

CIRCLES OF HEALING

*A support group
curriculum
for abused
Christian women*



A program that supplements the video,
Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman,
produced by:

FaithTrust 
INSTITUTE

Working together to end
sexual & domestic violence

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CIRCLES OF HEALING

A Support Group Curriculum for Abused Christian Women

Written by the Domestic Violence Awareness Task Force
Office of Justice and Peace
Catholic Diocese of Richmond, VA

This program is designed to be used together with the video,
Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman,
produced by FaithTrust Institute

All quotes from *The Lord Hears Your Cries: Hope and Strength
from the Scriptures in the Midst of Domestic Violence*,
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CIRCLES OF HEALING:

A Support Group Curriculum

This curriculum uses the video *Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman* and is based on its accompanying study guide. Both the video and the study guide are produced by FaithTrust Institute, Seattle, Washington, (206) 634-1903, www.faithtrustinstitute.org.

INTRODUCTION

Many survivors of domestic violence find that their Christian faith is a source of strength and comfort. For others, the Bible's message brings confusion, guilt and fear when they think about or attempt to leave their abuser.

Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman is a powerful video that can help survivors from Christian traditions apply Jesus' core message of love and respect to their own situations.

Circles of Healing is intended to supplement the video and study guide, *Wings Like a Dove*. The three-session curriculum is designed for use with small groups of Christian women survivors of domestic violence in shelters or other safe settings, with the leadership of pastors, religious educators, or volunteers who have theological training.

Circles of Healing is best used as a series of three consecutive two-hour sessions, but each session is self-contained and can be used as a discrete unit. The intention is to make it easy for women in shelters to enter the process beginning with any one session. The goal of the total three-session curriculum is for women "to reflect upon their experiences in light of the core message of Christian scripture which is God's love for them and their worthiness to live a life of dignity free from harm."

General suggestions concerning the group sessions:

These are *guidelines* for the process during each session. Experienced facilitators will want to use creativity in their own style and adapt to the culture of the group.

- Be sure to announce before each session that this program is within the Christian context.
- At the beginning of each session, state the two religious issues that will be treated in the two sections of the video they will view. Remind the group of the "ground rules" of confidentiality and respect.
- Review briefly the previous session(s) before introducing Sessions II & III.
- At the end of the discussion time, summarize the "facts" in the sections of the video just viewed.

It is best if membership during the 3 sessions is consistent, but the process allows for times when this is not possible.

Leaders

We recommend co-facilitators, e.g. a shelter worker/volunteer with expertise in the dynamics of domestic violence and a person from a local congregation or seminary. The congregation or seminary leader needs a firm grounding in theology and Hebrew and Christian scriptures, a knowledge of the basic elements of domestic violence, and training/experience in facilitating groups and leading prayer.

Leaders and participants should agree to respect the religious traditions of one another and to maintain the confidentiality of the group proceedings.

It is important that the leaders model respect for a wide range of diverse Christian beliefs and traditions, even though it may be necessary at times to question specific interpretations (or misinterpretations) of these traditions that have been used to justify or perpetuate abuse.

Resources needed:

1. Video — *Wings Like a Dove: Healing for the Abused Christian Woman*.
2. Brochures — *What Every Congregation Needs to Know About Domestic Violence* (one for each participant)
3. Booklets — *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*, By Rev. Marie Fortune (one for each participant)

All of the above are available from FaithTrust Institute in Seattle, Washington. Purchase copies by contacting FaithTrust Institute at www.faithtrustinstitute.org or (206) 634-1903.
4. Copies of *The Lord Hears Your Cries: Hope and Strength from the Scriptures in the Midst of Domestic Violence* (one for each participant). Copies may be obtained from the American Bible Society, 1865 Broadway, New York, NY 10023-7505. To order, go to www.americanbible.org or call 1-800-32-BIBLE.
5. Copies of different denominational statements on domestic violence from which participants can choose. (Appendix B)
6. A list of helpful scripture passages for each participant (Appendix A)
7. Copies of a song for creating prayer cards. (You may use the song, *Peace is Flowing Like a River* in Appendix C – or you may make copies of a song of your choice for opening and closing each session. Look for an inspiring song that is used by a range of Christian traditions.)

