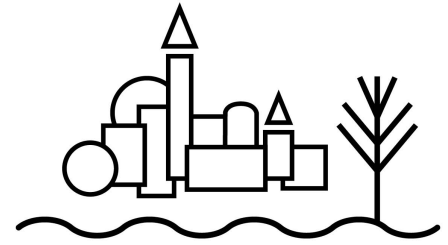


Connecting with My Abused Neighbor

Luke 10:29-37



While living as a missionary in Japan, I tasted new foods, heard new words, made new friends, and learned new things every day. Japanese history and traditions permeate modern culture, and I felt privileged to see and experience all that the country and its people had to share.

One evening while enjoying various points of interest with a friend on our way to a museum, I heard intense shouting in the distance. I turned away from my friend, who kept talking about *fugu* (puffer fish) unfazed by the disturbance. A man was screaming into the face of a woman. Her spine was curved and she looked down to the ground, shuffling her feet and crying—unable to move quickly away from this angry and violent man. He shoved her and pulled on her. My friend glanced in their direction then quickly looked away, pulling on my sleeve and urging me to do the same. As they passed, I continued to stare in horror as the man pulled the woman around the corner into an alley. She was calling to him to stop hurting her. I rushed around the corner without a second thought. The man had knocked the woman to the ground and was dragging her along the concrete. I put myself between them and in my very broken Japanese said firmly, “Excuse me. No. Stop please.” I suddenly recognized how dangerous what I was doing might be, but proceeded in faith. I encouraged him to look at me and breathe with me and try to separate himself from his angry actions. I saw him shake his head as he realized that he’d been seen doing something incredibly unkind. He matched his breathing to mine as tears filled his eyes. His wife clutched my legs and sobbed, “*Arigatou gozaimasu!*” thanking me again and again. Only then did my friend come around the corner where he’d been peeking out, watching this scene at a safe distance. We helped the crying woman to her feet, and while I dusted her off, my friend apologized to the man for my interfering! I understood this well enough to say, “Actually, I would like to know what is going on and how we can help.” We learned about this couple’s struggles and helped them resolve the conflict. They walked toward home, both relieved that the tension between them had been dissolved. Of course, we will never know what happened to them later, but my hope is that unplugging from that bad pattern and being seen and cared for may have altered or even counteracted future possible incidents. Later my friend confided by saying, “I would have wondered about her the rest of my life, but would have done nothing.” He explained that in Japanese culture, people’s business is their own, and outsiders must never get involved. “I’m glad we got involved.”

The truth is, this attitude is not exclusive to Japanese culture. Here in America, we often allow people to suffer abuse because we don’t like to feel uncomfortable or don’t understand how someone “could do something like that” or “let someone do that to them.” In our culture, we sometimes feel that violence must be justified: That child being spanked or loudly admonished must have been very disobedient; The cashier being yelled at must have made a horrible mistake; The woman being abused by her partner should just leave... We fail to see how complex situations like these can be, and we fail to see our role in connecting with our abused neighbors.

Reflections

1. Intimate partner violence can happen in any country, at any age, to anyone. How has abuse touched your life?
2. Have you ever felt called to reach out to someone who was suffering, but did not do so? If so, what do you think prevented you from helping? If not, what did you do? What would you do differently if you had the opportunity today?
3. Read 2 Timothy 1:7 New English Translation (NET Bible). *For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.* With this insight in mind, try to put yourself in the shoes of one who has been or is being abused. Imagine being a child growing up witnessing abuse. Try to empathize with one who uses power and control over another. Did the scripture's meaning change when applied to different neighbors? How can you pray for each of these people?
4. Think of a time when someone reached out to you when you needed it most. What made this connection meaningful? Can you feel empowered to connect with survivors of intimate partner violence in a meaningful way?

A Call to Action

1. Familiarize yourself with one domestic violence advocacy organization in your area and what services they provide. Do you feel called to volunteer? What supplies do they need that you can donate? Do they have annual fundraisers in which you can participate? What number should someone in your community call if they need help? (Program the number into your phone to have on hand.) Invite someone from the organization to speak to your group.
2. Make a plan of action. What will you do if you ever encounter a loved one or stranger who is in an abusive relationship?

Prayer

God, we may not understand the ways in which people hurt one another, but let us not exist in fear. Let us faithfully strive to connect with our abused neighbors, empowering them to heal and experience Your love. Sometimes we feel that the problems of others are too big, too scary, too foreign, and we are too busy, too small, and too unready. Ready our hearts in you. Assure us that doing something is better than doing nothing, and doing anything may be enough. Amen.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

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