

[Are the Shepherds Safeguarding the Lives of the Sheep?](#)

by [Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger](#)

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Only yesterday I was told of a Christian woman who escaped a viciously cruel marriage and went to consult her pastor. The man of God, wishing to restore domestic peace and harmony, sent the fearful congregant back to her home along with his well meant prayers and good advice. Two days later the woman was dead, slain by the hand of her husband. Only weeks before a similar tragedy had been played out in a neighboring parish. Although the pastor had intended to reestablish the marital union, his guidance had led to its permanent destruction. His first obligation was to do all in his power to safeguard the life of the parishioner.

Are our evangelical shepherds endangering the lives of the sheep? Ezekiel speaks of the watchman appointed by God who is responsible for the safety of the lives entrusted to him.

"If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them...I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood." (Ezek. 33:6)

But most of our pastors are unaware of the danger.

C. S. Lewis observed that one of the devil's cleverest tricks is to convince folk that he does not exist. Unencumbered by Christian wariness, he is far more free to wreak his mischief in our lives. Similarly there is a belief among evangelicals that domestic violence does not exist within our ranks, that the horrifying statistics are only feminist fabrications. Yet the government computes the body count with data gathered from hospitals, police stations, and morgues. In America at least two thousand women a year are killed by their intimate partners, and the toll for children is even higher. The facts tell a grisly tale that we have chosen to ignore.

Throughout the world, the death rate is equally high and sometimes far higher. Most abused women and children do not die, but they often carry the wounds for life - in terms of both physical and emotional injuries. We must also note that five percent of abusers are women, although their lack of physical strength makes them less likely to inflict serious injury.

Tragically, our longing to see the family made whole has blinded us to the dangers that lurk in family life. We must first admit that the danger is real and that we have been slow to recognize it. Isaiah lamented

"Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge. They are shepherds who lack understanding." (56:10,11)

We are ignoring the danger to thousands of women and children within our churches.

No type of faith community is immune from the scourge. Sociologist Nancy Nason Clark has researched the prevalence of abuse in evangelical families, and finds the rate about the same as in the general population. In North America, a pastor preaches on Sunday morning to a congregation in which, on average, there is abuse in one quarter of the families. Other studies, such as that done at Calvin College, confirm the findings. We are not facing this reality, nor are we prepared to deal with the terrible reality that engulfs us.

Few pastors have been given adequate preparation to deal with domestic violence. Our seminaries seldom offer instruction on the issue, although pastors report that they spend more of their counseling time on this subject than on any other. A Canadian study revealed that the more training pastors had been given on the subject, the more they were to refer the problem to a highly qualified professional. The less training pastors receive, the more likely they are to feel that they can handle the challenge themselves.

Studies show that when a Christian woman seeks help in an abusive marriage, she ordinarily consults either her pastor or a Christian woman in the congregation. The first lesson that we must teach pastors is that the danger is real and that it takes great courage for a woman to disclose the humiliating truth that she is a victim. She is well aware that many a woman is sent home by the pastor along with the rebuke that if she had been a better wife there would have been no problem. Thus she must struggle not only with shame but also with fear - fear that she will not be believed and fear that it may go worse for her at home once she has made the disclosure. "They have healed the also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying 'peace, peace' when there is no peace." (Jer. 6:14)

The Pastor's Dilemma

Some pastors suspect that the women are fabricating stories of their abuse, and they are very reluctant to hear of such behavior on the part of their fine church members. Occasionally a woman does indeed make up the charge, but most of the time the fears that she expresses are based in reality. It is far better to err on the side of safety and to make sure that the woman is placed in a secure location even when she may be too distraught to give a rational account of the problem. Pastors must understand that even the most astute of mental health experts have been misled by putative perpetrators. Abusers may seem very pious, very self-controlled or even very repentant, but they may be very dangerous. Even the most convincing of statements may not guarantee safe behavior behind closed doors. Those who work most extensively with endangered women maintain that the victim herself usually has the most accurate understanding of the level of risk to herself and her children. We must not ignore or minimize her appeal for help in the face of her perceived peril. The woman can be helped to make a safety plan to be utilized if there is need. Often those best equipped to help with the plan are

ready at the other end of a hot line. The victim can also be told of the resources that are available to her in the community.

