

When Violence Comes Home

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert S. Owens, retired minister in the Presbyterian Church(U.S.A.), who has been involved in ministry to victims of domestic violence and their families for many years.

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INTRODUCTION

The woman speaking on the phone was obviously very upset, confused, and frightened. Her voice shaking almost uncontrollably, she explained that her husband had been abusing her, almost from the time their honeymoon ended. At first she did not realize it was abuse, and she had been wondering what was wrong with her. Was she failing to meet his needs? Was she not measuring up to his expectations? Was he disappointed in her?

This was her first marriage. She had waited for years for the right man to come along, and had believed David was that man. From the first day they had spent together alone, they had enjoyed each other’s company so much. They shared similar interests, liked the same kind of music, and also seemed to have the same core values. He appeared to be a real gentleman—i.e. a gentle man. He was courteous and considerate, sensitive and supportive, kind and understanding—not arrogant or rude, not demanding and domineering like some men she had known, including one who had married her sister, and a few who had married close friends.

How wrong she was! How could she have known that it was all an act, that he was simply extending himself to her in courtship, that he was not revealing his true nature? How could she have known that he had a history of violence? In only a matter of weeks the harassment and intimidation had started, the accusations, the threats, and the verbal abuse. She was so bewildered by it all, and hurting at such a deep level. There was no physical violence in those early months of their marriage, but her self-esteem had taken a beating. She was wondering, “Have I done something to provoke him, or is there something I have failed to do?” The verbal assaults had not only shocked her, and wounded her; they had also humiliated her and crushed her spirit. She felt betrayed, but was naturally looking within herself for answers. Surely there was some reasonable explanation. Were his unmet needs causing him to act this way? What was causing him to say such hurtful things, to call her such horrible names?

The woman on the phone was my daughter!

Our theme this morning is “**When Violence Comes Home.**” It had never occurred to me that abuse could ever invade our home. There was no history of violence on either side of our family. Like most people who have never experienced abuse in family life, I assumed this was only a problem among those who had come from dysfunctional families, those involved in multiple relationships, extra-marital affairs, and certainly people who were outside the orbit of the Christian community. I now look back and ask myself how I could have been so uninformed, as well as so unconcerned as a

pastor and counselor, regarding this terrible cause of human misery? Why had I never given any serious consideration to the problem of domestic violence? Was it because I had been wearing blinders? Was it because so few abused women had ever come to me for counseling? Had I assumed there were no victims of family violence in the churches I had served, or among our friends and neighbors? Like so many well educated persons, people in polite society, those living in nice neighborhoods, I had also assumed that only uneducated, irresponsible, immoral, and irreligious people were guilty of such violent acts.

Regardless of the possible explanations for that false assumption that now come to mind, just like my daughter I have found myself asking: “How could I have been so wrong? How could I have been so blind? How could I have been so deceived?” I now know that domestic violence knows no such boundaries. How easily we label and stereotype people, revealing not only our ignorance, but our prejudices and blind spots. Many of us are also living in denial. We have convinced ourselves that nothing like this has ever happened, or could ever happen, in our own families. Domestic violence could never invade our home. I surely hope it never does, but I assure you an abuser can marry into any family, even the best of families. I can personally testify to that!

I have also discovered that there are indeed abused women and abusers in the Body of Christ, in all branches of the Church, in every congregation of any size. In fact, some of them are ministers, Christian counselors, Christian educators, Sunday school teachers, Elders, Deacons, and Vestrymen. You will find abusers in every profession, including physicians, lawyers, psychologists, teachers, bankers, highly successful businessmen, elected officials, law enforcement officers—leaders in the community, very respected people. They have been identified. I have confronted some of them myself, having learned of their abuse, not always from their victims, but from relatives, neighbors, doctors, and nurses in hospital emergency rooms.

