LEGACY31 • FAITH COMMUNITY RESOURCE

WHEN SEXUAL VIOLENCE MEETS FAITH

A practical guide to compassion, safety, and accountability for pastors and faith communities.

The church cannot undo the harm someone has experienced. But its response can avoid adding another wound.

LISTEN • SUPPORT • PROTECT • CONNECT

Legacy31 | Faith-Informed Advocacy. Lasting Restoration.

Tamar: When Silence Follows Sexual Violence

2 Samuel 13:1–22 | A story of sexual assault, power, and the failure to protect.

Tamar, the daughter of King David, was sexually assaulted by her half-brother Amnon. Afterward, he rejected her. Her brother Absalom urged her to be quiet, and David was angry when he heard what happened. The passage does not describe David taking action to secure justice for Tamar.

ANGER IS NOT THE SAME AS ACCOUNTABILITY

The text records David’s anger, but not a protective response. Faith leaders must do more than express outrage: they must take responsible steps to promote safety and access to support.

What Tamar’s story asks of the church

- Will we prioritize a person’s safety over a family’s or institution’s reputation?
- Will we refuse to pressure survivors into silence, forgiveness, or reconciliation?
- Will we respond to disclosures with care instead of demanding proof or details?

PASTORAL REFLECTION

When someone shares an experience of sexual violence, will our first response protect their dignity—or protect our comfort?

Scripture invites reflection; it is not a substitute for survivor choice, professional support, safeguarding, or applicable reporting requirements.

Sexual Violence Is About a Lack of Consent

A person’s dignity and right to bodily autonomy do not disappear because of relationship, status, or setting.

Four truths every faith community should know

CONSENT	Consent must be freely given. Silence, fear, incapacitation, or pressure are not consent.
POWER	Authority, spiritual influence, threats, or dependence can be used to coerce.
TRAUMA	Freezing, delayed disclosure, fragmented memory, or continued contact do not prove consent or discredit a survivor.
RESPONSE	A pastor is not responsible for investigating an allegation. The church is responsible for responding safely and appropriately.

Common myths to challenge

- “They knew each other, so it could not be assault.”
- “A real survivor would report immediately.”
- “A respected person could not have done this.”

Survivors have different needs and choices. Avoid making assumptions about what a person should feel, remember, report, or do next.

When Someone Tells the Church

Your first response can make it easier—or harder—for someone to seek safety and support.

Say this

- “Thank you for trusting me with this.”
- “I’m sorry this happened. You did not deserve it.”
- “Are you safe right now? What would be helpful?”
- “Would you like information about confidential support options?”

Avoid this

- “Why didn’t you fight back or report sooner?”
- “Have you forgiven them yet?”
- “Let’s keep this quiet for the sake of the church.”
- “Let’s pray first, and then decide whether you need help.”

SPIRITUAL CARE SHOULD BE OFFERED, NOT IMPOSED

Ask permission before praying or sharing scripture. Do not require forgiveness, reconciliation, counseling with the accused, or a meeting with church leadership.

Do not promise absolute secrecy. Explain confidentiality limits, especially if a child or other legally protected person may be at risk.

Make Safety Part of Church Culture

The church’s response begins long before someone makes a disclosure.

01 TEACH

Speak clearly about consent, dignity, coercion, boundaries, and the misuse of spiritual authority.

02 PREPARE

Identify designated response contacts; train staff and volunteers on how to receive disclosures and refer safely.

03 SAFEGUARD

Maintain clear child and youth protection policies, appropriate supervision, and processes for concerns about leaders.

04 ACCOUNT

Avoid internal investigations that interfere with authorities or pressure survivors. Use independent expertise when allegations involve church personnel.

05 PARTNER

Build relationships with sexual assault service providers before a crisis occurs.

A QUESTION FOR LEADERSHIP

If someone disclosed sexual assault tomorrow, would your congregation know whom to contact, how to preserve privacy, and where to find qualified support?

The First Response Toolbox

Keep this page accessible to pastors, ministry leaders, and trusted volunteers.

1 LISTEN

Find a private setting. Thank the person. Do not interrogate or ask for unnecessary details.

2 CHECK SAFETY

Ask about immediate safety and urgent medical needs. Call emergency services for immediate danger.

3 EXPLAIN OPTIONS

Offer choices, including a sexual assault service provider, medical care, and reporting options. Respect adult survivor autonomy within applicable law.

4 FOLLOW THE LAW

Understand Ohio’s reporting requirements, especially for minors. Consult qualified guidance; do not assume every adult disclosure requires a police report.

5 CONNECT, DON’T CONTROL

Offer a warm referral. Ask permission before sharing information. Do not contact the accused or promise an outcome.

Support and next steps

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center | clevelandrapecrisis.org
Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center | Summit County, Ohio
OAESV (Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence) | oaesv.org
RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline | 800-656-HOPE (4673) | rainn.org

A survivor does not need to earn compassion by sharing every detail.
Faithful care makes room for dignity, choice, safety, and accountability.

Educational resource; not legal, clinical, or investigative advice. Confirm local reporting duties.
Scripture: 2 Samuel 13; Proverbs 31:8-9; Psalm 34:18.

Build Your Church's Resource Network

Write down the contacts your congregation can use to respond safely and promptly.

LOCAL SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT

Agency / advocate:

Phone / after-hours contact:

MEDICAL CARE & FORENSIC EXAM OPTIONS

Hospital / SANE program:

Phone / location:

CHILD PROTECTION & REPORTING

Children services / reporting agency:

Phone / reporting guidance:

CHURCH RESPONSE CONTACTS

Designated safeguarding lead:

Phone / alternate contact:

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Counseling / legal aid / other:

Phone / website:

Before a disclosure happens:

Confirm numbers, after-hours access, confidentiality practices, and referral steps.
Keep sensitive contact details in an appropriately protected location.