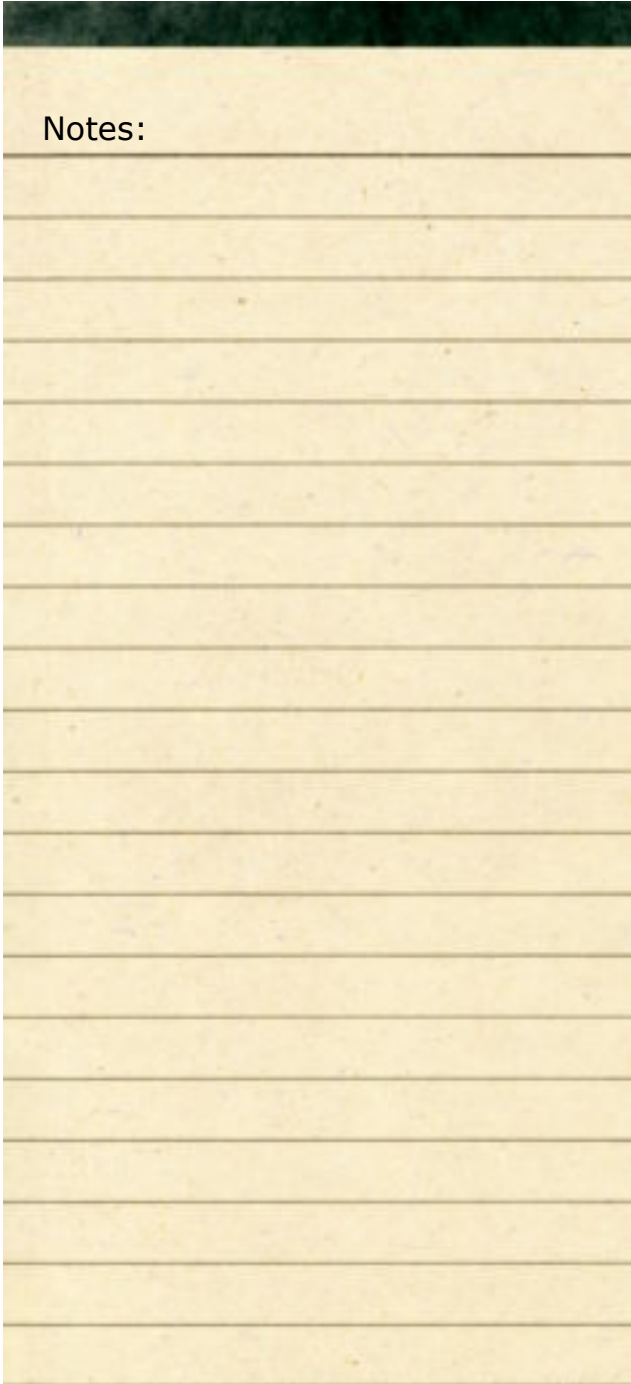


## Abuse Roundtable

**Mart:** Let's talk about the subject of abuse. But let's talk about it in what I think might be its most difficult arena. I think the people who have more trouble with abuse are people of faith. People of faith in churches, in homes, in homes where there's sexual abuse, where there's domestic, physical, emotional, even misuse of power. In churches where congregation members see something happening that they sense is wrong and that shouldn't be going on, but they're told: Touch not the Lord's anointed; which is like a quote from the Bible. Over and over again, wives who are being beat up are told that you've got to be more submissive. You have to give him less reason to be afraid of you, less reason to beat you up. Children in abusive relationships with the parents are told the same thing. The Bible is quoted. How do we deal? Joe, you've had pastoral experience. Now you're the president of a Christian university. Larry, you're sort of a pastoral/counselor, but do you agree that the Bible in some ways is a huge issue and oftentimes contributes to the problem when dealing with the misuse of power?

**Larry:** You know the way Christianity is often understood makes me ashamed to call myself a Christian. The way Christianity is sometimes taught, you know, the wife who's beaten up needs to submit because we've got a verse for that. That is not what the word means: Just to sit there and take it when you're beaten up. And it's just such a misuse of the Scriptures that I really struggle with the way Christianity is often taught, whether it's just legalistic, whether it's impositional, whether it's completely

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insensitive to the realities of human nature. It makes me almost ashamed to call myself a Christian. Now the true Christianity I believe in, what passes for Christianity today, Philip Yancey did a book on—*What's So Amazing About Grace*—and he interviewed a bunch of people on airplanes, just casual anecdotal, and he said to them: “Let me say a word, and you tell me the first word that comes to mind when I say it.” And Philip would say, “Christian.” He never heard the word *grace*. What he heard was bigoted, angry, judgmental, and that’s . . . I think that Christianity as understood incorrectly increases the struggle with abuse; and I think that’s a horrible thing.