The Pastor's Resources

The first and mightiest tool that the pastor has is prayer, but he (or she) must add other weapons to this arsenal. There must be both basic information and essential contacts. Many different kinds of resources will be needed in a crisis. In dealing with a life-threatening situation, it is imperative to move cautiously. A pastor should not enter a house where there is active violence until he is accompanied by police or other members of the church. Bear in mind that many a police officer has lost his life in responding to domestic violence calls. Frequently the safest place for an endangered woman is the community shelter. The experienced staff has in place many safety features that might not occur to a congregation, no matter how well intentioned they might be. It is important that the location be unknown to the perpetrator and that it is an unlikely one for the perpetrator to discover. Remember that stalking and lying in wait frequently accompany other kinds of abusive behavior. More than one church member has been slain because they offered housing to an abused family. Many pastors are fearful of sending a member of their congregation to a shelter that is operated by persons with another life philosophy. This is sometimes a necessity, the best immediate solution for a terrifying problem, one that provides far more security than a local church can offer. The path of safety runs "from the steeple to the shelter."

As is so often the case, the church has lagged behind other elements in our society when it comes to addressing an evil that cries out for redress. Feminists have led the way in developing a methodology and an expertise in saving the lives of endangered women and children. Much of the operation depends upon dedicated volunteers who are trained to answer hot lines, transport endangered victims, staff shelters, locate safe houses when all the beds at the shelter are full. Some are skilled in filling out applications for restraining orders and will accompany the victim to court. Others provide care for bewildered children, locate food, clothing, toys. How much this mission should be shared by the church!

Churches may well partner with a local shelter, supplying basic necessities, painting a room, providing special treats for a holiday. Better yet, church members could take the basic training for rescue workers. They may not care for some of the sentiments expressed or the language in which it is voiced, but this is true in many aspects of contemporary society. Nevertheless there is much that dedicated members of a congregation might learn to help their own members in time of trouble - and much to help others. If it is necessary for a woman to flee from a dangerous situation, trained workers can help make the transition safer. Seventy-five percent of all domestic murders take place before, during, or shortly after the woman leaves. The preparatory arrangements must be disclosed to as few people as possible, and judicious guidance is indispensable in the planning. Various precautions and strategies of secrecy can make the process more orderly, safe and effective, with necessary funds, documents, and medicines in hand. Where are the Christians in our congregations who stand ready to give this kind of care?

There are many other issues that arise in long-term care for abusive families. Often the victim is flooded with advice, but no one addresses the perpetrator. Some maintain that it is not right to interfere with the way a man conducts the life of the family in his own home, but this is not what the Bible says. “If a brother be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, restore such a one.” (Galatians 6:1) Sometimes pastors have been slow to refer offenders to batterer intervention programs because there has been a very low rate of success. In God's providence there are now a few Christian intervention programs with excellent rates of transformed conduct. The best rates ensue when the offender is referred by the pastor, the family or the church. We evangelicals must insist that these programs be studied carefully and that qualified therapists be trained in these techniques. There are answers to be had, but we as the people of God must work together to find them.

We must establish as well a network of Christian hot lines, Christian shelters, Christian rehabilitation centers - for both victims and perpetrators. Our lack of caring has made us a reproach in many circles. It is time that we take action, but first we have a need for pastoral leadership. We need to be challenged to offer prayer and practical support to victim and offender alike. We can be there to listen and to care, to set up accountability groups within an atmosphere of zero tolerance for the offense; but we must be led.

The Pastor's Mission

The first obligation of the pastor remains that of proclamation. It is the duty of a prophet to observe evil in our society and to speak out against it by applying the Word of God to the need. The scriptures contain over one hundred condemnations of violence, stalking, lying in wait, word twisting, as well as mental and emotional abuse. Very seldom do we hear these issues addressed from the pulpit. The Bible says that it is the obligation of the righteous to deliver the oppressed from the hand of the violent. Few sitting in the pews have ever heard an exposition of this biblical mandate. Fewer yet have been called to committed and constructive action. All too often we have failed to view the totality of biblical teaching on God's patterns for the home. In the Bible, one of the features most strongly emphasized for godly homes is that of safety.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” (Isa. 32:18)

Within their own homes, God's people should be able not only to lie down in safety (Lev. 26:6; Ps. 3:6; Is. 14:30; Jer. 23:6; 32:37; 33:16; Hos. 2:18) but also to live in safety (Jer. 23:6; 32:37; 33:16; 34:24-28; Ez. 28:26; 34:24-28; 38:8) “You shall know that your tent is safe” (Job 5:24). As heavenly husband, Yahweh vows to his repentant wife Israel a home life free of fear and abuse:

“your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be the prosperity of your children. In righteousness you shall be established. You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fail because of you. . . No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises

against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, says the Lord.. .this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication with me, says the Lord” (Isa. 54: 13-14, 17)

If this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, then we must help them to claim it. How often does this promise enter our discussions of the Christian family? Faithful teaching on the Christian family must include at least as much proclamation of these aspects as is accorded in Scripture.

Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers? (Ps. 94:16)

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene. (Isa 59:15b-16a).

Where are the pastors who will bring pastoral care and biblical perspectives to abusive situations?

Suggested resources:

James and Phyllis Alsdurf, “Wife abuse and Scripture” in Abuse and Religion: when Praying Isn’t Enough. Ed. A Horton and J. Williamson Heath Publisher, 1988 pp 221-28.
Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence InterVarsity Press, 2001

Al Miles, Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Should Know. Augsburg Fortress, 2000

Nancy Nason-Clark, The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence. Westminster John Knox, 1997,

Christian Intervention Programs:

Northwest Family Life, Seattle , WA Christians Addressing Family Abuse, Eugene OR
Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (www.peaceandsafety.com)

Patriarchy and Abuse: Have we read the scriptures right?

by [Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger](#)

On Thurs., April 28, 1757 John Wesley made the following entry in his diary:

I talked with one who, by the advice of his Pastor, had, very calmly and deliberately, beat his wife with a large stick, till she was black and blue, almost from head to foot. And he

insisted, it was his duty so to do, because she was surly and ill-natured; and that he was full of faith all the time he was doing it, and had been so ever since. [\[1\]](#)

The account contains no record of any sort of protest, and yet Wesley's own compassion is evident. Like many another Christian, he is caught between the desire to honor the ministry of another clergyman and his own sense of social justice. Wesley's description reflects his discomfort and dismay at the abuse that the woman has suffered, but what sort of questions did he pose to an abuser who acted out of religious conviction and upon the advice of his pastor? Did he ask how this accorded with the command for a husband to love his wife and cherish her? Did he dare to criticize that pastoral advice that had been given or to question a theology that justified the abuse?

Two hundred and fifty years have passed since Wesley made that entry, and the dilemma still remains. To-day we stand at a critical crossroad. Increasingly there is an acknowledgement that a major contributing cause of domestic abuse is a societal acceptance of male dominance and an accompanying sense of entitlement. Males have a right to control their intimate partners, or so it is supposed. Lundy Bancroft maintains that the common characteristic of abusers is their fundamental mindset, and to this we have an opportunity to address ourselves. ?” Evangelical theologian John Stott used to say that the church needed to engage in a double listening: with one ear to the needs of contemporary society and with the other to the Word of God. We have come to a juncture of one issue where this double listening and reflection is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ.

The abuse of women appears to be growing at an alarming rate. In America some fifteen hundred women are slain yearly at the hands of their domestic partners, about half of the number killed on September 11, 2001. Many others are permanently maimed, and far more bear deep emotional scars. More critical yet is the harm done to children, both those who suffer actual abuse and those traumatized by the presence of abuse in their homes. Research shows that children are far more aware and far more deeply impacted than parents often imagine.

Though it is sometimes fashionable to blame the victim, the basic responsibility must be placed upon those who abuse. Lundy Bancroft declares that it is because of a fundamental mindset shared by perpetrators. The root lies in the offender's concept that he has fundamental possession of his intimate partner, and from this arises the trunk of the tree: entitlement. Out of this trunk branch forth the various forms of abuse that ensure the victim's compliance with his wishes. We must observe that in some ninety percent of cases, the victim is female and the offender male. Douglas Gaudette, director of the Family Safety Project of Caritas Holy Family Hospital puts it more bluntly: “Patriarchy is the breeding ground of abuse.”

Concerned Christians involved in intervention programs are well aware that a misinterpretation of the biblical concepts of “headship” and “submission” is a major obstacle in working with Christian batterers and victims. Jesus warned about the destructive effect of bringing a wrongful message and added “by their fruits you shall know them” (Matthew 7:15-16). We need to think this one over.

Even though earnest Christians deplore the atrocities of domestic abuse, they simply do not know how to handle the scriptural statement that man is the head of woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). It is time to deal with the issue forthrightly, to lay out the concerns, both theological and practical, and to move forward to new understandings. In point of fact, the same First Corinthians passage also says that God is the head of Christ. The Greek-speaking Church Fathers were quick to point out that this meant not superiority but rather similarity, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were equal in goodness power and love. So too woman, as drawn forth from man, is of the very same substance “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh” – not inferior having but the same intellect, the same emotional capacity, the same personhood and longing for God.

