



## What About Me?

By Pat Burke  
with Catherine Clark Kroeger

### When Reality Hits

*Recently a woman told me of having picked up one of the little PASCH “shoe cards” that are placed in women’s washrooms in churches. As she read the list of behaviors that constitute abuse, a light went on in her mind. She had known that she was in an unhappy marriage, but now she saw that the treatment she was receiving had a name: abuse. She realized that she needed to process the situation in a new way, to seek new resources and solutions.*

*A Christian woman is confronted with many considerations when she comes to this discovery. Often she has been told that she must have done something to deserve the mistreatment—that if she would only behave better or pray harder, the abuse would stop. She needs to understand that responsibility lies with the perpetrator rather than with the victim, that abuse is strongly and repeatedly condemned in the Scriptures. This is not to say that she is sinless but rather that she must not shoulder guilt for sins that are not hers.*

*All too often the victim assumes she is being punished for something wrong that she has done. There may well be moments when she will ask “Why me?” She may feel she is the only one who suffers such devastating treatment at the hands of the very one whom she should be able to trust. Most are shocked to discover that one fourth of all women have been abused in one form or another. It is indeed consoling to know that God is there, even in times of deep distress. This reflection by Pat Burke may be helpful.*

### Why Me, Lord?

If God is such a loving God, why does he let horrible things happen to good people? Why is God “allowing” me to be treated so badly by my husband or boyfriend?

For centuries, philosophers and ordinary people alike have been asking these questions. If God is a loving and just God, then how can we explain the devastating things going on all around us? Is God punishing humankind because they are so evil? There are definitely people who deserve to be punished

for their wickedness, but what about innocent people who are abused, raped, murdered, manipulated—children, helpless adults (the elderly and disabled), and women who are less powerful than the men in their lives? Ultimately these questions lead to a more personal question: “What did *I* do to deserve this?” Let’s see what the Bible says about this subject and the examples of many good people who suffered.

Job had not sinned when Satan afflicted him with all manner of evil.

We are never told why bad things happen to good people, but we do read that God was mightily displeased with the friends who blamed Job for having deserved his sufferings (Job 37:14–39:30).

Scriptures about suffering raise many questions regarding our own lives. How do we keep from blaming God for our pain? Sometimes we cannot see beyond the pain, and we believe God has forgotten about us. But he has not forgotten!

St. Paul maintained that what he suffered for Christ made him stronger (Rom. 5:1–5; 8:15–25). Early Christians were mistreated *because* of their faith and found within that suffering a fellowship with Christ and with others (1 Pet. 1:3–9; 2:18–23; 4:12–19; 1 Cor. 12:26). There was a purpose for what they endured. They suffered because they would not deny their Savior, and their witness became the seed of the church. *But does sinful conduct on the part of another human being constitute a divine purpose for my life? Is this God’s choice for me or the choice of the abuser?*

### What About Me?

A Christian victim needs to ask “What about me?” What can she do to preserve her safety and her sanity, as well as that of her children? When her self-esteem has been demolished, her confidence shattered, when she can no longer see any light at the end of the tunnel—what then? How can she act responsibly in the midst of her crisis?

There are a multitude of resources for victims of abuse, both community and faith based. Even if she decides to remain in the abusive situation, there are ways she can keep her soul afloat. Many community shelters and social agencies offer counseling services that are available whether the victim leaves or remains. There she can find a listening ear and a chance to process her thinking about the circumstances in which she finds herself. She can be helped to make a safety plan if at any time she concludes it is no longer safe to stay.

A victim can also receive information about the effects of violence upon children and what steps can be taken to protect them. But what can be done to help her when she is overwhelmed, distraught, and unable to make good decisions?

### What Can the Rest of Us Do?

Barnabas—who sold his possessions to help the poor—had a name that meant “Son of Encouragement.” A quick study of the Greek word for encouragement, *paraklesis* (noun) and *parakaleo* (the verb, “to encourage”), is surprising. It is not quite as simple as it sounds. The words *paraklesis* and *parakaleo*, which appear many times in the New Testament, have a double meaning; there are two sides to this coin—a harsh side and a soft side. One means to encourage; the other exhort. And, sometimes, both meanings are present within one verse.

