

Lesson 9 (Teacher)

FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." (Proverbs 27:12)

When do you know it's time for you to flee from a domestic violence situation? David faced this question in his relationship with King Saul. In this study we will look at how David made this decision, and how he carried it out.

1 Samuel 18:8-11

⁸ This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" ⁹ So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

¹⁰ The very next day a tormenting spirit^[a] from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, ¹¹ and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice.

After Saul becomes angry and jealous, an evil spirit comes over him, and he tries to kill David.

1 Samuel 19:10

¹⁰ Saul hurled his spear at David. But David dodged out of the way, and leaving the spear stuck in the wall, he fled and escaped into the night.

After Saul tries to spear him again, David understands that this is a pattern that will repeat itself. He is sure now that he is in physical danger. He confides in the prophet Samuel and in Saul's son Jonathan, people he trusted. Though it can be hard for victims to break the silence, it is important that they confide about their situation to people they trust. This support can help victims to do what they must in order to stay safe and end the violence, and to get the help they need.

Question 1: Do you remember a particular point at which you realized that you were in an abusive relationship? If it was dangerous, can you remember a point at which you became certain about it?

Question 2: In what ways can we try to excuse, explain away, or minimize our abuser's behavior as we try to make sense of what is happening in the relationship?

1 Samuel 20:2

²“That’s not true!” Jonathan protested. “You’re not going to die. He always tells me everything he’s going to do, even the little things. I know my father wouldn’t hide something like this from me. It just isn’t so!”

At first, not even David’s close friend Jonathan believed David, but David persisted and enlisted Jonathan’s assistance. Victims may find that some people, even family and those closest to them, do not believe the abuse, however, they should persist in developing a network of resource people who will help them.

Question 3: If you confided in others about your abuse, how did they react? Did anyone not believe you in spite of the facts?

1 Samuel 20:5-7

⁵David replied, “Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. I’ve always eaten with the king on this occasion, but tomorrow I’ll hide in the field and stay there until the evening of the third day. ⁶If your father asks where I am, tell him I asked permission to go home to Bethlehem for an annual family sacrifice. ⁷If he says, ‘Fine!’ you will know all is well. But if he is angry and loses his temper, you will know he is determined to kill me.

David devises a way to test Saul, and enlists Jonathan’s help

in carrying it out. Victims are often unsure about what is happening, and wonder whether the violence will continue, is temporary, or due to extenuating circumstances. Frequently, abusers will escalate their abuse when they feel they are being challenged. David uses this fact to test Saul's intentions and to clarify the situation. If it is safe to do so, victims of domestic violence may wish to use the four-stage process taught by Jesus in **Matthew 18:15-17** to confront their abusers and test their willingness to stop the abuse.

Question 4: Have you ever found that abuse and attempts at control escalated when you tried to confront or resist your abuser?

1 Samuel 20:18-22

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said, "Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. You will be missed when your place at the table is empty. ¹⁹ The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid before, and wait there by the stone pile.^[a] ²⁰ I will come out and shoot three arrows to the side of the stone pile as though I were shooting at a target. ²¹ Then I will send a boy to bring the arrows back. If you hear me tell him, 'They're on this side,' then you will know, as surely as the LORD lives, that all is well, and there is no trouble. ²² But if I tell him, 'Go farther—the arrows are still ahead of you,' then it will mean that you must leave immediately, for the LORD is sending you away.

Jonathan helps David to develop a safety plan before David tests Saul. Victims of domestic violence should have a safety

plan in place before taking action or attempting to leave. Your local women's shelter or domestic violence program can advise you on how to plan for your safety.

1 Samuel 20:30-35

³⁰ Saul boiled with rage at Jonathan. "You stupid son of a whore!"^[a] he swore at him. "Do you think I don't know that you want him to be king in your place, shaming yourself and your mother?" ³¹ As long as that son of Jesse is alive, you'll never be king. Now go and get him so I can kill him!"

³² "But why should he be put to death?" Jonathan asked his father. "What has he done?" ³³ Then Saul hurled his spear at Jonathan, intending to kill him. So at last Jonathan realized that his father was really determined to kill David.

³⁴ Jonathan left the table in fierce anger and refused to eat on that second day of the festival, for he was crushed by his father's shameful behavior toward David.

³⁵ The next morning, as agreed, Jonathan went out into the field and took a young boy with him to gather his arrows.

When is it time to leave? When David sees that he is definitely in danger from Saul, he leaves Saul's presence. Author Gene Edwards, in his book *A Tale of Three Kings* (Christian Books, 1980), says the aggressor makes the decision for the victim by his threats and attacks or by giving the victim cause to believe he intends harm.

Jesus and Paul also escaped rather than allowing themselves to be abused by people who were out to harm them (Luke

4:28-30 and 9:23-25; Acts 9:23-25 and 14:5-6). In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus taught that we should stay away from those who persist in abusing us, after we have made an effort to resolve the situation. Sometimes a victim needs to stay away from the abuser because he refuses to get the help he needs in order to stop abusing. Leaving and seeking safety is not the same as abandoning your marriage or relationship.

Question 5: If you had to leave a domestic violence relationship, what precautions did you take, or wish you took?

Abusers may go to extremes to prevent their victims from leaving their control. If you feel you must leave, use extreme caution. Use your safety plan and seek advice from your local women's shelter or domestic violence program if possible. It can be dangerous to announce your plans or imminent departure to your abuser. It is much safer to tell him later, and only if it is safe to do so.

Question 6: What are some ways to notify your abuser of your departure after you have left, that will help to guard your safety?

If a victim leaves an abusive relationship in order to stop the abuse, when is it safe to return? Most abusers are unable to stop abusing on their own. Professional intervention and much work is usually required. Domestic violence specialists usually recommend domestic violence perpetrator treatment programs (not anger management training or couples counseling) that last at least one year. Unless an abuser successfully completes such a program and is no longer exhibiting abusive behaviors (consistently, for at least 6 months), it is likely that the abuse will resume once the victim returns to the relationship. Even if an abuse program is completed there is no guarantee that the abuse will end.