



Five Things You Can Do to Help Someone That Has Been Abused and Why It's Good for You to Do So

Several weeks ago I saw a disturbing video of a two year old child in China being struck by a vehicle laying on the street. People simply walked by, ignoring her. She died.

Recently I watched a television show called, *What Would You Do?* An actor fell down on a crowded city sidewalk, seemingly unconscious. The show wanted to see if anyone would stop to help. Sadly few did. More people stopped for an attractive young woman. But a man? Not so many stopped to help. When it was a man dressed as a homeless person with a bottle of alcohol in his hand, only one person stopped—another homeless person.

We've all been in situations where something has happened or someone has disclosed something to us, and we act as if we don't see it or don't hear it. Jesus tells a story like that where the religious leaders who should have helped, ignored and walked by someone who was beaten and laying on the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37).

Could Jesus have been talking about you? Or me?

Men, women, and children who attend our church and live in our neighborhood are suffering in homes where abuse is present. Yet we don't want to see it, and it's easy to ignore. But that would be wrong. It hurts them, and it hurt us. When we ignore someone desperate for help, they continue to suffer and we lose our humanity.

Jesus tells his followers, "Whenever you helped someone who was overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40 *The Message*). When we take our time to help someone, Jesus says that we are ministering to Him.

Here are five things that you can do if you know someone is in an abusive relationship:

1. **Listen hard, speak little.** People who disclose problems at home usually feel a great deal of shame. It's already difficult for them to talk about it, but when we jump in with our response or offer a solution, we often shut them down or give unwise or trite answers to a very painful and complex problem. Proverbs says, "He who answers before he hears, it is his folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13).
2. **Validate their experience.** It's normal to feel afraid to tell a family secret. It's common to blame oneself for one's partner's abusive behaviors. Don't minimize, trivialize or

rationalize things away. Saying things like, “I can’t believe what you’re saying, he or she seems so nice or godly or normal” is hurtful.

Instead, say things like, “It was good that you told someone.” or “I can’t imagine what you’re going through, but telling someone is the first step to getting help.” or “No matter how you disappoint your husband (or wife), you don’t deserve to be treated this way.”

3. **Pray.** We often forget how potent prayer is and that even when we don’t know the whole story, God does. Sometimes we feel helpless to really know what to do in these kinds of situations. Prayer is an important reminder that God is in charge and loves both the abused and the abuser. We must bring the situation before God daily, asking Him to intervene in a way that we cannot imagine.
4. **Offer tangible help.** James says, “Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing and you say, ‘Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well’ - but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all - it is dead and useless.” (James 2:16,17).

Does the person need medical attention? Counseling help? Legal aid? A safe place to live? Sometimes people need concrete support to break free from abusive patterns, and it takes the loving and tangible resources of a community of people to help them. The Good Samaritan didn’t just pray, he also carted the broken and battered person to the inn and paid for his care.

5. **Advocate and/or report where needed and appropriate.** If you are a mandated reporter and a child discloses that he/she has been a victim of abuse, you must report this disclosure to the proper authorities. However an adult victim of spousal abuse needs an advocate too. Someone who will come along side of him/her and speak with community agencies, attend legal proceedings, and help communicate with church leaders in order to have the best possible hope for repentance, healing, and reconciliation of the family.

I have a framed card in my office that says,

“On the street I saw a small girl cold and shivering in a thin dress, with little hope of a decent meal. I became angry and said to God: why did you permit this? Why don’t you do something about it?

For a while God said nothing. That night He replied quite suddenly: I certainly did something about it. – I made you.”

Edmund Burke once said, “all that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men (and women) do nothing.”

We may not be able to do everything needed to stem the tide of violence at home, but we certainly can do something. What can you do today?