

To be used with the sermon:

Breaking the Silence

August 23, 2003

Musical Prelude:

Invocation:

Call to Worship:

“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.” —Matthew 11:28-30, Jerusalem.

Opening Hymn: Any hymn of praise and adoration

Offering:

Children’s Story: (A story that stresses God’s love no matter what the child does would be good. God may be disappointed and sad, but He always loves us and we can always seek forgiveness.)

Special Music or Praise Songs:

Prayer for the Congregation:

(Ask the one praying to be certain to pray for those suffering from abuse or who may be abusing)

Responsive Reading:

(It would work nicely if a family would lead out in the reading, either taking separate parts or doing the regular type and the congregation answering with the italicized words.)

“I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.

The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land.

They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.

You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord.

—Ezekiel 34:26-28, 31, NIV.

Sermon: “Breaking the Silence: Making a Difference”

Hymn of Dedication: “The Christian Home (# 827 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*; or “Love at Home” # 652 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*).

Benediction:

Postlude:

Breaking the Silence Making a Difference

By Ardis Stenbakken

Director, General Conference Women's Ministries Department

The General Conference took an historic and brave step in 2001 when it voted that the fourth Sabbath of each August would be dedicated to an emphasis on abuse prevention. Why did it do this? Because as a Church we know that abuse is not right. In fact, it is a sin. And therefore the Church must address it. Even when it is uncomfortable. And in our Church there is a wide range of belief regarding abuse: all the way from those who say, "abuse does not happen in the Christian home" to those who have left the Church because they have been hurt or feel the Church has not addressed abuse sufficiently.

After the material was sent out for August 2002, the General Conference Women's Ministries Department received a letter. When the administrative secretary gave it to Ardis Stenbakken, the Director, she said, "This is not the type of letter you want to receive."

The correspondent wrote, among other things:

I guess you still don't get it! You think that this stuff doesn't really happen to kids in YOUR church.

It was a letter that was hard to take. The letter writer outlined years of abuse that she suffered at the hands of church leaders and family.

But still, a lot of people don't want to hear about abuse: in the news maybe, about another church but not in our Church. Such things don't happen in Adventist churches and families, right?

So why do we have to hear about it in church?

- ▶ Because there are too many who are suffering just as this correspondent was.
- ▶ Because there are people sitting in this audience who are suffering at the hands of family members. And maybe even church leaders. I hope not, but too many are.
- ▶ Because God talks about it.

So then why doesn't the Bible talk about abuse?

Well, it does. A lot. And it talks even more about the opposite of abuse: love. And unless we too talk about and address this issue we become as sounding brass, a clanging cymbal.

Proverbs 31:8, 9 gives us some guidance as to our Christian duty:

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.*

*Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

Several years ago the South Pacific Division voted a statement regarding abuse: It says:

"To remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and possibly extend family violence."

That is why we need to talk about it. We don't want to condone, perpetuate, or extend violence.

Abuse: Some Definitions:

We need to be sure that we are thinking about the same things when we talk about abuse. So

lets look at some definitions. These are written out for you on the handout so you don't have to take notes or try to remember. Please look at them with me.

Physical abuse: behaviors such as shoving, pushing, restraining, hitting, kicking, pulling hair, choking, cutting, burning, slapping, punching, etc.

Psychological or emotional abuse: consistent and harsh criticism, degrading, disparaging name calling, verbal threats, episodes of rage, depreciation of character and person, isolation from family and friends, forced financial dependence, intimidation, control over where the partner can go and what she can do. It can even include threats against or damage to personal property, pets, etc. used as intimidation or as an "example."

Sexual abuse: any forcing of sexual acts which are unwanted or declined. Includes incest, molestation, rape, forced prostitution, oral/genital contact, fondling of genitals or breasts. Done by anyone in position of authority: parent, older relative, pastor, teacher, or other person in a position of trust, etc.

Another definition: SIN

Psalm 11:5:

The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

And in the New Testament we find:

In **Galatians 5:19-21**, Paul writes:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissections, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These actions Paul names—hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition—are all terms that apply to various aspects of abuse.

Missing heaven is a pretty serious consequence. It also means that we had better understand the problem and begin looking at solutions. I love what the Psalmist writes in **Psalm 73:8, 9** where he describes people who claim to have a relationship with God but do not act like it. He writes:

*They scoff and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression.
Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.*

This could be describing people who come to church and look holy but go home and abuse members of their family.

