

# Bible Studies On Domestic Violence

Olympia Union Gospel Mission

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# Introduction

Domestic violence is a pattern of misuse of power and control used against a household member or intimate partner. It is coercion, intimidation, and control through emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, financial, religious, or other means.

In the Bible we see that God has much to say to us about domestic violence. The website of the Olympia Union Gospel Mission offers thirty-eight biblical studies on domestic violence issues (see <http://www.ougmission.org>). This workbook includes ten of these studies which are focused on understanding the basic dynamics of domestic violence relationships, including verbal abuse.

I want to thank the many women who have attended the Mission's domestic violence support group in the past. These women provided invaluable input, perspectives, and inspiration for these studies, as well as a lot of forbearance as the lessons went through a long process of refinement. I hope this material will help you better understand domestic violence and reassure you that God cares deeply about this issue and about you.

*Judy Kennedy*

Olympia Union Gospel Mission

# **The Story of Saul and David: God Teaches Us About Domestic Violence**

Where is God in all the domestic violence going on? Does He really care? Yes! Because God not only cares, but loves us and wants to preserve our lives, His Word includes instruction and advice about domestic violence. One of the places we find this is in the story of King Saul and David in the book of **1 Samuel**, in the Old Testament. The story of Saul and David provides a study of the patterns often seen in cases of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a pattern of misuse of power and control used against a household member or intimate partner. It is an attempt to coerce, intimidate, and control through emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, financial, religious, or other means. Domestic violence is more about power and control than about gender. The domestic violence we see King Saul carry out against David is between two males, yet it shows many of the patterns typically seen in spousal abuse today.

The story of Saul and David helps us to understand what goes on in domestic violence relationships. Even if you've already left such a situation, this portion of 1 Samuel can help you to

- Deal safely with a domestic violence relationship
- Understand what may have happened in a past relationship
- Protect yourself in future relationships
- Teach your children to recognize and respond to domestic violence that might occur in their future relationships

You are encouraged to read ahead through chapters 16-26 of 1 Samuel. You will see that Saul showed many of the characteristics frequently seen among domestic violence abusers, including:

1. Blames his abuse on David, the victim
2. Has history of not taking responsibility for his actions, and using excuses
3. Narcissism (the world revolves around him and what he wants)
4. Extreme jealousy
5. Controlling, watches his victim's every move
6. Likes to bend or break the rules and defy the "system;" is rebellious
7. May lie or not keep his word
8. Repeatedly abuses, asks for forgiveness, then repeats the abuse
9. Becomes obsessive about David and stalks him
10. His religion was mostly an outward "show" to impress others
11. He twists the intents and meanings of others, and sees evil in others' motives
12. Lacks empathy, and a willingness to sacrifice others to get what he wants
13. Is insecure

14. Uses his position or power as a license to abuse
15. Had difficulty loving his son
16. Probable trauma or generational sin in his upbringing (see Judges 20)
17. Can at times seem "possessed" or "out of his mind"

As you read these chapters in the Bible, you will also see that David's experiences matched those of many domestic violence victims today. He:

1. Tried to appease his abuser and had to "walked on eggshells" around him
2. Found that all his efforts to appease his abuser and avoid violence didn't work
3. Grew up with abuse in his family of origin: his brothers were abusive to him, and father treated him as inferior
4. Found that some people were not willing to believe he was being abused
5. Was stalked after fleeing his abuser

The story of Saul and David has much to teach us about dealing with domestic violence. We have a God who provides wisdom from His Word to meet our every need (**2Timothy 3:16**) and who has promised to teach and guide us (**Psalm 25:8, 9; Psalm 23:3**)!

**Question:**

An abuser's background may provide clues for predicting future abuse: growing up with abuse; having trouble with authorities or the law; abusing a previous partner. Can you see any of these patterns in an abusive person you have known?

# CONTROL AND ISOLATION

Domestic violence is about power and control. It is a pattern of coercion, intimidation, or violence used to gain and maintain control over a household member or intimate partner. One of the ways abusers gain control over their victims is by isolating them. It is often one of the earliest signs of a domestic violence relationship.

After David slays the giant warrior Goliath, King Saul makes him a part of his household. In **1 Samuel 18:2** we see attempts by Saul to keep David under his control and to separate him from his family. Abusers frequently try to isolate their victims by controlling whom they communicate or spend time with. An abuser may try to disconnect the victim from her family. An abuser may put down the victim's friends and discourage her from seeing them. Other isolation tactics include moving frequently (often away from family and social contacts); living in isolated areas; restricting access to money or reliable transportation; preventing the victim from working outside the home or causing her to be fired. The abuser may "assign" the victim numerous domestic duties designed to keep her at home.

Jealousy can also be used to control and isolate the victim. In **1 Samuel 18:8-9**, we see that Saul is insecure and becomes jealous of David, monitoring his every move. An abuser may force the victim to account for every moment of her time, and may falsely accuse her of infidelity and betrayal when he disapproves of her use of time or travel. Early in a relationship such controlling behavior may be mistaken for "love" and devotion. It can be flattering to have someone want to spend all his time with you and say he cannot live without you. But it can quickly turn into an unhealthy isolation enforced by jealousy and other control tactics. Jealousy can lead to increased surveillance, anger, and threats. For David it led to physical violence and stalking.

