

A PASTOR'S PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Experience is said to be the best teacher. Unfortunately, I was a pastor who learned about domestic violence by experiencing a murder and suicide within a church family.

Several days before the tragic event, I was made aware that a woman of the church was being physically abused by her husband. At first I could not believe that the husband could have an abusive character. The wife was part of a weekly women's Bible study and prayer meeting that my wife taught. Wasn't this the couple that attended a Sunday School class I taught? Wasn't this the couple that my wife and I had known for years and enjoyed group fellowships together? No, I couldn't believe what I was being told! How could this be?

I was totally unprepared for the phone call I would receive at one o'clock in the morning from the husband who was asking if there were any sins God wouldn't forgive. To be awakened at a time when you are in the deepest sleep made it hard to comprehend his question at that time. I did tell him that God could forgive any sin as long as it was confessed. I suggested we meet the next morning for coffee, and we would discuss God's forgiveness.

The next morning when I awoke, I thought about the call and the question asked. I went to the office and was shocked when the secretary told me that there had been a murder/suicide of the wife and husband who were members of our church. I reacted in shock! Now I understood the late night phone call. I asked myself, "How can this be?" I was supposed to meet the husband for coffee to discuss his question. I was overwhelmed with grief, anger, and guilt. I was experiencing an emotional breakdown. Anger and guilt were the two emotions that affected me the most. I was angry with myself and a deep sense of remorse and guilt overpowered me. I castigated myself for not responding immediately to the phone call. I called a fellow pastor who heard me as I wept tears. I found myself caught in a vice of incompetence.

I then began to think of the congregation and how they would respond to the news. Naturally, the congregation was grieving, and they also would have emotions to deal with and questions that needed to be answered. I contacted a local domestic violence program and they helped me get through my emotions. They also helped me organize an evening seminar. This seminar was held at the church and over one hundred people attended which not only included church members but people from the community.

This event could have been swept under the rug with the hope that time would bring healing. I chose to address the tragic event, and it brought understanding and closure for the church and community. Pastors, I would encourage you to educate yourself about domestic violence so that you are not caught as unprepared as I was and have to rely on experience to be your teacher.

Today, the memory of the tragedy still stirs up those emotions even though the tragedy happened years ago.

A Pastor