**Mart:** And, Joe, what about you? Here we’re talking about the Bible oftentimes being a part of the problem rather than the solution. Do you feel like, as somebody with a lot of pastoral experience, that puts you in a corner?

**Joe:** Well, not really, because I agree with Larry that the Bible rightly understood is actually a help in the area of abuse.

**Larry:** The only real help.

**Joe:** Exactly. For instance, to the abuser who has misused the power, if you can abuse someone, you’ve got power over somebody—a father over a child, a husband over a wife, the power of speech whatever. And consistently in the model of Jesus Christ, He never ever used His power for His own benefit. He

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always used His power to bless. That's the underlying theme in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Satan wanted Him to use His power for His own benefit. So I think even the healing of abusers, if we can get them out of the very deep, off-times, clinical, psychological struggles that create the abuse, if we can get them to that point where they use their power to bless others instead of to harm others, I mean now we're talking about the Bible as a big help.

**Mart:** Okay, but somebody says, but wait a minute, it's all over the place. You say the Bible should be a part of the solution, but how can it be? Why is it that in almost every realm of home, church, society, the Bible is used to reinforce the problem?

**Larry:** Are you overstating it, do you think?

**Mart:** I might be, but I've seen, Larry, as I know you and Joe have countless cases. I really think countless cases of individuals of women who either as children were sexually abused by a parent who misused their role in the home, and we're told you have to be obedient to your parents or you have to forgive and get . . . go beyond quoting the Bible or wives who are being emotionally manipulated or beaten up and the church tells them over and over again, you've got to be more submissive. I don't think I'm overstating that.

**Larry:** You've got some fire about this, don't you?

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**Mart:** I do.

**Joe:** Well, I do think that happens but it certainly wouldn't be . . .

**Mart:** What do you think once in a while it happens?

**Joe:** No, I think periodically it happens, and I think there are certain groups of Christians where it happens more frequently. But my heart is that the Bible again rightly understood . . . Let's say that I'm a woman in an abusive situation physically, because that's the easiest to say that's clearly abusive. What do I do? Of course, the Bible tells me to submit to my husband, but the Bible also says that if I've been wronged, I should go to the person. And if the person doesn't respond, I should go to the church, and the church ought to put pressure on that person. And then the Bible also says that he's given us government, laws, to protect us and that we can appeal to our government and to those in the community who have the power to bring pressure on the abuser. So the Bible says far more than just, you know, lie down and take another hit. In fact, I would think that would be the opposite of what the Bible encourages us to do.

**Larry:** It never says to do it.

**Joe:** It never says that.

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**Mart:** But you'd admit that the church very, very often will pick up the permanence of marriage; they say that's the ideal, that's what God wants—God hates divorce—and use the permanence of marriage as a way of pushing a woman and children back into a house that's a threat.

**Larry:** Yeah, but we're on dangerous ground here, because when we talk about the woman's being abused or the husband—we have a lot of husband abuse these days too—or the child's being abused . . .

**Mart:** Saying the wife . . . they are abusive to the husbands.

**Larry:** Yeah, that's not uncommon.

**Mart:** You're right. We do. No, it's not.

**Larry:** And when we talk about how we don't want to use the Bible to put people into a corner where they just sit there and take it (and I don't want to put people in that corner either because the Bible doesn't do it), but when we argue against that we too often fall off the other side . . .

**Mart:** Argue against what?

**Larry:** Argue against "just take it, because you're supposed to submit to your husband." I don't think that's what submission

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means at all actually, but when we argue against that—which we should—then we can easily go into, well, stand up for your rights, and I don't think that's biblical either. I think the real issue, and this can sound very religious so forgive me for getting religious here, the real issue is: What does it mean to live for the glory of God when your husband's beating you up? And there's never an exception to that. But the way that's understood is so often completely unbiblical in my mind.

