

**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)

**Third Session:**

***Moving from Fear to Love***

(Total time: 58–68 minutes)

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***Objectives:***

- To explore our thoughts about the presence of torture in our society.
- To provide a basic Biblical context for study.
- To open participants' ears to the stories of those who torture, and to acknowledge, through confession, our role in torture.
- To encourage participants to acknowledge and reflect on their fears and the role fear plays in resorting to torture and condoning torture.
- To familiarize participants with possible unexpected consequences of torture.
- To explore love and empathy as responses to the pain and suffering torture inflicts.
- To help participants begin to feel hope when dealing with the issue of torture.

***Scriptures used in this session:***

- Luke 10:25–37 (see commentary in Appendix 1)
- I John 4:16–21 (see commentary on I John 4 in Appendix 2)

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***Session outline:***

- 1. Introduction** (3 minutes)
- 2. Opening Exercise** (15 minutes)
- 3. Reflection on the Motivations and Consequences of Torture** (15–20 minutes)
- 4. Reading and Reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan** (15 minutes)
- 5. Discussion of I John 4:16-21** (5 minutes)
- 6. Closing Activity and Prayer** (5–10 minutes)

***Handouts provided for this session:***

1. *Eight Lessons on Torture* from the Center for Victims of Torture
2. *Abu Ghraib — One Year Later (Excerpts)* by Physicians for Human Rights

***Facilitators should prepare for the session by:***

1. Studying and reflecting on the Scripture passages that will be discussed
2. Reading the two resource articles
3. Setting up newsprint pages and gathering other necessary items

***Items needed for this session:***

- 5x7 note cards, at least two per participant
- Pens/pencils
- Bibles
- Newsprint
- Marking pens
- Copies of the resource articles

## *Moving from Fear to Love*

### **1. Introduction** (3 minutes)

The leader should welcome the participants and begin with a brief, informal recap of what has been covered in the first two sessions. Then the leader should introduce what's to be covered in this session. After an opening exercise to help participants focus on their fears and hopes, we will reflect on what two groups involved with torture victims, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), have to say about the consequences of torture. This will lead us to explore the deeper motivations for practicing or condoning torture. After that, we will consider alternative Christian responses -- both to our fears and to the pain and suffering that torture entails, mainly through reflection on and discussion of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Through realization of the Samaritan's loving response we can then begin to contemplate a key Scripture for the remainder of this study series, I John 4:16-21, which raises up love as a power that can transcend fear. The session will close with prayer. (Leaders may not want to go into this much detail in previewing the content of the session.)

### **2. Opening Exercise: Expressing Our Fears and Hopes** (15 minutes)

- Hand everyone two 5x7 note cards and a pen/pencil.
- Ask them to write the word FEAR on one card and HOPE on the other.
- Show the group these questions (on newsprint):
  - a. *What do I fear?*
  - b. *What do I hope for?*
- Ask them to take 2 minutes to answer these questions on the corresponding cards.
- Then flip the newsprint to reveal two more questions:
  - a. *What do we as a society fear?*
  - b. *What do we as a society hope for?*
- Ask them to take 2 minutes to answer these questions on the back of the corresponding cards.
- Collect the cards, then redistribute them among the group so that no one has her/his own card.
- Ask each person to read aloud *one* response from the "I fear" card.
- Next, ask them to read *one* "I hope for" response.

- Let these resonate with the group for a minute before asking each of them to share *one* response from the “society fears” cards.
- Let these fears sink in, then launch the rest of the session.

NOTE: Do not read the “Society hopes for” cards until the end of the session. Use them as a way to close the session, allowing everyone to feel some hope for the world as they leave an otherwise very heavy session.

### 3. Reflection on the Motivations and Consequences of Torture (15–20 minutes)

*Why do we resort to torture if we know the consequences?*

Distribute copies of the two handouts, *Eight Lessons on Torture* by the Center for Victims of Torture and *Abu Ghraib – One Year Later (Excerpts)* by Physicians for Human Rights. Ask participants to read these carefully. Encourage participants to mark, perhaps with a question mark in the margin, any of the articles' conclusions that they question. Allow ample time to discuss, in the full group or in small groups, the conclusions that participants questioned or found surprising. The force of the articles will probably lead some participants to question the efficacy of torture for extracting useful information. The articles should, at least, lead to the realization that torture can have unintended, unexpected and undesirable consequences for all involved. The leader should try to lead the discussion toward this key question:

*If we accept or, at least, entertain the arguments that, in addition to being physically and psychologically damaging to both victim and perpetrator, torture is simply not effective in producing the results interrogators say they hope for, why then do we resort to it? Why do we allow it to continue?*

