

## **Transcript for the podcast “Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women.”**

**Hosts:** Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

**Episode 34 — Guest:** Darby Strickland

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Elyse Fitzpatrick 0:06

Welcome to Worthy, a Christian podcast that celebrates the value of women. Each week, we'll bring you conversations with women and men on the value of women in the church, home, and society. We won't always agree on everything, but we do agree that God is glorious, the Bible is true, and women are valuable. And respectful conversation on this topic is essential in our day.

Eric Schumacher

Hi there. Welcome to the Worthy Podcast. I am here today, along with my co-host, co-author, co-belligerent, cocoa drinker, Eric Schumacher. And Eric and I are happy today to welcome a friend to be with us on the podcast today, a woman we know you're going to love to hear from. Our guest today is Darby Strickland. Welcome, Darby.

Darby Strickland 1:40

Thank you. It's an honor to be here.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 1:42

And Darby is a Christian counselor who works with individuals, families, and couples facing a variety of issues. She has her M.Div. from Westminster, in Philly, which is impressive, and we're going to talk about that. And that's where she met her husband John. She teaches Counseling Abusive Marriages for the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. She has written two booklets: "Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond and Rescue," as well as "Domestic Abuse: Help for the Sufferer." Working along with the team, she developed the curriculum, "Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused," which is a free web-based training that provides best practices for pastors, ministries, and leaders who minister in the context of abuse. I'm so thankful for that resource. And her speaking and writing focuses on training churches and counselors to train well for those who have been victims of trauma and abuse. And Darby has written a book on how to help victims of domestic abuse, titled, "Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims." And that's a P&R publication. So before we get into our conversation with Darby, I just want to thank all of you who listen in every week. Eric and I are so encouraged by all the people that we hear from that are being encouraged, enlightened, strengthened through this podcast. Thank you for doing that. Thank you also for our Patreon supporters. This podcast, even though it's free to you is not free to us. And so we would love it if you have \$5 a month that you can not spend on Starbucks. Well, if you could buy something at Starbucks for five bucks, that would be a good thing. If you'd become a Patreon supporter, Eric and I would be very thankful for that. And at the end of the podcast, Eric and I are going to ask Darby, a question that you're going to want to know the answer to, but you're not going to be able to hear it unless you're a Patreon supporter. So... Gosh, that's really motivating, isn't it? So I am happy. Now that I've done my commercial, you can... We're glad you're here. You can rate, review, and subscribe to us. And we wish you would do that because that's very helpful for us. Darby is married. She has three kids that she homeschools. You're a brave woman. I homeschooled for a while, but now they're all grown and gone. And may God be praised forever. And she loves water, which is... You and I are water babies. I love that I live by the ocean, and you must live by a lake or river or something. So I'll let you talk about that momentarily. So welcome, Darby.

Darby Strickland 4:52

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 4:54

Sure. You're welcome. Do you like to swim laps? Or do you just like to swim around?

Darby Strickland 4:58

I was a competitive swimmer throughout high school and college, so I really enjoy the water. Being near large bodies of water, I just find personally refreshing. I dabble in my work and a lot of darkness. And I just find being by the water is just so restorative. God's creation is just so glorious, and the water is ever changing.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 5:22

Yeah. That's wonderful. That's great. I love the water as well. But I love the ocean. And I... I don't mind walking out into the ocean, into the sand. But walking out in a lake kind of gives me the creeps. I don't know.

Darby Strickland 5:40

Understandable.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 5:42

It's like, "Uh, I don't know what's down there." Okay. Darby, tell us about your history and your faith journey.

Darby Strickland 5:50

Sure, I grew up in a Christian home. So looking back, there was never a time that I didn't know the Lord or not sense that he was with me. I know when I went off to college, I went off to a secular university in Chicago and really had my faith tested there quite a bit. Bible was taught as just literature, uninspired. A lot of my faith and belief was challenged. And so it really had to dig in at that time. I think I really grew closer to the Lord, but also just, more apologetically, grew stronger. And understanding why I believed what I did became really important. And God's just been kind and gracious. He's patient with me. He's pursued me. I've been reluctant often in his charge and his calling, and He always gets me where he wants me. So I've learned humility, and listening to him is really important.