**Mart:** For instance, how is it misunderstood?

**Larry:** A woman came to me some years ago, actually more recently, and said, "My husband wants to swap partners with the neighbors. Should I submit?" And I said of course. She said, "You mean go have sex with the neighbor guy?" And I said no. Tell the guy no. She said, "But I need to submit." That's submission, because you're submitting to the purposes of God in this situation, which would never include having sex with a neighbor husband.

**Mart:** Okay, you're redefining the meaning of submission.

**Larry:** You're darn right I am, because that's . . . I think I'm defining it biblically because the word means "to fall in line with the larger design." The Greek is *hupotasso* and it means "to arrange yourself according to a larger purpose," and that's what every Christian who's abused needs to do. So when I'm abused, I

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need to arrange myself, saying, “God, what are your purposes in the middle of this?” And it may be as Joe says to go to the elders of the church. It may be to call this guy to task. It may be to recognize that there’s been incredible harm being done to me, and God wants me to live as a full woman, as a full man, and to find out what that means to do that, as opposed to just sitting there meekly and taking it. That’s not what the Bible says at all.

**Mart:** Okay, there’s part of me that just wants to accept and say, “Okay, great answer,” but here’s the problem: How many churches are prepared either by their elders or their pastors to understand the nature of what a woman is going through and to be able to separate the right use of Scripture and the wrong and damaging use of Scripture?

**Larry:** And I hope our little conversation here might help wake up a few hearts and eyes to the reality that so often the person who’s suffering in an abusive situation is very badly mishandled in the name of Scripture.

**Mart:** You say, “What about the covenant?” What is a husband—as a man and a woman stand before the preacher and make a covenant before one another—what is the nature of that covenant, and how is it that down the road so often that covenant is used to hold two people together who are violating everything they ever committed to one another. It’s a tough subject, isn’t it?

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**Joe:** That's a very tough subject and the covenant that we make when we stand, you know, just think standing there that day looking into each other's eyes at the marriage altar and kissing and saying I do, who would have ever dreamed that it would go so far south on us and that what we thought would bring us the ultimate happiness has brought us the ultimate agony and pain. And again, it's that we live in a fallen world and we're fallen people, so God has given us ways in which to deal with the fallenness. And that's what's so strong about the Bible in terms of reproofing the abuser and advising the one who's being abused. And it's a very hard issue, I think, to go back and to talk about how do churches deal with this. To build alliances in the community with biblical counselors, counselors who understand the Word of God and at the same time understand the dynamics. It's not just a church problem. Someone who is an abuser is struggling with deep, deep issues that have finally been uncorked in a relationship. Somehow the dynamics of the relationship have uncorked this steam that's been building up, this head of steam—and as a pastor, quite frankly, I don't have the equipment to handle that. I mean I can navigate them through the Word of God, but I need people like Larry. I need people who as counselors understand those dynamics. And building those alliances are very important.

**Mart:** And that would be wonderful to see that happening together. Larry . . .

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**Joe:** If I can just say that in one who has been abused as glorifying God, needs to hope for cure and resist the bitterness so that they have the grace to encourage the cure of the abuser and to look forward to the day when their relationship is happy again as it was at that altar.

**Mart:** If it ever could be.

**Joe:** If it ever could be, I just . . . I think to encourage someone who has been abused, to alienate themselves. Maybe they need to physically for a period of time, and not to be loving the abuser. I mean that's the whole unique essence of Christianity that we love our enemies, we pray for those who despitefully use us. So that's the dynamic to keep alive in the heart of the one who's been abused.

**Larry:** You know we're talking about marriage a lot, and I think it's a good topic to bring up the issue of abuse. When Peter talks about submitting to your husbands in 1 Peter 3, he begins it by saying, "likewise," talking about Jesus staying on the cross the whole time. And people have misinterpreted that to mean that you should stay in the abusive marriage. Jesus stayed on the cross because that was the purpose of God for Him to reveal the character of God. Now the question is: How then can I as an abused wife reveal the character of God in this marriage? Bonhoeffer has a great little thing . . . he has a sermon called "A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell," in which he said the point

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of a successful marriage is not staying in love, it's recognizing that you are adopting, you have been placed into, his phrase "a post of responsibility to the world and humankind" and when the husband or a wife or a child or anybody who's being abused says, "Now wait a minute, I have a post of responsibility here." Nobody thinks like this. Quickly I understand, but this is the biblical perspective in my mind. I have a post of responsibility. I have been called to an opportunity to reveal something about the character of God. That gets perverted when we simply assume that means just stay there with the nails in your hands, because that's not what the Bible is teaching there. And so I think that I as an abused wife have to ask: How can I fulfill my post of responsibility as a woman? Now to get to that might take months and months and months of hard conversation and difficult interaction about the deeper dynamics going on there but that's . . .

