

Addressing Abuse in the Church 2



MEETING DATES

1. February 11
2. **February 18**
3. February 25
4. March 3
5. March 10
6. March 17

RESOURCES

* Addressing Abuse, PCA Report 2022 <https://www.pcaac.org/aic-report-abuse/>

Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* (1820s)

Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (2008)

Lindsey Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (2014)

Chris Moles, ed., *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse* (2015)

Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God* (2015); *Redeeming Power* (2020)

Scot McKnight, *A Church Called Tov* (2020)

Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit* (2022)

COURSE OVERVIEW

To examine the issue of abuse found inside the church so that the church can repent, protect, and give glory to God.

CASE STUDY

See below

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: “Abuse is the treatment of any person that is callous, often cruel, for selfish reasons, and that has deeply detrimental effects on the person physically and/or sexually, emotionally, and spiritually. The image of God in the victim of such treatment is completely denied... (Abuse is) persistent maltreatment that causes lasting damage.”

1. **Damage** – real, sometime measurable, hurt is caused to victim
2. **Persistent** – it is not one-and-done, but consistent
3. **Power** – the abuser misuses power to his advantage
4. **Motivation** – the abuser does not see value in the victim as made in the image of God

Domestic Abuse: “A form of oppression in which one spouse controls and dominates the other through a pattern of coercive, controlling, and punishing behaviors” (*PCA Report*, 75).

Forgiveness: “A decision to release someone from suffering punishment or penalty for his sin” (Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 207).

STUDY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

“Many churches are woefully underequipped to deal with domestic violence” (Lindsey A. Holcomb and Justin S. Holcomb, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for those Suffering Domestic Violence*, 30).

1. What Is It?

See Handout 1

2. How to Spot It?

Five tactics of domestic abusers (PCA Report, 80-88):

1. **Emotional Abuse:** *Any non-physical behavior designed to control someone through degradation, humiliation, and/or fear*

- i. Verbal abuse
- ii. Intimidation
- iii. Emotional blackmail
- iv. Isolation
- v. Gaslighting
- vi. Using children as pawns

“A marriage is emotionally abusive when one spouse uses multiple behavior patterns on a consistent basis. Regular use of these tactics creates an oppressive environment in the home. The victim and family are trapped in bondage to the abuser’s moods and emotions. Although emotional abuse leaves no visible bruises, it is difficult to understate the impact.” (PCA Report, 83)

2. **Spiritual Abuse:** *Using a person’s faith as a tactic for manipulation and control*

“In the hands of an abuser, the Word of God may be a tool to tear down a victim rather than build her up (Rom. 14:19). Abusers may take good and pure truths and twist them into a perverse shadow of what God intended” (PCA Report, 83).

3. **Economics Abuse:** *Behavior that dominates a person financially.* Either through:

- a. Abuser maintains tight control over finances
- b. Abuser has a sense of entitlement which results in financial recklessness.

4. **Sexual Abuse:** *Any unwanted contact or interaction that occurs for the sexual stimulation of the abuser*

“Sexual abuse is the most difficult category of abuse to discuss. Sexual assault in the home is well hidden, and the related shame and confusion often prevents victims from disclosing” (PCA Report, 85).

5. **Physical Abuse:** *Any behavior that dominates a person through physical force or violence*
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[Lindsey A. Holcomb and Justin S. Holcomb's book, *Is It My Fault? Hope and Healing for those Suffering Domestic Violence*]

"The wheel is a tool created by researchers to help define and identify some of the behaviors used to maintain power and control" (Holcomb, *Is It My Fault?*, 43).

- The source is the hub – "power and control"
- The outer rim is the "hands on" abuse.
- The spokes of the wheel are the "hands off" abuse.

3. What to do when you Suspect it?

(PCA Report, 91-93)

- Prior to disclosure or discovery, church leadership sets the pace for the congregation in the treatment of women. Leaders honor their wives and speak to and about their wives with respect. Leaders encourage and facilitate the development and use of their spouses' gifts as God directs. Leaders encourage staff and church members to do the same.
 - Label abuse as such. **If you aren't sure, use words that you discover to be true: harsh, cruel, manipulative, deceptive, etc.** "Abuse is comprised of many sins, and a good start is to accurately label sin."
 - Protect sheep. Resist sending the woman back into a dangerous situation with instructions to pray and/or submit more. **Do NOT mutualize.**
 - Provide at least one trained, respected, godly woman to accompany the victim.
 - Form and train a team of men and women to function with knowledge and authority in situations involving domestic abuse, as they come alongside the victim, children, and abuser.
 - Read widely from both pastoral and clinical sources.
 - Familiarize yourself with training and resources provided by local domestic abuse organizations.
 - Establish ongoing oversight of the educational and training measures.
 - Familiarize yourself with state and local laws.
 - "In the case of domestic abuse, reporting is not recommended unless mandated by state law. It violates the victim's freedom, and it may unintentionally jeopardize her safety" (93).
 - Familiarize yourself with the names and contact information of emergency departments, shelters, attorneys, advocates, employment-training facilities, food banks, etc.
 - National Domestic Violence Hotline
 - 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)
 - 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)
 - National Domestic Violence Email
 - ndvh@ndvh.org
 - National Sexual Assault Hotline
 - 1-800-656-4673
 - National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline
 - 1-866-331-9474
 - National Child Abuse Hotline
 - 1-800-222-4453
 - Establish connection with specific individuals in the public sector.
 - Host seminars utilizing professionals to educate.
 - Provide other resources and books on domestic abuse in the church library.
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The *PCA Report* recommends that each church have two teams:

1. Church Advocacy Group (*PCA Report*, 94)

Those who have experienced any form of abuse, assault, or harassment inside of or outside the church should have an easily accessible, empathetic, reliable, and formal means of reporting. Persons with like experience or situation help somewhat in decreasing fear of reporting. **Appointed and highly visible advocates in the local church** might include a small group of well-trained members. The advocacy group should document the concern or complaint in sufficient detail to categorize it as reportable to public authorities (such as physical abuse, rape, sexual assault, physical assault, battery, kidnapping, etc.) or non-reportable (spiritual abuse short of the above, sexual harassment, adultery, etc.).

2. Crisis Intervention Team (*PCA Report*, 94)

The Crisis Intervention Team should consist of **effective, wise, and disciplined elders (other than those assigned to advocacy group)** able to intervene promptly, efficiently, and effectively to the complaint.

Major tasks will be to

1. Investigate the matter,
2. Relieve any allegedly abusive leaders from duty (after confirmed disclosure, family safety, and abused must set the pace), and
3. Provide shepherding counsel and support to victims, abusers, and their families.

The Crisis Intervention Team is also responsible as a liaison with church and/or presbytery leadership, and communication to and with the congregation and general public regarding the matter. Truth, honesty, and accountability should be the hallmarks of the team's interactions with the accused, congregation, presbytery, and with the public.

4. How to Shepherd the Participants?

The Victim/Survivor

(Beth M. Broom, "Trauma Healing for Abuse Survivors," *Caring for Families Caught in Domestic Abuse*, ed. Chris Moles, 96-103)

1. The ministry of wisdom. **Ecclesiastes 7:4**. Give time to walk around the suffering.
 2. The ministry of presence. Jesus didn't hurry. **John 8:1-11**. Give time to heal.
 3. The ministry of stabilization. **Mark 5:25-34**. Give time speak.
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The Abuser

"In *When Home Hurts*, Jeremy Pierre and I assert that repentance involves **seeing** and naming your sin accurately, **owning** it (without avoiding accountability by minimizing, denying, and blaming the victim), **hating** the sin increasingly because God hates it and because it separates us from him, and, ultimately, **turning** from the sin through time-tested changes in behavior" (Greg Wilson, "Counseling the Abusive Individual," *Caring For Families Caught in Domestic Abuse*, ed. Chris Moles, 143).

BIBLE STUDY

Matthew 6:12

... and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors..."

Matthew 18:21-35

... ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

"Forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same" (*PCA Report*, 282).

The work of the victim/survivor

"By forgiving an abuser, a survivor lays aside bitterness, anger, and malice and they depend on the Lord for justice according to His righteousness (Eph. 4:31-32; Ps. 72:2). Yet the consequences of an abuser's sin remain. When a survivor forgives their oppressor, they do not release the abuser from accountability in the courts of God or man" (*PCA Report*, 280).

The victim/survivor is not responsible to restore the relationship with the abuser. While it is true that the victim is called to forgive, that is between the Holy Spirit and the victim. The abuser has no right to that time frame, nor does he have any role to play in that forgiveness. Furthermore, the victim/survivor has the resources available to her to forgive – at the cross of Jesus.

"Forgiveness is a brutal mathematical transaction done with fully engaged faculties... Beware the forgiveness that is tendered soon after injury; be suspicious. Real forgiveness needs a time lag, for it is wrought in private agony before it ever comes to public amnesty. All true acts of courage are thus done in secret" (Andrée Seu Peterson, "The Thing We Don't Do: Forgiveness is Hard Work," *World Magazine*, September 30, 2006).

The work of the abuser

Repentance. “Scripture is clear: the offending party, not the offended, is responsible for repentance (Luke 17:3). The abuser is responsible to turn from their abuse. Repentance and a renewed relationship with the Lord is the goal” (*PCA Report*, 282-83).

PCA Report, 284-85:

1. Ownership of sin without minimization
2. Willingness to fully accept the consequences for sin
3. Patient endurance with the victim’s healing
4. Godly repentance recognizes the difference between being forgiven, being trusted, and/or being restored
5. Commitment to stop the abuse and recognize the damage it has caused

2 Corinthians 7:10-11

¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

What characteristics of “godly grief” do you see?

When is reconciliation possible?

