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COMMENTARY: Is a Domestic Abuser in Your Church?

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[Michael Clark](#)



COMMENTARY

I have a confession: I've been to jail twice for domestic violence.

I'm actually relieved I went to jail for my inexcusable, wrong behavior -- because it gave me the jolt I needed to set me on the path to freedom and a total change of life.

After my wife obtained a restraining order against me, the only place she would let me see her was in church. I had little interest in God or religion, but as I sat stony-faced in the church pew -- glancing over at the woman I loved -- I heard something that seemed impossible: "God loves *you*."

Imagine -- God loved *me*, an abuser and wife-beater. That simple yet profound message 15 years ago changed my entire life, setting me free from my compulsive, abusive behavior.

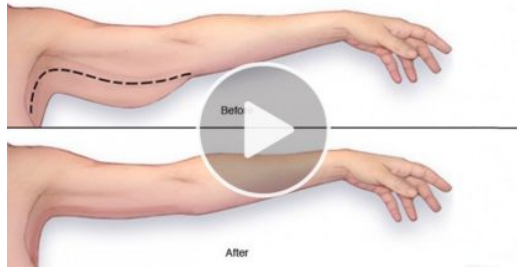
Right now, I know there are literally millions of men and women across America and around the world who struggle with the demon inside. They hate the fact they can't stop lashing out at their closest companion. They love their spouse and family -- but they strike out uncontrollably with their hands and their weaponized words.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly 20 people every minute in the U.S. -- 10 million per year -- are physically abused by an intimate partner. One in every three women -- and one in four men -- will experience domestic violence in their lifetime.

There's likely someone in your church -- perhaps in nearly every row or pew --

who's a physical or emotional abuser.

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Like me, on the surface, they may appear to "have it all together." They might have a nice home, drive a nice car, have a good job, and well-groomed kids. But behind the façade, they hide a secret no one would ever guess: they harm their spouse or partner.

Few people want to get into a heart-to-heart conversation with a domestic abuser -- unless it's to "give them a piece of their mind." **But, please, don't reject them.** I am living proof of the power of God to woo the vilest offender and completely transform a life. Once I experienced God's love and learned how valuable I am to him, the need to control others vanished.

You might think that "rehabilitation" is the job of the justice system. Let me tell you straight from someone who's been there: *Batterers' Intervention Programs don't work.*

I spent 36 weeks in a Batterers' Intervention Program. It told me that I beat my wife because I had a "macho attitude" of entitlement and I just needed to get over my "male superiority" complex. Quite honestly, I didn't have a feeling of entitlement or superiority. I just couldn't stop hurting my wife -- the woman I loved.

Determined to change, I went to helpful secular therapists and counselors, but none seemed to have the complete answer -- the "cure" I so desperately needed.

Struck by 'Love Thunderbolt'

It took a "love thunderbolt" from God to change my heart and break the stranglehold of abuse. Where did I encounter that thunderbolt? *In the church.*

It could have been *your* church. It might have been *your* Spirit-led words that pierced my heart: "God loves *you*."

You won't hear those words in a state-run program. You see, the criminal justice system is poorly equipped to deal with domestic abusers. It simply enforces restrictions on the offender from the *outside*. It cannot change a person on the *inside*.

The church, however, has an "internal transformer." When the Holy Spirit gets ahold of a person the result is a re-birth of the heart that, along with pastoral care and solid

counseling, results in radical lifestyle and behavior change.

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God does what secular “intervention programs” cannot do. He gets to the heart of the problem -- often rooted in past trauma and emotional wounds that spiral into abusive patterns later in life.

This is why the church is best positioned to address -- and stop -- domestic violence.

The church has additional advantages over the justice system. In a highly stigmatized and shame-filled situation, a pastor can offer a safe, familiar, and non-judgmental outlet for both perpetrators and victims. Church communities are best equipped to surround those who cause harm to others with people who provide accountability *and* godly, positive examples of how to handle relationships differently.

God is in the business of transforming lives, and the church is his healing channel. Remember the disciple Ananias in the Book of Acts? In obedience to God he visited Saul -- the ultimate abuser and persecutor of Christians -- prayed for him, and set him among the accountability and daily example of the local church elders. Transformed by God, Saul became the Apostle Paul -- going from abuser to the greatest missionary ever.

Perhaps you’re trembling in your boots about the prospect of having a domestic abuser in your church, and reaching out to help them on the road to healing and restoration. Don’t be intimidated. They are a “Saul” waiting for their Ananias to come to them -- and release the Apostle Paul!

At the **[Ananias Foundation](http://www.ananiasfoundation.org)**(<http://www.ananiasfoundation.org>), we stand with you, ready to help. Let’s break the shackles of domestic violence -- and show our hurting world that Jesus is still the great healer and restorer.

Michael Clark (a pseudonym) is the founder of the [Ananias Foundation](http://www.ananiasfoundation.org) and author of *From Villain to Hero*. The Ananias Foundation’s mission is to restore individuals who have harmed their partners because they were created for something better.

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