Those who have not battered their wives seldom consider themselves an abuser, because there has been no physical violence in their home. However, each of them has used his strength and verbal abuse to intimidate, dominate, and humiliate his wife. All of them have abused their wives emotionally, verbally, mentally, and psychologically. There are women listening to me right now who know exactly what I am talking about. Are you one of them? Studies reveal that one out of every three women have been, or will be in their lifetime, a victim of abuse. That shocking statistic includes the women in our church families, including St. Johns. If you have been a victim of either date rape or spouse abuse, if you are in an abusive relationship at this time, you have probably tried to keep it a secret. You are so embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated, confused, and also very afraid. Those of you who are single, with abusive boyfriends, find yourselves in a similar situation, though there are differences. If your abuser is your husband, he has probably tried to isolate you from your family, your friends, as well as your extended family in the Body of Christ, except for public worship. He may even participate in Sunday morning worship with you, and may be sitting beside you in the pew right now. He may be in the choir. He may have a leadership position in the church, for that contributes to his reputation as a good man. However, he is not a good man. No man who abuses his wife is a good man!

Others in the church may even see him as a godly man, but he is not a godly man! No man who abuses a woman, married or single, is a godly man! God hates abuse! I did not say God hates abusers, but God does hate the abuse! There is no person in this world, even those who abuse others, who can say, “God does not love me.” God loves everyone, without exception. Even those who are abusers will always have God’s love, but that does not mean they have God’s approval! God never approves of abuse! There is absolutely no excuse for abuse! I say it again, with the hope that this truth will grip your mind this morning, God hates abuse!

So, if your husband is an abuser, I want you to know he is sinning against God, as well as you! He has no one to blame but himself for his own behavior. He may have seen abuse in his family as a child. It is possible, very possible, that he may have learned his abusive behavior from his own father, who abused his mother. However, that is only one possible explanation for his abuse, not an excuse. There is no excuse for abuse! Your husband may also have been abused as a child. That is true of many abusers. Nevertheless, he is still responsible for his own actions and reactions. He cannot blame anyone else, including you! Therefore, don't blame yourself! Don't allow him to shift the blame, and to pile the guilt on you! Don't believe his lies! Your marriage is not the problem. His abuse is the problem!

Your husband is responsible for his own choices. He has chosen to be cruel and condescending! He has chosen to be suspicious and accusatory! He has chosen to call you terrible names, even in front of the children! He has to have someone else to blame for his lack of self control, since he cannot face his own faults, his own frailties, His own failures. He does everything he can to misdirect your attention from himself to yourself, by criticizing you at every opportunity when he is at home. Nothing you do in private, or in public, pleases him. Of course, he is a different person when you are with others away from home. He does not use the same demeaning language when others are around, although he is no longer fun to be with. He is not the same man you married! In fact, you feel trapped in a relationship with someone you don't know, someone you no longer love, someone for whom you have no respect. You know something must be done, but you do not know what to do, or where to turn for help. You are at your wit's end. Your husband controls the finances. You can't afford to leave. How could you support yourself? What about your children? You have no place to go? Where would you stay? You feel helpless, hopeless, and powerless!

Now I want to speak more directly to you husbands who have been sitting there uncomfortably listening to what I have been saying. Some of you know I have been describing you, but you have never really acknowledged that you are an abuser. You know you have a problem, but you have never confessed it, not even to God! You thought you could control your anger, as an alcoholic thinks he can control his drinking, but he cannot, and you cannot! You have not! At home your anger controls you so much of the time! You have made all kinds of excuses, blaming the stress in your life, problems at work, financial worries. Yes, you have even tried to convince yourself that your wife is to blame! You have searched for ways to not only excuse your lack of self control, but to even condone it! You have probably always apologized to your wife following every abusive outburst, every harsh word, every threat, every false accusation, saying: "I'm sorry. Forgive me. I promise you it will never happen again"—but it has happened again, and again, and again!

That is the typical "cycle of violence"—harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, ultimately escalating into physical violence. This familiar cycle is almost always followed by that so-called "honeymoon phase" with apologies, flowers, candy, or an evening out, which gives abused women hope, but it is false hope! For it isn't very long until the abuse has begun again, the cycle is repeated, the same old tactics are being used to maintain control, and they find themselves in the same situation as before. Nothing has changed!

