

## Abuse

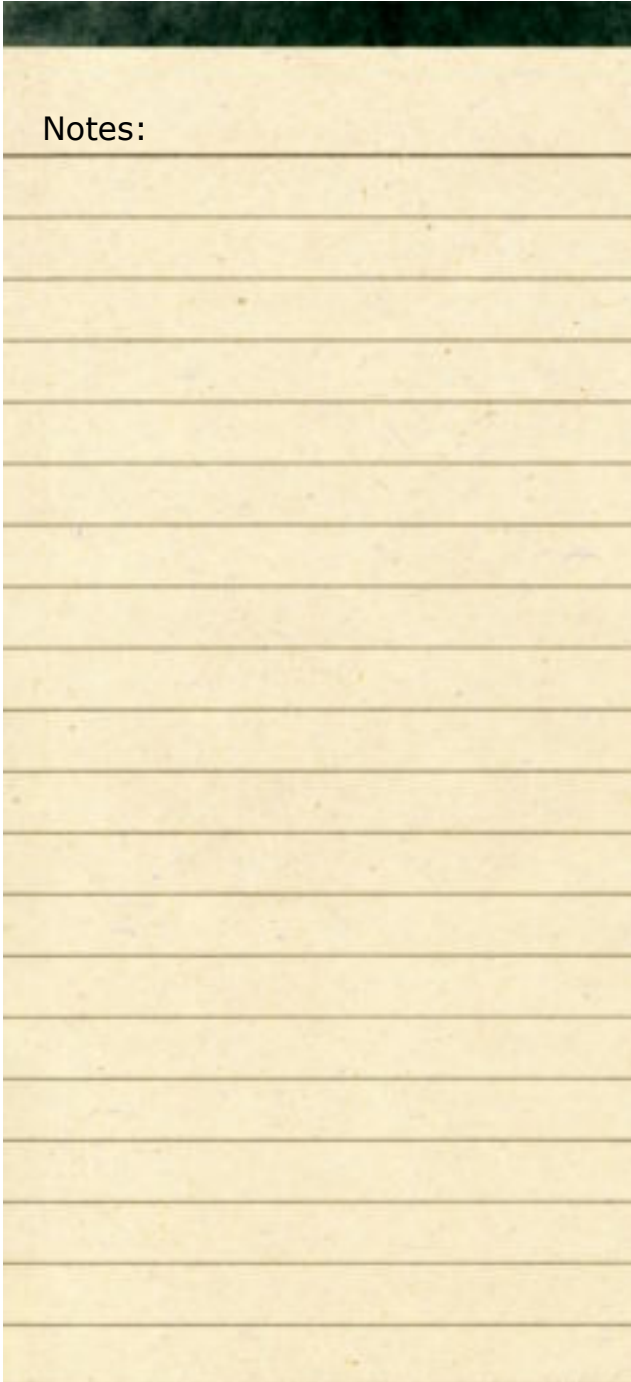
Abuse is one of those dark family secrets that no one likes to talk about in polite company. However, abuse—in all its forms—is a growing worldwide pandemic that transcends every possible national, cultural, and socioeconomic boundary known to man. While diverse cultures and societies may address or ignore the problem of abuse in a variety of ways, what can't be ignored and must be addressed is the devastating impact that abuse has on individuals and their relationships to others and to society as a whole. And that's where the real damage of abuse comes home.

Abuse is all about the misuse of the power that each of us has been given. Because every human being is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), we each have been given power to influence and impact others. How we handle that power—for good or for ill—determines whether or not we are abusively controlling others or lovingly engaged with them. Are we seeking selfish interests? Or are we serving the interests of others? That's where the heart of the matter is revealed.

If there is any group of people who should be advocates on the frontlines battling for abuse victims, it's those who are called Jesus followers, the church. But sadly, those of us within the church are often all too silent on the issue. Sometimes it's because we don't know what to do or what to say to fix the problem. We feel ill-equipped and untrained. Often, we're simply afraid of what we don't know how to handle. But we can learn. We must learn.

As the church attempts to reach out and minister to individuals within a local community, hurting people looking for help and a reason to hope again are turning to the church. And that's where the people of God in a community need to step up and offer gracious understanding and spiritual healing to those

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whose lives have been ravaged and defined by abuse.

Situations where abuse is exposed become opportunities for the church to meaningfully and powerfully engage in the process of healing and restoration of wounded souls. However, we must be careful to not fall into the trap of superficially addressing the wounds of abuse (Jer. 6:14). The church needs to be a safe haven for those who have been exploited, a MASH unit for the soul. At the same time, the church needs to be intolerant of any form of abuse among its members and staff.

Abuse flourishes in a tolerant society that has lost its moral compass and allows the strong to prey upon the weak. As the church, we must become known as a grace-filled community with the strength of heart to courageously stand against anyone that would abuse power to exploit the weak. At the same time, we must become a safe haven where people broken and wounded by abuse can be compassionately restored to health and hopeful living.

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