8. Votive candles in glass holders — can be found in craft, candle and gift shops. The scent of lavender reportedly produces calmness. Lavender candles, oils, etc., can be found in candle and aromatherapy shops.
9. A figure of a woman that is appropriate for the group — expressive of freedom, dignity and wholeness, and large enough to be visible by all in the circle.
10. Traditional scallop or other seashells, miniature doves and a mirror — can be purchased in craft stores.
11. Song: *Peace Is Flowing Like a River*. Words provided in text of the curriculum. Give song on cards for participants to keep. (Text for creating cards is in Appendix C of this curriculum.)
12. Tape or CD player and recordings of music to use either before the sessions as gathering music, after the sessions during socializing, or during the sessions if it seems appropriate for the group. Choose something appropriate and easily sung, e.g., instrumental songs from various cultures, etc.

NOTE: A local congregation, preferably the leader's own congregation, should be invited to purchase materials for participants as a donation in support of this ministry to survivors of domestic violence.

Child Care:

This service may be necessary for women to be able to participate in this process. Hopefully, additional volunteers from a sponsoring congregation or a collaborating group will provide this service at the shelter during the sessions.

SESSION I

I Am not to Blame for the Broken Covenant

Suggested Environment:

Choose a safe, secure space for the session. Arrange the chairs in a circle with a small, low table in the center. On the table, place the following: a multi-colored cloth, a figure of a “freed” woman (see “Resources Needed,” p.3, #9 for more details), an image of a dove for each participant, a full face-sized mirror, a living plant, a Bible. Have several lavender scented candles to gently light the room. Place boxes of tissues around the room in reach of the participants. Have the music tape/CD ready to play.

Introduction:

The leader invites each participant to introduce herself and say something she wants the group to know about herself.

Leader:

The God in me greets the God in you. We gather together, embraced in the warmth of Jesus Christ, a circle of sisters, a circle of confidence and safety, a circle of respect and confidentiality, a circle of brokenness and healing. Here together as a community of sisters sharing the pain of abuse, we open ourselves to the powers of healing within and among ourselves.

We are daughters of the universe. We are daughters of God. We are beautiful. We are loved. We breathe in goodness to activate our energies of healing (*deep inhalation*). We expel the evil of pain (*exhale*). Again: in to activate healing and out to expel pain. One more time.

Song:

Peace Is Flowing Like a River (or another song chosen by facilitator)

First verse by the facilitator. Participants join in vs. 2 & 3 led by facilitator.

1. **Peace** is flowing like a river,
 flowing out of you and me.
 Flowing out into the desert,
 setting all the captives free.
2. **Love** is flowing like a river,
 flowing out from you and me.

Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

3. **Healing's** flowing like a river
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

4. Hum through the melody.

Leader:

As we get ourselves into a comfortable position, opening ourselves to the energy of God, let us pray together.

Meditation Prayer: (Facilitator reads slowly)

“The torment of being violently assaulted by the person you love can cause you to have feelings of guilt, even though you are not at fault. You may feel guilty or worthless, as if you brought the violence upon yourself. You may be saying to yourself: ‘If only I was a better person, if only I had done more to please.’” (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.14.)

The question of *who* suffers and *why* does not have easy explanations; to suffer pain does not mean you are guilty. “God is not punishing you; the responsibility and blame for your suffering at the hands of your abuser must be squarely placed where it belongs: on the abuser. Your abuse is the sin of the abuser.” (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.16.) He has broken the covenant of love. He has betrayed you and your love.

“You may not think God is punishing you, but may ask, ‘Why is God allowing me to be mistreated? Why is my abuser allowed to keep abusing me?’” (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.18.)

In the Bible we hear Job asking similar questions.

“Why is life so hard?
Why do we suffer?
We are slaves in search of shade;
We are laborers longing for our wages.
God has made my days drag on and my nights miserable.
I pray for night to end,
But it stretches out
While I toss and turn...

And so, I cry out to you in agony and distress.” (Job 7:1-5, 11)
(Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.18.)

“In your exhaustion you may also ask God, ‘how long must I endure this terrible suffering?’ You may even feel angry with God feeling that God does not hear or care about you.” (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries* p.19.)

