

Summer 2014

Can I Trust My Perceptions?

Joan woke up in the morning with heaviness on her heart. "Another day, another problem," she thought. It seemed like every day there was another mountain to climb, hurdles to jump, and barriers to get around.

She could not make sense of her relationship with Tom. One minute he appeared sensitive to her feelings and the next he was yelling at her for not going along with his perspective.

She tried to keep the peace in the relationship, but that required her to follow his instructions to the tee jumping the hurdles when he said jump.

"This is madness," she exclaimed. "I think I am losing my mind!" She kept that statement to herself fearing that he would call her the crazy one. Nothing ever seemed good enough. She could feel resentment and anger building inside. She did not like the person she was becoming. What happened to the old Joan, the calm, compassionate, caring one?

She proceeded with her day, household chores, home schooling, running errands for her husband, etc. She hoped that focusing on other things would distract her from the craziness all around her and keep her mind from whirling.

She felt so weary having to be on her guard. She hated the instant replay

that played in her mind when accused of not doing something right by her husband. "Can I ever trust my own perceptions," she wondered.

Women like Joan get caught up in the whirlwind of confusion, verbal barrage, and emotional torture perpetrated by the person who is sup-



posed to love her. They want clarity but are afraid to reach out for help fearing that they will not be believed or told that they are the problem. After all, their husband says he is following Scripture.

They expend extreme amount of time and energy trying to determine the best course of action. It is the first thing they think about when they wake up and the last thing on their mind when they go to bed. They do not realize that

they have made their husband and marriage an idol.

Although the women may know God, it is difficult for them to keep their focus on Him instead of their relationship. Some may even begin to question the presence of God. They feel that God has abandoned them and withdrawn His love and compassion for them. Blinded by their situation, they miss the glimpses of God's faithfulness to them and his provision.

A cloud of despair hovers over their mind as they try to make sense of what is happening. This is quite difficult for the abuser has distorted the truth through deceit, lies, and manipulation.

To obtain clarity, it is important for each woman to embrace the truth given in God's Word and to soak it into every part of her being. Truth combats lies. Part of absorbing Scripture is keeping in constant communication (prayer) with our Lord and Savior who guides and directs our path.

The Bible is our filtering system to purify our mind and life. If we seek the Lord, he provides insight and wisdom that dispenses any confusion an abuser can exhort. God whispers truth to us when we stay close to Him.

Paula Silva

Learning about Abuse...the Hard Way

I knew Juan had experienced physical abuse growing up, but I did not understand the potential impact on his life. Juan was a new Christian when we met, growing like a weed, and excited about serving God. He also condemned physical abuse, assuring me I need not fear such a thing. I loved him and trusted him, and we eventually married. I never saw it coming.

Juan kept his promise and was never physically abusive. However, *something* in our relationship did feel right, but I could not pinpoint it. As our family grew and involvement in ministry increased, so did our stress. Our problem-resolution techniques were not working, and they always ended with me giving in to keep the peace. It was confusing. Did I *never* have good input? Were my ideas *always* bad? It took a while to realize that Juan simply did not value my opinion. I was never told this point blank, but gradually it became clear he had no interest in my point of view.

For example, Juan showed me a catalog, encouraging me to choose a birthday gift. I picked a pastel-colored dress. Upon seeing it, disappointment came across his face. Turning the page, he pointed out a plaid skirt, as if to say, "*Wrong answer. This is what you really want!*" The conversation that followed revealed he wanted to buy *his* preference while having the appearance of letting me choose. I did not realize this was indicative of a growing trend that would continue to emerge throughout our marriage.

Admittedly, the above scenario was not a huge deal. That is what makes

the abuse so mind-boggling. It's rarely clear-cut or obvious. An individual event can easily be overlooked or forgiven. Yet the continual hacking away at my self-worth was, in fact, killing me from the inside out.

Eventually it became apparent that I was supposed to innately know Juan's expectations. When I failed, I was called unsubmitive or disrespectful. Sometimes, after Juan expressed disappointment in me, I would ask:

"What have I done to make you feel disrespected?" He would glare at me in disgust and quickly point out that I knew *exactly* what I had done. Trying to be patient, I gently told him I did *not* know, but I wanted to so that I would not repeat the offense. That angered him more. In his eyes, if I truly loved him, I would *just know*.

Another time, while disagreeing on a child-rearing issue, Juan shared his opinion while I listened quietly. When finished, I asked, "*Can I say something?"*

He glared at me and said, "*Why?"*"

"I listened to you and heard you out."

His defiant response: "*Well, you can share, but that does not mean I will listen. Go ahead and talk if you want!*"

It would be several more months before I would stumble across my first book on emotional abuse and discover terms like "crazy-making" and "walking on eggshells." I needed no definition; I was finally given words to describe my life! It was then I realized that physical abuse was not the only kind of abuse. As I read, I felt the author had been following me and recording all our crazy conversations.

Plus, I realized that *others like me were out there*, suffering in silence in their supposedly "Christian" marriages, living a double life, giving one impression to the church leaders, while living a completely different reality at home. In a strange sort of way, it was liberating to finally be able to label what had been happening to me over the last two decades.