Eric Schumacher 6:45

Hmm, that's great. So you ended up at Westminster Theological Seminary to do your M.Div. work, and I'm assuming your theological experience there was a little bit different than maybe the Bible college was. Congrats on that degree. What drew you to go get a degree from a seminary, and especially from Westminster?

Darby Strickland 7:08

You know when I finished school in Chicago, I really wanted to do a year of service. So I spent a year working in a shelter for abused and neglected children in the city of Chicago. And it was a holding tank for children that situations were so bad that they couldn't place. And it was this... The things you saw were just unimaginable. And that led me to want to pursue a degree in counseling children. So I actually enrolled in Boston College and was continuing to do crisis work there. It just became really evident to me after semester of school that I was sitting on the things that the children needed the most, and that was the gospel. The gospel was always going to be the most powerful influencer in a child's life. And I

just felt like I couldn't offer that in a secular job. And so literally one day I opened my mailbox, and there is a brochure for Westminster Seminary, unsolicited, unasked. And they were advertising that they had a Master's of Divinity specializing in counseling. And that just really appealed to me because it was really intensive, study of Scripture, as well as counseling.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 8:16

Well, that's really impressive. I know that the work you had to do in the languages, and everything at Westminster, was very rigorous. And so that really speaks to your heart and through love of really wanting to help people. You know, what was your goal? Was your goal when you enrolled in those courses, "I just want to be able to help people who are in these situations"? Or were you hoping to work at CCEF? Or What were you thinking?

Darby Strickland 8:49

I don't know. Yeah, that's a great question. I don't know that I knew. I knew when I entered in it was a four-year, full-time commitment. And I knew coming out as a woman, getting a job in a church was probably going to be unlikely. So I really just was trying to figure out what the Lord wanted. And wanting to do that one-on-one work was the goal, but I didn't know what shape that could possibly take.

Eric Schumacher 9:16

Do you... Following up on that? Do you know of many churches that have women on staff doing counseling?

Darby Strickland 9:25

That's a great question. I think there are a few, depending on the size of the church. Sometimes they'll have part-time counselors or directors of women ministry that dabble. I don't want to say dabble in counseling, but part of their very large responsibilities is counseling women. So yeah, it probably really just depends on the resources of the church.

Eric Schumacher 9:48

Would you encourage that if a church could afford even a part time woman that's trained in counseling to do that? What would be the benefits of that?

I think several things. I think for one, it gives women in the church a place to go to another woman who is identified as trained, a good, valuable resource. It takes burden off pastors' and elders' plates. And I just think there's so many people who are suffering in our churches that need longer term care. Our churches tend not to do great with longer term problems, just because they don't have the structure to man the burden. And having women in those places, I think is really just a blessing...

Elyse Fitzpatrick 10:35

So what was your experience like as a woman at seminary? And I mean, if it was great, then I want to hear that. Yeah. I'd like to... I'm not searching for some specific answer. I want to know what it was like.

Darby Strickland 10:54

Yeah, I can say, going there. I... Let me think how to put it... I walked into seminary unaware of reformed theology, unaware of what I was getting into, in a sense. But I did find the community very gracious, particularly the professors. I always felt valued, respected, honored. And so particularly, the counseling faculty was fabulous. There was one winter where two male students wanted to do an independent study with Harvie Conn on some passages in Scripture that pertain to women. And he told them, he

would do it only if they found a woman to join them. And I just really appreciated his insight there and tenderness and teaching them how to listen to women. With the students, you know, there were some that was fine and great. Some were very suspicious, particularly because I was getting an M.Div. You know, "Does she want to be a pastor? Or is she trying to find a husband?" So you kind of had to... I felt like I had to defend on why I was there when I was young. So I felt like I had to defend why I was there. In the end, I feel like I won. I did find a husband, so...

Elyse Fitzpatrick 12:16  
Well, there you go!

Darby Strickland 12:18  
Right! I had to take back some of my defensiveness of that. But with great joy. He was a great prize. And you know, there was... I did have to take a preaching class, and I would say, that was probably the most awkward thing for me, as a woman. You know, I do believe in male authority. I don't really... I don't... I did not want to be a pastor or a preacher, yet at the same time, the degree required it. And I think we do do a disservice. We want women who are qualified with scriptures to be able to speak well of Scripture and be able to give a good presentation. But I remember getting up to give my -- I kept saying preaching, small "P" -- my talk, and having some of the students walk out. Some of the male students walk out because of their uncomfotability and to protest. But you understood the seminary could have set them up better to receive that and by just labeling my requirement differently.

