

“STANDING IN THE GAP”
REVEREND INGA D. GREEN, M.DIV

If you would, please turn with me in your Bible to the nineteenth chapter of Judges beginning with verse twenty-five and ending with verse twenty- seven; in The Living Bible, we find these words:

25/But they wouldn't listen to him. Then the girl's husband pushed her to them, and they abused her all night, taking turns raping her until morning. Finally, just at dawn, they let her go. 26/She fell down at the door of the house and lay there until it was light. 27/When her husband opened the door to be on his way, he found her there, fallen down in front of the door with her hands digging into the threshold.”

And just for a little while, let us consider, “Standing in the Gap”

How many of us have ever told someone, “don't worry, I gotcha your back.” “Yes—you **can** count on me...hey, if you need anything, call me.” Often time when we make these declarations the intent is to let folk know we care about, value and love them. These types of pronouncements allow persons to feel connected to someone who is committing themselves to us when situations in our lives become unnerving and we're wrestling with what to do. Therefore, we take comfort in knowing we've got somebody who's genuinely concerned, connected and in our corner, somebody willing to stand in the gap for us. But, when the rubber meets the road, when we actually get that call at 2am from a frantic loved one confessing that their partner has just beat them, when a friend, colleague, or coworker gets the nerve to come to us with obvious signs of being battered, will we really stand in the gap?

October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. Domestic Violence is not only a physical offense but it also encompasses psychological mistreatment as well. This month is devoted to further encourage those of us who are being abused or have been abused, to utilize resources that could empower us to remove ourselves from this awful condition of existence; thereby enabling us to move ourselves towards healing. For others of us who may not be able to identify with this kind of abuse, today is our opportunity to become enlightened about this horrific offense. With the numbers rising due to the frequency of abusive occurrences happening across continents, in our communities, our homes and mostly likely, in the lives of someone sitting on your pew...are we the church prepared to stand in the gap?

A few days ago I ran across this poem entitled, "Battered Bride," by Lynn M. Kraft it reads---

"I watch her walk by every day
Smile, but I didn't know what to say
I know he beat her, I could hear the anguished screams
I told my children they were just bad dreams.
They belonged to the pretty girl upstairs
Who fell deeply in love
Then stripped of every ounce of pride
When she said I do and became a battered bride.

She was found yesterday, hanging in the kitchen with a new rope braid

And a note saying she would never again be afraid

He dug her grave long ago

But her death had been quite slow.”

Disturbing isn't it? Although this is a poem, it was somebody's reality then and if we were to ask Sistah Bynum, portions of these verses could be her reality today. Even though this is a poem entitled, “Battered Bride,” stats show it could easily be titled battered groom, battered partner or battered stranger. No matter how we label it abuse is abuse and it is still wrong!

Unfortunately, my sisters and my brothers, some of us are like the person in this poem, we see but don't see, hear but don't hear and make excuses to try and make light of these offenses, by trying to force ourselves to believe that everything is just fine when the obvious signs before us speak differently!

And if this senseless persecution is not enough, know this, on September 25th, the 2007 National Census of Domestic Violence Services summarized that in Virginia “on this one day alone, one thousand thirty five victims were served, one thousand thirty five victims in one day!! People, it is time that we the church take our head out of the sand and shift our thoughts on how we gloss over these wrongdoings and face the reality, that domestic violence is happening, and yes, even within the lives of some members of our own church families. Church can we stand in the gap?!

As we enter our text—we find ourselves in a city called Gibeah, a few miles north of Jerusalem. Night has fallen and there are visitors in town, trying to find a place to sleep for the evening. But all the hotels are filled and there is no light on at the local “Motel 6”—there are no vacancies, anywhere. Standing on the sidewalk, is, a Levite brotha, his “other wife” and his homie pondering their room less dilemma. However, before too long, scripture informs us that hospitality is extended to these folks by an elderly guy who invites these travelers to rest at his home that he shares with his daughter. And from the looks of things that should have been the end of the story. These visitors would get some food, drink and a good night’s rest and in the morning, be on their way.

