

## **FACING UP TO THE SILENT EPIDEMIC**

### ***Still Waters Ministries***

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#### Introduction:

- **Good Morning**, and thank you for taking the time out of your very busy schedules to participate in this necessary discussion and I hope, awakening.
- I would also like to thank you in advance for the measure of grace you will show me in the next couple of minutes.
  
- **I need you to** be gracious, since I am no expert on the subject matter, but I am passionate about our need to face up! To this insidious scourge that is silently sabotaging the Family of God.
  
- I would like to thank Sam and Jill, The leadership of Still waters Ministries, Pastor and members of the Conestoga Mennonite Church for hosting this very necessary forum.
  
- I read recently that ***“the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq almost equals the number of women who have been killed on American soil by husbands and boyfriends over the same span of time.***
- ***Since 2003, just over 4000 American soldiers have been killed in the war.***
- ***Approximately 6000 women have been killed on the homeland”***
  
- **Violence against women was named as a “significant public health issue” by the World health organization in 2013,**
  
- That means that at least 35% of all the women around the globe have experience some form of sexual or physical abuse at the hands of a partner or non-partner.
  
- While the data clearly shows that this is an issue of Global proportion,

- There is very little evidence on how Pastors view and address this issue of Domestic violence.
- The question that remains unanswered is:
- ***What are pastors doing about the issue of domestic abuse?***
- So it is time for us to start Facing Up: ... To The Facts

**FACT #1 is that:**

### **Domestic Abuse Exists...**

- Based on the stories and information we have heard already this morning I think that we can all agree on that fact.
- Our congregations are comprised of people within our communities.
- Therefore in many ways our communities of faith are a microcosm of what's out there in the world.
- So if domestic abuse exists out there, it will exist in here.
- This means that even as I speak here there may be a perpetrator and or a victim sitting among us.
- I'm just saying....

**FACT #2 is that Domestic Abuse is a:**

### **“Non –Discriminatory Evil”**

- Almost six decades ago, I was born to missionary parents working in the jungles of South America;
- I have been a P.K. (Pastor's Kid) in five different countries and now, I Pastor a small church plant in the most developed country in North America, perhaps the world.
- All my life, I have been closely associated with the church – the Community of Faith; and it has been my consistent observation that domestic abuse is present and prevalent across all spectrums of culture, class and collective facets of society.
- **Domestic Violence** is like a syringe with a long needle that penetrates and permeates all the walls of society,
- **It penetrates beyond** the walls of Education,

- **It penetrates beyond** the walls of Religion,
- **It penetrates beyond** the walls of Race,
- **It penetrates beyond** the walls of socio-economic classes
- **Domestic Abuse does not discriminate against the Poor,**
- **Domestic Abuse does not discriminate against the Wealthy**
- **Domestic Abuse does not discriminate against Race or Color or Ethnicity.**
- **It inflicts its terror** wherever people in relationships are found...
- **And that includes** the church of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion?

- **Fellow Church Leaders, Domestic Abuse is in your church,**
- **Domestic Abuse is in your community of faith,**
- **Domestic Abuse is in your sphere of leadership.....**
- **And it's time to start facing up to this silent epidemic in the church.....among us.**

**FACT #3 is that Domestic Abuse is:**

### **Destructive to the Image of God**

- Statistics and The imperial data clearly indicate that domestic abuse among communities of faith is on par with that among secular communities at large.
- Now why is it important for us to face these facts?
- Because all humans are created in the image of God, those of us who are “In Christ” make up the body of Christ;
- Therefore any form of abuse to a member of the body is destructive to the very image of God.
- Domestic Abuse destroys the body/victim at every functional level.
- It is Physical, for example, hitting, slapping, burning, pushing, etc.
- It is Psychological – shouting, swearing, frightening, blaming, ignoring, humiliating, threatening hurt and harm.
- It is Financial, it can be Sexual and it is always Spiritual.

- Abuse is sinful, and like all sin, if it goes on unchecked, it always declines to deeper depths of depravity, and its ravishing consequences are greater.
- This is why it is time for us as leaders to start FACING UP!

### **TO THE FIGHT:**

- Domestic Abuse is a destructive tactic that the enemy has brought into the family of God in order to achieve his objective; which is, ***“to kill, steal and destroy”***.
- Someone once said, ***“The only thing necessary for evil to continue is for good men to do nothing”***.
- **For too long fellow leaders**, we have stood idly by while the enemy .....’Kill, steal and destroy the women, men and children in the flock.
- **We are told in 1 Peter 5:1-3 that we are to ....**
- ***<sup>2</sup> Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.***
- **What kind of shepherds are we to god’s children under our care?**
- Domestic Abuse, by its very nature, lives and grows in a climate of silence.
- Victims in these relationships are often controlled by the perpetrator; they are isolated and threatened against speaking out.
- **We are called:** To speak for those without a voice...
- **We are called:** To be strong for those who are weak (help those who are weak)
- **We are called:** To right wrongs...In
- **1Tessaloanians 5:14 Paul writes**

- ***And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1Thessalonians 5:14***
- **We must face up to the fight:**
- **Why is it that we are not preaching** sermons that unlock the complexity of Domestic Abuse?
- **Why is it that we never use** the words Domestic Abuse from our pulpits?
- **Why is this hatus**, sinful practice treated with a code of silence within the church where....
- **We are called to shine** light in the darkness,
- **We must do something** about this dark evil!
- ... **But what can we do about it?**
- The first step is to admit that Domestic Abuse exists among us and within our church communities.
- The predominant attitude and action that I have observed within the church is to deny and reject the notion that we have a sacred responsibility to protect the well being of our brothers and sisters in Christ,
- Acts 20:28 makes clear that as Leaders we are to:-
- ***“28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Acts 20:28***
- This matter of domestic abuse is a difficult subject for Pastors and Church Elders to deal with for two basic reasons.
- **One is that most pastors** like me are not equipped to deal with the complexity of intervention where there is domestic abuse.
- We are not equipped to deal with:
  - The Legal Implications,
  - The Financial Needs Required,