**Mart:** Are you talking with the counselor or with the husband?

**Larry:** I'm talking about the counselor working with the wife in dealing with that situation, but the other thing I'd like to get us to is that I'm not an abused woman. I'm a guy who's never been abused by my wife and never been abused in the obvious sense by my parents.

**Mart:** A lot of men are.

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**Larry:** Yeah, a lot of men are. But all of us have been failed by someone. And why the dickens does James say: “Welcome problems”? Because problems are so damaging; problems hurt. I don’t want to get cancer again. I don’t want my wife to leave me. She never has; I don’t believe she ever will. She has reason to sometimes, but she never will, I don’t think. I’ve never abused my children, but I think that abuse is a far broader topic than even the severe kinds of things. My mother, who was a wonderful mother in a thousand ways in her 87 years of life, never once told me she loved me. Is that abuse? Well, not in any classical sense, but you know I can even feel an emotion as I tell you that. That’s hard, and yet I need to say, “God, if you’re really there, there’s some way for me to—in the middle of this difficult emotional reality within my soul that lingers and has its repercussions in my marriage—there’s got to be some way for me to be restored to all that you’ve called me to.” Is it possible for somebody who’s been abused in minor little ways like that, which don’t feel that little to me, or in some real horrible significant ways—rapes or whatever—is there some way for me to be restored to a greater fullness of manhood in Christian manhood? And the answer is yes. If there’s no answer yes to that, then . . .

**Mart:** Okay, and so you’re talking now inclusively of all kinds of abuse, and then we all have been hurt. We’ve all hurt other people in the process, but at the same time let’s not overlook the severity of the wife who has felt her husband’s hand around her neck threatening to kill her. Threatening to, if you tell anyone what’s

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going on in this house, I'm going to tell everybody that you are crazy or that you're having an affair yourself. The child who's living in a home where the child is being sexually molested and abused; it's the family secret.

**Larry:** Or disciplined by . . . One father recently last week was disciplining his son and intentionally broke his son's arm, and called it discipline.

**Mart:** Yeah, and what's happening then all too often is that religious institutions are protecting that kind of abuse, and my heart goes out to pastors. My heart goes out to the church. I love the church, but it seems to me that there's a huge issue that has to be addressed. And people are being hurt, and they're being told all the wrong things.

**Larry:** What do you want the church to do? What do you want the pastor to do given these realities?

**Mart:** I think to listen. To listen to people who've had experience with those who've been sexually molested, to those who have had experience in the area of domestic abuse to realize that the issues are far more complex, far more serious than to pull an isolated Scripture out of the Bible and to throw it into a home to reinforce the problem, rather than breaking the problem up and getting people help.

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**Larry:** I would love for the abuse victim, if you will, to feel incredibly safe in Christian community.

**Mart:** That's what has to happen.

**Larry:** That's what has to happen.

**Joe:** And to see the Christian community, the church, as a protecting environment for them because they're up against a lot of threats. You right, a child who's being abused, the father is threatening, "If you ever . . ." or the spouse, so that there would be the protection there. And the community of Christ has to be bold and be willing to take that kind of a risk. It's a great challenge. And I would hope that any pastor or church leader who's eavesdropping on our conversation right now is taking notes and asking the important question: How is our church becoming a safe haven for the abused in our community and in our church? Can I just flip this a little bit?

**Mart:** Sure. Sure.

**Joe:** What happens if I'm eavesdropping on this conversation and I was abused, sexually abused by a parent, by a father?

**Mart:** It could be either a man or a woman who's been abused.

**Joe:** Right, you know, because, Larry, I think you could share

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with us you take those scars, those . . . it haunts you through your whole adult life. What do I do if I'm a victim of abuse?

**Larry:** My wife has given me permission publicly to talk about the fact that she was a victim of sexual abuse for four years, ages 8 to 12. She is now my age and the scars still linger.

