

UNMASKING THE
MONSTER
IN OUR MIDST

SHAWN FOSTER

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD IS NOT SILENT

It was supposed to be about *him*. That's what we were told when we were invited to the meeting. He'd made some poor choices that were unraveling their marriage and damaging his personal testimony. They wanted counsel. We went with heavy hearts—ready to listen, speak truth, and help them begin to heal their marriage.

At least, that's what we *thought* we were walking into.

But when we sat down, it didn't take long to realize this wasn't just his story. Her silence spoke louder than anything he said.

She sat stiffly on the far end of the couch, shoulders tense, leg bouncing nonstop as if her body couldn't hold the pain inside any longer. She nodded when we greeted her but didn't meet our eyes. My wife and I both noticed. She carried a weight that didn't match the narrative he was giving us.

He talked—mostly about his struggles, his confusion, and what he thought might help.

He was calm, even measured. But she was unraveling in plain sight.

My wife leaned toward her gently, just offering presence. And slowly, piece by piece, the truth began to slip out—not loudly, or even clearly at first, but it was real. The problem they were facing wasn't just his issue—she'd been hiding a deep hurt. And little by little, she began to share her story.

She'd been abused—not recently, but as a child. Now, years later, she was living under the weight of someone else's brokenness, still carrying wounds of her own that had never healed. No one had ever really asked her about them.

That moment changed something for us. When she finally whispered what had been buried for so long—hands trembling, voice barely audible—we realized abuse stories don't always begin with shouting. Sometimes they begin with silence.

For us, it started with a woman who wasn't the one we came to counsel—but who turned out to be the one who truly needed to be heard.

This exact story mirrors at least four separate couples in the years my wife and I ministered together as the pastor and his wife. Same story. Same details. Same tragic past. Four husbands with personal struggles, and four wives whose hidden pasts came to light because of his struggles.

We learned, but not quickly enough to help them all.

And that's what this book is about—seeing the ones who have been pushed to the margins, letting their voices be heard again, and learning to unmask the monsters that walk among us.

Here's something that surprised me the first time I noticed it: the word *abuse* barely shows up in the Bible. In the version I use—the King James—it appears only four times. Just four.

When I first saw how rarely the word appeared, I'll admit—I felt a little uneasy, because if abuse is as serious and as widespread as we know it is, especially in the world we live in now—why doesn't God mention it more clearly? Why isn't it in bold, chapter after chapter, *front and center*? Why does it feel so hidden?

The more I read, and the more I prayed through those questions, something began to shift in me. I started seeing something more powerful than the word itself—I started seeing the heart of God. And His heart is for the abused. *Deeply. Unquestionably.*

No, you won't see the word *abuse* stamped across every page—but the message against abuse is woven all through Scripture. The Bible doesn't need to repeat the word to make God's position clear. He has already said it—through His commands, His justice, and His compassion.

He speaks out against oppression. He condemns selfishness and pride. He defends the weak. He holds the powerful accountable for misusing their authority.

Jesus said it plainly in Matthew 7:12, a verse many of us grew up calling the Golden Rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

That's not just a nice piece of advice—that's the very heart of God. Treat people with the dignity and love you would want for yourself. There is no room for abuse in that kind of love. Not then. Not now. Not ever.

God doesn't just suggest we be kind—He commands us to stand up for those who've been hurt. I found Psalm 82:3–4: “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.”

The word abuse doesn't appear there, but the heart of God, and His command to care for the abused, is unmistakable.

If you've ever been mistreated, neglected, or hurt by someone who should have protected you—especially someone in authority—I want you to know: *God sees that*. He doesn't excuse it. He condemns it. And He calls us, His people, to act on behalf of the wounded. He demands that we not only care for the abused, but also publicly reprimand the abuser.

In my own life, I've seen what happens when people look the other way. I've seen the pain, the confusion, and the silence that follows. But I've also seen the healing that begins when someone finally steps forward and says, “This is wrong—and I won't ignore it anymore.”

That's part of what this book is about, too. In Ephesians 5:25–28, Paul gives us a glimpse into how relationships should look, especially in marriage: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ... so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

That's not just poetry—it's a command to selflessness. A marriage shaped by Christ's love doesn't control, manipulate, or hurt. It cherishes. It protects. And it sacrifices.

Abuse flies in the face of everything God intended for human relationships.

Jesus had something to say about those who throw their weight around and abuse their positions. In Matthew 20:25–28, He made it plain: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them ... But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ... Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”

Jesus isn't just our Savior—He's our example. He showed us that leadership isn't about dominance. It's about service. That's the kind of leader God calls us to be, whether we're pastors, husbands, parents, or friends. And when someone uses their position to control or harm, they're not following Christ—they're abusing His name.

And here's something that means a lot to me personally: Jesus knows what abuse feels like. He was rejected. Mocked. Lied about. Beaten. Crucified.

Isaiah 53:3 puts it like this: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

If you've ever felt abandoned, shamed, or attacked—Jesus gets it. He walked that road before you. Not only does He understand, but He responds to your pain with love, truth, and healing.

That's the kind of Savior I want to follow.

As you read this book, you'll see that I come from a ministry background—my grandfather and father were both pastors. I still believe in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. I still believe in the local church. But I also believe that we, as the people of God, have failed far too many victims by covering our eyes, excusing the inexcusable, and protecting abusers under the guise of “grace.”

That stops here.

In the chapters ahead, we're going to walk through one of the most sobering stories in the Bible: the tragedy of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13. It's a story I've studied deeply—and it's changed me. I believe it can change you too.

As we examine that narrative, I'll show you how the same dynamics of abuse show up again and again in real life today—even in churches.

We'll look at the roles people play: facilitator, abuser, silent bystander, well-meaning protector, and wounded victim. We'll walk through what Scripture teaches about justice, accountability, and healing. And we'll do it all through a biblical lens—one that doesn't minimize sin, doesn't excuse silence, and doesn't waver from the truth of God's Word.

This isn't a textbook. It's a conversation. A burden. A plea. My prayer is that by the end of this journey, you'll not only understand abuse more clearly. You'll be equipped—to respond biblically, compassionately, and courageously.

Before we begin, I need to thank someone special.

To my wife Debbie: This book wouldn't exist without you. You've poured your heart and life into helping others—espe-

cially those who've been hurt. You've sacrificed yourself, even when those you were helping lashed out in their own pain. You saw through their pain and still stood by them, even when they couldn't see your heart. You've helped me see through their eyes. You've shaped this work more than you know. Your unwavering love for the Lord and for others shines as a testament to your faith. I thank God for you every day.

To you, my fellow Christian—whatever circumstances have led you to this book—I truly believe God has a message for you. But it begins in His Word, first and foremost. So let's take a moment to open our Bibles and our hearts, and embark on this journey together.

Remember, you are not alone. And God is always speaking to us.