There are certain contemporary theologians who comprehend that if they maintain that women are subordinate to men, to be consistent they must also say that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinated to the Father. Recently a new theological seminary has been established to propound precisely this view. We are entering a time of theological crisis, especially as it impacts family life. Of course there is a need again to ask what the Bible really says, and not what some popular guru says.

Ty and Barb Schroyer, directors of a Christian model of the Duluth batterer intervention program, are anxious to have a biblically-based discussion that will face the dilemma so often faced in support and intervention groups. How are caregivers to deal with the concern that clients express about headship and submission? How can we be both faithful to the scriptures and faithful to the wounded. Are we betraying offenders when we do not offer a corrective interpretation affirming the full equality of both male and female and their full right to respect, dignity and decent treatment?

The time has come for us to step into the ring. Sometimes we have just made polite noises because we didn't want to “rock the ship.” We don't want to alienate believers, but neither should we allow them to engage in, ignore abusive behaviors justified by faulty theology.

This is the basis for our planned panel at the August 7 event, in which there will be an honest discussion of the problems created by patriarchy and also of the theological challenges that must be met. We seek to bring about an interchange between representatives of biblical and theological thought along with the practical evidence, frustrations and sometimes desperation of care givers and healers. We say that praxis flows from theology, but we have usually sidestepped the issue of patriarchy. The results of remaining are simply too costly.

Why do we plan such a feature at an event that we hope will be attractive to secular caregivers? Because we are being told that they are desperate for such an interaction. They do not know how to cope with the religious batterer or the victim who insists that she must submit to the mistreatment no matter how vicious. Here, as at many other points, we believe that the scriptures can bring healing rather than harm and that there are many ways in which we can serve the secular DV community as we are faithful to the wounded and faithful to the Word.

[1] John Wesley, vol. 2 of The Complete Works of John Wesley, 7 vols. (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997), 450.

Jesus' Lament for the Daughters of Jerusalem

Jesus' Lament for the Daughters of Jerusalem
(Lk 23:26-31)

As he carried his cross along the Way of Sorrows, Jesus stopped to express concern for a group of women who stood along his path, lamenting his death. According to Roman law, women were not allowed to prepare for burial the bodies of those executed as criminals, nor could they engage in the mourning rites so essential to a proper funeral. What the women could not give later, they would give now in an expression of love and grief. But Jesus' concern is not for his approaching torture and death but for the sufferings that are so widespread among women.

Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."
(Luke 23:28)

He speaks of the vulnerability of women when they are pregnant or nursing a young child and of the horrors they endure in times of war. Already severely beaten and humiliated, he turns his attention to those who are even more marginalized than he. Luke's account makes Jesus a fellow sufferer with the lot of women, willing to have them weep for themselves rather than for him. With them, he has known beating, vilification, insult, ridicule, mockery, demeaning trivialization, the twisting of words, emotional abuse and ultimately death. He too was deprived of justice even though the Roman governor declared him to be innocent of all the charges brought against him. Thus he is equipped to be the Savior of women because he, although a male, has undergone similar outrage and afflictions.

It was precisely Jesus' sufferings that made this a supreme opportunity to address himself so clearly to the abuse of women and children. Surely this concern must be understood as encompassing a universal concern for violence against women and children, wherever and whenever it occurs.

Hagar in Islamic Tradition

More than other religious traditions, Islam has explored the spiritual implications of Hagar's terrible ordeal in the desert. The story is told more simply in the Koran than in the Hebrew scriptures: not even her name is given. Nevertheless she is well known in Islamic legend.

As in the Hebrew Bible, Hagar is given to Abraham at the time when the Pharaoh takes Sarah into his harem, under the mistaken impression that Sarah is Abraham's sister rather than his wife. In one version of the story, Hagar is the Pharaoh's daughter given in

marriage to Abraham. In another version, she is the daughter of the king of Maghreb who was defeated by the Pharaoh. Thus Hagar became a slave and was given as a prize to Abraham. In this account, her name (Arabic Hajar) is Ha ajruka, meaning “here is your recompense”

In any case, the relationship between Sarah and Hagar is not a smooth one after Hagar becomes pregnant while Sarah remains childless. Guided by the angel Gabriel, Abraham sets forth from Syria to bring Hagar and her young son Ishmael to a new place of habitation. For part of the grueling journey, they are transported by a wonderful soaring horse. At last they come to Mecca, where Abraham shows her the Ka’aba and arranges for her to remain. He settles her under a tree and provides her with water before leaving to continue on with his own journey.

