

'The Most Shocking Thing' This Woman Found After Polling Pastors

Author, speaker and Christian advocate Autumn Miles is on a mission to reach people who have been abused, misunderstood and abandoned. Much of her work in this arena—efforts that started well before the #MeToo era took the world by storm—were sparked by her own experience as a survivor of domestic abuse.

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"When I was in high school, I met my high school sweetheart," she recently told 's "Pure Talk." "He was abusive."

Miles, author of the upcoming book, *I Am Rahab*, explained that she ended up marrying him, but eventually took her husband's abuse to their church. Miles feared for her safety—and her life—so she filed for divorce. Her church responded by kicking her out.

In the end, Miles said that the traumatizing situation motivated her to help other women in similar situations find freedom, as she sought to "shed a light on [spousal] abuse in the church."

"God really released me, gave me freedom," she said. "I wanted to reach all the Autumns in the world who were misunderstood, who weren't listened to."

Miles has since shared her personal journey through books, media and speaking appearances, launching ministry efforts aimed at helping women find themselves amid turmoil.

Among other projects, she partnered with LifeWay Research to

explore how pastors and churches cope with domestic violence, surveying 1,000 preachers to discern their views on the matter. The results were stunning.

“The most shocking thing—and the thing that really drove my passion to speak out all the more is that out of 1,000 pastors polled, only 30 percent of pastors had ... a victim come forward in three years,” she said. “With statistics like 1 in 4 women struggle with domestic violence and 1 in 7 men ... there is a chasm between what pastors think and what domestic violence victims perceive.”

It’s quite possible that many victims don’t see churches as a safe place to go for help, Miles added. Other results from the LifeWay survey underscore this disconnect, though, as pastors seem more than willing to help.

In fact, 97 percent of preachers said they see their churches as safe havens for domestic violence victims, though only 52 percent had a current plan in place to help the afflicted. Clearly, there’s a need to help churches think deeper about these issues.

“Pastors need to speak out more. Victims need to know that there are amazing pastors who want to help them,” Miles said, underscoring the need for churches to think more holistically. “Pastors are amazing but they’re not superpowers. You need to have domestic violence professionals in your area that you have talked to.”

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Miles said that it’s essential to bridge the gap between pastors, churches and a hurting community of victims in need of assistance.

Appealing to her own story, Miles explained that there are uphill battles when it comes to helping people who have been

abused: mainly, helping them escape patterns of abuse that unfortunately become normative in their lives.

“I had to get in the Scripture myself,” she said, noting that she had to rely on God to discover His plan for her life. “We have to help [victims] retrain their mind and point them to the truth of God’s Word, because that’s what saved my life.”

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