



Grace Church of Tallahassee

Guiding Document for Domestic Abuse

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1. Biblical Foundations

God created, values, and has a particular model for marriage, family, and all human relationships. (Genesis 1:26; 2:4-25; Ephesians 5:22-6:4)

God's design for how men and women are to treat one another does not support, but clearly condemns abuse. (Prov. 12:18)

Abuse (articulated as oppression in the Bible¹) is destructive to image bearers, marriage and family, and the body of Christ, and thus must be addressed by the church. (Gen. 1:27, Gen. 9:26, Eph. 5:22-33, Col. 3:19)

Abuse is wrong (sin) and has no place in society and especially in the church. (Eph. 4:30-31, 5:11, 13; Col. 3:15)

Church based domestic abuse care is a way that God protects his flock, calls abusers to repentance and purifies his church. (Matt. 18, 1 Peter 4:17)

Governing authorities have jurisdiction over certain cases of abuse. (Rom. 13:1-5).²

2. Definition

“Abuse is desecrating the image of God in another person through the pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.”³

3. A Theology of Oppression

In addressing abuse, the Church needs a theology of oppression to accompany her theology of suffering. The theme of suffering is ubiquitous in the Scriptures, but so is the theme of oppression. God's Word teaches us that suffering produces sanctification (Rom. 5:3-4), that pain is purposeful (Rom. 8:28-29), that God comforts us in our suffering so that we can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-4), that suffering is a gift (Phil. 1:29), and that we suffer because Christ suffered (1 Pet. 2:21), among other things. A theology of suffering is essential for a church leader, but a theology of suffering without considering God's view of and response to violence and oppression can lead to reckless care and harmful counsel.

God hates oppression (Pr. 14:31; Is. 1:16-17; 10:1-2). Believers should always pay attention when the Bible tells us that God hates something. We should hate what God hates. “The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence” (Ps. 11:5).

God sees the oppressed (Ps. 9:9; 103:6; 146:7). He hears their cries, and He acts with compassion, mercy, and justice; we should do the same.

¹ The terms abuse and oppression will be used interchangeably in this document.

² For more discussion on authority, see Grace Church of Tallahassee's position paper “A Biblical Understanding of Authority.”

³ This definition was drafted by Chris Moles.

4. Elders' Statement on Domestic Abuse

Oppression is sin. While there are many contributing factors when a person chooses to abuse (bad theology, past experience of trauma, mental illness, pornography, substance abuse), there is no justification for abuse. Therefore, while abuse cannot be entirely prevented by sound teaching, teaching is nevertheless critical to help those tempted to abuse fight this sin, to throw off any attempts at justifying their abuse, and to embolden those who are being oppressed to resist abuse and seek help. It is necessary then to teach what the Bible says about the dignity, value, and worth of men and women as made in God's image, and to clearly proclaim that oppression is sin against God, the oppressed, children, and others who witness abuse.

The Elders of Grace Church of Tallahassee stand at the ready to protect the oppressed, call oppressors to repentance, discipline the unrepentant, provide ongoing biblical counsel and support for the abused, and point both the oppressed and the oppressor to the hope and healing that comes from the gospel.

5. Policy

Domestic violence in any form – physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or spiritual – is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being, and is therefore an assault upon God Himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Domestic abuse severely damages relationships and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Given this acknowledgment, the Elders at Grace Church of Tallahassee affirm the following:

- we will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling, and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship;
- domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living;
- all abuse is spiritually damaging for both the person being abused and the person who is abusing;
- domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society;
- domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage problem, the victim's problem, or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem;
- we will teach that domestic abuse is a sin;
- we will listen to, take seriously, support, and care for those affected by domestic abuse
- we will discipline abusers and remove them from the church if they are unrepentant;
- we will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity, and worth.

6. Protocol⁴

In cases of domestic abuse, the safety of the victim(s) is paramount. We will move first to care for the victim, then to correct the perpetrator and finally, if appropriate, to reconcile the marriage.

