



THE PASTOR'S VOICE

Insights from Church Leaders

The Pastor's Voice Podcast: Episode 13

Transcript: Taming the Wolves in Christian Marriages

Reuel Sample: But what it comes down to for pastors is that we've got to get out of this idea of one size fits all when somebody comes into our office and they are having marital issues. We just can't put them through the marriage counseling mill. We've got to take time to make sure that we know the details of this individual marriage. We know what's going on with each, each person in that marriage so that we can go forward in a proper Christ like way, whether it is finding ways to heal that marriage or finding ways to end that marriage for the good of both parishioners.

Gretchen Baskerville: Absolutely. You know, let me I have two quick tips for pastors to make this easier. One is get your hands on a free copy of the Duluth Wheel of Power and Control. It is a really cool graphic, and it helps people see different kinds of abuse because abuse victims don't always know they're being abused. They may say, Well, my husband's mean to me, but maybe I deserve it or, yeah, he throws me around. But that's because I spilled the coffee. Ok. They don't even know they they abuse victims tend to underplay the abuse, not overplay it. The other thing to get your hands on, I have free on my website. Life saving divorce. Forward slash self-tests. Self-tests. I have seven different self-tests and you can just print them out and give them to the person who comes in the door and just seems in despair. Depressed. They've tried everything. They've prayed, they've fasted, they've been more agreeable, they've been more sexually enthusiastic. They have done everything. For year after year after year in this marriage and it just gets worse. It doesn't get better. And so if you give them the self-test they can, these tests all avoid the word abuse because of abuse victims. Never,

ironically, never know they're abused. They will. They'll say, Well, I'm in an unhappy marriage. But but even this woman was telling you about earlier who had been beaten and left for dead. Even she believed that she was in an unhappy marriage, not an abusive marriage. So these self-tests? And there's five different ones. Some of them are secular. Some are Christian will really help them decide, Oh, and there's a scoring mechanism on it, and they can kind of see for themselves and you can see for them, for yourself, you know, kind of where this marriage falls.

Reuel Sample: As a navy chaplain, if somebody came into my office and said, I'm abusing my wife or I'm abusing my child. There were some restrictions that I had to follow in terms of confidentiality, but one of the things that I could do was say, Well, thank you for telling me you're not going home today. You are. You are ordered to stay on base because I that was a great, great escape for both of the people. Should pastors always be ready to provide that escape for the abused spouse? Should they always have something in the back of their minds to say, OK, this person can go to John and Melissa's place tonight because they'll be safe there?

Gretchen Baskerville: That would be such a fabulous gift for an abused spouse, male or female, to have a home with, with people who will give them hugs and say You're safe here, we will not let your spouse know where you are. No one knows where you are. You can borrow our computer, our phones. You can turn off your computer. You can turn off your phone because a lot of smartphones today have tracking devices on them. You know, find my iPhone or, you know, life 360 and things like that. Turn off your phone. We will give you everything you need to contact the outside world, but you are safe and here with us. What a huge blessing that would be, because a lot of times people are so living in abuse every day that their brain, their brain, can't even function. They can't even see straight. They can't even get safe enough for 24 hours or 48 hours to make any decisions at all. And so what you're describing here, it would be an absolute blessing to someone and then call contact the Hotline Dawg. Believe it or not, the hotline dot org is the. It's funded by our United States taxes, and it's not manned by volunteers. It's manned by or woman by, or, you know, it's staffed by people with ninety five hours of training and domestic violence, and they will even take a call from a pastor saying, Hey, I think I'm going to have an abuse victim, walk into my office in 30 minutes, tell me what to do. So they are there for you, pastors if you need someone to give you a hand. Also, because our domestic violence shelters right now are really filled to the brim

in many states, you know, having some other places a person can go. And boy, I just love your idea of having a family who's ready to go, who's not going to, who's not going to interrogate them or pressure them to reconcile, but just get them to safety. What a what a huge life.

Reuel Sample: And talking to pastors and talking to church leaders, folks we are not trained for this. We know how to balance budgets. Domestic abuse is in it's both in our wheelhouse and out of our wheelhouse. It's in our wheelhouse because we're the first line, but it's out of our wheelhouse. Get the folks to help get them out of that relationship and then start figuring out what to do.

Gretchen Baskerville: Yeah, some people talk about therapeutic separations, and that can be. I've seen conservative pastors tell a couple, you need to be separate for three whole months because that's how long it takes for an abuse victim to kind of the cloud. You know, the cloud dissipates and they can think clearly because otherwise they're constantly walking on eggshells and they're like hamsters on a wheel. They can't ever get off. They're exhausted, but that's all they know. So a therapeutic separation is a good idea, too,

Reuel Sample: And we're focusing on on the victim here. But a therapeutic separation also helps the abuser to get the the the help or the direction or the discipline that he or she needs. Because we know that that person too is a member of our church and to turn our back on that person is also a bad thing to do. Up to the point where that person is not going to accept any help and then our job as Christians is to put that person out of the church. But until that point is that our job as pastors is to help both of these people and to be open to the possibility that a one size message of marriage at all costs is neither helpful nor biblical.

