

Chapter 1

Does This Sound Familiar?

Sarah and Dave

Sarah and Dave were the pastors of the Glory Christian Center for three years. Dave was a charismatic Bible teacher, who had a way of making the Scripture lessons an exciting adventure. Sarah was a mighty prayer warrior and a gifted teacher in the Children's Ministry. She had devised a marvelous Christian education and worship curriculum for children that kept their children's church filled to capacity each week. Trained in Church Administration, Sarah was also a gifted manager and established an effective administrative structure for the church. Sarah and Dave selected the office staff, and Sarah personally trained each staff member. A very talented singer and musician, Dave organized the music ministry and in two years Glory had a 75-voice choir, a large Male Chorus, a Children's Choir, and a vibrant praise band that was the talk of the city. The upbeat worship services and Dave's dynamic preaching attracted hundreds of people. Politicians and celebrities from the sports and entertainment industries flocked to Glory to enjoy the worship services and to be associated with such a wonderful church.

When Sarah became pregnant with their fourth child she took a leave of absence at the church. Dave appointed his secretary as the Church Administrator and assigned Sarah's ministry duties to one of the staff ministers. Although Sarah was home alone and far along in her pregnancy, Dave often came home at midnight. Whenever Sarah asked him where he had been and why it required him to come home late so often, he would tell her that there was so much more work for him to do at church in her absence. After the baby was born, Dave continued his late-night pattern. Frustrated and lonely from spending many nights up with the baby and without Dave, Sarah confronted Dave with the rumors about his relationship with the new Singles Ministry leader. Dave angrily accused Sarah of spying on him and suggested she spend more time tending to her fat body and being a more submissive wife. As the head of the house he had the right to come and go as he pleased without

question. The arguments increased and became physical. Dave would grab Sarah by both arms and shake her, daring her to tell anyone about their problem. He mocked her and sneered at her each time she cried.

Sarah longed to talk with someone about her marriage problems. But who could she talk to who would believe her, honor her confidentiality, and give her wise counsel. Her parents taught her that you never discuss “family business” with anyone, no matter what. If she shared her problem with her mother, her mother would blame her for making “such a fuss over just a little gossip.” She would reason that “church chatter” about the pastor is common, and Sarah should not be moved by it. Dave’s family would never support her because they really didn’t approve of the marriage. His family felt he was marrying “out of his league” because Sarah’s family was “high society”. It was useless. Every person Sarah thought of going to knew them and would think badly of them, especially Sarah, if she told them about her marriage problems.

Sinking deeper and deeper into depression, Sarah began to release her frustrations by eating. She soon became overweight, and Dave found ways to taunt her about her size in front of their friends. He dismissed her pleas to seek marriage counseling, declaring that it would be improper because he was the senior pastor of a well-known church. What would people think? He eventually moved out of their bedroom and would not speak to her for weeks and months at a time. Dave rarely came home for dinner, and the children saw less and less of their father. When Sarah asked him why he was treating her this way or tried to hug him, he shoved her away, almost knocking her down.

Spousal abuse or domestic violence incorporates emotional abuse and physical attacks within the family context. It is a chosen pattern of behavior that involves the use of verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse; and physical, and sexual violence to terrorize, intimidate, hurt, victimize, and impose a batterer’s will on his spouse, former spouse, or girlfriend.¹

The very thought of spouse abuse in the Christian home seems so absurd. In the Christian mind, the words “abuse” and “Christian” are contradictory terms and should not even be uttered in the same sentence. It boggles one’s moral sensibilities that domestic violence or spousal abuse can exist in Christian “Bible-toting, Scripture-quoting” homes. The occurrence of spousal abuse in the Christian leader’s home... the pastor’s home, is an even greater enigma. When I went to the downtown Los Angeles City Central Library and requested assistance in locating data about Christian clergy spousal abuse, the librarian gasped: “Spouse abuse in the Christian home!?... in the pastor’s home? You would not think it possible”. Nevertheless, to her surprise, there were literary works on spousal abuse or

domestic violence in the Christian home. Though difficult to admit, spousal abuse, as all other diseases and dysfunctions, exists in Christian homes. And, it occurs in more Christian clergy homes than we care to imagine.

Unfortunately, most people are like the city librarian. They do not acknowledge nor think it possible that wife abuse occurs in Christian marriages, and certainly not in pastors' marriages. It seems so horrifying to entertain the thought that a man who professes and preaches Jesus is Lord, can and does abuse his wife. The reality that church pews have a number of abused wives filling them every Sunday seems absolutely incomprehensible. It is even more difficult to fathom that not only are there abused wives in the congregations, but they are also well-represented in the church leadership, particularly in clergy marriages.

Surprisingly, many people have witnessed or been aware of some of the previously cited forms of abusive behavior by the pastor in his marriage. However, they refuse to call it abuse because it is the pastor. For most churchgoers, the pastor is a symbol of the institutional church. The church is the place that represents morality and holiness. Because of his link with the sacred and the moral, it is painful for the Church to associate the pastor with the immoral. Even if he is obviously practicing an immoral lifestyle, somehow his association with the moral and the holy can make even his immorality acceptable. For some persons, pretending that his sinful behavior does not exist or making excuses for the behavior is much easier to live with than confronting him.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 1,500,000 women are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner. The Department of Justice also notes that "because the number of victimizations far exceeds the number of victims, there are an estimated 4.8 million intimate partner rapes and physical assaults against women annually.² In 2002, 20 percent of female crime victims and 3 percent of male crime victims were victimized by intimates.³ In all probability, Christian homes and Christian pastors' homes represent an undetermined portion of these tragic statistics. Unfortunately, there appears to be no official compilation of statistics that document the incidence of domestic violence in the Christian pastors' homes.