Scripture is also clear regarding reconciliation; it is “conditional” on true repentance (Luke 17:3, Col. 1:21-23). Repentance that is obvious, genuine, and demonstrable over time is necessary for restoration (*PCA Report*, 283).

“Those truly repentant will wait patiently until the abused are ready for relational restoration” (*PCA Report*, 45)

“Sometimes God will perform a miracle and bring healing and restoration to the marriage. But many times, He does not, and in such cases victims should not be forced to endure a lifetime of abuse” (*PCA Report*, 300).

HOMEWORK

- How is your regular (daily?) prayer for those suffering abuse in the church going?
 - Who do you need to forgive in your life?
 - What sins do you need to repent of? Meditate on 2 Cor. 7:10-11 and ask if you have really repented of them?
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CASE STUDY

(pages 137-39 of PCA Report)

Natalie backed the minivan out of the driveway. . . a little too fast. She had to swerve to miss the mailbox. Natalie and the kids were late for Sunday school, so she was driving erratically. The kids flinched when the van jerked, but they didn't dare mention it or respond with any show of fear. They knew better. "I'm. SO. Grrrr . . ." the kids heard their mom spew more than speak.

Moments before they left the house, Natalie and Mike had been fighting. Again. Mike worked the late shift Friday and Saturday night after his day job. At 8:30 am he was still asleep, so Natalie had to get the three kids (ages 2, 4, and 6) bathed, fed, and ready for church by herself. She was not happy. "I. DO. NOT. DESERVE. THIS," she murmured, and turned down the street toward the church.

The fighting began that morning like usual. It started with Natalie's silence. She wasn't silent because she didn't want to wake Mike—more so because she was seething inside. She had taken care of the kids by herself all weekend and she was done! She needed Mike to get up, act like a man, and participate in the family as a father should. But Mike was still sleeping. The kids were watching cartoons in their pajamas, eating bowls of dry Fruit Loops with marshmallows. Natalie had told the oldest to prepare his siblings' breakfast. The cereal and marshmallows were all he could find. Natalie contemplated her next steps.

When the silent period ended, the kids knew to go to their rooms. Even the two-year-old wanted to be out of hearing distance from the yelling. "YOU JERK!" they heard from the "safety" of their bedrooms. Natalie was standing over Mike as he lay in their bed. She had ripped the sheets and blankets off his body, jerked the shades off the windows to let in the sunlight, and screamed at the top of her lungs. "I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE STILL IN BED WHEN THE KIDS NEED A BATH AND I NEED TO GET TO CHURCH." Natalie was on the nursery schedule; she had told Mike earlier in the week. She never reminded him, but she expected him to remember and be available when called on to help.

Mike had had a total of four hours of sleep between Thursday night and Sunday. He was definitely sleep deprived. He worked two jobs just to keep up with the bills. Mike had gone to seminary but never found a calling. He drove a UPS truck during the day and cleaned the local middle school building on weekend nights. Natalie constantly complained to Mike she couldn't continue to live with his schedule. She blamed him for not getting the job when he applied for a pastoral position. She told Mike his "humility" (his word—Natalie called it weakness) came off pathetic. Who would hire a man like that for their pastor? She wouldn't forgive him for giving up and settling for random part-time jobs.

Sometimes Mike would fight back. He would tell Natalie he'd fully support her if she wanted to get a job. Natalie would just sneer and say "Are you kidding? Are YOU going to take care of the kids and get them to school and appointments? I have enough on my plate with Bible study and Life Group and my discipleship

relationships! Are you going to tell me that, just because YOU can't get a job in ministry, I have to ignore God's calling for ME? If you loved me, you'd find a better job that would allow you to be the husband and father you were meant to be!"

It didn't seem to matter to Natalie that Mike typically stopped at the grocery store on his way home from work, or that he was the one to start the crockpot with dinner before he left to pick up his UPS load in the morning. Natalie had fallen asleep watching a movie the night before this latest blow up, so she didn't see Mike read the kids a story and tucked them into bed. Nothing Mike did was good enough. The mood in the home was one of general discontent, and the center of that unhappiness evolved around Natalie.

Natalie's demeanor calmed as she pulled into the church parking lot. She put on her "Sunday face" and delivered each of the older kids to their Sunday school class. By the time she got to the nursery with her two-year-old in tow, she was late. "I'm soooo sorry," she told the children's director. "I just wanted to make sure my kids' classes didn't need any help because I know how you hate when they're short-handed. I was so anxious to make sure all was right according to your meticulous standards!" A toddler climbed up on the small plastic chair next to Natalie and started to teeter. The director called out to Natalie, "Catch him!" Natalie turned toward the child and stepped back. The boy hit the floor hard, headfirst. Natalie's version of rescue was to pick up the crying child by his ankle and deposit him into the lap of another worker. When confronted, Natalie smiled and said, "I'm sorry! I can't always be perfect! You know, you were right here too! I'm not as strong as you and besides, if that boy's mom had taught him better, it would never have happened."

- If you were the Children's Director, what would you do?
 - If you suspected abuse, what would you do?
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