I wish I could say I have a story-book ending, but I cannot. Things eventually got so intense that my physical health was suffering, not to mention my spiritual and emotional health, as well as that of our children. I separated from my husband, with the hope that he would agree to get counseling so that we could reconcile, but after nearly four years he still refuses help, yet blames me.

But God has not abandoned me by any means! In the depth of the crisis, God has shown me what it means to be wrapped in His arms, assured of His constant presence and unconditional love. He is my Rock and has surrounded me with many "Rockettes" in the form of godly friends and counselors who helped navigate the rocky waters. I know God can do the miracle of changing my husband's heart, but I also know that He is sufficient should we remain separated. I have found peace during this time of limbo as I learn to rest in Him each and every day, knowing that my heavenly Father is more than enough (Psalm 23:1).

Karolyn Dekker

Helper versus Rescuer



Helping a battered woman is a process that may take a long time. We have to realize that she needs to move according to her timetable and not ours."

Erin Clark, manager of hotline services, Safe Place

Helper	Rescuer
Believes that a battered woman with support, information, and resources can make her own decision regarding her relationship	Feels that they know what is best for the victim and will make the decisions for her
Asks and gives the victim what she needs and directs her accordingly	Tells the victim what she needs and sets up a plan for her
Listens attentively giving the victim as much time as she needs to talk	Listens but interrupts and does most of the talking
Establishes and maintains appropriate boundaries	Feels they need to be there for the victim 24/7
Feels the victim can develop options with guidance	Feels the victim is helpless and needs someone to save her
Waits for the victim to express a need before helping	Gives help even if the victim does not ask for help
Presents information so the victim can make an informed decision	Gives advice as to tells the victim what she should do
Encourages the victim as she takes the lead in decision making	Tries to control the victim under the guise of "helping" and "caring"
Does not judge and criticize the victim for decisions made	Gets offended if the victim does not follow through on what they suggest
Perseveres and walks the hard journey with the victim	Gives up and walks away when the victim does not move forward as they think she should
Displays confidence in their self-worth and identity	Helps because it meets their need for self-worth and value
Knows their limitations in fulfilling a victim's need and refers out to other resources	Tries to meet every need of the victim

It Can't Happen to Me

I am quite simply the poster child for "This Can't Happen to Me." I was raised in a stable Christian home. My mom and dad just recently celebrated 50 years of marriage. Both of my parents were raised in loving Christian homes, and so on and so forth for generations. I am the baby of the family, the only girl. I have two older brothers. One was my partner in crime, while the other was more like a father figure. In high school, I was the president of the debate team and floor captain of the volleyball team. I was in all honors courses and got pretty much straight A's.

Can you see the picture of the perfect middle class upbringing? Of course, my childhood was far from perfect, but it definitely doesn't fit most people's picture of where an abuse victim would come from. Yet, *it did* happen to me.

In college, I began dating a Christian guy, from a good Christian home. After just two dates he wanted a commitment. It was every girl's dream, right?! He was so attentive and made an effort to listen to the music I liked, study with me, take me dancing, and hang out with my friends. We spent every possible free moment together. When he felt we didn't get to spend enough time together between school and both of us having part time jobs, I quit my job. He kept his. We'd see another girl walking down the street,

and he'd suggest I wear an outfit like hers. Suddenly he didn't like to dance, and he didn't like me dancing with anyone else. I stopped going to the places I had gone before I met him. I spent less and less time with my friends.

Over time things escalated even more. My internal warning bells would start to go off. But he said he loved me, so I would ignore them. No one had ever paid this much attention to me before. I was caught between feeling loved by him and being suffocated by him. I desperately wanted him to love me, and I found myself willing to do what I had to do to keep him loving me.

The name calling got worse. He called me things I wouldn't call my worst enemy. He constantly insisted that I wasn't a normal girl. A normal girl would do this or that, especially if it related to sex. When he'd get extremely frustrated, he'd put his fist through the wall. His jealousy became all consuming.

After 2 years of dating, he asked me to marry him, and I said yes. A year later, we were married. A month later, he hit me for the first time.

It didn't matter that I had come from a Christian home or not. It didn't matter whether I came from a stable home environment

or not. It didn't matter that I came from a middle class family in a good community or not. It still happened to me. It didn't matter that I managed to complete 2 Bachelor's degrees and a Master's degree. It didn't matter that I was the bread winner for our family. It didn't matter that we had the perfect house in the perfect suburban neighborhood and 2 kids. It still happened to me.

It happened to me because I did not know any better. Dating violence was not something that happened to someone like me. If it didn't happen to girls like me, then why should I be aware of it? Why should I know what the warning signs were? Why should I be taught what constituted a healthy relationship versus an unhealthy one? I went to Sunday school. I went to youth group every Sunday. Didn't I understand just how much God loved me? Didn't I find myself worthy of that love? Why would I let someone abuse me if I did?

If I had known all of these things, this wouldn't have happened to me.

Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves.

Ezekiel 33:5



It Can't Happen to Me

Hindsight is truly 20/20. So let me give you the benefit of my 20/20 vision. You do need to worry about dating violence. Intimate partner violence can affect you, your child, your friend, your neighbor or your parent.

