

*Harriet Hill, Margaret Hill,
Richard Baggé, Pat Miersma*

Healing the Wounds of Trauma

How the Church Can Help

**Expanded Edition
Middle East Stories**



KİTAB-I MUKADDES
— ŞİRKETİ —

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF TRAUMA

© Harriet Hill, Margaret Hill, Richard Baggé, and Pat Miersma

First publication 2004

Revised edition 2013

Expanded edition with supplemental lessons 2016

Middle East Story Set, 2017

This book is intentionally written in basic English.

Story set drafted by Harriet Hill.

Scripture quotations are taken from the *Good News Translation*

© 1992 American Bible Society, unless otherwise noted.

Design: Peter Edman

Illustrations: Ian Dale

**For training in how to use this book to carry out trauma healing,
see your local Bible Society, visit TraumaHealingInstitute.org,
or write to traumahealing@americanbible.org.**



KİTAB-I MUKADDES

— Ş İ R K E T İ —

İstiklal Cad. No:237

Tünel 34421 Beyoğlu / İstanbul

yaralarisarmak@kitabimukaddes.com

CONTENTS

	Introduction	5
Lesson 1	If God loves us, why do we suffer?	9
Lesson 2	How can the wounds of our hearts be healed?	18
Lesson 3	What happens when someone is grieving?	29
Lesson 4	Helping children who have experienced bad things	41
Lesson 5	Helping someone who has been raped	50
Lesson 6	Ministering in the midst of HIV and AIDS	60
Lesson 6A	Domestic abuse.....	68
Lesson 6B	Suicide	77
Lesson 6C	Addictions.....	84
Lesson 7	Caring for the caregiver.....	91
Lesson 8	Taking your pain to the cross	100
Lesson 9	How can we forgive others?.....	105
Lesson 10	Living as Christians in the midst of conflict	114
Lesson 11	Preparing for trouble.....	125
Lesson 11A	Helping people immediately after a disaster	132
	Forgiveness ceremony	138
	Acknowledgements	143
	About the authors	144

(Titles in bold are the core lessons.)

*The LORD is near to those who are discouraged;
he saves those who have lost all hope.*

Psalm 34.18

INTRODUCTION

The goals of this book

In the world today, many people have experienced war, ethnic conflict, floods, car accidents, domestic abuse, or crime. Many of them have been wounded inside by these things. The Church should be helping its members who are suffering (Acts 20.28) as well as being like light and salt in the world. This book is written to help church leaders know how to help their people after difficult events. Each lesson presents what the Bible and mental health teach about how to heal from trauma.

Many passages in the Bible talk about God's people suffering. Here are some examples: the authors of the epistles write a lot about Christians suffering. In the book of Psalms, the authors write about how they felt when they suffered. The book of Job shows that a person who has not done wrong can suffer. These passages tell us about who God is and how he cares for people, and this can help us heal from the wounds of our heart.

How this book came about

If people have had terrible things happen to them, can God heal them? Can the Bible help? These are questions that the authors of this book were asking in the late 1990s as they saw people suffering from war. They were all members of SIL or Wycliffe Bible Translators, living and working in Africa.

At the time, there was very little to help church leaders in rural areas find answers to these problems. The authors found one book that was helpful: *Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict: The Role of the Church in Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation* by Rhiannon Lloyd. With her agreement, they decided to write a book for local church leaders that

would be easy to teach, easy to translate, and easy for church leaders to teach to others.

In 2001, a group of people met to write the lessons. The group included mental health professionals, Bible translators, Scripture engagement consultants, and African church leaders who had experienced war. The lessons were tested in war zones and were first published in 2004 by Paulines Publications in Nairobi. By 2011, people in forty-two countries on five continents were using the book and it had been translated, in whole or in part, into 157 languages.

More and more people asked for training in trauma healing. Because of this, SIL saw that trauma healing needed more attention than they could give. At the same time, American Bible Society became interested in trauma healing. So in 2010, American Bible Society agreed to become the agent for the authors and made Dr. Harriet Hill their Trauma Healing Program Director. American Bible Society also set up a Trauma Healing Advisory Council of mental health professionals to be sure that the best mental health principles were used. The Nida Institute at American Bible Society helped to be sure that Scripture was being used correctly. In 2012, American Bible Society hosted the first “Community of Practice” to bring together organizations that were working in the area of trauma healing. This group agreed to the basic approach the authors had used from the start:

- Trauma healing is based on biblical and mental health principles.
- We adapt the book and program to fit the local situation.
- We try materials out with people and revise them until they work well.
- We train local people to teach the material.
- We work mainly with groups rather than individuals.
- We have people participate as they learn because they learn best this way and it helps them to heal from their trauma.
- We work in ways that let churches and communities continue trauma healing on their own.
- We encourage organizations to work together to help the many people suffering from trauma.

In 2012, American Bible Society established the Trauma Healing Institute. The Institute supports and develops the program. It works with Bible Societies and other partners worldwide to train and certify facilitators to care for people who are traumatized.

How to use this book

This book is intended to be used in the context of a trauma healing program with trained facilitators. Contact your local Bible Society or write to traumahealing@americanbible.org to find out about training sessions in your area.

Trauma healing programs begin by bringing church and organizational leaders together. At this meeting, they learn about the need for trauma healing and how the program works. Then they decide if they want to have this program in their church or organization. If a number of these leaders decide they want the program, then it is time to hold a workshop to train people to use this book.

After this workshop, the participants go home and use what they have learned to help others by holding healing groups. After some months the participants come back to learn more at an advanced workshop. At this workshop they share what has gone well, and the problems they have found as they have helped people. They practice how to teach others and how to listen to people. They make plans for trauma healing in their country or region. By the end of the workshop, they should be skilled at helping people who are suffering in their community.

Other materials

You can find other materials to help you.

- *Facilitator's Handbook*. The handbook gives much more help on leading a trauma healing program.
- *Trauma Healing Scripture Companion Booklet*. This book gives the main points of each of the lessons in this book and also has many Scripture verses written out completely. It is especially helpful for those suffering from trauma who do not have a Bible or who have difficulty finding passages in the Bible.

- *Story-based Trauma Healing*. This version of trauma healing is for oral communicators. Facilitators tell stories from the Bible and stories like those at the beginning of each lesson. Then they lead a discussion to help people discover what the stories are teaching.
- *Audio Trauma Healing*. In this version of trauma healing, the stories and discussions are recorded. People listen and discuss.
- *Healing Hearts Club*: This is trauma healing for children ages eight to thirteen who have experienced bad things.

You can find print or digital editions of these resources, plus information on training, certificates, working with others, and more, at our website: **TraumaHealingInstitute.org**.

THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT,
OR CURE ANY DISEASE. IF YOU USE THIS PRODUCT,
YOU SHOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THIS.

IF GOD LOVES US, WHY DO WE SUFFER?

1. The young man Farid

Farid grew up in a big family in the village of Dallup, one of the most beautiful places on earth: green rolling hills, sheep, fruit orchards. Their home had been in the family for generations. Hardly a week went by without a family gathering with lots of food and laughter.

But war was never far off. When Farid was just four years old, his village was attacked and his father died in the combat. Everyone had to flee the area. His mother sent Farid to live with an uncle from his father's family. This uncle's wife seemed kind in public, but behind closed doors she treated Farid cruelly, beating him often, making him do lots of chores despite his young age, and not giving him enough to eat. In the midst of this trouble, Farid missed his father more and more with every day that passed.

Farid's happiest moments were when Uncle Fouad, his mother's brother, came to visit and check up on him. He would always play with Farid and talk to him. When Farid was old enough to go to school, Uncle Fouad bought him a uniform and paid the school fees.

When Farid was a teenager, he went to Uncle Fouad's house often. Every week, a small group of people met there to study the Bible together, sing, and pray, for Fouad was a spiritual guide. These meetings made Farid feel happy. Before long, he decided to be committed in his relationship with Jesus Christ.

Three years later, Farid was able to go to university. He fell in love with Salwa, one of the young ladies he met at Uncle Fouad's house. Before long, they got married. Peace had come back to their homeland, so Farid moved back to Dallup. Farid invited people to come to his house

every week to read passages from the Bible and the gospels together and pray, just like Uncle Fouad had done.

Unfortunately, they had only been back a short time when new waves of violence came to the region. Farid saw innocent people being killed, women grabbed and raped by Sinah, and children maimed by bullets and bombs.

In some of the meeting, the spiritual leader said that whatever happens is God's will. But Farid did not want to follow a God who brought so much pain to people. He kept wondering why God would let his people suffer so much. Maybe God had abandoned them. Or maybe God was not powerful enough to prevent these things from happening. Or maybe God was very angry with them for their sins, and now they are paying the price! He knew Uncle Fouad would be displeased with him for having thoughts like this, so he never told anyone about what he was thinking. If ever he tried to talk about God's love, he felt like a hypocrite because, in his heart, he felt very far from God. He wondered, "If God loves us, why do we suffer?"



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is Farid feeling in his heart about God?
2. Why do you think that Farid feels this way about God?
3. Have you ever felt like Farid? If so, explain.

2. When we are suffering, what do we need to remember about God's character?

When we suffer, we try to make sense of our experience. What we know about God from the Bible might be different than what our culture tells us about what God is like. What our culture tells us may come to mind and cause us to doubt God's love for us.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What does your culture tell you God is like, especially in times of suffering?

In the large group, list responses on the board or flip chart.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Each table group should take one of the following verses and discuss the questions below.

Romans 8.35–39

2 Peter 3.9

Psalms 34.18

Genesis 6.5–6

Matthew 9.35–36

1 John 4.9–10

1. What do these verses teach us about God’s character and relationship with us?
2. How is this similar or different from our traditional view of God?

In the large group, read each passage aloud and compare what it tells us about God with what our cultures tell us about God.

A. Romans 8.35–39

Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death? As the Scripture says: “For your sake we are in danger of death at all times; we are treated like sheep that are going to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sometimes when trouble comes we think it means that God doesn’t love us anymore. This is not true. Nothing can separate us from his love. God promises to always be with us, even when we suffer (Ps 23.4–5; He 13.5b–6; Is 43.1–2).

God still loves us.

B. 2 Peter 3.9

The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.

When we pray that God will stop a certain evil thing, and it continues, we must not think it is because God is weak. He is in control and hears our prayers. He is slow to act because he wants to give everyone time to repent, not because he is weak. When the time is right, God will powerfully judge sin (Ps 73.25–28; Ro 9.22–24; 2 P 3.10).

God is all-powerful.

C. Psalm 34.18

*The LORD is near to those who are discouraged;
he saves those who have lost all hope.*

Jesus understands our suffering because he suffered on the cross. His suffering was far beyond anything we will ever experience (Mt 27.46; He 12.2–3). He suffers with those who are suffering (Mt 25.35–36). He is merciful and gracious even when we have doubts (Is 63.9; Is 53.3–4; He 2.18).

God suffers with us and feels our pain.

D. Genesis 6.5–6

When the LORD saw how wicked everyone on earth was and how evil their thoughts were all the time, he was sorry that he had ever made them and put them on the earth.

Not everything that happens is the perfect will of God. God hates evil and injustice (Pr 6.16–19; Ro 1.18).

God hates evil and injustice.

E. Matthew 9.35–36

Jesus went around visiting all the towns and villages. He taught in the synagogues, preached the Good News about the Kingdom, and healed people with every kind of disease and sickness. As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus went looking for people who were suffering. He preached the Good News and healed people of all their diseases. He felt pity for them.

Jesus looks for us when we are suffering and has compassion on us.

F. 1 John 4.9–10

And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

God loved us so much he sent his Son into the world to give us life and forgiveness of our sins.

God loved us so much he sacrificed his Son for us.

3. What is the origin of suffering in the world?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What do the Scriptures tell us about the origin of suffering in the world?

The Scriptures tell us:

A. Satan rebelled against God and tries to get others to rebel.

Satan rebelled against God, and he wants to get as many people as he can to rebel against God (Lk 22.31; 1 P 5.8–9). He is a liar and murderer (Jn 8.44). Those who obey him lie, kill, and destroy.

B. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God.

God created people with the freedom to choose good or evil. Adam and Eve are the ancestors of all people. They chose to disobey God. When they did, evil and death entered the world (Gn 3.1–24). All creation and all people experience the effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience (Ro 5.12; Ro 8.20–22). We can see these effects in natural disasters, people's behavior, disease, and so forth.

C. God gives all of us the freedom to choose whether we will obey him or not.

We all have the freedom to choose good or evil. God is grieved when we choose to do bad things, but he lets us make our own choices (Mt 23.37b, Ro 3.10–18).

Sometimes, even though we obey God, we suffer because of other people's evil choices (1 P 2.20–22; 3.14–17).

4. How does God use suffering?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How has God used suffering in your life?
2. Think of a Scripture passage that relates to the way God has used suffering in your life.

Get feedback in the large group and add anything in this section that has not already been mentioned.

A. God uses suffering to purify our faith.

When gold is heated over a very hot fire, the bits of dirt in it rise to the top. These can be skimmed off, leaving pure gold. Suffering is like fire: it is painful, but it results in purifying our faith in God (1 P 1.6–7; Jas 1.2–4). It makes us yearn for God's kingdom (Ro 8.18; 2 Co 4.16–18; Ro 5.3–5; 1 P 3.14–17).

God's love is stronger than any suffering. In terrible situations when everything else is taken from us, we are assured that God's grace is all we really need (2 Co 12.9–10).

B. God turns evil into good.

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, but God used this experience to deliver the Israelites from famine (Gn 50.18–20).

God turned the greatest evil that was ever done into the greatest good for us all when Jesus was crucified on the cross (Acts 3.13–15; Phil 2.8–11). God works in ways we don't always understand, but we

can always trust his character (Ro 8.28; 11.33–36). In the end, Satan will be completely defeated (Rev 20.10).

C. God comforts us in our suffering so we can comfort others.

God comforts us when we suffer. He holds us in his arms (Is 40.11). He comforts us with his Word (Ps 119.50, 92). We can pass on this same comfort to others when they suffer (2 Co 1.3–5).

5. Why is it difficult to believe in God's goodness when we suffer?

In addition to cultural beliefs, there are other things that can keep us from believing in God's goodness when we suffer.

A. Some teaching can make it difficult to believe in God's goodness.

i. When we only hear about God's anger and judgment.

Sometimes we hear a lot about how God judges us when we sin, but not much about how God loves us. It is true that God is all-powerful, but we must also remember his great love for us (Jr 31.3; Lm 3.22–23; 1 Jn 4.9–10).

ii. If we are told that suffering means we haven't done enough to please God.

We may be told that we are suffering because we have not been good enough to please God. God's love is not based on our behavior. He loved us before we turned to him (Ro 5.8; Titus 3.4–5; 1 Jn 4.19). He continues to love us by grace, not because of what we do (Ro 3.23–24; Eph 2.8–9).

iii. When we are taught God promises prosperity for everyone who believes.

If we are taught that people who obey God will always be rich and healthy, we may feel guilty for suffering. We may feel that we have caused our own suffering by our lack of obedience and faith. The apostle Paul is a good example of someone who suffered a lot even though he was very obedient to God (2 Co 1.8–10).

B. It is difficult to remember God's goodness when we do not do the things that will help our faith grow strong.

As we follow Jesus and study the Bible, we learn the truth about God and this sets us free from the lies of Satan (Jn 8.31–32; 2 Ti 3.14–17). Christians need to meet together for teaching, prayer, and fellowship (Acts 2.42; Phil 4.6–7; He 10.24–25). If these things are missing, we will find it much harder to believe in God's goodness when we suffer.

C. It is difficult to remember God's goodness when the Church does not speak out against evil and injustice.

God put the Church in the world to challenge injustice and to help those in need (Lk 4.18–19; Mt 25.31–46). When the Church does not do its work, evil increases, and people find it difficult to believe that God is really good like the Bible says.



A loving father

D. Childhood experiences can sometimes make it difficult to believe in God's goodness.

Children need to feel secure and protected from evil. If we have experienced difficult things as a child, we may find it difficult to trust God when we become adults. For example, if we grew up without a father or mother, or if our father was often angry with us, then we may think God has abandoned us or that he is always angry with us, even though the Bible teaches us that God is a loving Father (Mt 6.9–13; Jn 17.24; Ro 8.14–17).

DISCUSSION IN TWOS

Think about your own father. As a child, did you experience his love? How does your experience with your earthly father affect your experience with your heavenly Father?

EXERCISE: EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE

1. Feel free to close your eyes. Now imagine you are a child and God is your loving Father. Sense the love in his eyes as he looks at you. Now listen as these verses are read aloud:

Lamentations 3.21–23	1 John 3.1–2
Psalms 103.13–14	1 John 4.9–10
Romans 8.14–16	1 Peter 5.7
2. Inspect your heart. Do you have any hidden doubts about God's love? If so, tell them to God.
3. Sing some songs about God's love for us.

HOW CAN THE WOUNDS OF OUR HEARTS BE HEALED?

1. Trouble comes to Dallup

Farid sat outside taking in the cool evening air after a long day in the heat of the summer. He watched his two sons, Ramez and Issam, playing together and thanked God for his wife and children. “Yes, these have been good years,” he thought. “Tensions are rising, it’s true. When will the Sinah stop fighting with the Hallak? This is our land, not for strangers! No matter what happens,” he thought, “I’ll never leave my homeland again, no matter how much Salwa nags me to go. No matter how many more families abandon this place.” Just that afternoon, his neighbor Ibrahim had left with his family.

That very night, planes flew low overhead. Bombs began to fall and one of them exploded right in front of their house. Snipers began to open fire. Three-year-old Issam screamed out in pain as shrapnel hit his head and right arm. “Quickly!” Farid shouted to Salwa. “Take Issam! Run! Quickly!”

Farid tried to grab Ramez and run, but Ramez tugged in the other direction. “Let me get my backpack!” he shouted, but Farid yanked him hard and said, “No time for that, son!” They ran as fast as they could into the night, trying to avoid the bombs and bullets flying all around them. About fifty other people were running with them. One of Ramez’s little friends who was running beside them dropped to the ground; they could not stop to even to see what had happened.

Finally, the bombs stopped. Silence. Only the soft sound of Salwa weeping, of Issam crying. “Salwa, be quiet!” said Farid, “We need to keep walking to safety.” On and on they walked, the whole group in silence. At daybreak, they came to the city of Al-Ramlia.

Their first concern was to get Issam to a doctor. They found one. After cleaning the wounds, the doctor told them, “These wounds are very deep. Clean them every day with sterile water and soap. And give him these pills twice a day.” He handed a prescription to Farid.

Salwa looked at Farid. What could they do? They had no money with them. “Don’t worry,” said Farid. “God will provide.” He left Salwa and before long, he returned with the medicine.

A church in Al-Ramlia welcomed displaced people to stay in their hall. Salwa and Farid went there. It was crowded and cold, but they found a spot for their family. After eating some hot soup, they laid down on the floor exhausted and fell into a deep sleep.

Over the next days and weeks, they sat waiting, wondering what would become of their lives. Little Issam lay listlessly, fighting off the infection that had set into his wounds. Farid had always been a good-tempered, jovial man, but now he wanted to be alone. He stared into space. He was angry at everyone. He could not sleep and complained of headaches and stomachaches. But since he was a man, he tried to appear to be strong.

Salwa didn’t feel angry, but she felt very sad. She had no interest in eating. Even though they were in a safe place now, she felt afraid all the time. Sometimes Salwa burst into tears and could not stop crying.

One day Ramez and the other boys were having fun blowing plastic bags full of air and popping them. They roared with laughter, but Salwa jumped to her feet and shouted, “Ramez, never do that again!” When she tried to sleep, she had nightmares of bombs and smoke and screaming people. Sometimes she wished she had died in the attack.

Farid and Salwa attended prayer meetings at the church. There the minister preached that everything that happens is God’s will and we should accept it without complaint. “God punishes sin,” he said, “so if you are suffering, you need to confess your sins. Spend time in prayer every day—at least one hour per day, and fast one day a week so God will be pleased with you.” All this made Farid and Salwa feel so bad they could not bring themselves to attend the service again.

One night, however, Salwa felt so desperate she decided to talk to the pastor’s wife. “I’m feeling so sad inside, I don’t think I can continue with life,” Salwa said. The pastor’s wife told her, “If you had faith, you would not feel sad. The Bible says, ‘Rejoice in the Lord.’” Salwa felt so ashamed she never talked about how she was feeling with anyone again.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How has the attack affected Farid?
2. How has the attack affected Salwa?
3. What does your culture teach people to do with their emotions when they are suffering?

2. What is a wound of the heart?

Our hearts can be wounded when we are overwhelmed with intense fear, helplessness, or horror (Ps 109.22). This is referred to as trauma. It can happen in the face of death, serious injury, rape, or other forced sexual activity. Our hearts can also be wounded, or traumatized, when we hear of someone else's bad experience, especially if that person is a close family member or friend.

A. A heart wound is like a physical wound.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Think of a leg ulcer: How does it heal? What helps it heal?
2. How is a wound of the heart like a physical wound?

If possible, write the left column of this chart on a blackboard or a large piece of paper in advance. Then, as a large group, discuss the ways a heart wound is similar to a physical wound and fill in the right column.

Physical Wound	Heart Wound
It is visible.	It is invisible, but shows up in the person's behavior.
It is painful, and must be treated with care.	It is painful, and must be treated with care.
If ignored, it is likely to get worse.	If ignored, it is likely to get worse.
It must be cleaned to remove any foreign objects or dirt.	The pain has to come out. If there is any sin, it must be confessed.

Physical Wound	Heart Wound
If a wound heals on the surface with infection still inside, it will cause the person to become very sick.	If people pretend their emotional wounds are healed when really they are not, it will cause the person greater problems.
Only God can bring healing, but he often uses people and medicine to do so.	Only God can bring healing, but he often uses people and an understanding of how our emotions heal to do so.
If not treated, it attracts flies.	If not treated, it attracts bad things.
It takes time to heal.	It takes time to heal.
A healed wound may leave a scar.	A healed heart wound also may leave a scar. People can be healed, but they will not be exactly the same as before the wound.

B. How do people with wounded hearts behave?

Proverbs 4.23 tells us: “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (NLT). What happens to our hearts affects how we live. People with wounded hearts may behave in the following ways:

Reliving the experience. Many people with wounded hearts find themselves thinking all the time about the event that caused their trauma. At times, they may feel they are back in the event, reliving it. This can happen while they are awake or in their dreams, as nightmares. Thinking about the event all the time can make it hard for them to concentrate on the task at hand. For example, schoolchildren may find it difficult to study. Some people may tell everyone about what has happened over and over again.

Avoiding reminders of the trauma. Some people with wounded hearts may avoid anything that brings back memories of their traumatic events. For instance, people who have gone through a war in which airplanes dropped bombs on them may now be very frightened by the

sound of an airplane. They may avoid airports. People who have been hurt by Christians may refuse to go to church.

Some people with wounded hearts may try to avoid their feelings, sometimes by taking drugs or alcohol. Others may eat too much or work too much to avoid feeling the pain. Some may not be able to remember what happened, or may only remember part of what happened. Some people may completely refuse to talk about what happened.

Some people with wounded hearts feel numb. They may not care about what happens to them. They may not be disturbed by violence or seeing dead bodies. They may be very sad and lose interest in eating. They may cry a lot and lack energy.

Being on alert all the time. Some people with wounded hearts are always tense. Every loud noise makes them jump. They are frightened all the time and expect another bad thing to happen at any moment. They may often overreact with violence or anger. They may be so tense they can't fall asleep, or they may wake up very early. At times, they may shake or have a fast or irregular heartbeat. They may have headaches and stomachaches. At other times they may have difficulty breathing or feel dizzy or faint (Ps 55.4–5).

All these reactions are normal in people who have heart wounds. These reactions may happen immediately, or may be delayed and start happening a long time after the event.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Think about wounded people you know. Have you seen anyone acting in these ways? Give examples.

C. What makes some wounds of the heart more serious?

Some situations are more difficult than others. For example:

- Something very personal, for example, a family member dying or being betrayed by a close friend.
- Something that goes on for a long time.
- Something that happens many times over a period of time.
- Something connected with death.

- Something that people have done intentionally to cause pain rather than something that is accidental.

People react to painful events differently. Two people may go through the same event, but one may have a severe reaction while the other is not affected much at all. A person is likely to react more severely to trauma if he or she:

- always wants someone else to tell them what to do.
- has mental illness or emotional problems.
- is usually sad or is sensitive.
- had many bad things happen in the past, particularly if they happened when he or she was a child, like both parents dying.
- already had many problems before this happened.
- did not have the support of family or friends during and after the event.

3. What does the Bible teach us about how to handle our feelings?

Some Christians who have troubles like these say that we shouldn't think or talk about our feelings. They also say that we shouldn't go to others for help with our troubles. They say we should just forget the past and move on. They think that feeling pain in our hearts means we are doubting God's promises. This is not true!

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What do these verses teach about handling our feelings?

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Matthew 26.37–38 (Jesus) | John 11.33–35 (Jesus) |
| Matthew 26.75 (Peter) | Jonah 4.1–3 (Jonah) |
| 1 Samuel 1.10, 13–16 (Hannah) | Psalms 55.4–6 (David) |

Jesus had strong feelings and shared them with his disciples. Paul teaches us to share our problems with each other as a way of caring for each other (Ga 6.2; Phil 2.4). The Old Testament is full of examples of people pouring out their hearts to God: for example, Hannah, David,

Solomon, Jeremiah. The psalmist told God, *“I am hurt to the depths of my heart”* (Ps 109.22b). God wants us to be honest and speak the truth from our hearts.

4. How can we help people heal from the wounds of their heart?

EXERCISE

Do a skit that shows someone listening well to another person, and one that shows someone not listening well. Discuss what you observe.

One way people get pain out of their hearts is by talking about it. Usually people need to talk to another person about their pain before they are ready to talk to God about it. They may need to tell their story many times. If they are able to talk about their bad experiences, then after a while their reactions will become less and less intense. But if people are not able to talk about their pain, and if there is no one to help them, these reactions may continue for months and even years.

This talking can be done one on one or in a small group. The group should not be more than ten or twelve people, so that everyone has a chance to speak. The group could be married couples, a family, or people who experienced a painful event together. If some people do not want to talk about their problems, they can be invited to listen. In time, they may be ready to share, too.

It's important to find a safe and quiet place so that people can talk freely. Babies and small children should be cared for so parents can talk without being distracted by them. The group will probably need to meet more than once.

A. What is the goal of letting people talk about their pain?

By giving people the opportunity to talk about their pain, they can:

- Gain an honest understanding of what happened and how it has affected them.
- Accept what happened.

- Be able to trust God, rest in him, and let him heal them (Ps 62.8; 103.3).

B. What is a good listener like?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

With what kind of person would you feel free to share your deep pain?

For people to feel free to share the deep wounds of their hearts, they need to know that the person:

- Cares about them.
- Will keep the information confidential (Pr 11.13; 20.19).
- Will not criticize them or give them quick solutions (Pr 18.13).
- Will listen and understand their pain (Pr 20.5).
- Will not minimize their pain by comparing it with his or her own.

Church leaders can identify wise and caring people and train them for this ministry. Allow the hurt person to choose the one with whom he or she feels most at ease.

C. How can we listen?

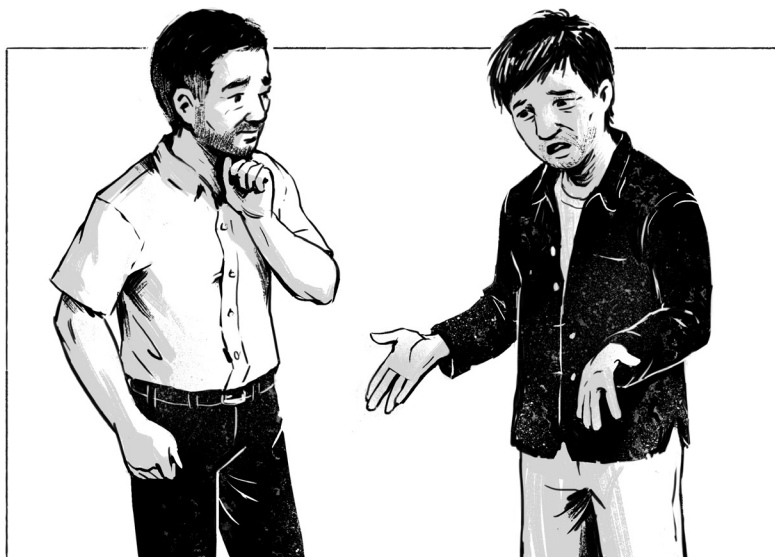
The listener should let the speaker speak at his or her own pace. It may take several meetings before the whole story has been discussed.

The following questions may help the listener to guide the person into telling their story:

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. What was the hardest part for you?

Show you are listening by responding in appropriate ways. This may be by looking at them, or by saying words of agreement like “Mmm.” Don’t look out the window or at your watch. Don’t seem impatient for them to finish. It is important to be sensitive to their culture as you

listen. For example, eye contact when listening or speaking may or may not be appropriate.



From time to time, repeat what you think the person has said. This will give the person a chance to correct, restate, or affirm your understanding.

If people become very distressed talking about their experience, it's not helpful to continue. Let them take a break, think about other things, and get calm inside. They can resume telling their story when they feel ready.

If people remember dreams, encourage them to talk about the dreams and what they think the dreams might mean. This may be their inner self working through the event while they are asleep, or it may also be God speaking to them in their pain (Job 33.13–18). The meaning of dreams can be symbolic and needs to be interpreted (Gn 37.5–8). The things that happen in dreams should not be taken as if they occurred in real life. Commit any distressing dreams to the Lord in prayer (Dn 2.20–22).

When the person is ready, pray for him or her. Eventually, people need to bring their pain to the Lord themselves, but it may take time for them to be ready to do so.

D. Serious cases

People who are very wounded may need more help than you are able to give them by listening to their pain. To evaluate how seriously a person has been wounded, look at:

- How many problems they have in the way they behave (see Section 2B).
- How frequently the problems occur.
- How intense the problems are.
- How many months the problems last.
- If the problems keep them from taking care of themselves and their families.

People who are seriously wounded need professional help. If a psychologist or psychiatrist is not available, an ordinary doctor or nurse may at least give them medicine to calm them down and help them sleep.

LISTENING EXERCISE

Divide the participants into groups of two. Have each person in turn tell about one bad thing that has happened—a small event rather than something very big. The other person listens. Listeners must be careful to listen properly and to show they have understood and are sharing in the speaker's pain. They should use the questions suggested in section 4C (What happened? How did it make you feel? What was the hardest part?). After ten minutes, switch roles.

In a large group discuss:

- How did you feel during this exercise?
- Was anything difficult?
- Did you feel heard when you were listened to? Why or why not?
- What did the listener do well?

ART EXPRESSION EXERCISE

Another way people can express their pain—without using words—is through an art exercise. To do this, have markers and paper or modeling clay available. Have everyone get quiet inside and ask God to show them the pain in their hearts. Then they can begin drawing or modeling clay without thinking about it too much, letting the pain come out through the fingers. Drawings may be symbolic rather than realistic. Each person will use symbols that mean something to him or her. For example, a cigarette might represent a brother who smokes.

Allow 30–45 minutes for people to work individually. Then, in small groups, let those who would like to share:

1. Tell about their drawing or clay model.
2. Explain anything new they realized about their situation through this exercise.

BREATHING EXERCISE

People with wounded hearts can be overcome by strong feelings. This breathing exercise can help them learn to take control and relax.

1. Get into a comfortable sitting position.
2. Close your eyes if you like. Think only about your own breathing.
3. Slowly breathe in and out, filling your lungs and slowly releasing the air. Think to yourself, “[Your name], feel yourself relaxing as oxygen is flowing in and out.”
4. Think about being in a quiet place. It might be the beach, or on a hill or in a tree. You might be alone or with someone who cares for you. You might think about Jesus telling you how much he loves you.
5. Continue to think about your breathing, flowing in and out, in and out.
6. After five minutes, open your eyes. Stretch and take one more deep breath.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE IS GRIEVING?

1. Loss upon loss

As the days went by, Issam's wounds got more infected and he developed a fever. Farid could not find a way to get more medicine, and the living conditions were far from hygienic. One night, little Issam's fever peaked. By morning, he had passed away. Salwa cried in a loud voice, inconsolable. Farid, on the other hand, did not shed a tear. It appeared as if his heart was made of stone.

Several others from the group had died by this time as well—a baby, a woman who was not able to get her medicine, a couple of elderly people. The group had developed a way of holding funeral services, and they organized one for Issam.

As Farid threw a handful of dirt into the little grave, he felt angry at God. Why had God let this happen? He had lost everything he had, everything he knew, and now God had to take his little son as well? He was angry at the government for the insecurity in the country. He was angry at himself: why had he not done more? Although he couldn't understand it, he even was angry at Issam for leaving their family.

Salwa felt so sad. She kept thinking to herself, "If only Farid had listened to me! If only we had left Dallup sooner, Issam would not have died!" Sometimes now her nightmares were mixed with happy dreams of playing with Issam, and she would wake up to the horrid reality: he was gone. She had no energy to give to Ramez or Farid.

From a hillside in Al-Ramlia, Farid could see Dallup in the distance. If the wind was blowing right, he could even smell it. His heart ached inside. The wonderful foods they used to eat! Their sheep! Their fruit trees! He was an important man in the village. All that was gone now.

Then one day, Uncle Fouad came to Al-Ramlia. He was visiting Christians throughout the region. Farid was so glad to see him. That night the two of them went to the small hillside to talk.

Uncle Fouad asked, "What happened to your family?"

Farid said, "You know the kind of things that happened to us!"

"Yes," said Uncle Fouad, "but I want to know what happened to you! Tell me."

Farid sensed Uncle Fouad was genuinely interested, and so he told about the conflict in Dallup, the bombing, their flight, Issam's death. Farid sensed his eyes were watering and hoped that in the dark Uncle Fouad would not notice.

Then Uncle Fouad asked him, "How did you feel?"

"Helpless!" said Farid. "So helpless! I'm a grown man and I could do nothing to save my family."

Uncle Fouad heard him and agreed, "Yes, feeling helpless is so hard, especially for us men." Finally, Uncle Fouad asked him, "What was the hardest part for you?"

At this, the tears began to flow and there was nothing Farid could do to stop them. "Seeing little Issam die. I loved him so much." He cried for some time. To his surprise, instead of feeling ashamed he felt relieved.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How has Issam's death affected Farid?
2. How has Issam's death affected Salwa?
3. Besides the loss of Issam, what other things have Farid and Salwa lost?

2. What is grieving?

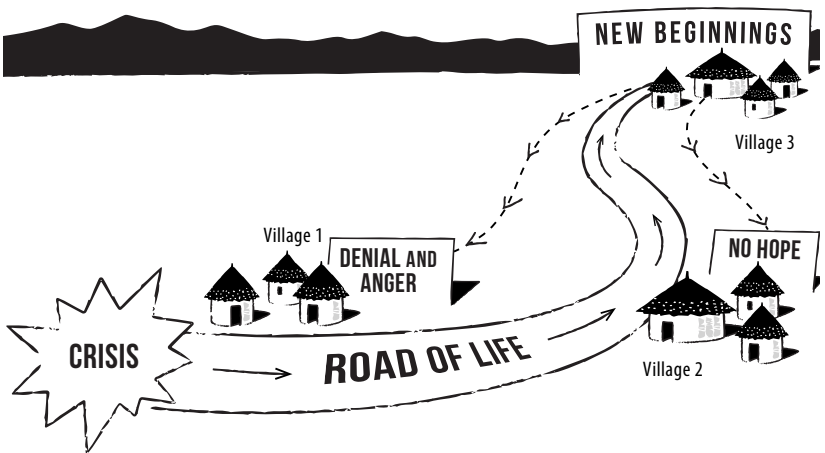
Grieving is mourning the loss of something. This might be the loss of a family member or a friend. It might be the loss of a body part or the function of part of the body. It might be the loss of property or position. Whether small or enormous, all losses affect us and make us experience some degree of grieving (Ne 1.3-4). Trauma always involves loss, but we can experience loss without trauma, as in the case of the slow death of an elderly parent.

When people lose someone or something very important to them, they may lose their sense of who they are. This is particularly true when a spouse dies, for example, or when someone loses a part of their body or their sight. Through the grieving process, a person's former sense of who they are changes and adjusts to their new way of life. This takes time.

Because Adam and Eve sinned, death came into the world, and grieving is part of the normal process of recovering from a loss. Only in heaven will there be no more mourning (Rev 21.4). Because Christians have the hope of heaven, when they grieve they do not despair like non-Christians do (1 Th 4.13). They are sad, but they are not without hope or comfort.

3. How can we grieve in a way that brings healing?

Grieving takes time and energy. It is like a journey that takes us through several villages and leads to healing (Is 61.1–3).



The journey of grief

A. The Village of Denial and Anger

Village 1 is the Village of Denial and Anger. Just after people experience a loss, they are often numb and not completely aware of what is happening around them. They can't believe that the person has really died, or that the event actually happened. At other moments they may suddenly start to cry or erupt in anger. They may be angry with God, or with the person who has died for leaving them alone. They may have many questions such as, "If only I had done this or that, he wouldn't have died," or, "I wish I had . . ." Or "Why did it happen to me?" A person may also be tempted to find someone to blame for the death, and they may try to take revenge. This often results in conflict and broken relationships which increase the pain.

Sometimes people refuse to believe that the person is really dead. They think that the person is still there. Often people dream of seeing or hearing the dead person. This happens to people all around the world, and is not necessarily connected with evil spirits.

This stage may last for a month or longer after the loss. It can begin during the time of the funeral, and while people are still coming to comfort the bereaved family. Weeping and rituals of the wake and burial are often helpful.



DISCUSSION IN TWOS

Think of a loss you have experienced. Did you have any of these feelings? Explain.

B. The Village of No Hope

Village 2 is called the Village of No Hope. When people get to this village, they often feel sad and hopeless. They might find it hard to organize their lives. They still continue to long for the dead person to come back. They may feel very lonely and neglected and may want to kill themselves. It is possible that they may feel guilty—as though it was their fault the person died—even when there is no reason for this. The questions that started in Village 1 may continue.

Often people stay in this Village of No Hope for 6–15 months.

C. The Village of New Beginnings

Village 3 is called the Village of New Beginnings. People who have accepted and grieved their loss can move on to Village 3. At this point they begin to think about making a new life for themselves. They are ready to go out with their friends and have fun again. Those who have lost their spouse begin to think about another marriage. If they lost a child they may want to have a new baby. But people are changed by the loss; they will not be the same as they were before. If they have grieved well, they will be stronger people who are able to help others.

D. Not always a direct journey

The grief journey is not always direct. It is quite normal for people to revisit previous villages for a short period of time. Someone who has arrived at Village 2 may re-experience a few days of feeling very angry and then leave that behind again. Sometimes people may even start in Village 2 and then go to Village 1 later. Someone may have arrived in Village 3, but move back into the hopelessness of Village 2 in response to some event like the anniversary of a death. This may last for a week or so. All this is normal. Gradually a person moves more and more into the Village of New Beginnings.

What is not good is for someone to stay in Village 1 or 2 for a very long time. For example, a woman may still think she can see or hear her husband a year after he is dead. A mother of a dead child may keep his clothes ready for him, and won't give them away a year or more after the death. A man may still be unwilling to go to social events with his friends two years after his wife has died. These people have stayed in Village 1 or 2 too long, and may need special help to move on.

DISCUSSION IN TWOS

In the loss you mentioned earlier, did you come through all the villages to the place of new beginnings? Do you feel you got stuck along the way? Did you loop back at all? Explain.

4. What can make grieving more difficult?



DISCUSSION IN TWOS

What can make grieving more difficult? Think again of the loss you experienced. Were there things that prevented you from grieving? What were they?

Grieving is hard work, but some things can make it even more difficult. These can be things such as how the loss happened or beliefs people have about grief.

A. The type of loss can make grieving more difficult.

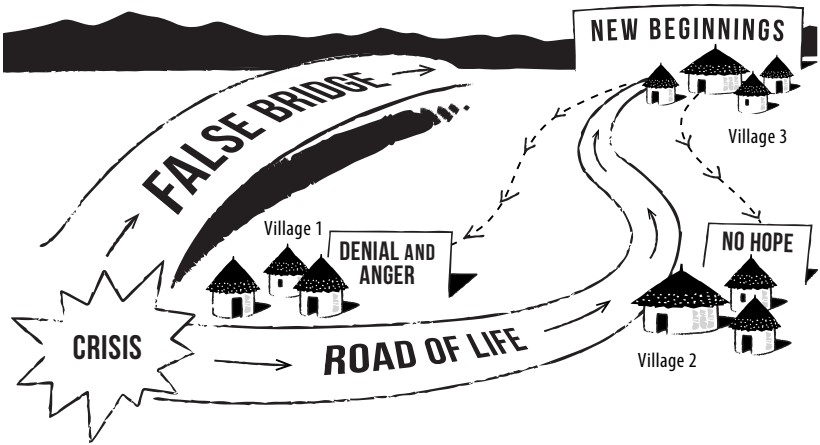
Most losses need to be grieved, but these losses are especially difficult:

- When there are too many deaths or losses at the same time.
- When the death or loss is sudden and unexpected.
- When the death or loss is violent.
- When there is no corpse to be buried.
- When there is no way to confirm that the person has died.
- When the person that provided for the family has died, or when the leader of the community has died.
- When the bereaved have unresolved problems with the dead person.
- When the death is a suicide or murder.
- When a child has died.

B. The false bridge can prevent people from grieving.

Sometimes we think that since we have the Gospel and believe all the promises of God, it would be wrong to feel angry or sad about a loss. Our cultures may reinforce this idea. This can be called the “false bridge,” because it appears to provide a straight path from the moment of the loss directly to “New Beginnings” without passing through Villages 1 and 2. This is not biblical, and it will not bring healing. God made us with the need to grieve our losses. Jesus expressed painful emotions on the cross when he said, “*My God, my God, why did you abandon me?*” (Mt 27.46).

Facing the pain of loss takes courage. We are tempted to avoid it. Sometimes we get busy doing God's work as a way to avoid feeling the pain. This is dangerous, because if we do not grieve a loss when it happens, the grief will stay in us. It will not go away and it can cause problems for many years.



The false bridge

C. Beliefs about weeping can keep us from grieving.

Some cultures require people to cry publicly when someone dies. Those who don't cry are suspected of not caring about the person who died, or of having caused the death. This can result in people crying dramatically, whether they feel sad or not. Other cultures do not allow people, especially men, to cry. This can result in people holding their grief inside rather than letting it out.

God has designed us to cry or weep when we are sad. These are ways we express our feelings and let our pain out. Weeping can be an important part of grieving, for men as well as women. Even Jesus wept when his close friend Lazarus died (Jn 11.33–38a). The psalmists wept (Ps 6.6; 39.12; 42.3), as did the prophets (Is 22.4; Jr 9.1). Ecclesiastes 3.4

says there is a time to weep. God notices our tears; they are precious to him (Is 38.3–5).

People should not hold their tears inside, nor should they cry just for show. As much as possible, they should let their tears flow naturally. Sometimes the sadness comes at unexpected moments, even months after the loss.

5. How can we help those who are grieving?

A. The example of Job's comforters

Job was a wealthy man with a large family. In an instant, he lost everything: his children, his cattle, his wealth, his health. When his friends heard about Job's problems, they came to comfort him. They sat in silence with him for a week before speaking. Then Job broke the silence by expressing his pain. His friends were quick to point out his lack of faith (Job 4.3–6), and that his suffering was due to his sins and the sins of his children (Job 4.7–8). Although Job claimed he had not sinned, they were sure that if he were innocent God would not have let this happen (Job 8.6–8; 11.2–4; 22.21–30). They accused him over and over to try to get him to confess. Finally Job said, "*Miserable comforters are you all!*" (Job 16.2, NIV). Rather than comforting Job, they increased his pain.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What things did Job's comforters do or say that were helpful? What things did they do or say that were not helpful?

B. How can we help people who are grieving?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When you have been mourning the loss of someone, what sort of helpful things have people done or said? What sort of unhelpful things have been done or said?
2. How does your culture traditionally help those who mourn? What customs are helpful? Which ones are not helpful? Are

there any that would not be good for a Christian to do? Why?
Report back to the large group.

Add anything below that has not already been mentioned.

Some traditional ceremonies and practices help a person grieve; others do not. Church leaders should encourage those ceremonies which are helpful and are in keeping with the Christian faith. In addition to these things, other ways to help a person grieve include:

- Pray for them (Eph 6.18).
- Visit them.
- When they are ready, encourage them to talk about how they feel. Allow them to express their anger and sadness.
- Listen to their pain. Do more listening than talking. Healing will come as they let the pain out. They cannot absorb teaching and sermons at this time (Job 21.2; Pr 18.13).
- Help them with practical things. If a grieving person has to worry about caring for themselves and their families, they will not have energy to mourn properly and recover. They might be too exhausted to do the work they did before, much less to do all the things the deceased person did. Relieve them of their regular responsibilities so that they can grieve. Especially at the time of the funeral and burial, there are many practical ways to help a grieving person. Widows and orphans are in particular need of help, and we are instructed to care for them: *“What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world”* (Jas 1.27).
- Help them to understand that it is normal to grieve, and that it is a process that will take time. They will not always feel like they do today. It is important that they do not make major changes, like marrying someone, based on how they feel as they go through Village 1 and 2. When they are in Village 3, they will be able to make better decisions.
- If there is no corpse, arrange a church service to remember the person’s life and to publicly acknowledge their death. A photo of

the person or a cross can take the place of the corpse. If the family is dispersed, those who are displaced can hold similar ceremonies.

- It is not unusual for a person to have difficulty sleeping in the early weeks and months after a loss. If people are not able to sleep, encourage them to get physical exercise. As appropriate, encourage them to take walks, do outdoor work, or get involved in sports. Getting exhausted will help them sleep better at night.
- If the person denies that their loved one has died, gently help them realize it in small ways. For example, help the person to disperse their loved one's personal belongings.
- When the person is ready, you can read a promise from God's Word, and encourage them to memorize it. For example: "*The LORD is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope*" (Ps 34.18).
- Eventually, they need to bring their pain to God. The more specific they can be about their loss, the better. For example, they may have lost a loved one, but also an income, companionship, respect, or security. They should bring these losses to the Lord one by one.

LAMENTS

In Psalm 13.1 David asks, "*How much longer will you forget me, Lord? Forever?*" In verses 5 and 6 he says, "*I rely on your constant love; I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O Lord, because you have been good to me.*" How can he say both of these things at the same time? They seem contradictory.

One kind of psalm is a lament psalm. In a lament, people pour out their complaints to God in an effort to persuade him to act on their behalf, all the while stating their trust in him (Ps 62.8).^{*} A lament can be composed by an individual or by a community.

Laments can have seven parts:

^{*}Sixty-seven of the Psalms are considered laments—more than any other type of Psalm. Some were for use by individuals; others were used by the community together. The individual lament Psalms are: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9–10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143. The community lament Psalms are: 12, 14, 44, 53, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 106, 108, 123, 126, 137.

- Address to God (“O God”)
- Review of God’s faithfulness in the past
- **A complaint**
- A confession of sin or claim of innocence
- A request for help
- God’s response (often not stated)
- A vow to praise, statement of trust in God

Not all parts are present in each lament, and they are not always in the same order. The only essential part is the complaint.

Laments allow a person to fully express their grief, and even accuse God, but this is often followed by a statement of trust in God. This combination makes for very powerful prayers. The grief is not hidden, but people do not stay in their grief—they call on God and express their faith in him. The laments encourage people to be honest with God, to speak the truth about their feelings and doubts. To lament to God is a sign of faith, not of doubt.

In a lament, people do not attempt to solve the problem themselves, but they cry to God for help. They look to God, not the enemy, as the one ultimately in control of the situation. They ask God to take action to bring justice rather than taking action themselves or cursing the enemy (Ps 28.3–4).

Laments are well known in many ethnic groups. They are a good way to express deep emotions.

EXERCISE

1. Have everyone close their books, read Psalm 13 in their Bibles, and identify the parts of this lament. When they have finished, read the Psalm aloud in the large group and have the participants say aloud what part each verse is.

vs. 1-2: <i>How much longer will you forget me, LORD? Forever? How much longer will you hide yourself from me? How long must I endure trouble? How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night? How long will my enemies triumph over me?</i>	Address and complaint
vs. 3-4: <i>Look at me, O LORD my God, and answer me. Restore my strength; don't let me die. Don't let my enemies say, "We have defeated him." Don't let them gloat over my downfall.</i>	Request
vs. 5a: <i>I rely on your constant love;</i>	Statement of trust in God
vs. 5b-6: <i>I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O LORD, because you have been good to me.</i>	Vow to praise

2. Take thirty minutes of quiet time for each person to compose a lament about their own painful experience. They should do this in their own language. It may be a written lament, a song, or a song and dance. Or have them work together in groups to compose a community lament. Share the laments in small groups and/or in the large group.

HELPING CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED BAD THINGS

1. Ramez's pain

A year passed after the attack. Ramez was now eight years old.

Before the attack, Ramez was a happy child, helping around the house, playing with his friends. He loved to go to school and was a bright boy. Farid was very proud of his son!

After the attack, Ramez refused to leave his mother's side. When it was time to go to school, he clung to Salwa. "Let him stay with me," said Salwa. Every night, he wrapped up his few possessions, ready in case of emergency. If a plane flew overhead, he raced for cover and quivered in fear. Every night he prayed the same prayer, "God, please keep the bad people from coming." Salwa explained over and over that they were safe now, but that made no difference. He had not wet the bed for years, but now his bed was wet and dirty every morning. Farid beat him to try to make him stop, but to no avail.

Finally Farid said to Salwa, "That child needs to learn to obey!" He bought him a new backpack and sent him off to school.

Within a few days, the backpack was torn and ruined. "Take better care of your things! Do you think money grows on trees?" shouted Farid. Ramez looked at his father and said, "Yes, father."

Farid bought Ramez another backpack, but within a few days, the second backpack was ruined as well. Farid was furious. "If that's how you treat your things, then use this!" he shouted, and he threw an old empty rice bag to Ramez.

Then Ramez's teacher asked Farid and Salwa to come to the school for a meeting. He said, "Ramez is always fighting with the other children,

and he doesn't understand any of the schoolwork. I can't have him in my class any longer." Exasperated, Farid and Salwa took Ramez home.

An older woman at the church, Sarah, had been a children's social worker before having to flee her home. She was a Christian, too. She noticed what was happening and asked Farid and Salwa, "What is Ramez thinking about the war and about losing his little brother?"

Farid and Salwa looked at each other blankly. Eventually Farid said, "We really don't know."

Sarah said, "Ramez has a lot of bad feelings bottled up inside him. They need to come out. Get some markers and paper, and ask him to draw about the night you fled."

They did. Ramez drew one picture after the other: planes dropping bombs, his backpack blown to bits, Issam covered in blood. Finally, he stopped. Farid asked him to tell him about the drawings. Issam spoke in a small quavering voice. His tears flowed as he told his parents about that horrid night.

"How did you feel when all that happened?" asked Farid.

"I felt so alone and afraid."

"Yes," said Farid, "it was a very frightening experience."

"And what was the hardest part for you?" asked Salwa. At this, Ramez began to sob uncontrollably. "Seeing Issam covered in blood. There was nothing I could do to help. I miss him every day!" Ramez sobbed and sobbed while Salwa held him in her arms.

"You're a courageous boy, to have lived through all this," she said. "Now tell me about the backpack here in your drawing."

Ramez looked angry. "Those bad people can never destroy my backpack again! I won't let them. I'll do it first." Having said that, he let out more huge sobs. "Ramez, my son," said Salwa, "I love you. We will get through this."



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did Ramez behave before the troubles? How did he behave after the troubles?
2. How did Farid and Salwa respond to Ramez's behavior?
3. How do adults in your culture usually respond to children who behave badly?

2. How do children who have experienced bad things behave?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Do you know any children who have experienced bad things? How do they behave?

When children experience bad things, they are affected in many ways. Many of these are different from the ways adults react.

A. Their emotions are affected.

- They may become fearful. Small children may cling to their parents. They may be afraid of strangers or of the dark. They may fear something bad will happen again. They may be afraid to go to school.
- They may become angry and aggressive. Small children may fight with their playmates more than before. Older children may rebel against their parents and teachers more than before.
- They may become sad. Even though a child is very sad, such as after someone dies, it is normal for him to stay sad for a while, and then play for a while.
- They may lose interest in life. The pain in their hearts preoccupies their minds. It saps their energy for life.
- They may become quiet and not respond to what is going on around them.
- They may feel they are responsible for what happened.
- Older children may feel guilty that they survived when others did not.

B. Their bodies are affected.

- Their speech may be affected. They may begin to stutter, or they may become mute.
- They may lose their appetite because they are anxious, or they may eat too much to try to kill the pain.

- They may complain of headaches, stomachaches, or other aches in their bodies. They may have hives or asthma.

C. Their behavior is affected.

- They may go back to behaving like they did when they were younger. Children may start wetting the bed or sucking their thumbs again.
- They may have nightmares and bad dreams. Some small children may scream in their sleep without even being awake. This will stop as they grow older.
- They may play at war all the time, or fight a lot and be irritable.
- They may cry a lot.
- They may be especially upset if they lose things that matter to them, like clothes or a toy or book.
- They may do poorly at school because they can't concentrate.
- Older children may use alcohol or drugs to kill their pain, or become involved in sexual relations outside of marriage.
- Older children may take risks, like riding fast on a motorcycle, taking up a dangerous sport, or becoming a soldier. This makes them feel brave in the face of danger.
- Older children may hurt themselves, for example by cutting their bodies or committing suicide.

3. How do we help children like Ramez?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How can we help children who have experienced bad things?

A. Reunite families, if possible, and re-establish routines.

It is important that families be brought together quickly after the bad event, if that is possible.

When the activities of each day are predictable, children recover more quickly. Each day Ramez should know what is likely to happen. He

should be encouraged to go to school, do regular chores, and play with his friends. Part of the activities should be having fun together. This may be playing games or, if making noise is dangerous, telling stories. It is important to try to finish activities that have been started. This gives the child the sense that they are able to accomplish something. It restores their sense of security. It helps them feel that the future is not out of control.

If there is tension between the father and mother, the children will sense it. Parents need to resolve any tensions there might be between them, for their own sake and their children's.

B. Listen to children's pain.

Children know more about what is going on around them than adults realize. They tend to fill in missing information in whatever way makes sense to them. If they do not have a chance to talk about things, they may get very wrong, strange ideas in their heads. Even if parents are not used to talking with their children, it is very important that they do so when bad things are going on, as well as afterwards. Use the three listening questions—"What happened? How did you feel? What was the hardest part for you?" This is not the time to say, "Go away and play."

Families should talk together about the bad things that happened. Each child should have the chance to say what they felt when the bad things happened. It is quite possible that some of the other children who are not showing that they have problems in fact do, and they should have the chance to share these. It is also good for parents to talk with each child individually.

Younger children are often better able to express things through play than by talking. When children reenact a bad event in their play, it helps them work out the pain they experienced. Parents should ask them about what they are playing and how they feel about it. Then they can go from talking about the role-play to talking about the child's experience.

Another way to help children talk about their pain is through drawing. Parents can give them paper and pencils or chalk, or if these are not available, have them draw in the sand. If they don't know what to draw, ask them to draw a man, then their family, then where they used

to live. Ask them to explain their drawing to you. Remember that the goal is to help them talk about their pain, not to teach them.

If children have bad dreams, explain that many times people dream about bad things that have happened to them. Encourage them to talk about their dreams. Ask them if they think their dream could be related to something that happened to them.



A child's drawing of his experience of war

C. Tell children the truth about the situation.

Children need to understand the truth of what has happened, in ways appropriate for their age. They should be told whether or not there is still danger and whether or not someone has died. Knowing the real danger is better than imagining all sorts of dangers that are not true. At the same time, parents should not exaggerate the danger or speak of all the bad things that could possibly happen.

Parents should make a plan for what they will do if something else bad happens and discuss it openly with the family.

D. Have family devotions daily.

Especially in times of trouble, families should find some time each day to talk together as a family. A good time is at the end of the day. Each person, young and old, should talk about what they saw or felt that day. Small children also need a chance to talk and to give their prayer

requests. Then the family can pray and sing together. Remember, as soon as children can talk to other people, they can talk to God. Bad things can bring a family closer together if they are handled in the right way.

Often, small children do not understand death. They expect the person to come back. They ask questions like: “Why did God let this happen? Will he let it happen to me? Was it my fault? What will happen to the body after it’s buried?” Some of their questions may be difficult to answer completely, but parents should answer as best they can and in ways that encourage the child to trust God.

Each family member needs to be helped to know that God is still there and cares for him or her. Each person could choose a verse to memorize. For example:

- Psalm 121.4: God is a watchman who never sleeps
- 1 Peter 5.7: God can take all our fears
- Psalm 23.1: God takes care of all our needs
- Psalm 46.1: God is always there as our refuge
- Proverbs 3.5: God wants us to trust him
- Matthew 11.29: God is gentle and patient



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Traditionally, do parents in your area listen to their children? Do they talk with them? If they do not, why not?
2. How do these practices and beliefs compare with Scripture? Read Mark 10.13–16 and Deuteronomy 6.4–9.
3. How can you provide a way for children to talk about their painful experiences?

E. Teenagers have particular needs.

Teenagers go through a difficult period of life even when there are no wars or other trauma. Some problems that may arise after a traumatic situation may be due simply to the age of the child.

Teenagers have a need for their own private space. This is particularly true for teenage girls. When families are displaced or in crisis,

understanding a teenage girl's need for privacy can help, even if parents are not able to provide her with much privacy.

Teenagers need to discuss things with their peers. This should be encouraged, especially after a traumatic event.

Teenagers need to feel useful, especially when their family is going through difficulties. If they can do things that help their family survive, this will give them a sense of worth.

F. We need to help teachers and school administrators understand what is happening.

Parents and other leaders should arrange a time to meet with the school director and teachers to discuss what has happened. They need to understand how the trouble has affected the children and their performance at school. If the teachers understand the situation, they will be more patient with the students and will be a part of the healing process.

G. Serious cases

If a child is still showing serious problems after a year, some mature, wise person needs to spend a lot of time with that child. God can heal the child, but it will take time. He or she may need professional help.

4. How can we help child soldiers?

In the world today, many children are kidnapped and forced to become soldiers. Others may choose to join the army. For example, they may be poor and hungry, their family may have been killed and they have nowhere else to go, they may be angry at the enemy, or they may want to look brave in front of their friends. Anyone less than 18 years old who is exposed to fighting, killing, and seeing others killed, will suffer trauma and will not develop properly as an adult without a lot of help.

Children who have been soldiers will find it very difficult to go back to normal life. They have often seen many evil acts and have learned to use violence as a way of solving life's problems. They may have been forced to do terrible things against their own communities or families. If possible, they need to return to their families, but this may be very

difficult because of what they have done. People may be afraid of them or hate them.

They will need special help before they are ready to return home and go back to school. There are organizations that run homes to help these children, and they may need to stay in such a home for some time. Like all people who have experienced trauma, they will need to tell their stories and be heard. Drawing pictures of what they did and saw, or acting it out in dramas will also help. Before they are able to return to normal life, they will need to know that people love and care for them. They will also need to repent of the evil they have done and know God's forgiveness (1 Jn 1.8–9).

The church needs to help the community recognise the pain, loss, and trauma the child soldiers have experienced. Both the community and the child soldiers need to give their pain to God so he can heal them. They need to confess their sins, forgive each other, and be reconciled. The families of child soldiers may need help and encouragement from others while their children are integrating back into normal life. The children will seem changed and it will take a while for relationships to be restored.

The church should also educate the community about the evils of having children serve as soldiers.

CLOSING SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

Discuss how you treat children. Identify children in your area who need special help and plan what can be done for them. Pray together for these children.

HELPING SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN RAPED

1. Two stories about rape

Choose the story that would be most appropriate in your context.

Nada arrives in Kakoot

Every week, more people arrived seeking safety in Kakoot. They arrived with the clothes on their backs and a look of horror in their eyes.

One morning, Salwa was dumbfounded to see her sister Nada and her husband Abdul among a group of new arrivals. Nada did not look good. She was carrying her baby, with a three-year-old boy following close behind. Her clothes were dirty and torn, and her arm in a sling made out of a piece of cloth. Salwa ran to greet them, and helped them settle into the church hall. The next morning, she took Nada to the hospital. The doctor said her arm was broken, and he set it in a cast. All this time, Nada said barely a word. Abdul had never been very friendly, but now he seemed distant and angry.

At night, Salwa could hear Nada weeping quietly. “What happened to Nada?” Salwa wondered. Before long, Abdul left the family “for a trip to visit his brother,” Nada said.

One night, after the children were asleep, the two women sat in the courtyard in a quiet place. They began to talk. After a while, Nada began to tell Salwa what had happened. “We were living so happily. One night, terrorists came to our village. They grabbed Abdul’s brother and killed him right in front of the family. They killed Abdul’s grandparents, too.”

“Oh, Nada. That is terrible,” said Salwa.

“Yes, I can’t stop seeing it in my mind, over and over. It haunts me,” Nada said. Tears began to form in her eyes.

“Tell me, Nada, what happened then?” said Salwa.

“Oh, I was hoping you would not ask.” More tears began to flow, and her voice became unsteady, but Nada continued. “The terrorists grabbed me. I fought back but they were stronger than me. They raped me, right in front of my husband and children.” Nada wept loudly now. Salwa put her arm around Nada and began to weep, too.

After some time, Salwa asked, “Nada, how did that make you feel?”

Nada answered, “I felt so ashamed. I was a virtuous woman but now I am polluted. Ruined. Worthless. Abdul wants nothing to do with me now. Please don’t let anyone know about this or I’ll be rejected by everyone!” Her tears continued as more pain came to the surface.

“Nada, this was not your fault,” Salwa reassured her.

When Nada had calmed down, Salwa asked, “Nada, what was the hardest part of all this for you?”

Nada thought and said, “The worst part of all this was that they did it in front of my husband and children. They will never forgive me. I am so ashamed.” Nada began to weep again as she told Salwa about this deep pain.

After a time, Salwa told her, “Nada, you did not sin. It was the terrorists who chose to do this evil thing. You suffered for their wrong choices.”

More tears flowed as she began to let go of her feelings of guilt.

“Yes,” said Salwa. “We are together now. We will help you heal from this bad experience. God will help us.”

Nada sighed. She felt tired. The sisters hugged each other and went to bed.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did the rape affect Nada? Abdul?
2. Why didn’t she want anyone to know about what had happened to her?
3. Why do you think she told Salwa about what had happened?

The story of Amnon and Tamar

Amnon was King David’s firstborn son. He was handsome and first in line for the throne. He fell desperately in love with his beautiful half-sister, Tamar, who was a virgin. He loved her so much it made him ill, but he couldn’t find a way of being alone with her. When his cousin

saw how sad he was, he asked, "What's the trouble? Why should the son of a king look so dejected morning after morning?" Amnon told him, "I'm in love with Tamar."

His cousin thought of a plan. He said, "Go back to bed and pretend you are sick. When your father comes to see you, ask him to let Tamar come and prepare some food for you."

Amnon did just that, and King David agreed to send Tamar to take care of Amnon. She came to his house and made food for him there. Then he said to her, "Now bring the food to me in my bedroom and feed it to me." She did, but as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, "Come to bed with me, my darling sister." She cried, "No, my brother! Don't be foolish! Don't do this to me! You know what a serious crime it is to do such a thing in Israel. Where could I go in my shame? Just ask the king and he'll let you marry me." But Amnon wouldn't listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her.

Then suddenly his love turned to hate, and he hated her even more than he had loved her. He snarled at her, "Get out of here!" Tamar pleaded with him, "No, no! To reject me now would be worse than what you have already done to me." But Amnon wouldn't listen to her. He shouted for his servant and said, "Throw this woman out, and lock the door behind her!" So the servants put her out.

She was wearing a long, beautiful robe. But now she tore her robe and put ashes on her head to show how sad she was. Then, with her face in her hands, she went away crying.

When her brother Absalom heard what had happened, he tried to calm her down by saying, "Since he's your brother, don't tell anyone what happened. Try not to think about it." Absalom took her to his house. She lived there the rest of her life as an abandoned and desolate woman.

When King David heard what had happened, he was very angry, but he did not do anything to punish Amnon because Amnon was his favorite son.

Absalom hated Amnon deeply because of what he had done and decided he would kill him. Two years later, he was able to trick Amnon and kill him. Afterward, he had to run for his life to another country to escape his father's anger. He stayed there for three years. Finally, David called for him to come back to Jerusalem. But even then, David refused to see him. Absalom became bitter against David and tried

to take the throne from him. He died in the attempt. This made King David even sadder.

(This story is a summary of 2 Samuel 13ff.)



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What effects did this rape have on Tamar? On Amnon? On the family?

2. What is rape?

Rape is when a person forces themselves sexually on another person without their consent. Most often, it happens to a woman or girl, but it can also happen to a boy or man. Even during times of peace, rape is a problem, but in times of war, it is far more frequent. Rape is rooted in the desire to have power over another person, and using force and violence to do so. It is not primarily about a desire for sex. Rape may be committed by a family member, a trusted friend, or a total stranger.

3. What are the effects of rape?

Rape is one of the most painful experiences a person can go through. It leaves deep wounds in the heart that last for a long time. Because victims feel ashamed by rape, the wounds it causes are often kept very secret. No one else ever knows what happened. Just because a person does not talk about being raped does not mean a rape has not happened.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you know of anyone who has been raped? How do you think the rape affected him or her? The family? The community?
2. Do you know anyone who has raped someone? How has it affected him or her?

A. How does rape affect people?

- They may feel a deep sense of shame. They may feel covered with a dirtiness they cannot remove.

- They may feel ruined, or that they no longer have any value. An unmarried woman may feel that no one will ever want to marry her. She may be very sad to the point of wanting to kill herself.
- Women who have been raped may be angry at all men. They may be angry at God for letting it happen. This anger may be let out on anyone who is with them.
- They may feel guilty and think God is punishing them. They may ask, “What did I do to cause this to happen to me?” People may reinforce this feeling by accusing the victim of being responsible for the rape. Some questions can suggest the victim is to blame, such as, “Why did you go into his house?” or “Why didn’t you fight him off?”
- They may be afraid to tell anyone, fearing that if others knew they might accuse the victim of lying or blame them for what happened. Spouses or partners might reject them, and the community may look down on them.
- They may no longer be able to enjoy sexual relations, and even become frigid (stiff with fear about sex). Or they may begin having sex with many people because they feel that they are ruined and worthless.
- They may have injured sexual organs or other internal organs. As victims struggle to stop the rape, they may break bones or suffer other injuries. They could get HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. Women may become pregnant and may want to abort the baby. These things could lead to sterility.
- They may be unable to trust God to protect them in the future.
- They may think demons have possessed them.

B. How does rape affect the victim’s marriage and family?

If the rape was done by a stranger, the family and community may be compassionate toward the victim. If they witnessed the rape, they may feel as violated as the victim.

If victims do not tell their family members, they will not be able to understand why they are sad and angry. Spouses may not understand why having sex is so difficult now.

If the rape was done by someone the family members know and the victim tells them about it, they might not want to admit that their father, uncle, brother, or pastor has done this bad thing. They may be afraid to accuse the rapist, especially if he is a respected member of the family or community. To keep the peace, they may deny that it happened and tell the person he or she is lying. Or, if they believe that it happened, they might blame the victim for flirting with the rapist, and they may punish him or her. Or they may plan how to take revenge. In any case, rape will cause serious problems in the person's marriage and family.

If a woman is raped, her husband is especially affected. He may fear getting a sexually transmitted disease. He may feel his wife is now polluted, and he may no longer want to be with her. When this happens, it adds to her feelings of shame and isolation.

C. How does rape affect the rapist?

Some rapists feel proud of what they have done, but the violence they do to others also kills something inside them.

Others may feel very guilty and ashamed, especially if they are Christians. They may be even more afraid than the victim to tell what they did. They will be full of internal struggles. Their shame may be so great that it leads them to kill themselves.

4. How can we help someone who has been raped?

A. Help them get medical care and legal help.

If there is a rape crisis center in your area, contact them immediately. They will know the best steps to take to care for the victim. Rape victims need immediate medical care within one or two days if possible. There are medicines that can be given immediately after a rape. These make it less likely that the person will contract HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, tetanus, hepatitis B, or other illnesses. A doctor should check for other infections and injuries like broken bones or internal bleeding. Even if there is a delay in getting help, it is still worthwhile.

Rape is against the law in most countries. The laws of most countries require that the rape of young people be reported to the police, but adult rape victims need to agree to report the rape. They are not always ready to do this, but talking with someone who knows the options, such as a person at a rape crisis center, can help them decide what to do.

A member of the family, a friend, or an older caring woman should go with the person to the doctor and the police. This comforts and supports them, and may also help them answer the many questions they are asked.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What resources are available in your area to provide medical and legal help to rape victims? If you don't know, make a plan to find out.

B. Help them find a person to talk to whom they trust.

Since rape makes people feel so deeply ashamed, they will only share their pain with someone they trust to keep the matter private. Since rape victims already feel badly about themselves, they will not want to share their pain with people who reprimand or blame them more for what happened. Often the person knows whom they can trust, and they should be allowed to choose those with whom they speak. It could be a priest, a pastor or pastor's wife, a wise woman in the church, or another person who has been raped. Leaders can identify people in the church who are able to do this, and give them training to improve their skills.

When a woman talks to someone about her rape experience, it is very personal and a bond can form between them. Because of this, it is better if a woman talks with the raped woman. If a man is talking with her, it would be better that another woman be present. This could be either the man's wife or a mature woman in the church. If another woman cannot be present, his wife and someone else in the church should know that he is talking with the raped woman, and when and where this conversation is happening.

Some people who have been raped will not feel free to share their pain with anyone. For this reason, churches should include prayers and teaching for rape victims in their services. This might bring a ray of hope to people who have deep, secret pain. It may also help them realize that they can talk about this subject with others.

The counselor must enable victims to talk openly about what has happened and what they are feeling. They should be allowed to say how angry and ashamed they feel. It is very common for rape victims to be angry with God. This is okay. God is able to accept their anger and still love them. It is better for them to be truthful about their feelings than to hide them. Writing a lament can be a way to get the feelings out (see Lesson 3, “Laments,” on page 38).

The first step in healing occurs when people realize the impact of the rape on their lives. This comes about by talking with someone who listens attentively, trying to understand how they feel. Victims will need a lot of time to talk about this over the following days and months.

DISCUSSION IN TWOS

1. If you had a big problem, who would you talk to?
2. What people in your church could be trained to help someone who has been raped?

C. Help them know that they are loved.

At first, victims may be so angry with God that they are not willing to pray or listen to God’s Word. The only love they might be able to accept is that of those around them. By seeing that others still value and love them, they will gradually realize that they are not ruined. Their spouse and family members can play a key role in this. Eventually, they may be willing to receive comfort from God’s Word and have others pray for them. Scriptures that might be helpful are Psalm 9.9–10; 10.17–18.

D. Help them bring their pain to God.

When people are ready, they need to bring their pain to God in prayer and ask God for healing. The more specific they can be about what was lost in the rape—for example, innocence, purity, joy—the better. They should ask God to restore these things to them (Ps 71.20–21).

E. Help them in the process of forgiving the person who raped them.

When the pain in their hearts has been healed by God, then they can begin to forgive the rapist. Rape is a terrible thing, but God asks us to forgive those who do evil to us (Mt 6.14–15). The process of forgiveness may take a long time. If a child resulted from the rape, forgiving the rapist may help a woman to more fully accept the child.

5. What about children born as a result of rape?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Are there any children in your church who are teased or rejected because of the events surrounding their birth? If so, how are you helping them?

A. What are their special needs?

Sometimes, children born as a result of rape are rejected by their mothers and families. They may be treated poorly, or even neglected so much that they die. They may be ridiculed for not having a father. Their siblings may hate them and not consider them to be full members of the family.

B. How can we help these children?

God has a special love for the fatherless (Dt 10.18). In Psalm 68.5–6, it says: “*God, who lives in his sacred Temple, cares for orphans and protects widows. He gives the lonely a home to live in and leads prisoners out into happy freedom, but rebels will have to live in a desolate land.*” As Christians, we should ask God to give us his special love for these children. They are not responsible for the bad things that have been done to them. They need our love even more than other children. They need special teaching from God’s Word to assure them that their life is not an accident. Some Scriptures that might be helpful are Psalm 139.13–18 and Isaiah 49.15.

When they begin asking who their father is, it is good to tell them the truth. They most likely know more than people think they know.

If the father is known, let them know who he is. If he is already dead, tell them who the relatives are.

Church leaders will need to help the whole family to accept a child like this. The husband may find this difficult, and even older brothers and sisters may struggle with it. When the time comes for the baby to be dedicated or baptized in church, ask for a special blessing on the baby and the family.

6. How can we help rapists?

Rapists need to take responsibility for what they have done. They need to explore their desire to rape and have power over others. They need to confess their sin to God and accept his forgiveness. Someone needs to walk with them to help them learn healthy ways of relating to others, to pray with them, and to hold them accountable day by day.

Rapists need to ask victims for forgiveness. Although they can never restore a victim's purity, they should do whatever they can to help as a visible sign of their repentance (Lk 3.8).

If there are rapists in the church, the pastor should talk with them about their problem. If they confess and repent, the church should extend God's forgiveness to them, all the while being careful to not let the rapist be alone with potential victims. Rapists have broken the trust people had in them, and they need to rebuild that trust with good experiences over a long period of time. If rapists do not repent, they should be excluded from the church, both to bring them to repentance and to protect others.

In all cases, the laws of the land need to be applied. People can genuinely forgive a rapist and still bring them to court to face the legal consequences of their actions (see Lesson 9).

CLOSING SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

Imagine that a person in your church has been raped. She or he has told the pastor what has happened. How do you think your church would respond? Be realistic!

MINISTERING IN THE MIDST OF HIV AND AIDS

It is helpful to have an informed medical person present during this session.

1. Didier and Mary's story

Didier and Mary were happily married with five children. They were both committed Christians. One day their village asked Didier to do a course on better farming methods in the capital city. Didier was very happy to be chosen and went off for four months to do the course.

By the second month, Didier missed his wife very much and began to spend a lot of time daydreaming about women. During the course he had made friends with some other men who weren't Christians and they kept inviting him to go out with them in the evenings. So far he had refused, but he began to worry when they told him that if a man didn't have sex regularly, he could go mad! One evening the temptation and his loneliness was too much for him. He went out to a bar with these friends, and afterwards he had sex with a prostitute. The next day he felt awful about it and resolved never to do this again.

At the end of the course Didier returned to his family, and after two years, Mary became pregnant again. About that time, Didier began feeling poorly. At first he was just tired and started losing weight. Then he started having strange rashes and diarrhea. He went to the doctor who examined him and gave him a blood test. Finally the doctor called him into his office and broke the sad news that he was HIV-positive and that he might already have infected his wife and even the unborn child. The doctor carefully explained that there were three fluids that could carry the virus of HIV/AIDS: blood, fluids from the sexual organs, and breast milk. Suddenly Didier remembered the evening he had spent with the prostitute.

Didier went home shocked and numb. At first he didn't want to tell anyone at all, but after a while he realized he must tell his wife. At first, she couldn't believe it. Then she was angry and sad.

Mary went to the hospital for the HIV test and found out that, indeed, she was HIV-positive. They told her that if she took some special medicine during the rest of her pregnancy, the baby was less likely to be born HIV-positive. She faithfully went to the hospital for these medicines and the baby was born healthy. However, Mary began to feel sick herself.

Didier and Mary despaired as they thought of the future of their six children. They heard of some special medicines called ARVs that would help them be healthy again for some years, but unfortunately they couldn't get them in their town.

They were afraid to tell anyone of their problem for fear people would start avoiding them. Soon, though, the problem was too big for them to bear, and they told their pastor. The pastor spent a lot of time with them over the next months, reading the Bible to them and discussing who could look after their children. As they were able to express their pain, they felt a real relief in their hearts.

Didier gave the rest of his life to teach children and young people about AIDS so they would not make the same mistake that he did.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In your area, do people tell others if they know they have HIV or AIDS? Why or why not?
2. How do people in your community treat people with HIV or AIDS?

2. What do you know about HIV and AIDS?

Read the questions below aloud and have each person write down their answers. Then go over the correct answers provided at the end of the lesson. Discuss anything that is not clear. See how many people got all the answers correct, how many missed just one, and so forth.

1. What does AIDS stand for?
2. What does HIV stand for?
3. What are the three fluids that can carry HIV?

4. What is the most frequent way that people worldwide are infected with HIV?
5. Is there a cure for HIV or AIDS?
6. Is it possible for you to be infected with HIV by doing the following? Mark each one yes or no.
 - a. Shaking hands with someone infected with HIV.
 - b. Receiving an injection.
 - c. Sharing food from the same bowl with someone with HIV.
 - d. Using the same toilet as someone who has HIV.
 - e. Using a razor blade that has been used by another person who has HIV.
 - f. Having sex with someone who has HIV.
 - g. Hugging a person with AIDS.
 - h. Washing the sores of someone who has HIV without wearing gloves.
7. Can you tell by looking that someone has HIV or AIDS?
8. What is the only way to tell for sure if you have HIV?

(Key on page 67)

3. What are some false beliefs that increase the spread of HIV?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What do people in your area believe about the spread of HIV? Invite someone who is medically trained, such as a doctor or dispensary nurse, to help you know if these are true.

Some people believe things that are not true about sex, HIV, and AIDS. These lies keep them from protecting themselves from HIV. Here are some of them:

- “A man who does not have sex for some time will go mad or become impotent.” Or, “Young people need sex to develop normally.” Or, “Having sex will help a man get over an illness.” These things are not true. Men do not need to have sex to develop normally, recover from illness, be sane, or remain fertile. Jesus and Paul were both celibate.
- “A woman should prove she is fertile before marriage.” In the Bible, all sexual relations outside marriage are considered sexual

immorality, and sexual immorality is sin (Ga 5.19). Children are a blessing, but they are not necessary for a Christian marriage.

- “If Satan tempts you to sexual sin, you can’t resist.” The Bible says, “. . . *Resist the Devil and he will run away from you*” (Jas 4.7). God will always give you a way to escape temptation. 1 Corinthians 10.13 says: “*Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.*”
- “AIDS is a curse from God” or “AIDS is caused by witchcraft.” There is no mystery about how a person contracts it. It is spread through contact with blood or certain body fluids.
- “A person who tells you that you have HIV is cursing you, so it is better not to tell someone they have it.” This results in a person giving HIV to others without even knowing it. People should respond to HIV like responding to a lion stalking the village. They should cry out and warn the villagers about the danger. No one would keep quiet about a lion coming!

4. What are some practices that increase the spread of HIV?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Are there practices in your area that increase the spread of HIV?
What are they?

Some cultures have customs or rituals that favor the spread of HIV. Here are some:

- Levirate marriage (for example, a man may be obliged to marry the widow of his dead brother). If the dead brother died of AIDS, the widow will possibly bring HIV into her new family.
- The low status of women denies them the freedom to make choices about their sexuality and reproductive health.
- Funeral practices that involve contact with the body fluids of the dead person.
- Sharing needles for injections with others.
- Circumcision using the same blade on one person after another.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What can we do about these things?

5. How can we teach children about sex, HIV, and AIDS?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How do children learn about sex? Who teaches them? At what age does this take place?

The most likely way a young person will get infected with HIV is through sexual activity. The church needs to help those who teach children about sex know the facts about HIV and AIDS. They should begin educating children about these things before they become sexually active, or earlier if they ask questions. Some very good books are available to teach children about sex and about HIV and AIDS.

Having many sexual partners increases the chances of getting HIV and is displeasing to God. Some agencies promote the use of condoms as a way to avoid contracting HIV. Condoms reduce the probability of getting HIV, but abstinence before marriage is the only completely safe way to avoid getting it. It also follows the biblical teaching of reserving sex for marriage. This teaching may challenge traditional sexual practices so young people will need a lot of encouragement to remain pure in this area. The example of the adults will speak louder than any teaching that is given.

Youth have a lot of energy. They need to be involved in good activities. If the church involves them in caring for people with AIDS, there can be many benefits.

- It makes them feel wanted and needed by the church.
- It helps them see the dangers of getting HIV.
- It gives them something good to do so that they are not so likely to do bad things.

Youth can develop ways to teach HIV awareness to others, through drama, song, presentations, or Bible study. They can visit the sick and read Scripture to them. They can do practical things to help them, like bringing water or food.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Are there any activities in your church that are useful and enjoyable for young people (10–20 years old)?
2. What can your church do to help parents (or other appropriate people) teach young people about HIV and sex?
3. How can young people in your church be involved in helping people avoid HIV and in ministering to those living with AIDS?

6. How can the Church help a person living with HIV or AIDS?

Churches need to train a group of helpers to minister to those who live with HIV or AIDS. Often these helpers go out two by two. People living with AIDS need help in all areas of their lives.

A. Tell them about Jesus and the Bible.

Helpers should read Scripture, pray, and sing with the sick person and his family. If the sick person is a Christian, it will be a comfort to hear about heaven. If the sick person is not a Christian, often he or she will be open to hearing about how sins can be forgiven and about God's free gift of eternal life.

As sick people begin to trust their helpers, they will be able to talk about their feelings about life and their illness. It is also important that sick people know they can tell God exactly what they are feeling. Psalm 38, where David expresses his real feelings to God when he was sick, provides a model. They might want to write their own laments (See Lesson 3, "Laments," on page 38).

B. Help them tell others about their illness.

Often people want to hide that they are HIV-positive. This does not help the sick person or the community as a whole. If they do not tell the real reason they are sick, people may wrongly accuse others of having caused the illness through a curse or witchcraft. It takes a brave person to be the first to say publicly that he or she has HIV or AIDS, but this can help others to do so. It is a very necessary step in helping the community "trap the lion."

Everyone needs to know how HIV is spread. It is equally important that they also know they will not get HIV by touching a sick person, or eating with them, or taking care of their needs.

C. They should not be excluded from their families or friends.

People need other people! Those living with AIDS may be rejected by their friends and even their family. The church needs to work with the community to help them accept these sick people and not be scared of them. Those who are living with AIDS can help each other by meeting and sharing their experiences. The church could help to arrange this.

D. Help them understand the grief process.

When someone has a disease that might be fatal, they often go through stages that are similar to those that happen when we grieve: anger and denial, depression, and then acceptance. People who help these sick people need to know that it is normal to be angry at first. They may also deny that they have HIV. A state of depression is also normal, and it may be some months before they can accept their situation. They may bargain with God, promising certain behaviors in exchange for their health. A good helper will be patient with them as they go through these stages.

E. Care for their bodies.

Two people may become HIV-positive. One may live for six years, another may live for six months. This is partly due to their overall physical well-being, but it is also due to their attitude and the care they receive. People who have something to do will live longer than those who do nothing, so it is good to give people living with AIDS some activity to help the family. They could learn to sew clothes or raise animals or engage in another activity that does not require great physical strength. In addition, good regular food will help people fight off disease. It is particularly important that sick people eat plenty of fruit and vegetables so that they get good vitamins to keep their bodies healthy. They will need a lot of rest, and they should not smoke, or drink much alcohol. In some places, antiviral drugs may be available. If

so, they need to follow the doctor's instructions exactly about taking them. If not, they will do more harm than good.

The church also needs to arrange care of orphans whose parents have died of AIDS, and help widows and widowers. James 1.27 says: *"What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering . . ."* The church should also help prostitutes find other ways to make a living.

CLOSING EXERCISE

1. Study 1 Corinthians 6.13b–20. Why should a Christian flee from sexual immorality?
2. Read the following verses. What do they teach about visiting the sick?

2 Corinthians 1.3–5	2 Corinthians 5.16–20
1 Corinthians 13.3–8	Matthew 25.35–40
3. Do you have trained people to visit the sick, or is the pastor expected to do this alone?
4. Are all of the five areas listed above covered when you visit the sick? If not, how can you change this?
5. After reading this lesson, what is the one thing you would like to start doing in your church?

Answers to the quiz

1. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
2. Human Immunodeficiency Virus
3. Blood, fluids from sexual organs, and breast milk
4. Through unprotected sex
5. No. Antiretroviral drugs only reduce the growth of HIV. They do not cure it.
6. a. No, b. Yes, c. No, d. No, e. Yes, f. Yes, g. No, h. Yes
7. No
8. Blood test in a laboratory

DOMESTIC ABUSE

1. Troubles at home

Farid had applied for refugee status, but new regulations made it look unlikely that it would be granted. And so they waited. And waited. Rains came and everything was flooded.

These were the years Ramez should be excelling at school, but the school in Al-Ramlia was overcrowded and understaffed. Salwa was able to keep busy cooking and cleaning, but Farid had nothing to do. He was in a bad mood most of the time.

One afternoon as they were having tea together, Salwa asked Farid, "What do you think will happen to us?" Farid threw his cup across the room and shouted, "I don't know! What can I do, woman!" Enraged, he began to beat her and then stormed out. He didn't come back until late in the night. Salwa nursed her wounds and hoped none of the neighbors had noticed.

The next morning, Farid apologized to Salwa and told her how much he loved her. She thought, "Oh, he's changed! He won't beat me like that again!" But later that week, it happened again. "This food is terrible!" shouted Farid as he threw the plate on the floor. "Did you never learn to cook?" And with that he took a stick and began beating her. Then he stomped off. Salwa had done her best to prepare a tasty meal with the little they could afford. She would have to try harder, she thought.

Then one day, Ramez and his friend were playing together. Farid said, "Ramez, stop making so much noise!" Ramez was quieter for a little while, but before long he and his friend were making a lot of noise again. Farid got up, grabbed Ramez, pinned him to the wall and began to beat him. Salwa watched, helpless. Finally Farid stomped out of the house.

Uncle Fouad was in Al-Ramlia for spiritual retreat and came by for a visit. Fouad noticed that Salwa had a black eye and a cut on her forehead.

He wondered what bruises her clothes might be covering. Later that night, the two men sat outside chatting together.

“Farid,” said Uncle Fouad, “Salwa has bruises on her face. Have you beaten her?”

“Yes, frankly, she’s been so difficult!” said Farid, “Always causing trouble, that woman. She needs to submit to me as the head of the home. Even the Bible says that.”

“Yes,” said Uncle Fouad, “that’s true. But the Bible also says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and cared for it.”

“Well, of course I love Salwa!” said Farid.

Uncle Fouad looked him in the eye and said, “And yet you beat her like she’s an animal? God created her in his image just like he created you in his image.”

“Uncle Fouad,” said Farid, “A man has to keep his wife in line!”

“Try the Jesus way: show her love and respect,” said Uncle Fouad, “You may be surprised with the results!”

Later that month, Farid found himself beating Salwa yet again. There was so much anger inside him that wanted to come out. The next day when he came back from a meeting in town, he found his apartment empty and a note from Salwa on the table: she and Ramez had left for their safety, she wrote, and he should get help to understand why he was so abusive. They would return when he was able to treat them as humans.

Farid was shocked. For the first time, he thought, “Maybe I have a problem.”



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Farid started abusing Salwa and Ramez?
2. Why did Salwa try to hide what was happening?
3. Is domestic violence widespread in your community?

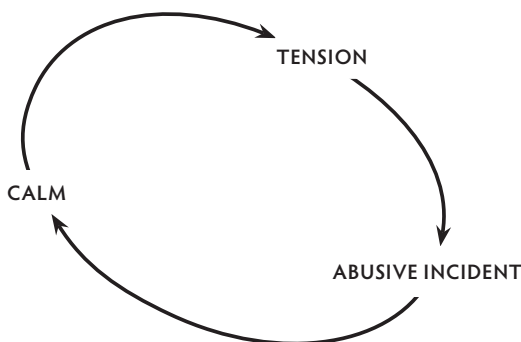
2. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of someone trying to control another family member. It can be directed towards elders, spouses, siblings, or children and it can take many forms:

- **physical:** beating, choking, throwing things, kicking, and so on.

- **verbal:** telling the victim they are stupid, unable to do anything right, and so on.
- **emotional:** making the victim live in fear, isolating the victim from others.
- **sexual:** forcing sexual relations on the victim.
- **economic:** not allowing the victim to have money, food, education, medical help, and so on.

All families have conflicts, but when there is a pattern of control and manipulation it is domestic abuse. The abuse happens in a predictable cycle: tension, violence, calm; tension, violence, calm. . . . The cycle can happen daily, or on certain days like weekends. Over time, the victim begins to feel unable to live without the abuser, and may live for the times of calm and making up. Even if victims leave the abuser, often they return.



EXERCISE: TRUE OR FALSE?

Read these statements aloud and have each person mark down his or her response. Then go over each statement and discuss it.

1. Violence within the home is a private family matter.
2. Alcohol and drugs are the main causes of domestic abuse.
3. At times it can be helpful for spouses to beat family members.
4. A victim could stop the abuse if she or he really tried.
5. Often, the abuse stops without help from others.
6. Someone who is violent towards a partner will be violent towards others.

(Key on page 75)



3. What does your culture and the Bible say about domestic abuse?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What does your culture teach about domestic abuse? Do you have any proverbs about this? For example, “if you don’t beat your wife, she has you in her pocket.”
2. Look up these verses and compare them with what your culture teaches about domestic abuse:

1 Peter 3.7

Genesis 1.26–27

Ephesians 5.21–30

1 Corinthians 13.4–7

Colossians 3.19

Ephesians 4.29–32

3. Are there Scripture passages that people in your community use to justify domestic abuse? If yes, what are they and what do they say? Be sure to read the whole passage!

God created people in his image, so we must treat everyone with respect. Husbands have a very high standard to follow: to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

When people get married, they vow to love and cherish each other. If a person abuses his or her spouse, this vow is broken. The other person cannot fix the relationship on his or her own.

4. Why does domestic abuse continue?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Summarize the reasons people abuse family members already stated, and then add any others that come to mind.

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything from the list below that has not already been mentioned.

Abusers may:

- have grown up in a home with domestic violence and not know how to relate to family members in healthy ways.
- believe it is acceptable to beat family members. The culture or religion may teach this.
- feel powerless in their lives, but powerful when they are beating another person.
- feel jealous and insecure in their marriage, fearing their spouse will leave them if they could.
- blame their actions on others.

Alcohol, drugs, and other stresses in life can make abuse happen more easily but are not the root cause of domestic abuse.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Summarize the reasons people remain in abusive relationships already stated, and add any others that come to mind.

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything from the list below that has not already been mentioned.

Abuse victims may:

- depend on the abuser for income and not be able to survive financially without him or her.
- believe they cannot survive emotionally on their own. The abuse humiliates them until they think they do not deserve respect.

- believe it is normal to be beaten, threatened, and insulted, or that it is wrong to leave their spouse.
- be afraid of the consequences of resisting the abuser.
- feel ashamed to let anyone know what is happening in their home. This is especially true if churches foster the idea that Christians should never have this problem.
- really love the abuser.

5. How can we help victims of domestic abuse?

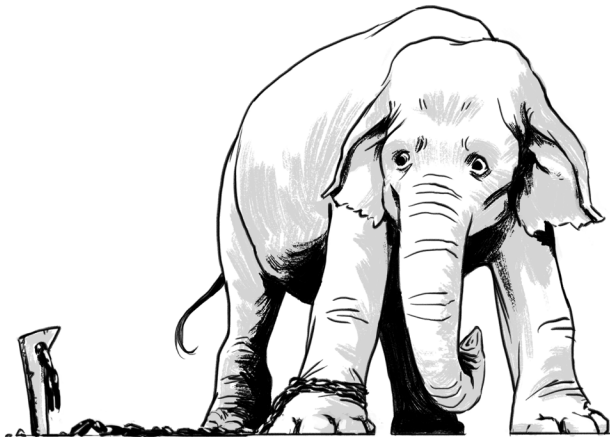


SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How can victims of domestic abuse be helped? If you are a victim of domestic abuse, what has been helpful for you?

Get feedback in the large group and then conclude with anything from the list below that has not already been mentioned.

- *Listen:* Victims need someone they can talk to, but this can be difficult because often abusers isolate their victims from contact with others.
- *Avoid marital counseling:* Don't recommend the couple to see a counselor together because often abusers act kindly in front of the counselor, and then take out their rage on the victim once at home.



- *Why stay?* Ask victims, “Why do you stay in the relationship?” Don’t pressure them to leave, but talk about the negative things in the relationship as well as positive things. Help them recognize the cycle of abuse. Pictures may help more than logic. For example, explain how elephants are trained to obey their masters: The master ties the elephant to the ground with a chain and stake. The elephant learns that she cannot go anywhere. Then the trainer can remove the chain and the elephant does not even try to get away. She still thinks she is chained to the ground. Victims of abuse need help to see that they can break free from their abuser.
- *See effects:* Victims need to see the effects the violence is having on them and their family. If there are religious or cultural values that encourage the victim to remain in an abusive relationship, these need to be addressed.
- *Not their fault:* Help victims understand that the abuse is not their fault; it is the fault of the abuser. God sees what is happening (Ps 10). Only the abuser can change his or her behavior.
- *Set boundaries:* Victims can set boundaries for what they will tolerate, such as, “If ever you hurt the children again, I will tell the pastor,” or “we will leave.” They can practice their responses so they are prepared.
- *A plan:* They need to develop a safety plan to get out of the relationship. The safest time to leave is when things are calm, rather than in the heat of a disaster. They need a place to go where the abuser cannot find them. They need practical help, such as a job and legal assistance. They may leave several times before leaving for good.
- *Healing of heart wounds:* Victims need to find healing for their heart wounds and, in due course, forgive their abusers. The trust that has been broken will take time to rebuild.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What is the most difficult part of domestic abuse for you?

6. How can we help abusers?

- Help them realize that they have a problem. Often, they have deceived themselves and blame others.
- Help them deal with the root causes of their problems and find healing.
- Help them identify the things that trigger their abusive behavior and develop better ways of responding.
- If they are using drugs or alcohol, they need to stop. Support groups can help.
- They need to ask God to forgive them for what they have done, and they need to forgive themselves.
- They need to ask their victim to forgive them, clearly stating what they have done and taking responsibility for it. This should not be linked to getting the victim back.

These things need to be done before the abuser can begin to think of reconciling with the victim.

CLOSING EXERCISE

What has your church done to be ready to help victims of domestic abuse? What else could be done?

EXERCISE KEY

All are false.

1. *Violence within the home is a private family matter.*
It is sin and sin needs to be brought to the light and addressed, or it festers and grows. In most countries, domestic abuse is a crime. The church is called to protect people who are mistreated and powerless.
2. *Alcohol and drugs are the main cause of domestic violence.*
People can abuse their partner without ever drinking alcohol or taking drugs, but alcohol and drugs make abuse happen more easily, like putting kerosene on charcoal to start a fire. The main cause for domestic abuse is the desire to control and intimidate others

because inside, the abuser is out of control. This is often due to not experiencing healthy, loving relationships during their childhood.

3. *At times it can be helpful for spouses to beat family members.*

Sometimes people use force to make spouses or children obey and submit. But in Ephesians 6.4 we read, “*Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction.*” And in Colossians 3.19 we read, “*Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*” Beating may result in obedience, but it is based in fear, and it makes the home a place that is not safe. To beat family members is to humiliate them and make them feel small, rather than becoming the wonderful people God created them to be.

4. *A victim could stop the abuse if she or he really tried.*

Only the abuser can stop the abuse. No one can make them stop. The abuser is responsible for his or her actions (Mt 15.18–19), but the abuser and others may blame the victim.

5. *Often, abuse stops without outside intervention.*

Abusers need to face their personal problems for the abuse to stop, and most often they cannot do this without help. People do not give up power easily. Even if the physical abuse stops, the abuser can continue to control the victim without losing their temper or becoming violent. Clearing their throat, or a certain look, can be enough.

6. *Someone who is violent towards a partner will be violent towards others.*

Abusers know how to be very pleasant in public. Usually, it’s not possible to tell an abusive person from other people. For example, Judas did not stand out as a betrayer.

SUICIDE

1. Nada's choice

Salwa had her share of problems, but they seemed small compared to those of Nada. Nada was so gloomy, it seemed like a dark cloud hung over her that no amount of visiting or care could lift. She neglected her children and was not eating much. Sometimes Salwa felt impatient with her. Yes, Nada had lived through horrible experiences, but couldn't she take charge of her life now that the danger had passed?

"Nada," Salwa called. "The aid organization is here; we can go and get food kits. Do you want to come?" Nada said in a weak voice, "No. Not today. I'm not feeling well. I didn't sleep last night." She stared into space.

Then one day, Nada came over all washed and clean, her hair beautifully combed, and a smile on her face. "Thank you, Salwa, for all of your help," Nada said. They sat together, chatting and sharing the news of the day. "You're like a second mother to my boys," Nada said. Salwa took this as a compliment.

The next day, Salwa was cooking and realized she was out of salt. "I'll just get some from Nada," she thought. She knocked on the door. No answer. She knocked again and waited. Finally she opened the door and stepped in, calling, "Nada, I've come ..." Salwa stopped dead in her tracks. She could not believe her eyes: there was Nada on the floor, white, cold, dead, an empty bottle of bleach by her side. In shock, Salwa raced to Sarah's to tell her what happened. They called the hospital to come and take the body, and Salwa took Nada's two children to her home.

A few days later, Sarah came by for a visit. She listened as Salwa talked about Nada. Finally, Salwa said, "Oh Sarah, I should have done more to help her! I didn't realize she was so desperate! I thought she

was doing better!” Sarah listened with eyes of love. “And now she’s gone,” Salwa said.

Sarah took a deep breath and said, “Salwa, you were a good friend to Nada. In the end, Nada made the decision to end her life. That was her decision. You did all you could.”

“Do you really think so?” asked Salwa.

“Yes,” said Sarah.

Still, when Salwa went to sleep that night, there was a new character in her nightmares. And two more children in her care. If only they would stop their crying ...

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Nada killed herself?
2. Who was responsible for Nada’s suicide?
3. What effect did Nada’s suicide have on Salwa?

2. Why do people commit suicide?

Suicide is taking one’s own life intentionally. It happens in all societies and by all kinds of people: young and old, men and women. It can be done in many ways, but it is always intentional.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Why do people commit suicide?

Ask for responses from the group, and then add anything from the list below that has not already been mentioned:

Every case is different, but often people commit suicide when they have lost all hope. Sometimes they may seem to be happy and are active with friends and family, but inside they are in great pain. Some may be hiding something they feel is so shameful they don’t dare tell anyone. They come to a point where they feel suicide is the only way to stop their pain. Some people commit suicide because they feel their loved ones would be better off without them. Others, however, commit suicide to punish their loved ones.

One suicide can often lead to another. People who have attempted suicide before, or who have a family member who has done so, are much more likely to commit suicide.



3. Desperate people in the Bible

☀ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Have each small group read one of the passages below about people in the Bible. Discuss what you know about the main characters. What were they feeling? What did they do?

Abimelech	Judges 9.50–54
Samson	Judges 16.23–30; Hebrews 11.32–34
Saul and his armor bearer	1 Samuel 31.1–5
Ahithophel	2 Samuel 17.1–7, 14, 23
Elijah	1 Kings 19.1–4
Job	Job 3.11–14
Jonah	Jonah 4.1–3
Philippian jailer	Acts 16.25–28

Many people in the Bible were so desperate they wanted to die. Some even killed themselves. Samson, for example, killed himself along with

three thousand Philistines in his last act. We can be encouraged that his name appears in Hebrews 11 as a person of great faith, and faith pleases God (He 11.6). The Apostle Paul also writes that nothing—not even death—can separate us from God’s love: *“For I am certain that nothing can separate us from God’s love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ro 8.38–39).

4. Warning signs

Sometimes people give clues that they are considering suicide.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What warning signs have you noticed that a person may be considering suicide?

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything below that has not already been mentioned:

- They may become extremely withdrawn and isolate themselves from others.
- They may talk about wanting to die or say things like, “What’s the point of living?” or “Soon you won’t have to worry about me!”
- They may give away things that are very important to them.
- They may go from being depressed to being very happy for no reason.
- They may neglect taking care of themselves.

Not everyone considering suicide gives clues like this, but if they do, take them seriously!

5. How can we help people considering suicide?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Imagine that a person in your community is considering suicide. Are the ways people treat him or her helpful?

2. How can we help people considering suicide?

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything from the points below about how to help that hasn't already been mentioned.

- Do not avoid talking about suicide for fear of offending them or of putting the idea into their minds. Find out how serious they are. Have they made a plan? Have they prepared? Have they practiced? Have they thought through how this will affect others? If they are serious, remove any means of committing suicide from their environment, such as medicines, ropes, guns, and so forth. Don't leave them alone.
- Be with them and listen to them. Don't preach at them, but ask questions that will help them express how they are feeling. Tears are good. Help them find ways to release their pain and express their anger.
- Ask them to imagine their situation being just a little bit better. What would have changed?
- Explore what has kept them from committing suicide so far. Try to build hope on those ideas. For example, if a mother is concerned about the future of her child, discuss how much her child needs her.
- Find out what they have already tried to overcome their problems, and help them think about what else they could try.
- Assure them that others have been in similar situations and there is a way out other than death. The apostle Paul writes, *"Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out"* (1 Co 10.13).
- Organize suicide awareness programs in schools, a suicide hotline, or a place people can go if they are considering suicide. Or find professional counselors to help them.
- Medications for depression may help. If they are already on medication, encourage them to continue taking it.

- Help them connect with others. Healing comes as they tell their story and reconnect with others. Even if they have professional help, they will still need the support of friends and loved ones.

6. How can we help the loved ones of someone who has committed suicide?

All death and loss is painful, but when someone commits suicide, the grief of his or her loved ones is especially painful. Their lives will be marked “before the suicide” and “after the suicide.”

Loved ones may feel:

- guilty that they were not able to stop the person.
- angry with the person for taking their life.
- very sad at the loss of a life cut short.
- ashamed, and the community may add to their shame. For example, in some communities, people who commit suicide are not buried in the normal way.
- that they need to understand why the suicide happened.
- afraid more bad things will happen; unable to trust others again.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Imagine that a person in your community commits suicide. Are the ways people treat his or her loved ones helpful or unhelpful?
2. How can you help the loved ones of someone who has committed suicide?

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything below that has not already been mentioned.

Ways to help the loved ones:

- Help with physical needs.
- Provide normal funeral services for those who die by suicide.
- Spend time with them.
- Talk about suicide openly without shaming them.
- Listen to them. Use the three listening questions (“What happened?” “How did you feel?” “What was the hardest part for you?”).

- Help them realize they are not responsible for what happened.
- Help them accept that they may never understand why the person did it. There are no simple answers for why a person has committed suicide.
- Help them remember the person's life, not the way he or she died.

CLOSING EXERCISE

1. For those who have lost someone to suicide, write a letter to that person saying the things you wish you could have told them.
2. In small groups, read Lamentations 3.19–23 and Matthew 11.28–29. Discuss how these passages could bring comfort to someone considering suicide or to people whose loved one committed suicide. Then pray for those in your community affected by suicide.

ADDICTIONS

1. Daud, the football hero

The population of Al-Ramlia had more than doubled in the past years. Everywhere people were crammed together in what space they could find. Ramez was now a teenager, with not much to do and not much to look forward to. One thing he and his friends loved to do was play football.

One of his friends, Daud, was by far the best player in the area. Every game, the team could count on Daud to score the winning goal. Then, for no apparent reason, there was a game when Daud just couldn't run as fast, and at the critical moment when he could have scored, he missed completely. Even more surprising, Daud didn't even seem worried about it.

Salwa had noticed a change in Daud as well. He had no energy and didn't seem to care about anything. Sometimes his eyes looked strange. "Why is Daud so different?" she wondered.

But there were other problems to attend to. She barely had enough money for her to make even the most basic meals. She kept close track of her money, but recently she couldn't figure out where it was all going. Had she bought something she had forgotten about? Had Ramez taken money from her purse? And now the beautiful necklace her mother had given her was missing. She had to be more careful with her things!

One day, she went to her weekly women's meeting but it was canceled, and she came home earlier than expected. As she came in the apartment, there standing in front of her was Daud with his hand in her purse! "What are you doing?" she yelled as she grabbed her purse from him.

"Oh, nothing, Mrs. S'Calwa, nothing at all," he said, but his eyes betrayed him. He ran out of the house as fast as he could.

Before long, the story came out: Some months earlier, a few of the older boys had given some pills to Daud and dared him to take them. He

accepted them happily. What an experience! All his hopelessness melted away. Nothing mattered! Now, months later, he couldn't live a day without the drugs. At this point, he would do anything to get the drugs, even steal from his friend's mother.

Salwa told Daud's parents what had happened. Daud's father found a time to talk alone with his son. "Son, think about your life. Do you really want to be like the drug addicts we see laying around in the street?" he asked.

"Father, our lives are without hope here. I have nothing to live for."

His father replied, "Honey, I know our lives are difficult but we will continue praying and won't lose hope or be weak. God will hear our prayers."

At that, Daud broke into tears and said, "Father, I don't like what has happened to me. But I can't stop it."

"Son," said the father, "Are you sure you want to stop?"

"Yes, father," said Daud.

"Then we will get over this together!" said the father.

The doctor at the local clinic gave Daud some medicine to help him recover from taking the drugs. After some difficult weeks, he didn't want the drugs so much, and his appetite came back. Still whenever he felt hopelessness come over him, the first thing he thought of was how he could get the drugs again. He would call Ramez and they would sit together and wait it out. Before long, the desire would pass.

Salwa and Daud's mother sat together one afternoon. "Your son has been spared a life of misery!" said Salwa.

"Yes," said Daud's mother. "Thank you for telling us about what was going on. You are a true friend."

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was Daud's problem?
2. What effect was it having on his life?
3. How was he helped?
4. List some things people can be addicted to.

Share responses in the large group and then, in response to the last question, add anything below that has not already been mentioned:

Common addictions include alcohol, tobacco, drugs, eating too much, extreme dieting, running or other exercise, gambling, shopping,

pornography, sex, and even work. People can be addicted to things that are normally good.



2. What is an addiction?

People become addicted to something when they crave it and depend on it to face life. It makes them feel better, or at least keeps them from feeling pain. But when the good feeling goes away, they miss it, so they repeat the behavior again. This goes on over and over. Eventually they become addicted. Their bodies stop producing the chemicals that normally make people feel good, and so they begin to need the thing they're addicted to in order to feel normal. As time goes on, they need to do more and more of their addiction to get the same good feeling.

As they rely on it more and more, the addiction becomes their god and they sacrifice everything to it. They think about it day and night. The more they yield to the addiction, the more power it has over them. Eventually it destroys their lives: their health, their families, their friendships, their job, and their role in the community.

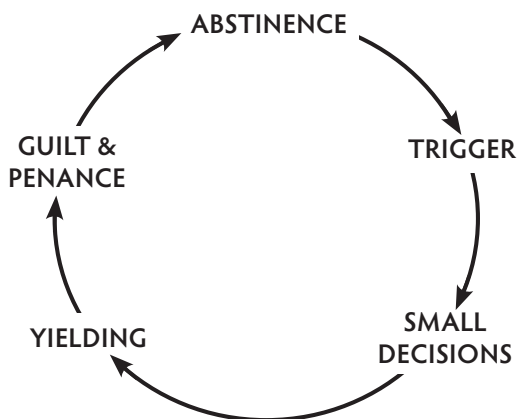
3. Why do people become addicted?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Why do people become addicted? How does it happen?

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything from the list below that has not already been mentioned:

- Social reasons: they are with others who drink (or gamble, etc.) and want to be accepted.
- Personal problems: the addiction numbs them from feeling the wounds of their heart.
- Personality and inherited traits: some people are much more likely to become addicted than others.



People who struggle with addictions often get trapped in a cycle:

1. **Abstinence:** “I’ll never do that again. I’m strong!”
2. **Trigger:** something triggers their desire for their addiction. This could happen when they’re hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. It might even happen after they celebrate how long they have abstained from the addiction.
3. **Small decisions:** they do something really small that opens the door to the addiction again. They feel they can withstand the temptation, or that they deserve this little thing.
4. **Acting on the desire:** they yield to the addiction again and it takes over.
5. **Guilt and penance:** they feel badly and try to do good things to make up for yielding to the temptation.
6. **Abstinence:** they start the cycle again.

The good news is that an addict can stop the cycle!

4. What does the Bible say about addictions?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Have each table group look up one of the passages below and report back to the large group on how it addresses addictions.

James 1.13–15

Romans 6.11–13

Ephesians 4.22–24

2 Corinthians 10.3–5

Colossians 3.1–3

1 Corinthians 10.13

To help people address an addiction, pay attention to what they are thinking as well as what they are doing. The Bible teaches that our thoughts can lead to desires. These desires can be harmful and lead to addictions. Once an addiction is formed, it is very difficult to stop.

Addicts need to ask God to change the way they think so they can find a way out of their cycle (Ro 12.1–2). They also need help to develop new, healthy habits and ways of coping with cravings and painful withdrawal symptoms. God can help them so that their desires no longer master them. God can also give them hope that one day they will be free.

5. How can we help people who are addicted?

We need to understand the challenges addicts face in order to be able to help them. Be gentle but firm (Ga 6.1).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Why don't addicts just stop?

Get feedback in the large group and then add anything from the list below not already mentioned:

- Their bodies crave the addiction. It is very painful to stop.
- They are deceived and have developed habits of lying and manipulating people to get what they want.
- They think of themselves as an addict. They have lost hope that they will be able to change.
- They don't recognize the cycle or know how to stop it.

- The addiction keeps them from feeling the pain of problems they do not want to face.

It is not helpful to preach to addicts or try to solve their problems for them. They need to decide for themselves that they want to stop. Addicts recover in stages, and each stage requires a different response.

Stage 1: “I don’t really have a problem” (Not ready). Help them think about where their lifestyle will lead and if this is what they really want.

Stage 2: “Maybe I do have a problem” (Getting ready). Help them think of the benefits and difficulties of giving up their addiction.

Stage 3: “I have a problem. I’m stopping!” (Ready). Praise the steps they’re taking to stop their addiction, even the small steps. Encourage them often. Help them:

- Begin to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings. Explore why the addiction started in the first place.
- Pay attention to situations when they have yielded to their addiction. For example, if they went to a bar with friends thinking they would order a soft drink but ended up drunk, they should avoid bars.
- Learn to wait ten minutes whenever they think of drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Often they are able to resist if they wait.
- Find someone who has recovered from a similar addiction who they can call for help and report on their recovery progress.
- Replace the addiction with something good (Lk 11.24–26).
- Address the wounds of their hearts and bring their pain to Christ for healing.
- Ask God and others to forgive them for the problems they have brought about, and then accept the full forgiveness Christ has promised.

Stage 4: “Oh, no! I did it again!” (Falling back). Falling back is a common part of the recovery process. Give more support so that they know that even though they have fallen, they can get up on their feet again (Ps 37.23–24). Their behavior doesn’t change God’s love for them (Ro 5.8).