You men who are guilty of this kind of repeated abuse have probably done a good job of hiding your ugly secret, as so many abusers have succeeded in doing—that is, hiding their secret sins from everyone but God! You are like many men bearing the name of Christ, who attend some church most Sundays, who sing the hymns, who join in the liturgy, who pray the prayers, who support the work of the church financially, who do everything they can to give the impression that they are committed Christians—but when they are at home behind closed doors their behavior, the way they treat their wives, makes liars of them all! Perhaps very early in life they were brought into the orbit

of the Christian community. They may have been born into a Christian home. They may not be able to remember a time when they did not believe in Jesus, but in their marriage and family life there is very little about them to remind anyone of Christ! Some of them are even convinced they have the God-given right to use their strength to control their wives, to keep them submissive. Some even batter their wives in the name of God! They delight in quoting those Bible verses which say the husband is “the head of the wife, just as Christ is the Head of the Church...Just as the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, subject to their husbands” (Ephesians 5:22-24). Are you such a man?

If you are, then you are probably also one who completely ignores the context of these verses I have quoted from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, for the context in that entire passage is mutual submission, submission to each other as husband and wife, in the covenant of Christian marriage, with both “subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). This is the same passage where husbands are commanded, “Love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her... husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the Church” (vs. 25, 28-29).

However, so many men in the Church have been taught to believe that God’s design for Christian marriage and family life makes the husband boss! That is the way they interpret Paul’s words regarding the husband’s headship, and the wife’s submission. To them that means to exercise control, to have the last word, to be one who makes the decisions, to be the one who is in charge. Is that what you believe? Well, that is not what the New Testament means by headship, by spiritual leadership in the home. Quite the opposite! it means servant leadership, loving leadership, caring leadership. No man has the right to dominate His wife, to intimidate His wife, to abuse His wife! That is not love! It never has been, and it never will be love! Love is not selfish, it is giving! Love does not demand its own rights, or insist on its own way! Love is not arrogant or rude! Love is not irritable or abusive! Love is patient and kind. Love is how we treat each other—with tenderness, gentleness, kindness, understanding, and respect (I Corinthians 13).

That is the kind of love God wants us as to demonstrate in our marriages, in our homes, in our family life. That is the kind of love that produces the kind of leadership Christian husbands are supposed to exercise in their families. That kind of love is powerful! In His teaching ministry, Jesus contrasted two kinds of power, the kind of power that hurts, and the kind of power that heals—the kind of power that seeks to control, and the kind of power that cares—the kind of power that takes, and the kind of power that gives—the kind of power that is destructive, and the kind of power that is constructive—the kind of power that tears down, and the kind of power that builds up—the kind of power that destroys, and the kind of power that saves. These two kinds of power are best described as worldly power and spiritual power!

Jesus told His disciples, “The Gentiles (i.e. the unbelievers) lord it over one another; it shall not be so among you!” He said, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). He said, “I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master” (John 13:15-16). We are commanded to have the same mind we find in Christ, who made Himself of no reputation, who never exalted Himself, but “emptied Himself”, never using His power for personal gain, but “humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus even had the power to save Himself, but if He had saved Himself He would not be our Savior!

The Apostle Paul admonishes us, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil. 2: 2:3-4). This mind-set—this lifestyle - this kind of self-giving—this kind of servant hood—must first be lived out in our marriages, in our family life. For if we can’t make it work there, how can we expect to make it work anywhere? That’s why Paul tells Christian husbands, “...love your wives, just as Christ loved His church and gave himself up for her.” Sadly, unfortunately, tragically, in too many homes that are supposed to be Christian households we find just the opposite—not self-denial, not sacrificial love, not the desire to serve, but the desire to be served. We find a power and control problem, with husbands lording it over their wives, with little or no understanding of real love, with little or no regard for gender equality, with little or no appreciation for the sanctity of life. In fact, the kind of love God revealed in His incarnation, in the Word made flesh in the ministry of Jesus, is rare—very rare. It has been called an “impossible possibility.” Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends... You are my friends if you do what I command you... This I command you, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12-14). That is not only difficult, it is impossible! That is, impossible without Jesus! It is impossible without Jesus Himself living in us, and loving others through us!

