

Shepherding and Domestic Abuse

Biblical Counselling UK

Bcuk.org



Domestic abuse and the church

What are some of the big questions you face week by week?



Definition

Any incident or pattern of incidents of **controlling, coercive, threatening** behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged **16 or over** who are, or have been, **intimate partners or family members** regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- Psychological
- Sexual
- Emotional

Physical

Financial

(and Spiritual ...)

Some myths about abuse

- It's not an anger problem
- It's not a self-control problem
- The victim is not part of the problem
- It's a problem of entitlement (often a slow drift into control)
- It's a problem of disordered worship

Statistics

- 1 in 4 women/1 in 6 men in England and Wales will experience it in their lifetime. Domestic abuse is no respecter of age, gender, wealth, nationality – it can happen to anyone.
- On average a woman will be abused 35 times before reporting. It is under reported.
- Crime with highest risk of repeat. One of the key causes of homelessness
- 2 women a week kill by their partner/ex-partner.
- Surveys show that the church is not immune (2002 Methodist, 2012 Evangelical Alliance, 2013 Premier Christianity + Restored).

(Statistics from www.cps.gov.uk and www.refuge.org.uk)

Possible Warning Signs

- Physical
- Relational
- Spiritual
- Other signs



How It Feels

- Worthless (John 4)
- Helpless (Psalm 88)
- Hopeless



The spiritual questions it raises

- Is this God's will?
- Should I just "bear with" everything?
- Does forgiveness mean just staying put and not seeking help?
- Is God really a rescuer?
- Does God care?
- Do I deserve this?
- How does the cross really apply to this situation?

How it impacts the children

- Heightened anxiety
- Greater risk of substance abuse / self-harm in adolescence
- Greater risk of falling into an abusive relationship as an adult

... even if they have never witnessed the abuse – the culture of the home is enough to have devastating effects

Why People Stay

- Love
- Duty
- Fear
- External pressure



Raising Awareness In The Church

In the building:

- Notices – Books – Where to get help

In the processes:

- Safeguarding – Training – Pastoral care

In the gatherings:

- Illustrations – Testimonies – Prayer – Care in preaching

Initial responses to disclosure

- Thank
- Believe
- Affirm
- Discern
- Plan
- Pray

Initial actions

- When and where to report
- Not approaching abuser
- Not doing marriage counselling
- Not getting stuck between the parties – circles of concern / separate support structures
- Safety first – some may leave straight away, others may stay for years
- Helpline (24-hour National Helpline: 0808 2000 247)
- Victim Support / Police / Social Services / Court Orders
- Money / ID / Housing / Social Media

Possible reactions of the abuser

- Denial
- Attack
- Reverse victim and offender

OR

- Tears – not tears of repentance but overflowing tears of self pity

OR

- Occasionally, true repentance and a willingness to get help and let go of control (willing to let the abused person define contact etc)

Watch for how they treat friends / supporters of their victim. That will give you a tiny glimpse of how they have treated their victim.

Ongoing listening and speaking well

- Hear the stories – and allow yourself to be moved
- Respect decisions – don't be the next person to control
- Avoid pitting justice against forgiveness
- Be confident in the gift of consequences for the abuser
- Hold on to hope for the relationship but not at the expense of safety
- Remember no-one changes quickly or easily

Overflowing with Biblical Perspectives

- Human identity
(Psalm 139 / Genesis 1-2)
- God's identity
(metaphors in the Psalms / Amos sets out his hatred of abuse)
- Place of Christian community that promotes sharing and change
(Ephesians 4)
- Certainty and hope
(Philippians 1)



Continuing to love long term

- From captivity to freedom (Joseph)
- From distance to intimacy (Woman at the well)
- From uncertainty / control to following God (Ruth)
- From hypervigilance to trust (David)
- From controlled to a life worthy of the calling of Christ ...

Any questions?

Any questions about the overall process?



Tricky questions: preaching

Submission is beautiful. Bearing with one another is a high calling. And that is universally expected in marriage and that is what I preach.

OR

Submission is beautiful. Bearing with one another is a high calling. But there are moments when spouses do not have to submit and bear with one another. There are moments when love looks like seeking justice. And that is what I preach.

Tricky questions: trust

The one accused in my friend – I know them, I trust them, they seem stable – the one accusing seems unstable. I want to back up my friend.

OR

I can never truly know anyone – the heart is deceitful. I'm aware I am more likely to have sympathy with the person most like me. Someone who abuses places a high value on control, the one abused may have had their confidence eroded over many year – I'll protect the vulnerable not the one I naturally warm to.

Consider Judas.

