

Brave Church/Hard Topics, 10/20 Domestic Violence

This is the chat log of the discussion. Names and identifiable information have been removed for privacy.

Slides mentioned in discussion topics refer to the Domestic Violence 20October2022.pdf file linked from the [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

Additional information added after the discussion are identified with “**NOTE:**”

Definition of Domestic Violence [Slide 6], Forms of Domestic Violence [Slide 8]

Domestic violence is when one person does a variety of things to control another person in an intimate relationship. Ways a person might try to gain power and control over their partner include isolation, economic abuse, verbal/emotional/psychological abuse, intimidation, coercion and threats, physical abuse, minimizing, denying, and blaming.

Technological domestic violence - social media, spying on email, DMs, etc - using that information

What about gaslighting?

Financial abuse - controlling finances, not allowing them to work, intentionally ruining credit, can't use other accounts unless spouse approves (because of the way VA laws are structured)

Domestic violence - a conditioning that takes place over time

Domestic violence counts for 30% of homicides in VA. 87% of those are women

Q/A with guest speaker (Mayka Little)

Q: Are people more unwilling to be open about domestic violence because there's another person involved?

A: I believe people are more unwilling to share they are in a domestically-abusive relationship for many reasons, including protecting child; afraid of losing custody; financial issues/support/abuse; shame.

There's no one reason.

A: One of first stages of abuse is isolation. May sever relationship with parents, friends, others. Village is gone (in your mind). Now you have shame. To ask for help is to admit you are wrong.

Comment: There is shame but also long term trauma.

Q: What are the legal challenges? At one time, women could not own property or have sole bank accounts in this country, part of the idea a wife is "owned" by the husband.

A: That mentality exists. But abuse is not confined to gender. Women are affected at higher rates.

Legal challenges: If you are in a financially abusive relationship, who are you going to hire to defend you? Where do you get the resources? Frivolous complaints can be filed at any time by anyone. That doesn't include restraining orders that require high burden of proof.

Also with COVID, trying to get on the docket is a challenge.

Q: In VA, did being African-American cause additional troubles?

A: It was more of an issue with seeking medical treatments than legal assistance. There's definitely biases within the medical system. Culturally, African-Americans tend to keep family business to self. Lessons learned are not necessarily passed down to protect the next generation. This results in African-American women being most prone to domestic violence.

Comment: Should one mention signs they notice of possible abuse? I remember a male supervisor excusing a petty officer from duty because she had two black eyes and she did not want people to see her. I felt it was a mistake, that she should/needed to face that she had been beaten because if her fiancée beat her then, he was likely to kill her after marriage.

Q: What are some things we can do as a community to help?

A: Normalizing conversations around domestic violence. Teaching youth in their dating years what is acceptable/not acceptable behaviors. Teaching children what an abuse of power looks like.

Q: How do you feel you were supported (or not) by your faith community?

A: I survived because of my faith. However, the minister who did pre-marital counseling didn't seem to have training to recognize domestic abuse. The minister also tried to talk me out of getting a divorce. Ended up leaving that church because of the minister. I didn't want to seem vengeful or angry, so I wasn't going to press charges. However, the Holy Spirit guided me – I was able to release guilt/shame.

Q: Please discuss why couples counseling is ineffective in an abusive situation.

A: No one situation is the same. Couples counseling is typically designed to get parties working together. Individual counseling for both separately works better - both have self-work to do on their own. When push both together, have to decide who is going to adapt. Victim is more likely to be willing to adapt than the abuser.

Comments on Bible verses [Slide 11]

Ephesians 5:22-23 is often used by those who believe that women are subservient to men. However, this ignores Ephesians 5:25-33, in which the husband is supposed to love his wife as Christ loves the church. That was revolutionary at a time when women were considered 'property' of men.

Forgiving does not mean one needs to reconcile.

The 1st Ephesians passage [5:22-23] troubles me as a 21st Century person. Reminded women were historically treated as property. That in some ways still goes on with financial abuse.

Is Grace church a safe haven or is Grace church doing harm?

This is not Grace, but wife left Catholic church because mother got divorced because of domestic violence, but the church didn't recognize the divorce. This turned her against the Catholic church and she has been a member of Grace since.

Depends on who you are communicating with in the church. The Steven's Ministry as a great resource. They're not counselors, but they can talk through things like having a safety plan. Not sure we bring up things like domestic violence. There are opportunities to talk about resources available.