Isolation is an effective method for gaining power and control. Without social contact and support, the victim is more easily manipulated. As contact with other people diminishes, the victim becomes more dependent on the abuser, and may come to see the abuser as her sole source of emotional nurture and practical help. This dependency may make it harder for the victim to identify and weigh options or to find alternate ways to get her needs met. She may feel trapped. What a contrast this is to the woman described in **Proverbs 31:10-31**, who earns, manages, makes investment decisions, teaches, and directs her household in support of those she loves, and whose husband praises and trusts her!

## Questions:

- 1) Have you had a partner who controlled you through jealousy? In what ways? In what ways may this have isolated you?

2) Did you ever try to break the isolation? If so, what happened?

3) Read the following checklist called “How Controlling Is Your Partner?”. Put a checkmark by the behaviors you have experienced in a certain relationship. How many checkmarks did you make?

## How Controlling Is Your Partner?

- He forbids or criticizes your outside activities and interests.
- He gets angry when you disagree with him.
- When there is a problem in the relationship, he blames you.
- He accuses you of flirting with other men when you are not.
- He follows you to check up on you.
- You know or suspect that he has been involved with other women.
- He is late or stands you up for appointments or dates.
- He sometimes drinks too much and becomes physically or verbally abusive.
- He embarrasses you in front of other people.
- He is critical of the way you look or dress.
- He insists on driving the car when you go out.
- He has hit, shoved, or threatened you.
- He does or says things you never thought you could tolerate.
- He stops talking to you or withdraws his affection when he wants to win an argument or make a point.
- He says he needs his freedom or “space.”
- He has used physical force to make you bend to his will.
- He doesn't allow you to have a checking account and gives you an allowance to pay the bills.
- He withholds information about household finances.
- He uses sex to quiet your doubts about the relationship.
- He is not interested in your day.
- He gives you extra money or buys you presents when you have been “good.”
- He calls you a nag or accuses you of stirring up trouble if you want to talk about the problems in the relationship.
- He calls you by a demeaning or derogatory nickname instead of using your real name.
- He doesn't phone when he is going to be late.
- He wants you around when he is there.
- He has been arrested at least once.
- He feels uncomfortable or gets angry with you when you get attention (for instance, because of some aspect of your job or a special accomplishment).
- He puts down your accomplishments and abilities.
- He discounts, trivializes, or makes fun of your feelings.
- He often says you're too critical.
- He flirts with women in front of you.
- He makes you feel sorry for him.
- He does things that frighten you.
- He finds fault with your friends and the people you are close to.
- He often contradicts you.
- He says you are crazy, stupid, or incompetent.

# HOW ABUSE ESCALATES

Rarely does abuse remain at the same level of severity. Over time, it tends to increase in its intensity and/or frequency. We see this escalation in King Saul's abuse of David:

<b>1 Samuel 18:2</b>	Control through isolation
<b>1 Samuel 18:8-9</b>	Paranoid jealousy; anger
<b>1 Samuel 18:10-11</b>	Attacking with weapon
<b>1 Samuel 18:25</b>	Secretly arranging David's death
<b>1 Samuel 19:1</b>	Publicly announces death warrant
<b>1 Samuel 23:8</b>	Sending an army to stalk and kill David

Psychologists have developed a scale called *The Continuum of Violence* to show how abuse grows over time (found on page 10). This scale lists abusive actions, starting with the less severe, and progressing to extreme abuse and death. The escalation of abuse might be so gradual that it is difficult for the victim to see what is happening until the abuse has become quite severe. Or she may learn to cope and accept it, becoming numbed to the signs of danger.

Without intervention and specialized help, abuse will rarely cease on its own. Often it worsens over time, becoming more severe and/or more frequent. Many abusers find that wanting or promising to stop is not enough. With specialized domestic violence programs, hard work, commitment, and accountability, some abusers can change their behavior.

It is important to understand that the behaviors listed on the *Continuum of Violence* scale are called sin in the Bible. It is no wonder that abuse tends to escalate, since sin is a slippery slope that leads to destruction. Praise God that we have a Savior who can change hearts and renew the minds of those who will humble themselves before him, sincerely repent, and turn from their evil ways.

## Questions:

1. If you think about an abusive relationship you experienced, you might be able to see how the abuse worsened over time. In what ways did the abuse escalate?

2. Can you spot any of Saul's actions on the *Continuums of Violence*?

3. What level of violence on the scale have you experienced in a relationship?

# The Continuums of Abuse

Abuse often becomes more severe and/or more frequent over time. *The Continuums of Abuse* illustrate how physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, can progress in their harm.

