

**GCCHM Leadership Certification
Level 11, Course #5**

**MINISTERING TO THE ABUSED: THE CHURCH'S ROLE
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(Presenter's Notes)**

Introduction

Abuse is happening not only in the home, but also at school, at church, and in children's programs. Churches often fail to do the right thing—both ecclesiastically and civilly—because they haven't thought through in advance how to proceed in specific situations; or, they kept silent so as to save the image of the church.

Biblical Basis for Ministering to the Abused

In Isaiah 61:1-2, the prophet proclaimed that the Messiah would do all the following:

- Bind up the brokenhearted.
- Proclaim freedom for the captives
- Release prisoners from darkness
- Comfort all who mourn

The hearts and spirits of abuse survivors have been crushed. They are prisoners of darkness living in shame and fear. Like the Good Samaritan, we are mandated to tend to those who have been beaten, robbed of their innocence and dignity, and left discarded by the roadside of life.

Who Are the Abused?

- Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse does not discriminate. It crosses cultures, races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Male and female, young and old, can be victims of abuse.
- Children, teens, and adult females are the most likely victims.
- Over 90 percent of abuse is committed by someone familiar to the victim.

Needs of the Church

- Pastors, staff, women's ministry workers, and children's workers need to be educated regarding signs of abuse and its effects.
- Know the necessary steps to take if abuse is suspected and intervention is required.

Ramifications of Abuse

- One's ability to trust is severely impaired, especially when the abuser is a trusted family member, friend, or minister.
- Abuse distorts a person's image of God and has serious ramifications on one's ability to trust God and experience Him as a benevolent, caring Father.

- Abuse survivors tend to cross another's personal space too easily or, in contrast, keep others at extreme distances.
- As a result of being sexualized at a young age, many survivors become sexually precocious, believing they are damaged goods and can only find a sense of worth in being a sexual object.
- Have poor interpersonal skills.
- Common adult manifestations of earlier abuse include -- eating disorders, depression, anxiety, intense anger and rage, self-loathing, self-harming behaviors, physical problems, sexual difficulties, homosexuality, intimacy problems, indecisiveness, perfectionism, addictions, and a need to be in control.

What Can We Offer to the Abused?

- Unconditional acceptance of them as persons made in the image of God.
- Model clear & appropriate boundaries combined with honest, direct communication.
- Provide a positive, honest, and affirming interpersonal relationship.
- Model Christlike compassion.

Make Available Resources

- Network with Spirit-filled Christian psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, and marriage and family therapists.
- Numerous educational resources—books, videos, workbooks, and recovery programs—can be accessed and implemented in the church.
- Local support agencies, such as family violence centers or child protection centers can assist those who trying to get out of abusive and dangerous situations.
- Invest in ministries that reach out to abused children.
- Larger churches can hire a professionally trained Christian counselor.
- Offer support groups for those overcoming the effects of sexual abuse, and educational support groups for spouses of abuse survivors.

Ellen White's Counsels

"But the very time for them to do this work is when the children are babes in their arms. It is not right for parents to pet and humor their children; neither is it right for them to abuse them. A firm, decided, straightforward course of action will be productive of the best results."

Child Guidance, p.194

Churches Need to be Game-Changers

- Game-Changers have an eye to reform the entire system.
- They look to help the non-Protector see the reality of their family and empower them to act with courage.
- They look to help the Abuser see the damage they cause and empower them to become a peacemaker.

Some Ideas for Becoming a Game-Changing Ministry

- Consistently put abused students into environments where people interact with them in healthy and encouraging ways to show them that the rules of their homes do not apply to the rest of the world.
- Preach on abuse and abusive systems. Teach your children, youth, and members that abuse is never okay and has no place in the Kingdom, but that there is always healing and reconciliation available for those who want it.
- Pair students with caring adult mentors who model healthy marriages to give them hope that the family they might eventually start doesn't have to be as chaotic and painful as the one they were given. Find ways to change the rules.

Conclusion

- Ministering to survivors of abuse is rewarding, but requires substantial investments of time, money, and emotional energy.
- A church that is alive and meeting the needs of its community cannot ignore this large and growing segment of our population.
- Survivors of abuse are eager to see Christianity in action and experience a Jesus who feels their pain and binds their wounds. Is your church willing to answer the call?

References

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