

Voices: A call to protect the vulnerable and steps to do it

January 21, 2026

In the wake of continued abuse allegations, amended and implemented national policies, and the renewed attention brought by the death of abuse survivor and former Lifeway vice president [Jennifer Lyell](#) last year, an opportunity exists to love, protect, and show Christ to the world.

John 13:34-35 shares Christ's commandment: "Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples."

The Christian faith's call to love one another requires courage, compassion, and sacrificial love to each other and the vulnerable.

As C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point."

In a world often fractured by violence, neglect, and despair, the example of Christians who protect and serve, and churches that pour out compassion on those in need, resonates as Christ's light and hope.

Scriptural expectations

Our character and actions are outlined in Scripture. We are called to act courageously, defend the vulnerable, and uphold justice.

Proverbs 31:8-9 commands: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

In the Old Testament, figures such as Boaz (Ruth 2) exemplified this protective role. Boaz went out of his way to ensure Ruth's safety in the fields, instructing his workers not to harm her, and providing for her needs.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." This sacrificial love extends beyond marriage, calling men to be selfless protectors and advocates for women and to reflect Christ's selfless devotion in every sphere of life.

As C.S. Lewis reminds us: "Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained."

Micah 6:8 further encourages: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This verse underlines the call for justice and mercy woven through Christian responsibility.

Responsibility as Christ-followers

To embody Christ's love is to embrace a love marked by sacrifice, humility, and unwavering dedication—a love that protects, uplifts, and seeks the highest good for others.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, Paul urges: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love." This charge ties strength to tenderness, courage to compassion, and vigilance to actively care for those around us.

Jesus declared in John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." In protecting, loving, and serving others, Christians are called to mirror the sacrificial heart of Christ—offering emotional support, dignity, and enduring kindness to all, especially the most vulnerable.

Our call then and now

Across the centuries, countless Christians have distinguished themselves by standing up against injustice and protecting the vulnerable.

William Wilberforce, for example, used his political influence to abolish the British slave trade, driven by his deep Christian conviction regarding the dignity of all people. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood against the evil of Nazi tyranny, risking—and ultimately sacrificing—his life to shield the oppressed.

The 21st century presents unique challenges, as vulnerable people around the world continue to face violence, discrimination, and exploitation.

[Almost half of all women and 2 in 5 men](#) experience sexual abuse, physical abuse, or stalking in their lifetime. Christians are called not only to reject such injustices, but to actively oppose them.

Romans 12:21 exhorts: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” This involves speaking out against abuse, supporting survivors, and working to create communities where all people are safe, valued, and empowered.

While [people of faith struggle](#) to change the current environment or leave the church because of it, [pervasive abuse of members continues](#).

[Despite recent efforts](#) of the Southern Baptist Convention for an [abuse database](#), a database has not been produced due to [lack of funding and priority](#).

In practical terms, this may mean individual churches are responsible for their ministers’ in-depth background checks, participation in accountability groups, congregational transparency and awareness, or advocating for policies that protect all participants.

It also means modeling respect in families and friendships, teaching children by example, and listening to the voices and experiences of the abused.

Practical steps for individuals and churches

- **Education and awareness:** Promote biblical character, accountability (Matthew 18:15-17), and courage (Joshua 1:9). Take time to learn about the challenges facing the abused in your community. Host Bible-based studies to foster understanding and compassion. Begin or grow programs for those who suffer from abuse or addiction. Awareness and open dialogue can help those who suffer by breaking the silence and debilitating guilt.
- **Advocacy and policy:** Support initiatives and policies that protect vulnerable people from violence and exploitation. Write to local representatives or join faith-based advocacy groups.
- **Mentorship and discipleship:** Mentors trained in discipleship, especially in sensitive topics, can guide younger people in character and responsibility, modeling what it means to honor, protect, and care for the vulnerable.
- **Prayer and spiritual support:** Lift up in prayer those who are marginalized or suffering, and seek wisdom in how to respond as a community.
- **Counseling:** Enlist counselors to provide free services to aid in mental health issues while providing safe environments to share stories of assault and provide resources for healing.
- **Relationship classes:** Tackle the difficult topics of biblical behavior, bystander and awareness training, abuse, pornography, teen mothers'

groups, and broken family relationships.

Renewed commitment

The call for Christians to protect others reflects the heart of Christ, who defends the oppressed and heals the broken. When people rise to protect and honor the vulnerable and churches pour themselves out for the least among us, the gospel becomes tangible. Communities are transformed. Churches help restore hope and dignity.

Seeking God's will in a new era, what innovative and global-reaching initiatives will Christians organize in his name?

In these acts of courage and compassion, the church fulfills its highest calling: to bear witness to the love of Christ in a hurting world.

We have a great opportunity before us to serve and provide the hope of Christ in stronger, more compassionate ways. May this generation rise up with renewed commitment to the vulnerable, so our communities might become havens of safety, dignity, and hope for all.

Lord and Savior, please open our minds to the broken and hurting of this world. Give us strength and courage to be humble, obedient, and compassionate. Let us be a Proverbs 31:8-9 people. Guide our service in your name, Amen.

Candice Sharp Fulton has held positions as a pre-teen group teacher and college group teacher/director. She is currently a doctoral student studying sexual harassment reporting on university campuses through Texas Woman's University's Education, Leadership, and Organization program. She is also a university professor, and member of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the

author.

Sources:

Hopkins, R. (2024, June 10). *Some churches call clergy sexual misconduct an "affair." survivors are fighting to make it against the law.* Christianity Today.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/06/clergy-sex-abuse-consent-law-crime/>

National Network to End Domestic Violence. (2025, May 20). *Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fact Sheet* . National Network to End Domestic Violence.

<https://nnedv.org/wp-content/documents/DVSA%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20May%202025%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

Shellnut, K. (2024, September 25). *Why does southern baptist abuse reform keep hitting hurdles?.* Christianity Today.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/06/southern-baptists-vote-abuse-reform-database-funding-delay/>

Shellnutt, K. (2019, May 21). *1 in 10 young Protestants have left a church over abuse.* Christianity Today.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/2019/05/lifeway-protestant-abuse-survey-young-christians-leave-chur/>

Smietana, B. (2025a, February 19). *Southern Baptists Abandon Abuse Database.* Baptist Standard.

<https://baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/abuse-database-not-a-present-focus-for-sbc-leaders/>

Smietana, B. (2025b, February 18). *Southern Baptist leaders remain undaunted as legal bills from Abuse Investigation Mount.* Religion News Service.

<https://religionnews.com/2025/02/18/southern-baptist-leaders-remain-undunted-as-legal-bills-from-abuse-investigation-mount/>