Eric Schumacher 13:16  
Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:17  
You could have just stood up and just said, you're not there to preach. You're just there to share some thoughts.

Darby Strickland 13:22  
There you go.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:24  
Yeah, I let me just say, I've had that same experience, actually at Westminster out here when Dennis Johnson was doing a class on women in church, home, and society. And he had asked me to teach a few of the hours, and some of the guys walked out. And, you know, that's like, whatever to them. I mean, they they have to do... They have to live according to their convictions.

Eric Schumacher 13:58  
Yep.

Darby Strickland 13:58  
That's right.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 13:59  
And so that was their conviction. Yeah. So did you have any female professors at seminary in your M.Div.? Or in the counseling module? Or...

Darby Strickland 14:13

That's a great question. Looking back, I was there when Karen Jobes was there, and she did not retain her position there.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 14:20

You've lost, I think, a very good friend in the last year or so. Probably in David Powlison, who was one of the kindest, most soft spoken person I've ever met in my life. That must leave a real hole there at CCEF. Or... How is that for you? Sorry, you can not answer that if you don't want.

Darby Strickland 14:45

You know. Yeah. I mean, I think David is just irreplaceable. He is one of a kind in his heart before the Lord and his humility and his care and his ability to listen for other people. And I noticed CCEF was transitioning. I just kept thinking that, "We are not going to replace David. We're just going to have to rely on a multitude of gifts given in other people." And I've seen the Lord be faithful to CCEF and the community grieve him well but also rejoice and just knowing, you know, when he talked about Jesus his eye twinkled. My just impression... It was like, "His eyes are just on fire."

Elyse Fitzpatrick 15:27

Sometimes I know when I had conversation with him, it was almost like, "Okay, I just met with the Lord for a little while." I mean, not to say that he didn't sin and not to say, you know, that his feet were made of clay. Of course they were. But sometimes when you were around him, it was like, "Wow. Okay. That's something different."

Darby Strickland 15:45

Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 15:46

It's marvelous. Okay. So you've written booklets about domestic abuse, and we assume that you've spent time counseling women in those kinds of situations. What do you think needs to be said by the church that isn't being said, and what are you encouraged about?

Darby Strickland 16:08

Yeah, that's a great question. I think the church often struggles when they encounter domestic abuse. They become afraid because it threatens the institution of marriage, in their minds. And marriage is something we all value. And so I just really want to encourage the church to value women and their children more than the institution of marriage and not to be afraid to lean in, to ask good questions, to find out what's really going on. But the Lord guides and gives wisdom, and we don't have to worry about the end of the story, per se, when we're just learning about somebody in their situation.

Two, I also think... I've really been encouraged lately by... There's just... I've encountered pastors and elders who have an attitude of learning. They're just really aware when they encounter of abuse of what they don't know. And that posture of just learners and people who are saying, "I'm uncomfortable. I'm in over my head. I don't know what to make sense of this." That's just been really encouraging to me lately. And I think, sadly, it's actually women sometimes are the ones to harm their sisters when their sisters are starting to share stories of abuse. They often dismiss them, put other women down, or offer really shallow advice. It doesn't really connect to abuse. And in the first disclosure women often make in church, and it's the most important, and it largely determines what their next steps will be. And so I really want the men in our church to embolden other women to be comfortable saying that God hates abuse and that he cherishes his daughters and that abuse is wrong. And I just think we're... It's brave to

say those things because they feel controversial, but Scripture is pretty clear. God hates what's happening when abuse is occurring. I think if we could be saying that clearer, we would just bless so many more people.

Eric Schumacher 18:21

So I'm curious about something you just said that women are often most harmed by women when they disclose. Why does that happen?

Darby Strickland 18:33

For one, I think other women, to be gracious, they really can't imagine what's happening in the marriage. You know, a victim often shares like a trial story or a little hint of, you know, "My husband's really jealous. Is your husband jealous?" or "My husband likes my house clean. Is your husband really picky?" And somebody might just brush off a comment like that or give advice. They don't slow down and ask for more information. Other times, they'll say, "I'm really upset with my husband," or then they talk about respect right away. They just go to the toolboxes that the marriage books have always taught them, and they don't know to be curious. And so one of the things I want to do in my book is just to teach people how to be curious, how to be a learner of someone's story, how to look for hidden red flags and draw somebody out. And then I think we just feel scared, right? When a marriage becomes at stake, people feel uncomfortable, because they just haven't spent the time studying, or no one's taught them. Right? The implications for that.

