resource for men who struggle with destructive intimate relationships. I am already beginning to develop those resources with the help of others. Far from being just a good idea, this project has become a very personal ministry for me, driven by the fierce urgency of now.

Conclusion

As I look back on this project and ahead to new ones, I am grateful to God, to TVC, and to SBTS to have been entrusted with this important task. The spring and summer of 2015 is still a very clear memory to many in leadership at TVC. I definitely do not want to go back to that season, but I also do not want to forget it. TVC leaders now look gratefully back on that time as a merciful wound from a loving Father and gaze upon the redemption he has wrought in us and in our body since then. I look forward to how God will continue to use this project for his glory, to make his church the safest place on the

planet for victims of abuse, to see perpetrators of abuse corrected, and to see both victims and perpetrators healed and redeemed.

APPENDIX 1

DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

This assessment was administered electronically to all participants in the initial intensive training, as well as all participants in the subsequent, ongoing leader trainings, as a pre- and post-assessment to measure the effectiveness of the trainings.

DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess the participant's current understanding of domestic abuse and confidence in caring for perpetrators and victims. This research is being conducted by Greg Wilson for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the training and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the training. Any information you provide will be held completely confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Please provide a 6-digit personal identification number. This number will be used to match up pre-training assessments with post-training assessments. Thus, you will be required to provide this number on the follow-up assessment. Please do not lose it.

1. Participant's Personal Identification Number _____

Directions: Please answer the following questions about yourself and your current ministry role at TVC.

2. What is your current age in years? _____
3. What is your gender? _____
4. What is your current ministry leadership role?
 A. Pastor/Elder
 B. Minister/Deacon
 C. Other
5. How long have you served in your current ministry leadership role (in years)? _____
6. At which TVC campus do you serve? (If you are on central staff, answer regarding the campus where you primarily serve in ministry.)
 A. Flower Mound
 B. Dallas
 C. Plano
 D. Fort Worth
 E. Southlake
7. Have you read one or more books on the topic of domestic abuse?
 A. Yes
 B. No
Title(s) of book(s) read: _____

Directions: Please mark the best answer to each question below.

8. Which of the following is NOT part of the typical abuse cycle?
 A. Increased sensitivity
 B. Outburst of rage or aggression
 C. Tension-building (escalation)
 D. Reinstatement of equilibrium (“honeymoon phase”)
 E. Shame and self-centered remorse
9. Marriage counseling or marriage reconciliation is an important first step once abuse has been identified.
 A. True
 B. False
10. Biblical headship means that a husband has the final say in all important decisions.
 A. True
 B. False
11. The appropriate time to confront an abuser over his abusive behavior is immediately after the abuse is discovered or reported.
 A. True
 B. False
12. Someone in an abusive relationship should document the abusive behaviors of the other. That’s keeping a record of wrongs.
 A. True
 B. False
13. Since abuse is primarily a legal matter, the church should generally not get involved.
 A. True
 B. False
14. Which of the following is NOT considered an abusive tactic in the context of an intimate relationship?
 A. Coercion
 B. Intimidation
 C. Shared responsibility
 D. Minimizing
 E. Isolation
15. It may be necessary for a woman in abusive marriage to consult with an attorney about her options.
 A. True
 B. False
16. A woman in an abusive marriage often needs to make her marriage a lower priority.
 A. True
 B. False
17. When abuse is reported, it is important to talk to the other spouse/partner to verify the truth of the report.
 A. True
 B. False
18. Domestic abuse affects a relatively small number of people.
 A. True
 B. False

19. Domestic violence only occurs between people who are married.
 A. True
 B. False
20. If the abuse was really bad, the victim would leave.
 A. True
 B. False
21. A certain amount of violence is normal in a family.
 A. True
 B. False
22. After abuse is disclosed, the most important first step is:
 A. Getting the other side of the story
 B. Reconciling the marriage
 C. Safety
 D. Forgiveness
23. In some relationships, one partner can cause the other to be abusive.
 A. True
 B. False
24. Domestic violence is caused by anger management issues.
 A. True
 B. False
25. It is relatively easy to spot when domestic abuse is taking place in a family.
 A. True
 B. False

Directions: Please respond to the following statements with the most appropriate response from the options below:

SD = Strongly Disagree

AS = Agree Somewhat

D = Disagree

A = Agree

DS = Disagree Somewhat

SA = Strongly Agree

26. I feel equipped when called upon to minister to a couple where abuse is involved.
SD D DS AS A SA
27. I believe our church is a safe place for victims of abuse to disclose the abuse and be cared for.
SD D DS AS A SA
28. I believe that our church is a place where abusive behavior is exposed and corrected.
SD D DS AS A SA
29. I feel confident in my ability to discern if abuse is occurring in a relationship.
SD D DS AS A SA
30. I really believe that perpetrators of abuse can change.
SD D DS AS A SA
31. I am clear about the next steps to take if I suspect abuse is occurring in a relationship.
SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

THE VILLAGE CHURCH DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

This domestic abuse policy was approved by the TVC central elders on March 5, 2018.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Domestic abuse, or intimate partner abuse, is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser’s spouse or intimate partner through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse usually occurs in a pattern that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated on accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual, or psychological means. Sadly, the abuse is often perpetrated through a combination of these.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification – to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term “domestic violence”, is pervasive in our culture. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime.¹ Domestic abuse is underreported, so those statistics are conservative. The statistical probability is that domestic abuse is just as pervasive at TVC as it is in the culture outside of the church, and so we must be alert to it.

Domestic violence in any form – physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological or spiritual – is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being, and is therefore an assault upon God himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the victim. Domestic abuse severely damages relationships and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages the flourishing of the individual, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear. Given this acknowledgement, The Village Church affirms the following:

- domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living;
- all abuse is spiritually damaging for both the victim and the abuser, and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family, and close friendships;
- domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society;
- domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage problem, the

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey” (2010)

- victim's problem, or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem;
- statistically, domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men, against the very people whom God has given these men to protect and shepherd - women and children.
 - we will listen to, believe, support, and care for those affected by domestic abuse;
 - we will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling, and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship;
 - we will not seek to investigate charges of abuse, but will refer both the abused person and the perpetrator of the abuse to competent professional counselors, and potentially legal counsel, and rely upon their determinations;
 - we will report abuse to the proper authorities without delay;
 - we will discipline abusers and remove them from the church if they are unrepentant;
 - we will work with local domestic violence support agencies, will learn from them and support them in appropriate ways;
 - we will teach that domestic abuse is a sin;
 - we will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity and worth;
 - we will train all pastors/elders, ministers/deacons, and lay leaders in the TVC Domestic Abuse Awareness Training;
 - we will seek to utilize trained professionals to encourage best practices and keep church members and leadership trained on and informed about the implementation of this domestic abuse policy.

APPENDIX 3

THE VILLAGE CHURCH DOMESTIC ABUSE PROTOCOL

This domestic abuse protocol was approved by the TVC central elders on
March 5, 2018.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH DOMESTIC ABUSE PROTOCOL

Recognizing Abuse

The first step in responding to domestic abuse is recognizing it. The definition above tells us what it is, but we often need help knowing what it looks like. Each category expresses a different kind of pattern used to assault, reorder, and control the victim for the achievement of selfish ends. The behaviors are categorized on a severity continuum from less severe, to severe, to most severe, keeping in mind that all abuse by nature is severe. It is not uncommon to be tempted to minimize the less severe behaviors in comparison to the most severe behaviors. However, it is important to note that all of the behaviors listed are descriptors of abuse and are destructive. The list is not certainly not exhaustive. It is also important to note these categories are not mutually exclusive, but work more like overlapping layers or dimensions. That is, emotional torment will always include mental torment, and physical abuse will always constitute a kind of mental and emotional abuse.

The key distinctive of abuse is a pattern of misusing power to get what one wants at the expense of another. Although almost any relationship could exhibit some of the behaviors listed below, an abusive relationship will demonstrate a recognizable pattern of such behaviors. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is.