6.1. Victim Care

- **Listen** to the victim(s). If desired, a Domestic Abuse Care Advocate will be assigned.⁵
- **Recognize** the signs and ask the questions
- **Report** if you suspect harm to children, elderly, or disabled persons.
- **Assure** the victim(s) of your support.
- **Assist** practically as desired by the victim.
- **Safety planning** with the victim
- **Individual counseling** as desired by the victim. Counseling should be individualized, aimed at recovery (not marriage counseling or marriage reconciliation).

6.2. Perpetrator Correction

- **Confrontation** of the abuser only after safety is established and with the victim's advice and consent.
- **Provide discipleship/accountability** if the perpetrator is open to it.
- **Individual counseling** aimed at heart issues underlying abusive behaviors, such as power/control, entitlement, previous abuse, etc., not marriage counseling or marriage reconciliation.
- **Repentance** is the goal. It will take time to discern, and in the short-term, worldly sorrow can sometimes appear to be godly sorrow. Over time, genuine repentance always becomes evident.
- We move faster with victim care and slower with confrontation and correction.

6.3. Reconciliation

- **Reconciliation to God** takes precedence over the reconciliation of the marriage.
- **Reconciliation of the marriage** while desirable, is not always possible and should be sought under the godly wisdom of the church elders.

⁴ See page 79, *When Home Hurts*.

⁵ See section seven of this document: *Domestic Abuse Care Advocate*



Victim Care

LISTEN

to the victim(s)

RECOGNIZE

the signs and ask
the questions

REPORT

if you suspect harm
to children, elderly,
or disabled persons

ASSURE

the victim(s) of your
support

ASSIST

practically as
desired by the victim

SAFETY PLANNING

with the victim

INDIVIDUAL

COUNSELING

as desired by the
victim



Perpetrator Correction

CONFRONTATION of the abuser only

after safety is
established and
with victim's advice
and consent

PROVIDE **DISCIPLESHIP /** **ACCOUNTABILITY**

if the perpetrator is
open to it

INDIVIDUAL **COUNSELING** aimed at heart issues

REPENTANCE

is the goal



Marriage Reconciliation

RECONCILIATION TO **GOD**

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reconciliation of the
marriage

RECONCILIATION OF **THE MARRIAGE**

should be sought under the
godly wisdom of the church
elders

7. Domestic Abuse Care Advocate⁶

7.1. Role

A Care Advocate is one of a group of people trained to provide specialized support and accountability for someone who has been a victim of domestic abuse. The Care Advocate's first priority is the safety and support of the victim and children.

Care Advocates may be mobilized in one of the following ways:

- Assigned to a victim of abuse as the main point person representing the church in coordinating care and providing accountability for a specific season of time.
- Compassionate care for a member/attender identified as a victim of abuse.
- Communicating with the victim as needed regarding interactions and the process.

7.2. Requirements

- Church member in good standing.
- Completion of a Biblical Counseling course approved by the Elders of Grace Church.
- Read and affirm Grace Church of Tallahassee's: Guiding Document for Domestic Abuse Care.
- Completed all eight sessions of IBCD: Counseling Care for Domestic Abuse.
- Read *When Home Hurts* and follow the recommended guidelines for victim care.

7.3. Responsibilities

- Handle details regarding the victim with extreme discretion.
- Place the safety and support of the victim as the highest priority.
- Communicate regularly with church Elders regarding all communication and actions taken with assigned victim.
- Communicate regularly with your assigned victim to provide support.
- Coordinate with church Elders and others as needed to provide resources that might be helpful for the victim's recovery.
- Participate in care meetings as necessary for training, support, and encouragement.

⁶ Adapted from: Pierre, Jeremy, and Greg Wilson. *When Home Hurts*. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2021. Appendix E: A Sample Role Description For a Domestic Abuse Care Advocate, pp. 271 - 274