

seems sinful, such as cursing, immodest attire, or having a hard or unforgiving heart.

Or you may want to ask the victim some questions that unintentionally blame him or her for being victimized. For example, when disclosing abuse in marriage, asking the victim, “What are you doing that makes your spouse so mad at you?” or after a victim discloses sexual assault asking, “Why did you go to that party, or not cry out for help?”

Studies show that abuse is traumatic, but disclosing abuse can be more traumatic when the victim isn’t believed or blamed by those trusted to help.

You represent God to the victim who asks for your help and justice.  
*Does God care about what’s happened to me?*

I know you want to represent Him well. And the best place to start is with compassion and care so that the victim feels heard, believed, and loved.

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What might cause us to be a poor steward of an abuse victim’s trust? Let’s go back to the “parable of the blades,” and remember the lesson: we see what we expect to see because of the role we are in.

As ministry leaders, when we hear *abuse* we tend to think “severe sin” (strong moral category) rather than “crime” (legal category). In an upcoming lesson, we will come back to this idea and wrestle with the question, “Is all abuse criminal and, if not, what do we do when severe relational dishonor is immoral and destructive but not illegal?” For now, let’s keep things simple.

When we think about how to handle “severe sin,” what passage of Scripture comes to mind? Chances are, one of the passages on our short list is Matthew 18. When a church member is being abusive, church discipline is an appropriate—even if neglected—response. We will talk more church discipline later in this lesson. But what happens when our