

## Verbal Abuse / How God Sees Abuse

**Carol:** I was buying some food this morning when I saw a mother and her little boy. He was such a cute little child, interested in everything in that shop. He wanted to touch them and play with them. He even squeezed a banana until it popped right open!

**Tammy:** Oh no, Carol, you know children loved to touch things. And it's not always a good thing, especially when we're in a hurry, but it's how they learn.

**Carol:** Well, it certainly seemed to annoy his mother. She kept telling him he was silly, stupid, and an idiot. "You are a bad, little horrible boy", she shouted. She even said that she wished she didn't have him. I felt so sad because his eyes filled up with tears and his mouth quivered. He stopped playing and followed her around, but he looked like a little beaten puppy.

**Tammy:** Did she beat him?

**Carol:** No, it was just the words, and the angry way she said them.

**Tammy:** Well, people say 'sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me'.

**Carol:** What does that 'saying' really mean Tammy?

**Tammy:** It means that people cannot hurt you with bad things they say to you or about you. But I think words really can hurt us. Have you ever been hurt by words?

**Carol:** I certainly have, Tammy. I can still remember things that were said when I was a little girl.

Welcome to *Women of Hope*. Today we're talking about words and actions that wound or hurt us. Sometimes we call it 'abuse'. Let's welcome our guest today. Fran is a counselor and she has seen many people whose hearts are hurting.

**Fran:** I have, Carol, and I've also had my own hurting heart. I think we can all remember feeling powerless and hurt.

**Carol:** Abuse is a strong word, isn't it Fran. What does it really mean?

**Fran:** We talk about 'abuse' when a person who has more power uses that power to please themselves. They do this in ways that hurt a person who is weaker than themselves.

**Carol:** Do you mean they are bigger and bully someone?

**Fran:** Yes it might mean that, but it can mean more than that. They *might* be bigger and stronger, and use force. But they might be in a higher position, like a boss... They might be richer, like a money lender or landlord... or have authority, like a policeman. They all have the power to make your life more difficult.

**Tammy:** I've heard of soldiers who force people to give them money, and even force women to have sex with them.

**Fran:** Yes, those things are certainly abuse. Sexual abuse is one of the worst kinds. No-one has the right, ever, to force or scare or trick another person into a physical contact that they don't want.

**Carol:** I always warned my children not to go with people they don't know.

**Fran:** That's good advice. But sadly, it is often not a stranger, but someone in the family or a family friend who demands sex or molests children who are powerless to say no. Children do not understand all that is meant by sexual contact, and their little bodies and minds are not ready for it. It is never right for older people to use them in this way. If a child hugs an adult, it is not an invitation to touch them in wrong ways- or make them touch an adult in wrong ways.

I have worked with many adults, both women and men, who have been deeply damaged in their hearts and minds because of sexual abuse when they were children. Usually the abuser has told them it is their fault, and they must keep it a secret. This kind of secret is wrong. If you, or someone you know, are being abused like this, find someone in authority who you trust, and talk to them about it. Children deserve protection against these kinds of cruel things. In God's word, the Bible, Jesus said that God will punish those who do bad things to children. He loves children and hates this evil. (Luke 17:2)

**Tammy:** Wow, that's pretty heavy, Fran.

**Fran:** Yes, it is heavy. It's very serious. I sometimes cry out to God in pain because of these terrible things that happen to people. It is not something that we like to talk about, but it happens all over the world, in many cultures. If we keep it a secret we help abusers to keep hurting innocent people, usually women and children. Bringing it out into the open is the first step to changing it.

**Tammy:** Mm. That takes a lot of courage.

**Fran:** But it's not always violence with sticks or fists. Well educated people can use clever words to hurt or trick others. Parents, teachers or religious leaders, who children are taught to obey, can use their position to get their own way.

I'd like us to think now about the words we use. Can you remember the first time you felt really hurt by words? Can you remember what was said, and how you felt? I'm sure a memory comes to your mind. Perhaps those same feelings rise up again, even now.

We tend to remember times when our feelings were strong, even when we forget what actually happened at the time. Those words may stay with us, and we still hear them in our heads. Years later we can live as though they are true. Think about that little boy that we heard about earlier. If his parents often act like that, he may go through life believing that he is no good and that he does not deserve love. The world will seem a dangerous place to him. He may be fearful, afraid to say what he thinks or step out bravely to do new things. Or he may become angry and bitter and find it very hard to feel love. And of course when he grows up he won't know how to be a good parent himself.

**Tammy:** But parents need to correct their children, to discipline them. Sometimes we think we need to smack them. Is that abuse?

**Fran:** What do you think is the difference between discipline and abuse?

**Tammy:** I suppose discipline is done to teach your child important lessons. Abuse is more about getting what you want.