We have a small pamphlet in the narthex about domestic violence, but not sure heard anything about it in the church.

That's what we're trying to do with this program. This is our first step in addressing these issues.

Because of the book/this class, I found out this is domestic violence month. We could wear ribbons.

Can't imagine our pastors at Grace using any of those passages to insist that couples in an abusive relationship come together.

Forgiveness and reconciliation don't mean you put yourself back into a day-to-day relationship with an abusive person.

The book author points out that forgiveness is one thing and reconciliation is a whole different thing.

Q: Do you say anything to someone you suspect is being abused? What do you do?

A: You cannot force someone who is not ready to leave to leave. What you can do is let them know you are there. When isolation is the first step in abusive relationship, letting them know you're there counters that. We have to be careful with pushing a victim before they're ready to take the next step.

What do you say to a person in an abusive relationship? It is not unusual for someone in an abusive relationship to leave and go back to them many times. I realized a friend had cut off contact with their friends. I called her, said, "I am your friend whoever you are with. I will always be here for you." Left it at that. Eventually she left him for good. Recognize that the person won't be ready to talk about it until ready. Let them know there won't be judgment.

Q: From a church perspective, if someone comes to you, what questions do we ask? How can we best have a conversation if someone confides in you?

A: Simply say: "How can I help you?" and leave it open-ended.

Discussion on The Relationship Spectrum [Slide 10] and what constitutes abuse

Q: How aware are abusers that they are abusive? Is it an issue of "they could learn" vs they're inherently manipulative?

A: Not aware of research done on abusers other than most abusers are in denial. They have an inability/unwillingness to take full responsibility for their actions.

Response: An abuser may not understand what they're doing. May be a point of education or experience. May not have a label other than ignorance.

Denial is key ingredient in that case.

If you don't understand, there is no denial. If you understand and continue, then there is denial.

There are abusers who feel if there is no physical violence, they are not abusing.

There has to be an acceptance of responsibility. That's the difference between someone who made a mistake and someone who is an abuser.

The Relationship Spectrum is not a yes/no illustration.

If you are hurtful to partner on a regular basis, then you are an abuser. There's a difference between getting mad once a year and doing it on a regular basis.

Denial AND acceptance of the behavior - that's when it becomes abusive.

Commenter disagrees with what they see as black/white terminology being used in the slide.

Some people who are raised being disrespected their whole lives don't realize that's an abusive behavior. It takes something to break that.

Domestic violence is about power and control - first and foremost.

Denial requires a claim. You can't deny something that doesn't have a claim. The denial after a claim is when it becomes abusive.

The slide is trying to show that continuum.

And part of that continuum is the frequency of occurrence.

Abuse takes place when the behaviors are habitual, not when they are occasional

There is also a denial that says, "I realize I hurt you but you made me do it." That is not taking responsibility.

Is it possible the person does not understand what they're doing can be abusive?

Q: Speak more about the problem of children in abusive relationships.

If you have no claims/evidence of abuse against the children, you have no way of protecting the children.

Some parents choose to stay in the relationship to provide that constant level of presence/protection for the children.

There is also trauma that children can/will experience as a result of domestic violence.

Grace has hosted a parenting program for a number of years – it helps people recognize what needs to change and learn to act/ behave differently.

People are referred to the program by Fairfax County programs (Social Services). Facilitators are trained/equipped by the county.

Kids who come from families that have a lot of turmoil have tremendous problems. The more disruptive the marriage/custody issues, kids have psychological problems.

Teachers, doctors, others in contact with kids on a regular basis - if they see any sign of potential abuse, they are required by law to report it to the police

That includes youth leader volunteers, preschool teachers.

We don't have that same requirement when people notice signs of abuse in adults.

From an earlier email to us on how Grace addresses mental health issues, Katie said that although pastors not required to report it, she has told youth that she would report any sign or comment of abuse, physical harm, thoughts of self-harm.

Closing Comments

Thanks – tonight's discussion reminds me that there are areas where I might be able to volunteer/help

Thanks, Mayka!

This is a guide our behavior in ALL relationships

Yes, all relationships.

Next week: We begin a 3-part series on Christian nationalism. Week 1: what it is and a brief history of Christian nationalism. Week 2: contrast the central beliefs/principles of Christian nationalism with Christianity (as we see it in the Gospels). Week 3: how do we engage with someone who adheres to Christian nationalism? What can we do as a church?