

The Hidden Storm

Case Study Discussion

SPEAKERS Rev. Douwe Agema | Royce Vermeulen | Richard Suter

If only people knew the truth. From the outside, Dan and Dana's family have it all together. Den is well respected in the congregation. Dana is the happy wife and their children. Team almost perfect. But behind closed doors, Dan isn't the same person. Everyone walks on eggshells at home, careful not to provoke him. His moods shift unpredictably. One moment generous, articulate, spiritual. The next, explosive and angry. He has started calling Dana ugly names, even at the dinner table in front of everyone. She also worries that one of these times his harsh style of discipline is going to hurt the children. The elders have arranged a home visit for next week. Ironically, the theme this year is Harmony in the Home. Dana knows that Dan will act all gracious and insightful.

But she also knows that if she speaks honestly to the elders about how things are going at home, there will be consequences over the next few days. Dan will be pounding the table again, ranting about how wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord. 'That the rod of discipline removes folly from the heart of a child,' You will probably blame her for triggering his rage and impeding his headship. She frets. Long into the night. How will the elders see past the surface to what's really going on? Will they notice her? Will they hear the silence that she's too afraid to break? If only people knew the truth.

Our three panel members joining us this morning are Reverend Douwe Agema, Emeritus Minister from the Canadian Reformed Churches, Royce Vermeulen, who's a member of the Free Reformed Church at Kelmscott, and Richard Suter, a Biblical Counsellor from Perth.

I hope we have a wide-ranging discussion today. And I'd like to open, and I'll ask each of the panel members an opportunity to respond to this, but just basically for our panel members to, when you hear this case study, what comes to mind? What are your thoughts on how you would approach this based on your experience? I'll start with you. Ranakama. The, uh, The challenge of this case study lies in the very beginning, where it says, 'if only people knew the truth from the outside, that looks good.' You cannot go through your congregation. I speak as a pastor, of course. You cannot go through your congregation and be suspicious of things in the families. Do you trust that things are done well? Godly.

At the same time, you do know that we live in a sinful world and a broken world and that things do happen. So, you would need to be aware of the symptoms of this and to be very well aware when you see things— maybe not openly, but you can see things happening there that make you concerned. And then you would use to deal further with that. Thank you. Thank you, Ashley. When I read this case study, what struck me the most was not the anger, although that's really concerning. It's the fear. And Kristen spoke about the Power— power under and power over. Everybody in that home is walking on eggshells. The children are anxious. The wife is not happy to speak honestly. And the husband uses scripture to justify his behavior.

It's a pretty serious signal that something is wrong. The challenge is, how do you unpack it? The reality is that this wife knows that if she says something, it's going to cause disruption. And the question going through her mind will be, 'Is the disruption worth it? Is it better to stay as it is? Or is it better to say something?' I think that's the challenge that an office bearer has when they're faced with a situation like this. How do you counsel and guide and even understand what is going on at home, because it looks so good? In response. And now to your concern about wanting to see the best. My alarm was pricked when I heard this case study because I know that what will happen is that when you look for the best, not the worst, you will miss what is really there.

As is, Dana's. Fear. And that you will leave thinking it was a good session and that everything is fine because you're being lied to. Dan is not the only one lying, but Dana is as well with her omission to speak the truth. And we understand that's because of fear. It's very understandable. But. My biggest concern was that the truth is not coming out, and we'll probably talk later about how to get to that, but my feeling on that is that if the elders and the pastor understand what can be lying in the background, they can be more sensitive to signs. was concerned that the elders might not pick up on signals. If they're aware that there is potential problems, then they'll be much more sensitive to the signs that they might see.

And they might know that they're being lied to and they should anticipate that that's a possibility. And they might have something up their sleeve to potentially bring out what is true. Because the deceitfulness is the big problem here. And. There's been a discussion asked, a question asked, sorry. Should Dana discuss her concerns with the elder before the home visit? I might go to you, Douwe. Should Dana come forward? Should she be talking to the elder before the home visit to kind of prepare, maybe, a conversation there? And then, I suppose, what comes from that is, if she does that, how does the elder then approach the home visit to make sure it's a place of safety, not a place of danger for Dana, because the last thing they would want to do is place her in that situation.

Sorry, big question. It is. Because the first one, should she? That's a very hard question to answer, I find, because you have to know the situation. You have to know what's involved. The second part that you have there, what should the office bearer do, in a way, is to me easier, and that is to take it seriously when this is mentioned to you, that you realize, yes, this is happening. And to do more than simply noting it, but also dealing with it. Not just there, but following up on it. So you take what is said seriously. You work with it, but that one home visit— Yeah. Will not solve it. You have it done. Say I'm going to come back, we're going to deal with this, and you are have to be very open about it also with both of them.

This is what is on the table— we want to deal with this and we want to help you deal with this in a biblical way. And so, Two comments, if I may. Number one is the office bearer should know the family. It's really important that they know the family before the home visit. Ideally, they have an inkling of what's going on already beforehand. If Dana calls the office bearer beforehand, that's an opportunity to engage with Dana to understand how it is best to be handled. Should it be brought up in the home visit? Is there another way that we want to address this for her safety? I think in situations where there is any form of abuse, you need to seriously and really carefully consider the person who is the victim and understand from their perspective what is best to move forward.