## Physical Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

Holding down, blocking, pinning  
Pushing or shoving  
Shaking or jerking  
Slapping and bruising  
Throwing objects  
Punching  
Kicking  
Black eyes, cuts, chipped teeth  
Burning with hot drinks, cigarettes, etc.  
Causing serious falls  
Choking  
Severe beatings  
Broken bones  
Hitting with objects  
Back injuries, paralysis  
Internal injuries  
Use of weapons  
Death

## Psychological Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

"Jokes" or put-downs that demean the victim  
Acting like the victim's feelings, needs, and ideas don't matter  
Enforcing rigid roles and rules for women  
Controlling through jealousy  
Isolating the victim  
Insults and name-calling  
Yelling and raging  
Humiliation, throwing food  
Fist through wall  
Threats and intimidation  
Destruction of her property  
Hurting or killing pets  
Displaying guns, sleeping with guns  
Depriving the victim of sleep  
Abuser threatens suicide  
Tries to get the victim to commit suicide  
Threatens to kill her and/or the children  
Death

Sexual Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

Anger at women

Sexual jokes and put-downs

Embarrassing comments

Treat woman as a sexual object; sex expected as a duty

Withholding sex to punish

Touching victim in ways that feel "uncomfortable" Promiscuity and sexual "affairs"

Sex after or together with violence or abuse

Forced by violence or threats into sexual acts the victim doesn't want to do

Marital rape

Incest with children

Sadism

Death of victim

# THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

## Read 1 Samuel 19:1-10

In this passage we see the beginning of a cycle that occurs in some domestic violence relationships: after abuse comes a “honeymoon” phase, then a building up of tensions, then another abusive incident. The cycle repeats itself over and over and its severity may increase each time. In Saul’s case, we see the cycle repeat in chapters 19, 24 and 26.

In the honeymoon phase of the cycle, the abuser may promise to stop the abuse, or to get professional help. He may ask for forgiveness or apologize profusely. The abuser may also try to win back his victim with presents, favors, or charming behavior, in an attempt to maintain his control over her. In Saul’s case we see that his honeymoon phases included:

<b>1 Samuel 24:16</b>	tears
<b>1 Samuel 24:17</b>	apologies
<b>1 Samuel 26:21</b>	promises
<b>1 Samuel 26:21</b>	confessions

Unfortunately, the honeymoon phase usually doesn’t last. Without intervention and help by a domestic violence specialist, the abuse doesn’t usually stop. Things may deteriorate to the point that the victim is “walking on eggshells” as she sees the abuser’s attitude and behavior worsen again. Eventually abuse erupts in a violent incidence, and the cycle repeats.

Wisely, David did not blindly trust Saul’s promises, confessions, and apologies. He cautiously kept a safe distance from Saul, waiting to see fruits of repentance (**Luke 3:8; Matthew 7:15-16**). He quickly found that Saul was merely going through the honeymoon phase of the Cycle of Violence. Victims of domestic violence should not feel obligated to immediately trust their abuser until they have proven their sincerity. In **Matthew 10:16** Jesus tells us we are like sheep among wolves, and must be shrewd as serpents.

## Questions:

- 1) Have you noticed a cycle in an abusive relationship? Were there behaviors that repeated themselves? How did you feel during the different phases of the cycles? How did you react?

2) If your partner made promises in a honeymoon phase, did he follow through?

# WHO'S TO BLAME FOR ABUSE?

**Read 1 Samuel 20:1 and 26:18.** David is bewildered and can't understand what he could have done to cause Saul to want to harm him. Have you ever felt this way about an abusive situation?

Usually, the victim comes to believe that she did something to cause the abuse. This happens in part because the abuser usually tells the victim it's her fault:

- If she just did something differently, there wouldn't be abuse.
- If she were different personally, the abuse would stop.

In the story of Saul and David, we see that David did not do anything to provoke Saul. In fact, he repeatedly attempted to soothe, appease, use reason, and bargain in order to stop the violence. None of his efforts worked. Many victims of domestic violence find themselves in the same situation. They may spend years trying one thing after another to avoid the abuse and to please the abuser, with little success. It is easy for such relationships to progress into a situation in which one person becomes a tyrant and the other experiences fearfulness, confusion, and low self-worth.

The issue becomes clearer when one realizes that domestic violence is not as much about what the victim does or doesn't do, as it is about an abuser's desire to maintain power and control over another person. Domestic violence is a *pattern* of coercive, intimidating, or assaultive behavior aimed at controlling the victim through fear of harm or loss, humiliation, belittling, criticism, threats, abusive control and isolation, raging, withholding, physical or psychological assault, or other means. While abuse may occur in any relationship, domestic violence is based on a systematic and repeated pattern of such behaviors with the intent of diminishing the victim and maintaining control over her. Meeting an abuser's demands usually does little to improve the situation, because the abuser relies on the abuse to maintain power and control. When one demand or condition is met, more may appear. The victim may come to feel a sense of futility and hopelessness about the situation, as well as feelings of being inadequate, unworthy, or defective.

When the facts about domestic violence are not understood, myths develop. These myths can lead to blaming victims for the abuse. It is important to understand that domestic violence is...

**NOT** a communication problem or a conflict of differing temperaments. Couples with these problems don't necessarily resort to abuse. Counselors teaching "couples communication" frequently find that this does not stop the abuse. Domestic violence can occur where good communication techniques are being applied; some abusers will try to use them as just another tool for controlling their victim.

**NOT** an anger problem--episodes of domestic violence can occur when the abuser is calm. Anger management training frequently fails to end the abuse.

**NOT** due to stress--many episodes of abuse occur when the abuser is not stressed, and many people do not become violent when stressed.

**NOT** caused by alcohol or drugs—though these may reduce an abuser’s inhibitions or provide him with an excuse for battering, drugs and alcohol in themselves do not cause domestic violence. Stopping the use of drugs and alcohol may not stop the abuse.

**NOT** caused by a lack of submission on the part of the victim. Attempts at appeasement, cooperation, obedience, and offering no resistance rarely stop the abuse.