**Fran:** Yes, that's right. Discipline could be punishment, like a smack... or being sent to their room for a while. Sometimes we make our children do something they don't want to, like helping with tasks at home. We do need to train our children. We usually don't enjoy disciplining our children, and they don't enjoy it either! God's word says that no-one enjoys their father's discipline at the time, but in the long run it produces good fruit in their lives. (Hebrews 12:11)

**Carol:** That is so true. I'm glad that my mum and dad made me study, and taught me to know what is right. I'm even glad they smacked me sometimes.

**Fran:** So when you need to correct your children, try to show them what they did wrong... Punish them if needed, but don't do it in a temper, or beat them. Don't call them bad names, and **always** let them know that you love them.

Friend, what do **you** think children need most? ...Yes, they need food, and a home, clothes and exercise. They need to be taught the right way to behave. But just as much, they need to know that you hear and value their thoughts, that their needs will be respected and met. They need to know that they are loved for who they are, even if they sometimes do wrong things.

**Tammy:** I think even as adults we need those things too... to be valued and respected...and to feel loved, don't we?

**Fran:** Yes we certainly do!

**Carol:** Is it just children that are wounded by words, Fran?

**Fran:** No, not at all. We can be hurt by words all through our lives. You know this if you live or work with people who tease you, or say sarcastic or cruel things. The worst times are when someone we love, or depend on, says harsh, bitter, threatening or untrue things to us. It feels worse than a slap. Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can REALLY hurt you.

**Fran:** Now I want us to think about how God sees abuse. What do you think he would feel like when he sees innocent children or adults being abused?

It is clear that people who abuse other people do not show respect... they treat other people as 'things' to be used. That is so wrong in God's eyes. God's prophets wrote that God is very angry with those who use their power to hurt and exploit others (Amos 2:6, 4:1-2). The Bible says he made all

people in his image... like him in some ways (Genesis 1:26). He says you are unique and special to him. You are not a 'thing', you are a person, and God wants to be your friend.

You know, my friend, God is like the best mother or father there ever was. He loves you so much, even when you do wrong things. In his word, the Bible, he says 'I have loved you with everlasting love' (Jeremiah 31:3). He may teach you lessons in life to help you do better, but he never turns against you. He never loses his temper with you, or uses his power to hurt you. He says his 'plans are to do you good, not to harm you. He wants to give you a future and hope' (Jeremiah 29:11).

If you have bad memories of abusive words, you can ask God to heal those memories and put his loving words in their place. If you are abused now, don't believe the lies people may say; tell yourself the truth. Remember that you are precious to God, so precious that he gave his Son Jesus to die for you, so that you could be his very special daughter.

Jesus taught his followers to show love and concern for those who are weaker, to try to protect the powerless and speak up for them. Jesus spoke up for children and for women. He reached out to people who were poor, or powerless or rejected.

Here is a true story about Jesus Christ, from the Bible...

Early one morning Jesus was sitting teaching the people in the temple courtyard. Some community leaders dragged a woman along and threw her in front of Jesus. 'Look at her' they shouted. 'She was caught in the very act of having sex with a man who was not her husband. The law says she should be stoned to death. What do you say?' They were actually trying to trick Jesus into criticizing their holy law.

Jesus looked at the woman and was filled with pity for her. He knew she had little power in that town. Perhaps she had been forced or tricked into being with that man. And where was the man- wasn't he just as guilty, perhaps even more guilty? Yet he wasn't being punished at all. How cruel and unfair it was!

Jesus didn't say sex outside marriage was all right.

He said quietly 'Let the man who has never done anything wrong throw the first stone'. Then he waited, bending down and writing something in the dust.

The leaders became very quiet, because they knew they were sinners. They had done wrong things too. The oldest leader turned away, and left without a word. Others followed silently, till only the woman was left. Then Jesus stood up and looked at her.

'Where are those who judged you?' he asked. 'They've all gone', she answered through her tears. 'I don't judge you either', Jesus said gently. 'Now go, and don't sin again' (John 8:1-11).

Jesus touched people who felt dirty from their own past wrongdoing and dirty from things that were done to them. He invited them to come to him (Matthew 11:28). He promised to forgive their sins and to wash them clean in their hearts, if they trusted in him and really wanted to start a new life that pleased God. He reaches out to you today, my friend in just the same way (1 John 1:9).

**Carol:** Thank you Fran for those **good** words. I hope they reminded you that you are precious... that every person is precious. Why don't we stop for a moment and pray together. You can pray this prayer too, if it is what you want to say to God.

*Dear God, we thank you that you love us better than the best mother or father could ever do...  
Will you please wash away the guilt of our sins, because Jesus Christ has taken our punishment...  
And please begin to wash away the pain and dirtiness we feel because of what we have suffered in  
our lives...  
We ask you to protect us and those we love, and to help us to protect and care for others.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Tammy:** If you would like to know more about Jesus and how he can help you please write to us.

**Carol:** It's time for us to go now. We'll look forward to being with you again soon.