

Pastoral DV 101

Good morning! My name is Neil Schori and I'm one of the pastors at The Edge Church in Aurora. Over the years I've been fortunate to be able to help a pretty large number of victims of domestic violence. I certainly wasn't always an advocate for victims...but on August 31st, 2007, I met with a woman I'd counseled for about 18 months...

Her name is Stacy Peterson...and she was married to Drew Peterson...Drew was a Bolingbrook police sgt. Stacy was his 4th wife...and when I met with them...I noticed problems, but nothing seemed too far out of the ordinary...he seemed insecure and controlling. She seemed nervous. But they both really SEEMED to care

for each other. I failed to identify the major red flags...and because I didn't understand the epidemic of domestic violence, I didn't do the right things to help her get out...and two months after I met with her...on October 28, 2007, she disappeared, and has never been seen again.

Back to August 31, 2007...Stacy confided in me that she knew that her husband, Drew, had killed his 3rd wife, Kathleen Savio...and I didn't tell anyone...because Stacy asked me not to...but since 2007, I've studied the dynamics of domestic violence...and I believe there is a better way...but for all of us in ministry...we have to get this right...but for that to happen, we have to grasp the reality of domestic violence in our midst.

~Women often get horrible advice from their pastors when they finally get the courage to divulge domestic violence in their relationships.

The author, Denise George, wrote a book called "What Women Wish Pastors Knew," and she told about a survey of 6000 pastors...in which they were asked how they'd counsel a woman who shared that she was being abused...

26% said they would advise the woman to submit to her husband, no matter what

25% said they would tell a woman that the abuse was her fault in the first place for failing to submit properly

and... 50% of pastors said they would tell a woman that they should be willing to tolerate some level of abuse because that's actually better than getting divorced.

I'm assuming that most of you here wouldn't give advice like that because you're aware enough to be here...but know this...there are pastors in this very area that WILL do just that...

Let's start with some domestic violence basics:

~Domestic violence is not just physical. As little kids we say ridiculous things like "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." But the truth is...I've

been far more hurt by words than by any sort of physical assault in my life.

Domestic violence is a pattern of intentional coercive behavior used to gain or maintain control over an intimate partner.

So...domestic violence is emotional, it's verbal, it's sexual, it's financial...abusers will try different tactics to see what is most effective in isolating and controlling their victims. Maybe you're wondering why she doesn't just leave...

~Religion does not change the rate of domestic violence.

What that means is...in and out of the church...synagogue...and mosque...the rate is pretty

steady...more than 25% of the women you see at your house of worship will be abused by her intimate partner in her lifetime.

~Religion often exacerbates the crisis...because sometimes pastors give wrong advice based on theological concepts we don't really understand...like on forgiveness and reconciliation...like on what it really means in Malachi when we're told that God hates divorce...and because abusers will always play on the sympathy of well-meaning church people...

Speaking of abusers...it is really important to know what to expect from them when they're dragged into the light...

~Expect them to own a SMALL part of the abuse~ A few weeks after a victim started attending my church, I received an email from her husband...it was long and appeared really respectful. He even said that while he didn't know what I was already told by his wife...that he did have to admit that ONE TIME, he lost his temper and he pushed her.

Here's the problem...it was a pseudo-confession...he failed to tell me that in a fit of rage he had held her down by her throat on their bed.

~Expect them to lie~ The Bible says this about the devil John 8:44...when he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar, and the father of lies.

Abusers tell good lies, too. They can brutalize their victims, and then convince the police to ARREST their victims...Kathleen Savio called the police on Drew Peterson 18 times...and she ended up being arrested...because he was a good liar.

Abusers will admit a portion of the truth, but won't tell you the whole story...because they are actively working to manipulate YOU so that YOU will convince HER to give HIM another chance. Don't do it.

~Expect them to appear repentant~ Abusers will say with fountains of tears pouring down their faces that they're

sorry and they'll never do it again. But as ministry leaders, we actually need to use discernment and biblical wisdom...peoples' lives are at stake. False repentance is tears and promises and NO action...what does real repentance look like? It looks like real behavioral changes over an extended period of time.

Jesus said that we must bear fruit in keeping with repentance...so don't fall for it just because he says he's sorry...abuse victims in your congregations depend on you getting this right.

~Expect them to have a great reputation in the community~ The very first victim that I met with after Stacy Peterson disappeared was also the wife of a police officer.

Not only was he a police officer, but he was awarded the honor of officer of the year in his county. He had an untouchable reputation...but behind closed doors he was a monster. He raped his wife at gunpoint daily for 10 years..and his 2 favorite threats to her were that he would make what Drew Peterson did look like child's play...and he would take her to places in the woods and tell her that was going to be where he would bury her.

So what can we do as religious leaders in our community?

Believe her...remember...isolation and control is the game that her abuser has played with her for a long time. She already doesn't really think her voice matters...and she's deciding if she has any value whatsoever.

One woman told me with tremors and through tears that 10 years earlier she'd told her story to her priest and in the middle of it, he walked her to the door, and told her that she needed to learn to submit to her husband...and that this must be her cross to bear. She looked at me and said...today, I'm going to tell you what's happened to me...and if you don't believe me, I'll never speak of it again.

Sometimes the greatest thing we can do is to validate another struggler on the journey of life.

The **second thing** I'd recommend that you do is to help her **connect**. That really means two things...I believe that we are not meant to live life alone...we were not made to be self-sufficient, but to be inter-dependent...in community...so offer her a place in your place of worship...in a support group, or in a small group...and then connect her with a domestic violence shelter in the area, like A Safe Place...because they can help victims in a more thorough and complete way than any other organization...counseling/emergency housing/child-care/continuing ed.

The last thing you can do is to help her tell **her story**.

Abusers are so good at isolating their victims and monitoring everything they do, that they rarely record

what's happened to them or have corroborating evidence...which means it is hard for them to have anything that could stand up in court.

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