Before long, the water supply is gone; and Hagar is desperate to find water. Gone is her husband Abraham, gone is the flying horse, and gone is the water. She is alone in the harsh desert with nowhere to turn. She senses that there is little hope that she or her child will survive. How can it be God’s purpose for her to live here when her husband has left her, when there is no one else to one to protect or provide for her, when she cannot find water, when there is no more meaning in her life? Many an abused woman has known these feelings of terror and despair and desperation. Where is God and how shall they survive and what can they do to keep their children alive?

Hagar must take prompt action, but what can be done. She starts to move about to find the water that can save their lives. But the desert is so vast, so dry and so dead. Perhaps there would be streams coming down from the mountains, and so she runs to two hills: Safa and Marwa. They are as dry as the rest of the landscape, and yet they are her best hope. Back and forth she races between the two, desperately searching for even a tiny trickle. Seven times she makes the trip up those mountains, and always in vain. Surely even God has forgotten her and her child. She stops to weep beside the form of her dying little son as he lies on the desert floor.

Just at that point the angel Gabriel strikes the ground beside Ishmael, and water bubbles up abundantly near his very lips. God’s care has been there all along. As is soften the case, it is when our whole world falls apart, when everything that seemed trustworthy is gone – that is the time that we find God in a new way.

In Islamic faith, the spiritual saga of Hagar takes on particular significance. It is memorialized as part of the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is required of all good Muslims once in their life times if they are able. Between Safa and Marsa there are now beautiful tunnels, air conditioned and paved with marble, through which pilgrims pass as they re-enact Hagar’s desperate search for water. They remember the challenge to her faith, her heart-wrenching anguish over her child, her joy and relief in finding God’s provision. Pilgrims drink from the well of Zamzam as did Hagar and Ishmael, at the end of the rite known as sa-i.

Not every woman can take the pilgrimage to Mecca, but every woman in need can take a spiritual journey to find the grace and loving care of God. Not every woman in need is Muslim, but they can draw strength from an understanding that God is always there for them. The prophet Jeremiah said “My people have forsaken me, the fount of living water.” The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “Ho, everyone that is thirsty: come and drink.” It’s time for desperate women to come and drink.

Building Images of Healing

by [Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger](#)

Often an image can give us guidelines around which to frame our thoughts. Pictures are sometimes more helpful than words. Jesus, himself a carpenter, speaks of building one’s house. Those who build upon unstable sand find that in times of stress the structure will not stand as the winds and waves engulf it. Those who build upon a solid rock find a security that can weather the worst of storms. Here he uses here an image from his own profession: that of solid construction. All of us have come to realize the terrible consequences of structures that lack a good foundation or are built carelessly of inferior materials. The implication is clear: watch out how you build a house for your own soul.

It is precisely at this point that victims of abuse some times discover that they have no house at all or a very flimsy one that will not hold up against the storm of violence and betrayal and oppression and humiliation.

Nowhere is this more critical than at the point when victims of domestic abuse start to take stock of themselves. A victim often does not realize at first that she is actually experiencing abuse. When that realization dawns upon her, she may give up the mask of denial and even of secrecy. It is terribly humiliating that somehow one has been reduced to a mass of jelly, unable to defend oneself or to stop the abuse.

But there is also a time when many understand that the most devastating part of their plight is its spiritual aspect. Not only does she/he feel that God has forgotten them or condemns them, but they feel themselves unworthy of divine grace and companionship. Yet the scriptures are full of assurances of God’s love for those who are abused and oppressed. As PASCH has been asked to provide consultancy in several different faith traditions, we begin to ask new questions and to think in new ways.

In Massachusetts, the population is predominantly Catholic; but here there is often bitter disillusionment. Boston has been the epicenter of the revelations of clergy abuse, and many are alienated who most need the help of the church. We might think of another period of time when the church fell into a period of great degeneracy, and from this came not only the Reformation but also the counter Reformation. Two of its major leaders were Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, both of whom are now recognized as doctors of the church. They worked tirelessly to purge the church, to bring it back to its original mission, to reaffirm the basic foundation. Both were at first repudiated and later revered and named as saints.