**NOT** caused by the victim’s behavior. Studies indicate that there is often little the victim can do to stop the abuse. Frequently, the abuser continues to abuse in subsequent relationships.

Domestic violence comes from *within* the batterer. Instead of choosing to respond to situations in other possible ways, the abuser chooses to use abuse. As David discovered, a victim is usually unable to stop the abuse by seeking to please the abuser or trying to meet his demands.

### **Questions:**

1. What are some other reasons you have heard people use to explain the cause of domestic violence?

2. What are some ways in which an abuser may have tried to convince you that you caused the abuse?

3. What are some things you did to comply with an abuser's demands? Did these things succeed in ending the abuse?

# WINNING AT ANY PRICE

Have you ever had the feeling that your partner sees you as an enemy? King Saul repeatedly called David his "enemy" (1 Samuel 19:17 and 24:19), even though David swore not to harm him (1 Samuel 24:21-22) and spared his life twice (1 Samuel 24 and 26). You may have said as David did in 1 Samuel 20:1, "What have I done? What is my crime?"

Like Saul, many abusers have an adversarial view of the world. Patricia Evans, in her book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, describes abusers as living in a different reality. In this reality, the world must be manipulated and controlled and everyone is a potential enemy. For such people:

- Relationships are based on control, not cooperation.
- Warmth and openness are seen as weakness and vulnerability.
- Their self-worth may come from getting what they want, or trying to win by causing others to lose.

People living in this other reality may feel powerful when they put someone down, call them degrading names, or withhold communication or information. They may have to have the last word and insist on being right.

Accepting a partner as an equal would be a disadvantage for such people, because it would mean giving up control, dominance, and privilege. This win-lose attitude and the need for control can be carried to the extreme. People living in this "other reality" may relentlessly pursue their victims through the courts in order to "win." Some become stalkers. Others feel they must win at any price—even homicide or suicide-homicide. (Saul sent a whole army after David.) Because of this, threats should always be taken seriously: if a person could possibly think of it and say it, it is very possible for them to act on it. We should believe they will, and act accordingly.

What a contrast Saul's use of power is to the type of authority that Jesus taught and demonstrated! Though he had all authority and power, he washed the feet of his disciples and sacrificed himself for us all. In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus explained godly leadership this way: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

## Questions:

1. What are some of the ways in which the concept of the man as the head of the home can be used abusively within a marriage?

2. What are some ways in which you may have tried to convince an abusive partner that you were not his enemy? What was the result?

3. What are some other ways in which abusers may try to "win" at the expense of others?

# FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”  
(Proverbs 27:12)*

When do you know it’s time for you to flee from a domestic violence situation? David faced this question in his relationship with King Saul. In this study we will look at how David made this decision, and how he carried it out.

**Read 1 Samuel 18:8-11.** After Saul becomes angry and jealous, an evil spirit comes over him, and he tries to kill David.

**Read 1 Samuel 19:10.** After Saul tries to spear him again, David understands that this is a pattern that will repeat itself. He is sure now that he is in physical danger. He confides in the prophet Samuel and in Saul’s son Jonathan, people he trusted. Though it can be hard for victims to break the silence, it is important that they confide about their situation to people they trust. This support can help victims to do what they must in order to stay safe and end the violence, and to get the help they need.

**Question 1:** Do you remember a particular point at which you realized that you were in an abusive relationship? If it was dangerous, can you remember a point at which you became certain about it?

**Question 2:** In what ways can we try to excuse, explain away, or minimize our abuser’s behavior as we try to make sense of what is happening in the relationship?

**Read 1 Samuel 20:2.** At first, not even David’s close friend Jonathan believed David, but David persisted and enlisted Jonathan’s assistance. Victims may find that some people, even family and those closest to them, do not believe the abuse, however, they should persist in developing a network of resource people who will help them.

**Question 3:** If you confided in others about your abuse, how did they react? Did anyone not believe you in spite of the facts?

**Read 1 Samuel 20:5-7.** David devises a way to test Saul, and enlists Jonathan's help in carrying it out. Victims are often unsure about what is happening, and wonder whether the violence will continue, is temporary, or due to extenuating circumstances. Frequently, abusers will escalate their abuse when they feel they are being challenged. David uses this fact to test Saul's intentions and to clarify the situation. If it is safe to do so, victims of domestic violence may wish to use the four-stage process taught by Jesus in **Matthew 18:15-17** to confront their abusers and test their willingness to stop the abuse.

**Question 4:** Have you ever found that abuse and attempts at control escalated when you tried to confront or resist your abuser?

**Read 1 Samuel 20:18-22.** Jonathan helps David to develop a safety plan before David tests Saul. Victims of domestic violence should have a safety plan in place before taking action or attempting to leave. (There is a safety plan in the Appendix of this workbook.) Your local women's shelter or domestic violence program can advise you on how to plan for your safety.

**Read 1 Samuel 20:30-35.** When is it time to leave? When David sees that he is definitely in danger from Saul, he leaves Saul's presence. Author Gene Edwards, in his book *A Tale of Three Kings* (Christian Books, 1980), says the aggressor makes the decision for the victim by his threats and attacks or by giving the victim cause to believe he intends harm.

