

Human Trafficking Awareness and Action: A Bible Study

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Introduction

This is a small group Bible study done in the facts, association, meaning, action (FAMA) method, adapted from *Literacy in Action: A Guide for Combining Literacy and Community Development* by Lynn Curtis and Josie Lee (Syracuse, NY: ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2005). This same method is being used in the United Methodist Women's Bible Women's program (HYPERLINK <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umw/programs/biblewomen>).

A facilitator will read the summary of the Bible verse or both the verse and the summary, after which the group will break into smaller groups of three to four people. The small groups will discuss the questions under each section, and then each group will share their answers with the entire group. The facilitator will also read the reflections in the "Meaning" and "Action" sections.

Judges 19:1-30: Woman From Bethlehem

This is a hauntingly powerful story of a woman from Bethlehem. She was a concubine. In a fit of anger she ran away from her master and owner to her father's house in Bethlehem of Judah. The man found her and wooed her back.

On the way back to his home in the hill country of Ephraim, it became late in the evening and they needed a place to stay. They depended on the hospitality of the people of Gibeah, but there was no hospitality forthcoming. Finally, an old man offered them a place to stay in his home.

That night a set of townsmen knocked on the door. They demanded the body of the male visitor. In order to appease the sexual hunger of the men outside, the old man grabbed the concubine and threw her out and shut the door.

The crowd outside gang-raped her, abused her all night. When dawn broke they left her lying on the ground. When her husband came out he saw her lying dead at the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.

Her memory calls out. It calls out to the psychological numbness of those around her, and it calls out to us down the centuries to amplify her silent cries.

Phyllis Trible, an Old Testament scholar, comments on this story of the concubine from Bethlehem in her book *Texts of Terror*. Ms. Trible says, "The story is alive, and all is not well. Beyond confession, we must take counsel to say, 'Never again.'"

"Have you seen my daughter?" is the cry of the victim's parents, echoing down the corridors of time.

Fact

- What do you see in this story?
- What is the story about?
- Who are the key characters in the story?
- What are some of the conversations that you hear in this story?
- Is there anything unrecorded or missing in the story?

More questions can be framed that draw on the realities in the story and that allow the readers to sharpen their observation and enter the story and the discussion easily.

Association

- Do all of the characters in the story speak? Whose voices are left out?
- Are there “insiders” and “outsiders” in the story?
- How do you think the “insiders” and “outsiders” in the story are feeling?
- Have you ever felt like one of them or some of them?
- Have you come across people who felt like one of the persons in the story?

Further questions can be asked that refer to personal experiences and the shared experiences from participants’ own contexts.

Meaning

- What are the key concepts in the story?
- What are some of the oppressions that you see in the story?
- What is the role of “culture” that contributes to the violence against women?
- What are some of the struggles and challenges of the persons in the story?
- Where is God in the story?

Additional questions can be offered that help the readers move into the next level of ideas, values and key thoughts in the story.

Female Face of Human Trafficking

Today the face of human migration is female. The face of poverty is female. The face of human trafficking is female. The face of the worldwide church is also increasingly female. Is this a peculiar predicament of mission, women’s work with women?

Linda Smith, founder of Shared Hope International, an organization that works with trafficked victims, says in a Shared Hope International report on sex trafficking ([HYPERLINK http://www.sharedhope.org/Resources/demand.aspx](http://www.sharedhope.org/Resources/demand.aspx)), “The market for sex trafficking and sex tourism is just like a shopping mall. Buyers can choose from a variety of human products of various ages and colors, and as long as buyers continue to purchase this human product and facilitators support the market, the shopping mall stays open.”

There are still thresholds of terror for women and children who stretch out their hands for help. The story of the woman from Bethlehem is a call for an investigation into the trafficking of the vulnerable, for God stands in solidarity with the poor, the vulnerable and those who are considered expendable by society.

The Christ Child from Bethlehem

We celebrated the birth of the child in Bethlehem only a few weeks ago. We know of the story of Jesus on the cross outside the city of Jerusalem. He, too, became an object of violence. His broken body on the cross is a sign of our redemption as well as a warning that never again should anyone be subject to violence. Jesus’ death

on the cross was once-for-all accomplished so that no one's body would be broken again and no human being made in the image of God be violated in body and mind. We, as members of the faith community, are bearers of this memory.

Action

- What is the relevance of this story in your context? In your community?
- What are some of the actions that we can take?

Other questions can include those that encourage participants to think purposefully about tangible steps that can be taken to combat violence and human trafficking.

The group should set action plans that the participants can implement and share methods of how United Methodist spiritual growth coordinators and social action coordinators can work together.

Reshaping Thresholds for Women and Girls

Committing to a life without fear of violence is still a receding goal for some women and girls. Human trafficking is modern-day slavery. More and more women and children are trafficked because of poverty. Victims are subject to force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor.

A key task of mission is making the world a home for the human family. Philip Potter, former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, at the 6th World Council of Churches Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, defined mission as “cooperating with God in making the *oikoumene* (the whole inhabited world) an Oikos, a home, a family of men and women, of young and old of varied gifts, cultures, possibilities where openness, trust, love and justice reign.”

Making a home for the human family with a welcome threshold is still part of the goal for us who are a covenanted community of believers sustained by the Holy Spirit and sent out in mission. Mission is saying *no* to violence against women, children and youth. Mission is saying *yes* to reshaping their thresholds as places of healing and wholeness, for the sake of the one who was born in Bethlehem for the healing and redemption of all, even Jesus the Christ.

We commit ourselves to reshaping the thresholds as welcome and safe places. God, open our ears to hear your voice crying, “Have you seen my daughter?”

Additional Resources

“Battling Sexual Exploitation” by Paul Jeffrey in the June 2010 **response**
www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/response/articles/item/index.cfm?id=216

“A Conversation on Human Trafficking”
www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/news-1/?search=Anna%20Noble&C=6542&I=31974

“Dear John”
www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/news/?search=Human%20Trafficking%20Training&C=6517&I=31594

“Intercept Human Trafficking”

www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/act/alerts/item/index.cfm?id=318

“Stop Human Trafficking”

www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/act/alerts/item/index.cfm?id=242

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www.missionresourcecenter.org/wdstore/resources/publications/NEWS_UMW_Summer2009.pdf

National Council of Churches: www.nccusa.org