Statistics:

There are many statistics about abuse and statistics don't mean much to us unless we can put a face with them, unless we know someone to whom this applies. But lets look at a few to get a perspective:

- ▶ World-wide: 1:3 women have been abused in some form
- ▶ England and Wales: 1:4 murder victims are wives killed by husbands
- ▶ Latin America and Caribbean: 6:10 women have suffered physical or psychological abuse by their intimate partner
- ▶ Papua New Guinea: 67% of wives report they suffer marital violence

- ▶ Egypt, Jamaica, Greece: 1:5 divorces granted on grounds of spousal cruelty
- ▶ Canada: domestic violence costs the country \$1.6 billion per year
- ▶ 200 women are raped or battered per hour in the United States

Women can abuse too:

Most concern and reports are about women who are abused by men. In this sermon we talk primarily about women who are abused. But women can abuse men and children too and we need to talk about that because that is not right either. Someone once said that “women abuse with their mouths.” That is probably true. But they can also hit and abuse physically and sexually.

Again, some statistics, this time from the United States:

While women are less likely than men to be victims of violent crimes overall, women are 5 to 8 times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner. — *Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends*, U.S. Department of Justice, March, 1998.

In 92% of all domestic violence incidents, crimes are committed by men against women. — *Violence Against Women*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, January, 1994

Similar statistics exist in other parts of the world as well.

Seventh-day Adventist statistics

Several years ago the Family Ministries department did a study of Adventist families in seven world divisions. Some of these figures are in your handout. They found that yes, abuse does happen to people even in Adventist homes:

Physical abuse:

15-43 % of females

16-55 % of males

(The 15% represents the division with the lowest report in this category and 43% represents the division with the highest reported numbers).

Emotional abuse

27-69% of females

6-37 % of males

Sexually abused

8-18 % of females

4-12 % of males

Should we say, “Well that is just the way the world is. We can’t change our culture. We can’t fix everything?” Or should we say, “God has a better way. Let’s look at it”:

God’s design for our homes

There is a beautiful picture in the Bible of how God wants us to treat people. This story, the book of Ruth, begins: “In the days when the judges ruled...” (**Ruth 1:1**). It comes at the end of a series of stories that relate the horrors of what happens when people do not follow the Lord’s leading:

Judges 21:25: *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*

Ruth and Naomi lived in a culture that did not give vulnerable women much protection. And a woman without a husband were totally vulnerable. Women were property. In fact, when Boaz first sees Ruth he asks “*Whose is she?*”

But Boaz was an entirely different sort of man. In fact his name means “manly” or “strength” He was a man’s man. A man to emulate.

When he first saw Ruth, it was love at first sight. But listen to the first thing he says to her—it is quite amazing. He says:

Ruth 2:8: *My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men to not touch you.*

He wanted to protect her from any abuse. He wanted to keep her safe. In verse 22 Naomi emphasizes this by saying to Ruth, “In someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

Then he said something else totally amazing too:

Ruth 2:9: *And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.*

After he had offered her some lunch, he told his men:

Ruth 2:15: *Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her.*

In other words, he cared about her physical well being, her safety, her emotions; he even wanted to make her work easier.

There is another reason also to be excited about these passages and the reason is found in **Ruth 2:20:**

Naomi wants to know where Ruth has been gleaning that she came back with so much grain. When Ruth tells her, Naomi responds:

The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.

We too have a kinsman-redeemer. Who is this? Yes, of course, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 44:6, 24 says: *This is what the Lord says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty....*

The Bible has 17 references to God and Jesus as our redeemer.

So Boaz is a type, a prophetic example of the type of person Jesus would be. He is an example of how He wants His people to treat others. A good question to ask ourselves is: How would Jesus act? How did He treat people?

In fact, He wants our homes to be an example, a preparation, a model of heaven:

I have a few quotations I would like to share with you from the pen of Ellen White. You have them in your handout so you can study them later. But listen:

- ...The Lord desires His people to give in their homes a representation of the order and harmony that pervade the heavenly courts. *Councils on Health*, 101
- Let them remember that the home on earth is to be a symbol of and a preparation for the home in heaven. *Ministry of Healing* 363
- The family here must, as far as possible, be a model of the one in heaven.

Adventist Home 146

- God would have our families symbols of the family in heaven. Let parents and children bear this in mind every day, relating themselves to one another as members of the family of God. *Adventist Home*, 17
- Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another. *Adventist Home*, 15

Can you imagine any hitting, slapping, injuring in heaven? Any calling of names? Hurting feelings? Any sexual abuse? Well, of course not. It would not be heaven if those things happened. And that is why we are talking about it here in church. That is why we need to look at how Jesus wants us to act. Because we are to make our homes little bits of heaven now.

What we can do about abuse:

There are many things the Church can and should do about abuse. Today's suggestions are just a beginning. There are many other parts to abuse that we have not talked about today. And abuse can be difficult to deal with. We don't pretend to offer solutions in just one sermon, just one Sabbath a year. But this is a beginning. We need to be helpful to and patient with those who have been abused.