Teresa traveled extensively throughout Spain as she brought new spiritual life to an old establishment engulfed in self indulgence, luxury and dissipation Her best known literary work, a sort of spiritual guidebook for her nuns, is called *The Interior Castle*.

I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions. If we reflect, sisters, we shall see that the soul of the just person is but a paradise, in which, God tells us, He takes His delight. What, do you imagine, must that dwelling be in which a King so mighty, so wise, and so pure, containing in Himself all good, can delight to rest? Nothing can be compared to the great beauty and capabilities of a soul; however keen our intellects may be, they are as unable to comprehend them as to comprehend God, for, as He has told us, He created us in His own image and likeness.

What good news for a victim who thinks she hardly has a soul at all! The image of building within oneself a castle can be a very helpful one for victims of abuse. Part of the genius of the Catholic church is its ability to reformulate old truths in a new way. Just so we can encourage disheartened Catholics to know that God is still there, that the scriptures are still unfailing, that if human leadership has failed there is still unfailing grace. Victims can still find the materials with which to build an interior castle where their soul can be strong and safe.

Castles are places of dignity, places where an individual can recover her self respect. A castle is designed for strength, to withstand attacks against it. How often an abused woman feels overwhelmed by the attacks that are launched against her! Her abuser may seek to convince her that her own attitudes or conduct are the basic cause of the abuse. Others may condemn her – her family, friends, faith community – and sometimes even professionals.

Often they maintain that she must have done something to warrant such treatment. Of course the fundamental answer is that abuse is always wrong and that the perpetrator is the one who is essentially responsible. Some faith communities may shame, scold or reject a victim. She may be subjected to spiritual abuse, to the charge that she has failed God, her marriage and the faith community. The walls of a soul's interior castle must be built upon a foundation strong enough to resist such onslaught.

Castles are permanent structures. They are built solidly and stand firm for hundreds of years. They are not constructed with haste but with careful planning, engineering skill and a dedicated work force. A lot of combined effort goes into creation of one of these remarkable strongholds; and it cannot be blown away. St. Peter declared that the faith community was composed of "living stones" built up into a "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Just so a storm battered and disillusioned victim may find a permanent place of refuge built not only upon her efforts but upon those of hundreds of thousands of faithful believers who have gone before. Teresa declared:

It is of the utmost importance for the beginner to associate with those who lead a spiritual life, and not only with those in the same mansion as herself, but with others who have

traveled farther into the castle, who will aid her greatly and draw her to join them. The soul should firmly resolve never to submit to defeat.

We can build our individual castle with materials tested, tried and found to be reliable by others, with Jesus Christ as our foundation.

No two castles are alike: they differ in design, construction and materials used. St. Paul declared himself a wise master builder and urged others to think carefully as they selected building materials. (1 Cor. 3:10-13) In the end, fire would test all the substances that one might choose: gold, silver, wood, precious stones, hay, straw, stubble. Those values that can not stand up to the test will be burnt away. Those values that remain yield a strong dwelling. The selection must be made with care. The strength available in the Christian tradition offers a treasury of resources.

A castle is designed to provide safety for others in need of protection. In times of danger the local population would retreat to the castle not only for safety but also to obtain supplies of food and water. The soul that has found security for itself can offer a shelter to other souls.

How can we assist a victim to crawl up from the dungeon to the heights of the turret? A castle is positioned on high ground in order to provide a wide view of the surrounding landscape and the movements of hostile forces. Within the castle, a soul can look down on things from a higher perspective, and gain a more comprehensive view. So often the self perception of a victim rests upon the humiliation and degradation that she has received from her oppressor. She believes the lies that she has been told about being stupid, and incompetent and the fault of all the problems in the relationship. Within grander view of the castle she can remember that she is made in God's image, a person of worth and dignity.

While the outer fortifications of a castle is designed for defense, there are within other chambers dedicated to everyday functions such as food preparation, dining, sleeping, storage of resources, and a reception hall. There are as well inner places for meditation and reflection; and there is a chapel for worship and adoration.

Teresa was emphatic about the need of the soul to recognize its own worth as created and affirmed by God:

We need not tire ourselves by trying to realize all the beauty of this castle, although, being His creature, there is all the difference between the soul and God that there is between the creature and the Creator; the fact that it is made in God's image teaches us how great are its dignity and loveliness. It is no small misfortune and disgrace that, through our own fault, we neither understand our nature nor our origin. Would it not be gross ignorance, my daughters, if, when a man was questioned about his name, or country, or parents, he could not answer? Stupid as this would be, it is unspeakably more foolish to care to learn nothing of our nature except that we possess bodies, and only to realize vaguely that we have souls, because people say so and it is a doctrine of faith.

