

What Color Is Your Elephant?

By Paula Silva

Wherever I go, I see evidence of God's most beautiful and unique design in creation in the women I meet. With just words, each woman was designed by God. Actually if you think about it, God was and still is the first HGTV program (House and Garden TV). HGTV is one of my favorite TV programs. It is amazing to me with just a dash of color and certain arrangements something is created from basically nothing.

I admire people who have the gift of seeing the potential in a room or house. I can view the beautiful results but cannot create it myself. The decorators remove the blemishes, cover up flaws, and add flair from their own design.

Each one of us can do the same in our personal lives. We have learned techniques to deny or ignore the existence of an issue that keeps us from growing in our lives and in our personal relationship with God. I call these "elephants".

Did you know that the elephant is the largest land animal on earth? At birth, it can weigh 260 pounds. An adult can weigh up to 26,000 pounds. No wonder we are so weighted down when these elephants exist in our lives. As you can see, elephants would be hard to get rid of but not impossible.

You have heard the old adage that *there is an elephant in the room, but no one addresses it*. We think if we ignore it, it will just go away. We try to keep it hidden. We decorate the elephant to match our personal décor so it will go unnoticed by us and others. What color is your elephant? Have you added accessories? Have you tried covering it with patterns of behavior that mask its appearance?



The elephant does not fit into our definition of a "perfect" Christian. It is a blemish that brings shame especially if you are in ministry. Most elephants have to do with relational issues. So what do we do? We cover it up by the mask we wear on our face and claim everything is fine when asked, but down deep inside the elephant is growing and destroying us piece by piece. Fear of it being exposed keeps us enslaved to this secret. No one has escaped an "elephant".

For more than 28 years, Pam dealt with an "elephant" that crippled her relationship with the Lord and devalued her as an image bearer of God. She did not realize that this elephant was becoming an idol in her life. It pushed away things that would enrich her soul and develop the potential God had placed within her. The elephant became her focal point no matter how hard Pam tried to deny its existence. It was a relational issue that quenched her spirit.

She was young, naïve, and uninformed. She believed in the myth that if you marry a Christian man, you would always have a Christian home filled with joy in the service of the Lord. The elephant in its infant stages was present, but the charm of the young man overshadowed its presence. There were little indicators, the authoritative tone that led her to question her parents' wisdom and guidance, the

aggressive behavior Pam interpreted as confidence. It was so subtle. What little she saw she determined to fix it by her love.

The baby elephant began to grow within the first week of marriage. An outburst of rage from her husband began a pattern of questioning her perceptions and overanalyzing the situation.

Her husband was well liked at work and church. He would often make sacrifices to others but not his family. Behind closed doors at home, he claimed his headship and demanded submission. Verbal criticism chiseled away her self-concept. His denial of his actions or gifts he would bring left her confused about how she perceived an incident. Scripture taken out of context or misinterpreted kept her in her place. Walking on eggshells whenever he was present became a norm in her life.

One day as she looked into the mirror she noticed how much her physical appearance was being affected. Her eyes were sad. Her posture slumped and eye contact with others had become difficult. Putting on makeup was left for another day. She felt no confidence in her abilities. Depression and despair were her constant companions. It was through counseling by a godly woman that Pam was guided into labeling her elephant. The label was domestic violence.

She learned a new term, *Boundaries*. She had the responsibility to guard her heart by only allowing in what would build her up and develop her relationship with God instead of what would destroy. Pam's lack of boundaries only enabled the abuse to continue.

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She realized that she had tried to fix everything under her own power, her abilities, and her actions. Pam did not allow the power of the Holy Spirit within her to work. She did not understand that she needed to give up control of the life she was losing. By letting God be Sovereign in everything, she would actually gain life.

No matter what your elephant is God is there to guide and direct you. Can you release it to God and trust that God is only going to do what is best for you? Who else can you trust and know that their promise is true?

There are specific key steps in addressing an elephant.

1. **Come out of denial. The elephant will grow and weigh you down more.**
2. **Identify, define, and label your elephant and then educate yourself about your elephant.**
3. **Don't ignore it. Remember the weight of the elephant at birth and the weight as an adult.**
4. **Begin to ask yourself the following questions.**
 - How have I disguised my elephant?
 - Has it been covered with a pattern of behavior?
 - Has the elephant become an idol in my life?" Is it my focal point rather than God?
 - Why do I ignore it?

The answer to the last question can contain many reasons that reflect past and present experiences in our life. Let's examine some possible reasons.

Shame

Shame takes a strong grip on us as we look at other women who seem to

have it all together. We compare ourselves to them pointing out our failures and judging ourselves harshly. We long to be all that God created us to be and to experience His grace, but we have become stagnant in our perceptions telling ourselves we are not worthy of anything. Shame becomes part of what we experience in difficult relationships.

- Shame that we can't fix it
- Shame that people will view us as being the cause of the problem
- Shame that we don't measure up to the standards of the Christian community

Fear

- Fear that we don't meet people's expectations of us
- Fear of not meeting God's expectation
- Fear of a sin being revealed
- Fear of repercussions from the abusive person
- Fear that we won't be heard and understood
- Fear of being blamed for the problem.

Rejection

If people know what your elephant is, they may reject you, abandon you or withdraw their love. That is a possibility, but God will not reject you, abandon you, or not love you.

Guilt

Maybe there is guilt for something you did to enable this elephant to grow, guilt that you didn't do something sooner about the issue or you didn't handle it in an appropriate way. *Should of, could of, would of*, and the *If only's* don't exist so don't dwell on them.

Condemnation

There is a possibility that others will condemn you and persecute you when your elephant is revealed. but rest in God's Word.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2 NIV

Sometimes we ignore the elephant because of the **labels** we wear. ***I am not good enough. I'll never measure up. I am unlovable.***

Think about where these messages came from. What hurts have created these wounds that placed these labels on you?

The next step is

5. **Take off the mask. Reach out to someone you trust and tell the secret.**
6. **Find resources to help you deal with your elephant.**
7. **Most important—seek God first. Let him be your focus, your strength, and power to deal with the elephant.**

There is **HOPE** in removing your elephant even though it may seem too overwhelming and difficult. Turn your focus to the Lord for He is your hope and strength.

Hope is:

Holding onto Jesus

Opening your heart and seeking God's guidance and wisdom

Preparing to take a stand against evil and sin

Experiencing God's faithfulness and unconditional love