Bob: A honeymoon is supposed to be a time of celebration for a new husband and his wife. For Nancy Murphy, her honeymoon was the beginning of a 10-year nightmare.

Nancy: We were on a deserted island, and we had been dropped off on this place that I had loved all of my life, and so here is Mike and I alone on our honeymoon in somebody else's home.

The third morning I woke up, and I'd had a bad dream, so I said, "Hey, I'll be right back. I'm just going to go on the beach, and I'll be right back." And I heard him say in a menacing tone I'd never heard before, "You're not going anywhere." And I looked at him, and he was still half asleep, and I said, "No, I just had a bad dream. I need to go have a walk with the Lord, and I'll be right back." He came after me, and he said, "How come you left the room?" And I said, "I had this really bad dream, and I just wanted to" – and then all of a sudden I got smacked, and that was my first time. It was with a clenched fist in the face as hard as he could, and it was just one blow after another after another.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, June 23rd. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. What happened on Nancy Murphy's honeymoon left her confused and wondering – how do I respond?

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us. We're going to be tackling a troubling and challenging subject over the next couple of days, Dennis.

Dennis: We are. We are going to talk about the subject of domestic violence and abuse, and to help us deal with this subject, Dr. Dan Allender and Nancy Murphy join us in the studio – Nancy, Dan, welcome to FamilyLife Today.
Dan: Good to be with you both.

Nancy: Mm-hm, I thank you for addressing this topic.

Dennis: Dr. Dan Allender is the president of Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle, Washington. Nancy Murphy gives leadership to the Northwest FamilyLife Learning and Counseling Center, which is a Seattle-based nonprofit agency that is — well, you really exist — not only help those affected by domestic violence but also related issues, right?

Nancy: Such as trauma and chemical addiction.

Dennis: That's right. You know, it's interesting, as we come to this subject, one of the first couples I counseled back when FamilyLife started in 1976, was that of a man who was abusing his wife, and I'll never forget this, because I didn't know how to deal with it. I was starting the ministry, I was very young, they were older than me, but here was their story. He was a Sunday school teacher, and he was at church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Monday night visitation, Wednesday night prayer meeting, and the other three or four nights a week he was abusing her. And he was hitting her in certain places in the summer where it wouldn't show, and then different places in the winter.

Bob: It was calculated.

Dennis: Absolutely. And I remember looking at this guy, I remember thinking, "This is something I don't have any context to be able to understand. This is foreign to me." And, Dan, you'll appreciate this, as a counselor, because you and I go way back. This was one of these God moments, where I looked him in the eye — this guy was a body builder. He was probably 210, 220, a weight lifter. He could have broken me in half. But I looked at him, and I said, "You know what? If you continue to deal wrongly with your wife by physically abusing her, God is going to deal with you."

Within two days he was physically hit by a train, by a locomotive. Not in a car — while he was walking across some railroad tracks, a locomotive hit him, knocked him 20, 30 feet in the air, and he landed on his backside, ripping out his britches. But evidently tenderizing his heart, because, to the best of my knowledge, he never laid another hand on his wife for the rest of his days.
And what I didn't realize was that I was getting a glimpse, Nancy, of what was back then and has now become a major issue, even in the Christian community – spousal abuse exists in the church big time, right?

Nancy: That's right. It seems to be as prevalent in the church as it does in the secular community.

Bob: There's not a difference? There's not a lower percentage in the body of Christ?

Nancy: No, there is not, and I see that as good news and bad news. Sadly, you know, that's a misunderstanding of God's love and perhaps it could be a good thing that our churches' doors are open now to people who have a lot of pain in their life, and we have a great opportunity.

Bob: You come at this subject as a counselor, and as one who has studied and who leads a program to help people through this, but you also come through the door of having been a victim. Take us back and tell us your story. Did you have any idea when you married your husband what you were stepping into?

Nancy: No, I didn't. I went out with him for a couple of years. I met him when I was out at a Christian college. He wasn't a student, but he lived in a nearby town. He was a bad boy. He had 32 convictions before he was 16 years old. That's convictions – so he had quite a criminal history, but he met the Lord. Remember the days of the Jesus People movement? And really tremendous testimonies of people coming to Christ in the Dave Wilkerson and Nicky Cruz days, and those were one of the testimonies of his conversion of coming to Christ.

Dennis: So it really looked like a miracle?

Nancy: It did.

Dennis: And you thought he was a transformed man.

