

OFFICIAL TEACHINGS FROM LATTER-DAY SAINT LEADERS ON ABUSE

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In my work researching and writing *The Roots of Sexual Violence in Utah* and conducting extensive 90-minute interviews with Latter-day Saint women in crisis—many of whom had endured profound abuse—I repeatedly witnessed how deeply words from trusted spiritual leaders can either wound or heal. To support survivors more fully, I asked therapists Rebecca Martinez, LCSW, and Katie Ball, LCSW, to identify statements from leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that have been particularly grounding, clarifying, or restorative in their clinical work. This handout gathers those and other teachings as a resource for individuals, families, and professionals. It will continue to evolve as additional statements are made or discovered.

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President Russell M. Nelson: “What is True?” (October 2022, General Conference)

“Abuse constitutes the influence of the adversary. It is a grievous sin. As President of the Church, I affirm the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ on this issue. Let me be perfectly clear: *any* kind of abuse of women, children, or anyone is an abomination to the Lord. He grieves and *I grieve* whenever *anyone* is harmed. He mourns and *we all mourn* for each person who has fallen victim to abuse of any kind. Those who perpetrate these hideous acts are not only accountable to the laws of man but will also face the wrath of Almighty God.”

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President Russell M. Nelson: “Peacemakers Needed” (April 2023, General Conference)

“Now, I am not talking about ‘peace at any price.’”

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President Gordon B. Hinkley: “Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood” (April 2002, General Conference)

“The wife you choose will be your equal. Paul declared, ‘Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 11:11).

In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man, neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey.

She is not your servant, your chattel, nor anything of the kind.

How tragic and disgusting a phenomenon is wife abuse. Any man in this Church who abuses his wife, who demeans her, who insults her, who exercises unrighteous dominion over her is unworthy to hold the priesthood. Though he may have been ordained, the heavens will withdraw, the Spirit of the Lord will be grieved, and it will be amen to the authority of the priesthood of that man.

Any man who engages in this practice is unworthy to hold a temple recommend.

I regret to say that I see too much of this ugly phenomenon. There are men who cuff their wives about, both verbally and physically. What a tragedy when a man demeans the mother of his children.”

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Elder Jeffrey R. Holland: “The Tongue of Angels” (April 2007, General Conference)

“Husbands, you have been entrusted with the most sacred gift God can give you—a wife, a daughter of God, the mother of your children, who has voluntarily given herself to you for love and joyful companionship. Think of the kind things you said when you were courting, think of the blessings you have given with hands placed lovingly upon her head, think of yourself and of her as the god and goddess you both inherently are, and then reflect on other moments characterized by cold, caustic, unbridled words. Given the damage that can be done with our tongues, little wonder the Savior said, ‘Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.’ A husband who would never dream of striking his wife physically can break, if not her bones, then certainly her heart by the brutality of thoughtless or unkind speech. Physical abuse is uniformly and unequivocally condemned in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If it is possible to be more condemning than that, we speak even more vigorously against all forms of sexual abuse. Today, I speak against verbal and emotional abuse of anyone against anyone, but especially of husbands against wives. Brethren, these things ought not to be.”

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Elder Patrick Kearon: “He Is Risen with Healing in His Wings” (April 2022, General Conference)

“If you have experienced any kind of abuse, violence, or oppression, you may be left with the idea that these events were somehow your fault and that you deserve to carry the shame and guilt you feel. You may have had thoughts such as:

- I could have prevented this.
- God doesn’t love me anymore.
- Nobody will ever love me.
- I am damaged beyond repair.
- The Savior’s Atonement applies to others but not to me.

These erroneous thoughts and feelings may have been a barrier to seeking help from family, friends, leaders, or professionals, and so you have struggled alone. If you have sought help from those you trust, you may still be wrestling with ideas of shame and even self-loathing. The impact of these events can remain for many years. You hope that one day you’ll feel better, but somehow that day has not yet come.

The abuse was not, is not, and never will be your fault, no matter what the abuser or anyone else may have said to the contrary. When you have been a victim of cruelty, incest, or any other perversion, you are not the one who needs to repent; you are not responsible.

You are not less worthy or less valuable or less loved as a human being, or as a daughter or son of God, because of what someone else has done to you.

God does not now see, nor has He ever seen, you as someone to be despised. Whatever has happened to you, He is not ashamed of you or disappointed in you. He loves you in a way you have yet to discover. And you will discover it as you trust in His promises and as you learn to believe Him when He says you are ‘precious in [His] sight.’

You are not defined by these terrible things that have been done to you. You are, in glorious truth, defined by your eternally existing identity as a son or daughter of God and by your Creator’s perfect, infinite love and invitation to whole and complete healing.

Though it may seem impossible, feel impossible, healing can come through the miracle of the redemptive might of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, who is risen ‘with healing in his wings.’

Our merciful Savior, victorious over darkness and depravity, has power to right all wrongs, a life-giving truth for those wronged by others.

Please know that the Savior has descended below all things, even what has happened to you. Because of that, He knows exactly what real terror and shame feel like and how it feels to be abandoned and broken. From the depths of His atoning suffering, the Savior imparts hope you thought was lost forever, strength you believed you could never possess, and healing you couldn’t imagine was possible.

There is no place for any kind of abuse—physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal—in any home, any country, or any culture. Nothing a wife, child, or husband might do or say makes them “deserve” to be beaten. No one, in any country or culture, is ever ‘asking for’ aggression or violence from someone else in authority or by someone who is bigger and stronger.

Those who abuse and who seek to hide their grievous sins may get away with it for a time. But the Lord, who sees all, knows the deeds and the thoughts and intents of the heart. He is a God of justice, and His divine justice will be served.

Miraculously, the Lord is also a God of mercy to the truly repentant. Abusers—including those who were once abused themselves—who confess, forsake their sin, and do all in their power to make recompense and restitution, have access to forgiveness through the miracle of the Atonement of Christ.

For the falsely accused, the unspeakable gravity of these accusations brings its own purgatory. But they too are blessed by the Savior’s vicarious suffering for them and the knowledge that ultimately truth will prevail.

But unrepentant abusers will stand before the Lord to account for their heinous crimes.

The Lord Himself is crystal clear in His condemnation of abuse of any kind: ‘But whoso shall offend one of these little ones ... , it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.’” (Matthew 18:6)

If you have additional formal statements from Latter-day Saint leaders that you have found useful, please share them with Dr. Susan R. Madsen, susan.madsen@usu.edu.