

- **She lives on false hope.**

She believes that if she tries a little harder or waits a little longer, things will change. Her hopes are kept alive by the cycle of abuse—period of tension building, followed by violence, followed by honeymoon period. She believes him when he says he won't hit her again.

- **She suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome.**

After long periods of trauma and repeated abuse, some women develop "post-traumatic stress disorder." This is a mental disorder characterized by significant changes in the way a person thinks, acts, and behaves. The victim believes she is helpless and lacks the power to change the situation. They may experience flashbacks or nightmares about past abuses, and may develop unhealthy coping skills to avoid anything that reminds them of the abuse.

- She does not see divorce as an option because of her religious and cultural beliefs.
- He has convinced her that she needs him to survive, since he has isolated her from outside relationships.
- She fears living alone and making all the decisions.
- She is waiting until the children are grown.
- She has a close bond with her step-children or grandchildren/step-grandchildren, and realizes she may have either minimal or no contact with them if she leaves.
- Her life is bound up in her family. She believes she will have no identity if she leaves.
- She does not realize that leaving does not necessarily lead to divorce. In some cases, separation is the wake-up call which will cause her husband to seek help and reconcile the marriage.

**Reasons why she leaves:**

- She believes that another abusive episode is inevitable, which may be fatal this time. He has threatened her life, and this time she believes he is serious. She finds a loaded weapon which he has hidden.
- She hears of other women who have left, and this gives her hope.
- She is on the brink of losing her sanity, and has to do something before she goes over the edge.

- He has begun to abuse the children, either verbally, physically, or sexually.
- She has received promises of support from family members or friends. Someone has become her anchor in the storm.
- He has refused to seek help, and seems to be losing control more often.
- She hears him telling friends and family lies about her, accusing her of being the one who is threatening him, and claiming to be the victim.
- She has been counseled by Christian therapists and church leaders to leave for her own protection.
- She finds evidence of sexual perversion or criminal activity.
- She has done everything humanly possible to preserve the marriage, from seeking professional help to active involvement by the church, but the situation has worsened instead of improving.

*Dear One,*

You are important and precious to God.

You are loved and valued just because of who you are.

Even though you have suffered greatly,

God offers you hope and joy

and the promise to walk with you each step of the way.

You are not alone!

Reach out to friends who care and to a God who loves you.

Remember . . . Domestic violence is a crime!

No one has a right to batter you, verbally or physically.

It's up to you to break the silence, confront the evil,  
and stop the cycle of abuse.

May God grant you strength and peace, heal your pain,  
and restore you to the woman He intended you to be.

*If you are thinking about leaving an abusive relationship, or are somewhere in the process, please request a free copy of our "Safety Plan." [www.focusministries1.org](http://www.focusministries1.org)*



*Why  
doesn't  
she just  
leave?*

**Why women stay  
in abusive relationships**



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Unfortunately, the first question that comes to people's mind is, "*Why does she put up with it? Why doesn't she just leave?*" When we ask that question first, we lose sight of the criminal and the crime and begin to place blame on the victim.

By asking "*why do women stay*" people have managed to blame the victims instead of doing anything to stop violent behavior. Few people will ask, "*What's wrong with that man? Is he in jail? Is she getting adequate police protection? Are the children provided for? Does she need medical help, financial assistance, or legal aid? Does she have a place to stay?*" Instead of blaming the victim, why don't we ask, "*Why hasn't this violence been stopped? What can we do to prevent it? Has the abuser been confronted and referred to a treatment program?*"

The fact is, most women who are abused do leave, and exhibit incredible courage and resourcefulness. But a woman leaves on the average of 7 times—leaving and coming back home—before she leaves for good.

#### **Reasons Why Women Choose to Stay:**

- **Confusion**

One day he worships her and places her on a pedestal. The next day she doesn't meet his expectations and falls from grace. It is a long fall, and she can't understand why he has changed from a loving, generous husband into a maniacal bully who delights in punishing her. A day or two later, he places her back on the pedestal and turns on the charm by sending her flowers and promising to love her forever. This emotional up-and-down strategy keeps her off-balance and in a state of confusion.

- **FEAR!**

She may get killed! A woman is at 75% greater risk of harm from her abuser when she leaves. She has every reason to be afraid. He has threatened to take the children away from her if she leaves, and she knows he will do it. He will lie in court

and testify that she is not a good mother. If he does not get custody, he will kidnap them. In extreme cases, he will kill her and the children. "*If I can't have you and the kids, then I'll make sure no one else will either.*"

She also fears the condescending and judgmental reactions of others who believe she is responsible for breaking up the family if she leaves. The same people who asked, "Why do you put up with it? Why don't you just leave?" are the same ones who pass judgment when she finally leaves. She may also fear offending God because she has been taught the scripture in Malachi that says "God hates divorce," and she is unaware that the same scripture also says "God hates violence."

- **Self-blame**

She may feel responsible for the breakup of the family, or for the abuser's behavior. He has told her over and over that she is the reason he gets upset, and she believes the lie.

- **Shame and embarrassment**

She doesn't want to tell anyone because it is embarrassing to admit she has allowed herself to get into or stay in this situation. She is ashamed of making poor decisions, and failing to make her marriage work.

- **Need to protect abuser**

Some women feel guilty for betraying the abuser. She believes he needs extra love and care because he has been wounded in the past. She feels it is her responsibility to help him become whole. She loves the part of him that is not abusive. She feels sorry for him because he has no one else to love him and take care of him. She is afraid he will fall apart or commit suicide if she leaves.

- **Disassociation from the pain**

The abuser convinces her that the violence wasn't as bad as she claims, or that it didn't happen at all. Sometimes he accuses her of hitting him, even though she is the one with the bruises. Her body feels the pain, and she knows she has been hurt, but her mind tells her it really wasn't that bad—ignore

it—he won't do it again—he promised to change—or if "I" could just change.

- **She denies the reality that the man she loves is capable of seriously hurting or killing her.**

Even though she knows he has hurt her in the past, she cannot believe he is truly an evil person because she would not choose to be with such a person, and she still really loves him.

- **It's easier to deny abuse than to face making hard choices and an uncertain future.**

She does not have a job, and fears that she cannot support herself and her children. Most women face extreme financial, social, and emotional hardships when they leave, and often find limited or no help available to them. Weak criminal justice systems offer no hope and have failed victims again and again. There are 3 times more animal shelters in the United States than shelters for battered women!

- **She is ignorant of the facts and consequences of domestic violence**

She believes the cause of violence is within her instead of within the abuser. She believes it is a temporary problem based on outside circumstances (like stress at work). She believes that once the stress is relieved the beatings will stop, or "If I lose weight, he'll love me more." She does not know that abuse is spiritually and morally wrong.

- **She believes children need a father-figure, and doesn't want her kids to suffer from divorce.**

Women who stay for this reason are not aware that children suffer much more long-lasting trauma by being in an abusive home than in a single-parent home.

- **She is blamed for causing or not leaving her predicament, but abandoned when she actually leaves.**

Doctors, therapists, and clergymen don't take the abuse seriously and send women back home. Some feel she got herself into this while others ask "*why doesn't she just leave?*"