

Such patterns should never be swept away with the words, "Will you forgive me?" The flesh and the devil thrive when hurts and sins are kept in the dark. Because this is so, one way a wife can love is to let her husband know the consequences of his sin in her life. This is not done to hurt; it is done to heal.

4. Speak with gentleness and love. In a world where advanced technology is power, we often overlook the power of words. Words, however, can disarm angry people. It can be a great encouragement for a woman to know that "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). Although the woman is not the cause of the violence, she nevertheless has some power to subdue it with humility, gentleness, and love.

Domestic violence is as damaging to a marriage relationship as adultery. We should never minimize its impact on the victim. But, as with all suffering, we should also never minimize the grace of God to these victims. God reserves unique glimpses of Himself to those who have been oppressed, and He gives power to shake off the twin enemies of timidity and rage.

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A: *Helping the Perpetrator*

"The grace of God has appeared...teaching us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" (Titus 2:11f).

People who publicly sit together in church pews on Sunday morning are not thereby prevented from doing violence to each other once they get in private. Ministry to the violent—like ministry to any with immediately destructive sins—demands wide-awake, bold, knowledgeable intervention, full of grace and truth. The perpetrators of battery (like sexual predators) are criminal, as well as wicked, as well as highly deceptive. The perpetrators of domestic violence need grace—effectual grace, life-changing grace, real grace. As they become willing to stop and look at themselves in the mirror of truth, as they embrace the Messiah as He is in fact, they can and will genuinely change. Scripture says a great deal about the sins of anger and violence and the ways of the Redeemer of sinners. What considerations ought to control your efforts to help such men (and, sometimes, women)?

The Common Need for Grace

Violent people have much in common with other people—both with those who would help them and

with those they hurt. We are all basically alike, 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 tells us. Interpersonal hostility comes in many forms—attitudinal, verbal, financial, physical, sexual. It comes with many degrees of intensity, from grumpiness and bickering to assault and murder. Every argument is, in principle, on a continuum with outbreaks of actual violence. So domestic violence is not different in kind from other typical sins. This fact produces both confidence and humility in those who seek to help others. If you know how to deal with your own sins of anger, you will have good things to offer others who struggle. I [DP] once counseled a couple who had had a gunfight in their home! Personal repentance from irritability and a critical attitude helped me both to understand them and to proceed sure-footedly. Would-be counselors of the violent are not the sinless coming to the sinful. We are finders of grace coming to those who need grace.

Similarly, you should typically expect to find two sinners embroiled with each other, not one irredeemable monster oppressing one innocent victim who needs no redemption. God will be at work in the lives of both people. So explore incidents of violence in detail. You will usually find places where both parties need Christ's grace to change. Perhaps one party draws most of the attention because he acts with his fists; but, on closer inspection, the other party may skillfully and perversely wield her tongue in ways that goad to violence. Outbursts of violence are usually extreme instances in more widespread, low-grade patterns of conflict. Look for the common sins that both parties share, as well as for the unique outbreaks of sin in one party. You want to help both people become more loving, wise, and peaceable.

The truths in the previous two paragraphs must be handled with great care by those who would minister: batterers distort these truths regularly. Are all of us tempted to anger? Batterers will turn that into an excuse: they are "just one of the boys," and violence is not that serious. Are the victims of violence also sinners, whose sins often play into and play off of the batterer's sins? Batterers will turn that into an excuse and an accusation: the fault really lies with their victims. You who would help must know the previous two paragraphs, but don't let the batterer twist truth into gross lies.

The Fog of Evasion

You need to know what violent people are like because they easily create a fog of confusion and evasion. Sin is deceitful; that is the lesson of Jeremiah 17:9. Violent people neither know themselves nor let others know them. You must know this. They are habitual

liars and hidiers, who often create elaborate patterns of deceit. They tend to conceal what they do; that failing, they tend to downplay its seriousness; that failing, they tend to blame-shift, portraying themselves as somehow aggrieved, innocent, and victimized; that failing, they tend to wallow in despair and “repentance” to make people feel sorry for them. Bear in mind the following characteristics of sin that typically characterize the violent:

1. Undergirding the violent act is a pervasive selfishness: his pleasure, his agenda, his desires, his demands, his cravings dominate much of life. Counseling must not let the visible “marquee” sins obscure attention from the foundational perversity of a lifestyle characterized by “ungodliness and worldly passions.” Often the awareness of sin is superficial; he may regret his sporadic violence but rarely recognizes his selfish lifestyle or the specific passions that drive him.

2. Expect to encounter intricate, subtle patterns of self-deceit. Abusers often feel sorry for themselves: “I’m really the victim, and my anger is just a reaction.” They often express the self-righteous opinion that “I’m not really like that” or “I know I shouldn’t do that, but....” Often they exhibit a marked ability to sector the heart, living two lives, in two worlds. A man might hit his wife, and then, one hour later, shift gears and smoothly lead a Bible study.

3. Expect to encounter intricate patterns of winsome deceit towards others. Violent people (like sexual predators) are often gifted seducers. They win people, creating trust again in the very people they’ve mistreated and betrayed. They skillfully manipulate other people—the victim, the would-be helpers—into feeling guilty and responsible for what happened and for now making it better.