**Mart:** They do linger, you said?

**Larry:** Oh yes, they do linger. It's not an easy thing. It's a very hard thing.

**Mart:** And we just said they always linger?

**Larry:** I would say that in this life meaningful restoration is possible. Complete restoration—that's heaven. Meaningful restoration to the point where you can become functionally alive, meaningfully alive, like being a woman or like being a man, I think all that's possible this side of glory. I think heaven's going to take us to a level we can't even imagine now, and so that's our real hope, but when you're talking about somebody who's been a victim of abuse, I want to say a couple of things here, I suppose, because I've lived with a woman now for 42 years who's been through . . . every abuse is horrific, so you don't even need to use the word *horrific*. It was horrific; every abuse is horrific. I needed to become a safe place for her in the first 18 years of our marriage. I wasn't. For 18 years, she had no courage—my fault

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not hers—to tell me the extent of her abuse. After 18 years, she told me, and I thought it was the whole story. It wasn't the whole story until 26 years into our marriage for whatever reason. Maybe I became a little safer, a little more sensitive, a little more able to hear her without either getting mad at the miserable abuser who I wanted to punch out, which is a terrible response, or to say, “Well, honey, . . .”

**Joe:** Although pretty understand . . . it's an understandable response, isn't it?

**Larry:** Oh, it's understandable but doesn't help her.

**Joe:** Yes, exactly.

**Larry:** It doesn't help her. And for me to respond to her by saying I want to know the deepest part of your beauty that has survived this abuse, because I believe it's there. And I want to speak into what is alive in you that no abuser can destroy, because I believe essential womanhood, essential manhood, nobody has the power to destroy. Jesus said that: “Fear the one who can destroy this soul, not the one that can just destroy the body.” And no abuser can destroy my soul. And I think to have that perspective as I talk to my wife and then to listen. We went away for a week to get to know each other after 26 years of marriage. We spent 6 full days talking to each other about our story, and she told me more about her abuse than I ever heard

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before. And I believe there's been meaningful healing because I listened, because I was sensitive to what I know was still alive in her, even though she wasn't able to discern it herself. And I believe also, just as importantly, that the real calling of all of us—abuse victims or victims of whatever has happened in our lives—the real calling is to believe that somehow the Holy Spirit has the power to restore my faith in God to the point where I can live a meaningful productive life, no matter what has happened in my background.

**Joe:** How do you deal, Larry, with the thoughts of it all? With the challenge of God's Word for instance to forgive and to love your enemy, especially when they keep showing up at Thanksgiving with everybody else?

**Larry:** That happens. Boy, does that happen.

**Joe:** For sure. You know, I think one of the fallacies is that we keep talking about forgive and forget. You'll never forget. There's no way that you'll forget, but you can forgive and talk . . . what's that process? How does that process get rolling? Because I do think that one thing that our adversary wants to do to us is to keep us living in our past and to rob us of our future.

**Mart:** He wants us bitter. He wants us angry. He wants us . . .

**Joe:** And if I don't forgive, I'm always living in the past. I'm

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playing the replay button. I have no future. And God wants to liberate us to our future and the tipping point is that act of forgiveness.

**Mart:** Is it possible though that it can even be love rather than forgiveness? Let's say there's no repentance; there's no acknowledgment of the wrong at all, could we still love that person? Love the enemy?

**Joe:** Do you think that forgiveness is predicated on someone's repentance, or can I forgive someone whether they've repented or not? Did Christ forgive me on the cross 2,000 years before I asked for repentance?

**Mart:** It depends what we mean by release, doesn't it? To forgive is to release, but there's sometimes when it is loving to keep the issue on the table and to keep pressing it. But even at that point we're told to love our enemies, but then the question is what does that love look like? You know I think we have to keep asking the question: What does love look like?

**Larry:** You know what I've come against, in my practice in chatting with lots of people over the years, that so many people who have been abused want to find some way to blame themselves as opposed to the abuser: "If I hadn't been seductive as a 6-year-old girl, Dad wouldn't have abused me"—and that's a lie. That's a lie from the devil. But let me tell you the function

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of it. The reason the abused victim wants to blame herself or himself rather than the abuser is because then if there's something I did wrong to cause it, I'm still in control. And I can stop doing it wrong so it won't happen again. It puts them in control. And so my position is in talking to an abuse victim of whatever kind of abuse—sexual abuse or whatever—is to say: “Now wait a minute, there is . . . the word *victim* is not always a bad word. You were a victim of somebody else's evil.” And as soon as I say that to somebody, the typical response of the abuse victim is, “Well, you don't know my dad's background. You don't know what he's gone through. His father left him when he was 2 years old.” And we mix up forgiving and understanding and why I want to understand that. Well, of course you abused me; look what you went through. And my thought is: That's a horrible response. The only way to forgive somebody is to say what they've done is wrong. And so I've got to say it wasn't me, not that I didn't have contributions. In every marriage difficulties there are two ways, of course; but a little girl being abused, I'm not going to blame that little kid. What I am going to say is: “Your father was wrong. Don't you dare try to understand him because that obliterates the possibility of forgiveness. You've got to recognize there's been a moral evil committed against you. And until you recognize that, you're not going to be in a position to forgive.” And forgiveness to me is not an act, it's a process.

