

Women Caring for Women: Domestic Abuse
CBC Sunday School
January 18, 2026

Discussion question: What makes someone feel like a safe person to talk to?

Preliminary Notes:

-For the purpose of this class, we will speak in terms of a wife suffering abuse from her husband, and while this encapsulates the majority of domestic abuse cases, there are certainly many husbands who suffer abuse from their wives as well as children who suffer abuse from their parents.

-This is happening more often than we probably realize. Statistics would suggest that 1 in 4 women will suffer some kind of domestic abuse in their lifetime. We must assume we know women who are suffering in this way.

-A difficult or sinful marriage is not the same as an abusive one. All spouses are sinful and say/do hurtful things—Christian marriages included. But an abuser is different: control is paramount. He will do whatever it takes to get what he believes he deserves, including hurting, punishing, manipulating, or lying to those under his influence. Any harm caused is justifiable to him if it helps maintain control. As Darby Strickland notes, oppressors ‘have such an enlarged view of themselves that they are capable of seeing only their own needs and wants.’ Abuse is not primarily an anger issue but a control issue. Anger is a feeling – abuse is a choice.

What is lost for the victim of abuse?

1. She has lost God’s good design for marriage. Marital abuse corrupts marriage. “What makes domestic abuse a particularly cruel form of violence is that the home is supposed to be the place where a personhood blossoms into its greatest potential. When home hurts, the world suffers.” *When Home Hurts*
 - a. **God’s design: Selfless Love** - “Love is the reverse of abuse because it builds others up at cost to self, rather than build self up at cost to others.” *When Home Hurts*
 - i. Distortion: “Oppressive people make [home] a place of domination. They have an inflated sense of self-worth and feel that they are owed preferential treatment and unwavering allegiance. They use manipulation and unrelenting pressure to get their needs met. When others fail them, they retaliate. Oppressors are willing to wound others in order to preserve their positions of power.” Darby Strickland, *Is It Abuse?*
 1. This may look like **physical abuse**, where an oppressor gains control with the use of violence, pain, fear, or other acts intended to cause harm (i.e. reckless driving, depriving of basic needs like sleep and food.)
 - ii. NOTE: An abusive marriage is not the same as a struggling marriage. Many marital conflicts happen because spouses are competitive (keeping track of who sacrifices more), selfish (spending time and money selfishly) or apathetic and lazy (ignoring the other’s needs). This is sinful and unloving but it is not domestic abuse.
 - b. **God’s Design: Sexual Oneness** - “Sex is never about forcing one person’s will on another or making them feel uncomfortable. It is about spouses willfully gifting their bodies to each other and committing to use their bodies only in ways that are in accordance with God’s design. (1 Cor 6:16-20)” Darby Strickland
 - i. Distortion: An abuser views sexual pleasure as his right, something he is owed. He may demand and force the wife to perform sexual acts without any thought to her preferences or enjoyment.
 1. **Forced sexual abuse:** Rape, unwanted exposure to pornography

2. **Coercive sexual abuse:** Consenting to sex out of fear of or in response to punitive behaviors towards her and others
 - a. “Coercive sexual abuse can be very confusing, because after being bullied her husband, a wife may give her consent to sex. The victimized wife is left wondering, ‘Was I sexually assaulted, or did I agree to it?’” Darby Strickland
 - ii. NOTE: A sexually abusive marriage is not the same as a sexually struggling marriage.
In some marriages, a spouse may withhold sex out of selfishness or fatigue, not because the other is abusive. In others, one spouse may desire more sex than feels reasonable, or requests sexual acts the other is uncomfortable with. Past trauma can also make intimacy complicated. In all marriages, selfish desires and struggles exist and must be prayerfully submitted to the Lord—serving another with our bodies does not come naturally to any of us.
- c. **God’s Design: Servant Leadership & Willing Submission**
 - i. Distortion: An abuser turns his authority into selfish and cruel oppression and rather than serve his wife, demands her servitude.
 1. This may look like **spiritual abuse**, where the oppressor uses Scripture or his role as spiritual leader as a weapon to establish control and domination.
 2. This may look like **emotional abuse** (also known as mental, verbal or psychological abuse.)
 - a. “[Oppressors] may neglect, frighten, isolate, belittle, exploit, play mind games with, lie to, blame, shame, or threaten their spouses. Their behavior is driven by the same root of self-worship and entitlement that drives other forms of abuse. Oppressors seek to control others for their own gain and comfort; emotionally abusive behavior says, ‘You do not matter to me—you are something for me to use.’ It demands, It mocks. It does not love.” Darby Strickland
2. She may lose an accurate view of reality
 - a. Her identity is distorted by shame
 - i. “Shame is the deeply ingrained belief that her identity is determined by what she has done, what she has experienced, or what has been done to her.” *When Home Hurts*
 - ii. She may feel shame that she has allowed herself to be abused.
 - iii. She may feel she deserves the abuse for some shortcoming or sin.
 - b. Her reality is distorted by lies
 - i. “Those under the influence of an abuser are bombarded with lies about God’s intention for human relationships, causing all kinds of havoc in their perception of self, of others, and most tragically, of God.” *When Home Hurts*
 - ii. She may see God as always displeased and disappointed in her and may even think that the abuse is God’s way of punishing her for a past or present sin
 - iii. She may question God’s interest in her, she may feel neglected by him. Consequently she may feel unable to read her Bible, pray or attend Bible study.
3. She may have lost true community
 - a. Shame keeps her from telling others what she is going through
 - i. “She may feel so foolish or ashamed of being in an abusive relationship that she would rather put up with the abuse then go through the embarrassment of having everything out in the open.” *When Home Hurts*
 - b. The symptoms of abuse she manifests may be misunderstood by others
 - i. She may seem scattered, disorganized, or flaky.