Nancy: Mm-hm, and in many ways he was. He memorized Scripture easily, he attended church, he knew all the things to say and do, and he did – he turned his back on his ways. So we dated for a couple of years, and when we got married, we were walking up the aisle, and my father was a missionary, and he was walking me up the aisle, and he said, "Nancy, you will be a social worker for the rest of your life." And I looked at him, I said, "Dad," you know,
underneath my breath, and I said, "Dad, why didn't you say something before?" And he said, "Well, I just don't have a good feeling about this," and up we went. I looked around, and here's all the people there, you know, we'd paid for the wedding. People had come by boat – this small community that we lived in, you can only get there by boat or by plane, and the place was packed, and I loved Mike, I wanted to be with him, but what a confusing moment that was.

So, driving away after we were married, waving goodbye to everybody on the dock, I got to town – we called it "town" where we lived, and he had fixed up our truck so nicely and put a new, kind of a gate, on the back, and finished it up, and he was so happy to show it to me, and I thought, "Well, I guess that's just – it's over, we're married." Twenty years old, you know, God can do everything. This is His institution, and away we go. We had two really great days. They were really great, but the violence started on our honeymoon. You can hear my voice crack – 25 years ago, and it's still really fresh in me.

Dennis: On the third day of your honeymoon?

Nancy: On the third day of our honeymoon.

Dennis: What happened?

Nancy: Oh, you want the scoop on what happened. Okay, the third morning I woke up, and I'd had a bad dream. So I said, "Hey, I'll be right back, I'm just going to go on the beach, and I'll be right back." And I heard him say in a menacing tone I'd never heard before, "You're not going anywhere." And I looked at him, and he was still half asleep, and I said, "No, I just had a bad dream, I need to go have a walk with the Lord, and I'll be right back." He came after me, and he said, "How come you left the room?" And I said, "I had this really bad dream, and I just wanted to" – and all of a sudden I got smacked, and that was my first time. It was with a clenched fist in the face as hard as he could, and it was just one blow after another after another.

Dennis: So it wasn't one blow?

Nancy: No, it was many. And when I was on the ground, I looked at him, and I pulled myself up, and I said, "Mike," and I was crying by then, and he was saying words that other people say, you know, that abusive swearing. It had never been directed towards me. And our context was we were on a deserted island. We can only get there
by boat, and we had been dropped off on this place that I had loved all of my life, and so here is Mike and I, alone on our honeymoon, in somebody else's home, and I just – I thought of all my memories. You know, everything just went through my head. This is a great place, a safe place, and I'm along with somebody who just followed me and swinging at me, and I stood up, and I took my rings off, and I looked at them, and I had the symbol of marriage, you know, that it was eternal and what was I to do and there was no boat coming for a week to get us, and I dropped into my seat thinking maybe we need to start again. Maybe he'll pick them up, and he'll recommit to me. We'll say our vows, something, but we can't be married and have this happen.

And he looked at me, and he just took off his ring, and he took the pocket testament out of his pocket that he had carried since he had made his confession of faith, and he threw both of them – the Bible and his ring – as far as he could into the ocean, and he looked at me, and he said, "Your life will never be the same." And he walked away. He walked into that house, and as I lay there, and I just thought, "What is happening?" Just – not having any context, thinking like I was a fool for throwing the rings on the ground. What on earth? And I started to see windows being smashed out of this house, you know, to the very top room and he started smashing out by hand all the windows, going from room to room, and I ran into the house and screamed, "Stop, stop, what are you doing? This isn't our – what are you doing?"

And he – it's a longer story than that, but to shave it down, I learned how to say the magic words that every battered woman learns to say – "I'm sorry. I am so sorry." And as soon as I said those words, he calmed down, he looked at me, the tears started to flow, and he goes, "Nancy, why did you leave the room? When I say something you need to obey me," and that was the beginning of our marriage.

Dennis: You know, I'm picturing my daughter, 20 years old, on her third day of her honeymoon. Three days ago she just walked down the aisle, and she has been told by her father that he didn't have a good feeling about this. And so you're left in the midst of the wedding with incredible lack of peace. And now, three days into it, you're beginning to live a nightmare.

Nancy: Yes. I didn't know what it was. You know, domestic violence, in my mind, happened where there was alcohol. There was no alcohol. It didn't happen in Christian homes. We were Christians. Everything just came crashing to my mind, and I just thought, "What is this?"
But I had to survive. Now looking back I can see it. A boat's not coming to pick me up for four more days. So we're there for a while, and I have to learn to get along with him. It's an interesting thing. I didn't have time to heal, you don't have time to think, you don't have anything, but he was in the bushes, and he started to cry, and they were amazing tears. They were from a deep, deep place, because I'm sure he didn't like what he had just done. He didn't know what had happened to him. He didn't know. He had never displayed that before, and we kind of muddled through the rest of the process, like, what was that? And the "Oh, baby, I promise I'll never do it again." And what am I to believe? I don't want to go home and tell everybody, "Guess what," you know? And by the end of the four days, I was better.

