

Why is it so hard to leave?

It is going to be very frustrating when encountering a victim who will not leave her abusive spouse. It might be that you want to throw up your hands, and in some cases, we must let the victim go. You cannot force anyone to get help that does not want it.

Hopefully at this point the church has done its job and ostracized the offender.

For what seems to be the obvious choice for most people on the outside looking in, it really just isn't that easy. Below are only a handful of factors to consider when walking in the shoes of a victim and also a tool to use when you counsel. Another struggle with a victim of abuse who is a Christian is the view of divorce. That will also be discussed.

1. Violence

In some instances, domestic violence can and will lead to death. Also, the victim of constant abuse and harassment will (rightfully) fear for their family, including the kidnapping of their children or harm to their animals. Orders of Protections are only useful with rational adults – not violent criminals.

In the case of women who are abusive – and where men are the victims - men tend to play it off as not a real threat, something that they can handle – in the case of Jodi Arias and many other women abusers, sex and stalking are their forms of manipulation – Arias went so far as to break into the home of her victim and used seduction as her way of manipulation whereby she used her sexuality as a weapon and refused to take no for an answer. Her victim continued to give in to her demands (as do all victims) and met a fateful end to his life. Travis Alexander (Arias' victim) was found brutally stabbed to death over 30 times in addition to a gunshot wound to the head.

It is important to note here that Arias first denied the charges – but at trial formed her defense around victimization of physical, emotional abuse, manipulation and sexual assault.

*As a counselor/supervisor in many domestic violence shelters, hospitals and institutions I noticed that it was fast becoming a pattern of behavior for violent women offenders to use the system to their advantage and turn the tables of their abuse by using a history of abuse by others to justify their own current pattern of abusive and violent behavior –

A good family violence counselor will structure their questions to obtain truth and to deal with issues pertaining to the client so that a pattern of responsibility is established and patterns of abuse come to an end based on Biblical principles for how Christ

demands that each person is to “walk worthy of the manner to which he/she has been called.”

Keeping in mind that where forgiveness must take place – Consequences are not – ever – negated! By law – any and all threats to oneself or another MUST be reported BY law to the proper authorities, immediately, without prejudice. As a counselor and/or court advocate, this is your Biblical and civil responsibility.

2. Fear of loneliness, isolation, grief, guilt, shame and disgrace.

For Christians, it can be an overwhelming sense of failure.

The “need” of a parent-child relationship, otherwise known as co-dependency, whereby the victim is fearful that if he/she leaves the offender will not survive without them, in some cases the offender has used this as a method of control and manipulation in the form of a threat, “If you leave me, I’ll kill myself!” or “If you leave, I will find you and I will kill you.”

This same reasoning is also valid for those offenders who are alcoholics or addicts whereby the victim feels a sense of responsibility for the offender’s well-being including their life.

3. No support System is in place

In Christian homes, whereby appearance is “everything” there will be no support system in place because the victim has either been threatened not to tell anyone due to their position in the church or simply to save face. Or the victim is ashamed.

Isolation is also a form of abuse in both Christians and non-Christian homes whereby the victim is kept from family and friends and therefore there is nowhere for the victim to go and no means to get there.

4. Financial

A victim of abuse could very well lose their home, car, and lifestyle for not only his or herself but that of their children and the humiliation and pressure of the American family makes it a hard choice to make.

Some victims of abuse have lost jobs due to their medical issues, moving, etc. The employer is trying to run their business and keep productivity up and therefore cannot afford for their employees to miss work consistently – Not to mention if the abuser shows up or excessively calls the victim at work. This could and most likely will cause termination of employment.

The victim of financial abuse will not have any means to leave because of their isolation, lack of job skills and/or their self-esteem; even their attire may be subject to

lock and key in the cases of severe abuse and isolation incidents. There are also those incidences where they may not even have a driver's license, let alone a vehicle or means to get one – or the abuser takes their keys and their access to money on a daily basis as to keep them isolated while they are away from home.

5. History

If the victim has had a history of distorted beliefs or chaotic home environment, including some Christian belief that God is okay with an abusive spouse.... it is likely that they have married into the same belief system and therefore know nothing else and feel uncomfortable in any other environment – it would be the same as if you were to move to a tribal community whereby everything is different – the language, the culture, even the customs – it would take a tremendous amount of support for you to learn to adapt and change.