Gretchen Baskerville: Exactly. And I think one of the things we have to be aware of is the Bible talks about wolves. The Bible talks about people who have a form of godliness, but they don't actually live out the traits. So be aware that an abuser, whether it's a man or a woman, can talk. A great talk can shed the tears of of repentance, can stand up front in front of the church and tell their testimony. But what you really need to see is, have they genuinely changed? Do they do they still blame the wife or the husband? Are they taking responsibility for what they do or do they excuse what they

do? And there can be a lot of mind games that an abusive person, a hardened, abusive. A person can play and they're just really good at fooling all of us as Christians, we do believe that God works miracles, but sometimes our idealism gets makes us blind to these people. And I would also look up the blog posts by Dr Anna Salter, a schoolteacher. She's written some things for Christianity today, and she talks about how abuse perpetrators and also child molesters really like churches because we are so trusting because we are so optimistic because we do have so much faith and we really do believe that God can change lives.

Gretchen Baskerville: And so we are we get groomed ourselves, we get preyed upon. I will be the first to say I have been conned. I've been in church ministry face to face church ministry since 1998, and I have been conned by some really clever cons. And in my case, since I mainly deal with women, I've been conned by women. I've I've seen them take advantage of others. I've seen them do financial swindles. I mean, and they talk such a good talk. So pastors, you know, just be aware that just be careful. Just be careful and be, you know, in in reality, it's the it's the wife. It's the victim. It's whoever, the vulnerable person who needs to say, Yeah, OK, I definitely see a change because if you tell them the the the victim, oh, we see a change, then you're siding with potentially siding with the abuser. Let them say, you know, I don't know. He looks OK. He he does a few nice things, but something deep in my gut, something deep in my heart says he hasn't really changed. He's just kind of going through the motions and saying the right words.

Reuel Sample: Gretchen, a couple of days ago, you put out on Twitter - Twitter that that paragon of morality and truthfulness - you put out a a tweet asking, Does your denomination have a divorce policy? Why is it important for denominations to have a divorce policy?

Gretchen Baskerville: Oh, thank you for asking that right? Some do and some don't, and some are helpful and some are not. So what what I've actually done is I've gone to I just arbitrarily took a list of the top 30 or 40 largest denominations in the United States, and I started going to their official denominational websites to find out what their official divorce policy is. I'm not talking about the places on their websites where they talk, where they condemn domestic violence. I want to know what they're doing. Their divorce policy is for domestic violence, emotional abuse, things like that. And so what I

discovered actually kind of shocked me how few conservative and evangelical churches condoned specifically in writing divorce for physical violence or emotional abuse or even family crushing addictions? We're talking about the alcoholism, the drugs. And so our churches, I've been shocked to see how bad. Sorry, sorry about that. How bad some of the divorce policies are. And. And when I bring it up to pastors, the pastors go, Oh my goodness, I didn't realize this, I didn't realize that this was my denomination's official position on the official website on the topic of divorce, and I said, Please do what, you can talk to the higher ups. And I have had I have had high ranking denominational leaders come to me and say, Oh, well, we don't really mean that. I said, Yeah, but you say

Reuel Sample: It, it's not in writing. It doesn't exist, you know?

Gretchen Baskerville: Exactly, exactly. So let me let me tell you, for those of you pastors who are listening and you have a denomination that kind of gives freedom, freedom of conscience for pastors and congregations on the topic of divorce for abuse? Let me tell you, let me try to persuade you that that's not a good thing. Ok. Here's why it's not a good thing. If the church's official divorce policy does not allow divorce for domestic violence, meaning physical abuse and emotional abuse, then the pastors who do allow it never really feel comfortable. They don't really feel they haven't really passed the insider litmus test. They feel like they're going rogue a little bit. So it's not totally comfortable for the pastors who choose to condone divorce for abuse. On the other hand, for the pastors who are hard liners and their staff and church leadership and lay leaders who choose not to allow divorce for physical violence and emotional abuse, this gives them the power to tell abuse victims to stay in their marriages. And they can. They can say that's our denominational stance. And in the worst case scenario, in the most extreme case scenario, they can exact church discipline and excommunication on abuse victims. And I have seen it. I have lots of stories on my website about it. I have one web page just dedicated to good pastors versus bad pastors, and it's the abuse victims themselves telling the stories. Oh my goodness. The number of pastors who who say, Hey, this is what the denomination says, so we're going to have to discipline you if you divorce for abuse, it's shocking.