4. Expect to encounter self-deceived versions of “confession and repentance.” It is almost as if they could deceive God—though, of course, they really deceive only themselves and others. They may seem to say the right Christian words or feel the right feelings, but their “repentance” often is God-less. It expresses remorse for damaging their self-image or their reputation in the eyes of neighbors. Such “repentance” actually serves the very same pride and fear of man that create the sins of secret violence. Violent people typically misuse grace or misunderstand it. Grace becomes “cheap,” and repentance becomes “jumping through hoops” to assuage the conscience and get

back into the good graces of other people. It can even become a tool of sin, a quick fix—sometimes calculating—that sweeps problems under the rug. They may weep, pray, and pledge it will never happen again, without any of the fundamental changes involved in repentance and faith unto Christ: that “change of mind” and “turning” that lead to a change of life.

5. They often intimidate and manipulate their victims. Violence is frightening. Violence is a tool of control. You will sometimes find it hard to get the facts even from the violated. The victim may crave to preserve this present moment’s interlude of peace, or may fear that honesty will lead to revenge, or may have been threatened that “if you tell, then....” The victim may find it highly embarrassing that the family has these problems and may be reluctant to make the degree of evil known. All this adds up to the fact that you may have to overcome a conspiracy of silence in the family that serves to protect the evildoer.

In all these ways and more, domestic violence is a “secret” sin. You must be prepared to drag it into the light.

The Word of Grace in Jesus Christ

Violent people need Christ; we see this in Hebrews 3:12-14. The drift of sin is always away from the living Christ. That is a problem of the heart needing daily attention. Jesus, who died for sinners, is gracious; and grace is effectual.

1. Aim for a fundamental restructuring of heart and lifestyle. Cosmetic adjustments that make the person’s behavior more socially acceptable are not enough. You must expose the heart issues that motivate violence: cravings for power, love, control, comfort, money, respect, pleasure. About what things is this person willful? The batterer’s violence is not about his wife; it is about himself, and the flagrant idolatries he brought into the marriage. Violent people play god and so act like the devil rather than serving God. They must repent of the “vertical” sins that fuel the “horizontal” sins. Both the motives and behaviors of hostility must be laid bare: James 3:5-12, 3:14-16, 4:1-4, 4:6, and 4:11-12.

2. Aim to solve the minor versions of the major sins as well as the major outbreaks. Judgmentalism, grumbling, irritability, bickering, and arguing usually precede violence and express identical themes of the heart. People who learn to repent of grumbling—and thus learn both gratitude and contentment in Christ—will rarely need to repent of assault and battery.

3. Give people the living Christ Himself. Jesus is abundant in lovingkindness and terrible in wrath. Violent people need to know the love of Christ. They deserve the violence of God; but He gave the Lamb of God. Jesus loved sinners, the ungodly, the wicked, the weak, enemies of God. He died, that those who live might live no longer for themselves. God freely gives grace and wisdom from above: James 1:5, 1:17, 3:17, 4:6, and 4:10. Effectual, life-rearranging grace is available for all who need it. Violent people need to learn to fear the Lord of wrath. He is jealous and holy: James 4:5 and 4:12. A person committing an act of violence lives without the fear of the Lord; he acts and reacts as if there were no God. But, in fact, “all are laid bare before Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). To begin to live radically “in public” is to live without the secrecy that violence depends on.

4. Bring violent people to a God-centered repentance: James 4:6-10. Internal changes come first. Compare their “repentance” to real repentance: Psalms 50 and 51, godly versus worldly sorrow. To know the Christ of the Gospel is to rearrange heart and soul so that sin can no longer thrive. Settle for nothing less. Those who seek find. Those who believe receive the Holy Spirit. How do you know someone has truly repented? You’ll know. Time always tells genuineness from falsity. You will see fundamental changes in relationships, first with God and then with others.

5. Help repentant believers learn the practical, peaceable, loving alternatives to manipulation, blame-shifting, intimidation, and violence: James 3:13, 3:17-18. People can learn to listen, to ask questions, to ask forgiveness, to take a time out, to ask help, to postpone decision-making, to give in tangible ways—the actions of the wisdom from above. Love can and will

replace not only the moments of violence, but the pervasive lifestyle of selfishness and willfulness. Not perfection, but progress. A person who has more and more “give” is a person with less and less room for hating and hitting.

6. Employ the resources of the community of Christ: James 5:19-20 and Hebrews 3:12-14. People repenting of violence need more than once-a-week, “formal” counseling. They need radical honesty, accountability, reminders, encouragements, models, daily exposure to the light of day, prayers of intercession. I have never known an incident of domestic violence to occur in a public church service or while someone was talking on the phone to his pastor or small group leader! Help the perpetrators of such sins to come out of hiding and live in the open. Sin thrives in dark corners; righteousness thrives in the daylight. A person who has changed internally towards Christ will willingly desire the humbling structures of accountability to Christ’s people in order to save him from himself.

How will you help the privately violent? Their souls must be rearranged to seek and know the Christ of the Gospel. Without that fundamental, living relationship with Christ, you can’t teach enough truth, you can’t shine the light of insight brightly enough, you can’t put up enough fences, you can’t make enough plans, you can’t invite enough commitment, you can’t bring in enough people, you can’t be enough like Christ. But when violent sinners embrace the love of Jesus Christ, these things—doctrine, heart insight, structure, plans, commitment, community, counsel—become channels and expressions of effectual grace.

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