Distortions – Victims who were raised in abusive homes or unloving, disrespectful home environments have a difficult time feeling that they are worth the value that Christ places on them. They have a “support system” made up of family and friends who are condescending, judgmental, blaming and make the victim believe that they deserve the abuse in some way because they have done something to cause it.

Personally, I remember calling my mom and dad after an incident whereby my ex-husband had chased me into a closet with a kitchen knife. I heard my father say something and asked my mother what he said, she replied, “He said, what has Holly done to make him do that!” and after a brief pause went on to ask... “Well?”

Another incident, some years later, I called a friend of mine, she was my long time “BFF,” a woman I happened to lead to the Lord when we were in high school who went on to marry a Christian man who later became a pastor and church planter – her response was to send me a message letting me know how disappointed she was in me and that I should “Fight for [my] marriage.”

Although difficult to fathom for most individuals, the church is often the most critical and harsh when dealing with victims of abuse. To the woman, they are met with little comfort and certainly less understanding and are usually turned away without more than a “we’re praying for you” comment and instructions to the next women’s retreat.

Men rarely bring the subject up – as to their own masculinity, shame, guilt, all of the above.

On October 26, 2015 Dr. James Dobson, highly acclaimed Christian psychologist and founder of “Dr. James Dobson’s Family Talk”, *Focus on the Family*, and many others, as well as the author of over 30 books that are dedicated to the Christian family: Posted this response to a victim of domestic violence on his blog.

The victim's husband was a leader in the church, a prominent lawyer, and well respected in their community. With a heart-wrenching letter to Dr. Dobson, she wrote about her recently loosened teeth and the fact that, "The beatings are becoming more frequent and more violent as time goes by."

The victim, who are referred to as 'Laura,' feared her husband would "blow up" if she asked him to seek counseling and as a Christian she did not "believe in divorce." She continued by informing Dr. Dobson that there was no telling what he would do if he found out that she was seeking *hare* advice.

Her final plea was to inform Dr. Dobson that she was, "So tired of being beaten and then having to stay home for days to hide [her] bruises," and ask how she was to "Deal with their situation."

Dr. Dobson's response? After acknowledging that reports of "wife abuse are reaching epidemic proportions in today's families," and that "entire volumes have been addressed to this problem..."

Dr. Dobson went on to "offer the victim a condensed answer," concluding that it would be the bases for their counseling:

"The 'love must be tough' response."

Based on Dr. Dobson's latest book, with the same title, the 'love must be tough' response/philosophy, that is most certainly not based on any exegesis of scripture, says that she "*must break out of that tyranny while she's still young enough to cope with the consequences. That might be accomplished by forcing the matter to a crisis.*" Dr. Dobson went on to state: "I would suggest that 'Laura' choose the most absurd demand her husband makes, and then refuse to consent to it. Let him rage if he must rage."

I would highly suggest that unless you desire to face a wrongful death suit from the victim's family, that you abstain from giving such advice.

In response to their post, I addressed the Dobson foundation and his blatant disregard for the victim's wellbeing with a letter directly to Dr. Dobson:

"Dr. Dobson, [with regard to being "young enough to cope with the consequences"], does that include the consequence of death? Is she "young" enough to cope with that? How about her children? Are they young enough? Old enough? What's the standard age of "coping" the loss of their mother, for the children?"

I never did receive a response.

As you can see, one of the reasons that victims do not leave, are that they have no idea what to do or where to go – especially when the abuse of victims stretches all the way to the pulpit of their very own church and church leaders.

There is no difference – Women and men are victims of domestic violence. I will remind you that research shows that while women are assaulted every 15 seconds, men are assaulted every 14.5 seconds.¹

Abusers masquerade as victims and victims remain silent. The church, family, friends have usually abandoned the victim, while excusing and in most cases, justifying and protecting the abuser. Truth has been distorted and Scripture has been twisted. Therefore, the domestic violence ministries are vital to both men and women, victim and offender. The counselor/advocate must be aware of the personality traits of offenders and of victims – being able to both correctly identify who's who and provide godly counsel, advocacy and resources.

“For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:2-7).

Property of: Redemption, Restoration, Recovery (R3) Domestic Violence Services and Training©
Author: Holly T. Ashley, All Rights Reserved. Can be used by permission with citation.

¹ Barber, C. F. (2008). Domestic violence against men. *Nursing Standard*, 22(51), 35-39.