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## Deliver Us from Evil

**D**omestic abuse looks different in different households. Sometimes the abuse is physical, and hitting, shouting, or hair-pulling are a regular part of your home. Other times, the abuser won't ever lay a hand on you—but you will be shamed, called names, and manipulated. Maybe you think you did something to spur him on, or that you were too passive or too demanding, or that you are somehow, in some way, to blame for the abuse you are experiencing.

Your experience of domestic abuse may be very different than someone else's, but no matter what, one truth stands the same for all: *It is never your fault.*

No matter what kind of abuse you have experienced, there is nothing you can do, nothing you can say, nothing you think that makes you deserving of it. There is no mistake you could have made and no sin you could have committed to make you deserving of violence.

You do not deserve this. And it is never your fault.

You did not ask for this. You should not be silenced. You are not worthless. You do not have to pretend like nothing happened. You are not damaged goods, forgotten or ignored by God, or “getting what you deserve.”

But you are created in the image of God. You should be treated with dignity, love, and respect, but instead you are or were the victim of abuse and violence, and *it was wrong*. You were sinned against.

If you're still not convinced, listen to the opinion of domestic violence expert Lundy Bancroft: “Abuse is not caused by relationship dynamics. You can't manage your partner's abusiveness by changing your behavior, but he wants you to think that you can.”<sup>1</sup> Situations of

domestic violence are often extremely difficult to deal with, because abusers are often masters of control and manipulation.

If you are in a situation of domestic abuse or think you might be, there's a few things you need to know. First, the abuse is not your fault. Second, while you may feel drained, depressed, frightened, ashamed, and confused, you are not alone. And third, help is available to you.

Maybe the abuse isn't physical—that doesn't mean it's not abuse. Most abuse cases begin with emotional, verbal, and other nonphysical forms of abuse and then escalate to physical forms. Or maybe the abuse has been going on for a while and shows no sign of becoming physical.

It might seem as though "violence" is too intense of a word to describe the kind of abuse that's "only" emotional. Here's what theologian Hans Boersma has to say about that: "Violence need not necessarily be physical. Emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse—and at times even more so."<sup>2</sup> Ethicist Wolfgang Huber argues that violence is better defined as the intent to hurt or torture, more than physical injury.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that your abuse doesn't send you to the hospital or leave scars doesn't make it any less painful, and it doesn't make it any less wrong. The scars of emotional abuse are very real, they can run very deep, and they are not to be dismissed. In fact, emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse—sometimes even more so (we'll talk about this more in chapter 4).

Violence seems like an intense word. But that is exactly what the experience of domestic violence is. There is both physical and non-physical violence. Augustinian Friar Donald X. Burt defines a violent act as "any act which *contravenes the rights* of another. It can also be described as an act which *causes injury* to the life, property, or person of a human being, oneself, or others."<sup>4</sup> Leo. D. Lefebure, a professor at Georgetown University, offers a helpful definition of violence as "the attempt of an individual or group to impose its will on others through any nonverbal, verbal, or physical means that inflict psychological or physical injury."<sup>5</sup>

Naming domestic violence for what it is—and dealing with it as such—is important for this essential reason: the abuse usually gets worse. Infrequent episodes usually progress to more frequent ones. Less severe episodes usually progress to more severe ones. Domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to physical violence. And while physical injury may be the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also severe.

If you're reading this and see signs that you are in an abusive relationship, we applaud you for having the courage to name what you are experiencing, to call it what it is, and to begin seeking a better way. Because the truth is, you were made for more than this. God loves you and it grieves Him to see you suffer this abuse—whatever it might look like. We applaud you for picking up this book in the first place, which is nothing less than an act of courage.

And we sincerely hope and pray you will next act on that courage by removing yourself from the abuse. This isn't about mustering up more courage to stay with him and continue to put yourself in harm's way. No, this is about courage to do what's best for you by fleeing the abuse altogether, in order to find a physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe place. This is our greatest hope for you.