Mental (Psychological) Abuse¹

...is a pattern in the use of words and actions to assault, reorder, and control the thoughts and ideas of the other person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
Regular, harsh criticism; Constant questioning and challenging thoughts and perspective; Cold shoulders or silent treatment to punish; Frequent “innocent” sarcasm about the ideas of the other person; Instinctive defensiveness; Habitual dishonesty to avoid accountability and blame others; Using Scripture to correct and control spouse to selfish ends.	Frequent insults; Biting sarcasm; Threats of suicide or harm to self; Playing mind games; False accusations as a means to control; Mocking; Screaming; Using tone to instill fear; Separating the other person from friends; Isolating the other person from contact with friends and family; Withholding help— money, means of transportation, medical care, and other resources.	Threats of physical harm; Vicious, demeaning words; Constant assaults upon character; Threats to harm children or friends; Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation; Relentless attacks upon and controlling of the other person’s view of reality; Extreme distortions of Scripture to torment, mock, and subdue the other person.

¹ John Henderson, “Markers of Relational Abuse,” reprinted with permission of the author.

Emotional Abuse²

...is a pattern in the use of words and actions to assault, reorder, and control the emotions and affective state of the other person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
Regular, low-grade anger; Blaming the other person for frustration and irritability; Constant criticism and questioning of how the other person feels; Cold shoulders; Silent treatment when upset in order to arouse guilt or anxiety in the other person; Subtle attempts at humiliation.	Emotional explosiveness; Insults; Biting sarcasm; Threats of suicide or harm to self; Playing mind games; Trying to induce guilt and shame in order to manipulate; Taking advantage of emotional frailty and weakness; Attempts to instill fear in order to control the other person.	Threats of physical harm; Vicious, demeaning words; Constant assaults upon character; Threats to harm children or friends; Severe and repetitive verbal harassment and intimidation; Attempts to instill terror for the fun of it; Aggressive mocking and ridicule.

Physical Abuse³

...is a pattern in the use of posture, property, and physical contact to assault, punish, and control another person for the achievement of selfish ends. The more intense and longstanding the pattern, the more destructive it is to people.

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
Threatening posture; Hostile facial expressions; Clenched fists; Slamming doors; Getting in the face of the other person; Poking or flicking; Self-harm to punish and manipulate; Refusal to offer simple physical assistance; Use of law enforcement, legal counsel, and churches to threaten the physical and financial livelihood of the other person.	Grabbing; Pushing; Shoving; Stalking; Punching walls; Throwing objects around the house; Spitting; Forced drug use; Destroying the other person's items of value; Slapping; Physically isolating the other person from friends and relatives; Refusal to offer vital physical assistance	Punching; Biting; Stabbing; Shooting; Forced confinement; Torture; Hitting with objects; Physical injury to the other person's loved ones; Active involvement of law enforcement or churches to threaten or severely harm the physical and financial well-being of the other person.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Sexual Abuse⁴

...is related to physical violence but more centered around sexual organs, ideas, and acts. Involves the use of sexual thoughts, privileges, and acts to assault, demean, devalue, manipulate, and control the other person for the achievement of selfish ends.

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
Unwanted sexual touch of genitals, breasts, backside; Pushing for sexual acts that feel demeaning to the other person; Criticizing sexual performance; Comparing to others; Viewing pornography before, during, or after sexual intercourse with spouse; Refusing sex to punish or manipulate; Sexual teasing with no intent to fulfill aroused desires but simply to frustrate the other person.	Coerced sex using threats or incentives (perhaps to avoid a beating or violent outburst); Forcing unwanted behaviors during sex (like sodomy) or unwanted locations (like in a public restroom); Verbal or physical punishment if the other person doesn't comply.	Purposeful injury to sexual organs or breasts; Forced making of pornography, or prostitution, or involvement of other people; Forced sexual intercourse after physical assault; Demanding spouse let other people watch, even their children.

⁴ Ibid.

Financial (Economic) Abuse⁵

...is a pattern of behaviors used to entrap or force the victim’s dependence on the perpetrator by limiting access to assets, concealing information about or accessibility to the family finances. Research indicates that 98% of victims in abusive relationships experience financial or economic abuse.