It is the love of Christ Himself that we are called to demonstrate, in our marriages, in our families, and in all our relationships. However, it is only possible to love as Jesus loves when we are willing to submit to His headship, His Lordship; when we are willing to live our lives under new management, His management! Once we decide to relinquish control, and allow Jesus to be the One in charge, then we discover that something miraculous, something inexplicable, is happening on the inside; we are being given a new nature, the old is passing away, and all things are being made new! That is a miracle only God can perform in our lives, but it only happens when our own foolish pride is broken, when our blind eyes are opened, and our darkened minds are illumined by the Spirit of the Living God. Then we see each other through His eyes. Then we understand for the first time that there is no place in our lives as Christians for feelings of superiority or inferiority. This is true in marriage, in the Church, and everywhere else! There is simply no place in a Christian’s life for the misuse and abuse of authority and power! The opposite of love is not hate. it is selfishness! It is the desire to intimidate and dominate! The opposite of love is abuse!

This brings us back to where we started. I want you men who are abusers to know that God will hold you responsible and accountable for the way you have been treating your wife! You cannot continue to sin with impunity! Your dark deeds will come home to roost! God has spoken once and for all! Your sins will find you out! “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap” (Galatians 6:7). God has entrusted your wife to you for her provision, for her protection, and commands you in His Word to love her unconditionally and unselfishly, to bestow honor on her, to live considerately with her (I Peter 3:7). No vows are more sacred than the vows we assume in the covenant of Christian marriage! No relationship is more holy than the relationship that exists in a marriage where a man and a woman have become one in Christ. The Bible calls this mystical union, this blending of two spirits, this fusion of two hearts, a “great mystery...applying it to Christ and His Church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Christian marriage is the only relationship that is compared in Holy Scripture to the relationship that exists between Christ and His Church; the Church is called His Bride, and Jesus is the Bridegroom. Husbands are commanded to love their bride just as Christ has loved His Bride. It is Christ who has all power, unlimited power, at His disposal. He told His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:19), and yet He only used His power to save and to serve.

We never see Jesus abusing anyone, even those who had abused others. Yes, He revealed a kind of righteous anger, directed at the wrong kind of righteousness—self righteousness! Jesus was angry when He saw religious leaders who prayed on their knees on the Sabbath, but preyed on the poor—the disadvantaged, the dispossessed—the rest of the time! Jesus was angry over intolerance, injustice, oppression, the lack of mercy, the absence of love!

Anger is a normal emotion, and even healthy, if we are angry over things that should make us angry. It is when little things, trivial things, make us angry that we find ourselves becoming irritable and hard to live with. It is when anger becomes abusive that it is abnormal! It is anger out of control that is unhealthy! It is when people direct their anger toward other people—people they want to hurt, and even destroy—rather than directing their anger toward those situations and circumstances that need to be changed, those strongholds of evil that need to be pulled down—that anger creates problems, rather than helping to correct problems!

The truth is most of us are not angry enough about those things that should make us angry; the evils in our society, evils that are by-products of the abuse of authority and power, that cause untold human misery, including the evils of spouse abuse, child abuse, and sexual abuse. Our anger should not cause us to condemn, for only God has the right to condemn; but we should be angry enough to confront! Abusers need to be confronted, and the abused need to be comforted!

This is part of the message that is going out in churches across America in October, which has been designated for a number of years as “Domestic Violence Awareness Month.” I am thankful St. John’s is among those congregations in Charlotte recognizing that Christ’s Church must seriously and prayerfully consider the religious implications of domestic violence, and decide how to become a part of the answer to this critical problem, rather than being a part of the problem, as too many churches and pastors have been, and still are—not only by their silence on this issue, but by their misuse and abuse of Scripture to abuse women, and because of their failure to support victims and their refusal to confront abusers—an ugly truth that should make us angry, angry enough to do something about it—angry enough to speak out—angry enough to protest—angry enough to proclaim without any apology, without any embarrassment: “There is no excuse for abuse!”

I am angry when I learn of pastors who are abusive husbands. I have met them. I have known their victims. Of course, most of them are in denial. They do not consider themselves abusers. In fact they believe God is on their side when they use their authority and power to keep their wives submissive. But I stand before you this morning as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments to say, “No! God is not on the side of abusers! He is on the side of the abused!” Let me say it again: “There is no excuse for abuse!”