However, as the group makes their way to the old man’s house, they didn’t notice the Gibeah Gang standing nearby, watching the old fella and his guests. These men in the gang had too much to drink and I can almost see them staggering in a drunken stupor making their way to the old man’s house, they were not looking for a place to sleep off their intoxication, no, no, no, they wanted some action, and they wanted it from the old man’s house. Can’t you hear them pounding on his door, can’t you hear them yelling and screaming?! The old fella is scared, and in order to avoid a home invasion he offers the Gibeah Gang his daughter for them to do with her what ever they wanted too. But it was not the female that they wanted and now the gang is growing more hostile, tempers are flaring, voices are raging, and before too long the words of our text are piercing our ears,

“25/But they wouldn’t listen to him. Then the girl’s husband pushed her to them, and they abused her all night, taking turns raping her until morning. Finally, just at dawn,

they let her go. 26/She fell down at the door of the house and lay there until it was light. 27/When her husband opened the door to be on his way, he found her there, fallen down in front of the door with her hands digging into the threshold.” (Jg 19:25-27)

In reading this text, I began to wonder how many folk heard her agonizing screams and turned up the volume on their televisions and I Pods. How many people witnessed her abuse, then closed their curtains and shut their eyes. How many folk had cell phones and yet, no one dialed 911. Nobody offered to do anything to help rescue our sistah!

But in spite, of this neglect, our dear sistah as battered, beat-up and as bloody as she is, sistah girl was able to muster enough strength to press her way to the place where she thought she would get some help only to collapse digging her hands into the threshold.

Where was the church?...Seemingly, we the community of faith have a tendency to ignore the painful reality of domestic and sexual violence by failing to provide a place of healing because we do not want to get involved. My people, when we do not allow our churches to be a safe place for survivors, because we don't know what repercussions may arise if we reach out to embrace those who are battered, we don't know how many lives we could possibly save. Since reaching out to the abused requires us to walk by faith to help the fallen, oftentimes we in the church pause, waiting for someone else to step up to the plate. By doing this, sadly, the pain of abuse continues causing more lives to be shattered and more spirits to become broken. Meanwhile, shelters continue to overflow, our emergency rooms continue to get busier and then many more needless graves will be dug, causing some of these deceased victims to receive flowers for the

very first time in their lives. Furthermore, when our churches neglect being that haven of hope, there will be more bloody hands gripping our threshold! Church can we really stand in the gap?!

See by us failing to provide a place of healing, a place of hope, we make it difficult to talk God talk when the abused are struggling daily mentality and physically, just to stay alive. We have got to reach them where they are—when our churches reach out to establish relationships with community safe houses, when we provide educational workshops to our congregations, thereby, empowering all of us to direct survivors to community resources for both the abused and the abusers as well, I believe we are showing a genuine concern for all. And then maybe, just maybe, they will see God in us, because we are being gracious to them.

Likewise, if the church is not the sanctuary of hope that God intended for us to be, the assaults will continue to increase and the cycle of abuse will never end. Here and now we have a responsibility to offer sessions for our young folk on healthy relationships, as well as teaching them to love one another as Christ loves them. If not, our young men will grow up thinking it's alright to violate, exploit and abuse females, if you watch some of the videos on television, you know what I'm talking about. If we don't teach our young ladies to love themselves, they will grow up believing that to be loved means to be someone's punching bag...because no one taught them this ain't God's way!!

Yet and still, if we continue to disregard the seriousness of abuse; shelters, and jails will overflow, newscasters will report more Bynum type stories, and the stats of abuse will increase and ultimately our sistahs and our brothers will die like a crushed

rosebud that never got the chance to bloom as God had intended. Church, can we stand in the gap?!