It is, however, not just in New Testament Greek that the word has two meanings. It is really the same in English. We encourage:

- *To build up*, empathize, listen to empathetically, show compassion for someone (console).
- *To exhort*, admonish, motivate someone to do something about their situation; encourage them not to do something that would harm themselves.

As you encounter people who have been victims of domestic violence and verbal abuse, how do you know when to encourage, when to console, or when to exhort? What do they need at a specific time in their life?

- *We encourage* (build up) when someone is disheartened, discouraged, depressed, despondent, in despair.
- *We exhort* when someone is lethargic, apathetic, insensitive, needs to improve their lives or the lives of their children.

Often when we encounter someone who has a story of terrible abuse, we think there is nothing we can do to help. We think this person needs a professional, but that is not always true. All Christians can be encouragers. What does it take to be an encourager—what internal resources, talents, or skills do you need to be an encourager? We need purity (Matt. 5:8) and love for one another (John 13:34; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:11). In 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, we are reminded that each has a different gift to use for God. Some of these gifts are listening (James 1:19), acceptance (Rom. 15:7), sympathy (1 Pet. 3:8), and carrying each others’ burdens (Gal. 6:2)—all means of encouragement.

On the other side of the coin, we need to consider what to do when someone needs more than encouragement to change a situation that is unhealthy. Who, then, can be an exhorter? Being an exhorter is an earned right. We must first build a relationship and then lovingly exhort or encourage people to choose a different path. Each person must be free to make their own life decisions, but we can be there to listen and to react to what we are being told. We can learn to be effective encouragers and exhorters, if we “serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13). ☞

## 2011 Conference in Canada



Our next major conference is planned for May 13–15, 2011, at Columbia College in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Co-chairpersons will be Gwen McVicker of Linwood House Ministries and Elsie Goerzen of the Mennonite Central Committee; Barbara Fisher-Townsend has agreed to serve as chair of the program committee. By working this far in advance, we expect to issue a call for papers, inviting people to send in proposals for a presentation they would like to make at the conference. Members and friends are encouraged to send us their observations, suggestions, and encouragement.



# Deleting the Picture Doesn't Erase the Issue

## A Teenager's Perspective on Dating Violence

By Christianna Barnard

It began as a fairly typical situation: A group of four friends and I sat in a hallway in our church, having a casual conversation. One friend scrolled through pictures on another's camera phone, commenting on the ones he appeared in. Suddenly, a look of shock crossed his face. He stammered, "That's horrible!" and then passed the phone to the girl sitting across from him. Curious, I peered over at the picture that inspired such a strong reaction. An animated image in the likeness of Chris Brown, a popular rapper, appeared on the screen. Mocking a recent report of dating violence, Brown's portrait constantly slapped an animated picture of his girlfriend and R&B performer, Rihanna. In horror, I grabbed the phone and deleted the picture. The young woman who owned the phone rebuked me, asking why I had erased it.

Why had I erased the picture? Her question troubled me almost as much as the fact that she had the image in the first place. What appeared to her as a celebrity scandal, an isolated event, was just one example of dating violence that occurs in relationships across the United States every day. A study published in the American Medical Association's journal states that approximately 20 percent of high-school aged women report to being sexually or physically abused by someone they dated,<sup>1</sup> and another survey concluded that 57 percent of teenagers know a friend or an acquaintance who has been abused by a partner.<sup>2</sup> Although the media's fascination with the aforementioned example makes dating violence seem rare, the reality for today's teens is drastically different.

Given the above information, the reaction of the young woman who owned the picture may seem cruel and insensitive. Her view, however, is surprisingly common. A survey conducted in Massachusetts about the Chris Brown and Rihanna incident provides a frightening view into how often victims become scapegoats for abuse. Out of the two hundred teenagers interviewed, 46 percent blamed Rihanna for the incident, and over half thought both she and her abuser deserved equal blame.<sup>3</sup> Oftentimes the victims are manipulated into blaming themselves for the abuse. A former abuse victim, referred to as "Lana" in the book *Saving Beauty from the Beast*, stated in an interview: "I thought I was being strong by putting up with everything he did... when he didn't get better, I thought it was my personal failure. I should have been working harder."<sup>4</sup>