- ii. “She may struggle to regulate her emotions. She may appear to always be on high alert, her head always on a swivel. She may have problems concentrating, remembering things. She will often relate to others differently, guarding herself in certain ways because of the unrecognized value for self protection that’s now more central to her motivations.” *When Home Hurts*
- c. Well-meaning friends who don’t know abuse is happening may judge her unfairly.
 - i. She may talk about ‘being a bad wife’ because her abuser has convinced her she’s never enough. Well-meaning friends might give tips on how to be more loving, submissive, or selfless—but this advice can feel confusing and alienating.
 - ii. Her oppressor may be a respected community or church leader. Many abusers appear competent outside the home, making it hard to believe they act differently at home. If he seems successful while she is physically and emotionally worn down, it can be easy to mistakenly assume she is the problem.

Discussion question: What stands out to you most about what women living with abuse endure?

Where is God in the pain?

- 4. God hates what happens to the abused person.
 - a. “Abuse is sin, and God hates sin more than anyone else is capable of hating something. It is contrary to his character and harmful to his good creation. It is a special kind of injustice that takes the good gifts God gave to men so that they could build others up, and turns it around for the opposite purpose, to tear others down. God hates the suffering of his people, and in fact, voluntarily enters into their pain with a sympathy that cannot be described (Rom 8:22-30).” *When Home Hurts*
- 5. God is for the oppressed and He will bring justice to the oppressor (Is 61:1, Ps 72:4, Prov 14:31, Ps 146:7-9, Ps 34:18)
 - a. God’s law included specific statutes that protected weaker people from oppression
 - b. Jesus came to fix what is broken. (Is 61) God’s wrath toward those who abuse others will either be poured out on the day of judgement for those who are not in Christ, or for those who take refuge in him, it was poured out on Jesus on the cross. Either way, every offence, every hurt, every punch, every lie, every manipulation, every rape... every abuse will be punished.

Discussion question: Can you think of some examples of oppression in Scripture? How did God respond?

What does healing look like?

- 6. Talking about the abuse to safe listeners
 - a. “We can’t do much about our problems until we can accurately identify them.” Ed Welch
 - i. Many abuse victims downplay what happened—or may not even recognize it as abuse. Talking about it is often the first step toward clarity, understanding and beginning to heal.
- 7. Finding safety from her abuser
 - a. NOTE: *This can be an extremely dangerous and complicated part of the healing process, and before either leaving your abuser or counseling a friend to leave her abuser, please seek counsel from someone who can safely guide you. See resources below.*
- 8. Reorienting herself to truth: abuse does not define her identity. Victims of abuse often feel defined by what has been done to them, and may feel imprisoned by the scars of abuse.
 - a. Maggie says “*My 9 siblings and I were emotionally and spiritually abused by our parents. Abuse affects people differently and while my scars are pretty minor compared to those of some of my siblings, I have often had to fight to believe my identity in Christ, instead of ‘what*

they made me into'. For example, their abuse makes me want to avoid closeness and dependence to anyone because those I was closest to hurt me and exploited my dependence in many ways. But the gospel has a different story. It says that I am made new in Christ, and all of his commands for dependence on him and nearness and vulnerability to my church community apply to me – meaning not only will he enable me to do those things but they are for my good! Good – not harm. My oft-perceived reality of 'I have relational issues because of childhood abuse' must be overruled by a truer reality: 'I have relational safety with a good Father. My dependence on Him brings joy, not fear. With my new spiritual family there will be no rejection – only eternal acceptance – because of Jesus. And my place in the family is not on the outskirts; I belong and am wanted. They love me in my vulnerability and care for me in my dependence.' Rehearsing the truth to myself has been an incredible avenue of healing.