Jesus and Paul also escaped rather than allowing themselves to be abused by people who were out to harm them (**Luke 4:28-30 and 9:23-25; Acts 9:23-25 and 14:5-6**). In **Matthew 18:15-17**, Jesus taught that we should stay away from those who persist in abusing us, after we have made an effort to resolve the situation. Sometimes a victim needs to stay

away from the abuser because he refuses to get the help he needs in order to stop abusing. Leaving and seeking safety is not the same as abandoning your marriage or relationship.

**Question 5:** If you had to leave a domestic violence relationship, what precautions did you take, or wish you took?

Abusers may go to extremes to prevent their victims from leaving their control. If you feel you must leave, use extreme caution. Use your safety plan and seek advice from your local women's shelter or domestic violence program if possible. It can be dangerous to announce your plans or imminent departure to your abuser. It is much safer to tell him later, and only if it is safe to do so.

**Question 6:** What are some ways to notify your abuser of your departure after you have left, that will help to guard your safety?

If a victim leaves an abusive relationship in order to stop the abuse, when is it safe to return? Most abusers are unable to stop abusing on their own. Professional intervention and much work is usually required. Domestic violence specialists usually recommend domestic violence perpetrator treatment programs (not anger management training or couples counseling) that last at least one year. Unless an abuser successfully completes such a program and is no longer exhibiting abusive behaviors (consistently, for at least 6 months), it is likely that the abuse will resume once the victim returns to the relationship. Even if an abuse program is completed there is no guarantee that the abuse will stop.

# CONFRONTING ABUSE

Jesus taught that we are to speak truth to those who sin against us in a relationship (Matthew 18:15-17), and even rebuke them (Luke 17:3). How do we speak truth to an abuser? How do we communicate honestly with someone who is unsafe for us and who may be acting increasingly out of control? The way David dealt with King Saul gives us some clues.

**Read 1 Samuel 24:8-15 and 1 Samuel 26:13-20.** In these passages, King Saul's abuse of David has escalated to the point that he is stalking David, seeking to kill him. Notice how David confronts Saul, his abuser:

1. He does it in a safe situation, keeping a safe distance.
2. He names the abuse and specific violations.
3. He sets a boundary--what he will and will not do (see verses **24:12** and **26:23**).
4. He requests a specific change or tries to negotiate for a specific solution (verses **24:14-15,21-22** and **26:19-20**).
5. He tests the agreement and waits to see if Saul keeps his word. He doesn't trust blindly, but waits to see if his abuser is trustworthy.

Note that David always treated Saul respectfully. He respected the person God put in authority, even if that person acted wickedly. However, he did not freely allow himself to be abused by this person. Likewise, **Ephesians 5:33** commands a wife to respect her husband, but **Proverbs 22:3** and **Matthew 18:15-17** tell us that this does not mean that she should allow herself to be harmed. (You are encouraged to read these verses.)

David never retaliated against Saul or laid a hand on him. This is a very important issue for domestic violence victims today. In many locations there are laws requiring the arrest of an abuser when law enforcement personnel are called to a domestic violence incidence. Abusers are increasingly using this to have their victims arrested, as another show of abusive power and control over them. If a victim strikes out in self-defense or swings her purse or other object at her abuser, he may try to have her arrested. It is better for a victim to leave the scene or call the police if possible, rather than using force against her abuser.

In speaking the truth to an abuser, be prepared for the possibility that it may not stop the abuse. David found that though Saul acknowledged his abusive actions and promised to stop, the abuse continued. Many times, abusers will try to deny, excuse, or minimize their actions when confronted. They may try to block or divert the conversation, or blame the victim. The victim should be prepared in case the abuser escalates his attempts at maintaining power and control or becomes violent. Victims should have a safety plan in place before confronting an abusive person (there is one in the Appendix to this workbook). A woman needs to decide whether the situation is too dangerous for confrontation. Your local domestic violence program can assist women in developing safety plans and alternate strategies.



# Relationship Wheels

# VERBAL ABUSE IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Bible teaches us that words are powerful. They can bring life (**John 6:63**) or death (**James 3:6,8-9a**). Words can build up people (**Ephesians 4:29**) or tear down nations (**Jeremiah 1:9-10**). Words can bring great suffering (**Psalms 55:2b-3**), or be a fountain of life and healing (**Proverbs 10:11**).

Like all domestic violence, verbal abuse is a pattern of behaviors aimed at gaining and maintaining power and control over another person. It does so by systematically diminishing the other person, wounding them emotionally and psychologically, and telling them that their feelings and very perception of reality is wrong. It can be an important early-warning sign of an abusive personality. According to Patricia Evans in her excellent book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, not all verbal abuse becomes physical, but virtually all physical abuse is preceded by verbal abuse.

Verbal abuse, also called verbal battering, is a particularly insidious form of domestic violence. Though it doesn't leave outward scars, it is calculated to assassinate the character and kill the inner person with cruelty; belittling; put-downs; shaming; name calling; intimidation; raging; silence; criticizing; blaming; twisting the truth and rewriting history; and strategic "forgetting." All types of verbal abuse are designed to inflict injury. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words can break our spirits and our hearts.

## Questions:

1. Read the list of the *Types of Verbal Abuse* and identify those you have experienced.
2. How does each category of verbal abuse give the abuser power and control?
3. How does each category of verbal abuse attempt to silence the victim and make her more powerless?

