

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)

Final Session:

In Christ We Respond in Action and in Hope

(Total time: 57 minutes)

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October, 2005

Objectives:

- To continue using Bible study to understand humanity's experience of, and God's response to, torture.
- To encourage hope through Scripture and the 2004 General Assembly's *Resolution and Confession on the Torture and Abuse of Prisoners*.
- To help participants experience hope when dealing with this issue.
- To encourage active, outward response to the issue.
- To witness the work of the Holy Spirit among the participants.

Scripture used in this session:

- I John 4:1–21 (text included as Appendix 1)
- Luke 12:4, 11–12 (commentary included as Appendix 2; text included in handout)
- James 1:22–25 (text included in handout)

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Bible passages are from the:

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Session outline:

- 1. Reading of 1 John 4** (3 minutes)
- 2. Introduction and Summary of Prior Sessions** (2 minutes)
- 3. What Have We Learned about Torture?** (15 minutes)
- 4. SO WHAT?** (14 minutes)
- 5. Expressing Our Love** (20 minutes)
- 6. Closing with Prayer** (3 minutes)

Handouts provided for this session:

1. *Eight Lessons on Torture* by the Center for Victims of Torture
2. Luke 12:4, 11–12 and James 1:22–25
3. *A Resolution and Confession on the Torture and Abuse of Prisoners* by The 216th General Assembly (2004) of the PC(USA)
4. *A Call to Say No! to Torture* from Rick Ufford-Chase and Ed Brogan
5. *It's Time to Say No to Torture* (Part 2) by Doug King
6. *What We Can Do* by the No2Torture Group
7. *12-Point Program for the Prevention of Torture...* by Amnesty International
8. *Internet Resources on Torture*

Facilitators should prepare for the session by:

1. Contemplating the Scripture passages that will be discussed
2. Reading the resource articles
3. Setting up newsprint pages with headings, if desired
4. Considering possible responses to the torture issue (handouts provide some ideas)

Items needed for this session:

Newsprint

Marking pens

Bibles

Copies of the resource articles

Copies of the 216th General Assembly's resolution on torture

Papers to fold into cranes

Story of the paper cranes and Sadako Sasaki:

- ◆ See *Make a World of Difference: Creative Activities for Global Learning*, Friendship Press, New York, 1990.)
- ◆ <http://www.sadako.org/sadakostory.htm>

Instructions for folding paper cranes, for example:

- ◆ <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/peacecrane.pdf>
- ◆ <http://www.sadako.org/foldingcranes.htm>
- ◆ <http://www.e22.com/peacecrane>

Writing papers, pens and envelopes

Sample letters

In Christ We Respond in Action and in Hope

1. **Reading of 1 John 4** (3 minutes)

Open by reading 1 John 4 (text provided in Appendix 1).

2. **Introduction and Summary of Prior Sessions** (2 minutes)

Briefly remind participants of the high points of the last few weeks.

3. **What Have We Learned about Torture?** (15 minutes)

- Ask each group member to state one thing that s/he has learned about torture so far.
- Allow the group to talk for several minutes.
- Invite the group to continue their reflections with a slightly different focus, then distribute the *Eight Lessons on Torture* handout. Say words like these:

“The Minnesota-based Center for Victims of Torture is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1985. The first organization of its kind in the United States and the third in the world, CVT has pioneered a comprehensive assessment and care program that is unique in the U.S. They offer us these lessons about torture. Some of this information is on the handout just distributed. Some you may have already known. Some you may have never considered. Regardless it’s OK. You are all here now and are learning about these practices – and their results – which are now occurring in some military installations. It’s also important to recognize that torture in some forms is also practiced in some of our state prisons across the country. While this is a frightening situation that deserves our attention, in this class we have been focused on the situation as experienced by people in places known and unknown. A little sleuthing on the web reveals a great deal more than we can cover here today. But what can we take away from our time together? Let’s look at CVT’s *Eight Lessons*.

- Invite participants to volunteer to read aloud the salient points which are underlined (and in red, if printed in color) and the **explanatory text which is in boldface type (and in blue, if printed in color)**.
- Divide the class into 3 small groups and ask them to discuss these ideas.

4. SO WHAT? (10-20 minutes)

Part A: Optional (10 minutes). If you are short on time, move to Part B.

- Ask the participants to remain in their groups and ask each group to study a different one of these three texts (included with the handouts for this session):
 - ◆ Luke 12: 4, 11–12
 - ◆ James 1:22–25
 - ◆ *A Call to Say No! to Torture* from Rick Ufford-Chase and Ed Brogan
- Ask the participants to consider these questions:
 - ◆ What does all this mean to us?
 - ◆ Based on what we have studied during these last weeks, and what you may have known before regarding torture, what, *if anything*, should we do about this matter?
- After the groups have considered their responses to the text, ask them to share their thoughts with the other groups. Allow the group to talk through their thoughts on this for several minutes

Part B: (10–15 minutes)

- Hand-out *A Call to Say No! to Torture*. Moderator Rick Ufford-Chase and Chaplain Ed Brogan have called on Presbyterians to say No! to torture. The question before us now is what do we want to do? We have spent five sessions together learning about these issues. Where does this information lead us, as a group or as individuals? Let's take a minute to reflect silently, then get some ideas down on newsprint.
- Use the newsprint to list all of the ideas as they surface.
- If the group needs ideas, stimulate the discussion:
 - ◆ Refer to the handouts provided: *What We Can Do*, Doug King's *Say No to Torture* (Part 2), and the 216th General Assembly's *Resolution and Confession on the Torture and Abuse of Prisoners*; OR
 - ◆ Distribute copies of *Amnesty International's 12-Point Program*, then ask the group to suggest specific actions to implement the program.
- Be sure that the list includes:
 - ◆ Ideas that will enable us to support captors, as well as captives; captors may also be victims of circumstances beyond their understanding or control.
 - ◆ Ways to address public policy through advocacy. One of the simplest ways to stay on top of current issues, so as to address public officials, is through the

www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/ site (click on “Act Now” and then on “Stopping Torture”). Making a commitment to write a letter a week (or a day!) can be a powerful form of spiritual discipline! In addition to this site, many of the other organizations on the Internet Resources list have advocacy suggestions.

- ◆ The suggestion to attend one of the upcoming No2Torture gatherings for a time of public witness, prayer, study, and strategizing. For details, see the www.No2Torture.org/ or www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/ websites.
- Ask the group which – if any – of these ideas they might be willing to commit to doing, either as a group or individually. Allow a few minutes for their responses.
- Distribute any remaining handouts for future study and action, including *Internet Resources...* that lists Internet sites and curriculum references related to torture.

5. **Expressing Our Love** (20 minutes)

Expressing our love for those who torture, for those who are tortured and for all who are affected by torture.

- Invite the participants to follow the teachings of the Scripture lesson as well as the words of the General Assembly by either folding paper peace cranes or writing a letter to elected or appointed officials who can influence policies and practices that affect the treatment of detainees. Be careful to remind them that by responding to God’s word we are showing our love for our brothers and sisters – as well as reaching back towards God’s ever-present love for us.

A. Folding Paper Cranes

- ◆ Tell the story of their meaning first.
- ◆ Invite those who choose to fold to consider action steps to pursue later.
- ◆ Provide instructions on how to fold their own crane.
- ◆ Suggest that their cranes could be taken home or offered to the congregation in next week’s worship as way to bring topic to the entire church. Invite those who folded the cranes to decide together what to do with them, such as making a display with an explanation in a public place.

B. Writing Letters to Government Officials

- ◆ Have paper, envelopes, pens and sample letters (see websites below) available for use.
- ◆ Provide names and addresses of Representatives and Senators for the area. These can be found by calling a local Representative's office, through the official sites <http://www.house.gov/> and <http://www.senate.gov/>, or through private sites like <http://www.congress.org/>
- ◆ Sample letters can be found at <http://www.cvt.org/main.php/Advocacy/HelpEndTortureNow/WhatYouCanDo>
<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=11477>
- ◆ For recent advocacy suggestions, see www.No2Torture.org/ and <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/actnow.htm> .

6. Close with Prayer (3 minutes)

- Form the group into a circle. Invite each member of the class to share a few words about the class experience and their hope for God's world — as a way of honoring the work of the Holy Spirit among them these last few weeks.
- When each has shared her/his prayer, offer this prayer:

Abiding God, Loving God,
We know you are with us every hour,
yet we have often failed to share your love
because we have been afraid.
We often say "I love God,"
but we still hate our brothers and sisters.
We know you revealed your love for us
because you sent your son Jesus to teach us that
perfect love casts out fear.
We know that since you love us so much,
we should love one another.
We know that your Holy Spirit has been among us
encouraging our witness and attesting to your abiding love.
We ask that you now stay with us as we move into the world
seeking ways to love our brothers and sisters and so come to truly love you,
in whom love has been truly perfected for this day and all days.
Amen.

(Prayer by Deborah Bowsher, based on 1 John 4)

Appendix 1

Text of I John 4

^{NRS} **1 John 4:1** Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus^A is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. ⁴Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love^B because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters,^C are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister^D whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters^C also.

^A Other ancient authorities read *does away with Jesus* (Gk *dissolves Jesus*)

^B Other ancient authorities add *him*; others add *God*

^C Gk *brothers*

^D Gk *brother*

Appendix 2

Commentary on Luke 12:11–12

Jesus' reminder to rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance concludes the first 12 verses of Luke 12. Here Jesus has been teaching the disciples in the presence of large crowds of onlookers. First he speaks to them about the hypocrisy that exists within a particular segment of the greater Jewish community, and he discloses to them that nothing can be concealed from God on the Day of Judgment. He admonishes his followers to not fear the consequences of professing their faith in public. Instead, believers should only fear God who alone can truly judge a person's life. It is critical for every person of faith to publicly proclaim and confess his/her faith despite threats of bodily harm or death. After all, God does not forget even the tiniest sparrow, and according to Luke, believers are worth far more to our Creator.

When first written, some 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, this passage offered encouragement and hope to Luke's community of faith. While much more significant persecutions occurred well after the author's life, Christians of the day struggled mightily to maintain their faith in the face of hostile neighbors and both Jewish and gentile officials.

Certainly a schism was beginning to appear between the Jews and Christians over the idea that Jesus might be the Messiah. Some no longer believed they came from the same root. However, scholars tell us that the greatest threats came from local gentile magistrates who could apply physically painful and prolonged pressure to those they interrogated. At this time many Christians still declared themselves to be part of the Jewish faith. The Roman authorities had allowed the Jews to refuse making homage payments to the preferred Roman deities on grounds that theirs was an ancient faith adhering to just one God. The Romans, however, did not include Christians as members of the Jewish faith because they claimed what appeared to be a new deity, Jesus, instead of Yahweh, as God. With such animosity growing between Jews and those who would become known as Christians, and in view of their failure to pay homage, members of this new "cult" were viewed as a threat to the economy and the stability of region. They were different and could not be trusted. The possibility of being beaten or even killed was a grim reality facing those who professed Jesus as Lord. Deep fear permeated Luke's community.

Yet, in verses 11 and 12, the author provides the audience with great words of hope: "the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what to say." In the wake of 9/11, great fear permeates our society. With lives at stake there is good reason for concern. And just as

things were 2,000 years ago, authorities still lie and behave hypocritically towards their constituents. Our faith is still besieged by society's skewed morals, and the marvels of technology seduce us into believing we are almost gods ourselves. To some who think we are powerless in the face of greater worldly powers, confessing one's faith is viewed with skepticism at best.

Yet Christians continue to believe that the Holy Spirit is still with us, working among us to bring forth God's Kingdom of peace and wholeness. Here, Jesus is already pointing towards the amazing gift of ongoing relationship, a relationship that will offer us the strength we will need if we are to live out our faith. And that is what this passage invites us to do: live out our faith. The question becomes how? How do Christians find the courage to follow Christ? Perhaps it is by reaching back in love to God. Perhaps it is in demonstrating our love for our brothers and sisters regardless of what they believe or look like. For they too are created in God's image.