

Am I A Safe Christian?

As Christians, we want those suffering abuse to be safe coming to us for support. Unfortunately, we can make matters worse if we are uninformed or if we have not prepared our own hearts. Here are some questions to consider and pray over:

- **Am I ready to listen to, believe, and affirm someone who tells me they're being hurt?**
Many times abuse is perpetrated by people you would not expect, which makes it hard for survivors to feel like their experience will be believed. Survivors also deal with a lot of shame (for something that is not their fault!). Be ready to believe people who tell you they are being abused, and to comfort and protect rather than blame. A listening ear is a priceless gift.
- **Do I understand forgiveness well?**
 - Forgiveness implies that an actual wrong has been done; we *must* acknowledge the evil of what has been done in order to truly forgive (otherwise we are just condoning the abuse).
 - Dealing with hurt is a process; demanding *immediate* forgiveness keeps people from being able to grieve, to understand the hurt done to them, and to freely forgive in time.
 - Forgiving someone does not mean failing to hold them accountable or keeping silent about what happened (see 1 Cor. 5, Eph. 5:8-14, Matt. 18:15-17). Not only is accountability loving and commanded by God, but it is often the only way to help: most perpetrators will not change (and will continue to victimize others) without the pressure of legal action or the prospect of losing the abusive relationship.
 - Forgiveness does not always include reconciliation; reconciliation requires proven repentance on the part of the abuser. (Many times abusers “apologize” but continue to abuse; there must be a pattern of genuine change.)
- **Am I fair when I hold people accountable? Am I holding the right person accountable?**
Many times abused women are told to “submit” and “repent of their bitterness”, without their husbands or partners being held accountable for their sin of abuse. (While the whole witness of Scripture forbids abuse, Eph. 5:28 and Col. 3:19 are particularly relevant here.)
Do I have a blind spot about men and women that makes me assess things unfairly? Do I hold the *abuser* accountable, or do I blame survivors for something that is not their fault?
- **Does my theology support love or unintentionally support abuse?**
 - Whatever I believe about gender roles, does it overshadow my belief that *all* Christians (regardless of gender) are called to gentleness, love, respect, and Christlike submission?
 - What do I believe about power? Do I believe a leader is called to enforce his or her own way, or do I believe in Jesus' example in Matt. 20:20-28, John 13:1-17, Php. 2:5-11?
 - Does my belief in keeping families together overshadow my belief in keeping all members of the family safe and alive?More help on this topic can be found in the resources listed at www.stillsmalltheatre.com/blog
- **Do I know where to find help in my area? Am I ready to learn more?**
A list of some good informational resources is at www.stillsmalltheatre.com/blog, and you can also find a map of Massachusetts resources on the Jane Doe Inc. website (www.janedoe.org).

The Lord invites us to have our thinking renewed and transformed (Rom. 12:2). We all have growing to do, but there is help and hope. Let's keep growing together!