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**AVA'S CALL is a quarterly publication of the Department of Women Ministries' program Advocacy for Victims of Abuse.**

**AVA's Goals are to:**

- Provide resources to bring healing to victims of abuse
- Equip the church to minister to victims of abuse
- Promote preventative measures to combat abuse

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[mu.covchurch.org/abuse/](http://mu.covchurch.org/abuse/)

**National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800-799-Safe (7233)**

# AVA'S CALL

## MY PAST IS NEVER TO FEAR...

Last month I had the privilege of being invited to speak about sexual assault at the East Coast Pastor's Ashram at Pilgrim Pines Retreat Center. As I rode in the car with one of the pastors, he began to tell me the story of his daughter being physically and sexually assaulted by a stranger near North Park University in Chicago where she attends school. His daughter's heart-breaking story reiterated the fear and torment this type of assault can cause in a victim's life. Experiencing sexual assault drastically alters not only the victim's life, it impacts the entire support system the victim has. Overcoming the physical and emotional damage she experienced has taken time, prayer and support as she tries to move on with her life. As part of her personal healing journey she has started writing. Below is a poem that she wrote to express where she is at this time.

### Far From Fear

There is a darkness I cannot explain  
Fear bleeds through my every pore  
My eyes hide what no one can see  
My past is never too far.  
There is a comfort in this despair  
Living the line between separate lives  
Daylight too weak to withstand the Dark  
My past is never too far.  
I stumble through peace  
Hold my breath through the pain  
My fear blinds the Forgiveness  
My past is never too far.  
I feel too much to feel at all  
My disguise drags me deeper  
Time makes a mark as it slips away  
My past is never too far.  
Imprisoned with chains, no slack to gain  
Regret is more pain to admit  
Daily blessings turn to dreadful burdens  
My past is never too far.  
The freedom of Love is too much to feel  
The Perfect Escape is too hard to see  
I deserve all that I fear  
My past is never too far.  
But His voice through the silence stills the storm  
His arms reaching out to take me Home  
He loosens my troubled grip to free my soul  
My past is never too far.  
I am who I am because of who I've been  
The Darkness knows this Light's fearless threat  
His panic stalks my prayers by night  
My past is never too far.  
But once overcome can now overcome  
My scars reveal my strength  
Freedom Reigns to break these chains  
My past is never to fear.

## BIRDIE'S STORY

After fifteen years of marriage, my husband announced that he had found someone else. Hadn't I been a good wife? After all, I cooked for him, cleaned for him, let him control the TV remote, looked the other way when he stayed out late at the casino night after night. When my family told me that he did not treat me well, I thought "What? He doesn't hit me." It was not until I decided to give back to the community and volunteer for AVA (Advocates for Victims of Abuse) that I realized how deep and devastating the wounds from my marriage were.

When I heard the line "abuse is not always physical," I envisioned weak, oversensitive women that were self centered and spoiled. Then I learned that when my husband ignored me for days and didn't show any kind of love toward me at all – not even so much as a hug—that was emotional abuse.

I just figured that was the type of man I had married. I'd have to live with it. Maybe if I tried harder to be a better wife, I would deserve a hug. When I was diagnosed with uterine cancer, there was no support. My family was with me when I went through the hysterectomy – but my husband was not at my side. In fact, he did not even visit me in the hospital. I explained to my family that he really did not like hospitals. But my heart was broken that he did not visit or even seem to care what happened to me. But he was my husband and divorce was not an option. Marriage was "until death do you part" – God hated divorce, right? I had to keep God happy.

I was unaware that financial abuse existed. I knew something was not quite right when he would go to the casino for hours on end, but I wasn't allowed to get a haircut or buy any new clothes (I told people I did not NEED them). The bank started calling saying the mortgage payments were late. How could the mortgage be late – I was being so careful with the money. When I asked my husband he said that he would take care of it. When I asked to see the bills, he would always make excuses or change the subject or make me feel as if I did not trust him. According to her Christian upbringing, the wife was supposed to submit to the husband. So I did just that – submit. I wanted to make everyone happy – my husband, God, my friends, my family.

For more than fifteen years, I had no idea that I was a victim of abuse. When the smoke finally cleared, I found myself lost, broken and very afraid. I was even afraid to cook for my family fearing it would

not be good enough; afraid to make a decision because it would be the wrong one. I did not expect to be listened and responded to and was shocked when it happened. I did not know how to make simple decisions like what to watch on TV. I realized that I had lost myself!

Thanks to AVA, I'm finding my way back to myself again. I am also finding strength and self confidence in myself, my decisions and my world. It will take a great deal of time and work to become who God made me to be, but I'm on my way, again, thanks to AVA.

## WAITING FOR THE LORD

*"The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a (wo)man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."*  
(Lamentations 3:25-26 KJV)

As a ceramist, hand building clay pieces is what I do. Some of my favorite pieces are my "light of God" series. These are simple figurines that stand quietly allowing light to fall across their up-turned faces and cylinder-type bodies. For me they symbolize what it is like to wait and seek God and believe that he will impart or reveal whatever is necessary for my life to fulfill his purpose.

As I walk with him and live out my life in his presence, I confess that it is hard for me to be still. However, there are times in our lives that all we can do is hope and wait quietly for the Lord to answer our prayers.

During this season, may we take the time to sit quietly and allow his light to fill our hearts and lift our spirits.

Reflection:

- What is it like for you to be still in God's presence?
- What are some things that you are waiting for him to reveal or impart?
- Do you have any fears or reservations about being in his presence?

Prayer:

*God teach me how to be still in your presence in the midst of my busy and complex life. Quiet my mind and my spirit so that I can come to know you and your voice. Help me to be open to you without fear or reservation.*