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
<p>Forbidding the victim from attending job training or advancement opportunities; Withholding money or giving “an allowance”; Not including the victim in investment or banking decisions; Running up large amounts of debt on joint accounts</p>	<p>Forbidding the victim to work; Controlling how all of the money is spent; Not allowing the victim access to bank accounts; Refusing to work or contribute to the family income; Forcing the victim to work in a family business without pay; Refusing to pay bills and ruining the victim's' credit score; Forcing the victim to turn over public benefits or threatening to turn the victim in for “cheating or misusing benefits”; Filing false insurance claims</p>	<p>Sabotaging work or employment opportunities by stalking or harassing the victim at the workplace or causing the victim to lose her job by physically battering prior to important meetings or interviews; Forcing the victim to write bad checks or file fraudulent tax returns; Withholding funds for the victim or children to obtain basic needs such as food and medicine; Hiding assets; Stealing the victim’s identity, property or inheritance; Refusing to pay or evading child support or manipulating the divorce process by drawing it out by hiding or not disclosing assets</p>

⁵ Bethlehem Baptist Church Domestic Abuse Response Team (unpublished internal document). Shared with permission of the authors.

Spiritual Abuse

...is a pattern of using one's spiritual position to control or dominate another person.⁶ Johnson and Van Vonderen go on to say, "Spiritual abuse can also occur when spirituality is used to make others live up to a spiritual standard."⁷ Ken Blue offers this definition, "spiritual abuse happens when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploit a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds."⁸ Spiritual abuse most often occurs in churches and marriages. **Spiritual abuse is not calling a brother or sister to repentance or to consider the legitimate claims of Scripture on his or her life. Like all other forms of abuse, spiritual abuse is an oppressive misuse of power for the purpose of coercive control over the other person for selfish ends.**

Less Severe	Severe	Most Severe
Misusing Scripture to control; Lack of humility with Scripture; Lack of mutual honor and respect; Negative comments about authority not allowed; Over-spiritualizing; Leadership unwilling to admit mistakes; Leaders preoccupied with their authority; Unspoken rules;	"I am right, you are wrong" messages; Unsafe to criticize authority; culture of exclusive spirituality ("we have the monopoly on God"); Financial manipulation; difficult to leave or move on; Trust demanded or legislated; Excessive legalism; Use of fear and shame to motivate; No respect or little respect for personal liberty.	Extreme distortions of Scripture to torment, mock, and subdue the other person; Isolation from the outside; Isolated accountability structure (or no accountability structure); Unsafe to leave

Responding to Domestic Abuse

Our response to domestic abuse is staggered as follows. We will move first to care for the victim, then to correct the perpetrator, and finally, if appropriate, to reconcile the marriage.

Victim Care

Responding to domestic abuse at TVC begins with care for those who have been harmed by abuse and oppression. We will actively look for the behavior patterns described above. If abuse is reported to us, we will listen to and believe victims, inform the appropriate personnel within the church, including the campus care pastor/minister and the domestic abuse response coordinator, report to authorities if legally or ethically required, assure the victim that he or she is not to blame for the abuse, and provide whatever assistance we can, including assistance with finding a professional counselor and/or safe and suitable living arrangements. The safety of the victim is paramount at this

⁶ David Johnson and Jeff Van Vonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse: Recognizing & Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1991), 20.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 12.

point, and it is not advisable to confront the perpetrator until safety has been planned and implemented.

Perpetrator Correction

It is a safety issue to confront the perpetrator of abuse without the prior advice and consent of the victim and the victim's counselor. Once victim safety has been secured, the elders will follow the direction of the victim and the victim's counselor regarding the best way to confront and lovingly correct the perpetrator. Individual counseling by a licensed professional experienced in working with perpetrators and/or group counseling through a Batterer Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP) will be recommended. Repentance of the perpetrator is the goal, as evidenced through fruit of godly sorrow that time will help us discern.

Marriage Reconciliation (If Possible)

The reconciliation of the relationship is always our hope, but it is not always guaranteed. And, marital reconciliation will not dictate our primary approach to care. Reconciliation to the Lord will. Reconciliation to the Lord will take precedence over reconciliation of the marriage, and we will only move forward with reconciliation if both parties and their counselors are in agreement.

APPENDIX 4

THE VILLAGE CHURCH ELDERS' STATEMENT
ON DIVORCE IN CASES OF ABUSE

This statement on divorce in cases of abuse was approved by the TVC central elders on October 2, 2017.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH ELDERS' STATEMENT
ON DIVORCE IN CASES OF ABUSE

The elders affirm that all forms of abuse—including physical, emotional, verbal, economic, spiritual and sexual abuse—of one's spouse or children are egregious evils because they are a desecration of the divine image of God in a person. We acknowledge they may be considered grounds for divorce as a breach of the marital covenant and/or desertion of the marriage, since stopping the abuse may require physical separation.

