

Lesson 3

HOW ABUSE ESCALATES

Rarely does abuse remain at the same level of severity. Over time, it tends to increase in its intensity and/or frequency. We see this escalation in King Saul's abuse of David:

- 1 Samuel 18:2 Control through isolation
- 1 Samuel 18:8-9 Paranoid jealousy; anger
- 1 Samuel 18:10-11 Attacking with a weapon
- 1 Samuel 18:25 Secretly arranging David's death
- 1 Samuel 19:1 Publicly announces death warrant
- 1 Samuel 23:8 Sending an army to stalk and kill David

Psychologists have developed a scale called *The Continuum of Violence* to show how abuse grows over time. This scale lists abusive actions, starting with the less severe and progressing to extreme abuse and death. The escalation of abuse might be so gradual that it is difficult for the victim to see what is happening until the abuse has become quite severe. Victims may learn to cope and accept it, becoming numb to the signs of danger.

Without intervention and specialized help, abuse will rarely cease on its own. Instead, it often worsens over time, becoming more severe and/or more frequent.

Many abusers find that wanting or promising to stop is not enough. With specialized domestic violence programs, hard work, commitment, and accountability, some abusers can change their behavior. However, the abuser must be willing to change, and often this change needs to occur during a separation from the victim.

The behaviors listed on the *Continuum of Violence* scale are called sin in the Bible. Therefore, it is no wonder that abuse tends to escalate since sin is a slippery slope that leads to destruction. Praise God that we have a Savior who can change hearts and renew the minds of those who will humble themselves before him, sincerely repent, and turn from their evil ways.

Questions:

1. If you think about an abusive relationship you experienced, you might be able to see how the abuse worsened over time. In what ways did the abuse escalate?
2. Can you spot any of Saul's actions on the *Continuums of Violence*?
3. What level of violence on the scale have you experienced in a relationship?

The Continuums of Abuse

Abuse often becomes more severe and/or more frequent over time. *The Continuums of Abuse* illustrate how physical, psychological, and sexual abuse can escalate.

Physical Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

- Holding down, blocking, pinning
- Pushing or shoving Shaking or jerking
- Slapping and bruising
- Throwing objects
- Punching
- Kicking
- Black eyes, cuts, chipped teeth
- Burning with hot drinks, cigarettes, etc.
- Causing serious falls
- Choking
- Severe beatings
- Broken bones
- Hitting with objects
- Back injuries, paralysis Internal injuries
- Use of weapons
- Death

Psychological Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

- "Jokes" or put-downs that demean the victim
- Acting like the victim's feelings, needs, and ideas don't matter
- Enforcing rigid roles and rules for women
- Controlling through jealousy Isolating the victim
- Insults and name-calling
- Yelling and raging
- Humiliation, throwing food
- Fist through wall
- Threats and intimidation
- Destruction of her property
- Hurting or killing pets
- Displaying guns, sleeping with guns
- Depriving the victim of sleep
- Abuser threatens suicide
- Tries to get the victim to commit suicide
- Threatens to kill her and/or the children
- Death

Sexual Abuse (in order of increasing severity and danger)

- Anger at women
- Sexual jokes and put-downs
- Embarrassing comments
- Treat a woman as a sexual object; sex expected as a duty
- Withholding sex to punish
- Touching victim in ways that feel "uncomfortable"
- Promiscuity and sexual "affairs"
- Sex after or together with violence or abuse
- Forced by violence or threats into sexual acts, the victim doesn't want to do
- Marital rape
- Incest with children
- Sadism
- Death of victim