Eric Schumacher 19:39

So I've just started reading your book "Is it abuse?" And I can just tell already, it's a book that I'm going to encourage pastors to buy, not just for themselves, but for their staff and for their volunteers. And just because of what you say in the beginning about the importance of being curious about other stories, looking for red flags, and then how you should and should not respond when someone brings something up like that. So could you maybe just give us an example of what a trial story might be? And then what you shouldn't say, and why. And what you should say, and how you might continue to be curious about that conversation.

Darby Strickland 20:29

Sounds good. So I'll just dive us all right into the deep end of sex. Because that's what typically happens when women come to counsel me. They say, "I asked my Bible study leader this question, and this was her response." So typically, a woman will be experiencing sexual abuse in marriage which, sadly, is really prevalent when women are being abused in Christian homes. And she'll say something to a friend, like, "How much sex does your husband want?" Or "I just feel like I can't keep up with my husband's need." And the woman will just take that at face value of thinking, you know, and offer something of saying, "Well, you know, it's good to keep your husband satisfied." Or "If he doesn't get it from you, he'll be tempted to look elsewhere. You know, pornography is everywhere." And so again, she'll just stay in a lane. Being curious, will look like, "Well, what do you mean? Why are you asking that question? How often is your husband asking for sex? What do you mean, 'You can't keep up with it?'" Right? And so even just asking one or two more questions, you get the clarity of, "It's three times a day," or "He's angry when it doesn't go a certain way." Or "Pornography is intruding in our to our relationship in this way." So it's not like we need the details of the sexual relationship, per se, but we do need more details to know what we're speaking into.

Eric Schumacher 21:49

Yeah. So what happens when a woman floats one of those trial stories out to a friend or a pastor and either a quick cliché answer is given or it's sort of brushed off with a joke?

Darby Strickland 22:08

Right, so women who are abused typically don't know they are. So they flow to the trouble in saying, "Is this normal?" And often what they then hear is, "That's normal," or "There's something wrong with me. There's must be something wrong with me that I'm struggling with this or that I'm uncomfortable with this." And so somehow, they then go back and try to stay in the system that they're in to be a better wife, be a better performing wife. Internally, they take it in a way that does a lot of potential damage.

Eric Schumacher 22:37

Hmm. So a person is curious. They're asking, "What do you mean?" And the person becomes very emotional as they try to share. What's your follow up?

Darby Strickland 22:52

Yeah, I think it's just saying to somebody, "Yes, I'm here. I'm listening. I can see this is hard for you." Oftentimes, oppressed people tell stories in circular and disorganized fashion because they're traumatized people. And I think as a people helper, that's just one cue that something bigger is going on. I'm not understanding what they're saying. And so again, it's just being in the moment. Just saying, "I'm here for you. I want to listen to you. What's helpful to you? Can I find you help?" Again, just really not debating their story or trying to extract details. Just saying, "What's helpful for me to know and understand?" What questions do you have that you're not getting answers for?

Eric Schumacher 23:34

So let's say a woman becomes really emotional. She's obviously very shaken. And she just says, "I have to go," and she turns and walks away. And you want to follow up with her later. Email her? text her?

Darby Strickland 23:51

Right? Absolutely not. Right.

Eric Schumacher 23:52

Why not?

Darby Strickland 23:53

Why not? Right? Because... You're on to this. Oppressed women are typically monitored by their spouses. So their emails are monitored. Their texts are monitored. Oftentimes, their phones are linked up with tracker devices. So you can say to someone, "Hey, I'd love to meet you for coffee." But you don't want to inquire for more information, even on a phone call. I've had counselees, whose houses have been bugged. And so you just want to keep it real open, unless you're in person. You might even say to the person, "What you're sharing to me is important, but I want to make sure we're not talking about things over the phone or emailing me."

Yeah. Yeah. So even offering to meet in a place that's comfortable for them, and for some that it could be your home, some that could be a public place. And I've often said as a male pastor, I'll offer to meet for coffee with a woman in a public place because then she's not... She doesn't feel trapped in an office. There's people around, if she wants that. You know, she can get up and leave. So let's say that you're talking with her, and she begins to disclose information about how her husband's treating her. How do you know when something is an occasional thing? Like he got mad and yelled at me (we all get mad and

yell). And when it is verbal and emotional abuse? How do you determine... Obviously, there's some things that cross the line, you know.