APPENDIX 5

THE VILLAGE CHURCH STATEMENT ON OPPRESSION

This statement on oppression was approved by the TVC central elders on
March 5, 2018.

THE VILLAGE CHURCH STATEMENT ON OPPRESSION

The church needs a theology of oppression to accompany her theology of suffering. The theme of suffering is ubiquitous in the Scriptures, but so is the theme of oppression. God's Word teaches us that suffering produces sanctification (Rom 5:3-4), that pain is purposeful (Rom 8:28-29), that God comforts us in our suffering so that we can comfort others with the same comfort we have received (2 Cor 1:3-4), that suffering is a gift (Phil 1:29), and that we suffer because Christ suffered (1 Pet 2:21), among other things. **A theology of suffering is essential for a church leader, but a theology of suffering without considering God's view of and response to violence and oppression can lead to reckless care and harmful counsel.**

God hates oppression. Believers should always pay attention when the Bible tells us that God hates something. We should hate what God hates. "The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence." (Ps 11:5)

God hears the cries of the oppressed and delivers them. In Scripture when the oppressed cry out to God, he hears them and he does something about it. God sees the oppressed. He hears the oppressed. And he acts on behalf of the oppressed to deliver them. Consider just a few examples:

- **Sarai's oppression of Hagar in Gen 16.** The angel of the LORD found her (v. 7), promises to multiply her offspring, providing protection and provision for her (v. 10), told her that the LORD has listened to her affliction (v. 11), and Hagar calls him "a God who sees me" and says, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." (v. 13)
- **Laban's oppression of Jacob in Gen 31.** Jacob says, "God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night." (v. 42)
- **The Egyptians' oppression of Israel in Ex 1-2.** "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Ex 2:23–25) And, then, in Ex 3, God calls and sends a deliverer - Moses.

"You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless." (Ex 22:22-24)

"The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble...he does not forget the cry of the afflicted." (Ps 9:9, 12b)

"O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more." (Ps 10:17-18)

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” (Zec 7:9-10)

God’s people must respond to human oppression as God responds to it.

Because God sees the oppressed, hears their cries, and acts with compassion, mercy, and justice, we should do the same.

“Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed.” (Jer 22:3a)

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Pr 31:8–9)

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Mt 5:7)

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal 6:2)

Of course, a thorough tracing of the theme of oppression in the Scriptures would take many more words than this brief survey will allow. The primary deliverance from oppression that all believers have experienced is the deliverance that Christ came to bring from the oppression of sin and its effects in the fall. Reading from Isaiah 61, Jesus inaugurated his ministry by pointing to himself as the fulfillment of the text:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Lk 4:18-19)

May we who are called to follow in his steps go and do likewise.

APPENDIX 6

THE VILLAGE CHURCH DOMESTIC ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING

This ongoing training is administered regularly (three-four times per year) to lay leaders at the church (group leaders, TVC Institute cohort leaders, next-generation leaders, men's and women's bible class leaders). It is also part of the onboarding process for new staff, elders, and deacons. The training is taught in a master teacher, lecture format by a licensed counselor who has training and experience in domestic abuse.



Domestic Abuse Awareness Training **2018 LEADER CONFERENCE**

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse, or intimate partner abuse, is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser's spouse or intimate partner through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

What is domestic abuse?

- ▶ It is an assault upon **the image of God** in another human being.
- ▶ It usually occurs in a **pattern** that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- ▶ It is always **intentional**, even if the abuser is unaware. The motives and intentions of our hearts aren't always immediately obvious to us or others. The intent is to get what one wants.

What is domestic abuse?