## ***TYPES OF VERBAL ABUSE***

### **Belittling**

Belittling "puts down" the victim and invalidates her opinions or feelings. Or it may be designed to tell the victim that her concerns or accomplishments are insignificant.

Belittling statements may be patronizing put-downs such as, "Well, that's nice that it gives you something to do."

Some belittling statements include:

- You can't take a joke.
- You're too sensitive.
- You don't know what you're talking about.
- You're making a big deal out of nothing.
- You always have to have something to complain about.

### **Countering and Correcting**

Countering shuts down the discussion and opposes denies the victim's reality. The abuser argues against her thoughts, her opinions, and her reality. By negating her views, the abuser feels he is maintaining his control and dominance over her.

### **Abusive "Jokes"**

Put-downs disguised as jokes often refer to woman's gender, to her mental abilities, or to her competency. This can include statements such as:

- You need a keeper!
- What else can you expect from a woman?
- You couldn't find your head if it wasn't attached.

### **Holding Out**

The abuser who refuses to share himself with his partner, who ignores or refuses to listen to her, or who refuses to share information is violating the premise of a relationship.

Holding back emotional support erodes confidence and determination. Holding out includes refusal to communicate, and statements such as:

- There's nothing to talk about.
- You wouldn't be interested.
- It's none of your business.

### **Side-Tracking and Shutting Down**

Forcing the discussion off track, shutting it down, or changing the subject are ways to control and frustrate the conversation. Sometimes accusing and blaming are used to hijack the discussion and throw the victim off balance. Some shutting-down statements are:

- You're just trying to have the last word.
- I don't want to talk about it anymore.
- Just drop it!

### **Transferring Blame**

Many abusers blame their partner for their anger, irritation, or insecurity. Telling the victim that the abuse is her fault confuses her and puts her on the defensive. An abuser may accuse the victim of the very actions done by the abuser himself. (This can be very “crazy-making.”) Some blaming phrases include:

- It's all your fault.
- You're just trying to pick a fight.
- If you weren't so...

### **Faultfinding**

Most statements that begin with the word "you" or “always/never” signal abusive faultfinding and criticism. Faultfinding veiled in help or advice is abusive.

- You're always so....
- Why can't you just...?
- You should just let me do that.

### **Intimidation**

Intimidation can come through words or actions that threaten or imply harm or loss. It is designed to control and gain power through fear.

### **Insulting and Labeling**

Insulting names and personal “labels” are abusive, as are demeaning sexual references.

- Dingbat, air-head
- Slut, bitch, broad
- Stupid, ugly, fat

### **Selective Memory**

Abusers may “conveniently forget” or alter the facts. This selective memory can be used to deny, twist, and rewrite reality (this is also “crazy-making”). Selective memory is signaled by statements such as:

- I don't know what you're talking about.
- I never said that.
- You're making that up.

### **Commanding**

When a partner commands or demands instead of respectfully requesting, he denies the worth and independence of the victim.

### **Lashing Out**

Lashing out at someone is never justified. Angry verbal attacks, yelling, raging, and temper tantrums can be effective ways to intimidate and control others.

# WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT VERBAL ABUSE

Victims of verbal abuse experience a special kind of agony. Though the abuse doesn't leave physical bruises, it can be just as painful, and recovery can take much longer. Generally, the abuser denies the abuse or blames it on the victim. Friends and family may see the abuser as a "really nice guy." Without evidence of physical battering, victims can spend years in confusion, doubt, and frustration. Though others may not understand the pain, the Bible gives voice to the victim's feelings and pain, and to the betrayal felt when this kind of violence breaks marriage vows to honor, protect, and cherish:

*For wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads. (Psalm 109:2-5, 22-23,25 NIV)*

*Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets. If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God. My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords. (Psalm 55:1-3,11-14,20-21, NIV)*

Jesus underscored the seriousness of verbal abuse by comparing it to murder:

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matt 5:21-22, NIV)*

As we can see from this scripture, verbal abuse is sin, as are all forms of domestic violence. The Bible refers to verbal abusers as "revilers" and "slanderers":

*But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. (1 Corinthians 5:11, emphasis added)*

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers... nor revilers, ... shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NAS; emphasis added)*

Frightening words! And yet comforting, in that they show us that all who will truly humble themselves and repent of sins like verbal abuse can receive the Lord's forgiveness, cleansing, and power to change. But first a verbal abuser must see his heart in order to bring it to God for healing. The victim can try to "speak the truth in love" (**Ephesians 4:15**) with the abuser about the problem, if this can be done safely. Sadly, verbal abusers often deny the abuse, and seek to blame the victim for it. Abusers may escalate their attacks when confronted, in an effort to reassert power and control.

Jesus taught a four-step procedure for trying to resolve transgressions and to restore relationship in a way that incorporates a series of safety measures:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (**Matthew 18:15-17**)

Some churches have staff who recognize the dynamics of verbal abuse and domestic violence, and will help bring the abuser to repentance. Or it may be necessary to get assistance from a professional counselor who specializes in domestic violence and is trained to help the abuser to see the pattern of abuse and its effects. However, no one can force an abuser to change.

### **Questions:**

1. Have you ever had difficulty in getting others to believe that you were being abused?

2. Has an abuser ever made you doubt your sense of reality, or to feel confused about whether you were being abused? How?

