

For Christian victims of sexual and domestic violence, the Bible can be a barrier to freedom...

"This is just my cross to bear." When Christ told his followers to "pick up your cross and follow me" (Mt. 10:38, 16:24; Luke 9:23), he meant that his followers may have to suffer if they follow in his footsteps. It is dangerous to speak out against injustice, to be in ministry in broken communities, or to speak God's word of peace in a violent and power-hungry world. Jesus was prepared to suffer in order to make God's kingdom of peace and justice a reality. But the suffering that domestic violence inflicts is different. It is imposed from without, rather than freely chosen by the victim. Instead of establishing God's Kingdom, the suffering of domestic violence is in opposition to God's kingdom, where peace and joy abound. God does not mean for anyone to suffer abuse.

"Christ suffered for me, now it's my turn to suffer for Christ." Paul said that Christ dies for our sins, not so that we may continue to suffer, but that we may have eternal life (Rom. 6:23). The writer of Hebrews says, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb. 10:14). Suffering for the sake of suffering is not redemptive. Jesus has justified and redeemed us.

"I made a vow before God. What God has joined, let no one tear asunder." (Matt. 19:6). The covenant of marriage is "torn asunder" by the abuser's violence, not by the victim's need to speak the truth about the violence. God does not intend for the marriage covenant to be a place of violence, verbal abuse or victimization.

"I was taught to turn the other cheek, and to forgive 7 x 70." Jesus taught us not to return evil for evil, to pray for our enemies, and not to be vindictive. But this does not mean that Christians are to be punching bags. Paul says, "hate what is evil; cling to what is good... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the lord'" (Rom. 12:17, 19). Abusers are subject to God's judgment, and their behavior is condemned by God. Forgiveness must be predicated on the batterer's repentance, and repentance means changed behavior, not just saying, "I'm sorry, honey."

"Women should be subject to their husbands." The Bible says that the husband and the wife should "be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ." (Eph. 5:21). Within that context, Paul goes on to say that "women should be subject to their husbands," but also that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body and himself its Savior" (Eph. 5:22-23). Remember that, as the head of the Church, Christ served, nourished, and cherished the Church, and even died for its sake. Christ would never do anything to abuse or oppress the Church. Neither should husbands abuse or oppress their wives. Rather, the two are to live together in mutual respect and love. As the writer of Colossians says, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them" (Col. 3:19).

...Or a resource more precious than gold.

All people are "a temple of the Holy Spirit. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him" (1Cor. 3:16-17). We are all precious and valued children of God. We are made in God's likeness, and God's spirit dwells in us. God never wills for one of His children to be abused. Abusers stand against God's judgment.

"Jesus came to give life, and to give it abundantly" (John 10:10). God's will for us is not that we merely survive from day to day, wondering when this nightmare will be over, but that we have a life that is rewarding, joyful, faithful, and fulfilling. God wants us to grow spiritually, and be able to respond to God's call in our lives. Physical, mental, verbal, financial, and spiritual abuse undermine a life of faith.

God calls people of faith out of oppression and into the Promised Land. When the people of Israel were in slavery in Egypt, God heard their cries for help (Ex. 3:7-9) and came to their aid. God delivered them from their oppression "with a mighty hand" (Ex. 3:39), and led them through the Wilderness to the Promised Land. God stands on the side of the oppressed, and is active in human lives to move people from oppression to freedom. God hears the cries of domestic violence victims too, and walks with them towards safety and freedom.

God will not abandon us. People of the Bible knew what it was to have their friend, their intimate partner, turn against them. The Psalms are a great resource for victims who are feeling abandoned (Ps. 22) or distressed (Ps. 55, 120). However, the Psalmist also speaks of the comfort of God's presence (Ps. 22, 91, 118) and God's guidance on the journey toward freedom. (Ps. 22, 107).

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