



David Clarke, a psychologist specializing in marital therapy, wants to help you find refuge from your abusive relationship. You need to *get out* so you can *sort it out*. Because only with some distance will you be able to see what your loving, ever-faithful God has in store for you.

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The Abuse Never Stops

The woman in her mid-sixties took her seat on my couch. She looked like the perfect grandmother. Gray hair, rosy cheeks, and a nice face. She would have made a great Mrs. Santa Claus.

She was a kind, sweet, and loving person. She told me she had spent her adult life trying to be a good wife, mom, and now, grandma. She doted on her grandchildren. These should have been the best years of her life. They weren't. Every year of the past forty years—ever since she married her husband—had been miserable. Two months after the wedding, he started abusing her. And he'd never stopped.

He criticized her. He belittled her. He called her stupid. He ignored her and her needs. He was somewhat nice only when he wanted sex.

Forty years of abuse.

That's what you're facing unless you decide to do something about it.

You may not be ready to admit you are in an abusive relationship. It's not easy to let go of the dream of a happy relationship

Abuse is a pattern of narcissistic, disrespectful, and harmful behavior exhibited by one person in an intimate relationship.

with a loving partner. You've coped for a long time by living in denial. You love this man and choose to believe he loves you.

You cling to the hope that one day he will change, and you will have a healthy, intimate relationship.

I'm going to communicate with you the same way I do with my abused clients in my therapy office. I'm going to show you the brutal truth about your man. I'm

going to push you past denial and into reality. When you finish reading the chapters in this first section, you won't wonder if you have an abusive partner, you'll *know* whether you do or not.

So we're on the same page, here is how I define abuse: *Abuse is a pattern of narcissistic, disrespectful, and harmful behavior exhibited by one person in an intimate relationship.*

In this part's chapters (1–5), we're going to take a closer look at each of the elements in this definition as I build a profile of your abuser. Let's start with the first element—that abuse is a pattern.

ABUSE IS A PATTERN

I'm not talking about one or two incidents of abusive behavior.

I'm not talking about a decent, loving spouse who is guilty of the occasional insensitive word or action.

I'm not talking about a man who has seriously sinned, but has confessed, repented, is in recovery, and has helped you heal from what he did to you.

I'm not talking about someone who has admitted his weaknesses as a husband, owns the blame for wounding you, and is in the process of changing.

I'm not talking about someone who is seeing your pastor or a Christian counselor—alone or with you—and is working hard to improve as a spouse.

I'm not talking about a spouse who has been very selfish, but is now sincerely trying to learn how to identify and meet your needs.

I am talking about a person who abuses you on a regular basis. He started abusing you early in your relationship, and he has continued to abuse you. He may say he wants to stop. He may even shed tears and say how sorry he is for hurting you. It's an act because he doesn't stop the abuse.

His words mean nothing. His behavior means everything. He is not going to stop abusing you.

He actually enjoys saying and doing things that make you miserable. It's what he does. It's who he is.

Remember the list of "What Abusers Really Think, Say, and Do" I covered in the introduction (page 12)? In whichever categories your abuser fits, he consistently abuses you in these ways over and over and over. Week after week after week. Month after month after month. Year after year after year.

The abuse never stops. It's not going to stop until you take action.

HE HAS NO LEARNING CURVE

To this date, your abuser has never been truly repentant. That's because he's not sorry for any of his abusive behaviors. He'll occasionally say the words *I'm sorry*, but they are only words. He says them only to stop the conversation and get you off his back.

Because he does not feel genuine remorse, he does not change. He has no learning curve. He thinks your pain is your problem, not his. He reasons that it's not his fault you're in pain, it's your fault.

So if anybody has to change, he believes it's you. You, you, you.

When you complain to him about his behavior, it's worse than a waste of time. His responses to your pain cause you more pain:

“You're too sensitive.”

“You misinterpreted what I said.”

“You're making a mountain out of a molehill.”

“You're only crying to manipulate me.”

“You're making it all up in your head.”

“You are way too emotional.”

“You won't forgive me.”

“You're attacking me.”

When you ask him to go with you to a counselor, here's what he says:

“Counseling is a waste of time and money.”

“Counseling won't help, because you won't change.”

“I've already gone to counseling.”

“You are never satisfied. You always want to go to another counselor.”

“If you're that unhappy, counseling won't do any good. Just leave.”

“You know you don't love me. No amount of counseling will make you love me.”

“Why should I try when you do absolutely nothing for the marriage?”

“Counseling is one more way you try to control me.”

He doesn't think his treatment of you is abuse, so in his mind it isn't. You have no right to be upset. When you are upset, it's your fault. When you have the nerve to bring up something negative about him, he actually thinks you are abusing him.

His thinking is irrational, wrong, abnormal, and sinful. Normal persons can take responsibility for their actions. He can't and won't do that. He has no learning curve.

Yet you continue to try to help him change.

THE PATTERN IS ENTRENCHED

This abusive pattern is entrenched. You know that, because you've tried every conceivable way to change your abuser and your marriage.

You've been patient.

You've been kind.