Well, I believe that, since we can see how minimizing the seriousness of domestic violence could potentially increase the problem because the church missed an opportunity to offer a safe haven and since we may have a better understanding of what might happen if we do not get involved, I invite all of us to really consider: “STANDING IN THE GAP”! How can we accomplish this? I’m glad you asked this question.

Initially, standing in the gap requires the children of God to be available to listen and not be judgmental, but in love offer a shoulder for someone to lean on when they need a person to trust and offer them that much needed support. When we become accessible we can be there to help pick up those that are unable to pick up themselves and in our moments of compassion we are courageously stating to others I really do have your back and you are not alone!!

Next, standing in the gap requires the people of faith to be accepting of these survivors embracing them with the love of God, comforting them in order to guide them towards a more excellent way. Perhaps through our love and commitment towards them, they will see that the church is that haven of hope and with God’s help they will find the strength and the courage to permanently be liberated from their oppression.

Then standing in the gap requires us to be affirming, to the down trodden, the abused, and the broken hearted. Empowering them through our words of encouragement; letting them know, “the Lord will make them the head and not the tail” (Det. 28:13 NKJV) letting them know that with God’s help,” no weapon formed against them will prosper” (Isa. 54:17 NKJV). We need to make sure we tell them...God loves them! God

loves them! God loves them!!! And ultimately we are praying for them. For I believe it is through the prayers of God's children that we can ask God to empower the survivors to lift up their head, believe God has the power to mend their broken hearts, restore their damaged spirits and ease their troubled mind. I believe that when we prayer, I mean sho' nuf pray...I pray and you pray and we pray together, I believe that God will enable those who are hurting to feel God's presence surrounding them. I believe God's agape love will enable the survivors to say enough is enough and will begin to bring closure to that negative aspect of their lives.

So yes, I do believe we the church can stand in the gap due to the fact we can no longer ignore the reality of Domestic nor Sexual Violence, we are now enlightened and because of this some of us are willing to take the necessary steps to get involved.

Yes, the church is equipped to stand in the gap, the Bible lets us know, and I believe with all of my heart, there is one who is constantly standing in the gap for you and me. One who endured mental and physical abuse and was beaten beyond recognition, one who stood in the gap, one day at Calvary... Jesus is His name, Jesus stood in the gap with a crown of thorns on His head, Jesus stood in the gap with His flesh hanging from His bones, Jesus stood in the gap enduring each hammering blow as He is nailed to a cross, doing it out of love for you and me! Jesus endured all of the abuse...and all of the mistreatment... out of love for you and I...Dying on that cross...Jesus the man died and was buried in a borrowed tomb....but that was not the end of His involvement with us, the Bible says Jesus rose on the third day with all power in His hand.

Jesus rose for every survivor,

Jesus rose for the fallen,

Jesus rose for every bloody gripped threshold,

Jesus rose for all of us and

Jesus our blessed Savior is still standing in the gap-- in the cut for all of us
today!!!

The woman in our scripture and the woman in the poem lost their lives, but today, by the power of Almighty God and through the blood of Jesus we the church have been given another chance, another opportunity to stand in the gap to try and help someone who has collapsed on our threshold... We may not be group facilitators, nor court advocates, or even counselors to the abused; however we can, be available, accepting and affirming.

My challenge to all of us is to be prayerful seeking God to enable each of us to do what we can to break the cycle and the silence of Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Standing in the Gap... Church, let's do it!!!

God Bless You!!!

Biographical Statement

Reverend Inga D. Green, M.Div., is a native of Washington, D.C. and now resides in Richmond, Virginia. She is a graduate of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University and a licensed and ordained Baptist Minister. Reverend Green is an Associate at Fifth Baptist Church and also serves as Co-director of the 8am Children's Church Ministry.

Inga is an Officer at a local bank in Richmond, and is a member of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance. Currently, she is completing her Domestic Violence public education training at the YWCA.

She is married and has one teenager.