Rarely do we reflect upon what gifts our souls may possess, who dwells within them, or how extremely precious they are. Therefore we do little to preserve their beauty; all our care is concentrated on our bodies, which are but the coarse setting of the diamond, or the outer walls of the castle.

The soul should be free to know the breadth of its own potential, the good news of its own value as redeemed in Jesus Christ.

However large, magnificent, and spacious you imagine this castle to be, you cannot exaggerate it; the capacity of the soul is beyond all our understanding, and the Sun within this palace enlightens every part of it.

A soul which gives itself to prayer, either much or little, should on no account be kept within narrow bounds. Since God has given it such great dignity, permit it to wander at will through the rooms of the castle, from the lowest to the highest.

Jesus calls the victim to leave the destitution and wretchedness of the dungeon, to place herself upon the ramparts, to know herself as full and free within the sunlight of God's love

[Spare the Rod, Save the Child](#)

by [Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger](#)

The American Journal of Preventive Medicine carries a report of a study on corporal punishment of children. The research was conducted by a medical team at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. One discovery was that spanking with an object rather than the hand raised by nine times the likelihood of other forms of abuse. Parents who spanked frequently were far more likely to beat, burn or shake their children.

Pediatrician Adam Zolotor, lead author of the study, wrote “Parents get angry when they’re spanking, and it’s not working. . . If a child gets spanked so often, they just don’t care any more and will misbehave anyway.”

This illustrates the need to re-evaluate certain passages of Scripture that result in the mistreatment of women and children. Many parents have been told that the biblical form for the disciplining children is corporal punishment. Have literal translations created a mindset that leads to dangerous situations? The appalling rise in mistreatment of children is attributable to many causes, but one of them is the notion that beating a child is biblically sanctioned.

The parental role in instructing the young child is carefully delineated in the fourth chapter of Proverbs. Indeed, the purpose of the composition of the book is said to be “to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young” (Prov. 1:4). The tractate is full of wise counsel designed to mold the character and conduct of the young. Instruction from both father and mother brings the child to wisdom (Prov. 1:8-

9; 6:20-23; 31:3) and forms a core of the message of Proverbs. The emphasis is on exhortation and verbal guidance.

The word “rod” in particular, though often used as a metaphor in the biblical text (Ps. 23:4; Isa. 10:15; 2 Sam 7:14; Micah 5:1), appears to be the center of difficulty for some Christians. Although in English “rod” evokes an image of harsh corporal punishment, the term has other associations in Hebrew. The term shebet (often translated as “rod”) is used in connection with the training of children at Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15. It is frequently a metaphor for correction, (Prov. 10:13; 13:24; 22:8; Job 9:34; 21:9; 37:13; Isa. 10:5, 24; 30:31), and in Isa 11:4 refers specifically to verbal correction.

Significantly, in Leviticus 27:32 and Psalm 23:4 shebet denotes the shepherd’s crook, useful to hook around the leg of an animal in order to pull it back from danger. The shebet was used as a means of counting sheep (Lev 27:32) and appears in a figurative sense in Ezekiel 20:37 as a tool to guide Israel back to a covenant relationship with God. The rod could be used to protect the sheep (Ps. 23:4; Micah 7:14) or to keep them headed on the right path. It could be interposed as a barrier to prevent animals from wandering astray and as a device to keep the flock moving in the right direction.

How much better to interpret the rod as an implement of guidance and control rather than as a means of inflicting pain. In its note on Proverbs 13:24, the very conservative New International Version Study Bible remarks that the rod is “probably a figure of speech for discipline of any kind.” Then we can translate Proverbs 13:24 to convey the sense that parents who withhold guidance and control from their children do them a profound disservice. The current NRSV translation “those who spare the rod hate their children” needs to be reconsidered. Those who love their children are careful to discipline them, but the guidance is to be positive and affirming. Could a fresh translation of this target text substitute an abstraction for the metaphorical rod - such as training, discipline, correction, guidance? Should there not at least be a marginal note offering an alternate meaning? The next line literally goes on to say “he seeks him early (or earnestly) with discipline.”