**Mart:** And it has to be rolled over onto God, right?

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**Larry:** Over and over and over again.

**Mart:** And you've got to give it to God, who says, "Vengeance is mine."

**Joe:** Yeah, Romans 12 is so clear on that. You know, "as much as is possible within you," the book says, "live peaceably with all men and put wrath in its proper place. Vengeance is mine; I will repay saitheth the Lord." Therefore, now I'm free to love my enemy. And, you know, if we think about "vengeance is mine; I will repay," I think we have not spoken to the issue strongly enough. I think about Jesus' word about abusing one of the little ones: That it would be better that a millstone be tied around that person's neck and thrown into the sea. I think we need to speak lovingly yet clearly about the depth of the nature of the sin, especially of abusing an innocent child, from the pulpit. And now if you're going to preach that way, if the church is going do that, there better be a safety net for those who suddenly come under conviction, and a way in which they can disclose this to people that they trust but, you know, it's kind of like one of those things we don't talk about. It's happening, and I think as our world becomes increasingly sexualized, it will happen more and more.

**Larry:** It's not getting less.

**Joe:** Exactly. So I do think it's time for the church to set up to the line and be confrontive and remedial in this area, just because the

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church must protect its flock. There are little children that must be protected. Wives and husbands that must be protected.

**Mart:** I agree, and together we're here because we believe that the Scriptures can be a part of the healing. But let's just . . . what would your hope be for somebody who comes with any degree of significant abuse, and they say: I just haven't wanted to get the Scriptures, because it seems like there's so much against me. Larry, from a counselor's point of view, Joe, from your pastoral experience, what would your hope be for that individual in relationship to the Scriptures?

**Joe:** I think I would ask them what is it that's against you in Scripture, and let them tell me why they're resisting that, and then help them to see: Actually, you don't have a bigger ally than the Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit and the community of believers that are around you. And you need to flee to that which would help you, because God's Word is a very present help to those in trouble. And so I would want to encourage them to disengage from those false notions.

**Mart:** And to realize that anytime that it was used to reinforce their abuse, it was misused. It was pulled out of context.

**Joe:** What do you do . . . there's a continuum of abuse, and I think physical abuse is clear. I mean, you can see the scars and you can see the bruises. Sexual abuse is clear. Verbal abuse, you

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know, I have sometimes as a pastor, people coming and saying, “I’m out of this marriage. Why? Because I’m verbally abused all the time.” Well, you know, there’s nothing like marriage to drive all of us to the edge of abuse once in a while, you know. So I . . . Larry, I have a hard time. Okay, now, when is just screaming at each other normal, and when does it become abusive? I don’t know where to draw the line.

**Mart:** It’s an important question, because I believe I could hurt my wife more with my words than with my fists.

**Joe:** Exactly, or that a spouse may be using that as an exit ramp when it’s not as abusive as we might think.

**Mart:** We don’t judgment. We have to . . .

**Joe:** Yeah, that’s right. How does a counselor deal with it?

**Mart:** The Scripture itself makes it clear that words can kill, and we . . .

**Larry:** Absolutely, life is in the power of the tongue. Yeah. This will sound like an overstatement, but if we had time I could convince you that I’m right when I say the next sentence. I believe that I have caused more harm to my wife’s soul than her sexual abuser, and I don’t think I’ve been a bad husband. I’ve never had an affair. I’ve never beaten her up. I don’t scream and

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holler at her. There have been times when I raised my voice, but I believe that the absence of meaningful love toward my wife at a variety of times in our marriage has hurt her soul more deeply than a perpetrator of abuse, because I'm a man in covenant relationship with her. One thing I think I've learned over the years that is a huge principle for me, and it's a huge thought in my thinking, that love touches the soul more deeply than evil. My wife has been touched by evil. I have the opportunity to touch her soul with a certain kind of love, and I have made it my preoccupation to try to understand what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 13. To try to understand what he meant in Ephesians 5: "Love your wives as Christ loved the church." That's a little bit of a high standard, and to think about what that means has given me an opportunity to think about what community, what the church, what pastors, what husbands, what friends can do to the abused victim. We can move into their souls in a way that reaches deeper than the abuse has ever reached. I can touch below the harm to what is still there because of the grace of God, and when I do that, I think that's been largely responsible for my wife's healing.

