



I stopped breathing when my son, who at that time was in third grade, said, “Mom, today we talked about abuse at school and we are.”

Gulp. He had said it out loud.

So I asked, “what do you mean?”

He said, “we are abused. By Dad.”

Of course he was right. Of course I knew that. As a professional leader in the church I had worked with many families through this. But this was my family and it was harder. Would the church still want me as a leader if they knew how broken we were as a family? It felt like everything was at stake.

It took me six more years before I would have the courage to end this marriage. For full transparency, I was not in a life-threatening situation, nor were my children. Yet today I feel that I waited too long. What finally motivated me was two things:

- Role Models: I met women with very few resources on my first international immersion experience in El Salvador. They were taking a stand against violence in their homes. This was just the beginning of my life-lessons coming from global companions. If they could do it, so could I.
- Truth: My coming to grips with the fact that I could be raising my sons to be abusers, or my daughter to be abused. The family-systems workshops were screaming in my head. I didn’t want violence to be our family legacy, even if that violence was mostly anger issues, resulting in yelling, waiting for the next explosion, worrying about what my husband might say to the kids or what he might do to hurt himself.

October is domestic violence awareness month. Domestic violence crosses socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural boundaries. Victims are emotionally, mentally and physically manipulated into thinking they

deserve to be in pain. Even our faith can work against us. I remember hearing my pastor talking about the Christian life of “taking up our cross” as we follow Jesus, and identifying my marriage as my personal “cross.” It took me a long time to realize that THIS is not what this text meant and that God did not expect me to stay in a marriage filled with fear and pain, regardless of how much I value the institution of marriage.

Please talk about domestic violence. Please make your place of worship a sanctuary for people that are victimized, to heal. Please share local resources so people can get help. And, please, point to a loving God.

Finally, please deal with your own issues. If you have anger-management challenges, get help now. Even if you are the pastor. If you are living in an unhealthy environment, reach out to people you trust, that can help you make a plan to change your life. I’m not an expert in this field, but there are resources available across the world to help women, men or children who are victims of abuse.

Today, I am grateful to have had six years of being single to work out my own healing, before re-marrying a man that couldn’t be more loving. I am grateful for a dynamic blended family, with five adult children, their partners, and our six beautiful grandchildren. I see my former spouse, new wife and children at family occasions, and I am grateful that they seem to have a healthier life together. We are all healing. And as great as my happy ending is, I recognize that this not everyone’s story. Yet, you will never fully know how God will bless you, if you keep living in the violence.

Did you know?

- 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men in the United States have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.
- On a typical day, domestic violence hotlines receive approximately 21,000 calls, an average of close to 15 calls every minute.
- Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime.
- The presence of a gun in the home during a domestic violence incident increases the risk of homicide by at least 500%.
- 72% of all murder-suicides involved an intimate partner; 94% of the victims of these crimes are female.

(From the National Collation Against Domestic Violence <http://ncadv.org/>)

Domestic violence, often involving alcohol or drugs, sometimes lethal weapons, and almost always unresolved anger management issues, is a problem of epidemic proportions in many parts of the world. One in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten in her lifetime. In the United States it is aggravated by the widespread availability of guns, making fatal what might otherwise have been events from which the victim might have recovered. (From Thepeoplesworld.org)

If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

For anonymous, confidential help, 24/7, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY).