



What is this place?

Six Bible Studies
exploring issues
around violence
against women



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Introduction—using these Bible Studies

A woman experiencing domestic violence can be caught in a cycle from which it is very difficult to break free; to escape is a huge step and takes great courage, and needs the support of other concerned people. The six Bible Studies in this booklet follow the "journey" which a woman experiencing violence may make, from recognising her situation, through despair and hopelessness, to a situation where she can begin to speak out and take action, and finally to look for change and a new beginning.

At the same time, the Studies offer a way in which people might recognise the stages of their own journeys from other difficult places in their lives, towards hope.

The Studies are linked by the story of Hagar, in Genesis Chapters 16 to 21, and also invite you to look at other relevant biblical passages. For some Studies there is additional material—notes on the bible passage or other resources to use in the study (see Contents page). Each Study has been written by a different author, so whilst the general outline is similar, you may notice some differences of "style".

To help you in following the journey, a prayer-poem—the *Pilgrim Prayer*—and accompanying artwork have been specially prepared for the Studies. Your group is invited to use the Prayer during each study session and to make it "your own". The Prayer is printed in the centrefold of the booklet; you may find it helpful to remove it and make a copy for each member of the group.

Facilitating the group

The Studies will work best with someone to facilitate your group. The rôle of the Facilitator is to help create an environment in which the members of the group will feel comfortable

and able to build relationships of trust, so that they will feel able to share with each other [see *Groundrules and Confidentiality*, below]. In a mixed group of men and women, the Facilitator will need both to be aware that some may find it more difficult to share, and to be flexible in the use of the material, depending on the needs of the group.

On a practical level the Facilitator will need to prepare for each session, and look ahead to see what is needed for the following session; for example, if there is something people need to bring with them.

Groundrules and Confidentiality

Read this section together as you begin Study 1, and remind yourselves of these groundrules from time to time as you work together.

As you look through the Studies you will see that sometimes discussion is with the whole group (see eg p20), sometimes in smaller groups of two or three (see eg p10). At times, someone may want to share a story or experience. It is **essential** that everyone understands that stories are **confidential**, and never to be shared further, unless the person who has shared the story is willing to do so.

The Studies cover issues which touch people's lives very deeply. The group will need to be sensitive and understanding to one another, listening to one another, and respecting confidentiality about what is shared.

Some women (or men) in the group may have experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives. This is bound to mean that there will be moments when sensitive areas are touched upon, or profound emotions released. For example, the pictures of the hands may be disturbing images for someone—hands can hurt as well as heal.

Deep feelings may be raised. Don't be embarrassed by emotion ... allow space ... time for silence ... allow the person to speak about what they are feeling ... or not , as they feel comfortable.

Try to establish a feeling of "closure" before you move on from an activity which has affected people.

Action/follow-up

Study 4 focuses on *Action!* and makes some suggestions about action which individuals and local churches might take. You are also invited to investigate the facilities available in your local area to support those suffering domestic violence (see Study 2).

See *Information and Resources* on p53 for further materials you may find helpful, including information and liturgy leaflets from the Women's Co-ordinating Group for Churches Together in England, who have produced these Studies.

Members of your group might like to think about their own life-journeys, using the model used in these Studies. You might like to meet again as a group to share your journeys.

What you need

For all studies

Copies of this booklet, or of the centre pages (i-iv)—the *Pilgrim Prayer*—for everyone in the group

Study 1—a jug and glass of water, a loaf of bread and a candle

Study 2—small bowl of oil, joss sticks or incense cones

Study 3

—candles and/or a picture of someone "speaking out"

—a large sheet of red paper or cloth

—a piece of string for each member of the group

Study 4

- four candles of different colours—red, yellow, dark blue and green are suggested
- information on local services/groups, which has been gathered since Session 2

Study 5

- paper and pencils or pens, coloured pencils or crayons, a white candle, a taper, and a receptacle in which papers can be burned

Study 6

- something small that feels good to hold, such as a smooth stone or wooden egg
- glue, large sheet of card as a background for a collage, items the group have brought to represent new beginnings
- small gift as people leave eg small bulbs or seeds (see end of Study 6, on p49)

Note—Numbering of Psalms

Psalms have been numbered in the format Psalm 22 (21); the number in brackets is the psalm number as used in some Roman Catholic prayer books.

Study 1—RECOGNITION

Opening

Create a worship centre as a focal point with a jug and glass of water, a loaf of bread and a candle, and, if possible, a copy of the *Pilgrim Prayer* and images of hands from the centrefold of this booklet.



When everyone has gathered, read and agree the "groundrules" (see the *Introduction*, p4). Light the candle.

Read slowly the following words from Psalm 130 (129):

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits.

In his word is my hope.

My soul waits for the Lord,

More than those who watch for the morning.

The Story—Hagar

Introduction to the story, to read aloud or summarise

We first meet Hagar in Genesis 16. Sarai, Abram's childless wife, gave her slave to her husband to bear a child for them. When she conceived, Sarai in her jealousy at her slave's fertility, began abusing her. Unable to bear it, Hagar ran away, but came face to face with God. That this should happen to a woman, and one not of Abram's family, is important both for women and for non-Israelites. The message she received was not one to lighten the heart, however. She was to return to her mistress and submit to her. God knew her despair and although her life would be hard, she and her descendants were promised a place in God's design and care.

Read Genesis 21:8-21

Read v14 again. We shall be focusing on a different part of the story each week for part of our study, so for today we are to keep that verse in mind.

In this exercise, you are encouraged to enter imaginatively into the story. Begin by reading this introduction—

"It's early morning. A day like any other or so it seems. Why get up, when no one sees you or cares about you, when you know that cutting words—or a quick slap—will be all the notice your mistress will take of you? And then *he* comes. The man who was once—and in a way still is—your husband. You held his body, let him penetrate the depths of your being, you carried his precious first-born, and suffered agony to bring him to birth. And for that self-annihilation your only return is abuse. And now he's here, wanting something more from you — your absence. Abraham, sheepish, passing the blame to Sarah, to God, to anyone but himself. "You've got to go," he says. "Now." He hands you bread and water. You pick up your sleeping son (how heavy he is) and head out into the desert."

In silence, try to think yourselves into Hagar's situation.

What thoughts might be in her mind, about the past and her present predicament? What emotions might be in her heart, or feelings in her body?

Take a stick of plasticine each (or similar moulding clay). Reflecting on what you have heard, try to make a model of Hagar as, wandering in the wilderness she *recognises* a corresponding desert within.

If you have recognised something of your own experience in Hagar's story, and if it is safe for you to do so, express something of your own story into the model you are shaping.

Take several minutes for this exercise. When you are ready, place your figure on the worship centre (if you have used the Hands there, you might like to place your model on the picture).

If you are able to, say a word or a sentence about Hagar or about how her story resonates with your own. Your comments will stand unquestioned; each one is sacred. There is no need to fill the

space if no one speaks.

Comfort break

You may choose here to release any tension before moving to the next part of the study, by passing round some small edible luxury (sweets, chocolates, grapes).

The Story—The Woman at the Well

Read John 4:5-18 & 4:27-30, part of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

On the surface, the stories of Hagar and the Samaritan woman are very different. Yet by digging a little, you may find a few significant points of contact between them. In twos, name any connections you discover.

Come together again to write them up on a flipchart or large piece of paper.

These might be among the ideas which are offered:

- ❖ each is an outcast, a victim
- ❖ each story features water (there is shortage and abundance, with varying layers of meaning — some might explore the spiritual dimension of this)
- ❖ each woman is addressed directly by God or by Jesus, and affirmed for herself
- ❖ each *recognises and accepts* that she is a survivor
- ❖ each becomes the means by which others receive God's blessing.



Sculpture of Jesus and the Woman at the Well, Chester Cathedral

Responding and Moving On

Either: if you have read the notes on pages 12-13, you could share something of the background with the group

or: all group members could read them after the session and reflect further on the stories.

(Don't read the notes during the session)

In twos or threes, look at the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and **talk about** what was happening to her in her encounter with Jesus.

Can you think of contemporary stories of survivors who, like these biblical women, have *recognised* the injustice of their abuse, and spoken out or taken active steps to move on? Briefly tell one or two stories.

This might be the first opportunity for survivors to tell something of their own story, if they feel able to.

Closing

Jesus said: "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty." Pass round the glass of water (or individual glasses filled with water from the jug) for everyone to drink.

Take up the bread and facing the person next to you, pass them the bread with the words: "x (her/his name), God is for you". That person breaks off a piece, hands the loaf to the next person saying the same words. S/he then eats the piece of bread as the loaf passes on.

Introduce and read the *Pilgrim Prayer*

This prayer has been written for these studies. It describes the stages of the journey people travel, and the questions they might ask, as they move from victim to survivor.

Using different voices each time, relate it to the pictures which accompany the prayer, use symbols, or present it in any way that

you and the group feel is appropriate. Make it your prayer.

Further optional meditation and prayer

Voice 1: Bewildered, alone, responsible for my child, not responsible for my fate—I am Hagar.

Voice 2: Ostracised, anonymous, responsible for my house-keeping, not responsible for my shunning—I am the woman who met Jesus at the well.

Voice 1: Trapped, locked in by power, diminished by abusive traditions.

Voice 2: Invisible, non-people, our passions not seen or heard.

Voice 3: Now, touched by love, of voice and eye, released, from fear, from self abasement, drawn out and up, holding on, scared, longing to be free.

All: God, we celebrate the new beginnings you wove for these women. Now release in us your wisdom and courage as we face our own future. Journey with us, loving, broken, living God. AMEN.

If you would like to, take your model home

Extinguish the candle

Study 1—Notes on the Biblical passages

Hagar who, unusually for a biblical woman, is named, and the Samaritan woman who is not, are both survivors.

Hagar has been used as a reproductive machine: her baby was to belong to Abram and Sarai. A modern fictional equivalent can be found in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: a few sentences from chapter 16 may repay reading in the group.

The Samaritan woman has either been widowed or divorced by a series of husbands. Personal tragedy and deep trauma underlie her story. Most commentators blame this woman for her marital record and her current co-habitation. Customs and laws relating to marriage and divorce in New Testament times are complicated and we know nothing of the woman's background here, but women were the property of men. Men alone could initiate or proclaim a divorce. This woman is therefore powerless, a victim of a patriarchal system. That she was banished from polite society is indicated by her coming to the well at midday; "decent" women came when it was cooler. That Jesus spoke to her is as reprehensible as is her marital state; a respectable man would not be alone with a woman let alone speak to her. Every detail that John records in his gospel is relevant to his purpose, so her marital state, and Jesus' action, are significant. Some commentators castigate the woman for her idolatry of men and contrast that with the true worship Jesus advocates; there is an Old Testament precedent, for adultery became a prophetic symbol of the people's apostasy. However, in the context of John's whole approach to women, it is also possible that she is being painted as an innocent victim whom Jesus accepts (and uses powerfully) as a lesson to those promoting exclusivity in the early church.

Our purpose in studying this story is not to explore the layers of meaning in the conversation about living water and about worship, important as they are, but to understand something of the difference the encounter makes to *the woman*.

So what is Jesus doing for her?

He makes himself vulnerable to her (he is thirsty, she has a bucket); he shows respect; he credits her with some intelligence (even when she doesn't understand what he is saying); he draws her into the spiritual depths (she must be worth it!); even when he identifies her co-habitation he does not condemn her.

And what effect does it have on *her*? How would *you* have responded? She feels valued because she's been respected as a human being. With her self-esteem building, she feels empowered; how else would she go back and call people to come back with her to see Jesus?

Both Hagar and the Samaritan woman move to being survivors by recognising they are not responsible for the condition they are in nor the things they have been forced to do. Although the road will be long and hard, there is a way out for each of them, and they have each taken the first step whether forced or voluntary.

They both show resilience to survive, and refuse any longer to be the scapegoat. (The scapegoat is the animal which is banished to the wilderness bearing the sins of the people—see Leviticus 16:10, and 16:20-22). A man or woman who abuses is projecting their own failings, jealousy, inadequacies and disappointments onto someone who is or has been close to them. This can be done by verbal, psychological, emotional or physical means. As we can see here, the responsibility for the abuse lies with the perpetrator, not with the victim. But because of the imbalance of power, it is the victim who readily blames herself and accepts the "justice" of the punishment.

But her survival is at stake. She must choose life. The alternative is to die (literally, in Hagar's case) or to remain in her invisible suffering. She claims life by *recognising* her own innocence, her personal worth especially to God, and God's will to give *her* life. However, God's refusal to support Hagar against Sarah, seemingly endorsing her abuse at Sarah's hands, leaves us with many questions.



Study 2—DESPAIR

Opening

Prayer feature: a centrally placed hand-sized bowl of oil for anointing (grapeseed and olive oils are non-allergic) surrounded by a few joss sticks or incense cones of myrrh or another astringent scent.

Music: if possible, meditative music can be played before the session begins, during the meditation and concluding prayer.

Explanation

Last time we followed the essential first step towards freedom for a woman who is being subjected to domestic violence: recognition. Recognition that she is a victim of abuse, and that this is wrong. But the immediate effect of her identifying her situation often adds to her emotional and spiritual torment, her feelings of isolation and despair. In this session we will open ourselves to these feelings, and perhaps risk getting in touch with our own. But the oil we have here is a symbol of God's healing love even when we feel ourselves completely abandoned: the oil poured, in one of Jesus' stories, into the wounds of the man rescued by the Good Samaritan. And incense symbolises the spices the women took to the tomb with oil to anoint Jesus' abused body in their despair and their love. "Myrrh anoints all the world's pain and all the world's loss."* We will anoint each other's hands in the concluding prayer.

The story so far

In this session we are going to look at part of Hagar's story alongside the story of an abused woman in our society today. Last time we followed Hagar into the wilderness for the first time when she was pregnant after Abram had slept with her. An Egyptian

* From a poem by Anne Hine, "Myrrh - a reflection" in *Journey to the Millennium*, published on behalf of the National Board of Catholic Women, 1998

slave girl, she was being used by Abram and his wife Sarai in an effort to found a male line. Whatever hopes she had of turning this to her advantage were dashed by Sarai's jealousy and Abram's callousness. After encountering God in the wilderness, Hagar had the courage to return to this household. But once Sarah had given birth, tensions were heightened. Again, Hagar was sent out into the wilderness, this time with her toddler son. This time she knew she would not be taken back, because Abraham (Abram) and Sarah (Sarai) now had a son of their own. Hagar wandered in the wilderness until, exhausted and without water, she sat down to wait for her son's death and her own.

Prayer

- ❖ Read the *Pilgrim Prayer* together: one voice asking the question, the group giving the reply. *During the **second** verse of the Prayer, one member of the group light the incense.*
- ❖ Pause for reflection

The Story—Victoria Claire

Read this story aloud

It comes from *A prayer from the street* by Victoria Claire (*The Tablet* 23.3.02, used with permission)

I am a 39-year-old single woman with a teenage son.

From the ages of 27 to 34, I was in an abusive co-dependent relationship with a charming, intelligent man whose heart had been brutalised at an early age, as had mine. I met that young man and fell in love at first sight. Ten months later we moved in together with his son and mine.

Two weeks later, he beat me for the first time. He overwhelmed me.

I realised that his "occasional line of coke" had been in fact a crack cocaine habit which he had had since he was 15 years old. As the voices from my past grew louder, I

lost my grip on the present and my mental breakdown began.

As his cocaine habit and my alcohol abuse increased, so did the violence. My partner forced me against my will to work as a prostitute. Three years of control and beatings had made me obedient and accepting. People seem to think that the more times you are beaten, the angrier you will become, until at last you can take no more and leave. In fact the reverse is true: each violation makes you weaker, each rape seems to eat part of your soul away. The longer you are abused the less you are likely to leave. There is a prevalent misconception that no intelligent woman would allow herself to be beaten and sold, and that if you stay with a violent man it must be because you "like it". This is untrue. Having suffered abuse already, I equated hurt with love, need with power and intimacy with abuse.

One night I screamed my rage at God, then prayed. I knew by this time that I was too weak to leave to save myself. Within days of my prayer an Anglican Sister of the Church came up to me on the street and said something beautiful to me. The sisters started regularly to give us food parcels. But seven or eight months later, I was still with my partner and his behaviour became worse. Believing that you have no choice is just as effective as actually having no choice, and I believed he would never let me leave. So I jumped off the roof of a building.

Pause

The Story—Hagar

Read Genesis 21:9-16 stopping at "... she lifted up her voice and wept."

Hagar has been turned out into the wilderness with her small child. Sarah's jealousy has pressured Abraham into this act of bru-

tality, but the deeper context is one of a society in which women are non-beings in comparison to men and male offspring. Hagar has literally been excluded from all human help. Now she expects to sit and watch her child die before she dies herself. "She lifted up her voice and wept."

The story of a woman subjected to even greater brutality can be found in Judges 19:17-29

Intensity of despair, so briefly indicated for Hagar, is explored in other Biblical passages which give voice to a level of darkness and distress that can only be known from personal experience. These passages can be found, for example, in the books of Job and Lamentations, and in the Psalms, especially Ps 22(1), 69(8), 88(7).

The Hebrew writers of these texts seek no easy comfort. They are aiming for a truth of expression that seems possible only in poetry. But generations of readers of the Bible have found comfort in these passages, which are rarely heard in church, because they show that someone else has undergone suffering so extreme as to feel cut off from all human contact.

Responding

To deepen this experience for ourselves we will reflect over one of these difficult passages for about half an hour. Adapt this pattern for your own setting.

Pattern for meditation

- ❖ someone reads to the whole group Lamentations 3:1-18
- ❖ two minutes silence or with music
- ❖ divide into pairs, preferably partners not known to each other
- ❖ music can be played as background for the rest of this exercise
- ❖ one partner reads aloud Lamentations 3:1-9; the second follows on with Lamentations 3:10-18

- ❖ spend time together in silence or allow comfortable silences during the conversation

Suggested areas to talk over

- the connections between Hagar in the wilderness, a people conquered and humiliated, Jesus on the cross
- the biblical connections with people suffering in abusive situations today especially women subjected to domestic violence
- the kind of prayer that is possible in these situations
- a look at one or more of the Psalms 22(1), 69(8), 88(7)
- **only if you wish to do so:** share any connections with personal experience, anything learnt from these that you would like to pass on to others

Reassemble as a group and turn off the music

Feedback

An opportunity for people to speak to the whole group about what has emerged in the paired meditation by contributing not their own observations but something they have gained from their partner while **respecting what was shared in confidence.**

Action

Over the next couple of weeks, do some research into the groups and facilities in your own areas concerned with domestic violence; there will be an opportunity to report on your findings in Study 4 "Action!".

Closing

- ❖ settle into silence/turn on background music
- ❖ light some more incense
- ❖ a member of the group reads Genesis 21:15-19, pausing at the end of verse 16

- ❖ explain that we are now moving towards next week's session on "Speaking Out", when the sufferer can begin to put her experiences into words and communicate them to others
- ❖ allow a quiet space for people in the group to call out words or phrases that have been significant to them in this session
- ❖ invite the meditation pairs to come to the bowl of oil in turn and anoint each other's hands by rubbing a little oil into the palm (perhaps in the shape of a cross)
- ❖ allow a moment of stillness after everyone is seated, then turn off the music
- ❖ read aloud the conclusion of Victoria Claire's story:

So I jumped off the roof of a building. [Pause] I did not die, but I am disabled for life. When I came home from hospital, I enrolled on a part-time psychology course (the Sisters helped me to get a grant). Then I asked them to find me a counsellor who did not charge. They did, and I saw her for nearly four years. Ten months later, I handed my thesis to my tutor—and the next morning I ran away from my partner. I stayed in a high-protection refuge and the council rehoused me in a new area. And here I sit, five years on, in my beautiful house with my peaceful life. My freedom was made possible through the love of people who never knew me. Through the donated food, my link to God and love was reawakened. Never underestimate the power of your gifts. To love people who do not love themselves is a powerful message.

Pause

Thanks and depart



Study 3—SPEAKING OUT

Opening

Light candles as a focus, or use a picture of someone speaking out

Read Psalm 119:41-45 (118:41-45)

Prayer

Speak, God

Do not be silent.

Offer words of comfort,

Encouragement and strength.

Hear, God

The voice of the hurt,

The words of campaigning,

The teaching of Christ's church

Act, God

Through us your people

Bringing peace and wholeness

Healing and life. AMEN.

Introduction

Resignation to violence and despair at one's circumstances within violence hinder a woman speaking out. Many other things do too.

Discuss what, in your experience, hinders women from speaking out against the violence they encounter.

The Story—Hagar

Hagar is hindered from speaking out clearly. Hagar was a foreigner, an Egyptian and therefore an outsider. She was also a slave with no power (Genesis 16). She was dependent on her

position for economic and social security.

Sarah and Abraham used Hagar as a surrogate mother. For a few months she spoke out, proud of her pregnancy in the light of Sarah, the wife's barrenness.

There was status and power in pregnancy, although at a cost to Sarah. Consequently, Sarah was so cruel that Hagar ran away, only to return. This was a matter of survival.

Later when Sarah had weaned her own son Isaac **she** spoke out to Abraham (Genesis 21:10) because she felt her child was being usurped as the heir by Ishmael, the first-born child by Hagar. This time Hagar was sent away but was to survive away from the violent setting. The child was older and more capable of independence. It was riskier to stay as Isaac grew. Isaac and his mother may have plotted against Ishmael to ensure Isaac's inheritance. Who is victim? Who is perpetrator? In a complex situation like this then the hindrances to speaking out multiply.

In the light of the story of Hagar and Sarah, **explore** further hindrances to speaking out against violence. For example—the children? other relatives? the “other” woman? economic security? physical safety?

Sarah herself was sexually exploited by Abraham who for his own security twice passed her off as his sister, to protect himself. (Genesis 12:10ff; 20:1ff)

- ❖ **What has helped you to speak out against injustice, unfairness, and destructive attitudes you have encountered?**
- ❖ **What would help a woman to speak out against the experience of violence?**

The Story—Tamar and Amnon

Tell or read aloud the story of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13 (read to 19:15 for the full story)

Amnon falls in love with his half sister, a virgin Princess in the Royal Household of his father King David. Tamar's purity means she is marriageable as part of a treaty with another political power. The loss of this will be costly. A friend called Jonadab advises Amnon to pretend to be ill and ask his father to allow Tamar to come and tend him. It is a ploy, for when Tamar prepares the food in his sight he rapes her, regardless of her protests. In her distressed state, she seeks refuge in her brother Absalom's house.

It takes Absalom two years to take his revenge and murder Amnon for his act of violence with Tamar. Then Absalom becomes an exile. Eventually he is able to return to Jerusalem, where later he rebels against the kingship of David and tries to take the crown. The plot is discovered and Absalom is killed in the ensuing fight.

Reflect on the perspective of each of the following characters –

- ❖ Tamar
- ❖ Jonadab—Amnon's friend
- ❖ Amnon
- ❖ Absalom

(The group could split into smaller groups, each taking a different character.)

Listen to each perspective and share the issues arising.

Discuss if and how the following characters spoke out against violence

- ❖ Tamar herself
- ❖ King David
- ❖ Absalom

Rape can happen in many settings—as a weapon of war, within families, as an attack from strangers. This is only one form of violence against women.

Discuss what you feel would help or hinder the following to speak out against violence—

- ❖ the woman herself
- ❖ the authorities (police, civil, legal, organisational leaders)
- ❖ a relative or friend of the victim

In a church setting known to you, if a leader abused a church member how would—

- ❖ the woman herself,
- ❖ the church authorities,
- ❖ a relative or friend

be helped or hindered to speak out against the violence?

How would the answer to this question be different if it was a situation of domestic violence within a church family?

Checklist

Here is a list of what is needed to help people speak out against violence. They may have arisen in your discussion.

- ◆ No denial: accept that it could happen here.
- ◆ No disbelief: listen and hear a woman's story of violence
- ◆ No turning away: a willingness to support and stand alongside.
- ◆ No sweeping under the carpet: clear policies and teaching that gives permission to people to speak out.
- ◆ No confusion: clear points of reference and contacts for people, a local advocate. (see *A Suggested Charter for Your Church*, quoted inside the back cover)

Responding

Discuss whether your own church is speaking out—

- ❖ through its teaching and preaching
- ❖ through care offered to people in violent situations.
- ❖ by being willing to adopt the suggested *Charter for Your Church* on domestic violence

Symbolic action and Reflection

Share the *Pilgrim Prayer* together

Write the names of individual women, or organisations, who have spoken out against violence against women, on a large sheet of red paper or cloth.

(Alternatively—or as well as—take a piece of string each, roughly 0.5 metre long. Tie a knot in the string for each name or organisation cited. The knots represent prayers and the string becomes a set of prayer beads that can be taken away and used as a prayer reminder in coming days.)

In a time of quiet, read the names aloud and offer them to God in thanksgiving and dedication.

Closing

Read aloud John 8:3-11

Reflect on these words—

Jesus speaks out and acts in a complex setting, when the woman herself caught in adultery is voiceless and in a life-threatening setting.

We might ask why the man with whom she was caught committing adultery is not present within the story.

What did Jesus write on the ground, causing such a reaction of withdrawal? Was it perhaps—

- a doodle?
- a familiar prayer?
- general sins?
- the specific sins of those around waiting to throw stones?

Silence

One person read aloud—

You are part of the crowd.

You see what he is doing.

*You feel the shuffle of feet as people
move away.*

You hear him speak to the woman

*The one whose unity with God allows him to
condemn refuses to do so.*

The woman is safe, but changed.

*Christ by speaking out offers freedom
and life.*

Silence

Say together

Christ,

Voice of the voiceless

We speak as your body

Against violence

Enabling those in its thrall

To speak and be heard

Creating your community

Of justice and love today. AMEN.

Study 3—Notes on the Biblical passages

Tamar and Amnon

2 Samuel Chapter 13. For whole story read through to Chapter 19:15

The biblical narrative presents King David as a great and glorious king, with psalms of praise to his victories recorded. Matthew in his genealogy (Matt 1:1-17) traces Jesus' ancestry back to King David. Luke takes it back through David to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). Jesus is of the house of David, he is a king in the line of succession.

However, David's reign is barbaric, and violence against women is central. There is the seduction of Bathsheba and the arranged murder of her husband (2 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12). The child conceived of the adultery dies but then Solomon is born of the union. Then there is incest: Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon and protected by Absalom her full brother, who kills Amnon. David's role as their father is ambiguous.

Later, in the civil war with Absalom, when David flees from Jerusalem he leaves ten concubines behind to care for the palace (2 Samuel 15:16) (concubines were mistresses of the king who did not have the status of wives). When Absalom enters the city, he is advised to have intercourse with these women, which he does (2 Samuel 16:21-22). On David's return to the city the ten concubines are put under house arrest until they die, for they are considered to be contaminated (2 Samuel 20:3).

The women who experience the violence of David's reign are present in the story, and because of this they speak out and their voices are heard.

The woman caught in adultery

John 8:3-11

This passage is not an original part of John's gospel. Thus in many translations it is bracketed. Yet, the story is believed to be ancient. The woman was caught in the act, for there needed to be eye-witnesses in order for a conviction to hold and the punishment of stoning to be carried out.

The protagonists are seeking to trap Jesus. If Jesus says "stone her" then he is being stricter than the current attitude would demand. If he says "free her" then he is not being obedient to the law. Jesus cleverly makes the protagonists judge themselves and thereby turns the trap on them.

The message from Jesus is "I judge no one". The story is placed differently in various manuscripts but this position gives a thematic link with the subsequent passage on Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:15).

Like Jesus, we are not to judge, but to attend to what is going on in the hearts of others and enable them to find their own space before God. Jesus did this both for the accusers and for the woman in the violent setting.

Study 4—ACTION!

For this session you will need four candles of different colours—red, yellow, dark blue and green are suggested



Opening

Prayers and introduction

This Study is about having the courage to take action and recognising that survivors cannot always take successful action unless other people work alongside them.

Light a red candle for Action

During the last few weeks we have thought about how people learn to recognise abuse in their own life or in the lives of others—

Light a yellow candle for recognising abuse

How admitting this abuse can lead to feelings of despair—

Light a dark blue candle for feelings of despair

How people learn to speak out—

Light a green candle for speaking out

Spend a few moments in prayer round the candles for everyone involved in these situations and finish with—

May God help us to do something useful in hard situations and bring about some change for the better

Discuss briefly in twos or threes (remembering the confidentiality code), the question—

When do we take action?

Draw the whole group together and share suggestions.

When do we take action? Here are some ideas which may come up in discussion—

When I see injustice. When I have enough energy. When I have friends to encourage and support me. When I know I am right. When I can stand the mess no longer

The Story—What do stories of women in the Bible have to tell us?

Read the next part of the story of Hagar, Genesis 21:16-21, and discuss it in pairs or as a group—

- ❖ What action did Hagar take after Abraham sent her and Ishmael from his household into the desert?
- ❖ Why did she behave like this?
- ❖ What else could she have done?
- ❖ What do you learn from this?

There are also two stories in the Additional Material (pages 35-36) about Vashti and Tamar which you may like to use as an alternative, or as well if you have time.

What can help today?

Some stories to begin your discussion—

Story 1 In the soap *East Enders*, during 2002, Little Mo's life of unending violent humiliation from her husband (who said he worshipped her and could not live without her) was taken over by the fierceness of his attacks. She suffered humiliation, but was extremely reluctant to tell anyone—even her sisters who all lived nearby and were very close. The mixture of fear, love and self delusion which drove her to have him back time after time broke up in the end. One day she took action and hit him with an iron and left him for dead. But it was not a glorious triumph because she was jailed for manslaughter and he was not dead.

Story 2 Angela had led a sheltered life, but finally met the man of her dreams and married him. They lived in a house which went with his job and they both had a firm Christian faith. After a few years he started to behave oddly. He asked her to pay rent for the rooms she occupied or used in "his" house; when she had her first baby he insisted that she return to work within a week of the birth and did the same when they had another baby. He insisted on controlling what she did and when she did it, and hitting her when she disobeyed him. Because she believed that a wife should submit to her husband, she felt she had to endure the increasingly harsh treatment. Eventually a colleague from work, who did not see her at home very often, dropped in to see her one Saturday and with the clarity of someone from outside the situation, saw that she was being seriously abused by her husband. It was affecting her at work and was reducing the children to a life of fear and uncertainty. What the friend said rang true with Angela and confirmed the unthinkable thoughts that had been coming into her mind. In time, Angela plucked up courage to plan an escape from the family home with the children and with a lot of help from family, friends and church contacts was enabled to set up a home where she and her children felt safe and were able to flourish.

Story 3 A man who had abused his wife and children until she could stand it no longer, went to his minister and confessed his secret. The minister told him that God is a forgiving God, but to receive forgiveness a person should be sincerely repentant and give evidence that they have changed their lifestyle long term for the better. The minister then told the man to phone the Social Services and report himself. The man agreed and was put onto a retraining programme during which the minister met him weekly for prayer and bible study.

Come together and share your feelings, briefly, about these stories

What is this place?

A Pilgrim Prayer for the journey

These Bible Studies follow the "journey" which a woman experiencing violence may make, from recognition of her situation to making a new beginning.

The prayer-poem overleaf was written by Olive Powell as a contribution to the journey.

The artwork was done by Anita Burrows, who comments ...

The poem is so strong that this idea came to me with the thoughts that when we suffer pain we are shattered. We are fragmented into pieces. On our journey of healing, perhaps we need to stop and examine the pieces, enabling us to see things we maybe hadn't see before, which is difficult, but in doing that we recognise pieces of ourselves that we can put back together tenderly and carefully, slowly seeing the reality God has given to us.



what is this place?

this is the place where you suffer
unknown to yourself
where you can not acknowledge that
you are being abused,
taking for granted this is God's will for
you

until one day you ask:



what is this place?

this is the place where you look at
your injuries,
where you are alone with the great
injustice done to you
convinced that God has abandoned
you

until one day you ask:



what is this place?

this is the place where you break
the silence,
where you name all you suffer to
someone outside
wondering if God has made a world
able to listen

so that one day you can ask:

what is this place?

this is the place where you escape
from tyranny,
where you choose to take up a
secret offer of help,
half-believing you are not a victim
in God's eyes,
so that one day you can ask:



what is this place?

this is the place where healing begins
and confusion reigns
where you must deal with new prob-
lems while your new self exists
only in the dream God has for you
to ask:



what is this place?

this is the place where you are on
your true way
where relationships thrive along the
journey together
through darkness and light into ...





the reality God creates for us

Some verses from the new Testament to talk about

John 10:10 Luke 4:18-19 1Corinthians 3:16-17	What strength or hope do these verses give to survivors?
The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)	Why did the Priest and the Levite not help?

Marie Fortune is a Canadian Roman Catholic woman who has been working against violence in the home for many years. What she sees in the parable of the Good Samaritan is

- 1 The passers-by were frightened of being attacked themselves
- 2 They did not know what to do to help
- 3 They knew of no other person or helping agency who would work with them to care for the victim
- 4 They blamed the victim for travelling alone anyway

Are these lessons which you learned from the parable? Are there others?

Responding—Who can take action?

Share the information you have collected about groups and services in your area connected with domestic violence (see Study 2, p18), and refer to them as you think about who can take action.

Also, try to look at some of the materials in the Information and Resources section (p53).

We can we take action ourselves

Learning from the Good Samaritan story, how could we best—

- 1 stand by the victim/survivor?
- 2 give practical support ?
- 3 work with other helping agencies in the community?

And ... can we tell our own story, if we are survivors ourselves?

Responsible people in the churches can take action

Three steps which ministers/clergy can take to help to stop violence, based on Marie Fortune's work, are—

- 1 Protect the victim when (s)he comes and tells you her/his story
- 2 Take steps to stop the abuser's violence (if requested by the victim)
- 3 Restore the family relationship if possible and if not, help the family mourn the loss of it.

How can this be done effectively and safely?

Our churches, together, can take action

Think about these questions (if you come from different churches, work in area or church groupings)

How can our churches—

- 1 give people confidence to help?
- 2 train people about helpful ways to respond in such a crisis?
- 3 learn about what other help is available in our communities?
- 4 make known what help is available?

Taking Action

Steps for the local church

- ⇒ Display posters and leaflets with information about help for women (eg Rape Crisis, Women's Aid, Local Housing Office, local and national helpline numbers)
- ⇒ Take other practical measures such as a register of temporary accommodation, or an emergency fund of food, clothes and money, to support victims
- ⇒ Encourage those who lead worship to speak out against violence against women in their preaching, teaching and prayers
- ⇒ Pay for leaders to attend training sessions on the pastoral care of those who experience domestic violence
- ⇒ Offer marriage preparation and on-going sessions for couples, which address the themes of equality, conflict, violence and control
- ⇒ Invite people from the police, social services, women's refuges to speak at church groups
- ⇒ Challenge gender inequality, which gives permission for sexual violence
- ⇒ Encourage collaboration with others working on the issues
- ⇒ Encourage and support initiatives which seek to help those who perpetrate violence
- ⇒ 25th November is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Hold a special service or event to mark the Day.

Closing

A victim taking action alone has an insurmountable task; if we can learn useful ways of working together with the victims we help them, and we bring something of the Kingdom of God into the sinful structures in our society.

A prayer

Bless you my sister
Bless you on your way...
So go gently my sister
Let courage be your song.
You have words to say,
In your own way
And stars to light the night

Blessing Song, MARSIE SILVESTRO

Share the *Pilgrim Prayer* together

Additional prayer, to use if you wish

O God, you are my shelter from the terrors and burden of shame I seem to have inherited. Let me not be disheartened when my journey to freedom never seems to go anywhere. Journey with me and fill me with the peace that knows no limits, so that one day I may come to know the meaning of Peace/Shalom AMEN.

MIRIAM THERESE WINTER

Study 4—Additional Material

What do stories of women in the Bible have to tell us?

The group could split into two, and each half study one woman's story—

1 The story of Tamar

There are two women called Tamar in the Jewish scriptures. In Study 3 we looked at an incident in the life of the Tamar who was a daughter of King David in around the 1000BC. This time we look at the story of Tamar who lived before that, in about 1800 BC.

The story so far ... Tamar was given in marriage to Er, son of Judah, but he died before they had any children. Local custom said that the main value of a woman was to provide sons for the family name, so when a woman was widowed his brothers had a duty to give her a child to carry on the name of her dead husband. Onan was Er's brother and he was reluctant to have full intercourse with Tamar. One day, to everyone's horror, Onan died suddenly, leaving Tamar childless. Two dead husbands did not give Tamar a good reputation and Judah was reluctant to give his third and youngest son to her, so he sent her home to her father saying that he would send Shelah to her when he was old enough to have sex with her. But Judah never called Tamar back so she was left unwanted in her father's house (he had paid a dowry for her) and with no chance of ever being married to anyone else (she was seen as second-hand goods).

Now read in Genesis 38:12-30 how Tamar dealt with this disgrace, and talk about the following—

1 The action which Tamar took was to deceive her father-in-law and bring shame upon him. Is this an effective way to challenge abuse today?

2 What events and feelings in Tamar's life may have pushed her to accomplish her own liberation in this way? Was her action a good one?

3 In Ancient Israel there was one set of standards of morality for men and another for women. Are there still double sexual standards for men and for women today? What do you think about that?

2 The story of Vashti

Read Esther 1:1-21 This is almost a tragi-comedy at times!

The story so far ... Vashti was the beautiful queen of Media and Persia, married to King Ahasuerus who was fond of big drunken parties. Vashti refused to be treated as if she were a bit of his property.

1 What action did Vashti take when she heard the king's request to appear before him and his guests? What was behind his request? What was the motive for her response?

2 Are women ever treated like this today? Can you think of any occasion in your own life (or have you ever read of a situation) when you have felt under pressure to do something you were frightened to do yet knew you would be punished if you disobeyed?

3 The laws that Vashti broke said "Women must honour their husbands" and "Every man shall be master in his own house". Do these laws influence society today?

4 How are women punished today when they disobey codes of behaviour?

* * *

Let the groups come together and say in three sentences each what action their heroine took, what they think about it and what we can learn from it for today.

Study 5—CHANGE

Victim to Survivor?



For this study you will need paper and pencils or pens, coloured pencils or crayons, a white candle, a taper, and a receptacle in which papers can be burned

Opening

Share in the *Pilgrim Prayer*, from the centrefold of this booklet.

Prayer

Say together—

Bless to us this time, O God that it may be sacred time, Bless to us this space O God that it may be holy space, Bless to us each other that we may share with compassion and understanding the experiences we share together in the presence of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

Light the candle

The Story—Hagar

We recall from previous weeks the situation in which Hagar finds herself. Having been used at Sarah's behest to produce an heir for Abraham, and subsequently having to suffer Sarah's jealousy when, on becoming pregnant, she assumes an air of contempt for Sarah in her barrenness. Hagar has returned from her initial flight from Sarah's cruelty, prompted by the promise of God that her descendants will be numerous and her son whom she should name Ishmael would become a "wild ass of a man" (Genesis 16:12).

After the birth of her son Isaac, Sarah became concerned that Ishmael would usurp Isaac's position as heir to Abraham as the first born son, and insisted that Abraham drive Hagar and her son away, causing distress to Abraham, though God assured him that

this son also would head a nation. Hagar and Ishmael thus find themselves in the desert with no means to replenish their water.

Hagar is desperate and moves away from her son whom she cannot bear to see die. God however speaks to Hagar once more, enabling her to see the well, the means of their survival.

Read Genesis 16:7-12 & Genesis 21:14-21

Victim. Survivor. Are these words interchangeable? Examine each one for a minute or two and in twos or threes share the images that these words conjure up. What is it that enables a victim to move on to becoming a survivor?

In the Genesis story, does Hagar move on from victim to survivor? If so what is it that enables her to do this? If not what is it that hinders her? What causes her to fall back into despair?

The Story—Lynn Evans

Hear the experience of Lynn Evans, a woman who has moved on from victim to survivor (quoted with permission):

My move from victim to survivor came as I walked out of my marriage and spoke to a woman of the Dublin Airport Police. She and her colleague were very firm in that no one deserves to be beaten up as I had been. They gave me shelter and protection and treated me as if I were a family member, giving me a hug as they sent me off in the ambulance and then when they saw me off at the airport when I came back to England.

That affirmation came from lots of different sources over the coming months, although there were equally those who said very strongly that I was doing the wrong thing in rebuilding my life alone and taking action through the Court. Those two girls from the Dublin Airport Police have been a very special part of my recovery—theirs are the

voices that I have kept hearing when I have been bombarded by "the other side of the argument".

Those first few hours were vital in the recovery process. I couldn't have done any of it without God to sustain me through the tough times, and there is no doubt that there were many of those. Having said that, there have been many, many blessings too.

Journal Entry—On 30th April this year (2002)

I thought of the good —v.—bad in my life in terms of three piles of coins. My pile had been a long while empty but the pile to my left kept piling coins onto mine and their pile did not diminish but the pile to my right was empty despite all the coins it had taken away from me.

*As I have grown and developed as a survivor my pile of coins has begun to grow and grow. When I was asked what colour the coins were I didn't hesitate at all in saying gold—**pure gold**.*

It's a very symbolic concept of how empty I was. In the end I had nothing and ceased to be. I just existed—an invisible being except for the shell people saw. Since I became a survivor I have grown and developed into a person I could never have imagined I would be and the blessings (coins) still keep flooding in.

Responding

Read Luke 13:10-17

Does Lynn's story resonate with the Hagar story or this Gospel reading?

Jesus not only releases the woman from that which binds her but

in front of all the "godly folk" who would condemn him for his act of compassion he gives this woman a status given to no other woman in the scriptures "This Daughter of Abraham", no longer an object of pity or someone of little or no worth but a person worthy of respect.

Symbolic Action

Individually take a sheet of paper and **write** a piece of poetry or prose to reflect the feelings of one of these women or your own feelings as a victim, survivor or onlooker. These writings may be shared with the group or not as you wish and they may be taken away, or offered to God and burned during the closing prayers.

Some words to help you

Here are some poetic writings which may help the group to express their own feelings—

A Prayer for those who suffer rape and assault

God of Love, hear my prayer. I come to you bruised and weary, angry and sad. Hold me and wipe away my tears. Help me to see that this insanity was not my doing. Walk with me through this long valley of darkness. Stay with me when I feel lonely. Sit with my heart for at this moment your gift of life to me is beyond my own feeling—even my own knowing.

Show me how to accept the care of those who love me and who pray for me, especially when I cannot find the words to pray myself. Pour out your healing spirit upon me, Gentle God, so that my spirit may again breathe and then revive to feel hope and love once more. All this and all that you see I need I ask of you. AMEN.

ANONYMOUS

By a fountain of water in the wilderness, We sit with Hagar

In the desert of Beersheba, We wander with Hagar.
Creator God, Spirit who moved upon the face of the waters
When the earth was without form and void,
Open our eyes that we may see a well of water,
Open our lips that we may never again thirst,
Open our hearts that we may bathe in love eternal.
Quench our parched throats that we may sip hope
And in hoping rejoice. For the water which we shall receive
Shall be a well springing up into everlasting life. AMEN.

NINA CERVANTES, CANADA,
from the *WCC ECUMENICAL DECADE RESOURCES*

Bent	spent
Over	with weeping.
a fist full	A woman
of twigs	is bent
twice daily	Surely
sweeping.	You meant
Bent	When You lifted
beneath	her up
a load	long ago
of wood	to Your praise
or care	Compassionate One,
Keeping	not one woman
the rules	only
keeps a woman	but all women
bent	bent
by burdens,	by unbending ways.

Woman Word MIRIAM THERESE WINTER

Closing

Closing Prayers (or use writings from the group)

Eternal God, as we leave this holy space we offer to you the stories we have heard and shared, stories which touch the inmost parts of our being.

(Writings that are not being taken away may be burned at this point, with flame taken from the candle.)

With these stories we offer also the unspoken stories from the silence of our hearts known only to you. Grant us gracious God sensitivity to each others needs, knowledge of how to offer and receive support and strength and courage to change and move forward. In the name of Jesus Christ in whom such change is possible we pray. AMEN.

Extinguish the candle

For next time

The next session will be looking at *New Beginnings*. Members of the group are asked to bring something which, for them, represents a new beginning, which they would like to share with the group, and which can form part of a collage.

Study 6—NEW BEGINNING



For this study, you will need

- ❖ Something small that feels good to hold (eg a wooden egg, or a smooth stone)
- ❖ Glue, large sheet of card as a background for a collage, together with what the group has brought representing new beginnings
- ❖ Small gift as people leave (see end of Study, p49)

Opening

Remember and reflect on the journey on which you have come so far—

During these studies we have walked together on a journey that has taken us through Hagar's story, but related it to other biblical material and to present day stories. Together we have travelled through recognition, despair, speaking out, action and change.

Using the small object to pass round, encourage brief reflection aloud on what has happened for members of the group in their personal journeys. Only the person holding the object may speak, so that each one is heard in silence, and then the object passed on; value each other in the sharing, acknowledging and accepting what is said without questions. When everyone who wishes to share has spoken, have a moment of silence and put the small object in the middle, allowing anyone who wishes to bring anything that has now been raised in reflection to the group.

Look again at the images of hands from the centrefold of this booklet, and share in the *Pilgrim Prayer*.

In a time of prayer, pray that as you reflect together today, you may be open to God to renew and transform your minds, so that being in touch with Christ within you, you may walk in his strength in today's world.

The Story—Hagar Genesis 16, and 21:8-21

The story so far—

Hagar had run away from Sarah when she was first abused when she was pregnant. Sarah blamed Abraham and Hagar for increasing the depths of her suffering, and Abraham condoned Hagar's mistreatment. Sarah must have been amazed when Hagar returned before the baby was born, after an experience in the desert which had made her aware of the presence of God whom she called "the God who sees me". Hagar named her child Ishmael, "God hears". Later, Sarah gave birth to a son of her own, Isaac. Although Abraham was concerned for his son Ishmael, nevertheless, when Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael should be banished so that he would not share Isaac's inheritance, once again Hagar was turned out into the desert with just the food and water she could carry.

Now read aloud the next part of the story, Genesis 21:15-21 reading again how God heard Hagar cry in her despair.

Reflect quietly on the story and especially the last three verses, 19-21.

What particular words or phrases stand out for you?

Here are some ideas which may come up in discussion—

God providing; being with the outcast; working in the situation; being able to get on again with the ordinary things of life; taking up her role as mother in choosing a wife for her son; realising that in this act she is building up family, the possibility of grandchildren ...

The Story—Mary and Elizabeth

Read Luke 1: 26-56

Take a few minutes to read this passage through quietly, and let yourself be a part of the story. Perhaps one person might read through all of the passage, allowing the others to listen with their eyes shut, imagining the scene ... A young woman, becoming aware that she is pregnant, trying to take in what she thinks she has heard ... Realising the implications in her own time and culture (What will her family say? Her father? What will neighbours say? Will it make any difference to Joseph?) ... Deciding to visit her relative who most surprisingly she has learnt is also pregnant ... Making plans for the journey ... travelling to the hill country near Jerusalem, three days journey from Nazareth, Mary's home ... finding Elizabeth in seclusion, not seeing the usual visitors, nor carrying out her normal social tasks.

Two more women, both challenged by the overwhelming events happening in their lives.

Again, what words or phrases in particular stand out for you?

Take time to share these ideas and feelings



Responding

Reflection

The challenge to change, to travel with the new insight that God has revealed to us making a difference in our lives, is at the heart of today's study.

How does it become possible to move on to a new stage in the journey?

For some people, this is moving out of the depths of despair. Study 2 invited you to look at one or two psalms of lament. Many of the Psalms express deep emotions, and perhaps the words Jesus used on the cross from Psalm 22 (21) express how others too may feel forsaken even by God. People may be in a difficult situation that has sapped all energy, facing loss in some way, struggling with feelings or events that seem too powerful to change. Others may be challenged by something that they had never anticipated would happen to them.

What is it that enables people to move on, to begin again in a new way, to regard themselves and others differently, to see possibilities for the future?

What happened in Hagar's life that she was able to think ahead, plan a future for herself and her son?

What made a difference to a young woman who found herself unexpectedly pregnant, or to an older woman who had grieved, felt isolated for years because she was childless,

God "speaks" into people's lives in many different ways, often in ways that they may not recognise at the time as being God "speaking". It may have been through his Word, a vision or a dream, but it may be best described by phrases like "It dawned on me that .." or "I realised nothing would change unless I ..". It may have been in something someone said, or something a friend did.

and who had secluded herself even during her pregnancy, possibly for fear that even now she would be the subject of surprised or judging looks and comments?

In pairs, share what events or moments in the past have been times of insight which have enabled you to move on from a position of powerlessness or despair.

Think and talk about—

- ❖ What has made a difference to you?
- ❖ How has this helped in continuing on the journey
- ❖ What could make a difference to your church community in responding to people who feel powerless, particularly thinking of issues of abuse and violence?

Allow 10 minutes for sharing, but be sensitive to one another. Remind each other of the preciousness of what has been shared, and that it will be treasured confidentially as a gift. After coming back together, share only what anyone particularly wants to say to the group.

Sometimes these events or moments are mountain-top experiences, and they need to be treasured. Sometimes they are a part of a much longer process of change, only apparent on looking back over the journey. They are a part of the process of allowing the work of the Holy Spirit into our innermost beings on the journey to transform us into the people or community we so often want to be.

Activity—collage

Talk through what members of the group have brought representing new beginnings. As you talk, glue and stick the pictures or pieces together to make one collage.

The collage of new beginnings may have pictures of flowers, coming up from bulbs year after year; or of a new baby—the miracle of new life. It may have a piece of lace from a wedding dress, or an exam certificate. It may have something representing pain and then new growth; light shining through a broken window or in a dark place. Your collage will tell its own story, the story of your group.

Closing

Mary's response to the mind-shattering truth which had been revealed to her was to move from the first moments of disbelief to accept that this was happening, to speak out to her cousin Elizabeth who would journey with her, and to break out into the glorious song we call the Magnificat. Her journey was changed forever.

The Magnificat—Mary's song

My soul gives you glory, Lord,
and my whole spirit finds blessing in you, my saviour.
For you have blessed me lavishly and make me open
and willing.

You shatter my little world, and let me be poor before you.
You take from me all my plans, and give me
more than I can ever ask or imagine.

You give me marvellous opportunities, and
the ability to be free, and to burst through my boundaries.
You give me the courage to be daring, to trust in you alone,
for you show yourself as the one and ever greater one
in my life.

You have taught me that it is by being servant
that it becomes possible for me to allow
God's Kingdom to break through
right here and now, at this moment. AMEN

Closing Prayers

Say this version of the Magnificat slowly together, then move into a time of silent prayer. You may like to have some music playing quietly in the background.

As people leave

This is the last session, so as group members leave, give each one the gift of a few small bulbs or a packet of seeds as a sign of God's hand in not only creating and sustaining new life, but also in transformation of what appears to be of little value, but which holds treasure.



Study 6—Notes on the Biblical passages

Psalm 22

Often it seems that the people who have been wounded themselves, or who have faced a similar life-changing situation, can be the best companions or listeners on the journey. Whether or not we personally have felt the depths of isolation and despair as did the Psalmist in Psalms 69 (68) and 88 (87), we are part of each other in Christ, and Christ himself is part of us. In Psalm 22 (21), we hear again the Psalmist's desolation—David's anguish in what seemed to be conspiracy against him, his cry for help, his belief in a God who saves even when it felt far from that, his conviction of the righteousness and holiness of the Lord. Was it the whole psalm that was in Jesus' heart and mind on the cross when he called out the first few words? Certainly he would have known the psalm from his childhood, and in using the first words, may have been expressing everything in the psalm. Here we see words of distress alternating with the conviction of God as Holy One, and the passion of our Lord reflected in the words of the Psalmist.

Luke 1:26-56

The earlier part of this chapter recalls how the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy came to Zechariah and Elizabeth—reflecting the story of Abraham and Sarah. In both cases, living in a culture which put high store on children, having difficulty in conceiving was a cause not only of grief but of shame. Doubtless both had prayed earnestly for children. Despite being a religious leader of his time, Zechariah was afraid, and had great difficulty believing his prayers would be answered. The angel's initial response to his fear (Luke 1:13) reflects the words of the angel to Abraham (Genesis 15:1), and goes on to explain the wider role this child will have, as well as being the answer to the prayers of a childless couple. Elizabeth's response was simpler—thanksgiving and acceptance of the blessing God has given her. She may well have stayed in seclusion

until she was clearly pregnant, lest she was not believed, and ridiculed.

The story goes on to tell of the fulfilment of God's promises through Mary. Nazareth was viewed with suspicion by the Jews, full of Gentiles, and so with close contact with "outsiders". Mary was young, engaged to Joseph, and probably in common with many of the faithful Jews of her time, longing for Israel to be restored, and free from the Romans. Mary too, was initially and understandably frightened by what seemed to be happening to her and by the unbelievable message the angel appeared to be telling her. In Simon Jones' commentary on Luke*, he contrasts Mary's simple belief and acceptance of what the angel said with Zechariah's doubt and dispute with the angel. She co-operated with God's plan despite the culture and custom of her time and the confusion and trouble it would cause her family, village and future husband. This was the beginning of a journey which would take Mary through all sorts of difficult places.

Mary starts off by going to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth. While John the Baptist's home is not detailed in the gospels, it is traditionally thought to be at Ain Karim, a village in an attractive valley about 5 miles west of Jerusalem and so in those days a considerable journey from Nazareth for a teenager. The older and probably deeply spiritual Elizabeth is aware "through the Holy Spirit" (v41) of the hand of God on both of their lives, and it is here with Elizabeth that Mary is able to express her response to God in the Magnificat, describing both God's power, and his gentleness, God's wider plan going back to his promises to Abraham (1:51-55), and his personal blessing (1:46-50). It gives an insight into the way Jesus himself will use words from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18-19 to speak of his ministry and kingdom.

These moments of insight led to a transformation in Mary which was deep, and dra-

** Crossway Bible
Guide to Luke's Gos-
pel by Simon Jones,
published by Inter-
Varsity Press*

matic. Her journey continued, and she needed all her inner reserves and sources of strength to keep her going. She needed to store them up for the times ahead (Luke 2:19).

Transformation is a process, in which the mountain-top experiences, or moments of insight may be a wonderful part; the journey continues, and may go on through the valley, when it can be hard to believe the visions seen from the top of the mountain. This was the challenge for the disciples in Matthew 17:1-20, and must have been an ongoing process for Mary as she came to understand more and more of the way God's plan was being unfolded in her son's life (eg Luke 2:48-52). The choice made to travel on with the insight gained is an act of faith. In faith, Mary accepted the challenge. Faith, like unconditional love, is not just feeling, but also an act of will.

Information and resources

Contacts

Getting help for people who are suffering domestic violence:

24 hour national helpline 0808 2000 247

Refuge

2-8 Maltravers Street, London WC2R 3EE

Tel (office): 020 7395 7700

Web: www.refuge.org.uk Email: info@refuge.org.uk

Rights of Women (Legal advice)

52-54 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT

Tel: 020 7251 6575 Advice line: 020 7251 6575

Web: www.rightsofwomen.org.uk Email: info@row.org.uk

Set Free (Christian)

PO Box 32, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4GF

Offers professional counselling and respite to all those in need of a safe and confidential environment.

Also provides seminars, literature, videos, books, prayer cards

Women's Aid Federation of England

PO Box 391 Bristol BS99 7WS

Tel (admin): 0117 944 4411

Web: www.womensaid.org.uk Email: info@womensaid.org.uk

Support for older people:

Action on elder abuse

Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER

Tel (admin): 020 8765 7000

Web: www.elderabuse.org.uk Email: enquiries@elderabuse.org.uk

National helpline: 0808 808 8141

Organisations working with men:

Domestic violence intervention project

PO Box 2838, London W6 92E Tel: 020 8563 7983

Violence prevention programme for men who want to end their abusive behaviour. Runs a parallel women's support service.

Men's Advice Line

National advice line for violent men and for men suffering violence from their partners. Tel: 020 8644 9914

Resources

Available from the Women's Co-ordinating Group:

Information leaflet on violence against women

Resources leaflet—the resources listed here, in leaflet form

Booklet of Prayers and Reflections (Breaking the Silence)

Leaflets 5p per copy, *Breaking the Silence* 25p per copy. Single copies free. Large bulk orders – cost price plus postage/delivery. Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH Tel: 020 7529 8132 Email: women@CTE.org.uk

Other resources:

Following Jesus in a Violent World—Breaking the silence ...about domestic violence

Pack raising issues for local churches. Includes material for ministers and for those living with domestic abuse. Price £3.50. From: Mary Parker, Baptist Union of GB, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8RT Tel: 01235 517714

Home Truths

Five young people tell of their experiences of domestic violence in this short animated video, particularly designed for use with 8-13 year olds. Price: £10 to hire, £40 to purchase. Leeds Animation Workshop, 45 Bayswater Row, Leeds LS8 5LF Tel/Fax: 0113 248 4997 Email: law@leedsanimation.demon.co.uk
Web: www.leedsanimation.demon.co.uk

Stop Hitting Mum!

Young people's views on domestic violence. Research project undertaken by Warwick University. Price £9.99 including p&p. *Available from:* Young Voice, Tel: 020 8979 4991 or order on the web-site www.young-voice.org

Out of the Shadows—a resource pack

The pack can be used worldwide, to raise awareness of violence and help small groups of women share ideas and suggestions and plan action to deal with violence. *Available from:* Mothers' Union, 14 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB Tel: 020 7222 5533 Email: mu@themothersunion.org

Women and Violence Resource Pack produced by the Women's Network of the Methodist Church. (Published: 2000) Price £5 *Available from:* Women's Network Office, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR Tel: 020 7467 5175 Email: womens.network@methodistchurch.org.uk

The Clothesline Project is a visual display T-shirts designed by women survivors of violence or abuse. The T-shirts hang side by side on the Clothesline, as though the survivors were standing there themselves ... The display also celebrates women's strength and courage to overcome the past. *For further details, contact:* The Clothesline Project, Northern Baptist College, Brighton Grove, Rusholme, Manchester M14 5JP.

The Manchester Mosaic is a patchwork wall-hanging, in which each panel tells the (genuine) story of a woman who has suffered abuse or violence. Sections of the mosaic can be borrowed, and there is a book which tells the stories behind the mosaic. *Book available from:* CTBI Publications, 31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN, Tel: 020 7898 1300 Web: www.chbookshop.co.uk *For information about borrowing the mosaic,* contact Church Life Secretary, CTBI, 3rd Floor, Bastille Court, 2 Paris Garden, London, SE1 8ND. Tel: 020 7654 7254

Ending the Pain and Healing the Hurt—A practical guide for faith communities responding to domestic violence

Produced by the Northern Ireland Regional Forum on Domestic Violence, so addresses are only relevant to Ireland (NI and the Republic), but there is much other practical and thoughtful advice which is helpful everywhere. *Available from:* Angela Courtney, Women's Aid Federation, 129 University Street, Belfast BT9 6AZ

Breaking the Chains .. of the past, of the silence, of the churches' teaching .. on violence against women. A booklet of theological reflections and suggestions for discussion and action. Price £3.50, including postage *Available from:* Church Life Secretary, CTBI, 3rd Floor, Bastille Court, 2 Paris Garden, London, SE1 8ND. Tel: 020 7654 7254

Training

Leeds Inter Agency Project Women and Violence Trust

has developed a range of training courses for people working in the voluntary and public sector, which are designed to develop understanding of domestic violence, promote good practice and service delivery. *Details from:* Leeds Inter Agency Project Women and Violence Trust, c/o CHEL, 26 Roundhay Road, Leeds LS7 1AB

Tel: 0113 234 9090 Email: liaptrust@hotmail.com

Websites

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/domesticviolence/index.html

Contains much helpful information and useful links to other sites.

www.womensaid.org.uk

The national site. It includes telephone numbers for local refuges and a Directory of Domestic Violence Forums.

Resources used or referred to in these Bible Studies

p14 Quotation from a poem by Anne Hine, from *Journey to the Millennium*, published by McCrimmons on behalf of the National Board of Catholic Women, 1998, quoted with permission

p15 *A prayer from the street* by Victoria Claire, from *The Tablet* 23.3.02. By permission, The Tablet Publishing Co Ltd, 1 King Street Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London W6 0QZ
Web: www.thetablet.co.uk

p31-32 Ideas from Marie Fortune taken from *Violence in the Family*, published by The Pilgrim Press 1991

p34, Prayer, p41 Poem *Bent* by Miriam Therese Winter, from *Women Witness*, published by Collins Dove 1992, quoted with permission

p34 Marsie Silvestro's prayer is quoted in *Jesus: Miriam's child and Sophia's Prophet*, E Schuessler Fiorenza, published by SCM 1994. Reprinted by permission of The Continuum International Publishing Group.

p41 Prayer by Nina Cervantes, taken from *Resources for the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-98*, published by the World Council of Churches

p48 This version of *The Magnificat* is taken from *Enjoy Praying with Scripture*, Michael and Terri Quinn, published by Family Caring Trust and used with permission

p49-51 Ideas from the *Crossway Bible Guide, to Luke's Gospel* by Simon Jones, published by Inter-Varsity Press were used in drawing up the notes on Luke 1:26-56.

p60 From *It happens everywhere—including your community* Lesley Orr MacDonald. Conference of European Churches 1999.

Contributors

The studies are an initiative of the Women's Co-ordinating Group for Churches Together in England, as part of a series of resources to help raise awareness of violence against women.

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Affirmation for women survivors

This is not God's will for you.

It is not your fault.

You are a valuable person who deserves a good life.

You are not responsible for another person's violent or abusive behaviour.

You do not have to tolerate, understand or accept it.

You deserve to find a safe person who will believe your story.

You have the right to speak out about what has happened—when you choose to do so.

You have the right to make choices and changes in your own life.

There are others who have also suffered abuse in their lives, and yet have found a pathway to change.

There are companions who are willing to share your struggle.

Together with others we can work to transform the relationships, attitudes and structures which are used to abuse and violate women.

Taken from *It happens everywhere—including your community*

Lesley Orr MacDonald

Issued by the Conference of European Churches 1999

A Suggested Charter for Your Church

This church

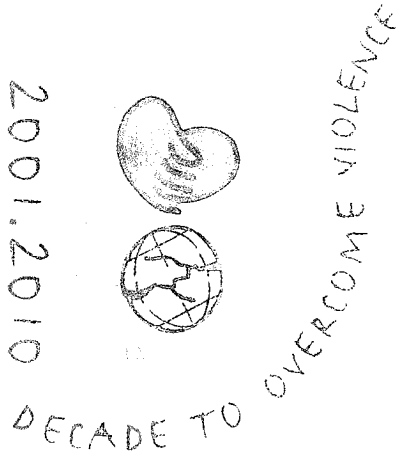
1. Accepts that domestic violence is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
2. Recognises that domestic violence is unacceptable and must be stopped
3. Undertakes to listen, support and care for those affected by domestic violence
4. Will keep up to date with the support agencies that are available locally and publicise them. It will also learn from them and support them in appropriate ways.
5. Will play its part in teaching that domestic violence is a sin that must be repented of on an individual level before reconciliation with God and with the victim can occur
6. Will live a new model of what it means to be human, male and female, teaching and preaching it, thereby challenging society and affirming that God is a God of justice, love, mercy and forgiveness.
7. Will appoint an advocate who will use good practice guidelines and keep the church informed about the implementation and development of this Charter

*[With acknowledgment to
Gloucestershire Churches
Together]*

What is this place?

The six studies in the booklet are linked by the story of Hagar, in Genesis Chs 16 to 21, and also look at other relevant biblical passages. They follow the "journey" which a woman experiencing violence may make, from recognition of her situation to making a new beginning.

These studies are a contribution to the World Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence, and are intended as a resource for local church groups, both men and women, to help them address issues around violence against women.



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