

Counseling the Emotionally Abused Woman

By Julie Ganschow

I. Defining and Describing Abuse

A. Defining Abuse

1. Abuse: "Improper treatment of another." Webster's 1828 Dictionary
2. Abuser: "One who mistreat another in speech, or behavior; one that deceives, uses rudeness of language, ill treatment or violence toward another person." Webster's 1828 Dictionary

B. Defining Domestic Violence

1. Domestic violence of a physical nature is an assault on the material person.
2. Domestic violence of an emotional or verbal nature is an assault on the immaterial or spiritual aspect of a person.

C. Describing Emotional Abuse

1. "Emotional abuse includes *verbal abuse* such as yelling, name-calling, blaming and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior are also signs of emotional abuse. Sometimes abusers throw in threats of physical violence or other repercussions if you don't do what they want.
2. Emotional abuse also includes *economic abuse* such as withholding money and basic necessities, restricting you to an allowance, sabotaging your job, and stealing from you or taking your money."
3. It is common for emotional abuse and verbal abuse to escalate to include things like blocking her way from the leaving the room, taking the car keys so she can't escape, taking her cell phone, restricting her from friends and family, moving out to the country, silent treatment, cold shoulder, physical restraint, locking her in a room or outside the house as punishment.
4. "It is a mistreatment used to control or overpower a wife in such a way that she is not able to function as an autonomous person."
5. "The most basic term for what has been called *emotional abuse* is "sin."

D. Describing What Is NOT Emotional Abuse.

1. Not liking your husband

2. Being dissatisfied in marriage
3. Being unhappy
4. Regretting marrying him (“I made a mistake”)
5. “He doesn’t meet my needs”

E. Scriptural View of Abusive Behavior

1. “...behavior, as described in Scripture that has become habitual, excessive, and destructive to the extent it has the potential of doing great harm to a wife and/or her children, either emotionally, physically, or both.”

- a. Proceeds from a heart of rebellion toward God (Ps. 2:1-3)
- b. Is characteristic of the fool as described in Proverbs
- c. Is characteristic of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-24)
 - 1) Selfishness
 - 2) Self-centeredness
 - 3) Fear
 - 4) Explosive anger/rage
 - 5) Jealousy
 - 6) Pride

2. Violates: “Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.” Isa. 43:7

F. Emotional Abuse Contrasted with Physical Abuse

1. Whereas physical violence is often obvious, emotional abuse is often quiet, subtle, and contained. It chips away at personhood, therefore, visible signs of destruction not obvious. Emotional abuse is obscure, and not easily noticed.

II. The Unfortunate Response of the Church

A. Refusal to Treat Complaints of Emotional Abuse Seriously

1. Discount woman as emotional, hysterical, attention seeking, vengeful, making much out of little. angry, bitter and looking for a divorce
2. Tell her she has no biblical grounds for divorce
 - a. “God wants you to learn to suffer well. He wants you to stay in the marriage and make it work.”

- b. “Everyone’s definition of verbal or emotional abuse is different. Perhaps you are just overly sensitive.”
 3. Minimize husband’s behaviors
 - a. “It’s not that bad.”
 - b. “At least he’s not beating you up.”
 - c. “Everyone has bad times in their marriage, it’ll pass.”
- B. Offer Poor Counsel
 1. Tell her to learn to be a better, more submissive wife.
 2. Don’t give him reason to become angry.
 3. Tell her to focus on her own sin.
 4. Suggest a Bible study
 5. Tell her she is suffering for Jesus
- C. Blame the Victim
 1. “If you were a more submissive wife...”
 2. “If you were not so mouthy...”
 3. “If you were more obedient...”
- D. Give False Hope
 1. Tell her everyone has troubles.
 2. Suggest things will get better in time.
 3. Suggest that maybe it was just a bad day.
- E. Offer Simple solutions
 1. Make him feel special.
 2. Commit to pray for him.
 3. Learn to submit more.
 4. Be willing to have more sex.
 5. Talk to him about it
 6. Be more open
 7. Tell him how you feel
 8. Listen more
 9. Be sensitive to his stress/needs

10. Have more sex
11. Change the home atmosphere
12. Be patient/more loving
13. Make excuses for husband

III. The Impact of Abuse on a Woman

A. Surrender

1. Vulnerable to believe what is said about her is true
2. Ashamed of herself for confiding in someone
3. Undermines her confidence in her abilities
4. Doubts she can do anything right
5. Feels guilty immediately when criticized
6. Eventually comes to believe she cannot survive apart from abuser.
7. Learned helplessness
 - a. Paralyzes the woman emotionally (particularly) in her capacity to make decisions
 - b. "Imposed guilt," guilt by manipulation, overactive conscience, misplaced/weak conscience, guilt-tripping.
 - c. She believes she is incompetent and unstable because he says she is