Discussion question: Have you noticed how different it feels when someone changes the subject from your pain versus when they stay present and listen?

What can comforters do?

9. **Put on your big girl pants!** Helping a friend through domestic abuse can be a long, difficult, frustrating and scary experience. But that's exactly what "bearing one another's burdens" means. "You may not have as much experience as you would like to handle this situation, but people with more experience are not sitting in the seat God placed you in at this time." *When Home Hurts*
 - a. Swallow that fear of making a mistake
 - i. "Fear of failure is often the greatest enemy of righteousness. Do not fear. There's a secret that will make your mistakes far less likely to harm anyone else: the virtue of humility. Humility – that is, both an awareness of your own limitations and a willingness to be corrected as you go – will keep you seeking the right knowledge for wise response, both from Scripture and from those suffering under abuse. Humility invites the grace of God. (James 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5)." *When Home Hurts*
 - ii. You do not have to (and cannot) be her sole support. She will need a good support system, including professionals and pastors. Use what gifts God has given you to love her well and pray for others to do the same.
 - b. If you do say the wrong thing – apologize! "We may be the first person who genuinely, humbly repents and apologizes to a victim of abuse." Darby Strickland
 - c. It's okay to be uncomfortable! You may feel tension between wanting to assume the best of others and acknowledging that abuse can exist even in people who appear loving or faithful..
 - i. "Christians...understand love not just as kind sentiments, but as the resolve to do what it takes to bring actual good to another person (1 John 3:18). So doing actual good for someone will sometimes involve not focusing on what they're doing right, but exposing what they're doing wrong (Heb 3:12-13)." *When Home Hurts*
10. **Listen** – like really listen – to your friends.
 - a. Ask good questions.
 - i. If she often speaks of herself as a bad wife or mother, resist the urge to dismiss or quiet those comments. Instead, gently ask, 'Why do you feel that way?' It may be ordinary discouragement—or it may signal abuse, since abusers often convince their wives that they deserve mistreatment. Asking questions, rather than smoothing things over or changing the subject, helps you understand her heart and situation more clearly.
 - ii. If she asks whether your husband gets upset about a messy house, resist the urge to deflect with humor. Instead, ask, 'Why do you ask?' She may simply be overwhelmed—or she may be experiencing abuse, as some abusive husbands

enforce rigid standards and punish perceived failures. Responding with curiosity rather than jokes helps you care for her more wisely.

- iii. If your friend mentions an angry outburst, respond gently by asking, 'Does that happen often?' A single incident may not indicate abuse, but a pattern of controlling, harmful anger can.
- iv. If your friend says she and her husband are always fighting about money, resist the urge to jump straight to financial advice. Instead, ask curious questions: "What does it look like when you fight? What kinds of words are exchanged? What's the tone? How does it end – and what happens after?"
 - 1. In marriage, it's not how often you fight, but *how* you fight. Healthy spouses may argue, but they do so humbly, aiming to understand each other and reconcile. They might say hurtful things they later repent of, but they don't manipulate, weaponize the Bible, or punish each other afterward.
- v. **NOTE:** If you often speak negatively about your husband—complaints, digs, or put-downs—an abused woman may not feel safe confiding in you. She might fear sharing anything critical about her husband and see you as a risky confidant.
- b. Listen calmly.
 - i. Keep your emotions in check—she carries enough already.
 - ii. Allow her intense emotions.
 - 1. "God hates how she was treated, and we should make room for her anger. Over time we can help her to shape her cries into laments, but we must not rush this." *When Home Hurts*
- c. "Listen carefully to how she tells her story. When she talks about herself, be it a lot or a little, you are listening for clues into how she is perceiving herself, her relationship to other people, and her relationship to God." *When Home Hurts*
 - i. Listen for lies she may be believing so you can gently help her to see the truth.
 - ii. You may want to write down what she tells you. Trauma often causes victims to forget things. She may not remember clearly what happened a week ago.

11. Be patient – This is a long process. It can take years for an abuse victim to go through the steps of recognizing their situation, and being ready to take steps to stop the abuse and find healing.

