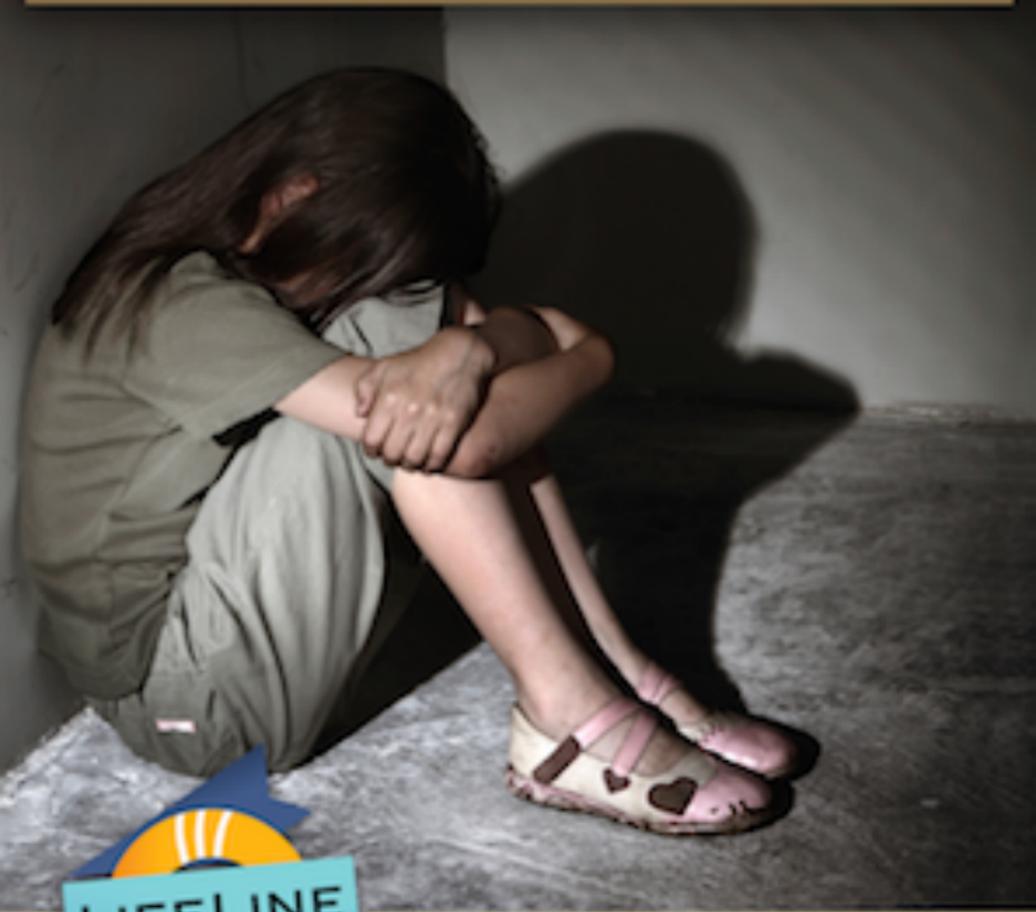


HELP!

**SOMEONE I LOVE
HAS BEEN ABUSED**



Jim newhelsler

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Jim Newheiser

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INTRODUCTION

Abuse is a growing problem. In 2007 there were over three million reported cases of child abuse in the United States, involving as many as six million children.¹ Estimates of the number of incidents of domestic violence range from just under a million to several million per year. It is estimated that one in four women has been the victim of domestic violence. While the overwhelming majority of victims are women, there has been a growing awareness of the many cases in which men are also the victims of domestic battering.² Similar trends are observed in other Western countries, including Great Britain and Canada.³ Abuse also touches those who are not directly victimized; for example, children are traumatized when they see their parents fighting. It is estimated that 70 percent of us know of friends and

¹ “National Child Abuse Statistics,” Childhelp, at: childhelp.org.

² “Domestic Violence Statistics,” Domestic Violence Resource Center, at: dvrc-or.org/domestic/violence/resources/C61/.

³ “UK Statistics on Domestic Violence,” at: home.cybergrrl.com/dv/body.html; “Violence against Women in Canada ... by the Numbers,” Statistics Canada, at: www42.statcan.gc.ca/smr08/smr08_012-eng.htm.

family who have been abused, 30 percent within the past year.⁴

The church is not immune to the problem of abuse. Some come into the church having been converted out of violent backgrounds. Many professing believers struggle with sins of anger which can quickly get out of control. I have seen many cases of abuse both in my pastoral ministry and in cases which have come to the counseling center at which I work.

We had known Sid, Jane, and their two young children for about three years.⁵ They were involved in the life of our church and appeared to be a great family. When they asked to meet with me one Saturday morning, I couldn't imagine what the reason could be. I was shocked to learn that for most of their marriage they had been engaging in shouting matches which often ended with Sid beating Jane. No one would ever have imagined that such a sweet couple could have such problems. How could they be helped?

Rob and Lucy were a different story. Rob was a very self-centered, angry man. Lucy seemed fearful and withdrawn. One Sunday Lucy showed up in

4 "Domestic Violence Statistics."

5 All names have been changed to protect the identities of those concerned.

church with what appeared to be a black eye. On another occasion she went to the emergency room with a broken wrist. Her friends in church suspected that Rob was beating her, but she claimed she was just accident-prone. Then one day, when Rob was watching TV, his five-year-old son got in his way and Rob slugged him in the face, leaving a big welt under his eye. Lucy had finally seen enough. She called her pastor for help. What could he do to help Lucy and her children?

Victims of abuse need help. Thankfully, the all-sufficient Word of God provides the wisdom we need to offer comfort, practical aid, and wisdom to those who are hurting. Because of the limitations of space, we will not be able to cover every aspect of abuse exhaustively in this booklet. However, while we will focus on cases of domestic abuse, the biblical principles discussed will apply to all situations of abuse.

1

What Is Abuse?

In general, abuse is an improper and harmful treatment of another by one person misusing his or her natural powers, privileges, or advantages.⁶

There are several categories of abuse, including:

- *physical abuse*, which is behavior that results in the non-accidental injury of the victim (who could be a child or an adult);
- *sexual abuse of an adult*, which includes molestation and rape;
- *sexual abuse of a child*, which is any use of a child for the purpose of providing sexual gratification;
- *verbal and emotional abuse*, which includes hateful, threatening, and manipulative speech and actions.

6 Paraphrased from Webster's 1928 dictionary.

Let's consider a few more examples of various kinds of abuse.

Diane's greatest desire is to be the perfect wife and mother, but sometimes she loses control and spansks her small children in anger, leaving welts. Her husband, Al, doesn't know if he can safely leave his wife at home alone with their children. What can be done to help this family? Does Diane need to be reported to the police?

When Marsha and Craig got married six years ago, they knew it would be a challenge to blend their two families. They never imagined, however, how bad things would get. One morning Craig's twelve-year-old daughter, Naomi, complained that her sixteen-year-old step-brother, Brad, had come into her room the previous night and touched her inappropriately. At first Brad denied doing anything; then he admitted that he had come into her room, but said that he had not touched her. Where do Marsha and Craig go from here?

When Roger and Christine got into an argument, Roger, who is a police officer, took out his revolver and waved it at Christine and the baby and said, "Maybe I'll just shoot you both and then shoot myself. Then all the pain will be over." Later Roger said that he was just being dramatic and that he never intended

to hurt anyone. Christine wonders if she needs to report his actions to the authorities, but worries that Roger will lose his job when his employer finds out what he did.

Does the Bible, which was written centuries ago, have anything to say to people like Al, Diane, Marsha, Craig, Roger, and Christine? God has given us principles in his Word that apply to all people living in every age. In Scripture we have examples of people who were abused. We also have an explanation of why people harm one another in this way. Most importantly, God's Word speaks with compassion and hope to those who have been abused and gives them guidance as to how they can find security in the Lord.