

God, Our Refuge and Defender

Sermon Outline from Selected Texts



Preliminary Thoughts

- Communicate early and frequently with the congregation regarding your intent to cover this topic. That provides an opportunity to someone who may be triggered by a sermon on the topic of abuse to prepare if they wish to attend or allows them to decide not to attend if that would be best for them.
- On the morning of the sermon, alert the congregation to the subject matter of this sermon.
- Share that abuse is an important subject to address.
 - Explain abuse may be a difficult subject for some to hear.
 - Provide a transition for younger people in attendance or those for whom a sermon on abuse may be triggering to leave (perhaps while you pray, followed by a video playing to provide the time and opportunity needed), and communicate what that opportunity is.
 - Sample Statement: The topic of this morning's message is both needed and potentially upsetting. It may be upsetting and beneficial for the same person. We're going to talk about abuse. The church cannot ignore this issue or pretend it doesn't exist. If you think it is best for you or your children to step out for this sermon, I want you to know that is perfectly fine. I am going to invite us to pray to invite God to help us address this difficult subject and to facilitate privacy for anyone who needs to step out.
- Share about the [Caring Well Challenge](#) and the role that the congregation and its leadership play in becoming a church that cares well for those who have been abused and in the effort to prevent abuse.
- If your church has already been working on this issue, let them know. And explain that as a church you want to continue to be vigilant and care for the congregation.

Suggestions for Introduction

- Show a video
 - [Stephanie's Video](#) (Testimony of a Survivor of Sexual Abuse in the Church)
 - [J.D. Greear's Video](#) (SBC President's Greeting)
- Share [statistics](#) about sexual abuse.
- Share a [survivor story](#).

Purpose

The purpose of this sermon is to equip God's people with a vision of God's heart for the abused so that the Church can care well for the vulnerable among us.

Main Point

Because God cares for the abused, his people must also care for the abused among us. No one should hurt alone and the church should be an asset, not an interference, to those who are recovering from the experience of abuse.

I. God hears the cries of his people.

- A. When the oppressed cry out to God for justice, God hears (Exodus 3:9).
- B. He will answer.
 - 1. When God answered the cries of Israel in Egypt, he used Moses as his instrument.
 - 2. When God answers the cries of the abused in our day, the Church should be prepared to be his instrument. That will be our focus in this message.
- C. Those who perpetuate abuse and/or protect abusers are making themselves out to be enemies of God himself (Exodus 3:8-10).

II. Because God listens, God's people need to listen.

- A. When we skip listening and start doing, it often feels unsafe to the abused person.
- B. Understanding is what makes action feel safe.
- C. The more delicate the wound, the more precise the care needs to be. We cannot afford to be clumsily good intentioned with our care. We need to listen to our friend who has been abused, so we are aware of what would be helpful.
- D. To prepare yourself to listen better watch Lessons 5 (sexual abuse), 6 (physical abuse), and 8 (emotional abuse) at churchcares.com.

III. God is the refuge and defender of abused people.

- A. Psalm 9:9 declares that “the LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”
 - 1. The word that is translated here as “the oppressed” is a vivid word that can be translated as “the crushed.” A form of the word is used elsewhere in Psalm 74:21 to refer to those who have been “beaten down.”
 - 2. Such vivid imagery of being “crushed” and “beaten down” explains why Eugene Peterson paraphrases Psalm 9:9 as saying, “God is a safe-house for the battered, a sanctuary during bad times.”
- B. Throughout the Bible, battered and oppressed people are invited to find refuge in the LORD. Consider this survey of passages from God’s Word:
 - 1. In Psalm 34:18, we see that the LORD is “near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
 - 2. Psalm 103:6 declares that the LORD “works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.”
 - 3. In Malachi 3:5, we are told that the LORD will draw near to judge “against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me.”
 - 4. We see Jesus, who is the greatest revelation of God’s character, preaching “good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, giving sight to the blind, granting liberty to the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Transition: So, what are God’s people to do? Meditating on the Scripture’s testimony about God’s heart for those who are abused, we will find that the same God who reveals himself as the refuge and defender of abused people, calls his people to care for people who are abused.

IV. God calls us to be a refuge and defender of abused people.

- A. Almost as frequently as God reveals himself to be the refuge and defender of the oppressed, we see God calling his people to reflect his character.