But the thing about violence is that it's not always bad, it's not bad, 24/7. It's just enough to keep you in that place.

Bob: So there was no more violence on the honeymoon, and maybe, you're thinking to yourself, "Okay, something snapped, but he's past that. We're going to be okay."

Nancy: I went through my vows. I kept thinking about "For better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and" – you know, just – I went through the whole thing, thinking, "What context? Where do I put this? Where do I put this experience? Who do I tell? Who is going to believe me? What do I do now? What does he do now?" I mean, we had no roadmap for what happens next.

Bob: You didn't tell anybody?

Nancy: No.

Dan: And that's one of the things that is so important to hear – that a victim feels silenced. They're really not free to tell anyone who could provide some help, even with the fear that if they don't, now what will happen? I'll be even in greater trouble than I was before. And you see how silence moves over into the category of self-blame. Nancy is finding fault with herself. She should have done something different. Maybe I will be successful the next time by obeying what he wanted me to do. So that play between silence and self-blame creates, then, a hope of success – that maybe my life will be better with this man the next time.

Dennis: And along with his tears – I mean, here is a young lady who has no other experience with a young man. Okay, so he blew it. Well, now, I've seen my husband weep. He's sorry, too. He's repenting.
We think these are the tears of a man who has decided what he's done is wrong, and he is going to turn from that sin, ask for forgiveness, and all will be better.

Nancy: I had seen that demonstrated in my life. I have a little brother and sister, and they were twins, and all my life it was, "Nancy, say you're sorry." I'd apologize to them and turn from it. You know, we were very big on apologies and changing our behavior. And that's what I expected.

Bob: How long was it before the next episode?

Nancy: Probably two weeks.

Dennis: So you went back to the mainland and began your married life.

Nancy: Began my married life, and that's another story – two weeks later when we got there, we went into a mall and just to look around. We were down in Victoria, and there was a derelict, homeless man, and we were going to live in the inner city in Vancouver and work with street people. That was what we felt called to do.

Dennis: I want to make sure I understood that. Your husband was in full-time ministry.

Nancy: Mm-hm.

Dennis: He had a call from God to reach the downcast.

Nancy: That's right.

Dennis: A very noble calling.

Nancy: And I loved that about him. He had many other amazing characteristics, and even though he didn't grow up with homeless people or didn't grow up with the street fighters and addicts, he knew how to be around them, and he knew the hope of the Gospel.

Dennis: So, okay, you're at the mall now.

Nancy: So we're at the mall, and we're on – Victoria is en route to Vancouver, where we were going to live. We get to the mall in Victoria, and there was a derelict man, who probably, he was schizophrenic, and he was kind of shouting out things, you know, just – that were nonsensical, and Mike went over and started to hit him and punch him and swear at him, and nobody did anything.
And I just walked out of the mall and thought, "What have I done? Where do we go from here? What do we do?" And he pushed me in the car, and we went to Vancouver, and he said, "You know, I don't want to live here. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to – I just think – I guess the reason that it comes up for me, and this is the first two weeks of my married life. Our profession has just changed, my hopes have changed, my message of hope for the family and of love – everything has changed for me, and I've learned how to lie and take responsibility, and I don't know who I am anymore or what to do.

Bob: You'd just walked into a nightmare. How long did that go on?

Nancy: For 10 years.

Bob: And nobody knew?

Nancy: Not really. If anybody knew, they never said anything. People have come up later, you know, and kind of said, "We had a suspicion," or "We had a hunch."

Dennis: You didn't just go on to stay married, you went on to have a family with him, and I want to hear more about that story tomorrow and how it continued to work its way out. But today we're speaking to women and perhaps a few men, because this is not solely a problem of men who abuse women, but it is primarily that, right, Dan?

Dan: Absolutely. We're talking about such high percentage that it's important not to forget the other side, but when we talk about the issue of domestic violence, I think it's appropriate to focus primarily on the violence that men do to women.

Dennis: And the prevalence of this – the number of women who have been abused is a dramatic number. It's not a small number.

Nancy: It's one in four. And I only tell my story because it's not unique. I tell it because you ask, but if – I know that your listeners who hear my story will say, "That's my story, too, Nancy." Whether they were physically assaulted or sexually assaulted or verbally assaulted, the stories – really, if you've married an abuser you'll know as soon as there has been sexual activity you're in a marriage commitment.