You've unconditionally loved him.

You've met his needs.

You've served him faithfully.

You've bitten your tongue a million times when he has hurt you.

You've brought up your concerns to him repeatedly.

You've cried in front of him.

You've begged him to change.

You've dragged him to your pastor.

You've dragged him to counselors.

You've dragged him to marriage seminars.

You've read scores of books on marriage.

You've tried to be the best wife you possibly could be.

What is the result of all of your efforts? I know the answer. No change.

You've prayed your heart out countless times.

Let me ask you a dumb but important question: What is the result of all of your efforts? I know the answer. No change. Same old abuse. Same old abuser.

You wouldn't be reading this book if any of these strategies had worked.

If you haven't tried counseling with a Christian, experienced, licensed therapist, give that a shot. If your spouse is willing to go and to genuinely work hard, counseling can help him break his abusive pattern. If your spouse refuses to go or goes once or twice and then quits, you know that the tough love plan in this book is for you.

Without an effective intervention, your husband is going to be an abuser the rest of his life. The good news is, you don't have to take his abuse the rest of *your* life.

You don't have to continue to tolerate his pattern of destructive behavior. My plan is the best choice for you and your children. It will protect you, get you away from the abuse, and lead to a new and better life. My plan is also *your husband's* best chance for change.

World-Class Selfishness

I had my first session with the successful businessman and his wife. How successful was he? Well, if I had given him six hours, he would have spent the entire time telling me just how prosperous he was.

From the moment his successful rear end hit my couch, the session was all about him. His superb education. His amazing career results. His incredibly fit body. His impressive charity work. His massive income.

I asked some strategic questions about his childhood, which revealed that his fawning parents had groomed him to be selfish. He was the favorite child—the special one. He could do no wrong from the moment of his birth. All his achievements were magnified and celebrated.

He married his sweet wife only because she was attractive and seemed willing to keep him on his pedestal of glory. He was the big fish. She was the pilotfish whose job was to idolize him and devote her life to his service.

He expected her to raise the kids, take care of the home, handle his laundry, cook for him, have sex on demand, and do everything needed to advance his career. If he was happy, he figured she should be happy.

They came to me because Mister Perfect's affair had just been revealed. He made it clear that he wasn't sorry. Furthermore, he said his adultery was 100 percent his wife's fault because she hadn't met his needs.

*Not all abusers
are narcissists.
But most are.*

When I told him his adultery was 100 percent his fault, he got angry. When I told him he had been a lousy, abusive husband for years, he had a fit and walked out

of my office. It may have been the first time anyone had possessed the nerve to tell him he was wrong about something.

After he slammed my office door, I said to his wife, "I thought he'd never leave. Let's work on helping you heal from his adultery and all the other wounds he's inflicted on you. And with God's help, I'll get you strong enough to leave him. Once you are out, he'll have his opportunity to change and get you back."

Let's look back at our definition of abuse: *it is a pattern of narcissistic . . . behavior.*

Not all abusers are narcissists. But most are. Even if your spouse doesn't get a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder, his incredible selfishness is a key part of his abusive behavior.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT ME, BABY"

A narcissist is a spectacularly selfish individual. Super-selfish, world-class selfish. Everything he thinks, feels, and does focuses on one

goal—to protect and please himself. The truth is, abused wife, your husband doesn't love you. He has feelings for you, particularly when you are meeting his needs. But he is incapable of loving anyone but himself. He lives in a universe of one. He is only aware of what *he* thinks. What *he* feels. What *he* needs. What *he* wants to do.

What you think, feel, need, and want to do doesn't matter. You're not even on his radar screen.

Your abuser lives in his own reality. Whatever he thinks is accurate. Always. You must agree with him, or you'll pay the price.

He lies continually, but he never admits any of his lies. He doesn't think he's lying. He believes his own lies, so he's very persuasive. He can even convince you of something that you know isn't true!

His life's mission is I, I, I . . . me, me, me . . . my, my, my.

It is always and forever about him.

He's always the smartest and best-looking person in the room. He craves attention and approval and has to be in the limelight. He is convinced that you should spend every waking minute being unbelievably grateful that you are married to him.

He is condescending because he believes he's better than everyone else. He has to bear the burden of never being wrong. This means, of course, that *you* are always wrong. Every decision he makes is based on what will make him look good, what will make him happy, and what is best for him.

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOUR NEEDS?”

This man will not meet your needs. As far as he is concerned, you don't have any needs. When he does something nice for you, it's for the purpose of getting something from you. To him, the only

reason for your existence is to meet his needs. You're supposed to worship him. Adore him. Support him. Praise him. Do whatever it takes to make him happy. He believes you are incredibly lucky to have the job of meeting his needs. It's a wonderful privilege for you—a privilege that, in his mind, quite frankly, you don't deserve. If you ever have the gall and poor taste to question his love for you, he'll immediately shut down or launch into a long rant listing all the things he has done for you, starting with marrying you.

Not all these descriptions of narcissism fit your abuser, but I'll bet many do. Living with a man this selfish is bad and painful and joy-robbing. And it always will be.

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