**Joe:** What do we say to someone who is in a marriage relationship where there's physical abuse? What are their options? What would be the track that we would lead them down to remediate the situation?

**Mart:** Yeah, what would you say, Larry?

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**Larry:** I'd tell them to submit. I'd tell them to call the cops.

**Joe:** Wouldn't that be the first thing, call the cops?

**Larry:** Of course it would be the first thing.

**Mart:** Depending on the nature, right?

**Joe:** God's given us the government to protect us. That's one of their functions.

**Mart:** So you're saying: Submit to the government then. Is what you're saying?

**Larry:** No, I'm saying submit to the purposes of God in this situation. Submit to the purposes of God, which is always to glorify His Son. And how can I do that in this situation? And I would think that if I'm a wife who's being beaten up by my husband, I would think the first thing I would want to do is make sure that I don't keep it a secret. I've got to tell somebody. I'd hope I'd be in a church where I could talk to my pastor. I could talk to an elder. I could talk to a friend. And I would hope that the church—and Joe's been emphasizing the protective goal of the church, and I couldn't agree more—that I would hope that if the church became aware of this situation, because the abuse victim made it known, that they would step into this. And I have

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seen many situations, and all of us have, where elders have said, “Well, we don’t want to mess with that. That’s too messy. So you just try to handle it on your own.” That’s hideous! So there ought to be some movement of the church to go to the husband and not to start with confrontation, but to start with exploration, which may lead to confrontation . . .

**Mart:** But wouldn’t you agree though, even before that the church may have to go outside to an agency—it doesn’t even have to be a religious agency—to get some knowledge about abuse?

**Larry:** Sure.

**Mart:** Find out what the worst mistakes are that you can make in this kind of a situation.

**Larry:** Let’s get the knowledge.

**Joe:** Yeah, wouldn’t a spouse start by raising the warning flag and saying something: “You know, I’m rooting for our marriage, but it can’t continue like this. And the next time you do that to me I will go to the elders of our church, and you can’t threaten me out of it.” So isn’t there a stage where the cop, the sheriff, doesn’t just show up at the door, but the spouse starts raising that warning flag?

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**Mart:** Unless she's had hands around her neck or a gun at her head or . . .

**Joe:** Yeah, unless she's in imminent danger, of course, or he's in imminent danger. Yeah, what about the . . .

**Larry:** And let me say a word about that. I think you're right on target with that because when the spouse . . .

**Joe:** Well, I just had, you know, this is too big a topic I guess for 25 minutes. You have wives who remarry abusers, you know, they're in their third marriage because there's something in her that she, for some reason, feels like she deserves to be abused or . . .

**Larry:** Deserved nothing better.

**Joe:** And we can't cover the whole waterfall.

**Mart:** I think we have to somehow qualify that you've got to get help from somebody that you believe you can trust and understand, and it may not be the elders. You wish you could say otherwise, but they're likely to be the most likely to give you the wrong answers until something happens.

**Larry:** I agree with that.

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**Joe:** There are some churches that actually have programs for abused people.

**Mart:** Yeah, right.

**Mart:** But what we've seen then is we could go a lot of different directions with this subject, the misuse of power or influence. What would your hope be for somebody who comes, just captured by it, doubting the Scriptures, not knowing where to turn? Do I go to a pastor? Do I get a counselor? I'm afraid to go to both; I'm afraid to go to either. What would you say? Joe?

**Joe:** I have two hope points that I would pray for that person and help them with. Hope number one is that there are places they can find help. And I do believe that it's not always in your local church. And not because the elders or the pastors aren't good people and don't care for you. They're not equipped. I'm not equipped. If somebody came to me with serious abuse problems, I would want to find somebody in the community. There are some churches in my community that have special abuse-safe havens who can help find a church, find a counselor.