Of course the process of getting to that safe place will be complicated and multilayered. Because as long as you are in a relationship with an abusive person, the abuse will not simply go away on its own. You don't need to confront him alone, because what you most need is to be safe and we will provide several strategies for this. We will be also very straightforward with you about the sort of dangers you will risk when you break off an abusive relationship so that you know what you will have to watch out for (or, if you are a friend or loved one, what you can help guard against).

The process of getting to that safe place may sound frightening or even impossible at this point, but to stay poses an even greater risk to you and your children, if you have them.

The pain is real, but the healing and hope is just as real. We are

convinced, because the Bible teaches it and experience confirms it, that “God is the God of Life, the one who redeems. Our faith teaches us that out of suffering, loss, and death, God brings life.”<sup>6</sup> God protects and delivers His people from suffering, abuse, and violence.

Jesus would not have taught us to ask God to “Deliver us from evil,” if it were not possible.

### DELIVER US FROM EVIL

This truth comes from the Lord’s Prayer, which is one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. Here is a traditional version found in Matthew 6:9–13:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

We’re going to spend a minute on this prayer because it is familiar to a lot of Christians and explains why we believe God offers hope—concrete hope—for victims of domestic violence (more on this in chapter 9).

Some of the prayer seems, well, just spiritual. When we pray for God to be honored, to forgive our sins, or to deliver us from temptation, it can seem like we are asking for things to happen on some special spiritual plane apart from the real world. After all, how can we tangibly tell if God is honored?

But then the other half of the prayer asks for concrete, visible things. God's will on earth. Daily bread. And finally—and for us, most importantly—deliverance from evil. These are reminders that God's power extends to the everyday realm and that He is active in our lives.

Not all of the people we meet are trustworthy. Not all of the environments we live in are trustworthy. The ordinary, everyday world is filled with evil and fraught with temptation. This portion of the Lord's Prayer, then, is about asking God to bolster our faith, to give us strength, and to save us from evil and its effects—violence, affliction, and suffering.

This, by the way, is a prayer our heavenly Father loves to answer yes to. The Lord's Prayer addresses God as *Abba*—the word used by Jewish children for their earthly fathers. Praying to God as “Our Father” conveys the authority, warmth, and intimacy of a loving father's care. “Our Father” is also “in heaven,” reminding believers of God's sovereign rule over all things—including the things that we fear the most. And not only that, but our loving and powerful *Abba* wants to and is able to deliver us from evil. An incredible thought!

Of course, the thought of calling God “Father” is not a comforting one for some. Many have experienced not love from their earthly fathers, but abuse. And for those with this experience, to see God through this lens is anything but a comfort. But God is not a God of abuse, and to Him, being *Abba* is to be tender, loving, and protecting. And He is powerful enough to transform your definition of this word—despite the pain you may associate with it.

Because this *Abba* yearns to deliver His children from evil, not subject them to it. And what's more, He is able to do just that for you.

### WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS BOOK

If you're reading this and have suffered domestic abuse, we know you must be in the midst of a whirlwind of emotions. So we'll cut to the chase and tell exactly where you can find what you most need to hear:

- If you need to know if what you're experiencing is domestic abuse, please turn to chapter 2.
- If you need to know if others will recognize what you're suffering is considered domestic abuse, please go to chapter 3.
- If you need to know whether you should leave or stay, please turn to chapters 5 and 10.
- If you need to know what he's really thinking and what the obstacles might be to leaving, please turn to chapter 4.
- If you need step-by-step advice on how to get out of an abusive relationship, including supporters to contact, numbers to call, and plans to help you stay safe, please go to appendixes 1 and 2.
- If you are suffering from shame, guilt, and other negative emotions as the result of abuse, please turn to chapter 6.
- If you need to recover from an experience where the words of the Bible have been used to threaten you or keep you in submission, please turn to chapters 7 and 8.
- If you need to know how God views you and your situation, please turn to chapter 9.
- If you need to pray, but don't have the words, please turn to chapter 11.

## WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

### *Victims and Survivors of Abuse*

We use the term “victim” throughout the book, and before we go further we want to explain what we mean. The term “victim” signifies the cruelty and unfairness of domestic violence and puts the responsibility for the assault where it belongs—on the assailant. In this book, we use the term “victim,” though “survivor” can also be appropriate as well. Generally, the terms are used interchangeably by people who have experienced domestic violence and by the professionals who interact with them.

However, there are distinctions. “Victim” is often associated with

the early trauma following an experience of domestic violence and emphasizes the fact that frequently a crime has been committed. This term is also used for emergency department responses. The terms “survivor” and “victim/survivor” are most often used within later periods of recovery to reclaim power. “Survivor” is often the chosen word for those who do not want to be viewed as remaining under the perpetrator’s influence and control.

We will use the term “victim” rather than “survivor” for two reasons. First, the unfortunate reality is that not all victims are survivors as many victims of domestic abuse are killed. Second, some victims do not feel like survivors and using that term can heap shame on them as if they have failed or done something wrong in the healing process. If you prefer the term “survivor,” we support you in your chosen identity.

However you identify yourself, please understand this: this book is a resource for healing and hope, not a substitute for reporting abuse, legal care, medical care, counseling, pastoral care, or family and community support. We focus exclusively on the emotional pain resulting from the violence and what the Bible says about the experience of domestic violence. We have ministered to many victims who want and need a clear explanation of how God’s grace applies to their experiences of domestic violence and its effects on their lives. We have also talked to many family members, friends, and ministers who know someone who was abused and are looking for a solid, gospel-based book that would be helpful in serving victims.

### *Pastors, Ministry Leaders, Friends, and Family*

If you have tried to approach a church about your experience with abuse and been disappointed, you know firsthand that many churches are woefully underequipped to deal with domestic violence. This is a tragic reality, and one we hope will soon change. But please don’t write churches off altogether as a resource for your struggle. Instead, see appendix 3 for ways your local church can care for you if you are at risk.

While this book is primarily for you, it is also for church leaders,

church members, and friends and family who know someone in an abusive situation.

If you are a leader in ministry, statistics tell us there are people under your care who have suffered—or are currently suffering—from domestic violence. This is particularly tragic because part of God’s mission for the church is to proclaim God’s healing and to seek justice for everyone it encounters.<sup>7</sup> And this book is to help equip you in doing just that for women in abusive situations. Additionally, we’ve put together a list of resources to help further your understanding of domestic violence and how to care for its victims, which you can find in appendix 4.

### *Women*

Finally, we talk about women and use female pronouns for victims. Statistics, which we’ll discuss later, point to the fact that the overwhelming majority of domestic violence victims are women. But we also know that there are male victims out there as well, who sometimes suffer from the added burden of feeling that it is unacceptable or a personal failure for a man to be the victim of domestic violence. If you are a man who has been victimized, even though we will focus on women here, please know that you are not forgotten.

### *A Prayer to Begin*

If reading this has sparked the urge to pray, Psalm 55 may be especially apt for you before you read any further. It is a prayer that pleads with God to comfort and save a person who has been harmed by someone close to them. God listens not only to religious psalm writers and holy men from thousands of years ago; He listens to *your* prayers and cries too. Perhaps the words of Psalm 55 can serve as your prayer.

Listen to my prayer, O God,  
do not ignore my plea;  
hear me and answer me . . .  
If an enemy were insulting me,

I could endure it;  
if a foe were rising against me,  
I could hide.

But it is you, a man like myself,  
my companion, my close friend,  
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship  
at the house of God,  
as we walked about  
among the worshipers.

Let death take my enemies by surprise;  
let them go down alive to the realm of the dead,  
for evil finds lodging among them . . .

Evening, morning and noon

I cry out in distress,  
and he hears my voice.

(Ps. 55:2–3, 13–15, 17–18)