Tricky questions: covenant

Abuse is unacceptable but if a spouse leaves they are breaking the covenant

OR

Abuse is a covenant breaking act if a spouse leaves they are seeking safety and giving the abuser the consequences that may mean they take the steps necessary for the covenant relationship to be saved

Consider the Lord's view of image bearers being treated as objects in Amos

Tricky questions: forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiven people forgive and reconcile

OR

Forgiven people take a posture of being willing to forgive but repentance is necessary for forgiveness and real change is necessary for reconciliation

Consider Joseph's response in Genesis 50

Tricky questions: change

They've said sorry. They won't do it again. It's safe to reconcile.

OR

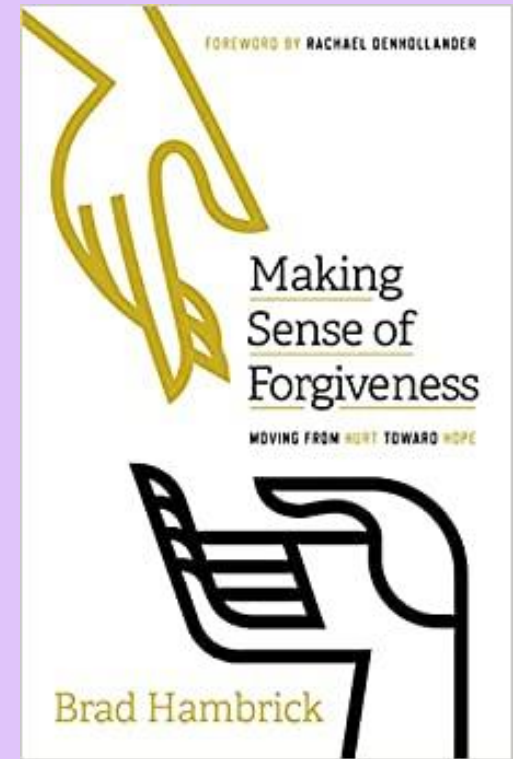
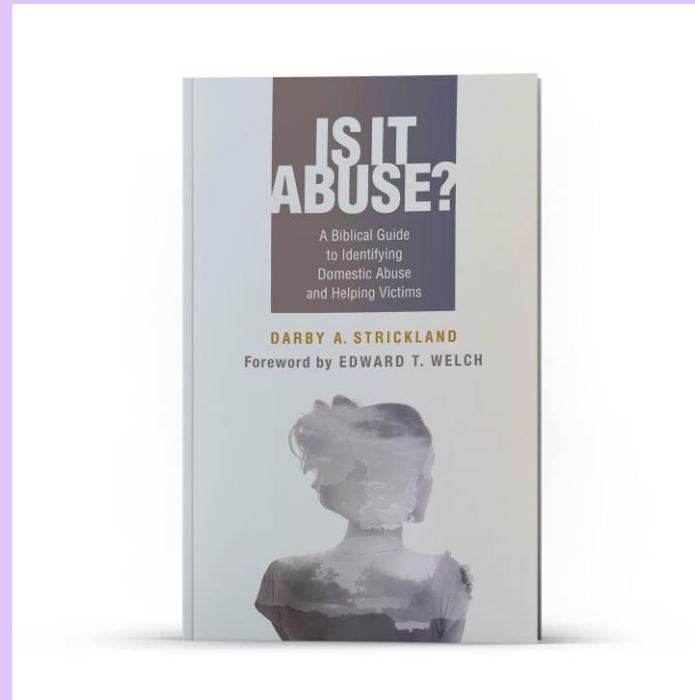
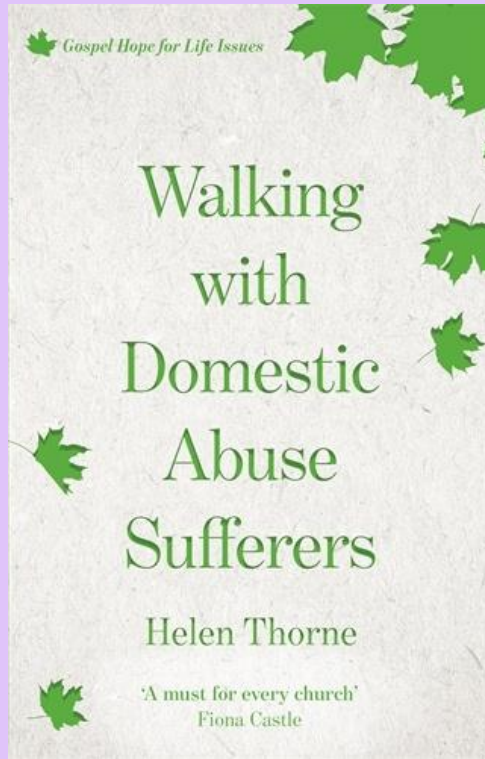
I know that my heart and my actions take many months / years to change. I can't expect someone who abuses to change any quicker. It will take a long time before reconciliation is safe.

Consider Peter.

Discussion

Which of those tricky questions do you want to reflect on more?





Further Reading

Any questions?