

## Hidden Abuse

By Paula Silva

Anyone who mentions the words domestic violence automatically thinks of the various forms of physical abuse which are visible to the naked eye. Below the surface of those wounds though is a crushed heart and a remnant of an image bearer of God.

Often in the Christian community the devastation of verbal and emotional abuse is minimized or denied as part of domestic violence. Yet it is those invisible, deeper wounds that are the most destructive to our spirit. No antiseptic or bandaids can repair. They leave messages about ourselves which are lies from the Evil One to keep us trapped in our perception of ourselves which can prevent us from becoming all God intended us to be.

This was true in Cindy's life. Cindy anxiously looked through her purse to locate her cell phone as it rang incessantly. Looking at the caller ID, she shuddered as she answered. The voice on the other end was her husband demanding to know who she was with, where she was, and what she was doing. "Why did he call her every couple hours?", she asked herself. She knew if she did not answer she would encounter flaming arrows of her husband's rage that would pierce her heart.

The cell phone has become an electronic tracking device for the abuser. The addition of GPS

systems on these phones has placed an additional way to maintain control and keep her from reaching out for help.

When Cindy returned home, she incurred her husband's wrath because she did not answer her cell phone quick enough. The rage increased as she handed him the grocery receipt. The verbal barrage continued into the evening. When bedtime came she chose to sleep on the couch hoping that her abuser would calm down. As she drifted off into sleep, she was startled an hour later by her husband raised voice ringing in her ears as the demeaning words fell from his lips. She covered her ears and hoped he would return to their bedroom.

When all was quiet sleep returned. In her dream she was falling, but this was really not a dream. Her husband had returned a couple of hours later and pushed her off the couch. This pattern continued all night long. As she arose in the morning, fatigue engulfed her.

Her husband was already up demanding his breakfast. He continued by humiliating her appearance as the children entered the kitchen. He called her "airhead" and "the worse excuse for a mother" all in earshot of the children. As she prepared breakfast, she questioned herself. "Am I all he said I am? Maybe what happened last night was all a dream. After all, he is a respected elder of our church."

Everyday women like Cindy



experience the destructiveness of verbal and emotional abuse. **Name calling, demeaning words, accounting of her time and money spent, sleep deprivation, and humiliation intertwined with crazymaking** are only a few examples that fit into this category of abuse.

Consider this definition of emotional abuse stated by Leslie Vernick in her book, *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Seeing It! Stopping It! Surviving It!* ***If you're in a relationship that lacks mutual caring, safety, honesty, or respect, and you regularly feel anxiety, fear, shame, anger, or despair, then your emotions are warning you that you are in a destructive relationship.***

In the book, *Boundaries in Marriage* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, it states, ***When two people are free to disagree, they are free to love. When they are not free, they live in fear and love dies.***

Verbal and emotional abuse is sin for it destroys God's image bearer.