- The Emotional and Social support necessary, not to mention the The Housing, Peripheral needs – child care, and the like.
- **The Second Reason** is that Pastors and Church Leaders deny that the problem is real.
- The thought of such evil inhabiting our safe, comfortable community of faith is too unsettling, so we take the approach –
- **“Let Sleeping Dogs Lie”.**
- **The reality is, however, the ‘DOG’ is not sleeping.**
- Often when the church comes face to face with the tragic signs of domestic abuse, people say..... *‘Oh, I did not know it was so bad’.*
- **Well, we could not know**, because we did not take time to care enough to see the signs, or
- **We did not know enough** to recognize the signs –
- **We did not know enough** to acknowledge,
- **We did not know enough** to observe, to ask....
- Can I help you? Is there anything I can do?
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- Pastors, Elders and Church Leaders, we must do all we can to face up to this fight and address this evil within the scope of our ability.
- **First**, we must recognize that few churches (except perhaps large one) have the resources to handle interventions on their own.
- Therefore, cooperation among churches and community services should be fostered as a means of sharing resources and expertise.
- **Second**, local churches should set in place some basic policies, procedures and forms of intervention.
- Safety should be the Number 1 priority, so there should be an established policy that is known among the congregation.
- **Thirdly**, education on domestic abuse should be offered to the congregation on a regular basis – informing them of:
  - ***A. The dangers and existence of this evil.***

○ ***B. The resources that is available to them confidentially.***

- It's important to note that safety must apply to both the victim and the persons doing the intervention.
- If the victim is exposed to physical harm, intervention should include a restraining order.
- The victim should be asked,
- ***“What will represent safety to you?”*** and that should be pursued.
- Finally, consideration should be given to what will keep the victim safe, physically, psychologically, emotionally, etc.
- A full determination of short term and long term goals must be made, giving consideration to housing, provisions, for children where applicable, school drop off, pick up, etc., financial support, legal counsel, and transition to independence must all be a part of the intervention plan.
- Help should also be offered to the perpetrator, should he desire it. (Different conference)

**FACING UP: TO THE FAITH ... *We Profess.***

- For too long, communities of faith have been distracted and isolated by traditions that in some cases have become doctrines we teach that are not Biblically founded.
- On the matter of marriage, the nature of divorce and individual suffering as it relates to domestic abuse.....Our theology has got to be founded on the Scripture and not traditions.
- We must recognize the full council of God's Word.
- Marriage is the first institution that God established between humans.
- Both men and women are created in his image, as equal partners with distinctly different rolls (*Genesis 1:27*).

- Therefore, husbands and wives are to live in a loving relationship, with mutual respect, valuing each other's God given dignity.
- A man is to be the head, or authority, of his home according to *Ephesians 5:23* and *1 Peter 3:1*.
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- He is to demonstrated that responsibility and earn that respect by following the command outlined in *Colossians 3:19*,
- ***“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”***
- This command is supported by the admonition found in ***1 Peter 3:7, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of God’s gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”***
- The teaching of scripture makes clear that abuse of any kind is emphatically contrary to the will of God and an affront to human dignity.
- Husbands are to love their wives as they love their own bodies.
- ***“No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body, which is the church.” (Ephesians 5:29)***
- The counsel of God calls men to be servant leaders, not demanding of authority or submission, but treating their wives in such a way that submission is a natural voluntary response.
- Jesus summed it up best when he said in *Matthew 20:28* ***“For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”***
- In view of these scriptures it is my opinion that marriage is sacred in its proper context.
- When that context is violated to the extent that human life and dignity is a risk steps must be taken to protect and preserve life itself.
- The Bible declares that God is the giver and taker of life.

- This places a real responsibility upon the church and its members to do everything possible to preserve and protect those lives that are at risk in a domestic abuse context.
- In situations of pain and suffering, rejection and patterns of violence the church must be the conduit through which the healing, redeeming, restoring power of God flows.
- As illustrated by Jesus in ***Matthew 23:35 – 36 “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”***
- We are obligated to intervene, the church for too long has failed to be “**The Church,**” to protect the vulnerable and to address matter such as domestic abuse and has intentionally or unintentionally reinforced abuse by failing to challenge abusers and assist sufferers and survivors.
- Victims of domestic violence need to be protected, this will include at times, moving them to a temporary, safe place.
- A wife may need to separate herself from her husband, and the appropriate treatment for his violence/abusive behavior administered.
- If and when it is deemed appropriate by a professional for the couple to reunite, they should make every effort to reconcile and live in peace, while continuing in some measure of accountability.
- Now in cases where the perpetrator does not get the necessary help that is needed or is not deemed suitable for reuniting with his wife by a professional then the wife is not bound to the unbelieving husband.
- ***1 Corinthians 7:15*** explains “***If the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.***”

- Peace will not exist in a home or marriage where there is domestic abuse.
- As a result, an abused woman will not be able to follow God's call to live in peace in an abusive relationship.
- And then there is still the matter of human value and dignity discussed earlier. *Psalms 9:9-10* reminds us that ***“The Lord is a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, O Lord have never abandoned anyone who searches for you.”***