

Tamar More Righteous Than Judah: A Christmas Meditation

By Catherine Clark Kroeger

How often we mistake God's purposes for the family! All too often we paint an ideal picture without regard to the realistic accounts given in the Bible. Again and again, unfortunate family relationships are salvaged by the power and grace of God. Resolutions are reached not by covering up the reality but by engaging in constructive and God-honoring action. A case in point might be the story of the childless Tamar, a wronged widow in early Israel. Her husband Er had been "a wicked man in the Lord's sight, so the Lord took his life" (Gen. 38:7).

Upon the death of her husband, Hebrew law required that an effort be made to impregnate a widow by her brother-in-law in order that she might bear an heir to be raised as the son of her late husband. Therefore Judah, her father-in-law, instructed his next son Onan to carry out this obligation. Onan, however, was aware that if he should sire an heir for his dead brother, he would lose a sizable amount of his own inheritance to the lad. Instead of gaining two-thirds of his father's estate as eldest surviving son, his portion would be reduced to merely one-quarter. Therefore, he refused to consummate the marriage, practicing *coitus interruptus* or as the text says, "Spilling his seed upon the ground."

The issue is not that of contraception nor even of masturbation, but rather of a willful refusal to provide for his dead brother's widow—the deliberate withholding of that to which she was legally entitled. While men inherited land, women had the right to work the land and to derive their income from their own agricultural efforts. Without a son to hold the property rights, Tamar had no means of supporting herself. She had been deprived of the one means of livelihood rightfully hers.

The aftermath of the story is swift and decisive. "The Lord considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother. So the Lord took Onan's life too" (vs. 10). He is slain by God because he has withheld from a widow her legal right and plunged her into a perilous situation. The biblical story appears to be an exemplary one. In a few other instances, someone is stricken dead upon the first occurrence of a particular form of evil and arrogant conduct that violates the holiness of God (Korah's attempted violation of the sanctuary and its priesthood, Uzzah touching the Ark of the Covenant, and Ananias and Sapphira lying to the early Christian community). The event is a sobering one for a father who has now lost two sons.

Under the pretext that he will arrange a marriage with the third brother when he is old enough, Judah sends Tamar back to her father's household although he has no intention of fulfilling his promise. Again Tamar is wronged. She can live under her father's roof as long as he survives, but her future thereafter is very uncertain when she will have neither access to land nor a son to comfort and support her in her old age.

By now, fully aware that she has no hope of marriage to the third son, Tamar contrives to disguise herself as a prostitute and attract the interest of Judah as he passes along the road. In exchange for her services, Judah promises a goat and leaves his seal, its cord and a walking stick as guarantee of payment. The messenger who brings back the goat can find no trace of the prostitute nor of the seal, cord or staff.

When Judah subsequently learns that his daughter-in-law has played the harlot and is now pregnant, he plans to execute her. When he calls her for judgment, she reveals to him the articles given to her by the man whose child she carries. Judah recognizes his own belongings and acknowledges that Tamar has acted appropriately to redress the wrong that has been done to her by Judah

continued

and his sons. He declares, “She is more righteous than I am, because I didn’t arrange for her to marry my son Shelah” (v. 26). Abuse sometimes consists in withholding what should properly be granted, and now Judah has come to see that he has permitted a seriously unrighteous situation to exist.

The wronged woman has been declared more righteous than Judah from whom the Messiah will be descended. Indeed, it will be her son Perez who is named in Matthew’s genealogy of the Savior: “Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar). Perez was the father of Hezron” (Matt. 1:3).

Ultimately, this story tells us of God’s abhorrence of the abuse of women and of His approbation of those seek to right the wrongs.

It is no mistake that the name of Tamar is read out in our churches at Christmas time. Her vindication is part of our Savior’s heritage. ☩