Some things are obvious, and make it easier. Right?

Eric Schumacher 25:31

You know? Yeah. So, yeah. How do you answer that question? Is it abuse?

Darby Strickland 25:36

I think the first thing is, I want to help if we don't have to answer it right away. Oftentimes, it takes a long time. We want to collect stories. We don't want to... We want to know... When I'm teaching my class, I tell students, "You want to understand. You want to get enough information that you know what it was like to be in the room with two of them. You don't just want the information of the argument -- what was said -- but you wanna know what it looked like. Where was someone standing? You want the screenplay, the whole feel of it." And that's just going to take time to extract. You also are going to need to establish that there's a pattern and that those behaviors of someone losing their temper who had a purposefulness to control and dominate someone. And a few stories can be shrugged away or misunderstood. But when there's oppression, there's going to be hundreds of stories. And if you understand what the dynamics of abuse are, you'll be able to say, "These behaviors had this intentionality." Or abuse is fueled by an entitled heart. You can start to clearly see that their spouse has this entitlement driving what it's after.

Eric Schumacher 26:43

Yeah. So that's where curiosity is important. Because if you just say, "Yes, sometimes my husband gets stressed, and he yells too," you've just normalized, what you actually don't know. Because you know, your husband one time a year, you know, yells at his truck when he's changing the oil. And you say, "This is normal." She might think because he berates her to tears every single night, "Well, that's that's just what a normal Christian marriage is."

Darby Strickland 27:19

Right. And that's when you're making the assumption that her marriage is like yours when you really can't imagine the evils and the horrors that she's enduring.

Eric Schumacher 27:27

So I guess I have one final question. So for pastors who... Let's say a woman says, or even husband says, "My wife thinks we should come in for marriage counseling. We just had a bad fight." And they come in together. She may feel unable to speak while he is there, and he may have a list of topics he's given her that are off limits. And I've had women tell me, "My husband doesn't want me to do marriage counseling unless he, any counseling, unless he's there, and there can't be any talk about sex." So what should a pastor do to make sure he's allowing her to have a safe place where she can disclose? Or he can be curious?

Darby Strickland 28:28

Yeah, I think it's always ideal to try to do at least a short meeting with both of them independently. So that is something that I just urge particularly when you see somebody that's got a high conflict marriage or they've been in marriage counseling that's failed several times, but there's something about it that just isn't sitting right. Or if she's sitting in the room, and you're sensing, she's not volunteering. She's not equal footing. She's trying to take up as little space and say as little as possible. There's some things that

are going to make you want to have a conversation on the side with her and just ask some of those questions, "Do you feel free to speak? Do you feel free to disagree with your spouse? What's marriage counseling like for you?" And I think if you can't create that opportunity, you just do not want to ask questions when the people are in front of you that could be used to harm her later. You want to really stay... I always say, you know, "Husband's the head of the home, so I'm gonna stay focused on you for a while." And you get a real quick sense if the husband wants to actually control the counseling. He actually becomes really directive of the pastor and says, "My wife needs to work on communicatio." Or if you approach him about his sin, he gets defensive. You start to pick up on cues that he's controlling what you're trying to do. That's also a good indicator for a pastor.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 29:45

So Darby, I'm assuming that you've done hours and hours and hours of this kind of counseling. I wonder, first of all, let me ask you, as far as an abusive husband is concerned, have you ever seen serial abusers actually change? I mean, serial abusers?

Darby Strickland 30:07

Yes, I know. I would say, often in all my years, I have seen one or two change. And one surprising was a non-Christian. I have seen men reduce the amount and the intensity of the oppression with high accountability from their church. But I have not seen sustained repentance for two or more years without high involvement.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 30:36

Yeah. Why do you think that is? Do you have thoughts about that?

