



2021 Justice and Advocacy Week: Domestic and Family Violence

Rev Gayle Hill

Psalm 56

For several years, I worked as a Christian counsellor as part of the overall role in my local church. Interestingly, we received referrals from a women's refuge in the area. All these women had experienced domestic violence. Some had been living in this vicarious situation with their children for many years and finally had the opportunity, courage, and determination to leave. In many ways it was remarkable we were able to gain the trust of those referring to us from the refuge. If not contextualised, Christianity can appear to be a religion that in some ways condones a power imbalance between genders. This belief is more widespread than we realise. The view is reinforced when we superficially read scripture. Words like, submission and obey can infer a subjugation that if not understood properly, lead to forms of abuse, whether subtle or intentional.

The Bible never uses the word abuse. But it does use the words violence and oppression (*meaning crushing or burdening someone by the abuse of power or authority*). All violence is considered an offence against God and against humanity. Scripture is full of condemnations of violence – time and again violence is associated with wickedness and condemned as “detestable to the Lord” (Psalm 11, Proverbs 3 & 10).

In particular, violence against women is condemned. In Jewish law, rape was viewed as equivalent to murder (Deut 22:26), as was pressuring a woman physically (Deut 22:25–27) or psychologically (Deut 22:28–29) into sex.

But our God is on the side of the oppressed and abused as we read in Psalm 56. The Psalm recounts David's experiences, but it could equally be those of a woman and family experiencing domestic violence. There are many movements in this Psalm which arrive in the final belief that our God is merciful and will restore injustice.

1. First the psalmist asks for mercy.
2. Second, we notice that the experience of oppression is constant. It never leaves the pursued. This is definitely the experience of women facing domestic violence. Imagine living in constant fear and uncertainty every second of your entire life. This does not account for a flourishing life.
3. Third, the psalmist notes that through this constant fear, the oppressed put their trust and praise in God and reassert the belief that God is a God who saves.
4. Fourth, and disconcertingly, there is a sense that the oppressed is conspired against by twisting their words. Often women in domestic violence situations are disbelieved by relatives, friends, and even those in the church.
5. Fifth there is not only a plea, but a belief that God will “note” the tears and emotional response to being oppressed. This belief aligns with the assurance that God is close, not distant, involved, not removed.
6. And finally, there is the assurance that God will deliver.



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Jesus himself, refused to play by the rules of violence and power (Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 26:52, Mark 10:41-45). This new revolution - modelled by Jesus himself - means that the powerful should give up their privilege to the vulnerable, the abuser should stop using violence against those powerless to resist, and the institution should stop ignoring the trauma of the abuse survivor.

Delivery from domestic violence is something we are all called to participate in with God, by believing, speaking up, confronting, and acting.

If you are experiencing domestic violence, know that any form of oppression, is wrong and totally against God's plan for flourishing. (Refer to the video and resources on this page for assistance.)

When we ascribe excuses for our behaviour, whether it is as the abuser, or as the abused, or as the church, we diminish and falsely define God's love and intentions for us. This is sin.

Let us join in with the Psalmist who says that in all good conscience, as those who are on the side of justice,

that I may walk before God
in the light of life.

Bio: Rev Gayle Hill is the Head of Mission Catalyst, BUV Support Hub

The main points of this devotion were taken from the resources from:

https://www.saferresource.org.au/the_bible_on_domestic_family_violence

Other resources:

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/januaryfebruary/three-views-after-domestic-violence-why-should-christian-wi.html?share=joPNrHiRrj0AkyekgM9FVBxvqktgid2M&paging=off>