**Mart:** Somebody who really understands the problem.

**Joe:** Yeah, there are people who are equipped to help. And I would hope for them that they could find that. I would also hope that they would believe that ultimately God brings all things

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together for good, even the worst things. Look at Christ on the cross; nothing was ever more abusive than the crucifixion of the Almighty God in our presence. And God turned that horrible abuse into my salvation and redemption. God has this wonderful power to take Satan's best moment and turn it upside down on him and bring about what is good. Sometimes it takes years, a lifetime; sometimes it's in heaven. But I do believe God does resolve these things, and I would hope for that.

**Mart:** Larry, what would your hope be?

**Larry:** Well, an old church father, Irenaeus, said that the glory of God is a human being fully alive. The abuse victim doesn't feel fully alive. They feel like they're damaged goods. They feel like they have to hide their shame. They feel like they can never relate intimately again. And if that old fellow was right, that the glory of God is a human being fully alive, and I think he is—I think Christ came to make us fully alive—then my hope would be very much what Joe was saying, in addition to finding the help wherever it can be found—somebody that understands and can listen well—to realize that the real hope that's available is that whatever happened, as Joe put it well, can be turned upside down so that the abuse even itself, as extreme a sentence as this will sound, but even the abuse itself can be used to bring you to a different level of aliveness than you've ever known. But the key point in that is to say that there is something in the core of the human being, in the core of the Christian human being that abuse

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can never destroy.

When I work with an abuse victim, one of things I'm thinking about the most is: What has survived the worst that's happened to you? Do you still have the capacity as a woman, as a man, to move in certain directions, to mend certain godly holy directions, and let me work with you to nourish that which the abuser thought he destroyed, but never could. Let's give Satan a fit, by having you come out of the situation more whole than you ever dreamed you could be. And that's possible for the abuse victim. My wife's an example of that.

**Mart:** And in the process of working through that, they need to be in a safe place. We're not talking about just throwing them back in.

**Larry:** There's got to be . . . healing happens in community. And the community that's safe, is a way that Asland was, you know, not safe but good. And that means that I'm safe for good purposes. I may not be safe for the immediate relief of pain, but I'm safe because my commitment is to your deepest well-being because of Christ. And that's a safe, good community.

**Mart:** But as far as being separated from the abusive person . . .

**Larry:** That may be required. And I would not have any . . . cause that would bring glory to God. That's not just a matter of getting rid of my pain, that's a matter of saying it has not

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glorified God for me to sit here and encourage, empower, enable the abuser to continue with his abuse. I'm not ministering to him at all by sitting here and taking it. I may best minister to him by leaving him; that could be godly ministry. Now that takes some discernment on the part of a Christian community, but that could be a very godly response.

**Joe:** The dynamic that Larry's talking about is a very important dynamic. If I stay in a sinful relationship, the attention of the offender's life is on me. And they find excuses in me for them to continue their activity. When I withdraw myself completely, they're left exposed and God can do a direct hit on their life. Because now they don't have me for an excuse anymore, and that now God is free to work in His very good way in their lives with phenomenal pressure on the person. So I fully agree that sometimes an abuse victim has to get out of there, not only to protect themselves but to see God do His work in their lives. And again I would encourage every abuse victim to be routing for their abuser's redemption and reconciliation that they could become whole before God and that the relationship could ultimately become whole, and it might mean withdrawing to get that done.

**Joe:** And saying that elders aren't equipped is not a negative statement. In fact, they could be equipped and maybe we ought to think through why aren't they equipped, because it's not rocket science. Sometimes it's making somebody feel safe and caring

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for their soul.

**Larry:** Do you think the elders need to go to get a PhD?

**Joe:** No, no absolute . . . well, what do you think? You're the PhD.

**Larry:** You know most of what I do when I'm counseling "professionally" has almost nothing to do with my 5 years of graduate training. It has everything to do with what I understand the Bible to teach about the nature of the human soul, the nature of relationship, what the word *healing* means, what restoration means. And my burden is to equip all these wonderful, well-meaning elders who feel ill-equipped and in fact perhaps are in fact ill-equipped. But it wouldn't take a PhD. It might take some thinking together. It might take a couple of good books. It might take a week-long course or . . .

**Joe:** Or maybe a local seminary giving the biblical basis of this and having pastors and elder boards come in, but I do believe that an elder who understands the dynamics and understands the Word of God can make great ground with someone in their church. I think the church can become a safe haven.

**Larry:** And that's my vision. That's what I really would love to see happen and I hope this conversation contributes to that.

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