



## **How Is Domestic Violence a Spiritual Issue for Victims & Survivors?**

Victims of domestic violence are abused and battered by the very people they love, trust, support, and believe in. Often abusive relationships begin as healthy relationships do: with promises of love and devotion and plans for a committed future. Perhaps the victim meets their new partner in their own faith community. The relationship may progress quickly and the couple's commitment may intensify in a relatively short period of time. There may be subtle warning signs, but nothing overtly abusive may occur for a while. The abuser may begin to emotionally abuse the victim, becoming increasingly critical, and begin to isolate her from her friends and family, monitoring her activities and contacts. The abuser may begin to question the victim's faith or misuse spiritual teachings to justify abusive actions and beliefs.

Some of the ways an abuser may specifically attack the victim's spirituality and connection with their faith community are:

- Not allowing the victim to attend the faith communities' worship services, events, and/or religious ceremonies.
- Interrupting or interfering with attempts to study religious teachings, pray or communicate with God.
- Misusing religious teaching, doctrine, scriptures and practices to justify positions of absolute authority, abuse and violence.
- Not allowing the victim to read, have access to or destroying spiritual books, materials, prayer beads, and other spiritual items.
- Accusing the victim of inappropriateness with members of the faith community and/or religious leaders to justify restriction from participation or contact.
- Forcing the victim to worship and adhere to the abuser's religious beliefs/practices that are not their own.
- Forbidding the victim from participating in religious holidays or ceremonies.
- Not allowing the victim to contribute money or to receive money from the faith community.

These are all examples of spiritual/religious abuse. When this occurs in the church, it is a safety issue, a service issue and a moral issue.

(Compiled from the North Carolina Council for Women and Domestic Violence Commission)

### **Religious Teachings Misused in Relation to DV**

- If victims are good Christians, they will not be abused. Victims of domestic violence are deserving of abuse.
- Turning to God is the only option; prayer and meditation alone will stop domestic violence.
- The only option available to a victim of domestic violence is to stay in the relationship while the perpetrator gets help.
- God gives someone only that which they deserve and can bear.
- The abuse suffered now will be rewarded later.

For more assistance, please contact Northwest Family Life Learning & Counseling Center  
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