Did you know . . .

- Nearly half of girls between 10 and 12 know friends who are verbally abused.¹
- 1 in 5 of girls aged 13 to 14 have a friend that is or has been a victim of dating violence.¹
- 72% of the girls in 8th or 9th are already dating and therefore at risk.²

Did you know . . .

- It doesn't matter what neighborhood you live in, teen dating violence runs across race, gender, and socioeconomic lines.³
- 1 in 3 teens in the United States reports knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped or physically hurt by their dating partner.⁴
- Nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year.⁵

Did you know . . .

- Girls between the ages of 16 and 24 experiences the highest rate of intimate partner violence, almost triple the national average.⁶
- Nearly half of dating college women report experiencing violent and abusive dating behaviors.⁷
- 1 in 6 college women have been sexually abused in a dating relationship.⁷

Now you know . . .

The reality is that dating violence can affect you or someone you love.

- No matter how rich or poor your family is
- No matter what type of home you come from
- No matter what color your skin is
- No matter how old you are
- No matter what gender you are
- No matter what level of education you have reached
- No matter what religion you are
- No matter whether you are on your first date or have been dating for a year

Sources:

1. TRU study for Liz Claibourne, Inc. & Nat'l NTDA Helpline, (2008)
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3. "Teen Victim Project," National Center for Victims of Crime, 2004
4. Liz Claiborne Inc., Conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, (February 2005)
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Physical Dating Violence Among High School Students—United States, 2003," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, May 19, 2006, Vol. 55, No. 19
6. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice and Statistics, *Intimate Partner Violence in the United States, 1993-2004*. 2006
7. Fifth & Pacific Companies, Inc. (Formerly: Liz Claiborne, Inc.), Conducted by Knowledge Networks, (December 2010). "College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll"

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Thoughts to Ponder

The longer someone stays in an abusive relationship the greater the effect of abuse has on the victim spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Weariness and exhaustion sets in. The mind games play havoc on one's perceptions.



What did your gut tell you that did not match up with the abuser's perceptions?

*Be not far from me, O God;
come quickly, O my God, to help me.
May my accusers perish in shame;
may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.
But as for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.*

Psalm 71:12-14

Domestic Violence Training for Churches/Groups/Organizations

Topics:

- What is Domestic Violence?—A Closer Look at Verbal, Emotional, Sexual, Physical, and Spiritual Abuse
- Characteristics of an Abuser/Why Does He Do That?
- Recognizing a Victim of Domestic Violence
- Why Women Stay or Leave/Developing a Safety Plan
- How Does Domestic Violence Affect the Family Especially Children
- Teen Dating Violence
- What Can the Church Do?
- Do's and Don'ts of Counseling
- Signs that the Abuser Has Changed
- Church Safety Plan/Risks
- Becoming an Anchor in the Storm/How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship

Development of Domestic Violence Program in Churches

- Do's and Don'ts of Counseling Victims and Abusers
- Development of Domestic Violence Policies and Procedures for Churches
- Step By Step Approach for Churches to Address the Issue of Domestic Violence
- Training for support group leaders

Prayer Requests & Urgent Needs

Urgent Needs:

- **New board members** with expertise in fund-raising, marketing, and the legal issues

Praises:

- **New office space**
- **Those that donated items for our office**
- **Dedicated** support group leaders
- **New support group** in South Holland, IL
- **For those that attended** our Partners in the Journey and Faith Based DV

Seminars in June

Prayer Requests:

- **Pray for our TEEN FOCUS team** as they develop our teen program
- **Pray for funds** to hire much needed staff
- **Pray for board members** as they make critical decisions regarding the direction of the ministry
- **Pray for women and families** who contact our FOCUS Women's

Center.

- **Pray for pastors' wives** that are being abused.
- **Pray for individuals, churches, and businesses** to commit to **monthly giving**.
- **Pray for all the FOCUS support group leaders**
- **Pray for houses** in IL, to be donated for use as transitional homes.
- **Pray for churches** to understand the gravity of domestic violence and will develop

appropriate responses.

- **Pray for FOCUS** as we plan for 2015.
- **Pray for those** that come to the ministry for help that do not know Jesus.



Upcoming Events

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The mission of FOCUS Ministries is to provide a safe place for teens, women, and families who experience domestic violence and abusive relationships to find hope and healing in Jesus Christ.

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- **Sept. 12 (4-6 p.m.) & Sept. 13. (1-3 p.m.) 2014:** Open House at New Office. 57 E. Park Blvd., Villa Park, IL
- **Oct. 3-4, 2014:** Partners in the Journey Training (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **Oct. 4, 2014:** Faith Based DV Training, Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **Nov. 22, 2014:** FOCUS "Fun"draiser, Harvard EFC, Villa Park, IL

The FOCUS team is available to come to your church for a women's retreat, seminars, workshops, DV training or other speaking engagements.

contactus@focusministries1.org

O Lord, You Alone Are My Hope! Psalm 71:5 NLT

Ways You Can Help FOCUS Ministries



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