At this point, the New King James offers “But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.” It is certainly true that parents who love their children seek to begin their guidance early in the life. Better yet is the New International Readers Version “Those who don’t correct their children hate them. But those who love them are careful to train them.”[\[1\]](#)

With a harshness not warranted by the text, the New English Bible version of Proverbs 22:15 reads “Folly is deep-rooted in the heart of a boy; a good beating will drive it right out of him.” Surely this can be grasped as an invitation to unfortunate action. The New International Reader’s Version renders the passage “Children are going to do foolish things. But correcting them will drive their foolishness far away from them.” The same verse in the NRSV speaks of “the rod of discipline”. This gives room for the concept of the rod as being a metaphor of instruction, correction or discipline. In Prov. 29:15, the shebet is equated with reproof that gives wisdom. The current NRSV rendering of Prov.

29: 15 “the rod and reproof” might better be emended to replace “rod” with “correction”, so that it would read “Correction and reproof give wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by a neglected child” At the same text the New International Readers Version declares “If children are corrected, they become wise. But children left to themselves bring shame to their mothers.” Two verses later it reads “If you train your children, they will give you peace. They will bring delight to you.” (v. 17)

More problematic is the instruction of Prov. 23:13-14 rendered in the New English Version “Do not withhold discipline from a boy; take the stick to him, and save him from death. If you take the stick to him yourself, you will preserve him from the jaws of death.” The NRSV is far more restrained: “Do not withhold discipline (musar) from your children; if you beat them with a rod, they will not die. If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol.” The New International Reader’s Version offers “Don’t hold back training from children. If you correct them, they won’t die. So correct them. Then you will save them from death.” Of all the versions that I checked this was the one that most consistently avoided reference to the actual rod or to beating. How tragic that an ugly political situation has forced Zondervan to remove it from circulation. The simplified translation, intended for children and those whose first language was not English, fell afoul of the inclusive language issue. Like the inclusive language NIV, it was banned. As John G. Stackhouse remarks in the most recent Christianity Today, the fervor over the latest translation question has “been aroused by the clash of social and political agendas.”[\[2\]](#)

But can we with integrity substitute an abstraction for the literal rod? In point of fact, this is already being done in Job 37:13. The NRSV reads “whether for correction, or for his land, or for love, he causes it to happen” while the NIV renders it “He brings the clouds to punish men or to water the earth and show his love.” The New King James has “He causes it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy.” [\[3\]](#) Although shebet appears in the original text, these versions translate it in terms of a metaphor. The literal rod makes little sense in this context.

Perhaps as an antidote to harsh interpretations of the Proverbs material, the New Testament writers encourage positive training, free from oppressive measures that will serve only to alienate the child. (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). The current translations might even be enhanced to emphasize the danger and the unfortunate consequences. At Ephesians 6:4 “Parents, do not arouse the bitter resentment of your children” would be stronger than the present “do not provoke your children to anger”. (Parorgizo, the verb of Ephesians 6:4 is an intensive, used primarily in the Septuagint when it speaks of arousing the fierce anger of God). Children are to be raised in the discipline (paideia) and instruction (nouthesia) of the Lord an echo of the instructions in Proverbs.[\[4\]](#)

The NRSV rendering of Colossians 3:21 reads “Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.” The verb erithizo is “to make resentful, or embitter.” Associated with erithizo is the concept of aggravation to the point of making a person rebellious or perverse, while the verb athumeo is to become discouraged, despondent or disheartened. The implication is that under overly harsh discipline, children will despair

of measuring up to what is demanded and will simply give up trying. Perhaps a fresh rendering could go something like this: "Do not goad your children into resentment, lest they be driven to despair."

The news article reporting the study concludes that "A growing body of research suggests parents should use their voice, not their hands or household tools." A major motif of the book of Proverbs is that of treasuring the verbal instruction that both parents offer to their child (1:8, 2:1-5; 4:1-4, 10-13, 20-22; 6:20; 7:1).

[1] , New International Reader's Version. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996.

[2] John G. Stackhouse "The Battle for the Inclusive Bible," Christianity Today, November 15, 1999, p. 83-84/

[3] . The New English Version omits verse thirteen altogether but offers in a foot-note "whether he makes him attain the rod, or his earth, or constant love"

[4] In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we find "You must not remove your hand from your son or daughter but you shall teach them the fear of the Lord from your youth." (Epistle of Barnabas 19.5). Here the text is understood to indicate that withholding a guiding hand is neglect of one's responsibility in training one's children.