12 Reasons Why Couples Counseling is Not Recommended When Domestic Violence is Present

By Dr. Chris Huffine

1. Focusing on the relationship assumes that each person contributes to the abusive behavior, when in truth the perpetrator is solely responsible for his abusive behavior.
2. Focusing on issues other than the abusive behavior allows the abusive behavior to continue.
3. Danger to the victim may increase due to the counselor’s involvement in the relationship. Because the batterer’s goal is to maintain control of the relationship, any interference on the counselor’s part may lead to an increase in his controlling behavior. The therapist may unwittingly elicit information or initiate interventions that escalate abuse.
4. Blaming the victim. When abusive behavior is identified, the victim may be asked, “What was your part in this?” Alternatively, the batterer may use comments and observations of the couples counselor to justify his abusive behavior (e.g., “Remember, he said how your refusal to answer my questions only makes things worse!”). Many victims already tend to blame themselves; the counselor may unwittingly encourage this.
5. Out of fear of further abuse, the victim may not be honest about the abuse or other issues in the couples session, giving the false impression that things are better than they really are.
6. On the other hand, the victim may have a false sense of security and safety in the couples session. This may lead her to disclose information she normally wouldn’t at home, believing that the therapist will keep her safe. Once they have left the safety of the counseling room, he may then retaliate with more abuse.
7. In couples counseling, if the therapist focuses extensively on the abuse, the batterer may feel shamed, scapegoated, and to blame for every problem in the relationship. In a batterer intervention group, while he is held accountable for his abuse, he is not blamed for every problem in the relationship. Couples counseling may discourage the level of disclosure that is possible in a group.
8. Before other issues in the relationship can be effectively addressed, the abusive behavior must end. Abusive behavior tends to distract attention away from other issues, like a smoke screen. This is akin to couples counseling where one or both parties are active alcoholics; until they are sober, such interventions have little effectiveness. Similarly, until the abuse has stopped, other interventions have limited effectiveness.
9. It colludes with the batterer’s denial. It allows him to continue to blame her and/or the relationship for his abusive behavior. He can then take advantage of the couples sessions to further his agenda of control and power over her.
10. Often in couples counseling there is no assessment for violence. If an assessment is done with both people present, the potential for honest disclosure will be undermined.
11. A couples counselor who is focused on the relationship may be hesitant to strongly confront just one of the individuals,

concerned this will be viewed as favoritism. Such failure to directly confront the abuse contributes to minimization and denial.

12. Couples counseling can keep a victim in the abusive relationship longer than she would

otherwise stay, in the false hope that the counseling may make things better. Some forms of couples counseling require couples to make a time commitment (e.g., 3–6 months) of not separating while in the counseling, which may prolong an abusive relationship. ☞

Dr. Huffine is a licensed clinical psychologist who has worked for over 16 years in the domestic violence field. He is the clinical director of Allies in Change Counseling Center, which offers counseling for anger/domestic violence issues for men and women. He and his staff can be reached at allies@alliesinchange.org.

When the Sun Falls

By Lynne Weche

All was quiet except for the blowing of the wind. In the houses on the street, lights were off except in one house at the very end. This wasn't abnormal. The family was pretty unusual; the kids kept to themselves, only leaving the house when they had to. Every once in a while, screams would be heard emanating from the house; but in the culture we live in, we mind our own business. Something, however, was different today. You could feel it in the air that something was going to happen—nothing good.

At one o'clock that night, a loud scream rent the air.

Immediately after that, more screams joined in, becoming a loud wail. The first screams were a woman's, the mother's; and the ones after were her children's, scared because their mommy was scared. The eldest, as frightened as he was, wanted to protect his mother from the monster; but he knew even at the young age of nine that he couldn't do that. All he could do was protect his little sister from the full effects of the horror. Calling the police didn't seem of much use; nobody had ever come to his rescue. All his neighbors pretended that the daily screams didn't happen, and that the woman

walking around with new bruises each day just kept falling down the stairs.

He ran to his sister's room and held her close while whispering soothing words to a child who couldn't comprehend what was going on. She was crying and turning to him with questions for which he had no answers. In the next room, their mother continued crying. A man's angry voice joined the melee, increasing in pitch until it practically reverberated through the whole house. As if also scared of the man, even the wind quieted down.

"Why is Daddy shouting at Mommy?" the little girl asked tearfully.

This left the boy at a dilemma—should he lie to protect her or come up with some version of the truth? He settled for neither. "Shush, it's all going to be okay."

"I want to see Mommy. I want to see Mommy now!"

The wails could still be heard. The woman tried muffling them, but that only made matters worse. The girl broke out from her brother's embrace and ran to her parents' room. She only got as far as the door before stopping dead in her tracks. Her mother was cowering in a corner, bleeding, her pretty face bruised. Her father held a whip in his hand and was sweating from exerting himself.



"Go back to bed, honey," she said to her daughter. "Mommy and Daddy need to talk in private."

"Now see what you've done," he said. "The kids are up!" He raised his hand to whip her again and she cried out in anticipation of the pain. The daughter screamed and ran to her mother.

The boy, acting out of pure instinct, rushed to stand in front of his mother and sister. "No, Dad, stop!" he cried out but was too late. He felt the whip slash across his chest and pain dropped him to his knees. Tears stung his eyes.

His mother hurried to him and cradled him in her arms, all the time sobbing heavily. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry," she kept whispering to him as she rocked him.