1. In a sense, then, to be godly, at least in part, means to be like God in his care for abused people. As Christians, we are called to glorify God by making his character known through our words and our deeds.
2. Simply put, if God cares for people who are oppressed and abused, his people must also care for the oppressed and abused, because such care is part of God's character.
3. Consider this series of passages that capture God's call to care for those who are victims of oppression and abuse:
 - a. In Psalm 82:3, God commands his people to "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute."
 - b. In Jeremiah 22:3, we find the LORD calling us to "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place."
 - c. In Zechariah 7:9-10, we are called to "Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."
 - d. In Matthew 25:41-46, Jesus assumes that God's people will meet the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the destitute, the ill, the imprisoned, and the stranger in their midst.
 - e. Likewise, in the book of James, God warns Christians about the dangers of neglecting their responsibility to bear spiritual fruit in keeping with repentance, particularly as it related to matters of equity, speech, justice, and care. James was concerned that his audience's faith in Jesus would be seen clearly in their words and deeds toward others.
4. But it is always good to remember that God's call to care for the abused is predicated upon our trust in Christ Jesus. We never want to believe or give the impression that caring for others is how one comes to be in a right relationship with God.
 - a. As the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9: "It is by grace that we are saved through faith and this is not of ourselves but it is the gift of God."
 - b. We are reconciled to God by the work of Jesus on our behalf. Salvation does not come through keeping the commands of Scripture.
 - c. However, Ephesians 2:8-9 is not the entire picture of the Christian life. The grace of Ephesians 2:8-9 is divinely intended by God to lead to "good deeds," as Ephesians 2:10 so clearly states.
 - d. The good news of Jesus Christ compels us to work to protect the vulnerable and to provide safety for the abused among us.
5. Thus, when we think about what it means to be or exist as a Christian, we must recognize that the gospel of God's grace in Christ not only saves us (Romans 1:16-17), but it also enables us to glorify God by doing good to others (Matthew 5:16).
6. A right understanding of God's grace in Christ should compel us to Christlike care. Sadly the Church has often not cared well for the abused. But when God's people truly care for people who have been impacted by abuse, they show the love and care that God demonstrated toward all who were "weak and without power" (Romans 5:6-8).

Transition to Concluding Application and Restatement: So, what would it look like if God's people were gripped by these truths? What might change in our lives or in our church if we lived as those who not only believed that God is the refuge and defender of the abused, but that God has called every Christian to care for the abused and oppressed in their midst?

Conclusion

V. Here are a few things we can do as a church:

Because God cares for the abused, we must also care for the abused, which means:

- A. Making sure survivors are truly heard and cared for, instead of silenced or marginalized, even if this comes at the cost of our church's reputation.
 1. For more on how we should do this as a church, watch Lesson 9 at churchcares.com.
- B. Creating a place where survivors of abuse feel trusted, welcomed, safe, and secure.
 1. We have been learning how to better do this through the churchcares.com curriculum.
 2. We would invite you to also take advantage of this free curriculum to help us have this culture in our church.
 3. List the specific ways you are seeking to create this environment in your church.
 4. For someone who feels unsafe and needs immediate help this would be a good place to reference the National Sexual Assault Hotline or the National Domestic Violence Hotline.
- C. Implementing policies and procedures that protect the abused, not the abuser.
 1. We have done this as a part of the process of the [Caring Well Challenge](#).
 2. As a church, we regularly revisit our policies to make sure we are doing everything we can.
 3. Working to prevent abuse by means of a well-structured process with well-educated volunteers
 - a. In 1 John 2:10, John says that those who love others do not cause them to stumble. While John most likely has the idea of "stumbling into sin" in mind, this verse also applies to preventative measures that Christians should take to protect others.
 - b. When a church works to prevent abuse, not only are they protecting the vulnerable, but they are working to remove stumbling blocks.
 - c. The scandal of sexual abuse that we have seen in many churches is a legitimate stumbling block to faith in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 5:1 for an example of how sexual immorality in the church at Corinth scandalized even the pagans).
- D. Recognizing the God-ordained role of the civil authorities in determining guilt and seeking criminal justice.
 1. For more on this watch Lesson 2 and 3 at churchcares.com.
 2. Abuse is always destructive and immoral, and often illegal.
 3. The [Church Cares](#) curriculum is helpful in pointing out that these overlap, but that what is illegal God has assigned specifically to civil authorities (Romans 13).
 4. As pastor Mika Edmonson shares in the *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused* curriculum:

We pastors are not trained to properly investigate crimes. With certain crimes, we intuitively understand this. If for instance, we found a murdered body on the floor of our pastoral study, we would immediately call the police. It would never occur to us to investigate the crime of murder completely "in house" because we recognize we are simply not called or equipped to properly do it. The same holds true for crimes like sexual and domestic abuse. Many dynamics in these situations require trained experts to address. The Lord's people are better protected and served when we leaders understand that (23).
 5. At our church, we are going to shepherd and protect the way God has called us to by being quick to report illegal activity that occurs to allow civil authorities to do what God has called them to do. After reporting, we have our role as the church in those matters, but that does not usurp or replace the God given role of civil authorities.
 6. We are also going to do what God has called us to do and deal with immoral abuse that may not be seen as criminal, but that is offensive to God and harmful to those impacted

by it. Where the court cannot act, we will oppose abuse through protection of those who are abused, care in walking alongside them, and by calling the abuser to repentance or in necessary situations through church discipline. Lesson 8 in the churchcares.com curriculum provides guidance for how we can care well and wisely in non-criminal cases of abuse.

If God is for the abused and the oppressed, then we, too, want to be on his side and work with him, by his grace, in order to be vessels of mercy and love to those that God has placed in our life.

God is on the side of those who are “crushed” and “battered.” If we ever doubted God’s care for the “crushed” and “battered,” just think about how God was in Christ reconciling this broken world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Jesus Christ was willingly “crushed for our transgressions and battered for our iniquities” so that we might be healed. Jesus is no stranger to being crushed and battered by the hands of evil men (Acts 2:23). We pray to one who knows the pain we feel (Rom. 8:26-27, Heb. 4:16-17). Yet, for the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, so that one day, the crushing and battering in this world would end forever when he makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Until that day, we weep and grieve while working to see the evil of abuse alleviated in this world, because we know that our God is the refuge and defender of the abused.