



Why Stay in an, Abusive Relationship?

Many of us wonder why a wife would stay in such a destructive situation. We become frustrated trying to help; because no matter how hard we try, she has a reason why she can't act to change the situation.

We don't understand that her fear and low self-esteem render her helpless, immobile, dependent on the relationship. (Actually, the husband is dependent on her, too, panicked at the thought of losing her.) We don't understand the coping mechanisms she develops in order to survive.

A woman often must deny, even to herself that she is abused. As one counselor pointed out, it is easier to deny the facts, because once a woman admits them, she really has to do something about them. And doing something—particularly leaving and facing the unknown—is to her more terrifying than the known, no matter how miserable it may be. Here are some ways she thinks that keep her from leaving:

1. I'm worthless. Therefore I can't function on my own. And possibly, I deserve this treatment.
2. It's all my fault, I need to try harder. If I were more spiritual, it would all work out.
3. Without a man, without my marriage, I'd be only half a person.
4. I couldn't make it financially on my own. I haven't any skills, talents. We would live in poverty. I have no resources.
5. It isn't really such a problem. He loses his temper, but he is not an abuser. He gets drunk, but he isn't an alcoholic; after all, he goes to work most mornings. He went three whole weeks without gambling.
6. It is going to get better when his promotion comes through or when the kids are older. He has promised he'll stop.
7. I love him. And he can be so loving, so generous, so sorry for what he has done.
8. I feel responsible for him. I might be the one to help him be saved. I can help him to change. Who else understands him?
9. It is better for the children to have a father, even an abusive one, than no father at all. Separation would be traumatic for them.
10. He says if I leave I won't get a penny from him, or he'll come after me, kill me/steal the children/hurt my family.



11. I'm too frightened to do anything when he is abusive and it seems pointless when he is being nice.
12. Nobody would believe me. His friends, coworkers, think he is wonderful. It would be my word against his.
13. The Bible forbids divorce and I just have to stick it out.

These attitudes keep her trapped. But we need to persevere in extending lifelines to her, again and again. Because the bottom line, according to all the experts in abuse whom we have interviewed—Christian and non-Christian—is that separation is essential if a woman and her children are in danger. And, except that God would give her a miracle, it is her only hope of getting her husband to cease his violence.