



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

WHEN WE ARE ABUSED

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Romans 8:28; 12:19 | Ephesians 4:31-32 | Hebrews 4:15-16

► SUMMARY

Throughout the world, people have suffered abuse of one form or another.

That's why we can't avoid dealing with this issue in our churches. God never condones abuse, nor is it justifiable under any circumstances. Yet we live in a fallen world, and many believers have experienced physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse. I'd like to share some suggestions that could be helpful to those who still suffer the effects of past or present abuse.

► SERMON POINTS

Since the word *abuse* is broadly used today to apply to any and every offense, I need to clarify what I mean by this term. I'm not talking about simple criticism or an unkind word or action that momentarily hurts our feelings. Genuine abuse causes such great harm that it affects a person long-term. This is especially true when the victim is a child.

The Difference Between Abuse and Discipline

- Discipline is the response to a specific behavior, but abuse flows from an internal predisposition, looking for an excuse to spew out hostility on the victim.
- The purpose of discipline is to correct a behavior for the good of the child. It's rooted in love, and desires what's best for the child. But abusers are not concerned for the welfare of their victim, only in expressing the anger inside them.

Helpful Suggestions for Those Who Have Suffered Abuse

- **Seek God's guidance.** There's no simple, standard response to abuse because each situation is unique. That's why it's so important to seek God's will. Spend time in the Word and be very sure you have God's instruction for any decisions you may face.
- **Pray for your abuser.**
 - Implore the Lord to save and transform that person.
 - Ask God to reveal the abuser's motive. Knowing why someone may act this way helps you to imagine the hurt that fuels the abuse. You will also discern how to pray for them.
- **Do not blame God.** The Lord never initiates or instigates evil behavior, but He uses every situation for our spiritual growth. Satan is ultimately the one who stirs up the evil in a person's heart and brings it forth as abusive behavior.
- **Forgive your abuser.** This is very difficult and may be a long process as you work through your hurt and anger, but holding a grudge is not an option for a believer. We're to forgive others just as God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:31-32). Unforgiveness is a determination to keep punishing the other person, and if we persist in this attitude, it will poison our souls and spill over onto others.
- **Forgive the one who allowed the abuse.** Sometimes someone else sees or knows about the abuse but does nothing to stop it. That person may have refused to face the situation because they didn't

want to believe it was happening. Or maybe that person felt unable emotionally, physically, financially, or spiritually to change the situation. Some believers could feel that they made a commitment before God to stay in that relationship. It may be helpful to ask the enabler why he or she didn't help. But whatever their motive, God calls you to forgive.

■ **Choose to believe the truth about yourself.** Victims of abuse are often told or made to feel worthless. They may have a recording of all the abusive things said or done to them that plays in their heads and shapes their self-concept. This internal audio records not only the words, but also the countenance, tone, and volume with which they were delivered. To counteract this internal recording, believers must reprogram their minds with the truth of God's Word. Once they believe what God says about them, they'll be able to begin to overcome the horrible effects of abuse.

- You're created by the Lord and are not an accident or mistake.
- You are loved by God.
- You are wanted by God and belong to Him.
- Christ considered you so valuable that He willingly died to save you.

Every human being has three essential needs that are required for emotional health, and all of these are provided for believers by the Lord through the church.

- **A feeling of belonging.** In the church we are all members of Christ's body.
- **A sense of value.** Believers love, appreciate, and honor each other.
- **A sense of competence.** The Holy Spirit has given each of us a spiritual gift that enables us to successfully serve the Lord in the church.

■ **Open yourself up to godly healing.** A healing process has to take place in your mind and heart because painful memories can act like poison, infiltrating every

aspect of your life. Ultimately, the Lord is our Healer, but He often uses other people in the process. You may need to seek help from a godly counselor who's grounded in God's Word and whose guidance is based on biblical principles. Counsel coming from a worldly perspective can be destructive and harmful. As always, the Holy Spirit will give us the discernment we need.

- **Refuse to retaliate.** Romans 12:19 says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."
- **Choose to move forward in life.** The Lord is able to take all the broken pieces of your life and put them together in the most beautiful way. He can even make you a blessing to someone else. You can be confident of this because He promises to work all things for good in the lives of His children (8:28).
- **Look for something good to come out of the abuse.** God works mightily in and through people who've gone through great hardship and difficulty. Though they may feel humbled and broken, He can build them up, reshaping them into strong, compassionate servants.

Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses because He too suffered rejection and verbal and physical abuse. In the midst of our pain, we're invited to come to His throne of grace to receive help in our time of need (Heb. 4:15-16).

▶ RESPONSE

- Have you suffered some form of abuse in your life? How has it affected you, your family, and your choices? How have you dealt with it?
- If you've never experienced abuse, what can you do to help someone who has? Look through your Bible at several of the "one another" passages to see how Christ wants you to respond and help others.

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