Participants might brainstorm, for about five minutes, possible responses to that question, though, given that this is the third session, some salient answers should emerge very quickly. These might include desire for power, hunger for control, expectation of extracting life-saving “intelligence” from captured victims and sadistic pleasure taken in suffering. Without dismissing any of these responses, leaders should try to raise the idea that, ultimately, torture is often motivated by **fear**. We are afraid of what will happen to us if terrorists are not stopped, and torture seems to offer us a way of finding out what we need to know to stop them. The fear of what terrorists might do to us and our loved ones, our families and friends, can be very real and very visceral. This can overwhelm our ability to consider alternatives to the strategy of making our enemies suffer before they can hurt us. Even if we cannot envision ourselves as torturers or interrogators, we may acquiesce to torture because we are afraid of what will happen if interrogators aren't

allowed leeway to “break” those might threaten us. We may feel that it’s acceptable to torture suspected terrorists and their supporters because terrorism demonstrates a deep disregard for the value of human life. Several minutes should be devoted to teasing out some possible connections between torture and fear.

#### 4. **Reading and Reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan** (15 minutes)

Without foreclosing on the discussion of torture's motivations, consequences and effectiveness, invite participants to turn to Luke 10:25–37, the familiar story of the Good Samaritan.

- Ask one participant, or several, to read the story out loud.
- Begin discussion; relevant discussion questions might include:
  - a. What does the story tell us about the beaten victim? Would it be helpful to know more about him? Why or why not?
  - b. Why do the priest and the Levite not stop to help the victim? What reasons, legitimate or not, might they have for not stopping?
  - c. What motivates the Samaritan to stop and help the victim?
  - d. What does the Samaritan’s response to the victim’s suffering suggest about what it means to be a “neighbor”?
  - e. Jesus tell this story to focus attention on the attitudes of his listeners. As the current audience, what does this story say about our attitudes – individually and as a nation – toward our country's detainees?

In reflecting on the parable, some of the following considerations may be useful.

The parable presents us with a range of responses to undeniable pain and suffering. As one commentator, Fred Craddock, has pointed out, those who refuse to help the victim may well have had reasons, regarded as legitimate then, and possibly still now, for not helping. Those reasons (though they need to be “read into” the story as Jesus told it) include: fear of being attacked, if the victim turns out to be part of an ambush, and fear of contamination, if the victim were to die while being assisted. Yet the Samaritan does stop, and Jesus says he does so because he is “moved with pity.” The translated Greek verb means literally that the Samaritan had “gut compassion” for the victim: he felt the victim’s pain viscerally. The same verb is elsewhere used of Jesus’ sympathy for those he heals. The parable notably does *not* say that the Samaritan was unafraid or unaware of the risks he was taking. Yet he responded with love, and generously.

One can therefore think of this parable as presenting, in a direct and dramatic way, the choices we face when confronted with pain and suffering. Torture undeniably involves such pain and suffering, even though the victim in the parable was not a victim of torture as we understand it.

#### **5. Discussion of I John 4:16-21 (5 minutes)**

*What does I John 4:16-21 says about the relation of fear to love, and how do we understand what is meant by “perfect love casts out fear?”*

The purpose of this segment is to help participants realize that the Samaritan story illustrates the power of sympathetic love as a response to suffering, and that that love can be understood as an alternative to fear for Christians. The force of John’s words, that “perfect” (mature, ripe) love casts out fear, might feel stronger after reflection on the Samaritan parable, because the parable suggests concretely how it might feel for love to overpower fear. We introduce I John 4 at the end of the session for that reason and also to encourage participants to reflect on its significance as a bridge to the final session, which may open with the same Scripture. The leader should not attempt an exhaustive discussion of the Scripture at the close of the current session, which participants probably found to be heavy and emotionally trying. Let them know that we will be returning to these verses in the final session.

#### **6. Closing Activity and Prayer (5–10 minutes)**

If the “HOPE” note cards were previously collected, redistribute them, so that each participant has one of the “Society hopes for” expressions that were not read during the opening exercise. Then, lead the group in prayer:

**Sovereign God,**

**It is written that faith, hope and love abide together, and that those who abide in love, abide in God. Yet often our fears cloud our love and stop us from acting mercifully towards our brothers and sisters. And so our hope for this society becomes tarnished. Yet, hope we must, if we are to overcome our fears and abide with one another in your love. We ask you to guide our faith in you and help us to reach out lovingly towards our hopes for this world which are spoken by each of us now:**

Here, invite each participant to read a “Society hopes for” response. Allow time for each response to be heard and resonate. Then continue the prayer:

**Loving God, we trust that your *perfect* love will cast out our fears, if we but allow your Spirit to work within our lives. It is with this good news in our hearts that we pray together the words taught us by Christ Jesus, saying “Our Father...” AMEN.**

Prayer by William Kumbier

## Appendix 1

### Commentary on Luke 10:25–37

The central question in this text is “Who is my neighbor?” The lawyer has asked Jesus this question, wanting to justify himself as one who is faithful in keeping the law. In Jesus’ day, there were strict boundaries within the society to define the term “neighbor” – or those with whom one was allowed to associate. These clearly defined boundaries were set up along the lines of class and ethnicity. One very clear boundary was that Jews did not associate with Samaritans.

