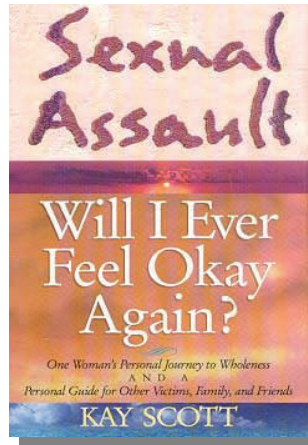


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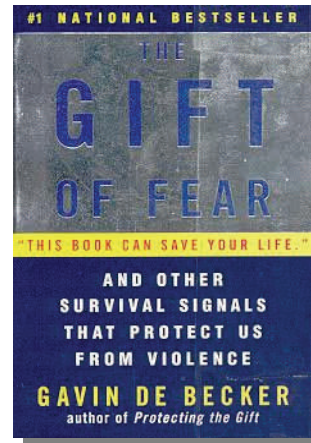
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Author Gavin DeBecker shares his expertise in predicting and avoiding violence. Readable and practical.

## THE CHURCH AS A SANCTUARY

Excerpted from  
“Counseling Survivors of  
Sexual Abuse,” by Diane  
Mandt Langberg, Ph.D.

*NOTE: The following article contains graphic content about rape and murder. Be prayerful about your potential response as it relates to trauma experiences in your own life.*

In the Old Testament, the Israelites, God’s chosen nation, were given regulations both for worship and for an earthly sanctuary. God told Moses to “have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). Since the coming of Christ, we now have a living tabernacle or sanctuary, for God dwells within his people both individually and corporately. In different ways, both the old and the new sanctuaries have been the dwelling place of God. Scripture is clear about the fact that the place where God dwells is to be a holy place as well as a place of refuge for the poor and oppressed of the earth. The psalmist says, “Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart...who does his neighbor no wrong...who despises a vile

man” (Ps. 15:1-4). The sanctuary of God is to be a holy place that provides a refuge from evil. Surely what characterized the sanctuary made by hands is to be manifested in the tabernacle made by God, the body of his church.

Sadly, instead of manifesting holiness and safety, the dwelling place of God has sometimes mirrored the horror we find in the tribe of Benjamin. In Deuteronomy 33:12, Moses pronounces the following blessing on the tribe of Benjamin before his death: “Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders.” One would think that a group of people so secure and shielded by the Lord God himself would offer that same refuge and security to those who entered their borders. Instead we find in Judges 19 the horrific story of the rape and death of the Levite’s concubine.

In Judges we are told that this particular concubine was unfaithful to the man to whom she was legally attached. In her anger she left him and returned to her father’s house. He went



after her four months later. After several days, the Levite finally extricated himself and his concubine and began his journey home. It was dangerous to sleep in the unprotected countryside, and the Levite chose to stay in Gibeah, where Benjamites lived.

Although the law of hospitality was strong in the Middle East, it was some time before they were offered shelter. Finally an old man took them in. Some of the wicked men of the city came pounding on the door later, demanding to have sex with the Levite. The owner of the house felt that would be disgraceful since the Levite was his guest, and instead the owner offered his own virgin daughter and the

Levite’s concubine. The men would not listen, so finally the concubine was handed out to them by the Levite himself, and they raped and abused her all night long. At dawn when they let her go, she worked her way back to the house where her master was and fell down at the door, her hands on the threshold. Her master’s response upon finding her there was to tell her to get up so they could go home. There was no

*(Continued on page 2)*

# SAFE PLACE NEWS

*Promoting safe places, consistent with the character of Christ, for women and their families to heal and grow.*

Issue 16

March 2002

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK:

Many thanks to Diane Langberg for permission to reprint her powerful article, "The Church As A Sanctuary." I can think of no reality more responsible for the formation of Safe Place Ministries than the one she describes: that although God intends for His church to be a sanctuary for vulnerable and abused people, in far too many instances it is not.

Research substantiates for our minds what honest stories, like the one in Judges, have already impressed upon our hearts.

- More victims of abuse turn to church leaders for help than all other care providers combined, but

*(Continued from page 1)*

answer; she was dead. He put her across his donkey, took her body home, cut it in twelve pieces, and sent them into all the sections of Israel.

We could consider many aspects of this account: the fact that the Levite was just as guilty of the concubine's death as the men who killed her; the fact that when he told the story to the Israelites, he lied and said that the Benjamites wanted to kill him rather than rape him; the fact that our shock at histories of sexual abuse is surprising given the bluntness of Scripture regarding the horrors humans commit. However, I want us to note two points in reference to an understanding of the church as sanctuary.

First, within the borders of a tribe that was to understand and experience the rest and safety of God himself, a woman was brutally abused. She died outside the door with her hands across the threshold. What a picture! How often we believers, who know and experience the rest and safety of God in Christ, have allowed the vulnerable and abused among us to "die" outside the door! How many battered wives have been "sent out" and returned to their abusers? How many survivors of sexual abuse have been "left" outside the sanctuary, told to take their struggles elsewhere, to just put it behind them, and in effect, to "get up and go"? What must it

- Church leaders are ranked lowest among care providers in the quality of the help they provide.

Too many victims are dying on our thresholds. Too many wounded people are being told to get up and go and not limp. The scriptures are so clear— their message so timeless. Will we (the body of Christ) minimize abuse, protect abusers from consequences, and ignore the needs of victims, or will we seek God's wisdom, provide safety and comfort to victims, and be willing to pay the price required to deal with sin effectively?