I am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this congregation’s effort to inform and educate the staff, leaders, members, and friends of St. John’s regarding the grievous sin of spouse abuse, and the role of the whole Body of Christ in dealing with this problem that breaks the heart of God! Our Father in heaven suffers with His abused children. The God we worship, the God we believe in, the God who has been revealed most fully in the person of Jesus Christ, is not a God who afflicts His children with suffering. Our God is a suffering God, who suffers with us! This is the whole meaning of the cross! He has carried our sorrows! He has borne our infirmities! He was wounded for our transgressions! He was crushed for our iniquities! He was oppressed, stricken, and abused! He was beaten, battered, and bruised, although He had done no violence Himself (Isaiah 53:4-5,7-9).

Therefore, God understands! God has shared our humanity. God has identified Himself with us in our suffering. That’s the word that says it best, identification! God is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He came among us as one of us to share our afflictions that we might experience His

love, His mercy, His compassion, His forgiveness, His acceptance, and His salvation. The Son of God became the Son of Man, that we who are the sons and daughters of men might become the sons and daughters of God! This was made possible through God's incarnation in the person of Jesus, the Christ, who loved us the way God wants us to love one another! Because of Jesus we know how much God loves us, how far God was willing to go to redeem us, even all the way to the cross! Because of Jesus, we know God is for us, and not against us (Romans 8:31), and that "all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). These are truths that have comforted me, and the New Testament tells those of us who have been comforted to console others "with the same consolation by which we ourselves have been comforted by God" (II Corinthians 1:4).

I stand before you as a pastor who has tried to do that, for like my own daughter, I too am a victim of domestic violence—a father who was viciously attacked by a former son-in-law. Fortunately, both of us are among those victims who survived such family violence, and from our vantage point years later we are able to see how God has indeed worked in all that happened for our good, for the good of others, and for His glory. Our story has been told in a video which some of you have seen, including one or more pastors on your staff—"Broken Vows" is an educational tool produced by the "Seattle Center for the Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence", a much valued ministry which is now known as "Faith Trust Institute," a national organization educating clergy and religious leaders on the need to help halt such acts of violence against women and their families. The encouraging response to the conferences they have presented, and the widespread use of the training resources they have provided, has given those involved in this collaborative effort much more hope. For too long, to quote the Apostle Paul's intriguing phrase, we have felt we were "hoping against hope."

Finally, I stand before you today to give you this challenge, this charge: Be good listeners. Listen with enthusiasm to those who are willing to share their hurts. Hurt with those who are hurting, weep with those who weep, relieve the oppressed, comfort the afflicted. Let us work together to make our congregations true "sanctuaries" for the victims of abuse; let us be sure our churches are providing competent counseling, the kind of counseling that is helpful rather than hurtful, as it so often is when pastors and church members do not know how to deal effectively with abused women. Too many pastors simply offer marriage counseling, rather than dealing with the presenting problem, which is the problem of abuse, the problem of violence! They even encourage abused women to remain in abusive relationships. I am thinking of one prominent minister in my own denomination, who told a battered wife who had asked him what she should do: "Go home and take another beating!"

Believe it or not, those words were spoken from the pulpit when I was in the congregation during a "Family Life Conference." I could share some other horror stories with you, how abused women have even been shunned by some congregations, excommunicated, expelled from the fellowship because they were seen as women who had rebelled against God, wives who had rejected their God-given role to be submissive and obedient to their husbands. The pastors, leaders, and some members in such churches have chosen to ignore the fact that abusive husbands are the ones who have broken their marriage vows by not cherishing their wives, by not living considerately with them, by not shielding and protecting them. They are the guilty ones, for they have violated the wives entrusted to their care by Almighty God! The Apostle Peter tells us that the prayers of such husbands will be hindered (I Peter 3:7). Are you such a husband? Have you been wondering why your prayers are not being answered, at least not when you had expected them to be, or in the manner you had expected? Well, take a long hard look at the way you have been treating your wife!

Is it any wonder that such abused women in the Body of Christ, abused not only by their husbands, but further victimized and stigmatized by their own brothers and sisters in Christ, are asking such disturbing questions as these: “If I can’t go to my own church with my problems and find understanding and support, where can I go? Where else can I find a place of security and safety in order to be healed?”—“If I can’t trust my own pastor to be a caring and comforting advocate, who can I trust?”—“Where is God? Why doesn’t God help me? Is God going to allow me to be destroyed? Doesn’t God care? Hasn’t God promised to protect His children from harm?”—“I am mentally confused and spiritually troubled, physically exhausted and emotionally drained. I am in great distress. Is there nothing God can do to help me?”—“Is it really possible that God wants me to remain in this abusive relationship? How can I know God’s will?”