The dad was in shock. What had he done to his little boy? It was one thing to knock around his wife for the fun of it, but his son was another matter. Instead of being remorseful and checking to see whether his son was okay or not, he turned to wife and

continued

yelled, "Stupid woman, why couldn't you just keep quiet? This is all your fault!"

"Shut up!" she responded. "Can't you see you hurt him? He needs a doctor!"

"He's a man. He'll survive."

By now the neighbors were thoroughly annoyed at the disturbance. A few were out of their houses in their pajamas, concentrated in small groups, discussing what was going on.

"Why doesn't she just leave him and take the kids?" one neighbor remarked. "It would be so much easier for everyone. We can't be waking up in the middle of the night every other day just because they're having a dispute."

"Well, you know she doesn't have a job," another replied. "How would she provide for herself and the kids? You know that husband of hers is a no-good jerk."

They spent about ten minutes dissecting the situation from the outside before someone actually rang the doorbell to check if everything was all right. The husband opened the

door, looking angry and menacing, towering above the man who rang the doorbell.

"We would appreciate it if you would keep it down in there," the man said. "We are trying to sleep, but it's very hard to do that when a woman keeps screaming."

"Fine, we'll try to keep it down. Is that all?"

"Actually," said a woman from the crowd of bystanders, "I heard the kids. Are they okay?"

"That's none of your business!" the man snarled and slammed the door shut.

There was a stunned silence, but then the neighbors started filing out in groups, all shaking their heads at the man's savageness.

"Well, at least we tried," they said to one another, satisfied that they had performed their neighborly duty.

The boy had been right in thinking that no one would help him but himself. None of the neighbors thought of calling the police. His mother obviously wasn't going to do it. He was all alone. His mother applied some ointment on his chest

and massaged him until the pain was marginally better. She stayed with him and his sister until they both fell asleep.

Before he completely dozed off, the boy asked his mother, "Why does Dad beat you like that, Mom? Why do you let him do it?"

"Oh sweetie, sometimes married people have problems; but it'll soon be okay. Don't worry." She attempted a wobbly smile.

He didn't believe her, but he was too tired to pursue it any further. He slept fitfully that night; and when he woke up, the previous night's events were still fresh in his mind, although his parents acted as if nothing had happened. Both he and his sister didn't go to school that day. When nighttime came, he was scared it would start all over again and that he would be powerless to stop it.

Nighttime was his absolute worst time. Not because he feared the bogeyman like most of his classmates, but because when the sun fell, his dad—whom he loved—turned into a monster. ❧

Lynne Weche is an undergraduate student from Kenya studying at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.

Love One Another: Teen Dating Violence

By Cathy Holtmann

At the RAVE Project, we are excited about the development of "The Dating Game," designed especially for youth pastors and teens to learn about issues related to teen dating violence. Soon, members of youth groups in churches throughout the country will be able to actively engage with the lives of teen characters like Athletic Bob or Handsome Harry and Musical Mary or Sensitive Sally and others as they go on a date. Teens can choose to navigate their charac-

ters through a variety of relationship scenarios that include going for pizza, volunteering at a soup kitchen or text messaging. Young women and men playing this online game can score points when they identify healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns, as well as when they identify ways in which they can respond to negative relationship factors in more positive ways. In addition to working on the skills needed for healthy dating relationships, teens can also help their

online characters to change! Teens can get to know Athletic Bob or Sensitive Sally by becoming friends with them on My Space or Facebook. While playing the Dating Game at their church youth group meeting, adolescents can use cell phones to text message Handsome Harry or Musical Mary with advice on how they can improve their self-esteem or engage in less controlling behaviors. For adolescents and teens in North America, the social pressure to

The Lost Dreamer

By Laurel Westphal



*Dreamers that dream their lives away,
only know disappointment,
because the dreams were always moving out of reach.*

*They ask why and can't see the reason
all has slipped away.*

*I married such a dreamer,
who was never satisfied, always frustrated
and even more as time went on.
The day turned to night and the nightmare came
then we all crashed against the rocks.*

*We have moved on,
left the train wreck behind,
but carry burdens needing to find release.
No more words exchanged,
the face of the dreamer has grown less focused.*

*Should we feel sad for him,
mad at him,
hurt by him,
or nothing at all?*

*Even the hurt no longer feels like a loss,
but now a sweet essence from
the way life shouldn't have gone.*

*While we, mother and child(ren),
bond together, seek help and rebuild.*

*What will be our dream beyond the fleeing moment?
There is renewed hope we seek in the new rising son.
There are new friends, help along the way.*

*We have gone from misery, to pain, healing and now renewed life.
Yet we have times we fear being found and hurt again.*

We are survivors, victors!