One of the best ways to stop someone being abused is to stop the abuser. And so. On top of the things that these gentlemen have said, which are critical, is the care for the person that is causing the problem. I have a lot of compassion for Dan. I'm not going to offer him my womb. But I will be able to be vulnerable with him. And say, 'I know what you're experiencing because I'm a human too. I know hundreds of Dans. I've been a Dan. And we need to be able to be honest and vulnerable about that with Dan so that he knows he's not being made a pariah of. That he knows he's a brother, who is understood. And that there is compassion available to him.' And as one of the speakers has already said, Dirk.

The pain that's there has come out. In the actions that he's doing. And to address his pain. And give him comfort in that will be one of the main things that needs to happen. I'm going to go straight back to you, Richard. There was a question asked that said, it seems like Dan has some underlying pain that has been unaddressed there. What can you do if you're the Dan in this situation? You don't have someone to open up to. As a counsellor, obviously, you're someone who they can do that. Sometimes that step to a counsellor and the first step can be quite a big one. What are the kinds of people that a Dan in that situation or what kind of people can we be in that situation to be a person that Dan can come to to start to open up about his issues.

As I said, we need to be vulnerable ourselves so that it's safe for the other person to be vulnerable. And it may take

a while for him to come to terms with that. I was brought up in a family where you didn't speak about emotions at all. I know that's true of many of you guys. My sister said to my dad once, 'I'm afraid that I'm depressed.' And he said, 'Suters don't do depression.' and just brushed her off. It was terrible. So we have to. Nurture ourselves and learn ourselves how to express our vulnerabilities and sinfulness. And give permission in that way for the person to engage with us. Dan could be one of two people. He could be, I wrote it down because I thought it was cute, so I'll try and find it.

He could be afraid and helpless, or he could be proud and heartless. And who he is will be— it will become evident when you approach him with compassion. With a desire to help him. He may say, 'I never knew.' That this was what I was doing. I didn't understand that that was the consequences of it. I don't actually know how to do any better. And that's the Dan that you can really help straight away. The proud and heartless Dan. He needs the gospel. He needs the truth that when we act according to the flesh, God won't be mocked. and He will reap what he's sowing. And it's going to be destructive. And how do we, and I'll ask Douwe, Royce, if you've got a friend who's in that situation, who's not seeing it themselves.

How do you? come alongside them to kind of reveal that heart like their heart to themselves so that they understand what they are doing in that situation. Dan's probably been brought up in a in a community like ours. He's learnt the behaviour that to look good is the right way to do things. And I think it's about exposing that and having a conversation with him about that. And walking that journey with him about where he's at. And why he acts the way he does. It depends on his reaction. To that confrontation as to how you take it forward. I think, as Richard said, if he's afraid versus being hardened, you have to deal differently with it. It will require a tough conversation with them.

I think the acknowledgement that he's no different than any one of us is really really important. Three of my children are sitting in the audience. They can probably see a bit of me in Dan. And I think it's about acknowledging that too. But then talking about how you work with that. How do I respond with my children when I lose it? Do I just leave it? Or do I work with it? Do I engage with them and seek their forgiveness? And get on my knees and pray to God for forgiveness. And that's what Dan needs to do too.

And one obviously part of this case study is the home visit, the impending home visit that's coming. If, as a pastor, I'll go to you, Doa, if as a pastor you know that you've got some elders going to a family where some of these things are, what advice would you try to give to those elders prior to the home visit to? Encourage the best out of that visit, but then also the journey that's going to continue beyond. So it's not. Home visits are not limited to that time. There's obviously a journey that the church is going to have to work with these people. I think you answered my question. Because you have to look at the purpose of the home visit. What is the purpose of a home visit?

And that's how you come into this home and that's what you deal with. But besides that, there is a pastoral care. So pastoral care is not limited to home visits. There's a whole lot more to it. So you have to know the family, you have to understand the family, you have to talk to the family. and I've said to my elders sometimes too that, if you come to difficult things in a home visit, then say, 'Well, I'm going to come back.' This week or next week and then we really deal with that and and to give the the sense that yes, we want to pay attention to it and you won't understand it, but to look at pastoral care just as that one visit per year, I think that is an incorrect way of looking at it.

There's someone asking for some very frank advice here. We've touched on a few things, but I think the question is worth bringing up. This is being seriously guilty of being similar to Dan. What do I do? What do I do now? I'm ask someone that can help you for help. Because there's help out there. And it's not rocket science. You don't have to You don't have to destroy yourself to be helped. You just have to be open to being helped. I was brought up in a way that we never would go to see a psychologist or a counselor. Because that costs money and they're the strategy is to make you worse, so you have to keep coming. So I was brought up with that.