There are no easy answers to such questions. These are questions that call for more than the canned answers preachers and others in the Church often give. We must pray for wisdom, asking God to give us insights and answers that are helpful and healing, not hurtful and demeaning. Both the abused and their abusers need to know that God is for them and not against them, and that they are loved by the people of God; that there is help available in the Body of Christ for all those who choose to be helped, and there is also help available to them in the professional community—competent counseling, recovery groups, anger management groups, which can contribute to their healing, but only if they are willing to seek such help in spite of their fears—the fear of rejection, the fear of condemnation, the fear of failure, the fear of public opinion.

Unfortunately, there are too many abused women who do not seek help. They remain in abusive relationships. Many who do seek help wait too long, until they have been terribly beaten, viciously stabbed, and in many cases do not survive. As for the abusers themselves—very few seek help. There are not many abusive men who are willing to acknowledge that they are the ones with the problem. As for those who do seek help, if God is not a part of the equation, the track record for recovery is not very good, not very encouraging. However, some do change, some are delivered, some are brought from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light, when there is a hidden factor—the Jesus factor! Even then, the road to recovery is a long road—a rough road, with no detours. It is the “narrow way” Jesus described, but it is the way that leads to life—life as God intended it to be lived, the abundant life Jesus offers, life with a capital “L.”

How about you? Are you willing to begin such a journey? It may be frightening to think of what will be required of you on this road to recovery, but don’t waste another moment. The longest journey begins with the first step, and the first step on this journey is a sense of need—the next step is genuine repentance, and the willingness to change. Are you will to truly and earnestly repent, which means more than saying, “I’m sorry.” It means you are willing to change, that you are willing for God to help you make the changes that are needed. It means you are willing to let go, and let God help you to become the man He had in mind when He first thought of you. God has a “faith vision of you at your highest and best. God knows your potentialities, your possibilities—God not only sees the person you are, He sees the person you are uniquely capable of becoming! So reach out to Him now, this very moment, saying: “God, I do not know the person you see, but with your help that is the person I want to be!” God can work a miracle of release and renewal in your life if you only believe, if you are willing to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life, and trust Him to do for you what you are powerless to do for yourself.

God can also make this church a community of faith where such miracles happen, but what kind of leadership will be required to produce that kind of church? Every church, like every other organization, tends to take on the lifestyle of its leadership. What kind of people will it take to produce that kind of leadership? It will take people who are more than church members. It will take

disciples of Christ, those who are truly following Jesus. It will take men and women who are willing to be servants, servants of their Servant Lord. It will take people who are willing to let their hearts be broken with the things that break the heart of God. It will take believers who are doers of the Word, and not hearers only. It will take people who actually possess the spiritual qualities Christ taught, and who realize that those qualities are designed for practical use. It will take people who have the mind of Christ, people who think His thoughts, people who are being filled with the Spirit, people in whose lives the “fruit of the Spirit” is being manifested (Galatians 5:22-23), people who love one another as Jesus has loved them.

That is the kind of people it will take to produce the kind of leaders required to make our churches what they ought to be—visible, living, demonstrations of Kingdom living, outposts of the kingdom of heaven on earth, colonies of heaven, true sanctuaries. When that happens, there will be far less abuse, for there will be fewer abused women in our churches, for there will be fewer abusers. When that happens, there will be far less abuse outside the Church as well, for those of us who bear the name of Christ will be able to make a difference in our society. We will be contagious Christians, channels of God’s love, instruments of His peace, and ambassadors for Christ, agents of reconciliation in a broken and fragmented world! This is where it must begin, in our own churches and in our own homes; for if it does not begin here and there, why should we expect it to happen anywhere?

PRAYER:

O Lord our God, let the changes that are needed begin with us, today! We believe, overcome our unbelief! We ask this in Jesus’ name, with thanksgiving for the joy of being instruments of His peace. Amen.

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