In 1999, author Laurie Halse Anderson wrote a young adult novel that she expected no one would publish. After being published, however, it became a *New York Times* best-seller, won numerous awards, and was made into a film. In an interview about the book *Speak*, which deals with date rape and the effect it has on the main character Melinda, author Laurie Halse Anderson said, "I have gotten one question repeatedly from young men. These are guys who liked the book, but they are honestly confused. They ask me why Melinda was so upset about being raped."<sup>5</sup> In a culture that stresses male domi-

nance, particularly in the area of sexuality, it is easy for young men to misunderstand the effects of violence against women. When juvenile sex offenders in California were surveyed, approximately one quarter stated that they believed that sex was an expression of power, and nearly 18 percent believed that sex was a way to punish their partner or release anger.<sup>6</sup>

Many factors contribute to popular culture's insensitivity toward dating violence. The first step from respect to complete disregard for a partner's wishes is the belief that the victim is an object and therefore incapable of sensitivity. Due to its

widespread use and availability, perhaps the most harmful influence in objectification of women is pornography. Serial killer Ted Bundy, who murdered and tortured at least thirty women before being sentenced to death, said in his final interview, "I'm no social scientist, and I don't pretend to believe what John Q. Citizen thinks about this, but I've lived in prison for a long time now, and I've met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence [against women]. Without exception, every one of them was deeply involved in pornography—deeply consumed by the addiction."<sup>7</sup>

Although Ted Bundy's horrible crimes were inspired by his addiction to violent pornography, it has recently been discovered that sexualized, albeit non-pornographic, images can inspire dangerous reactions. Princeton University researchers used brain scans to conclude that "when straight men looked at pictures of women in bikinis, areas of the brain that normally light up in anticipation of using tools, like spanners and screwdrivers, were activated." It was also discovered that areas of the brain usually connected with empathy for others stopped operating for a while after viewing the images.<sup>8</sup>

Growing up in an abusive family increases the possibility that a child will grow up to become an abuser in a dating relationship. Whether the parents hurt one another, or the parent abuses the child, either scenario creates an unhealthy relationship model for the child. In fact, compared with children growing up in healthy homes, abused children are seven times more likely to become abusive or antagonistic toward their dating partners.<sup>9</sup> A famous example of this is displayed in the story of Burt and Linda Pugach, as told in the award-winning documentary *Crazy Love*. Growing up, Burt was physically and verbally abused by his mother. While in his thirties, he fell madly in love with the young Linda Riss. Despite his flattery and ostentatious gifts, Linda became uneasy with his attentions. She broke off their relationship when she discovered that he was married, but he continued to stalk and obsess over her. Upon her engagement to another man, Burt grew so infuriated that he hired men to attack and blind her with lye at her home in New York. Burt's unhealthy relationship with Linda was strongly influenced by his relationship with the dominant woman in his early years, his mother. Biographer Berry Stainback, who was interviewed for the documentary, said about Burt's childhood: "As a child, people tended to look down on Burt

and make fun of him, things like that...and it all stems from [his] parent's relationship."<sup>10</sup>

During a conversation I had about abuse with Mother Ann Paton, my church's liturgical assistant, she said, "Abuse is disrespecting the fact that another is made in God's image." Her view is one that many Christians have adopted and applied to their relationships. However, other Christians have views that open the door to accepting abuse. Martha Peace, speaker and supporter of "biblical womanhood," says in her book *The Excellent Wife*, "If you disobey your husband, you are indirectly shaking your fist at God."<sup>11</sup> If this is true, then abuse could be viewed as a necessary disciplinary action for disobedient wives. Evangelical professor and theologian Bruce Ware supports the dominant role of husbands in marriage, even though he recognizes its dangers due to the sinfulness of mankind. In one sermon he stated, "Husbands on their parts, because they're sinners, now respond to that threat to their authority either by being abusive, which is of course one of the ways men can respond when their authority is challenged—or, more commonly, to become passive, acquiescent, and simply not asserting the leadership they ought to as men in their homes and in churches."<sup>12</sup> Which view is best supported by biblical evidence? To find the answer, we must begin with Genesis.

During the Creation, God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Neither male nor female is dominant in God's perfect creation; both are equal and complementary in the sight of the Lord.

Unfortunately, life does not continue in this beautiful equilibrium. A mere two chapters later, both man and woman have sinned and have destroyed the sinless freedom they enjoyed with their Creator. Only now does God speak the words of Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you," a punishment given to sinful humankind.