Darby Strickland 30:41

I do. I think, because entitlement fuels abuse, right? You get to make the rules. You get to enforce them. You get your world the way you want it. It's pretty hard to put down that kind of power. Also, oppressors are really blind and self-justified in what they're doing. They really believe that they're right and righteous. So when you have that kind of heart, you don't really see your need for a savior. And so your heart, it's harder to reach them, to teach them, to bring them the gospel, in general. So I think it's really just... And a hardened heart that perpetrates abuse, we all know, it over time, it just gets harder and harder and harder. And it's harder to reach.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 31:21

So we've had Todd Bordow on the show before, and you may or may not know him. He's an OPC pastor, and he has talked about serial abusers having a hardened heart and are actually just very, words that you were just using, and they're really not regenerate, even though they know all the right words, all the Christianese. They know how to play the game in the Christian world. And so if they end up in counseling, you know, then, of course, they want to be the ones in control of the counseling. But then they know how to say all the things that an let's say untrained counselor or pastor would want to hear. How do you propose that pastors or counselors try to get it something like that?

Darby Strickland 32:17

Yeah, I think that's really a nuanced thing or aspect of when someone is faking repentance or a pseudo-repentance or is only repentant about the things, the sins, that they're willing to give up. Oppressors cheat, seem to change their control tactics. But they also can cry, the biggest tears, and they are wonderful with words and casting a public image. And so really, the only person who is truly going to know if their spouse is repentant is the wife. She is going to be alert to the way that control is changing

and happening. And actually, at the end of my book, I spend quite a bit talking about what real repentance should look like in oppressor because that's just something I'm really concerned about. That we rightly assess the difference between worldly sorrow -- you know, sin always regrets making a fool of itself for being caught -- versus Godly sorrow, "Am I sorrowful for the harm that I've done? Am I clear? Specific? Knowing that I grieve the Lord, am I doing everything that I can do to grow in humility?" Or "Am I managing the situation?"

Elyse Fitzpatrick 33:30

I know that a lot of times, women will come into a situation. By the time they get to counseling, they're pretty much at their wit's end a lot of times, and they may be unloading and responding in ways that it would be very easy for a pastor or a counselor to say, "Well see, you're really you're provoking the situation." And during that time, then also you have the husband who knows how to play the game. And so it calls for so much wisdom, so much patience, so much seeking to understand. It makes it really difficult for a pastor or a counselor to know how to proceed. Have you seen that sort of thing with the wife coming in? She's just... she's the big mess.

Darby Strickland 34:19

Well, and she can either seem mentally unstable because she's so anxious and depressed, right? I've had plenty of oppressors convince their pastors that their wives are mentally ill, she can't remember things. Or they're so angry because they finally realize what's happening to them is so wrong. In either case, the presentation of the victim really throws the pastor off because he's looking at someone that to him is ungodly. She's not submissive. She's fearful. She's angry. And so again, we have to really not judge the emotion or the presentation. We really want to judge the content. We want to listen and collect those stories. And I think a good Question is, you know, "Would God be angry about the things that he's hearing happen to this person." And so I always tell my students, you know, "Allow emotions to be expressed. It's going to be messy, but trust the Lord that He will mold them into lament over time. But just allow the emotions to sit in the room. If you see somebody who's highly disorganized, or confused, be patient." So many of my women come in with little pieces of paper and bits of stories and are so disorganized. And they're just quick to be dismissed by friends and leaders in the church, and "She can't remember things." And so helping people understand what that actually is a sign of helps them interpret what they're seeing differently.

Eric Schumacher 35:44

Yeah. So let's say that a pastor or a counselor, a member of the church, has revealed that abuse is happening. This woman has come to realize, "Yes, this is abuse." You've worked intensely with both of them for a long period of time, maybe two years, like you mentioned. And there's no owning up to it. There's no repentance. It's time to bring this to church discipline, and remove him from the church. She's in a safe place. So as this is presented for church discipline, what do you and do you not disclose to the congregation? And how do you respond to church members who are going, "I can't believe that he'd be abusive because he's such a godly man I see every Sunday." You know, "Is this really abuse?"