6. How can we help family members of addicts?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How can we help the family of an addict?

Share responses in the large group and then add anything below not already mentioned.

- Family members need to realize how much the addictive behavior is affecting their lives and that their situation is not normal.
- Family members need to need to address the challenges they face around the addiction, such as anger, bitterness, differences of opinion on how to respond, financial strain due to rescuing the addict, and so forth. They need to take responsibility for their own decisions and hold the addict responsible for his or her decisions.
- Family members need to talk to the addict about the situation, cautiously and at the right time. This may be difficult and upsetting. Most often, addicts want to cover over the problem. They may feel too ashamed to talk about it.
- When an addict recovers, family members may feel they have lost part of their identity and purpose in life. They may become aware for the first time of other problems they have that were under the surface. And they may feel angry if people congratulate the addict for recovering and do not recognize how much the family has suffered through the years.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Imagine you are living with an alcoholic like the person in the story at the beginning of the lesson. Discuss these questions.

1. What can you actually change?
2. How can you take care of yourself?
3. What things might you do, intending to help the addict stop, that actually help him or her continue? (For example, covering up what is happening.)

CLOSING EXERCISE

What helps are available in your community or church for those who want to stop an addiction?

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

1. Salwa is overloaded

Salwa had been in Al-Ramlia for five years now. Wave after wave of displaced people arrived as the weeks and months went by. Somehow word got out that Salwa could help people with the pain in their hearts. People came to her at all hours of the day and night. Even when she was tired, she did not turn them away.

Finally, one day Ramez said, “You care about everyone but us!” Salwa answered, “But Ramez, these women need me! They have lost everything!” Ramez looked at his mother sadly, “But you’re my mother! I need you, too!” Just then, someone was knocking at the door. It was Mira. She wanted to pray with Salwa. “Sure, of course, come in!” said Salwa. Ramez went back to his room. It was no use.

Salwa heard story after story of horror, killing, and rape. One story really haunted her, of a young mother whose child was hit by a bomb and died in her arms. That night, she dreamed that she was drowning in a sea, Issam was sinking, she was sinking, the women were sinking all around her. She woke up crying.

The next morning, as she was making breakfast, the knife slipped and gashed her hand. The wound was so painful. She sat down to stop the bleeding. “Whew! Why did she feel so tired?” She felt like giving up.

Sarah had noticed how Salwa was helping everyone. “Salwa,” she said, “even Jesus took time to rest. If you don’t take care of yourself and your family, soon you will be too weak to care for anyone!”

Salwa was surprised. “Rest? With so many needs all around me? I’ll be fine. I’m strong.”

The next day, Salwa accidentally walked out in front of a car and was nearly hit. She went straight to Sarah's house. "What was it you were telling me yesterday?"

 **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

Why was Salwa having all of these problems?

2. How can we know if a caregiver is overloaded?

 **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Do you know people who have become so overloaded helping others that they became very discouraged or sick? What do they say? How do they behave?
2. Have you ever felt overloaded? Describe how you felt.

Taking care of other people can wear us out. When we listen to people's stories of trauma and grief, we may absorb some of their pain and experience some of the same symptoms they are experiencing. This is referred to as "secondary trauma." We can get so busy caring for others that we do not take time to care for ourselves. If we behave in some of the following ways, we may be overloaded:

- Feeling angry or sad all the time.
- Feeling tired and irritable.
- Not sleeping well.
- Having problems with relationships.
- Questioning the truth of our faith.
- Questioning God's goodness and power.
- Beginning to believe the lies of Satan.
- Becoming ill or having many accidents.
- Resenting those who need our help.

If we have some of these symptoms for a long time, we need to change something in our situation. If we have our own heart wounds that have not healed, they will add to our load. We need to be healed of these wounds to be able to help others. And if we allow ourselves to become exhausted, we will not be able to carry on with the work God has given us.



3. Why is it difficult to be a caregiver?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

What difficulties have you experienced as you have cared for people?

In times of war or crisis, many people have problems and need to talk to someone about them, so the caregiver's work increases. They may face some of the following difficulties.

A. Caregivers may be caring for too many people.

Caregivers may think they are indispensable to God's work and have to personally care for everyone. Church members may think that the pastor has to do everything. They may want to talk only to the pastor and no one else.

B. Caregivers can be the object of people's anger.

People who have experienced trauma are often angry. They can sometimes lash out without reason at the people around them. This can include caregivers, even though they are only trying to help. When this happens, caregivers must recognize that the hurt person is not really angry with them. They must not take it personally.

C. Caregivers may be manipulated by people.

Some people who come with problems are not really seeking solutions. They want to blame others, but are not willing to change themselves. If caregivers try to confront them about their part in the problem, they might try to change the subject. These people can take up a lot of time. Caregivers need to discern those who really want help from those who are merely seeking attention.

D. Caregivers may find out certain things in confidence that they must tell others.

When people share their problems with a caregiver, what they say is held in confidence. Some things, however, cannot be kept secret. These include illegal activities, rape, plans that would hurt someone, abuse of a child, or plans of suicide. Tell the people ahead of time that these things must be reported to the authorities.

E. Caregivers may find that they enjoy being at the center of everything.

Caregivers may enjoy a sense of power over other people's lives. It may make them feel needed when otherwise they lack confidence. Sometimes helping others is a way of avoiding looking at one's own problems. These are not good reasons for helping others. Caregivers need to look at their own motives for helping others to be sure they are pure.

F. Caregivers may neglect to take care of themselves.

Caregivers may think they should be strong enough to bear heavy burdens without complaining or becoming angry. But if they don't acknowledge when they feel angry, sad, or afraid, they run the risk of spiritual and emotional exhaustion. And if they neglect taking care of their bodies by working nonstop, not eating well, not sleeping enough, or not getting exercise, they will run out of energy and may even collapse.

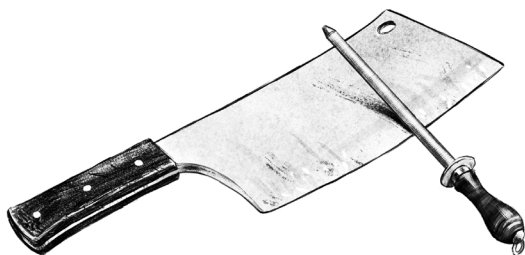
G. Caregivers may neglect their own family.

Caring for people takes time. Caregivers can easily spend so much time with others that their own family is neglected. Spouses may become depressed or angry. Children may feel angry that their parent has time for everyone else but no time for them. The parent may not be at home enough to discipline them. Eventually, caregivers who neglect their families will face serious problems.

4. How can caregivers take care of themselves?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. (*Hold up a knife and sharpening file. If a knife would remind the participants of their trauma too much, use a pencil and a pencil sharpener.*) What will happen to this knife if it is never sharpened?
2. Is the time it takes to sharpen it wasted or well-used?



We are God's instruments for good in the world. If instruments are not cared for, they will break down and lose their usefulness. Just as we must stop using a knife to clean and sharpen it, so we must stop and care for ourselves. Then we will be able to take care of others.

When we listen to many people, the burden of all their pain can be very heavy, much heavier than any one of them bears individually. We have to be careful not to be crushed by it.

A. Let God care for you.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

1. Read 1 Kings 19.3–8. What did God do for Elijah when he was tired and discouraged?

2. Read Mark 6.30–32. What did Jesus tell the disciples after they had finished ministering to many people?

God has promised to comfort us, help us, and be strong for us when we are overwhelmed. He understands that we are weak. Even Jesus got tired and sad and felt troubled. The Bible gives us many examples of God’s servants who were so tired that they could not continue their work. God gave them special care at that time. Take time in prayer to know God’s love and care for you.

B. Share your burdens with others.

Have regular times for sharing and prayer with a small group or another person. Share with other caregivers or mature Christians. In the same way that people who have experienced trauma need to talk it out, caregivers need to share their burdens with someone (Ga 6.2).

C. Share the workload with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Read Exodus 18.13–23. What was Moses’ problem? How did he solve it?

Sharing the workload means, first of all, giving up some of the control of your ministry. Others will do things differently than you do, and you will no longer be at the center of everything that happens.

Identify others in the church who are mature and who are gifted in helping others. It is good to have a balanced team of people: men and women, from different ages and ethnic groups (Ro 12.4–8). Train them how to help others, and then let the people know that they can go to them for help when they have problems. Help church members understand that people besides the pastor or priest can help them. Christians can minister to one another. Help church members understand that you will be able to work better if you can take time to “sharpen your knife.” Then your satisfaction comes from training others well and seeing them succeed.

If people from other churches come to you, explain to their church leaders what is happening so they don’t think that you are trying to

steal their members. Train these church leaders how to help people with wounded hearts.

D. Take time away from the situation.

Find opportunities to rest and get away from the difficulties and pain. Jesus and his disciples did. *“There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn’t even have time to eat. So he said to them, ‘Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest a while’”* (Mk 6.31). Sometimes it takes several days—even weeks—of rest to begin to release the burden.

Spouses and children are part of our ministry, not a barrier to it. Caregivers need to reserve time for their spouse and children. A family retreat or holiday might be appropriate.

E. Take care of your body.

- Get exercise daily. Exercise releases stress.
- Get enough sleep. Adults need 7–8 hours per night.
- Eat good, nourishing food. If money for food is limited, learn about less expensive options such as beans and rice. Don’t become so busy with work that you forget to eat. You need good food to be strong physically.

CLOSING EXERCISES

1. In small groups, describe your workload. How can you care for yourself and your family as you care for others?
2. Read Psalm 1 together. Discuss what trees need to grow and bear fruit. In what ways has God given you the things you need to grow and bear fruit?
3. Time permitting, do the Container exercise or Tree exercise below.

CONTAINER EXERCISE

Sometimes we can be overwhelmed by what we have experienced but we are not in a situation where we can express how we feel. This exercise can be helpful.

Close your eyes, or just look down at the floor so you are not distracted. Imagine a big container. It could be a big box or a shipping container. Imagine a way to lock the container, like a key or a padlock.

Now imagine putting all the things that are disturbing you right now into the container: big things, small things—everything that is disturbing you. When they are all inside the container, close it. Now lock the container and put the key somewhere safe. Do not throw it away. When you are ready, open your eyes and look up.

Later, find a time when you can get quiet. Take the key, open the container, and take out the things you have put inside one by one. You may want to do this with someone who can help you talk about these things. Do not leave them in the container forever!

TREE EXERCISE

This is an exercise for increasing resiliency. Doing this exercise when you are not under stress will help you be able to relax in times of stress.

Read Psalm 1 (very important!). Now close your eyes (or, if that makes you uncomfortable, just fix your eyes in one place). Imagine that you are a tree.

- What kind of tree would you be? See yourself as that kind of tree.
- In your imagination, look around. Is your tree by itself?
- What's the landscape around you?

Now look at the trunk of the tree.

- Notice it going down into the earth and up into the branches. Follow the branches way out into the leaves. (If it's a fruit tree: See the fruit hanging from the branches).

Now follow the trunk down to the roots.

- Look at the roots—is it a long single root or many roots going out? Notice how the roots are anchored into the ground.

- Now watch how the root system is bringing water and nutrients to the roots and how those nutrients travel up the tree to the branches.

Notice the weather.

- Imagine the sun shining on the leaves, making oxygen. Imagine the tree just being there with just the right temperature and light.
- Now the tree needs a bit of water. Imagine a gentle rain slowly coming down over the leaves and going towards the roots. See the water going down, down into the roots. See the moisture being taken up into the tree.
- Now stop the rain and imagine the sun coming out again to dry the leaves.

Now imagine the tree with some live creatures—perhaps birds, or squirrels or insects going up and down. Watch all the activity.

Now there's a storm.

- Black clouds are beginning to form in the distance. The storm won't harm or destroy the tree but the storm *will* come.
- The wind is picking up and the clouds are coming. The branches are shaking. The trunk is moving back and forth. Some of the leaves are falling and some of the fruit is falling.
- Now focus on how the roots are holding firm and allowing the tree to move back and forth in the wind. Let the storm go on a bit. Feel the tree moving back and forth with its roots firmly planted in the ground.
- Now the storm is slowing gradually until everything is still again.
- How is the tree feeling after the storm?
- Now the sun is returning. The insects and birds are coming back out again. Things are drying. Imagine the tree coming back to normal.

When the tree is still again, the sun is shining, the insects and the birds are back out again, gradually take some deep breaths and open your eyes.

TAKING YOUR PAIN TO THE CROSS

We have taken time to recognize the pains we are carrying, and we have expressed that pain by sharing and listening to one another, in laments, and in the art exercise. Now we will bring those pains to the cross of Christ and ask him to bring healing to our wounded hearts.

This exercise should be done toward the end of the seminar, after people have been thinking about their heart wounds and feel ready to share their pain with God and others. Do it in a way that people know they will not be criticized and that what they choose to share will be held in confidence and not used against them. The exercise is not a magic ritual, but a way to experience God beginning to heal our pain. It is often done as an evening session.

To prepare for this exercise, leaders need the following items:

- A cross made of wood, or if that is not possible, a cross drawn on a box. If the symbol of the cross is not acceptable to the group, use a plain box for participants to put their papers in.
- Pen and paper for each person. If paper is not available, or if people are not literate, or if they are afraid their security might be at risk if they write down their pain even for a moment, get sticks or something else that can be burned for participants to use to symbolize their pain.
- Song sheets or recorded music
- Matches. In some urban contexts it may not be possible to burn the papers. In those situations, find another creative way of destroying them, such as using a paper shredder.
- Nails and a hammer if the papers are to be nailed to the cross. Or a basket if the papers are laid at the foot of the cross.
- a place to burn the papers

- a fire-proof container in which to burn the papers
- a stick or other tool to stir the fire

The large group is divided into small groups of two where each person has the opportunity to share their deepest pain. The leaders need to decide in advance how best to group participants. Sometimes, it is important to keep men with men, pastors with pastors, and women with women. If the point of the seminar is ethnic reconciliation, people from different ethnic groups could be put together. When people trust each other enough to share and hear each other's deepest pain, healing often takes place. Children should be grouped with at least one adult. In some situations, it may be best for participants to form their own small groups.

It may be good to talk about the experience the next day, to discuss how people felt about it and how they could do this with other groups in their churches. Healing takes time. This ceremony will not necessarily heal all hurts instantaneously, and we may need to bring our pain to Christ many times in the healing process. We can do this in our thoughts and prayers, even in the middle of the night.

1. Identify the wounds of your heart

Read aloud (or tell in your own words) the following:

We are here to take our pain to the cross. We are taught in Scripture that Jesus came not only to bear our sins but also to bear our pain and heal us. In the Gospel according to Matthew we read: *"When evening came, people brought to Jesus many who had demons in them. Jesus drove out the evil spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. He did this to make come true what the prophet Isaiah had said, 'He himself took our sickness and carried away our diseases'"* (Mt 8.16–17).

Matthew was quoting from the book of Isaiah, which says: *"We despised him and rejected him; he endured suffering and pain. . . . But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God"* (Is 53.3–4).

In Luke 4 we learn that Jesus went to the synagogue and read aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people” (Lk 4.18–19).

We further learn that after reading this passage, “*Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read”*” (Lk 4.20–21).

Jesus felt the full burden of human pain and sinfulness. Jesus knows the pain that is in our hearts and we need to bring it to him so he can heal us. In this exercise, we will bring our pains to the cross.

A. Write down your worst pain.

Take time alone and ask God to show you the painful things that are buried deep in your heart. Which ones are most painful? Which memories do you not like to think about? Write these down. We will bring these to the cross and burn them later, so no one will ever see what you have written.

Be as specific as possible. This is an opportunity to write down the heavy things in your heart that you want to bring to Christ, such as:

- Painful things that have been done to you.
- Painful things you have seen done to others, or bad dreams you have had.
- Painful things you have heard about that have happened to others.
- Painful things that you may have done to others.

Take about twenty minutes for this. If someone is not able to write, they could make a mark on paper or have someone else write for them, or use an object to represent their pain.

B. Share your pain in small groups.

Divide into groups of two or three. Give each person the opportunity to share as much or as little as they wish of what they wrote down. The other two should listen without criticizing or offering advice. Share openly but don’t dwell on violent parts. Pray for one another.

2. Bring your wounds and pain to Jesus

In the large group, say: What can we do with these pains? We can bring them to Jesus, by whose stripes we are healed, as it says in Isaiah 53.4–6:

*But he endured the suffering that should have been ours,
the pain that we should have borne.*

*All the while we thought that his suffering
was punishment sent by God.*

*But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.*

*We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.*

*All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.*

*But the LORD made the punishment fall on him,
the punishment all of us deserved.*

A. Talk to Jesus about your pain.

Take some time to bring your pain to Jesus. Tell him exactly what it is: for example, anger, sadness, loneliness, or feeling abandoned. Empty your soul. Let any emotions you feel about the pain come out.

B. Bring your pain to the cross.

Bring the paper on which you wrote your pain to the cross. Nail it to the cross, or put it in the box at the foot of the cross. As you do, say, “I’m handing over my suffering to Jesus, who died on the cross for me.”

C. Burn the papers.

When all the papers have been deposited, take them outside and read Isaiah 61.1–3.

The Sovereign LORD has filled me with his Spirit.

He has chosen me and sent me

To bring good news to the poor,

To heal the broken-hearted,

To announce release to captives

And freedom to those in prison.

*He has sent me to proclaim
That the time has come
When the LORD will save his people
And defeat their enemies.
He has sent me to comfort all who mourn,
To give to those who mourn in Zion
Joy and gladness instead of grief,
A song of praise instead of sorrow.
They will be like trees
That the LORD himself has planted.
They will all do what is right,
And God will be praised for what he has done.*

Now burn the papers to show that the suffering we have experienced has become like ashes. This can be a time of experiencing God's healing.

Afterwards, each person should pray for the person on either side of them, that Jesus will continue to heal their wounded hearts.

3. Share the good things God has done

Invite some people to share the ways that they have seen God at work, even in the midst of their problems.

Thank God and praise him in words and songs because he is healing the wounds in our hearts.

HOW CAN WE FORGIVE OTHERS?

1. Farid wants to forgive

Over the years, it became clear how the attack on Dallup had happened. Their neighbor in Dallup, Ibrahim, had leaked information that allowed the Sinah snipers to infiltrate the village and carry out the attack. Ibrahim and his family left for safety just in time. “He was my neighbor! My brother!” Farid said. “How could he have betrayed us? He profited, no doubt, but it cost me my life, my home, and my little Issam!”

As a Christian, Farid did not take revenge, but he could not stop hating Ibrahim. Many nights he tossed and turned, going over every detail, and he could never say enough bad things about Ibrahim to anyone who would listen.

Once again, Uncle Fouad was in Al-Ramlia, leading evening meetings. Farid went to listen. That night, the topic was forgiveness. “If you don’t forgive those who have offended you,” he said, “God will not forgive you.” Farid yawned and looked at his watch, wondering when the meeting would be over.

Then Uncle Fouad had the group act out a story from the Bible. Farid had a reputation as a good actor and so he was chosen to play the role of a man who owed a huge amount of money, so much he could never repay it. He begged the lender to have mercy and, to his great surprise, the lender agreed and said, “Fine. Go free.” He enjoyed playing this part of the drama very much. The next part was more difficult. Someone owed him a very small amount of money, and he had to refuse to forgive him despite the way the man begged and pleaded. Farid felt miserly and miserable. How could this man be so short-sighted?

Then Uncle Fouad said to the group, “You see, God forgave our sins—a debt we could not pay, so we should forgive others for the small things they have done to us.”

After the meeting, Farid and Uncle Fouad went back to the hillside to talk privately. “That may be true about small things,” Farid said. “But what Ibrahim has done to me is big! I will never forget what he did, never!”

Uncle Fouad said, “No one has asked you to forget what happened. You will always remember. But when you forgive, you will remember the event without feeling the pain. Would you like that? Bitterness can poison you, you know!”

Farid said, “Yes, but what Ibrahim did was not right. He broke our brotherhood. He betrayed us for his own benefit. Look at my life now!”

Uncle Fouad answered, “Forgiving is not saying that what Ibrahim did was right! But it means you have turned it over to God to do justice. And God will bring justice better than you can!”

Farid responded, “You have a point there! I don’t even know where Ibrahim is!”

Uncle Fouad said, “Forgiving Ibrahim does not mean he will not face the consequences—from God, from the law, from those around him.”

Farid said, “Well, all that’s fine and well, but as for me, I can never trust that man again.”

Uncle Fouad said, “Exactly. It would be stupid to trust him again, not unless he had proven that he was trustworthy—and that would take a lot of time. But forgiving him does not mean you trust him again. It just means you are giving up your right to hold a grudge against him. If Christ has healed your pain and forgiven you for all your sins, can you forgive Ibrahim for what he did?”

Farid said, “Maybe if Ibrahim apologized sincerely, I could forgive him.”

Uncle Fouad, “No, it’s not like that. Jesus forgave the people who beat and killed him, who spit on him and mocked him. They never apologized. Forgiving is something you do regardless of what Ibrahim does or doesn’t do.”

Farid went silent. Uncle Fouad was always right, and the way he talked about forgiveness made it seem like a really good thing! He had to admit to himself that his bitterness was making his life miserable.

Finally Farid confessed, “Uncle Fouad, I would like to be able to forgive Ibrahim for the evil thing he did, but I am not able to let go of the bitterness I’ve felt all these years.”

“You’re so right! Being able to forgive is a gift of God. It’s not something we can do on our own. Ask God to help you forgive Ibrahim, or

maybe you can start by asking God to help you want to forgive Ibrahim,” said Uncle Fouad.

That night, all alone, Farid prayed, “God, please help me want to forgive Ibrahim. I give what he did to us into your hands.” Tears welled up in his eyes. And when he said Amen, he felt somehow different, like a heavy weight had fallen from him. He woke up in the morning refreshed and happy.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did not forgiving affect Farid?
2. What helped him be able to forgive?
3. How is forgiveness different from what Farid expected?

2. Forgiveness is not . . .

- saying the offense didn’t matter or that we were not hurt by what the person did.
- being able to make sense of why the person did what he or she did.
- acting as if the event never happened.
- dependent on offenders apologizing first or changing their behavior.
- letting those who do wrong avoid the consequences of their action.
- letting the offender hurt us or other innocent people again.
- trusting a person again right after they hurt us.

3. How can we forgive others?

If we think forgiving is too hard for us to do, we are right. God is the only one who can enable us to forgive (1 P 2.24).