The story could end in this fallen mayhem. However, it does not. Through the forgiveness and fulfillment of God's promise completed through the death and resurrection of Christ, equality has been restored. According to Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." All humans are created in the image of God and deserve dignity and respect—the opposite of abuse.

This equality through Christ does not end in marriage. However, a verse in Ephesians seems to directly contradict this: "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24). If we view this verse solely, we ignore another example of Christ's restoration of the Creation. Throughout the rest of the passage, a clear view is given of an ideal marriage: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Eph. 5: 25, 33). The wording in this passage is clearly different from that given in Genesis—in the earlier passage, the husband will "rule over [his wife]," whereas in Ephesians marriage is shown through mutual love and respect.

Because of the new covenant under which we live as Christians, we need to make a proactive effort to fight all kinds of relationship abuse with care and peace. Considering the

presence of dating abuse in our culture and that today's teenagers are the future leaders of the church, dealing with dating abuse is an important step. It is, however, not necessarily the place to begin. As "prevention is better than cure," fighting gender-based violence should begin as early as Sunday school. Donald Guffey, a guest blogger whose testimony was shared on the "CBE Scroll," said, "Prejudices and stereotypes have to

be taught—they are not inherent."<sup>13</sup> If we can instill values of equality in young Christians, we may not need to take steps to end violence in the future. From toddlers to teenagers, youth should be informed of egalitarian principles and learn to make decisions based on them.

Abuse will never completely disappear from our sinful world. Therefore, it is imperative that the Christian community provides help for

persons involved in abusive relationships. Counseling can be beneficial to both victims and abusers, but only if it is free from judgment and focuses on equality. In order to create an atmosphere where victims feel comfortable sharing their burdens, adults too should be educated about egalitarianism. Deleting a picture of abuse won't erase the issue, but a dedicated church filled with Christ's love and understanding can. ✂

<sup>1</sup> Silverman, Jay G, PhD, Anita Raj, PhD, Lorelei A. Mucci, PhD, and Jeanne E. Hathaway, MD MPH. "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286 (2001): 572–79.

<sup>2</sup> "Liz Claiborne Inc. Omnibuzz Topline Findings: Teen Relationship Abuse Research." *Love is Not Abuse*. 23 June 2005. Teen Research Unlimited. 20 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Valencia, Milton J., and Jenna Nierstedt. "Many Boston teens surveyed say Rihanna is at fault for assault." *Boston Globe* 13 March 2009: B2.

<sup>4</sup> Crompton, Vicki, and Ellen Zelda Kessner. *Saving Beauty from the Beast: How to Protect Your Daughter from an Unhealthy Relationship*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. Platinum ed. New York: Puffin, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *Teen Dating Violence Facts*. American Bar Association. 18 Apr. 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Dobson, James. "Fatal Addiction: Ted Bundy's Final Interview." *Pure Intimacy*. Focus on the Family. 20 Apr. 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Sample, Ian. "Sex objects: Pictures shift men's view of women." *Guardian.co.uk*. 16 Feb. 2009. 19 Apr. 2009.

<sup>9</sup> *Teen Safety: Dating and Relationships*. Learning Zone Xpress, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Crazy Love*. Dir. Dan Klores. Perf. Burt and Linda Pugach. DVD. Magnolia Pictures, 2007.

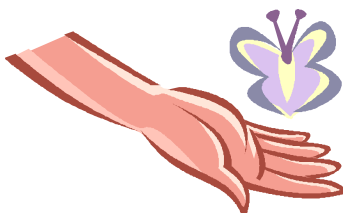
<sup>11</sup> Peace, Martha. *The Excellent Wife: a Biblical Perspective*. Bemidji, Minn: Focus, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Fortune, Marie. "Confusion Reigns for Southern Baptist Professor." *EthicsDaily.com*. 24 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.ethicsdaily.com/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Guffey, Donald. "Personal Story." Weblog post. *The CBE Scroll*. 27 Mar. 2009. 22 Apr. 2009 <<http://blog.cbeinternational.org/>>.