Darby Strickland 36:46

Yeah. And I think that's what's so difficult for I... My heart just goes out to pastors on many levels because they have an oppressor in their congregation who is trying to win the PR war. And they will create a camp. And they will create a different narrative. And they will try to create division among the elders and the people in the church to side with them. And so sometimes... All pastors that I've worked with handle it differently. Some will discipline, and it'll be public proclamation of why. Some will discipline, and it won't be. Sometimes the wives want it mentioned. Sometimes they don't. But I tell

pastors, in all situations, they can help their congregants identify a divisive person, a person who's stirring up strife and conflict. They can always have an open door, if they're, you know, they're hearing a story come talk to one of us who know the story directly. They should definitely be working with the couple's small group and her closest friends. So saying, "This is what we verified. And this is what we've seen." And so I think all churches are going to handle that differently, but I think it's really important because if the narrative isn't clear to the key players, it gets used and twisted. And I just feel for... I've seen sessions fall apart. Or even pastors deeply grieved years later, when they see what they missed. Yeah.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 38:05

So thank you for that Darby. That's so helpful. It's so helpful. Some kinds of biblical counseling has gotten a bad reputation. I am a... I have a degree in biblical counseling. I don't want to say much because I don't do much counseling at this point, but... And I'm going to say that probably the first decade or so of the years in which I was trained to do counseling, I was probably one of those women who were more harmful, did more harm than good. And really, I bought into thinking a lot of times, "If you could just be more submissive. If you could just be sort of more calm. If you..." You know. So I repent of that. And so I'm wondering, you know, biblical counseling has gotten a bad reputation, and especially when it comes to counseling women in abusive relationships. Do you think that reputation is deserved? Is it still deserved? And if you could speak to pastors and those who believe that the Bible is in fact sufficient for counseling, what would you say?

Darby Strickland 39:17

Yeah, I think to the first question, yes, sadly, sometimes, biblical counselors still miss it. Or when they see it, they don't understand that they need to prioritize protection for the abused. Oftentimes, I'll see couples that are on their third, fourth, fifth counselor, and the counselor is just... They knew that they were seeing a highly high conflict marriage, but they didn't have the questions or the tools to unearth what was happening. Or like you're saying, Eric, they didn't have the wisdom to pull them apart, to do some individual exploration. And secondly, I think we all know that we all sin in our marriage. And so sometimes biblical counselors will lean towards the sin before they lean towards the suffering, and = when they fail to understand the dynamics of abuse, they think if again, "If I could just teach a woman to do this." I remember telling a wife, "Just go home and make his favorite pie." I could die now.

Elyse Fitzpatrick 40:11

"Go do your ironing, you'll be okay."

Darby Strickland 40:14

Just, you know, he doesn't... "Just let him know, you're still interested in him." You know, and then he threw the pie at her because it wasn't his favorite kind and if she knew him, he would have loved her better.

Eric Schumacher 40:22

She should make that pie from "The Help."

Darby Strickland 40:25

There you go. So I think we've all been there. We've all had these missteps when we didn't understand the dynamics. And sadly, the oppressed person is always going to be the most compliant person in the room. And so when your counseling in a case and it's difficult, you're gonna keep leaning where you get the least resistance really. So again, I think we just have to really understand the dynamics. And then...

And I would say, I agree that the Bible is sufficient. It's just we have to take the proper conceptualization of what is happening to it. And so when there's oppression, or abuse, we want to go to the passages about oppression or evil or deceit or enemies or bad kings. And that's the places we're going to learn where to address abuse in marriage. If we really understand, we learn how God talks about his love for his people and the ways that Jesus's love is sacrificial, we'll be able to see that oppressors stand in extreme opposite of that. So I believe the Bible sufficient; it's just we don't know. We don't understand the dynamics. We're not bringing scripture the right questions.

Eric Schumacher 41:40

That's good. You've been listening to the Worthy Podcast with our guest, Darby Strickland. And she is the author of the new book that you need to go and get and buy extras as gifts for the people in your church and for your pastors and women's ministry leadership and men's ministry leadership. The title of that is, "Is It Abuse?" by Darby Strickland. Darby, thank you so much for joining us today. It has been...

Darby Strickland 42:08

The pleasure's been mine. I really enjoyed it.

Eric Schumacher 42:10

So we've got one last question for Darby, and listeners, we're gonna bid you goodbye now. And this question will be answered on Patreon. And so Darby, what would you say to pastors about being open and approachable to women who want to come speak to them about helping abusive relationship? Or about how they have been helping abusive relationships?

Elyse Fitzpatrick 42:42

Well, friends, that's our time together today. So glad that you joined us. Would you please help us and rate and review and subscribe to our podcast? If you agree with what we're doing to try to have respectful conversations about the value of women, please help us get the word out. And don't forget, you can always become a Patreon supporter. So thanks for being with us today. Lord bless you. Be well.

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