So I was never going to see a counsellor ever because it's a double loss. They make you worse and it costs you money. When my first marriage ended. I was in a desperate place because, ironically and sadly, the church wasn't able to help me. They just didn't know what to say. That is very sad. So in desperation, I found accidentally a counsellor in the US. So I thought, well, they're a long way away, so they might be a bit safe. And it was free. So I thought, this is great, I'll just try a free session. From a guy on the other side of the world who doesn't actually know me. And I got so much out of that that I'm a counsellor today. So it's not something that you need to be afraid of. Just pick the right person. Right after that. Talk to those people who you've hurt. Confess it to them. And work with them on how to move forward. They're probably waiting for this moment. They're probably hoping for this moment. And the moment's come. Now deal with it. Go for help.

There is an aspect of, you know, the elders are obviously being confronted with this. Richard, you're a counsellor. You've had training in this. Some of the elders in our church don't have those opportunities. They don't have that professional background. In some churches, they can be relatively young. How do we as churches then equip our men? And starting from a relatively young age, how do we equip our young men to be able to be. How to be effective in this situation. Well, you already know. I recommend people to resources that are accessible. For the elders, there is a resource called 'Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused' by general editor Brad Hambrick. It's a free course that churches can get.

That's very good for a general overlay of all important information that you need to understand. As an office bearer. One of the biggest things that I got out of the course seven years ago was that, as a church, we think in terms of sin and repentance. And we tend to primary on that. But there is also things that are illegal. And God has given us the justice system to bring justice that we can't do as individuals. The justice system that exists is answerable to God, but given to us for that purpose. And if there are things that are illegal happening, then that is certainly what we need not to neglect. We have to consider that. It's important. It's a God-given thing for us. Paul Tripp's books on parenting and being uh, husband are very good.

His book on marriage and his book on being a parent are exceptional. Especially for seeing your kids, and demonstrating to them the redemptive power of God in your own life and how to see them as individuals and speak that into them. So there are just a couple of resources that would be useful. Any of you two got examples of how a church does this well? Well, about the question that you had, I think it's also important to know your limitations. And when it comes to physical problems, we know that and we go for help when needed and we do not try to fix it ourselves. I've seen too many problems where people think they can fix it themselves or that they can do it rather than go for the help that is available.

So it's also a matter to me of humility that you know there you As an office bearer, I'm not a counselor. As a father, I'm not a counselor, but there is help out there available that can do what I cannot do. Direct him with that too. Actually, I'm encouraged by the fact that most of our churches now, I think if not all of them, have an abuse policy. and regularly we're talking about that policy. and training each other in it. I think it's important. This is a topic that we are regularly talking about as consistories. and when we're dealing with the cases that we consider all of these elements. And is there something that The question is, is there something that children could do?

I assume the question is relating particularly to the children of Dan and Dana. particularly if they're a little bit older. We can think about children, sort of, of any age in that family. I think everyone's. You know, you grow up from young to very old and you're confronted with that the whole way through. Is there something that, you know, we can do to support the children or something the children can do to kind of get involved? I've seen it a number of times with older children, even ones who've moved out of home. They've obviously experienced it during their childhood. But then they have the agency, I suppose, to be able to speak up and do something about it. And then they can surround their siblings, their mum, or whoever it might be.

To help them confront the issue and work through it. I think that children are very important here because they can also feel guilty, as if it was their fault, or that they're going to repeat what Dad did, and I'm going to be the same. In Catechism class, I always made it a point of really addressing this. also point talking about what are proper relationships how how do you deal with this and if there is not something that right how do you talk about that so through the children you don't want to use the children to get to the parents but through children you do get a very good idea as to what lives there and you can step into that in that way too and and help out but i think certainly they they need help, direction, but also training what is a proper relationship.

And you're not bound to repeat what your parents did. one of obviously this has come into a head when Dana is wanting to or considering sort of talking about it a home visit and the ideal scenario is it to be is for it to be sort of picked up and for the elders to kind of be aware of it without Dana necessarily having to come forward and to be able to deal with it that way. So the question was asked, how do we see signs of what is going on? Not all of us are. as quick about spotting on what's going on in a relationship as others. And this probably extends not just to elders involved in a family, but how do we see, you know, our brothers and sisters, you know, who are married, how do we look at our friends and our colleagues, and what are the signs we should look at to say, 'Yeah, there's not something right going on there' and to kind of address it hopefully early, but to be able to pull it out at that time. Does it look too good? Is everything too perfect? I think is a sign. Is there openness from all members of the family in communication? Or are we just hearing from, in this case, just the father? Is the silence the telling sign? Absolutely. But also be bold. and take responsibility for your brother and sister. Because far too often, it's easy to say, 'Maybe that's something, maybe it's not.' I have a little nagging that something might be wrong, but it's not my business.

And we should stick out of other people's businesses. And I wouldn't like people poking into my business. I just won't get involved. And we turned a blind eye. And if everybody does that, then nothing gets addressed. So we need to take responsibility for our brothers and sisters. And ourselves first, obviously. All right, that's pretty much run us to the time that we have allocated for this panel discussion. I want to thank you for the very frank conversation and also to the audience for your participation through the messages. I pray that this discussion also was a blessing to you. There were a lot of questions and comments that haven't been addressed. These will all be recorded, and the committee will utilize these in the development of content and resources following the conference. Thank you, brothers.