- a. Don't rush her
 - i. "She has to live with the decisions that are in front of her to make, and few of her choices will have easy outcomes. It is essential that she set the pace based on *her* clarity and urgency – not ours." Darby Strickland
 - ii. "Be careful not to push her to leave her abuser before she is ready. It is more dangerous for a woman to leave abuse and then return to it. Abuse always intensifies after a failed separation." Darby Strickland
 - 1. On average, a victim will leave her abuser seven times (and come back) before she leaves him for good.
- b. "Don't encourage her to quickly forgive and quickly take him back." *Shepherding Women in Pain*
 - i. It will take time for an abuser to prove real repentance and change.

12. Speak with care

- a. Express concern gently as she will be on high alert for criticism and rejection. "I am worried about you because you seem really stressed."
- b. Do not bash her spouse
 - i. Her relationship with him is complicated. She loved him once and may love him still. She may feel shame for exposing him. If you say things like "He is a monster!" she may feel the need to defend him which adds to her confusion and pain. Instead, name

the sin and speak truth “It is cruel of him to treat you that way” without personally bashing him.

- c. Point her to God and the truth of His Word
 - i. “Learning to trust God at His Word gradually builds true ideas, inspires more stabilizing emotions, and encourages self-controlled choices.” *When Home Hurts*
 - ii. “The burden of your ministry is to assure her of God’s heart, and give her hope that the evil she suffers is not a permanent burden. The Lord will personally wipe every tear she has ever cried from her face, which will one day shine like the sun and his presence (Rev 21:4).” *When Home Hurts*
- d. Do not gossip or speculate. Only share knowledge with those who can actually do good in the situation.

13. Be proactive

- a. For you: Be careful about believing that just “living right” will keep you from suffering. This may cause you to judge others who are suffering (i.e. abuse victims, a parent of a wayward child, someone with financial troubles, or a spouse who has been cheated on.) Recognize your own dependency on God’s grace to you, and that none of us deserves or can earn a suffering-free life. If you are not currently suffering, that is a gift from God.
- b. For your daughters: Our daughters and friends need us to talk about this. We know abuse in marriage happens and we know that silence and shame fuels it.
 - i. Say: “Marriage is a wonderful gift from God. If you get married someday and no matter what you try it just doesn’t feel like anything like a wonderful gift, please ask me or a trusted person ‘is this normal?’ That is a good and wise question to ask. Your marriage matters to God.”
 - ii. Say: “I hope you find a wonderful husband and have a joyful marriage. But if you ever find yourself with a man who is cruel or harms you—emotionally or physically—that is not pleasing to God, and it’s not something you can fix by trying harder. If that ever happens, I hope you’ll tell me, or another trusted friend or pastor, so we can help you.”
- c. Do you have a daughter who’s dating—or might start soon? How can you keep communication open so she feels safe sharing concerns or confusion?

14. Are you wondering if your marriage is abusive?

- a. Find a safe person to talk to about it. Talking brings things to light.
 - i. Christ First Counseling in Shawnee (www.christfirstcounseling.com)
 - 1. Lisa Moore is recommended for women in Domestic Violence situations. For appointments call (785) 272-0778
- b. Find safety
 - i. Rose Brooks Shelter in KCMO (www.rosebrooks.org)
 - 1. 24hr hotline 816-861-6100
 - ii. www.calledtopeace.org
 - 1. 24hr hotline 800.799.SAFE (7233) or text START to 88788
 - 2. Their website has local resources such as Hope House (a domestic abuse victim shelter in Independence, KS), classes and information

Recommended Resources

- When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* by Greg Wilson and Jeremy Pierre
- Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland
 - Mini book for victims: *Domestic Abuse: Help For the Sufferer* by Darby Strickland
 - Mini book for helpers: *Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, Rescue* by Darby Strickland
- The Creaking on the Stairs: Finding Faith in God after Childhood Abuse* by Mez McConnell

Women Caring for Women CBC Sunday School Syllabus

Part 1

Oct 5:	Introduction to loss, grief, suffering and healing
Oct 12:	Infertility & Miscarriage
Oct 19:	Depression
Oct 26:	Chronic Illness & Terminal Illness
Nov 2:	Post Abortion Syndrome
Nov 9:	Divorce

Part 2

Jan 18:	Domestic Abuse
Jan 25:	Sexual abuse
Feb 1:	Eating disorders
Feb 8:	Addiction
Feb 15:	Pornography & Infidelity
Feb 22:	Same Sex Attraction

Questions or feedback? Contact us!

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