## I Was a Victim!

**By Laurel Westphal-Peterson**



*Yes, I was a victim.*

*I was hurt physically, emotionally, relationally, and economically.*

*For safety sake I had to run, to hide, and get protective order against the person I thought had loved me.*

*Now I have had to go back to answer many questions, produce reams of paperwork, meet with legal mediator and wait...*

*But I am loved!*

*I feel battered and bruised emotionally more now, and the physical scars are healing, as I endure the financial fallout of the mess I am left with to work through.*

*It's so natural to continue feeling the victim and unloved. When others don't show love, it is my reaction to feel more unloved, to want to run away as I had done for safety sake.*

*But I am loved very dearly by our wonderful Lord and Savior. Yes, I am loved.*

*And so are the people I have started to believe were my adversaries. But I want my Father's eyes, to see them as God does and to realize I am not a victim again, but here to offer God's grace to those I may fear dealing with the most.*

*God is teaching me that I am a survivor and am now beginning to experience a revival in order to be his thriver for life.*

*What an awesome God we serve. He heals, he protects, he renews and gives us wings to soar and be there for others needing his love also. ✂*

# What's the Problem in Our Homes Today?

By Joanne Van Beek

I was standing in a Christian bookstore, browsing over the wide range of material in the “Marriage and Family” section, when it struck me that while we as Christians are inundated with resources to help us improve our homes and marriages, the sad reality is that our homes and marriages are still struggling. Many of us are familiar with the disturbing statistic that the divorce rate, which currently stands at about 50 percent, is the same for Christian couples as for non-Christian couples. My question is this: If there are so many resources available for Christian couples, why does the problem of marital breakdown and disharmony continue to exist?

What is actually going wrong in our homes today? Is it really just poor communication? Is it really that women do not respect their husbands or that husbands do not love their wives? Is it that the balance between *together* time and *alone* time is lopsided, or that a couple's *weekly date-night* is nonexistent or not exciting enough? Is it because men are presumably from Mars and women from Venus, or that they have poor conflict resolution skills? Is the problem the culture we live in, the influence of media, or the pressure to be successful in our affluent society? Judging from the myriad of resources available, it would seem that the above issues are the problem; but if that were true, then why are relationships not being helped? I propose that perhaps the problem lies elsewhere.

I am the ministry director for the *Riseup Ministries Society*. Our outreach center provides counseling, support groups, and resources for women impacted by domestic abuse. We also give educational seminars within the Christian community to promote awareness of the dynamics of

family violence. A disturbing statistic shows that the prevalence of abuse in the Christian home is similar to the rate for domestic violence and abuse in the non-Christian home. What I have come to realize is that in the majority of cases, the underlying dynamics causing family violence are actually the same underlying factors that bring unresolved conflict and unhappiness to most couples who are seriously struggling within their marriages. For the most part, the brokenness experienced in so many homes today is not a result of poor



communication skills or an inability to listen well, or of opposite personalities not getting along, or even, poor problem-solving skills; it is about a desire for *power and control*. Let me explain.

A desire for power and control is at the core of all family violence. Family violence is defined as a pattern of behavior used to harm, exploit, or manipulate another person with the intent to gain power and control over them; it is founded in a sense of *entitlement*. The behaviors or tactics of abusers to gain this power and control are varied and complex. Too often people think family violence is only about physical violence, such as slapping, hitting, choking, blocking an exit, kicking, or throwing things. As traumatic as these are, most victims feel that physical violence is one of the lesser forms of abuse. Far more damaging is what is referred to as verbal or emotional and psycho-

logical abuse. Here the abuser attempts to undermine a victim's emotional or mental well-being by controlling what they think and feel. This abuse includes verbal put-downs, intimidation, making excuses for the abuse, blaming, using excessive criticism, and creating no-win situations. Equally destructive, sexual abuse is the use of any unwanted or forced sexual activity or contact and includes the use of guilt, threats, coercion, and demeaning or discriminating sexual remarks. When an abuser attempts to cut off a person from sources of support by controlling their social interactions, this is called isolation abuse. Intentionally denying someone financial security or access to financial decision making is called financial abuse. Any behavior that uses or involves children to gain power and control is also abusive. Another form of abuse is spiritual abuse, where words or actions are used to damage one spiritually or are used to legitimize abusive behavior. In essence, all abuse becomes spiritual abuse, for it attacks the core value of a person and destroys their sense of being.