The Samaritans lived in Samaria, the region to the north of Judea. In 722 B.C.E., when the Assyrians had conquered Israel, many of them had settled in the northern region. They had intermarried with the people living there. The Samaritans were considered unclean by the Jewish people because they were a mixed race descended from this time. Also, the Samaritans believed that the true place for the worship of God/Yahweh was on Mount Gerizim, not in the Temple in Jerusalem. This was considered heretical by the Jews whose center of worship was Jerusalem.

Jesus tells this parable in which an anonymous man is traveling the very dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. All we know of this man is that he was robbed, beaten and left for dead. Presumably, anything that would have identified him according to his status was taken from him by the bandits. All that identifies him is his desperate need.

Three people travel near him on that road. The first, a priest, would have been expected to stop and help him. If a priest found a corpse on the road, he would have been obligated to bury it. However, touching the corpse would have left him unclean, and he would have had to go through the ritual of purification in order to resume his functions as a priest. Next to come is a Levite, also a likely person to help this man. It is not completely without reason that neither of them stopped. This man in the ditch could have been a plant to trick them into coming over so that they could be robbed. Yet, both of these people see the person in need and do nothing, making them culpable.

The third person to arrive is a Samaritan. He is the one who helps the man in desperate need. For this man by the side of the road who is in desperate need, the boundaries of race, religion and class are irrelevant. The one who comes near to him, who shows him compassion, is his neighbor.

For those who were listening to Jesus, this parable would have been scandalous. With whom were they to identify? They would not have wanted to identify with the religious leaders who showed no compassion, but they certainly would not have identified with a Samaritan.

In telling this parable, Jesus is pushing the boundaries of who is our neighbor. There are no boundaries about who is our neighbor, and there are no boundaries regarding those to whom we are to show compassion. When we act out our faith in deeds of love and compassion, all people are our neighbors.

**Sources:**

“The Gospel of Luke” by R. Alan Culpepper in The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume IX, Abingdon Press, 1995.

“Samaritans” by T. H. Gaster in The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, R-Z, Abingdon Press, 1962.

“Luke” by Fred B. Craddock in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, James Luther Mays, Editor. John Knox Press, 1990.

## Appendix 2

### Commentary on 1 John 4

In First John, the author states one of the very basic confessions of our faith: God is love. We know this, he says, because of the self-sacrifice that God made in sending Jesus to live among us and to give his life for us. In the incarnation of Jesus, the character and nature of God is revealed, and that nature is self-giving love.

The author of this letter was responding to people within the community who were questioning the humanity of Jesus. These people were known as Gnostics, and their world view was dualistic – a separation between spirit and flesh. But the writer of First John is saying unequivocally that Jesus was fully human as well as being fully God. He was born, he lived, he suffered, he died, and he was resurrected. If he had not been human, then he would not have died, and the love of God would not have been completely revealed in him. It is in Jesus' humanity that the love of God is revealed.

Thus, to confess that Jesus is Lord, is to confess that he was truly human, the incarnation of the God who is love. And if we claim to know God, then God's love also must be revealed in us – in how we love other people. We demonstrate that we know God and that we love God by loving others. God's love was revealed concretely in the sacrifice of Christ – it was not an abstract idea. Therefore, our love for God must be revealed in action. It must be acted out in how we treat one another. It is not something to think about – it is something that we do.

Finally, as we live out this self-giving love, as God's love is perfected in us, we are able to let go of fear. Our lives are no longer consumed with our wants and with what we can control and possess, but they become other-directed. There is no basis for fear. We are living in obedience to the will of God which is love. There is the freedom to love with abandon and to live as those in whom God abides.

#### Sources:

“1, 2, and 3 John” by Gail O'Day in The Women's Bible Commentary, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Editors, Westminster, John Knox Press, 1992.

An Introduction to the New Testament by Raymond E. Brown, Doubleday Publishers, 1997.

“1, 2 and 3 John” by Johannes Beutler, S.J. in Global Bible Commentary, Daniel Patte, General Editor, Abingdon Press, 2004.

“First, Second, and Third John” by Moody Smith in Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, James L. Mays, Series editor, John Knox Press, 1991.

“The First, Second, and Third Letters of John” by C. Clifton Black in The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. XII, Abingdon Press, 1998.