Reuel Sample: It's just shocking. Pastors, church leaders, if you are in a denomination that. Does not take a firm stand on the biblical necessity for divorcing in an abusive

situation. At the very least, have this conversation in your local church and come up with a plan to come up with a statement, come up with a challenge because I can guarantee you is that if you are in a church of any size, there are couples in your congregation that are struggling with issues of abuse or addiction or other things that go completely against what the biblical Christian world view of marriage should be. And so we need to have those policies in place. Having it at the denominational level is just an excuse to make it happen at the local church.

Gretchen Baskerville: Amen, amen. I so wish that the pastors who do condone divorce for abuse would put something on their website, and I've a good example I've got I've got a good example of one pastor's a policy that he put on his site. I think it's on. Go to my website. Life saving Forbes.com: d v for domestic violence October and you'll see an interview with Pastor Neil Schori. His church, the Edge Church in Aurora, Illinois, changed their public online divorce policy to make it clear that they do condone divorce for abuse, and they will be supportive and encouraging of whatever the victim chooses, which is really a powerful statement. And and this also goes Let's go back to the denomination. If the denomination isn't willing to have a very clear stance condoning divorce for abuse, then the pastors within the denomination who do condone it. Are they going to put their name? Are they going to put it in writing on their church's own website? If they don't, that is evidence of the chilling nature that these kinds of policies have at the denominational level.

Reuel Sample: Condoning marriage, condoning divorce, providing a way out for abuse victims, providing a way out for people in these kinds of situations is not a ticket to free for all marriages. Is that this is not saying, well, we don't need to get married. We don't we can just go in and out of marriage as we want. This is addressing a very specific problem in marriages, and that's that's nowhere in scripture. Does wood wood or does Christ say stay in an abusive marriage? So pastors, we need to provide a way out for our people? Gretchen, as we as we as we wrap up our time today, what is your word for the people of of Christ? What is your message for those who are listening to this podcast today?

Gretchen Baskerville: Luke 13, Jesus, he's at a synagogue. And he is I think this is Luke, 13, 11 through 14. He is there and he sees a woman who has been in bondage to an evil spirit, I believe, for 18 years. And it's a disabling spirit. It's a physically disabling spirit. And he calls to her and says, Come to me. And she does. And he heals her, and

the evil spirit is cast out. The disabling spirit that has been holding her in bondage for 18 years is cast out. She gives glory to God. But the synagogue leader does not give glory to God. The synagogue leader is angry. The synagogue leader? Is infuriated the synagogue leader, he thinks he has interpreted the Sabbath law correctly. But Jesus actually interpreted the Sabbath law correctly. The synagogue leader thought he was confident he knew God's will, but Jesus actually knew God's will. Now, the synagogue leader would set his oxen and donkeys free to get water on the Sabbath, and Jesus set a bound woman free and restored her on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader saw himself as righteous. Jesus saw him as a hypocrite, and he said so. The synagogue leader ignored Jesus and the miracle and just told the other people to come back later, and Jesus wasn't having anything of it.

Gretchen Baskerville: Jesus was defiant, and he emphasized his healing on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader thought that the Sabbath was more important than the woman's bondage. Jesus said the woman's well-being was more important than the Sabbath that's in mark to the synagogue. Leader ignored the satanic, disabling spirit, enabling it to continue. But Jesus identified the evil, broke the bond and set her free. The synagogue leader saw the woman as a threat to his power and authority, and Jesus saw the woman as a precious daughter of Abraham. The synagogue leader did not give glory to God when she was healed. But the woman whom Jesus called over and healed gave glory to God. I guess my point is based on this, what is Jesus view? Does he value an abused person's marital status over his or her? Life and sanity and the kids life and insanity, do we just want to check that checkbox? Oh yeah, they're still married. I mean, it's sort of a mockery of marriage, right? That's not the loving, undefined and lifelong marriage that the Lord planned for us. So I guess that's my mini sermon in a nutshell. Let's do as Jesus did.

Reuel Sample: Amen. You can't get any better than that. Gretchen Baskerville, the author of *The Life Saving Divorce Hope for People Leaving Destructive Relationships*. Check out her paperback or all of her books. She's also online at [w-w-what](http://w-w-what.com) life saving divorce. There's a whole bunch of resources over there for pastors and for laity, and for others who are going through all of this. If you are in an abusive relationship, get in touch with somebody who can help you to get out of that marriage or to get out of that situation. If somebody is telling you to stay in that marriage, they're wrong and get

yourself some help. And Gretchen, I can't can't tell you how much I am thankful that you are here.

Gretchen Baskerville: Thank you, Reuel. I appreciate your time, and this has been a wonderful opportunity to have a really good conversation.