Dennis: In other words, in a church of 100 people and half of them are women – 50 women – of those women, 12 of them, approximately, have been abused.
Nancy: Twelve will know my story.

Bob: Dan, at Mars Hill Graduate School you are working with what Nancy is doing now in her professional program – hoping to train and equip Christians to be able to intervene in these situations and to help those who are caught in a cycle of violence.

Dan: God has been very gracious to me to give me the opportunity to enter the issues of abuse. Originally, through sexual abuse, but it's so important to hear what Nancy just put words to, and that is that seldom is physical violence apart from emotional violence and also from sexual violence. And so you're looking at a pattern that shows itself usually on all three dimensions.

Now, when we begin to mess with these issues, what we're really beginning to mess with is usually a long history of some harm. That person wasn't just harmed in the marriage. They usually have other factors that go back to their own childhood. So as we begin to enter these issues, what we're really trying to do is to say the Gospel has power to change the human heart. Not with a pretense that one confrontation and one exposure and tears of repentance and now everything is fine. There is probably nothing more I say that's more important than hearing that there is this period in almost every abuser's life where they will be very sorrowful with a great commitment to change, but it has not changed their heart. They have not opened the door to beginning to name what has brought them to that point; to be a person so committed to power, so committed to violating another person's dignity, and perhaps it's harshest to put at some level, enjoying the harm that they are doing to another human being.

Nancy: Right.

Dennis: There are really two reasons why we are doing this program today and over the next couple of days. One is we want to bring help and hope to that person who is being abused, and if there is a message today that is clear, if you are being abused, you must let someone into your life – someone outside the marriage, someone outside of that abusive relationship.

The second reason, and don't miss this – the second reason we are hearing these broadcasts is we believe that Matthew 5:16 is at stake here within the Christian community. He commands us to let our lights shine in such a way that men may see our good works, and they glorify God. And if there is an area where the Christian
community needs to step in boldly but with redemption and hope and safety to protect the abused, it's this area. And so we're not only raising the issue of abuse, but we're talking about some solutions that Mars Hill Graduate School is offering by virtue of a certificate in domestic violence and learning how to protect that person who is being abused.

Bob: I want to encourage our listeners to go to our website at FamilyLife.com. There is information there about this certificate program that Mars Hill is offering, but there is also information there for the abuse victim on steps you can take – positive steps you can take to begin to do exactly what you're talking about, Dennis, and that is to open the door and let some light shine in on this issue and to get some real help.

We've got a mini-book that we have created called "A Way of Hope," that is designed to provide that kind of counsel for women who are experiencing domestic violence. The text of that is online at FamilyLife.com and also order the booklet from us by calling 1-800-FLTODAY or going to our website, and you can have a copy of the booklet sent to you.

It's now also available in Spanish. So if you would like to receive the Spanish version of it, you can request that when you call 1-800-FLTODAY or go online at FamilyLife.com.

And Nancy has provided a handbook that offers guidance to pastors and others who want to be able to provide help for those experiencing domestic violence. The handbook is called "God's Reconciling Love," and we have that available in our FamilyLife Resource Center as well.

Call us at 1-800-FLTODAY for information about either of these resources or go online at FamilyLife.com.

You know, we've addressed this subject on a few occasions on FamilyLife Today. Anytime we do, we hear from a number of hurting people – folks who are right in the midst of this situation, trying to know how to deal with it, where do I go for help, how can I get biblical counsel on this subject, and that's what we want to try to provide to the many women and to some men who are experiencing ongoing domestic violence, and I just want to say a word of thanks to those of you who help support our ministry. You make this kind of ministry outreach available. You make it possible for us to provide hope and equipping for those who are experiencing these kinds of difficult circumstances. We are a
nonprofit organization. Your donations are what keep us reaching out to provide practical biblical tools for marriages and families – all kinds of marriages and all kinds of families.

So thanks for your support in the past, and if you can help us with a donation this month, we would appreciate it. You can donate online at FamilyLife.com, you can call 1-800-FLTODAY to make a donation, or you can write a check and mail it to us, and if you need our mailing address, just go to our website or give us a call, and we'll be happy to pass the mailing address along to you.

Well, tomorrow we're going to come back and revisit more of your story, Nancy, and hear about the steps you began to take to find safety and to get some help as you were dealing with an abusive husband. I hope our listeners can be back for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ.

NOTE: Some names have been changed in this transcript.