Barna Research, a national Christian research organization, lists information for 23 clergy related topics on its website. None of the topics address clergy domestic violence. In fact, there was no information regarding domestic violence in the Christian context. The lack of information on the website of this nationally renowned Christian resource organization leads one to believe that information regarding domestic violence and Christianity is not often requested. Jenny Pappariella, Technical Specialist at the National Resource Center on Domestic

Violence tracks statistics. Pappariella stated: "We have no statistics for the clergy homes. That's going to be hard to get because the higher the person is in the community, the more difficult it is to [statistically] track."⁴

Para church ministries and organizations that serve Christian women should devise networks of assistance where battered women can confidentially receive help, and where the incidence of domestic violence in the church subculture can be statistically tracked. There are a growing number of women in the church, including clergy wives, who are contracting AIDS from their spouses.

Effectively dealing with this problem requires a separation of the human and the divine. Although the pastor is God's representative, he is not God. He is a finite human being representing an infinite God. Holding the pastor accountable in regards to his marriage requires that the pastor, the human being, must be separated from the institutional church. He is not Christ, but a servant of Christ as capable of wrong-doing as any other man. The pastor and all Christian leaders should be held to the Biblical standards of holy living and holy loving as under shepherds of Christ's flock.

If you are reading this book, chances are that you know a battered wife or may be a battered wife. Most women are not aware of the warning signs that may indicate a pattern of domestic violence. The problem of domestic abuse transcends race, culture, gender, occupation, and socio-economic class. **THE CHARACTERISTICS ARE THE SAME FOR ALL BATTERERS!!** The following list may help you or someone you know to recognize the behavior of a potential batterer:

1. **Has he ever hit you?** If he has hit you once he will hit you again, no matter how sorry or remorseful he sounds. The first hit makes the next one easier. The second act of violence may not happen for weeks, months or years, but odds are it will happen again and the violence will escalate becoming more frequent
2. **Has he ever hit his former girlfriends?** Batterers sometimes have a history of violence with all the women in their lives. Listen to what the man's friends and ex-girlfriends have to say about him and what he actually says about himself. He may, and usually does, blame her for his violence, but there is no excuse. He has hit a woman, broken the taboo, and for that he is dangerous.
3. **What does he do when he gets angry?** Does he get angry over the smallest thing? Can he talk about his anger or does he deny it? Does he throw things, call you names, punch the walls, or break your most precious belongings? Is he cruel to animals or violent with other

- men? Are you afraid of his temper? Pay attention to signs that the man thinks violence is an acceptable way to gain power.
4. **Does he attempt to keep you and your life under strict control?** Does he try to control the way you dress, whom you see, how you spend your money? Does he try to make you account for every minute he's not with you and generally treat you like a helpless child? Subtle control is when the man oversees your life in a seemingly kind and caring way, such as always driving you where ever you want to go, doing things for you, and making all of your decisions until your independence is totally undermined.
 5. **Does he try to isolate you?** Does he try to control you by cutting you off from family and friends? Or make it unpleasant for family and friends to visit or communicate with you?
 6. **Is he pathologically jealous?** Does he accuse you of imagined encounters with other men? Does he question you in detail about other people you have seen, especially other men?
 7. **Does he always blame you or others for his problems?** BATTERERS never think they are responsible for their violence or any other problem in their lives. It's always someone else's fault - usually the women they batter. A batterer will say, "I was out of control" as if another self is responsible. He has to learn to take responsibility for his violence.
 8. **How does he re-act to your success?** BATTERERS often resent success in your life. A man is more likely to become a batterer if he holds traditional beliefs about sex roles, and is inferior or equal to his wife in socio-economic status.
 9. **What is his family like?** Battering men tend to come from violent homes, but not always. Sometimes verbal abuse alone can turn boys into batterers. Look at how a man treats his mother and sister for an indication of how he will treat his wife.
 10. **Does he get violent when he drinks?** Some researchers say that men use drinking as an excuse to batter. They pretend alcohol caused them to batter when, in fact, they drink in order to blame something other than themselves for their need to batter.
 11. **Is he able to empathize?** A batterer's inability to consider other people is a key factor in being able to hurt them. BATTERERS and other violent men are characteristically self-centered. He may sound remorseful but that is only because he knows he should show regret.

12. **Does he have a Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr.Hyde-personality?** Batterers are commonly able to switch from nice to nasty in a second, with or without the help of alcohol. A batterer may be so charming to everyone but his wife that no one will believe he hurts her. This may also make her feel isolated or crazy.
13. **Can he express himself clearly?** Most batterers can't talk about their problems, and they often mistake emotions such as sadness for anger or sexual urges, turning emotional encounters into a fight or seduction. An abuser's confusion of violence with sex is one of the reasons rape is so often part- usually the last act- of a battering episode.⁵

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