3. In what ways may you have been blamed for the abuse?

Appendix:

**Personalized Safety Plan**

Named: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Review dates: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PERSONALIZED SAFETY PLAN

The following steps represent my plan for increasing my safety and preparing in advance for the possibility for further violence. Although I do not have control over my partner's violence, I do have a choice about how to respond to him/her and how to best get myself and my children to safety.

**Step 1: Safety during a violent incident.** Women cannot always avoid violent incidents. In order to increase safety, battered women may use a variety of strategies.

I can use some or all of the following strategies:

- A. If I decide to leave, I will \_\_\_\_\_-. (Practice how to get out safely. What doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes would you use?)
- B. I can keep my purse and car keys ready and put them (place) \_\_\_\_\_ in order to leave quickly.
- C. I can tell \_\_\_\_\_ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noises coming from my house.
- I can also tell \_\_\_\_\_ about the violence and request they call the police if they hear suspicious noses coming from my house.
- D. I can teach my children how to use the telephone to contact the police and the fire department.
- E. I will use \_\_\_\_\_ as my code word with my children or my friends so they can call for help.
- F. If I have to leave my home, I will go \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Decide this even if you don't think there will be a next time.)
- If I cannot go to the location above, then I can go to \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
- G. I can also teach some of these strategies to some/all of my children.

- H. When I expect we are going to have an argument, I will try to move to a space that is lowest risk, such as \_\_\_\_\_-. (Try to avoid arguments in the bathroom, garage, kitchens, near weapons or in rooms without access to an outside door.)
- I. I will use my judgment and intuition. If the situation is very serious, I can give my partner what he/she wants to calm him/her down. I have to protect myself until I/we are out of danger.

**Step 2: Safety when preparing to leave.** Battered women frequently leave the residence they share with the battering partner. Leaving must be done with a careful plan in order to increase safety. Batterers often strike back when they believe that a battered woman is leaving a relationship.

I can use some or all of the following safety strategies:

- A. I will leave money and an extra set of keys with \_\_\_\_\_ so I can leave quickly.
- B. I will keep copies of important documents or keys at \_\_\_\_\_.
- C. I will open a separate checking and/or savings account by \_\_\_\_\_, to increase my independence.
- D. Other things I can do to increase my independence include: \_\_\_\_\_
- E. The domestic violence program's hotline number is \_\_\_\_\_; I can seek shelter by calling this hotline.
- F. I can keep change for phone calls on me at all times. I understand that if I use my telephone credit card, the following month the telephone bill will tell my batterer those numbers that I called after I left. To keep my telephone communications confidential, I must either use coins or I might get a friend to permit me to use their telephone credit card for a limited time when I first leave.
- G. I will check with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to see who would be able to let me stay with them or lend me some money.

- H. I can leave extra clothes with \_\_\_\_\_.
- I. I will sit down and review my safety plan every \_\_\_\_\_ in order to plan the safest way to leave the residence.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (domestic violence advocate or friend) has agreed to help me review this plan.
- J. I will rehearse my escape plan and, as appropriate, practice it with my children.

**Step 3: Safety in my own residence.** There are many things that a woman can do to increase her safety in her own residence. It may be impossible to do everything at once, but safety measures can be added step by step.

Safety measures I can use include:

- A. I can change the locks on my doors and windows as soon as possible.
- B. I can replace wooden doors with steel/metal doors.
- C. I can install security systems including additional locks, window bars, poles to wedge against doors, an electronic system, etc.
- D. I can purchase rope ladders to be used for escape from second floor windows.
- E. I can install smoke detectors and purchase fire extinguishers for each floor in my house/apartment.
- F. I can install an outside lighting system that lights up when a person is coming close to my house.
- G. I will teach my children how to use the telephone to make a collect call to me and to \_\_\_\_\_ (friend/minister/other) in the event that my partner takes the children.
- H. I will tell people who takes care of my children which people have permission to pick up my children and that my partner is not permitted to do so. The people I will inform about pick-up permission include:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (school),  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (day care staff),  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (babysitter),  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Sunday school teacher),  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (teacher),  
 and \_\_\_\_\_ (others).

- I. I can inform \_\_\_\_\_ (neighbor),  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (pastor),  
 and \_\_\_\_\_ (friend)  
 that my partner no longer resides with me and they should call the police if he is  
 observed near my residence.
- J. If I talk to my abuser on the phone I can protect myself by  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 4: Safety with a protection order.** Many batterers obey protection orders, but one can never be sure which violent partner will obey and which will violate protection orders. I recognize that I may need to ask the police and the courts to enforce my protection order.

The following are some steps that I can take to help the enforcement of my protection order:

- A. I will keep my protection order \_\_\_\_\_ (location).  
 (Always keep it on or near your person. If you change purses, that's the first thing that should go in.)
- B. I will give my protection order to police departments in the community where I work, in those communities where I usually visit family or friends, and in the community where I live.
- C. There should be a county registry of protection orders that all police departments can call to confirm a protection order. I can check to make sure that my order is in the registry. The telephone number for the county registry of protection orders is \_\_\_\_\_.
- D. I can call the local domestic violence program if I am not sure about B or C above or if I have some problem with my protection order.
- E. I will inform my employer, my minister, my closest friend and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that I have a protection order in effect. I will provide a photograph of the perpetrator to reception areas and/or security.
- F. If my partner destroys my protection order, I can get another copy from the courthouse located at \_\_\_\_\_.

