

**Out of Horror, Hope:**  
**A Biblically Based Study of Torture's Ravages and**  
**Potential Responses in the Reformed Tradition**

*from the*

No2Torture Group (studyguide@No2Torture.org)

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***Preface***

**An Introduction to the Study**

This curriculum arose out of a growing concern about the acceptance and normalization of torture. While torture is, unfortunately, not new, it appears that the fear generated by the attacks of 9/11 has decreased our objections to it.

At the 2005 Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico, a small group of Presbyterians concerned about torture and abuse, and their seemingly commonplace use in our government's efforts in the "war on terror," met and began a groundswell to say No! to torture. Informed by Scripture, Reformed theology, the daily news, and the forceful voice of the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in *A Resolution and Confession on the Torture and Abuse of Prisoners*,<sup>1</sup> this group organized to move beyond outrage to action.

This study curriculum is an effort to take seriously our responsibility as Christians and Presbyterians to confess God alone and to renounce all actions of our government that are contrary to the Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup>For full text, see the handout for the 2-hr session, or for Week 5 of the 5-session series.

*The terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 was a heartbreaking tragedy which we will never forget. That catastrophe is also an opportunity to witness to the power of God. Some have said that everything changed on the morning of 9/11, but it did not. We were challenged, but our beliefs and our society are stronger than a handful of terrorists. As Christians, we know that our hope and security come from one place only: our full trust and complete confidence in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior. Unfortunately, instead of taking comfort from the strength we have in God, instead of drawing on our nation's standards of decency and justice, we have given way to the temptation to fear and, in fear, we have jeopardized some of the very things that we value most.*

*Due process has given way to secret detentions, justice has given way to expediency, and humane treatment of prisoners has given way to torture. We are told that our country does not torture prisoners, but our heads and our hearts tell us differently. Hidden, institutionalized torture has become routine. Doing things beyond our borders, or having others do them for us, does nothing to lessen our responsibility.*

*Torture threatens the very nature of our society. Torture degrades us more than its victims. Torture puts us and our troops at risk from those seeking vengeance. We must adhere to our principles for our own sake, as well as out of concern for others. To be aware and be silent is to be complicit. As Christians and patriots we cannot be silent; we must say "no."*

*We must not let fear or hatred be our motivation individually or as a nation. Instead we must trust that "God is love...and perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' but hate their brothers or sisters are liars..." (1 John 4:10b, 18–20a).<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup>Excerpt from Rick Ufford-Chase's and Ed Brogan's *A Call to Say No! to Torture* (a handout for Session 5).

## How to Use this Guide

This is a flexible resource that can be tailored to fit the needs of your congregation. There are two possibilities for using this curriculum in your congregation:

- One, 2-hour session intended to give participants exposure to the realities and ramifications of torture and a chance to decide how they might respond.
- Five, one-hour sessions with lesson plans, exercises and readings.

Each session includes objectives, exercises, a time for prayer and a closing. Each also includes Bible study, excepting Session 4 which focuses on the *Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The study guide includes optional activities that the leader may choose, as well as lists of additional readings and web references for those who want more information. Where possible, copies of the articles used in this study guide are included.

We hope that the leaders will use this material in whatever way best meets the needs in their context. Our goal was to give more than could be covered in one-hour sessions or in a one-time event, so that leaders may feel free to pick and choose from high-quality material and don't have to find ways to fill time or compose their own exercises (although that is encouraged as well!).

## List of Sessions

*Out of Horror, Hope*: single session for a one-time event

- *What Is This Horror? How Can There Be Hope?* (2 hrs)

*Out of Horror, Hope*: five weekly sessions:

- Week 1: *What Is This Horror? How Can There Be Hope?* (60–75 min.)
- Week 2: *Do We Live to Ourselves? Do We Die to Ourselves?* (53–68 min.)
- Week 3: *Moving from Fear to Love* (58–68 min.)
- Week 4: *We Confess God Alone* (50 min.)
- Week 5: *In Christ We Respond in Action and in Hope* (57 min.)