The story in Judges is ruthlessly honest, almost overwhelming. Dr. Langberg's commentary on it is so wise and penetrating. I know it's hard but I hope you read it—more than once—

have felt like to be handed out to a group of crazed, strange men and be gang raped all night long? Her wounds and bruises must have been clearly visible. How could someone look down on such injuries and simply say, "Get up; let's go"?

Had the Benjamites reflected the God who had blessed them with security, shielding, and safety between his shoulders, this woman would have found safety and comfort such as she had never know. She who was weaker and less honorable would have been protected from destruction and injury. The Benjamites missed a phenomenal opportunity to give to another a taste of the God who is our refuge! May we who name the name of Christ never be guilty of such missed opportunity!

Second, when the rest of Israel learned of the devastation that had occurred, they

prayerfully and carefully. Then do one more thing.

In this month when many of us are preparing for and remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus, remember this as well. Remember the death and potential resurrection of those who have been sexually assaulted (one in three women). April is also Sexual Assault Awareness Month. As you pray for a greater understanding of what Christ has done for you and given to you, pray for those who have experienced the death that follows the sin of sexual assault. Pray that they will also experience the resurrection life offered to them in Christ.

### Nancy

were shocked, and they all assembled before the Lord in Mizpah. We are told that "the leaders of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of the people of God" (Judg. 20:2). After hearing the Levite's story, they united as one man against the Benjamites. First they asked the Benjamites to surrender the men who had committed the abuse. The Benjamites would not listen and chose instead to protect them, exhibiting a misplaced loyalty to the abusers in Gibeah. They chose to fight on behalf of the evil men against their own "brethren the children of Israel" (Judg. 20:13, KJV). As a result, Israel went to God at Bethel, the house of God, and asked him what they should do. God directed them to go against the Benjamites.

I think we would expect that if God told Israel to go against the Benjamites, he would then give them victory. Instead, the Israelites lost twenty-two thousand men on the battlefield that day. They

*(Continued on page 3)*



- Somewhere in America, a woman is sexually assaulted every two minutes, according to the U. S. Dept. of Justice
- Less than one in three victims of sexual assault report the crime to law enforcement
- 49% of sexual assault victims suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

For more statistics:  
<http://www.rainn.org/stats.html>

## SPM BENEFIT DESSERT

On Friday evening, February 8th, we held our Second Annual Benefit Dessert and celebrated the growth of our ministry. This year approximately 140 of you joined us, double the number from last year! We had a great time visiting, sharing, bidding on items in our Silent Auction, and drawing the winner of our quilt. Helen Gersema of Boise was the lucky winner of our "Christmas Cactus" quilt.

Among other gifts, our guests gave the following:

- \$4,707.00 in donations (including auction and raffle)
- Approximately \$2,000 in additional annual pledges
- 29 guests picked up Albertsons Community Partner cards
- 10 guests signed up to be on our E-



### Team

- 27 guests signed up to volunteer for SPM
- 109 Outreach Cards were picked up and tucked in wallets and purses

This past year, SPM has experienced a 100% increase in the number of referrals, number of clients, and number of direct victim services offered. Since July 1, 2001, we have served 70 clients and are currently working with over 30 women. During our last ministry year (7/1/2000 through 6/30/2001) we also provided support or education to 652 care providers, and distributed over 1,890 SPM resources.

*(Continued from page 2)*

went to God and wept before him, asking again what to do. God sent them again to fight the Benjamites. This time they lost eighteen thousand, all armed with swords. In other words, they sent in prepared men and lost them in the fray. A third time they went weeping before the Lord. They fasted and offered sacrifices. Again they asked whether or not they should go up against their brothers. This time God said yes and also promised them victory.

The horrific sin of the Benjamites resulted in brother having to go against brother at great cost to many. It was the only way to "purge the evil" in their midst. The holiness of God demands that the sin be dealt with. Doing so required perpetual seeking after him with tears, fasting, and sacrifices (which meant in part dealing with their own sin). Thousands of innocent men died as a result. The cost was great. God continued to send them into the fight, knowing about that cost. He did not make it easy. The effects of that hideous rape and murder and the Benjamites' attempted protection of the evildoers cost thousands of lives. Had

they allowed the perpetrators to be brought to justice, it would have been far less costly to the nation of Israel. Whenever the body of Christ, through denial or actual choice, ignores such sins in its midst, the entire body suffers terribly as a result.

Obedience to God in circumstances such as these is very costly. We in the church of God are engaged in a battle. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that all of life is a battle for those who love God, yet few seem willing to bear it as an occupation. Yes, we will get hurt. We said in chapter 1 that suffering leaves its mark all over those who must endure it. Entering into the suffering of others will also leave a mark. God does not promise that such battles will be without cost. However, as we seek him and weep before him, he will enable us to fight. He will give wisdom so that we do not send people out to be abused. He will grant us open hearts so that no one dies on our thresholds but rather everyone is welcomed in and protected. He will grant us courage to enter the fray, knowing that whatever the cost, the

ultimate price has been paid by his Son, enabling all of us to find God as our fortress, our deliverer, our refuge, and our shield. May we as the body of Christ provide sanctuary to others, never causing someone to cry out with David, "I have no refuge; no one cares for my life" (Ps. 142:4).

*Used with permission from*  
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