A. Bring the pain to Christ.

Forgiving someone means that we recognize that the person has wronged us and we accept the pain their sin has caused us. To say it has not hurt if it did is to lie, and we are called to speak the truth (Eph 4.25). We bring our pain to the cross and release it to Jesus. When Jesus heals our pain, then we will be able to forgive those who have hurt us.

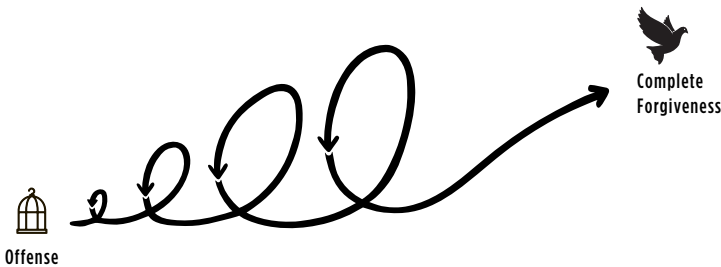
B. Do not wait for the other person to apologize.

Often we are unwilling to forgive until the offender has apologized to us. Or we want to see that the person has changed their behavior before we forgive them. Like Jesus, we need to forgive people, even if they are not sorry about the evil they have done (Ro 5.8). On the cross he said, “*Forgive them, Father! They don’t know what they are doing*” (Lk 23.34).

C. Allow time for the process.

Forgiveness does not happen all at once. We start to forgive, but sometimes we circle back as we remember the hurt of the offense. Then we forgive again a little more thoroughly, and gradually we make our way to complete forgiveness.

When we forgive someone, we will still remember what happened. At first, we may still feel the pain associated with it. When this happens, we need to continue to take the parts that hurt to Jesus. The commitment to forgive often comes before the feelings of forgiveness, and sometimes long before. As we bring our hurt to Jesus over and over, eventually we will feel less pain when we remember the event.



The cycle of forgiveness

If we forgive someone, it does not mean that we trust him or her immediately. Just because we have forgiven a person does not mean that he or she has changed. Even if there is a change, trust has been broken and will take time to rebuild. Little by little, as we have good experiences with that person, we will begin to trust him or her again. But it may take a long time before we can trust him or her completely, if ever.

D. Let the offender face the consequences of their action.

Forgiving someone does not mean that they will not be punished if they have done wrong things. By forgiving, we allow God to judge and take revenge (Ro 12.19–21). He can do this much better than we can.

God has given national and traditional leaders the job of punishing criminals and protecting the innocent (Ro 13.1–4). Even though we have forgiven someone, it may be necessary to bring them to justice to prevent others from being hurt in the future.

Forgiveness does not mean that the offender is excused from paying back what was taken. Some things, like virginity or a person's life, can never be repaid. But if someone has stolen a bicycle, for example, the thief should return or replace it (Nu 5.5–7). Sin must be paid for, even if it involves great expense. God gave us the model to follow when Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross—and he was completely innocent (Col 1.20–22).



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

How are the biblical ideas about forgiveness similar to our cultural ones? How are they different?

4. Why does God want us to forgive other people?

A. Forgiveness frees us from anger and bitterness.

When we are angry, we can give Satan a foothold in our hearts (Eph 4.26–27). We become slaves of anger and bitterness and they begin to destroy us. If we do not forgive someone who has offended us, we are the ones who suffer. Refusing to forgive can make us physically ill with headaches, stomach ulcers, or heart problems. It may make us become as violent and evil as those who offended us. Forgiveness releases us from all this. We forgive for our own good (2 Co 2.10–11).

If we do not forgive others, we pass our hatred on to our children. This can result in cycles of revenge and violence between groups which can go on for generations. The letter to the Hebrews tells us: *“Try to be at peace with everyone, and try to live a holy life, because no one will see the Lord without it. Guard against turning back from the grace of God. Let no one*

become like a bitter plant that grows up and causes many troubles with its poison” (He 12.14–15). Only forgiveness can break this cycle of revenge.

B. Forgiving others allows us to receive God’s forgiveness.

We forgive so that we can be forgiven by God. Matthew 6.14–15 says, *“If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.”* (See also Mk 11.25.)



Forgiveness sets us free from the chains of bitterness

C. Forgiveness shows that we understand Christ’s sacrifice and our salvation.

When we understand how much we have offended God by our sinfulness, and how Jesus offered himself for our forgiveness even before we repented (1 Jn 4.10), any offense we have experienced will seem small. We will want to extend that same forgiveness to others (Eph 4.32; Mt 18.21–35).

D. Forgiveness allows us to be reconciled with those who have offended us.

Until we forgive those who have offended us, our relationship with them will suffer. Forgiveness makes it possible for our relationship with them to be restored. Full restoration, however, requires repentance and forgiveness by both parties.

E. Forgiveness can change the person who offended us.

Forgiving someone may be the start of God bringing that person to repentance. In Acts 7, as Stephen was dying, he forgave those who were killing him. One of those people was Saul, who later became Paul the apostle (Acts 7.59–8.1).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What do you find the hardest thing about forgiving someone? What has helped you the most to forgive others?
2. What traditions do you have that help you to forgive others? What traditions do you have that hinder you from forgiving?

5. What if we are the ones who have caused the offense?

A. We need to repent.

- We allow God's Spirit to show us how much our sin hurts him and others. This may make us sad and even weep (Jas 4.8–9). This sorrow can be good for us. *"For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death"* (2 Co 7.10, NLT). Both Peter and Judas were sad that they had denied Jesus, but Peter's sorrow brought him closer to God; Judas's led him to kill himself.
- We take responsibility for what we have done and clearly state our sin (Pr 28.13; Ps 32.3–5).
- We seek God's forgiveness of our sin, and then accept that he has done so (1 Jn 1.9).

- We ask those we have offended to forgive us, without defending ourselves, blaming them, or demanding that they trust us again right away (Jas 5.16). We should ask forgiveness in such a way that all those affected by our sin are aware of our repentance. For example, if we insulted someone in front of others, then we should ask forgiveness in front of the other people as well.
- If we have repented in our hearts, we will show it by the way we act (Acts 26.20b).
- Repentance may involve paying back what was taken (Nu 5.5–7).

B. How can the church help people repent?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

As a church, how do we deal with members when they sin? Has this helped them to repent?

Church leaders are charged to watch over the spiritual life of their members (1 P 5.1b–3). If a member is sinning, and will not listen to those who talk to him about his sin, the church leaders should talk to him (Mt 18.15–17; Ga 6.1).

CLOSING EXERCISES

Omit these exercises if the group will be going on to the Forgiveness Ceremony.

1. Have one person read each of the following verses aloud and give the main point.

Ephesians 4.32	Matthew 18.21–22
Matthew 18.35	Romans 12.14
2. Take five minutes in silence to ask God to show you any sins of which you need to repent. Confess those sins to God and receive his forgiveness. At the end of the time, read 1 John 1.9 aloud.
3. Take another five minutes to reflect on any people that you need to forgive. Ask God to help you forgive them.
4. Share together what God has shown you about forgiveness.

5. Praise God, in words and in song, that he forgives us and enables us to forgive others.

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

1. Two stories of conflict

Church conflict

Have the group act out this skit spontaneously. Don't tell anyone what the story is about except one person: the person who plays the role of Peter. Have him read Acts 6.1–7 and be ready to say, "Stop! It's not right for us to stop studying and preaching God's word in order to distribute food. So, choose some wise men to put in charge of this problem." Read the script aloud or use your own words to direct the skit.

In a large church in the capital city, trouble was brewing. This church was known for taking care of the widows in the congregation. At this time there were two groups of widows, and both groups were good Christians.

The first group of widows had always lived in the homeland. *(Choose a group of people and send them to one side to look like sad widows.)* Every day, the church sent some workers to give these widows food and the other things they needed. *(Choose a group of people to carry food and clothes to the widows. The widows should look happy.)*

The second group of widows was made up of women who were displaced by war and had lived in another country so long that they no longer spoke their own language. *(Choose a group of people to be the second group of widows. Put them at a distance from the first group. They should act like sad widows as well.)* The church sent them food as well. *(Have another group of people start taking food and clothes to them.)*

One day the widows who used to live abroad started complaining that they were getting less food than the widows who had always lived there. *(Have the second group of widows start yelling and complaining.)*

Soon many in the church got involved in the argument. (*Have the servers of food start arguing, some on the side of one group of widows, some on the other—by now all of them should be shouting and arguing.*)

(*Now have “Peter” walk in and say:*) “Stop! It’s not right for us to stop studying and preaching God’s word in order to distribute food. So, choose some wise men to put in charge of this problem.” The church members thought this was good and chose some people from each side. (*Have them do this.*)

If they have not realized by now, tell them that this is the story in Acts 6. Then read the Bible story or retell it from memory:

At the time when the Church was just beginning, many Jews had been displaced, and were living in foreign countries. They lived there so long that they took on the customs and language of their adopted country. They feared God and continued to worship him and made trips back to Jerusalem as often as possible. They believed it was good to be buried in the homeland, so older couples moved back to Israel if they could. Often the husband died first, leaving his widow in need of someone to provide for her.

Meanwhile, the Jews who stayed in Israel through the years continued to follow their customs and speak their own language. They felt that because they had never left their land or traditions, they were better in God’s eyes. Even though they were poorer, they looked down on the foreign Jews.

One of their traditions was to care for widows as it was taught in the Bible. Out of obedience to God, they took care of the foreign Jewish widows just like they took care of their own. But there were so many foreign Jewish widows that the homeland Jews had a hard time caring for them.

In the early Church, it wasn’t long before tensions formed between the homeland Jews and the foreign Jews. The foreign Jews complained that their widows were not being given their share when food was handed out each day. So the apostles called a meeting to address the problem openly. They realized that these ethnic tensions could destroy the Church. They said, “It’s not right for us to give up God’s word in order to distribute food. So, brothers and sisters, choose seven men who are respected, wise, and full of the Holy Spirit. We will put them in charge of this problem.”

The Church chose seven men. At least one of these men was from the group of foreign Jews. They dealt with the problem, and the Church continued to grow. The unity between the foreign Jews and those who stayed in the homeland was a strong testimony to those outside the Church.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What were the historical causes of the conflict in Acts 6.1–7?
2. How did the leaders keep these tensions from ruining the Church?

The school committee

Salwa overheard Ramez talking with Daud. “They’re so bad, the Sinah. Don’t ever trust them for anything! And they smell. Have you noticed?”

“Yes,” said Daud. “Did you see what Husani did in class today? It was so stupid! What our teacher whispered to us after class is right: the only good people from this group are dead ones.” The boys roared with laughter.

Salwa was not amused. Conflict between these different people groups had gone on for generations, and each side could cite a long list of losses: people killed, property lost, and massacres. Their country would always be poor if they could not learn to live together peacefully.

About that time, Farid was selected to serve on a committee at Ramez’s school. The first meeting of the committee took place on a Wednesday evening. He went dressed in his best clothes. There were five committee members in all: two Sinah men, Amer and Iyad, and one Sinah woman, and then Farid and another Hallak woman. The school director, who was not from the area, chaired the meeting.

The director opened the meeting and described the task of the committee. They needed books and computers for the classrooms and they could not rely on the government to provide them. Without these materials, their children’s education would suffer.

The committee was concerned for their children’s future and a lively discussion followed. Farid was surprised at the good ideas that came from Amer and Iyad, and the two women also had good points to make! Together they discussed different ideas for a couple hours, and finally came up with a good plan.

After the meeting they had a meal and the group visited together. Farid had never had much personal contact with the Sinah. He was

surprised to hear them talk about their concerns for the future of the children of Al-Ramlia.

The committee met regularly for six months. Little by little, Farid began to think of Amer and Ivad as friends, forgetting that they were Sinah.

One day a fight broke out at the school between a Hallak student and a Sinah student. They were hurling insults and fists at each other, and students were beginning to take sides in a shouting match. A small offense was igniting attitudes the children had learned at home. Farid and Amir happened to be at the school at the time and went to see what all the commotion was.

As they realized what was going on, the two men stood together in the middle of the crowd of children and shouted in a loud voice, “Quiet down, everyone!” As the fight calmed down, Farid told the group, “Both Sinah and Hallak children are created by God in God’s image. We need to respect one another. It’s time to go home now, but over the next week I want each of you to get to know someone who is different than you. We will be back next week to hear what you have learned.” The students grudgingly agreed and started to head for their homes. Farid and Amir looked at each other with satisfaction. Maybe there was hope for Al-Ramlia. Maybe there was hope for their country.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why did Farid, Amer, and Ivad have trouble accepting each other?
2. What will others think when they see these three men together?
3. How could these three men begin to bring the two groups together?

2. What are some causes of conflict between groups?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Are there conflicts in your community or country? What are the roots of these conflicts?

A. Desire for resources

At the base of every conflict is the desire to have something so strongly we are willing to fight for it (Jas 4.1–3). We may fight over land or water

or political power, for example. We may be greedy and want more than our share of the available resources, or fearful that resources are running short, or fearful that others will take what we have from us.

B. Ineffective or unjust governments

God has put governments in place to see that people receive justice (Ro 13.1–4, 1 Ti 2.1–2). If governments do not protect their citizens and there is widespread suffering, at some point people rebel. In times of political instability, old conflicts between groups resurface because there is no one to stop them.

C. Troublemakers

Some individuals, like Hitler, can single-handedly stir up whole nations to war. The newspapers and radio can also fan the flames of hatred. Soon people start killing each other without really understanding why, and a cycle of violence begins. Once it is started, it can only be stopped by radical forgiveness (Mt 5.43–48).

D. A heritage of prejudice

Children often learn prejudice and hatred for other groups from their parents. Whenever we think, “The people from the other group are always . . .,” we are expressing prejudice. Prejudices portray all members of the other group as if they are the same, and all bad. Prejudices keep people from ever finding out what the other group is really like. If they knew each other, they would discover that their prejudices are not accurate. God accepts people from every group (Acts 10.34–35).

In times of conflict, all the problems are blamed on the other group. To be able to kill them without feeling guilty, the other group is portrayed as if its people aren’t even human. Meanwhile, people see their own group as superior, and entitled to certain things. For example, a group may feel entitled to special respect and service from those who were their slaves earlier in history.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are the prejudices you may have inherited about another group? Can you think of any examples that would show these ideas are not true?
2. How do others describe your group? What examples might they have for this description?

3. How can we live as Christians in the midst of conflict?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Write on a flip chart or blackboard the four headings below (points A to D). Assign one heading to each small group and ask them—keeping their books closed—to find Bible passages that apply to that subject. Share responses in the large group and then add anything below not already mentioned.

God calls Christians to be salt and light, bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ into evil and dark situations (Mt 5.13–16; Phil 2.14–16). Conflict between Christians is a special cause of concern, as it affects the testimony of Christ in the world, as Jesus said: “*I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me* (Jn 17.21). Christians are to have their minds transformed by Christ. This means that they should react differently from non-Christians (Ro 12.1–2). This is the path of blessing, but it is not easy. It needs a daily, intentional decision.

A. God wants us to trust in his sovereignty.

Matthew 10.28–31 says:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!

Not even a small bird dies without God knowing it. We can trust that God sees what happens to us. He will use it for our good (Ro 8.28).

We must look beyond the evildoer to see the hand of God in the situation. Both Joseph and Jesus suffered, but God used their suffering for good (Gn 45.5–7; Acts 3.13–15). God is at work, even through people's evil intentions.

God tells us that our lives are not our own. God knows the date of our death before we're even born (Ps 139.15–16). If we have been spared while others have died, it is because God still has a purpose for our lives (Esther 4.13–14; 2 Th 1.11–12).

B. God wants us to be prepared to give up everything but Christ.

In times of conflict, everything that defines who we are may be taken from us: our family members, our homes, our possessions, our work, our own lives. Only Christ can never be taken from us. 1 Peter 1.3–6 says:

Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope, and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away. They are for you, who through faith are kept safe by God's power for the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

We must voluntarily give up the cultural prejudices with which we grew up. Old ways of judging others must go; they are worldly and cause divisions. 2 Corinthians 5.16–18 says:

No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so. Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also.

Our only desire must be to know Christ, and to help others know him (Ga 2.20; Phil 1.21; 3.7–9). Christ has redeemed us from all of the evil in our past (1 P 1.17–19).

We must give up any rights we think we might have as members of our group. God has no favorites; all people are accepted equally by him (Acts 10.34; Ro 2.9–11). We now belong to a new nation with other believers where everyone is equal (1 P 2.9; Eph 2.18–22; Rev 5.9–10). Christ provided the model for us to follow when he gave up his rights to save us (Phil 2.5–11).

Everything we give up for Christ will be rewarded one hundred times (Mt 19.29; Lk 9.23), but the process is not easy.

C. God tells us not to take revenge, but to show love.

Romans 12.19–21 says:

Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, 'I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.' Instead, as the scripture says: 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.' Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

As Christians, we no longer have the responsibility to take revenge for the wrongs done to us or our families. We are to show love and allow God to punish others (Mt 5.38–42). Revenge does not bring peace to our hearts or bring back what was lost. It only perpetuates the violence.

Each human life is sacred because it reflects God's image (Gn 1.27). We are not to destroy or mistreat it, but we may need to defend our lives and the lives of others.

God works through governments to bring justice, punish evildoers, and protect the innocent. The apostle Paul speaks about how Christians should treat those in authority. He says:

Everyone must obey state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God. Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgment on himself. For rulers are not to be feared by those who do good, but by those who do evil. Would you like to be unafraid of those in authority? Then do what is good, and they will praise you, because they are God's servants working for your own good. But if you do evil, then be afraid

of them, because their power to punish is real. They are God's servants and carry out God's punishment on those who do evil (Ro 13.1–4).

The most powerful thing Jesus did was to make himself completely vulnerable to his enemies while he was on the cross (1 P 2.21–23). People like Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States have challenged governments by standing against evil without using violence. These movements have resulted in correcting widespread injustice more effectively than a violent reaction could have, and those involved were not guilty of shedding blood.

D. God wants us to receive strength from him.

In times of conflict, we need to let Scripture transform us (2 Ti 3.16–17; Ro 12.1–2). We need to bring our wounds to God, perhaps in a lament (Phil 4.6–7). Spending time away from the situation “on the mountain” with God can restore our souls (Mk 6.31, 45–46). The Holy Spirit helps us, especially when we are weak (Acts 1.8; 2 Co 12.9–10). Meeting with other Christians to share our pains and pray for one another is helpful (He 10.25; Jas 5.16), but be careful not to talk about the situation in ways that sow more bitterness (1 Co 14.26).

4. How can we help bring reconciliation?

BRIDGE EXERCISE

Make an imaginary river in the middle of the room. A group is camped on each side of the river. They are in conflict. In small groups, have participants find something that symbolizes what they could do to make a bridge between the two groups. Have them explain their symbol as they lay it over the river. Top up with anything below that has not been mentioned.

A. We can become a bridge between the groups in conflict.

God created us to be social beings. By nature, we need to belong to a group. In times of conflict, we may have to sacrifice that need to belong so that we can become a bridge between the two groups in conflict. For

example, we should share food and resources with those in need, no matter which side they are on.

God calls us to love our enemies (Mt 5.43–48). When we do this, we no longer have any enemies. All people become our brothers. However, loving our enemies may put our lives at risk. Our “enemies” may want to harm us because we are their enemies. Members of our own group may also want to harm us because we have befriended the enemy. Close family members may condemn us (Eph 2.11–22).



If we do not know any other peacemakers in the situation, we may be alone with God as our only friend (Mt 5.9). We may well feel we are aliens in this world (1 P 1.1–2; He 11.13–16).

As a bridge between the two groups, we need to try to understand the pain that each side of the conflict has experienced from their perspective. Then we can help each side understand the pain of the other, give up prejudice, and view the other as human (Ro 12.17–21). If we hear too much from one side, we may begin to see only their point of view. We will need to spend time with the other side to recover perspective.

B. We can lead people to Christ so that they find healing and repent of their sins.

God has given us the ministry of reconciling people to himself in Christ (2 Co 5.17–20). Where there is conflict, nearly everyone has wounds of the heart. These should be brought to Christ so he can heal the pain. Where people have sinned against others, they must repent and ask God and those they have hurt to forgive them.

C. We can help people repent of the sins of their group.

The worst things that happen in the world are caused not by individuals, but by groups: ethnic groups, governments, religious groups. Even if we were not involved personally in causing suffering, as members of our group, we need to repent before God for the suffering our group has caused. Then we need to ask forgiveness of those we have hurt on behalf of our group. In the Bible, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Ezra did this on behalf of their people (Dn 9.4–9; Ne 9.1–37; Ezra 9.5–15; Lv 26.40). There are also many examples of people doing this today: Americans asking forgiveness of Native Americans, Germans asking forgiveness of the Dutch for the suffering they inflicted on them during World War II, South African Whites asking forgiveness of Blacks. Often when one group repents and asks forgiveness, the other group repents as well, and reconciliation follows.

D. Groups should discuss their problems openly and find solutions.

When the pain in people's hearts is healed, the real problems that started the conflict must be addressed. People need to work together, give and take, and find a solution that is fair and acceptable to all.

No problems are too small to need attention. No matter how small, they can become big if they are not solved.

E. Celebrate Christ and the unity he brings.

When Christ has broken down barriers between us, we need to celebrate and praise him together (Eph 2.14). He is Lord. He sets us free from the lies and traps of the enemy.

CLOSING EXERCISE

In small groups, discuss practical steps you could take to help reconcile conflicts in your community. Pray for any enemies you have (1 P 4.8).

PREPARING FOR TROUBLE

1. Trouble coming!

“There’s been no trouble for some time,” Farid said to Salwa one night. “But I hear that the Sinah are planning to attack again soon.”

Shock and fear appeared on Salwa’s face. More trouble? Later that day she was chatting with Sarah and told her what Farid had said.

“Well,” Sarah said, “if we think trouble is coming, we should get prepared.”

“What do you mean—get prepared? Shouldn’t we just pray to God to protect us?” Salwa asked.

“Well, yes, we should pray,” Sarah said, “but we also do some other things. We need to organize people to make evacuation packs.”

“What’s an evacuation pack?” said Salwa.

“You make a pack of really important things in a backpack or a sack you can carry. You keep it ready in a safe place so if trouble comes you can grab it and run,” said Sarah.

“Oh, so I’d put clothes, and rice, and dried meat, and pans and water ...” said Salwa.