- G. If my partner violates the protection order, I can call the police and report a violation, contact my attorney, call my advocate, and/or advise the court of the violation.
- H. If the police do not help, I can contact my domestic violence advocate or attorney and will file a complaint with the chief of the police department.
- I. I can also file a private criminal complaint with the district justice in the jurisdiction where the violation occurred or with the district attorney. I can charge my battering partner with a violation of the protection order and all the crimes that he commits in violating the order. I can call the domestic violence advocate to help me with this.

**Step 5: Safety on the job and in public.** Each battered woman must decide if and when she will tell others that her partner has battered her and that she may be at continued risk. Friends, family and co-workers can help to protect women. Each woman should consider carefully which people to invite to help secure her safety.

I might do any or all of the following:

- A. I can inform my boss, the security supervisor and \_\_\_\_\_ at work of my situation.
- B. I can ask \_\_\_\_\_ to help screen my telephone calls at work, and review my parking lot situation and work schedule for possible changes.
- C. When leaving work, I can \_\_\_\_\_.
- D. When driving home if problems occur, I can \_\_\_\_\_.
- E. If I use public transit, I can \_\_\_\_\_.
- F. I can use different grocery stores and shopping malls to conduct my business and shop at hours that are different than those when residing with my battering partner.
- G. I can use a different bank and take care of my banking at hours different from those I used when residing with my battering partner.

H. \_\_\_\_\_ will be my emergency contact should my employer be unable to contact me.

I. I can also

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Step 6: Safety and drug or alcohol use.** Most people in this culture use alcohol. Many use mood-altering drugs. Much of this use is legal and some is not. The legal outcomes of using illegal drugs can be very hard on a battered woman, may hurt her relationship with her children and put her at a disadvantage in other legal actions with her battering partner. Therefore, women should carefully consider the potential cost of the use of illegal drugs. But beyond this, the use of any alcohol or other drugs can reduce a woman's awareness and ability to act quickly to protect herself from her battering partner. Furthermore, the use of alcohol or other drugs by the batterer may give him/her an excuse to use violence. Therefore, in the context of drug or alcohol use, a woman needs to make specific safety plans.

If drug or alcohol use has occurred in my relationship with the battering partner, I can enhance my safety by some or all of the following:

A. If I am going to use, I can do so in a safe place and with people who understand the risk of violence and are committed to my safety.

B. I can also

\_\_\_\_\_.

C. If my partner is using, I can

\_\_\_\_\_.

D. I might also

\_\_\_\_\_.

E. To safeguard my children, I might

\_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Step 7: Safety and my emotional health.** The experience of being battered and verbally degraded by partners is usually exhausting and emotionally draining. The process of building a new life for myself takes much courage and incredible energy.

To conserve my emotional energy and resources and to avoid hard emotional times, I can do some of the following:

A. If I feel down and ready to return to a potentially abusive situation, I can

\_\_\_\_\_.

- B. When I have to communicate with my partner in person or by telephone, I can \_\_\_\_\_.
- C. I can try to use “can ...” statements with myself and to be assertive with others.
- D. I can tell myself -  
 “\_\_\_\_\_” -  
 whenever I feel others are trying to control or abuse me.
- E. I can read \_\_\_\_\_ to help me feel stronger.
- F. I can call \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
 and \_\_\_\_\_ as other resources to be of support to me.
- G. Other things I can do to help me feel stronger are  
 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and  
 \_\_\_\_\_.
- H. I can attend workshops and support groups at the domestic violence program or  
 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ or  
 \_\_\_\_\_ to gain support and strengthen my relationships  
 with other people.

**Step 8: Items to take when leaving.** When women leave partners, it is important to take certain items with them. Beyond this, women sometimes give an extra copy of papers and an extra set of clothing to a friend just in case they have to leave quickly.

Items with asterisks on the following list are the most important to take. If there is time, the other items might be taken, or stored outside the home.

These items might best be placed in one location, so that if we have to leave in a hurry, I can grab them quickly.

When I leave, I should take:

- Identification for myself
- Children’s birth certificates
- My birth certificate
- Social Security cards
- School and vaccination records
- Money
- Checkbook, ATM (Automatic Teller Machine) card
- Credit cards

- Keys - house/car/office
- Driver's license and registration
- Medications and prescriptions
- Welfare identification
- Work permits
- Journal and any photos of injuries
- Green card
- Passport(s)
- Divorce papers
- Medical records - for all family members
- Lease/rental agreements, house deed, mortgage payment book
- Pay stubs, bank books/safety deposit keys
- Insurance papers
- Small salable objects
- Address book
- Pictures
- Jewelry
- Children's favorite toys and/or blankets
- Items of special sentimental value

**Telephone numbers I need to know:**

Police department - home \_\_\_\_\_

Police department - school \_\_\_\_\_

Police department - work \_\_\_\_\_

Battered women's program (Crisis Hotline) \_\_\_\_\_

County registry of protection orders \_\_\_\_\_

Work number \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's home number \_\_\_\_\_

Minister \_\_\_\_\_

D.V. Advocate \_\_\_\_\_

Friends \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_