- ▶ It is about the **misuse of power** to control or manipulate the other for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- ▶ It can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, or psychological means: **overt or covert, in words or in actions.**
- ▶ Its goal is **self-gratification** – to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Prevalence

1 IN 4 WOMEN
HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
IN THEIR LIFETIME.

(CDC, 2010)

Prevalence

1 IN 7 MEN
HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
IN THEIR LIFETIME.

(CDC, 2010)



More Women Experience Intimate Partner Violence

Victims of domestic violence, by gender, 2010



Prevalence

"None of us can escape the brokenness of our world. We are sinful, hurting, people in a universe groaning under the curse of sin. The reality of physical and sexual abuse in our world provides a blatant and painful proof of this brokenness."
John Henderson

Prevalence

- ▶ **Domestic violence and abuse is pervasive in our culture and often hidden due to fear and shame.**
- ▶ **We know statistically that domestic abuse is just as pervasive at TVC as it is in the culture, and so we must be alert to it.**

Domestic Abuse: A Very Public Case Study



Colbie Holderness, Rob Porter's 1st Ex-Wife





Colbie Holderness, Rob Porter's 1st Ex-Wife

Recognizing and surviving in an abusive relationship takes strength. The abuse can be terrifying, life-threatening and almost constant. Or it can ebb and flow, with no violence for long periods. It's often the subtler forms of abuse that inflict serious, persistent damage while making it hard for the victim to see the situation clearly.



Colbie Holderness, Rob Porter's 1st Ex-Wife

Then there is the just-as-serious issue of being believed and supported by those you choose to tell. Sometimes people don't believe you. Sometimes they have difficulty truly understanding what you are trying to tell them. Both Willoughby and I raised our cases with clergy. Both of us had a hard time getting them to fully address the abuse taking place. It wasn't until I spoke to a professional counselor that I was met with understanding.



Jennie Willoughby, Rob Porter's 2nd Ex-Wife

If someone finds the strength and courage to come forward, he or she is to be believed. Because that declaration only came after an uphill battle toward rebirth. Ultimately, this is not a political issue. This is a societal issue, and the tone has just been reset by the White House. If the most powerful people in the nation do not believe my story of abuse in the face of overwhelming evidence, then what hope do others have of being heard?



Rachel Denhollander, Larry Nasser Victim

Church is one of the least safe places to acknowledge abuse because the way it is counseled is, more often than not, damaging to the victim. It is with deep regret that I say the church is one of the worst places to go for help. That's a hard thing to say, because I am a very conservative evangelical, but that is the truth. There are very, very few who have ever found true help in the church.

Patterns of Abuse



Patterns of Abuse

"Domestic violence is always on an escalating pattern. It always gets worse...Whatever my gut instinct is about a particular marriage or a particular husband, I can never say to a woman, 'well you won't be a statistic or your husband is a non-escalating sinner.' I must look at each woman I counsel as a statistic in the making."
Jeffrey Black

Patterns of Abuse

- ▶ **As long as these patterns continue, the abuser's "sorrow" is worldly sorrow (remorse), not godly sorrow (repentance).**
- ▶ "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." 2 Cor 7:9-10

Patterns of Abuse

- ▶ **Only genuine heart change, resulting in fruit-bearing repentance, can interrupt these patterns of abuse.**
- ▶ "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:43-45

Patterns of Abuse

- ▶ **Godly sorrow takes time to discern. Be skeptical of change that seems to happen too quickly.**
- ▶ "Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly." Prov 26:24-26

Abuse is NOT primarily...

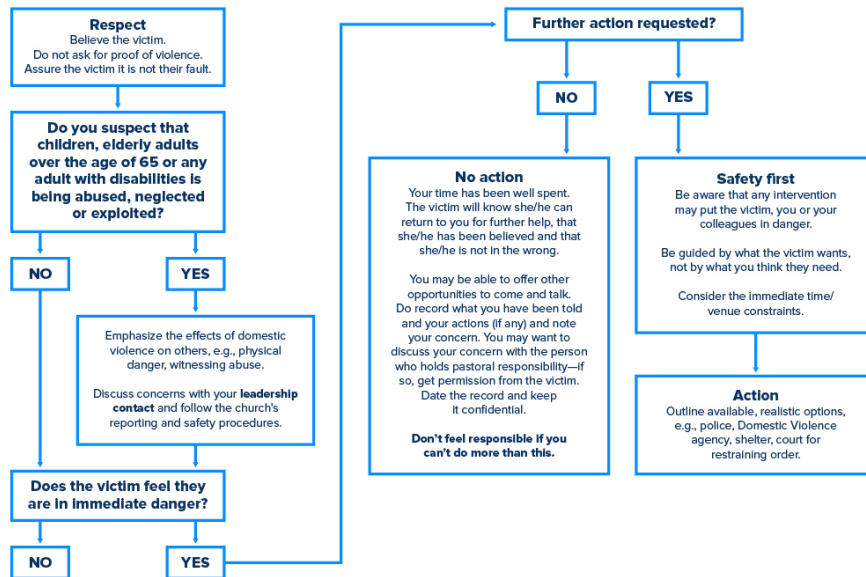
- ▶ ...a **legal** problem
 - ▶ ...an **anger** problem
 - ▶ ...a **marriage** problem
 - ▶ ...the **spouse or partner's** problem
- Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse*

Abuse IS primarily...

...a heart problem!



Domestic Violence Disclosure Flowchart



When Abuse is Disclosed – Care First

- ▶ **Safety** is paramount.
- ▶ **Listen** to her.
- ▶ **Believe** her.
- ▶ **Inform** a pastor/minister as soon as possible. (Keeping confidences is not an option.)
- ▶ **Assure** her (it's not your fault).
- ▶ **Assist** her (based on her desires).

A Theology of Oppression is Required

- ▶ **We need a theology of oppression to go with our theology of suffering.**
- ▶ A theology of suffering is essential, but in situations of abuse a theology of suffering without considering God's response to violence and oppression can lead to some dangerous advice.

Our Response to the Oppressed

Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. (Jer 22:3, ESV)

Our Response to the Oppressed

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Prov 31:8-9)

Good Counsel for the Oppressed

- ▶ It is good to overcome evil by doing good. (Romans 12:21)
- ▶ It is good to protect yourself from violent people. (Prov 27:12)
- ▶ It is good to expose the deeds of darkness. (Eph 5:11)
- ▶ It is good to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:25)
- ▶ It is good to stop someone from sinning against you when possible (Matt 18:15-18, James 5:19-20, Prov 19:19)

More Good Counsel for the Oppressed

- ▶ It is good to allow the abusive person to experience the consequences of his/her behaviors (Gal 6:7)
- ▶ It is good to see the fruit of repentance before reconciling (Gen 42-45)
- ▶ It is good to be gracious to your enemy (Gen 42:20)

Ask Good Questions (When? Where? Why?)

- ▶ Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in this relationship?
- ▶ Have you ever been an unwilling participant in a sexual act?
- ▶ Have you ever felt fearful around your partner?

More Good Questions (When? Where? Why?)

- ▶ Are there times you don't trust your partner's honesty?
- ▶ Do you have the freedom to be yourself, make decisions, give your input and say no to things? If not, what happens when you try?
- ▶ Can you respectfully challenge and confront the attitudes, decisions or behaviors of your partner? When you try, what happens?

Things to Listen For

- ▶ imbalance of power/control in the relationship
- ▶ consistent lack of mutuality
- ▶ lack of freedom to speak up, have an opinion that is different, disagree, or make choices on his/her own
- ▶ consistent indifference to his/her partner's needs, feelings, desires, thoughts
- ▶ blame-shifting, minimizing, and lack of responsibility for wrongs committed in the marriage
- ▶ an attitude of entitlement

Dig Deeper (Looking for Patterns)

- ▶ When was the first time?
- ▶ When was the last time?
- ▶ What is a typical time? (Can you give me an example?)
- ▶ What was the worst time?
- ▶ Listen for imbalance of power and control, as well as patterns of abusive/destructive behaviors often escalating in frequency and intensity over time.

When Abuse is Disclosed – Confront Carefully

- ▶ Confrontation of the abuser should only happen with the **advice and consent of the victim**, and only after safety has been established.
- ▶ Since abuse is a desecration of the *imago Dei*, it is **never** an appropriate response to provocation.
- ▶ Since abuse is a misuse of power, abusive men need a **redeemed** view of power, position, and authority.

When Abuse is Disclosed – Confront Carefully

- ▶ Since abuse is about self-gratification, abusive men must learn humility. An abusive man is often an **entitled** man.
- ▶ Since abuse is an act of **oppression**, God's people should have the same attitude towards abuse that God has towards oppression.