IV. The Emotionally Abusive Man

A. Characteristics

1. Controls his partner by manipulating her fear of harm, isolation, and deprivation; he threatens or implies that he might hurt her, leave her, or keep her apart from the things she loves.
2. Abuser tells her:
 - a. You deserve such treatment
 - b. If you were better than I would/wouldn't...
 - c. You make me do these things
 - d. If you were more submissive
 - e. If you didn't question my authority
 - f. If I kill myself, it'll be your fault

3. Adjusts His Tactics- Manipulations
 - a. Becomes more reasonable
 - b. Becomes thoughtful
 - c. Is funny, lighthearted
 - d. Becomes loving, kind, or attentive.
- B. How Abusers Get Away with It
 1. Mask their true nature
 2. They are often admired and respected people
 - a. Charming, winsome, “a nice guy”
 3. He’s a completely different guy away from you
- C. Case Studies of Abuse
 1. Alecia and Ted
 2. Jean and Ronald
- V. Counseling The Emotionally Abused Woman
 - A. First Steps
 1. Believe her
 2. Assess the risk to her and the children
 - a. Use the ARI (abuse Risk Inventory)
 - b. Report to authorities if necessary
 - c. Develop a safety plan
 - B. Next Steps
 1. Confront the husband
 2. Provide both parties biblical counseling
 - a. NOT marriage counseling
 - b. The husband has to get to be willing to deal with his own sins before God.
 - c. It is unwise to try to sort out blame, determine who caused what, said what and so on.
 - d. That is a dead-end in abuse counseling.
 - e. Potential counseling issues for abuser



Reigning Grace Counseling Center

Counseling Center Phone: (816) 694-1677

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abusive • Anger • Backbiters • Bitter • Blameshifting • Blasphemer • Brawling • Brutal • Conceited • Cursing/filthy language • Deception/lies • Deceitful • desire + lust • Envy • Evil suspicion • Faithless • Fits of rage • Foolishness • Greed • Hopeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idolatry • Impatient • Jealousy • Lack of self-control • Loveless • Lover of evil • Lover of pleasure • Malice • Manipulative • Murder • Pride • Obsessed with disputes and arguments over words • Rage • Rash • Rebellion • Scheming • Selfish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-control • Self-righteousness • Self-serving • Sexually immoral • Slander • Strife • Treacherous • Underserving • Unforgiving • Ungrateful • Unholy • Unloving • Unmerciful • Useless • wrangling over words (twists Scripture) • Wicked 	<p>Based on:</p> <p>1 Timothy 6:4-5</p> <p>Ephesians 4:29-30</p> <p>Galatians 5:19-21</p> <p>James 1:3</p> <p>2 Timothy 3:8</p> <p>Colossians 3:6</p> <p>Matthew 7</p> <p>2 Peter 3:16</p> <p>Psalm 56:5</p> <p>1 Corinthians 13:13</p> <p>(opposite of)</p>
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f. Potential counseling issues for wife

- 1) Heart issues related to wrong desires and responses
- 2) Wrong thoughts, beliefs, desires about God, her husband, her situation, and herself.
- 3) Fear of man
- 4) Depression
- 5) Hopelessness
- 6) Faithlessness
- 7) Idolatry
- 8) Slander/gossip
- 9) Unforgiveness
- 10) Bitterness
- 11) Anger
- 12) Understanding her foolish/naive/simple thinking.
- 13) Develop a theology of suffering

- 14) How to confront her husband when his behavior is ungodly.
 - 15) How to respond to her husband in ways that are respectful and glorifying to God, and do not feed his sinful behaviors.
 - 16) How to think biblically about her marriage and its purpose.
3. Consider physical separation for duration of the counseling
- a. The woman is in danger, spiritually, emotionally, and possibly physically (Mic. 6:8; Acts. 20:35; Romans 15:1; 1 Thess. 5:14).
 - b. The church's goal in allowing or encouraging separation is restoration and reconciliation of the couple and the marriage.
 - c. The distance will help her to discern the reality of her husband's manipulation.
 - d. Our recommendation is 6 months at the very least
 - 1) He has to demonstrate the fruit of repentance to her and to the team of people who will be ministering to him.
 - 2) Once the team is satisfied that he is consistently displaying the fruit of repentance in his life the couple will be encouraged to spend time together privately but in public. Essentially dating.
 - 3) The team will have to listen carefully to the couple and watch for re-emergence of problem patterns, addressing them as they go forward with their relationship, increasing time together and interaction with each other.
 - 4) Once the team is confident the husband is able to be trusted home, he can move back in and the new relationship will go forward.
 - 5) Depending on the depth of problems at the beginning, and the level of commitment to the process of biblical change, this can take as long as a year and maybe more.
 - 6) The church team must remain involved with the couple the entire time for the safety and wellbeing of the woman and the man.

C. Ongoing Ministry

1. Couple and children become disciples of a stable, grounded, growing couple who will watch over them for an extended period of time and take the role of long-term discipleship seriously.