Can you imagine living in a situation where your partner monitors everything you do, makes you wait in the vehicle for hours on end, pressures you sexually with threats of infidelity, locks you in a room, spends money recklessly forcing you to use the food bank? Can you imagine a partner who humiliates you in public, threatens to take the children, destroys property, quotes Scripture about love, forgiveness, and submission after verbally attacking you, demands to be catered to, manipulates conversations to their advantage, and yet is seen as the model citizen in church and community circles?

In an abusive relationship, this desire for power and control does not

necessarily originate in an abuser's low self-esteem, a dysfunctional childhood, a mental illness, or a particular ethnicity or economic condition—these are, for the most part, myths. Abusive behavior is first and foremost supported by an unspoken and subconscious belief system. The attitudes that drive abuse originate in an abuser's deep sense of entitlement, which is a belief that provides them a special status with exclusive rights, privileges, and opinions that do not apply to their partner. When the layers are peeled away, those who dominate and control others consider their behavior to be justified, because at the core of their being they believe they are superior to their partner or victim. Thus, they are entitled to behave the way they do because of who they believe they are. Their core belief of superiority sets in motion a determination to maintain a position of power and authority. They view their intimate relationships through this lens of entitlement, which then allows them to justifiably use any behavior to secure their position of special status over their partner. For example, if I believe I am right, or that I am in charge, then I am able, because of my sinful nature, to revert to using behavior that is manipulative, harmful, and disrespectful of my partner in order to have my way or to exert my authority, and feel totally justified in doing so.

But what does this have to do with the thousands of *non-abusive* couples who either choose to end their relationships or resign to living in an unhappy marriage? If we dig a little deeper, we will discover that many of the conflicts experienced by couples today originate not in personality clashes or in poor communication skills, but in a power struggle created by a particular belief system. The belief system adhered to by many Christians today is that in our

world and in our homes: *someone* needs to be in charge, *someone* needs to have the final authority, and that complete gender equality or mutuality between the sexes is impossible or at least contrary to Scripture.

As human beings, our underlying beliefs and core values lay a foundation for our behavior; in fact our core beliefs are the basis for everything we do, think, and say. In other words, what we hold to be true will always have consequences or repercussions. I recall a recent Sunday morning

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sermon suggesting that although men and women are equal, the male in the home is to have the final authority should a decision reach a stalemate. The logical conclusion of this sort of thinking is that a marriage should be seen as an arrangement where 51 percent of the relationship shares are given to the husband and 49 percent of the shares are given to the wife. Although this may sound *equal* or even generous, in reality, the woman has no decision-making power and virtually no authority or voice beyond expressing her opinion. The consequence of this particular belief system puts all women into a position where they are vulnerable to mistreatment, and puts unrealistic expectations on the man to be fully responsible for every decision in the home. In order for couples to experience mutual satisfaction in their marriages today, this teaching or underlying belief needs to change.

A correct theology of marriage is properly extracted from a study of Genesis where God's design for the

first marriage is laid out. An unbiased study of Genesis 1–3 will reveal that God's original intention for men and women was to equally reflect the image of God; to share equally in having dominion over the earth and to enjoy a mutual and harmonious relationship as suitable counterparts. Neither the man nor the woman was to be more responsible for the marriage than the other. The power struggle and resulting hierarchy between men and women today is a sad consequence of sin, but was never God's design for men and women. The harmonious relationship Adam and Eve enjoyed prior to the Fall can surely be enjoyed once again, when mutual equality is embraced as the foundational belief in all male-female intimate relationships.

As long as we hang on to the faulty belief that *someone needs to be in charge* and do not embrace gender equality in every aspect of our marriages, we will never solve the problem of abusive relationships, nor gain much ground in bringing about marital happiness to the average couple struggling in their relationship. The next time you are having a conflict with your spouse, recognize it for what it is—a power struggle. Evaluate your underlying belief system about your relationship and about the issue at hand. Both of you need to be willing to step back and consider that you are equal partners and mutually responsible for each decision made. Respect one another as equals who bring individual gifts and insights of identical value to the relationship. You may find that you do not need to read the myriad of marital self-help books if you focus on mutually respecting one another. Remember, you are both in charge and equally responsible for your marriage. This is God's design for marriage and it works! ☞



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