## List of Bible Passages Used

### Single Session:

- Jeremiah 38:4–13 (commentary provided)
- James 1:22–25

## **Five Weekly Sessions:**

First Session:

- Jeremiah 38:4–13 (commentary provided)

Second Session:

- Romans 14:7–12 (short and in-depth commentaries provided)

Third Session:

- Luke 10:25–37, Parable of the Good Samaritan (commentary provided)
- 1 John 4:16–21 (commentary provided)

Fifth (Final) Session:

- I John 4:1–21 (commentary provided in Third Session)
- Luke 12:4, 11–12 (commentary provided)
- James 1:22–25

## **A Note to Leaders**

### ***Regarding the graphic nature of the readings for this curriculum...***

A curriculum about the facts and effects of torture obviously needs to include pieces that reflect the experiences of those who have suffered from torture or those whose lives have been touched by it in some way. This curriculum includes such readings.

We believe it is important for people to read these articles and excerpts, while recognizing that the graphic nature of such accounts can be upsetting for people. Most of us have no direct experience with torture or with people who have been tortured. While the media has done an excellent job of desensitizing Americans to the realities of torture, these are graphic readings and may elicit powerful and difficult emotions for participants. Here are some suggestions for addressing this issue:

- The most important thing to do is to say up front that there will be some graphic readings and materials. Indicating awareness that these are difficult readings gives people the permission to feel what they are feeling as they read. It will also indicate that this is not a casual issue and will require going deep emotionally as well as intellectually.
- Prepare people for what they are going to read. In preparation for leading, read the materials for the entire five weeks ahead of time. Pay attention to your own responses and reactions. At the end of a session, spend some time setting people's expectations

for what they will be reading. For example, before reading the Talvi piece (Session 2), explain that they will be reading one person's account of torture and that it is graphic. Talk about (or elicit discussion about) why it is important to spend the time with stories that are not comfortable for us.

- Find ways to connect people to other experiences of when they have told their story and how important it was that people listened and really understood their experiences. Why is this important?
- You might want to suggest that the group have a phone list and that they could call one another during the week to talk about the articles.
- You might want to read an excerpt from an article while the group is gathered together so that people have an opportunity to be with others when they first react. This would also give people an opportunity to choose not to read something if they think they cannot tolerate it. Again, this is not ideal. Try to find out what people might be afraid of and how they can be supported by the group during this class.
- Honor feelings as they emerge. Do not try to make people feel better or to change their emotional response. Acknowledge it and affirm that difficult emotional responses are appropriate and even expected. Sharing in another's pain is the first step in true compassion and toward just action. The readings are chosen to move us in that direction.

*As Presbyterians we are aware of God's sovereign call to witness to Christ's reconciling work of justice and love. Central to this are the hard tasks of speaking the truth to power and loving our enemies. While those who conspire to terrorize innocents must be brought to justice, we cannot achieve this by terrorizing others who may be innocent.*

...

*Abuse and torture are complex and difficult issues, but knowing the truth – even uncomfortable truths – can set us free to act.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from Rick Ufford-Chase's and Ed Brogan's *A Call to Say No! to Torture* (a handout for Session 5).

## About the Contributors

This project has been a volunteer effort by:

- ◆ Deborah E. H. Bowsher, Senior MDiv candidate and member of Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Ohio – lead author on Sessions 1, 2 and 5, and who wrote commentaries on Jeremiah 38:4–13 and Luke 12:11–12.
- ◆ Rev. Katherine L. Carpenter, Pastor, Rustburg Presbyterian Church in Rustburg, VA – who wrote the commentaries on Luke 10:25–37, 1 John 4 and Romans 14:7–12.
- ◆ Rev. Dr. George Hunsinger, Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary and coordinator of Church Folks for a Better America ([www.cfba.info/](http://www.cfba.info/)) – who wrote the in-depth commentary on Romans 14:1–12.
- ◆ Rev. Kirsten Klepfer, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Grinnell, Iowa – lead author on the Preface and Session 4.
- ◆ Dr. William Kumbier, member of First Presbyterian Church, Joplin, MO, active on the Peacemaking Committee of John Calvin Presbytery, and Professor of English at Missouri Southern State University – lead author on Session 3 and the timeline.
- ◆ Rev. Carol Wickersham, Parish Associate, First Presbyterian Church, Beloit, Wisconsin and Beloit College Sociology Department faculty – editor.

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Included materials are used with the permission of Amnesty International, Center for Victims of Torture, Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, *In These Times*, Doug King, Physicians for Human Rights, and The Presbyterian Church (USA). Bible passages, used by permission, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Div. of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## **Bibliographic Listing of Readings**

Many of these are referenced in this curriculum. Many more can be found elsewhere online. Articles not excerpted or reproduced here can be examined at the web pages listed (as of September 2005).

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