An Abusive Man is an Entitled Man

“He sees his rights, opinions, and desires as more important than those of his wife and children. He is so preoccupied with getting his needs met (narcissistic) that he feels misunderstood, not wrong.” Brenda Branson and Paula J. Silva, *Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis*.

Power, Position & Authority

- ▶ Mark 10:35-45
- ▶ Ephesians 5:21-33
- ▶ Philippians 2:1-11
- ▶ Colossians 3:19
- ▶ 1 Peter 3:7

Guidelines for Care

- ▶ Domestic violence and abuse is pervasive in our culture and often hidden due to fear and shame.
- ▶ We know statistically that domestic abuse is just as pervasive at TVC as it is in the culture, and so we must be alert to it.
- ▶ Domestic abuse is primarily perpetrated by men, against the very people whom God has given these men to protect and shepherd - women and children.

Guidelines for Care

- ▶ When someone discloses abuse, listen to her, believe her, be quick to assess and plan for her safety, and don't handle it alone. Give practical assistance.
- ▶ All abuse is related to a misuse/imbalance of power and control. Note this dynamic, look for it, and be sensitive to it in your response to an allegation of abuse. Men, especially, if working with a woman who has been oppressed by a man, have a trusted woman in the room and let her take the lead.
- ▶ Confrontation of the abuser should only take place with the advice and consent of the abused and after safety has been established.

Guidelines for Care

- ▶ Godly sorrow will take time to discern. In the short-term worldly sorrow can sometimes look like godly sorrow, but over time genuine repentance always becomes evident.
- ▶ Move faster with care and slower with confrontation and correction.
- ▶ Reconciliation with God takes precedence over reconciliation of the marriage.
- ▶ Maintain a humble confidence in the Lord and his goodness, his love for both parties and his sovereignty over all.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND PROTOCOL FOR THE VILLAGE CHURCH IN FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS

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This project developed a domestic abuse policy and protocol to assist the leaders of The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, in caring for victims and correcting perpetrators of domestic abuse in her midst. Chapter 1 describes the ministry context of The Village Church, including the particular challenges and complexities that exist at TVC, establishes a rationale of the need for this project, and sets out the project's goals. This project had four goals: (1) increase baseline knowledge of all ministry staff, elders, and deacons in the care and correction of domestic abuse cases by bringing in expert master teachers to conduct an extensive initial training, (2) develop a domestic abuse policy and protocol for TVC, including specific processes and pathways for care, (3) develop a training curriculum for the ongoing training of pastors-ministers, elders, deacons, and lay leaders in domestic abuse awareness, including recognition and response, and (4) train key lay leaders, as well as new pastors-ministers, elders and deacons on a regular basis utilizing the training developed in goal 3.

Chapter 2 provides a biblical and theological understanding of domestic abuse. Biblically, abuse is a desecration of the *imago Dei* in both the abuser and the abused person, and a desecration of the creation mandate, requiring a God-like response by the church toward both the abused and the abuser for the advancement of God's kingdom. It is an act of oppression. God responds to this oppression with compassion and care for the

oppressed and with anger and punishment toward the oppressor. God's people should respond to abuse as God responds to it.

Chapter 3 presents critical elements of a church domestic abuse policy and protocol. A domestic abuse policy and protocol helps leaders protect families by answering two questions: "What is domestic abuse?" and "How do I respond lovingly and competently to a disclosure or discovery of domestic abuse?" It is critical that church leaders know how to recognize domestic abuse and how to respond to it as God does. When a church has a clear policy and protocol for domestic abuse, those inclined to abuse know that the church is not a safe place for them to abuse and those vulnerable to abuse know that the church is a safer place for them.

Chapter 4 chronicles TVC's journey of progress, not perfection, in domestic abuse awareness, recognition, and response. This journey of growth was marked by the various stages of implementation of the project, including the initial master training, the writing and implementation of the domestic abuse policy and protocol documents, as well as a statement on divorce in cases of abuse and a statement of oppression, and the design and implementation of the ongoing training.

Chapter 5 reflects upon TVC's journey of growth and assesses the project's effectiveness based the project's stated goals. I also reflect in chapter 5 on my personal growth through this project, as well as future projects that I plan to undertake. Much work remains. The hope for this project is that it would in help make Christ's bride more beautiful through the compassionate care of victims and courageous correction of perpetrators of domestic abuse in the church.

VITA

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