We can educate, right here in this church (**Note:** if you are going to do a seminar in connection with the Abuse Prevention Emphasis day this would be a good time to mention it again).

(Note: If your pastor is well aware and informed about abuse, give him/her affirmation today for that fact.) We need to help our church board fully understand about abuse.

1 Timothy 3: 1-4: *Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [bishop] he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, **self-controlled**, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, **not violent but gentle**, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.*

(Note: In cultures where dating is not done before marriage this section of the sermon should be adjusted accordingly). We need to educate our youth. Many who suffer domestic abuse report that they were abused even before they got married but they thought it would stop or change after marriage. It doesn't work that way. We need to help them understand about abuse and what to watch for so they can avoid it in the homes they establish. In a California study, 27% of high school students had experienced some form of violence while dating. This was irrespective of race, religion, economic level, grade or academic standing.

Despite all the clamor and headlines about changing sex roles, young women still learn to be cute, sexually attractive, flirtatious and submissive in a dating relationship.... They aren't supposed to take responsibility or control. The young man, meanwhile, still learns to play the aggressor. *—Battered into Submission, pg. 139.*

We need to educate the Church body just as we are doing today. We have been put in families and church to help each other to find their value in Jesus Christ. We need to know how and where we can get help for them. If laws in our community need to be changed to protect the innocent, we can become involved. There are many things we can do.

As a basis for all of this, we need to acknowledge abuse is sin:

Psalm 73:6-9: *Therefore pride is their necklace, they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.*

We need to educate our children. We need to educate them regarding their value in Jesus Christ and the value each person's gifts and personhood in making decisions, regardless of gender. As you can see, there are many classes and seminars we can have here in our church and community.

We need to teach girls to trust themselves in their decisions, to value their own perceptions. We need to educate ourselves to respect ourselves: Here is one of my favorite quotations from ***Desire of Ages, 657:***

The Lord is disappointed when His people place a low estimate upon themselves. He desires His chosen heritage to value themselves according to the price He has placed upon them. God wanted them, else He would not have sent His Son on such an expensive errand to redeem them.

Isn't that beautiful? Christ paid a high price for us, His own life. We can value and respect the life He gives us and others.

Romans 12:1, 2: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

We don't want to batter and abuse what God has made. As Adventists we talk about health reform, avoiding smoking and alcohol and illicit drugs. Should we not also avoid allowing anyone to abuse these bodies? Yes, of course. It is appropriate to say no to anyone who many want to abuse this gift from God.

And think about this familiar text:

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your Body.*

What should you do if someone you know is being abused?

What are some of the things you can do for someone who is being abused?

- ▶ First, listen and take every report of abuse seriously. Many times the person who is abusing is someone we have respected and looked up to and we find it hard to believe they can abuse. We are not to judge, just listen and believe until the facts are proven otherwise. Give her time to talk, and listen without judging. Ask again a few days later.
- ▶ Show you care. That is what we are to do as Christians—be people who care.
- ▶ Let her know that it is not her fault. One of the reasons it is difficult to stop abuse is that the victim so often believes, and are told, that the abuse is his or her fault. We need to tell them that no one deserves to be abused.
- ▶ Show her that help is available. This means that as a church we need to find out what help is available in our community. And if help is not available, it means we will need to do

- something ourselves.
- ▶ If she remains in the relationship, continue to be her friend while expressing concern for her safety.
 - ▶ If she is planning to leave, remind her to take important papers with her.
 - ▶ Encourage her to tell a medical professional so the abuse can be documented.
 - ▶ Remind her that domestic violence is a serious crime and that she can seek help from the police and courts.

(Note: The above list will have to be adjusted according to what help is available and what local laws prevail.)

In our community:

We can help pass laws to help protect the abused and see that these laws are upheld. We can help establish or maintain women's shelters.

As a church we are to work toward the ideal. **Galatians 6:2** tells us:

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Will this sermon solve the problem?

No. If you are being abused you need to get help. If your physical safety is being jeopardized, you need to find help and safety. Now.

If you are abusing, you need to get help. Talk to a pastor. Talk to your doctor, a psychologist, marriage/family counselor. Get help. Now. Before you do more irreparable damage to anyone.

The Church has a series of brochures that deal with abuse, both for the abuser and for the abused, or if your child is or has been abused. They can be very helpful. **(Note:** If you mention these, please be sure they are available. Otherwise, do not mention them; or offer other material that is available.)

And of course there is help from God. He is the only one who can truly change hearts and lives. But He often uses human hands to accomplish His work.

Scripture brings us many beautiful promises. I would like to close with two of these. The first is found in **Ezekiel 34:26-28**: It speaks of the last days, our time. Notice what it says:

I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.... They will know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them.... They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.

And the last verse takes our thoughts to heaven. It is our goal. Jesus waits for us there.

*No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. **Isaiah 60:18.***