

The Value of You

Good morning and thank you for being with us for this important gathering. Some of what will be shared today may be difficult to hear, but my wish is that we all will leave more informed than we came in. Being together here today, listening and learning, could literally save a life.

I am a counselor to women with Still Waters Ministry and have, for the past 4 years, joined with Sam in this journey of healing and restoration in the lives of others. I have lived through much in my 62 years and as I share during this conference, I will draw on those life experiences and also what I see in my counseling office with broken women. My mission is not just one of textbook or clinical training, but is a personal journey of the heart.....a mission that I am very passionate about.

We all have been wonderfully made and carefully made by God. We are His workmanship and if someone messes with that, He is not pleased. If another seeks to destroy His creation, it is like spitting God in the face. Abuse does not line up with the will of God. In fact, the very opposite is true. I see many (too many) women who have been messed with and their value has been compromised or is non-existent. I tell the abused women I see that if Jesus were in the same room where threats, slaps, or vulgar remarks were being hurled, He would take that woman's hand and gently lead her out of that dangerous place. He would hold her and protect her and keep her safe. Jesus loved women in the purest way and women loved Him. He broke all the rules of His day when connecting with women. To Him, a woman was valuable, not just a piece of property. Who Jesus is and was, gives us the confidence to offer rest and peace to women in abuse.

All that is precious begins with value. Value of life. Value of ourselves. Value of others. Living in value elevates respect and love. Injecting value into human life can raise an entire society.

Value, at its core, protects us from harm. It encourages us to stand up for others and ourselves. It strengthens our tolerance against abuse.

Unless value takes seed in one's heart, all gloves are off and abused women are exposed to unacceptable attacks. Until a woman believes the truth that she is loved and valued, she will struggle with her worth.

A day in the life of an abused, Christian woman is scary. She may look good, talk good, dress good and even smile, but she may be hiding deep wounds or secrets about the reality of what she lives with. There may be empty places deep inside that are buried. Places where she never quite feels like she is enough and self-criticism nags at her. Under her roof is consistent, on-going bad behavior from a husband who isn't just having a bad day every now and then, but one who keeps his wife in fear, walking on egg shells, never knowing when he will erupt and lash out at her.

One pastor's wife who came to see me had been abused for many years. She protected him because they had a family image that she did not want to shatter. She admitted to me that he had told her he wanted her dead and wanted to kill her. I highly recommended that she leave that dangerous situation and find a safe place with supportive family or come and stay in a home of one of our "Lilies of the Valley" host families that provide a quiet, loving environment in which to heal. This woman was ready to take that step, but family members talked her out of it. They told her that her husband was just having a bad day, was tired and under stress and that he just needed prayer. She called me and told me she had changed her mind and that she would continue to stay with her husband. These were her exact words..."I am ready to die at the hands of my husband because I'd be in heaven at least." This woman had lost the very will to live. As a counselor, I really cannot not help a person who doesn't care if she lives or dies. I had told this poor woman that when her husband tells her that he wants to kill or hurt her, he has already done that in his mind. And the line between thinking and doing is very fragile and close. She was so numb, she did not care. That was a frustrating day for me...knowing she was returning to a dangerous situation.

What are the faces of abuse? On your tables, you will find a hand-out. It defines 20 types of abuse. I will only cover a few of these for the purposes of this conference. But this is a beneficial list for you to take with you to review.

Let's begin by giving definitions to physical, verbal, sexual and emotional abuse:

Refer to hand-out. This material comes from an excellent book called, "ANGRY MEN and the WOMEN who love them" by Dr. Paul Hegstrom.

I want to emphasize that we are bringing to light today the fact that abuse exists in our churches. I wish it were not true, but church members bring abused women to me who sit in the church pew. Abuse is in the church, no matter how loud we protest or deny it. Abusive men sing in the choir, they teach Bible Studies, they hold high positions in church leadership. They smile and act normal, never giving any indication of the harm they inflict on their wives and children. Are you shocked by this? I do not make this up. I have seen these examples in my counseling office. Abusers even preach from the pulpit. I know, because I have met pastor's wives that keep silent about the abuse of their pastor husband.

From I Corinthians 3: 16-17: Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are".

God values us. He wants us to live knowing that we are precious. Do you value what God values? We need to value what God values and love what God loves.

We are all on different paths, but each of us can seek the same things: joy, emotional wholeness and health, peace and value.

All kinds of things can strip away value and we will shed light on those here in our time together. Above all else, what we tell ourselves is what we believe and if a woman values herself and is valued by us, the church, she recognizes

what is good for her life and runs from negative, abusive people who could hurt her. From the small things to the bigger, more dangerous things, we need to pay attention and be aware of what is pulling women down, making women shrink, making women feel invisible or unimportant.

Every woman has the right to feel safe and supported by her church family. The time is now to recognize that abuse has gone on too long. Abuse loves silence and silence is no longer an acceptable response. Ignoring it won't work. We must empower ourselves with options to respond in strength and expose the truth of this evil.

I call abuse, ADULT BULLYING...feeling small and invisible and thinking that is okay. But we can stand up and break the silence that speaks against tolerance of bad actions and words. The beaten down woman usually gets used to terrible treatment and lets it happen again and again. Being controlled, losing her will, walking on eggshells, just to keep someone else happy and appeased...this is an environment which should not be considered normal.

The church has a special purpose and place in this world and its path is important. And showing a beaten down woman what her purpose is....that is crucial. And what is her purpose, you may ask? The answer is simple: sharing her unique, God-given gifts with the world around her. But, and this is important, gifts cannot reach their full potential if all life energies are being drained by fear. There are many homes that are scary for women and children. They are not comfortable or relaxed. They are not safe. Do you know someone in that situation? Please speak up, if you do. Abused women have voices that have been silenced out of fear. They keep quiet to remain safe.

God did not create us to live in fear. We were created for an abundant life... to live in hope, love and security.

You may have noticed posters on these walls depicting various scenes of abuse. Most of them show physical abuse, but abuse can exist without a bruise to the skin or a punch across the face... hurts that go just as deep as physical battering. Emotional, verbal and psychological....all carry the wounds which cause brokenness.

As church leaders, we have the moral responsibility to change the culture of silence, ignorance, and disregard that exists in many of our churches and to lead through the abuse. And....we cannot and should not do it alone. It will take a village to share the burdens carried by women and children suffering from domestic violence. Be the church that abused women run to. They are escaping from that which threatens them and are looking for a place to run where love abides. Embrace them and surround them with support.

Never under-estimate the power of love. Each act of love is significant: a smile, a touch, a kind word, a meal, a financial gift, a listening ear...time. Remember that there are those around us, very close to us, who are looking for anything to encourage or lift them up. We could be the difference between life and death to another person. Let's offer that ray of hope as the process of healing and starting over becomes a reality. Let's continue to have a voice for those who have none. BE A BLESSING and may God bless you.

Thank you.