“Wait a minute! You have to be able to carry it! You have to think carefully about what you should take. We can make a list tonight with the others.”

“I know when we fled from Dallup, I wished so much we had brought some medicine. Maybe little Issam would have lived if we had brought medicine!” Salwa said.

“Yes, that’s it. Medicines, important documents, matches ... we’ll make a list with the others.”

That night people got together to discuss how to prepare. They discussed back and forth what should be in their evacuation until finally everyone had decided what they would put in their pack. Then

Sarah said, “We also need to plan how to communicate with each other. Families could get separated.”

The group planned places to flee to if trouble came unexpectedly. They chose two locations in case one was blocked. Everyone could flee there and wait for the others. Parents agreed to teach their children where to go, and to be sure that they knew how to say their full name (their name, their father’s name, and their family name)—in case they got separated. Salwa was already feeling less afraid as these plans came into shape.

The pastor was there and said, “Another way we can prepare is to think about ‘what if’ situations, and how we should respond as Christians. For example, what if someone held a gun to your head and told you to kill one of your family members or they would kill you. What would you do? What does the Bible say?”

The whole group became alive discussing this question. Some said one thing, the others another. They went on thinking of other ‘What if’ questions and discussing them.

In the end, the Sinah never came. But Salwa did not regret being ready.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Is it right to prepare for future trouble? Can you think of any Scriptures that say we should do this?
2. What troubles might you need to prepare for in your area?

2. Why should we prepare for the future?

God’s Word says, “*Sensible people will see trouble coming and avoid it, but an unthinking person will walk right into it and regret it later*” (Pr 22.3). God has given us intelligence and common sense and he expects us to use them. Church leaders are responsible before God to lead and look after their congregations (Acts 20.26–31; Jr 23.1).

People in the middle of a crisis often don’t have the ability to think in a clear way. If a decision has been made beforehand when there was time to study what God teaches, then it is much easier to do the right thing when a crisis comes.

Plans can also be developed for situations including natural disasters. For example, if a community lives near a volcano, or in an area subject

to flooding, plans can be made as a community as to what could be done to help prepare for a flood or a volcano eruption.

Sometimes government officials may think that the church leaders are getting involved with politics when they discuss this type of preparation with their congregations. Depending on the local situation, it may be good to talk with local officials about this and involve them in the planning. This may help them see the goodwill of the church.

There are three areas of preparation that are important: practical preparation, communication, and spiritual preparation.

3. How can we prepare practically?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Imagine the following situation: Your family is told that within thirty minutes they must leave to run into the bush. They can only take what they can carry. Make a list of the most important items to take and share this with the whole group.

Share the lists in the large group. Add anything not already mentioned from the list below:

- Medicines
- Food, including salt
- Water
- Matches
- Cooking pot
- Identity papers
- Knife and/or machete
- Radio and batteries
- Torch/flashlight
- Bible
- Extra clothes
- Phone

According to the local situation, other items will be added. If a family really only had thirty minutes to get ready, they would probably leave some important items behind. The best thing to do if it seems like trouble is coming is to prepare a bag of essential items. Then this can be collected quickly if the family needs to leave. All the above items except the radio (which is probably in daily use) could be put into the bag ready to go. There are various ways of preparing food so that it will not spoil. In some situations, it would be best to hide this bag in some other place where the family plans to go in case of trouble.

The church leaders also need to think about church belongings. If possible, they need to take the most important documents with them. In some situations, it could be dangerous for a list of church members or other church documents to fall into the wrong hands.

For both the families and for the church, large heavy items that are important but cannot be taken should be hidden. Wrapping things up well and burying them in the ground seems to be one of the best ways to hide things. Be sure a number of people know where they are buried!

4. How can we communicate when trouble comes?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Does your community have a plan of what to do if enemy soldiers are approaching or if a natural disaster occurs? If you do, explain it. If you do not, who should be involved in making a plan?

A. With our families

Each family should openly discuss the danger they see coming. This discussion should include the children (see Lesson 4). The family should plan where they will go in case of danger. They should decide on a meeting place if the family gets separated, and discuss different routes to get there. It is important that even very small children are capable of saying their name and their family name. Even a three-year-old can learn to do this. In one East African war where many families were separated, children who could clearly give this information were reunited with their parents much more rapidly than children who only knew their first name. This has also been true in cases of natural disasters such as the tsunami in Asia.

B. With the churches and the community

In a certain West African country, the pastor of a church heard that enemies from another ethnic group were coming to the village. He rang the church bell and everyone came running to the church. This made them an easy target for the enemies, and many people were killed in the church. Rather than calling people to come to the church, often it

is better to have a way of ringing the church bell (or drum) that means “Leave the village!” This should be discussed beforehand so people are ready to leave in small groups to arranged destinations.

If there is more than one church in a village, it is important that the church leaders get together and make a common plan. This should also involve community leaders. In a large town, plans should be made in each area of the town.

C. With the outside world

When trouble comes to an area it is important to have a way of making this known to the outside world. This may be done with media contacts, by contacting those who have prayed for the people in that area, or through local NGOs. This will help bring aid to the area and may help bring an end to the conflict.

5. How can we prepare spiritually for difficult situations?



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups. Have each group take one of the sections below, look up the Scripture passages, and discuss the questions. Then have each group give feedback to the large group.

A. What if a soldier tells you to kill someone or he will kill you?

Read Revelation 21.1–7 and Exodus 20.13 and discuss these questions:

1. What will happen to Christians when they die?
2. What does God say about murder?

Heaven is a much better place than earth. If a Christian is killed, that is not the worst thing that can happen! A person is made in the image of God. To kill someone is very wrong in God’s sight.

B. What if a soldier demands that you give him all you have?

Read Matthew 6.24–33, Hebrews 10.34, and Luke 12.15. Then discuss the following questions:

1. In Matthew, what does Jesus teach about possessions?
2. The writer to the Hebrews says that they have accepted something gladly. What was that?
3. Jesus says that our lives are not tied up in what?

People matter much more than material goods. Goods can be replaced later on; people cannot. We should be willing to give up our possessions rather than be killed.

C. What if the enemies say you must denounce Christ in order to stay alive?

Read Mark 8.31–9.1, Acts 4.13–21, and Revelation 3.7–10. Then discuss the following questions:

1. In the Mark passage, what does Jesus say his followers must do?
2. What does Jesus say about someone who tries to hold on to his own life rather than following Jesus?
3. In the Acts passage, why did Peter and John refuse to obey the religious leaders?
4. In the Revelation passage, why did Jesus praise the church of Philadelphia?

It is never right to deny that we follow Christ, but sometimes this can be very difficult. If we deny Christ and later truly repent, God will forgive us. Think of the story of Peter.

D. What if you are hiding people from an ethnic group that is being killed and their enemies come to your house? If they ask where these people are, will you answer truthfully?

Read Joshua 2.1–16. Then discuss the following questions:

1. Why did the spies come to Jericho? Who sent them?
2. Why did Rahab lie to the officials of Jericho?
3. Was she right to lie? Why or why not?

There may be special cases where it is right to deceive those who are against God. However this needs careful discussion because it is wrong to tell lies under normal circumstances.

E. Other “what if . . .” situations that may be helpful for your community to discuss:

1. What if a soldier tells a man to rape a woman or be killed?
2. What if soldiers make a person eat human flesh or be killed?
3. What if you are captured by the rebels? How will you behave?
4. What if soldiers attack your family? Will you defend them?
5. What if you are the only one who knows that a certain father in your community is HIV-positive and is sleeping with his wife without taking precautions? Should you do anything?
6. What if you are hiding an illegal immigrant and the police come looking for that person?

Add other cases according to your situation.

6. What are some general points that may help?

1. Promise together beforehand that no one will kill another person.
2. Do not panic in the face of danger but quickly say a short prayer (Lk 12.12).
3. Memorize Scripture passages beforehand that will help in these difficult situations.
4. Cooperate with other Christians. Work together for everyone’s safety. Especially protect children and the elderly.

CLOSING SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

As we look into the future, no one can know what will happen. Even if we plan ahead, we can never be sure how we will behave in a crisis. But we do know God wants us to prepare and will be with us, even in pain and suffering. Share your hopes and fears for the future, and pray for each other and for your community.

HELPING PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY AFTER A DISASTER

1. Earthquake

One night as Salwa was sleeping, she felt the earth move. Not much. But definitely, it moved.

The next morning, the news was all over Al-Ramlia. A massive earthquake had hit a nearby region. Homes, roads, and bridges were destroyed. The death toll was not yet known.

“We need to help these people,” Salwa said. She was not the only one who felt that way. Before long, a group was discussing what they could do.

The local government in Al-Ramlia along with NGOs in the area were arranging for supplies like tents, water, clothing and food to be delivered to the area. Maps were put up, and a detailed plan worked out.

“But what about helping people with the emotional trauma they have experienced?” Salwa asked. One of the NGO leaders responded right away, “That’s a very good point, Salwa. People need someone to listen to them after a disaster as much as they need all these other things.”

Salwa and Sarah volunteered to go to the area to help listen to others.

“But there are just two of you! There may be thousands of people who have lost everything,” a man shouted.

Salwa didn’t know how to respond, but Sarah stood up and said, “That’s a good point. I propose we train people here in how to listen after a disaster and so we can go with a team.”

“Who will pay for your transportation and food?” the man shouted.

Again, Salwa had no idea how to respond. She just knew she needed to help. To her great relief, an elderly gentleman stood up and said, “I will get funds to cover your expenses. I have some money set aside, and I’ll ask others to help.” Salwa felt relieved and thankful.

Within a few days, the group was organized, trained, and ready to go. When they arrived at a village in the earthquake zone, it was worse than they imagined. Right away Sarah organized them into teams of two to go to different areas of the village.

Salwa listened to women, men and children talk about how the quake happened, where they were, what they lost. Many people talked without stopping, but sometimes the conversation lulled. She remembered the three questions and used them with success: “What happened? How did you feel? What was the hardest part for you?”

That night the whole team came together to talk about the day. Telling the others about the stories she heard helped Salwa release some of the pain she had absorbed. They prayed together and then fell into a deep sleep, even though they were sleeping on the hard ground under the stars.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What kinds of help do people need right after a disaster?
2. How can we prepare to be ready to help others?
3. What kinds of emergencies are likely in your area?

2. Getting organized after a disaster

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

How can we get organized to help immediately after a disaster?

Discuss in the large group. Add any items from the list below that are not already mentioned.

Partners: Meet with partners and decide:

- Who will be the lead organization?
- Who will do what, where, and when? Victims may need food, shelter, medical help, reconnecting with loved ones, and trauma care.
- How will partners stay informed of activities and needs?
- How will requests for help and money be handled?
- If victims are in restricted access locations like refugee camps, how can they be reached?

Facilitators: Meet with trauma healing facilitators for a day or more to go over trauma symptoms and listening skills, and to organize who will do what where and with whom.

Materials: People are less likely to read after a disaster, so keep any printed materials short. Audio programs on trauma healing may be especially helpful. Where appropriate, at the end of a visit, facilitators could leave a small printed flier or card with a short Bible verse (Ps 34.18; Ro 8.38–39a) and a peaceful picture or symbol. On the back, list trauma symptoms and things that help recovery. Some people may appreciate the *Scripture Companion* booklet.

Funding: Alert any international or national organizations that may be interested in sending funds or supplies.



SMALL GROUP EXERCISE

Imagine a disaster has just happened in your area. Now:

1. List the partners you work with who you would mobilize after a disaster. How can you build relationships to be ready?
2. What facilitators are in place? What materials are available?

3. Meet with victims in a large group immediately after a disaster

After a disaster, people need an opportunity to tell what happened to someone who knows how to listen. Explain that each person will have the opportunity to talk with a facilitator about what happened and how they are feeling, but that this is not a time to discuss practical needs or to request funds. Not everyone will want to talk to a facilitator, so invite but do not force.

A. Recognize normal reactions to trauma.

Each person responds to trauma differently. Here are some normal reactions (see also Lesson 2). Help people realize that often these will go away with time.

- People may find that their heart begins to pound fast and they breathe fast. They may have headaches and stomachaches. They may have trouble sleeping or have no appetite. They may feel shaky or exhausted.
- They may be confused and not be able to concentrate or make good decisions. They may be anxious, overwhelmed, or depressed. They may blame themselves for what happened. They may be irritable and angry.
- They may want to be alone.
- They may try to avoid how they are feeling by using drugs or alcohol, working nonstop, overeating, and so forth.
- They may do things that, in the end, will bring them harm, like smoking, spending more than they can afford, engaging in sexual immorality, and so forth.
- They may have accidents.

If children have been affected, go over the ways trauma affects children and how adults can help (see Lesson 4). To work directly with the children, use parts of the *Healing Hearts Club* materials (for example, Lessons 1–3).

B. Know what will help you recover more quickly.

- Take care of your body. Eat nutritiously, exercise, and get as much sleep as your body needs.
- Reestablish routines and set small goals that you can accomplish.
- Express your pain. Talk to someone. Write or draw about what happened and share it with someone. Tell God how you are feeling. Write a lament.
- Sing or listen to soothing music.
- Laugh when you can. Cry as needed.
- Spend time with people who are positive and helpful.
- Ask for help and accept the help others offer.
- Learn to calm yourself with the breathing exercise (page 28), the container exercise (page 98), or the tree exercise (page 98).

C. Watch out for things that will hurt your recovery.

- Making big decisions.
- Being very busy.
- Drinking alcohol or drinks with caffeine.
- Taking drugs to sleep.
- Talking in public about what happened before you have had time to recover.

As people wait their turn to talk with a facilitator, have snacks and beverages available if possible. Minimize distractions—silence cell phones, have someone care for small children, and so forth.

4. Listening to individuals

Arrange a private place for facilitators to meet individually with each person. Normally, people can be helped in one session, but some people may need more help.

Help the person feel at ease and assure confidentiality (see Lesson 2, Section 4).

Use the three questions to guide your listening:

1. What happened?
2. How did you feel?
3. What was the hardest part for you?

Use these additional questions, if appropriate, to help the person realize that some good things have been a part of the experience:

- Who helped you?
- Were you able to help others?
- What gave you strength to get through?
- Did you see God in this situation? Explain.

If the person is not able to talk about their experience, ask them to draw a picture and try to discuss it. If you are listening to two or more people together, encourage them to share their story but not to dwell on the most difficult parts, as that may traumatize the others.

5. Ongoing care

People should be calm before they leave, so do an exercise to help them relax before they go, either with each person or in the large group: the tree exercise (page 98), the container exercise (page 98), or the breathing exercise (page 28).

Encourage people to write a lament after the session or to draw about their experience. Close with a prayer.

Stay in contact with the people who have shared and invite them to join a trauma healing group after things have settled and they are able to reflect more on their experience.

After the individual listening sessions, arrange for someone to listen to the facilitators themselves so they can express how they were affected by all that they heard. This can be done individually or in a small group.

CLOSING EXERCISES

1. Do a roleplay of listening after a disaster. Discuss it. Then have everyone practice listening with another person. Be sure everyone understands they should not preach or give advice.
2. Practice the breathing exercise (page 28), the container exercise (page 98), or the tree exercise (page 98).

FORGIVENESS CEREMONY

Preparation: Identify songs for the ceremony. Get half-sheets of paper; pens; facial tissues; a cross; a box or basket; a place to burn the papers safely; a metal spoon or stick to use to stir the fire; a bucket of water; matches.

Introduction

Begin with a song—“What a Friend We Have in Jesus” or a song about Christ’s death, for example.

Now read the following aloud, except for the verse references in brackets:

We have had time together to talk about pain and trauma, and you may have recognized some pain that you are carrying. Or you may have recognized that you are harboring bitterness, that you have not forgiven those who have hurt you. Or you may have recognized that you have hurt others and need to ask them to forgive you. In this Forgiveness Ceremony we have an opportunity to ask God to forgive us and to help us forgive others as we bring our pain and our sin to the cross.

In Lesson 9 we learned that forgiving others involves bringing the pain of the offense to Christ. And we know that God wants us to forgive others. Each time that we pray the Lord’s Prayer we remember his words, “*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us*” [Lk 11.4]. Jesus also said “*If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done*” [Mt 6.14–15].

Forgiving others allows us to receive God’s forgiveness. Forgiveness also shows that we understand and value the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross for our sins. Let us not be like the servant who was forgiven a huge debt, who then refused to forgive his brother a small debt.

We know that God responds to us when we repent. The apostle John says, “*If we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away*” [1 Jn 1.9, CEV].

Jesus knows the costliness of sin in our lives and in the lives of others. He took that sin on himself when he suffered and died on the cross. In Hebrews we read that “*Christ died only once to take away the sins of many people*” [He 9.28a, CEV], and that “*we are made holy because Christ obeyed God and offered himself once for all*” [He 10.10, CEV].

Our lives are now to reflect the forgiveness that Jesus offers through his death. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul [in Romans 12.19–21]:

Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God’s anger do it. For the scripture says, “I will take revenge, I will pay back, says the Lord.” Instead, as the scripture says: “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame.” Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

In the first part of this Forgiveness Ceremony, we will spend time alone with God. Then we will have opportunity to share and pray in groups of two or three. Finally, we will bring our sin, pain, and bitterness to the cross of Christ.

Reflection time (15–20 minutes)

Read aloud: Take time alone to think and pray about any bitterness in your heart. Is there anyone you need to forgive? Or have you hurt someone and need to ask their forgiveness? On the paper, write any bitterness you want to release to God, and any offense you have caused and want to confess to God. Or perhaps other pain you are carrying will come to mind. Write that on the paper, too.

Find a quiet spot now where you can listen to God.

Sharing in small groups (15–20 minutes)

Divide into groups of two or three. Share with each other briefly—as much or as little as you wish. You do not need to share specific names or situations. Then pray for each other.

Bringing our bitterness, sin, and pain to the cross (10 minutes)

Call people back. Sing together a song of trust and surrender to God such as “Spirit of the Living God” or “It Is Well with My Soul.”

Read aloud: Brothers and sisters: Christ suffered and died to set us free from bitterness and sin, and to bring us healing.

The prophet Isaiah wrote [Is 53.4-6]:

*But he endured the suffering that should have been ours,
the pain that we should have borne.*

*All the while we thought that his suffering
was punishment sent by God.*

*But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.*

*We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.*

*All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.*

*But the LORD made the punishment fall on him,
the punishment all of us deserved.*

Now we are ready to bring our papers to the cross: as a sign that we are giving up bitterness and forgiving those who have hurt us, that we repent of our sins of hurting others, that we are giving our pain to God and asking him to take it from us.

When you are ready, bring your paper to the cross and say, “I’m handing over my sins, my bitterness, and my pain to Jesus, who died for me.”

When all the papers are at the cross, read the following prayer:

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against your holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.*

*O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare those who confess their faults,
restore those who are penitent,
according to your promises declared to mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;*

*and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.**

Now take all the papers outside and burn them.

Read aloud: We burn the papers to show that our suffering, bitterness, and sin have become like ashes.

The Bible tells us: “*How far has the Lord taken our sins from us? Farther than the distance from east to west!*” [Ps 103.12, CEV]

God offers us a crown of beauty and calls us to a new work. As the prophet Isaiah said:

*The Sovereign LORD has filled me with his Spirit.
He has chosen me and sent me
To bring good news to the poor,
To heal the broken-hearted,
To announce release to captives
And freedom to those in prison.
He has sent me to proclaim
That the time has come
When the LORD will save his people
And defeat their enemies.
He has sent me to comfort all who mourn,
To give to those who mourn in Zion
Joy and gladness instead of grief,
A song of praise instead of sorrow.
They will be like trees
That the LORD himself has planted.
They will all do what is right,
And God will be praised for what he has done.
They will rebuild cities that have long been in ruins. [Is 61.1–4]*

Praise and conclusion

Sing a song of praise, such as “You Are My Strength” or “In Christ Alone.”

In the large group, offer an opportunity to share the good things God has done. If there are those in the group that need to forgive each other, or ask for forgiveness, encourage them to make the time to do so.

Close by saying the Lord’s Prayer together.

*Adapted from the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Alternative for conflicts between groups

If you are addressing conflicts between groups, break up into the groups in conflict for the reflection time. Have each group reflect on the sins their group has committed against the other group(s) and identify any bitterness they are ready to release to Christ on behalf of their group. Then, during the sharing and prayer time, meet together in the large group and have a spokesperson from each group confess their group's sins or bitterness. Have the groups pray for each other. Then have each group bring their paper to the cross for burning and conclude the ceremony as above. Emphasize the challenge of the new calling identified in Isaiah 61.4.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank all those who have contributed to make this book what it is. First of all, we recognize the Christians in Africa whose suffering compelled us to look at Scripture with fresh eyes and be engaged by it.

We acknowledge the seminal work by Rhiannon Lloyd and Kristine Bresser in *Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict: The Role of the Church in Healing, Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Mercy Ministries International) that emerged from the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

This book has evolved thanks to the many church leaders from the majority world who have used these materials with their people and provided insight and feedback on how to communicate effectively to those suffering from trauma. We thank them for their passion and companionship.

We thank Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL, who encouraged us to respond to the trauma needs of the people we had grown to love, and who supported our efforts to do so.

We thank the many volunteers who have taught, translated, and lived with these materials so people and communities broken by trauma can be restored to well being. Thanks in particular to Pam Daams for work on the forgiveness ceremony.

We thank the many mental health professionals who have contributed their expertise to the development of these materials. We especially thank the members of the Trauma Healing Advisory Council, particularly Diane Langberg and Phil Monroe. Dana Ergenbright, Carol King, Pam Daams, Margi McCombs, and Carine Toussaint also made substantive contributions.

We thank the many donors who have enabled this ministry, especially Mrs. Swannie te Velde, who funded the first publication of the book in 2004.

Most of all, we bring our thanks and praise to Jesus Christ, who took all the suffering of the whole world upon himself on the cross, and whose wounds bring us healing (1 P 2.24).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The four authors of this book have trained trauma healing facilitators using these materials since 2002. Harriet Hill received her Ph.D. in intercultural studies from Fuller Seminary. She serves as director of the Trauma Healing Institute at American Bible Society. Richard Baggé, a psychiatrist with SIL, studied at Jefferson Medical College and Duke University Medical School. Margaret Hill received her master's degree from the University of Manchester, UK, and spent her career with SIL in Bible translation and Scripture Engagement. Pat Miersma, a counselor with SIL, received her M.N. as a Mental Health Nurse/Ethnic Clinical Specialist from the University of California at Los Angeles.