*Our dreamers are gone, we still stand
raising our hands:
first for help,
then to thank
and find our own dreams that are within our reach!*

Love One Another: Teen Dating Violence

continued from page 4

have a dating relationship is intense. Yet the context of dating and dating behaviors vary widely by age and gender. While at ages 12 and 13 they may be going on “group dates” and attending school dances, by ages 15 and 16 they may be going on “couple dates.” Abuse and violence occur in dating relationships at all ages; in fact, it parallels adult violence in that it exists on a continuum from verbal and emotional abuse to sexual assault and murder. There are a variety of social factors that may contribute to teen dating violence, such as:

- Sexism and violence in the media,
- Gender role stereotyping, and
- Aspects of student lifestyles.

Contributing individual factors may include:

- Jealousy,
- Anger,
- Alcohol and drug abuse,
- Witnessing domestic violence in family,
- Experiences of child abuse,
- Aggressive personalities,
- Coercion and domination, and
- Limited social support.

The consequences of experiencing violence in a dating relationship are long lasting and may include damage to self-esteem, confidence and sense


of safety, a negative affect on development and functioning, and, importantly, increasing risk for experiencing or perpetrating further violence in future relationships.

Teens are not likely to tell their parents about experiences of teen dating violence, and most parents do not believe their children are at risk for being victims or perpetrators. When surveyed, the majority of teens think that dating aggression is never justified, yet they seem to have a higher tolerance for female aggression.

- Research in New Brunswick, Canada, done in 2004 shows that 38% of teens in school have experienced some form of dating violence, while 47% report that they have witnessed dating violence in the past month.
- Research in the province of Ontario in 2008 shows an increase in sexual harassment and assault of girls in schools (National Post, February 2008).
- The Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that a survey of 500 young women, ages 15 to 24, found that 60% were currently involved in an ongoing abusive relationship and all participants had experienced violence in a dating relationship (Bureau of Justice Special Report:

Intimate Partner Violence, May 2000).

A 2004 study conducted by the Creating Peaceful Learning Environments research team at the Muriel McQueen Ferguson Centre for Family Violence Research of the effectiveness of teen dating violence prevention programs in New Brunswick has shown that while teens are becoming increasingly aware of the prevalence of teen dating violence, they lack the communication and intervention skills that would enable them to address or correct abusive behaviors. Schools, community agencies and churches need to work together in order to close this gap between information and action.

It is our hope that we can help churches reach out to teens in families of faith in order to gain some of the skills they need to prevent abusive relationships through the interactive nature of the RAVE Dating Game. People involved in pilot tests with church youth groups at our Charlotte, North Carolina, site in September have shown great enthusiasm for this new development. For more information on teen dating violence and the forthcoming RAVE Dating Game, please visit the RAVE website at www.theraveproject.org 

Are All Churches Safe?

By Brenda Branson

Many people turn to the church for help when they are experiencing deep emotional pain from personal struggles or abusive relationships. Some have found acceptance and unconditional love from compas-

sionate people. Others have been severely wounded by the insensitivity and judgmental attitudes in churches where guilt, manipulation, fear, and shame abound. In his book, *Why Churches Don't Heal*, author Doug Murren writes, “Often the

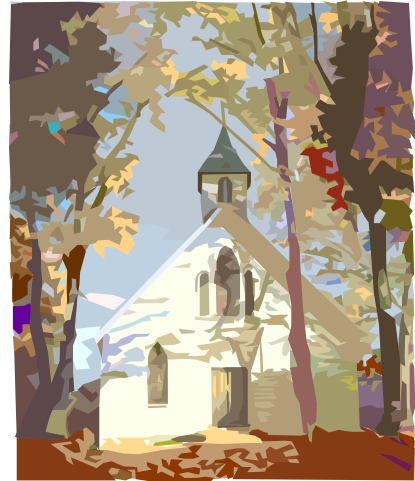
church is just not a safe place for us to let down our guard and be real. Imagine needing urgent medical care and getting to a hospital where you dare not admit that you have been injured! Similarly, it often seems that the last place we can admit to a personal

struggle is in the church. And so we are not healed and we do not heal others.” Ronald Enroth writes in *Recovering from Churches That*

Abuse: “Spiritual abuse takes place when leaders to whom people look for guidance and spiritual nurture use their positions of authority to mani-

pulate, control, and dominate.” So how can you tell the difference between a healthy church and a toxic church? Here are a few contrasts:

- A healthy church is a place where people don't hide their problems. A toxic church has a “don't ask, don't tell” atmosphere where problems are hidden and self-righteous people appear to have their lives all together.
- In a healthy church, forgiveness and grace abound. In a toxic church, people are defined and judged by the mistakes of their past.
- In a healthy church, independent thinking is encouraged and questions are welcomed. In a toxic church, people are not allowed to question the beliefs or actions of church leaders.
- Healthy church leaders invite dialogue and advice from church members. Toxic leaders prefer for people, especially women, to keep their opinions to themselves and “don't make waves.”
- In a healthy church, people are taught to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and reflect Jesus' love to others. In a toxic church, the focus is on rule-keeping, being right, and external conformity.
- In a healthy church, the pastor is transparent, admits his mistakes, and is accountable to a board of godly men and women. In a toxic church, the pastor has ultimate authority and is not accountable to anyone.
- In a healthy church, the pastor guides and encourages members based on biblical principles, but does not control individual decision-making. In a toxic church, the pastor tells members what to believe and how to live, demands conformity, and pressures members to break fellowship with others who don't share their beliefs or meet their standards.
- In a healthy church, men and women are given equal respect and roles of responsibility at church and in the home. Abuse of any kind is not tolerated. In a toxic church, women are considered subservient and are expected to submit to everything their husbands demand. Many women in abusive marriages are told stay with their abuser, cook his favorite meals, be more submissive, and pray harder.



In *The River Within*, Jeff Imbach describes the environment of many unhealthy churches today: “Self-righteousness and debauchery are but mirror opposites on the same continuum. We feel good if we've memorized more verses than most people in our

church. Or we get our high out of being free from vices. Too often, Christian spirituality gets focused on control in the name of holiness. We define our morality and spirituality in terms of things we don't do. Natural passion for life gets diverted into

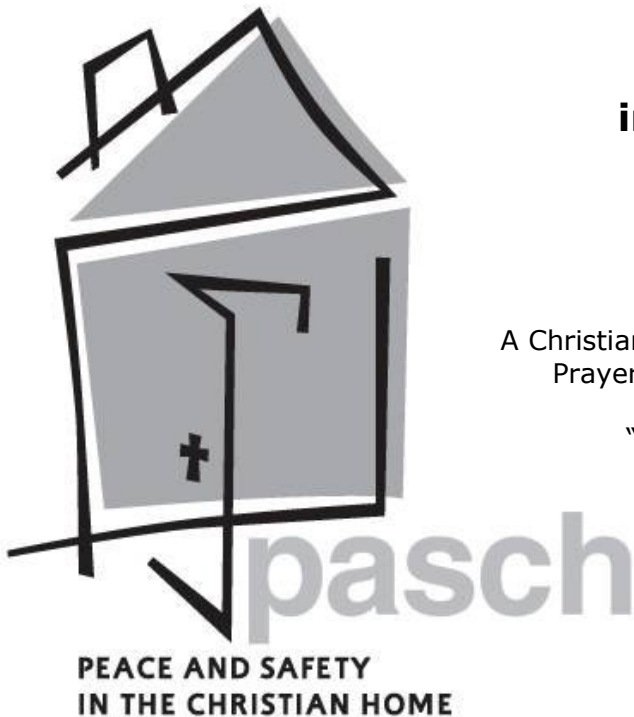
religious fanaticism, and we can turn into arrogant, critical, and lonely people. Through self-righteous control we idolize our spiritual appearance.” If you are recovering from the wounds of a toxic church, here are some ways to recover:

- Admit the truth to yourself about what has happened and ask God to direct you to a healthy church.
- Grieve the loss of friends, family, and years of history in a toxic church as you cautiously develop new friendships in a new church community.
- Expect feelings of doubt, guilt, fear, and shame. Seek help in dealing with these emotions.
- Forgive those who have hurt you in the past and move on to enjoy your freedom in the Lord.
- Get involved in a spiritual community where you can risk being yourself, where you can passionately pursue God, study Scripture, and experience a life of vibrant, loving communion.

As you find healing and safety in a church community, reach out to others who may be struggling so they may experience love and acceptance as God's life flows through you. ☞



1095 Stony Brook Road
Brewster, MA 02631
508-896-3518
www.peaceandsafety.com



Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (PASCH)

www.peaceandsafety.com
1095 Stony Brook Road
Brewster, MA 02631
Tel. 508-896-3518 ☎ Fax 508-896-6864

A Christian network addressing varied aspects of domestic abuse.
Prayer support, biblical and practical resources, literature,
conferences, training, research, referrals.
"Faithful to the wounded, faithful to the Word."