You may feel like saying along with the psalmist:

“How much longer, God,
Will you forget about me?
Will it be forever?
How long must I be confused
and miserable all day?
How long will my enemies
keep beating me down?
Please listen, God,
and answer my prayers.” (Ps. 13)
(Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.19.)

Now ask yourself...Can I believe that God hears me in my pain? Can I let go of my pain and feelings of guilt? Can I mourn the loss and feel the cleansing of my own tears? Can I say with the psalmist:

“Listen, God, listen to my prayer!
Don’t reject my request.
Please listen and help me.
My thoughts are troubled
and I keep groaning
because my loud enemies
shout and attack.

My friend turned against me
and broke his promise.
His words were smoother
than butter, and softer
than olive oil.

My heart is racing fast,
and I am afraid of dying.
I am trembling with fear,
completely terrified.

I wish I had wings
like a dove,
So I could fly far away
and be at peace.” (Ps. 55: 1-8, 12, 13, 20, 21a)
(Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p. 10 & 11.)

Song:

Peace Is Flowing Like a River

View Video:

Wings Like a Dove

Part I - It's Not Your Fault (Guilt/Shame)

Part II - Marriage: When the Covenant Is Broken (by Violence)

Discussion:

Each session has questions for discussion after the viewing of the video. They are designed to guide reflection among the participants. Skilled facilitators may have additional ways to guide the process. Be creative!

1. In what ways are your experiences similar to those of women in the videotape?
2. In the video, did the clergy say something that helped you better understand the religious issues around the abuse you have suffered?
3. What are some examples of Bible stories that are often quoted that create problems for Christian women facing abuse?
4. Father Heagle talks about how divorce doesn't end the marriage, but that the violence does. The marriage vows are already broken when the husband batters the wife. The battering, not divorce, is the sin. How does this help you to better understand your relationship?
5. Can you give examples of the following conflicts?
 - a. Being angry and forgiving the abuser;
 - b. Blaming yourself and feeling the need for him to take responsibility for his actions;
 - c. Giving in to his abuse and protecting yourself and the children;
 - d. Money issues - wanting to leave but needing to stay because you depend on him;
 - e. Religious beliefs, which may keep you together, contradicted by the need for safety.

6. How do your religious beliefs and some religious leaders make it more difficult for you to confront your abuser and get help? Do you think God approves of the violence in your relationship and expects you to live with it?
7. Have any of you returned to your partners as some in the video did? Why do women return to their abusive partners?
8. In the video, Delia talks about being raped after being beaten and feeling that it was part of the beating.
 - a. What does she mean by this?
 - b. Why is marital rape not only unacceptable but also illegal?

Closing Prayer and Ritual:

Leader:

Let us pray. We give thanks for the wisdom of God among us. We now understand more about our feelings of pain and guilt. We understand that we are not to blame for the abuse that has happened to us. We are women of the universe. We are daughters of God. We are beautiful and we are loved.

(Going around the circle, each in turn holds the mirror for another as all say)

(Name of person), you are a woman of the universe. You are a daughter of God.

You are beautiful. You are loved. And you are on the wings of a dove.

Someone gives a dove from the table to each participant.

Song:

Peace Is Flowing Like a River

1. **Peace** is flowing like a river,
 flowing out of you and me.
 Flowing out into the desert,
 setting all the captives free.
2. **Love** is flowing like a river,
 flowing out from you and me.
 Flowing out into the desert,
 setting all the captives free.
3. **Healing's** flowing like a river
 flowing out of you and me.

Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

4. Alleluia, alleluia...

Leader:

In your life during the week ahead, may the dove you hold/wear remind you of God's blessing and love for you. Go, now, in the peace of Jesus Christ, our brother.

All:

Amen.

****Give each participant a copy of the booklet, *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, and *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse*.*

SESSION II

The Children, Forgiveness, and Accountability

Suggested Environment:

In the same space as the first session (if this is possible) arrange chairs in a circle with a small low table in the center. Cover the table with a white cloth and on the table place: a figure of a “freed” woman, one small colored candle for each participant with one lighted, a lighter, a tree-like potted plant, lavender incense, a scissors, 8” piece of yarn for each participant, small pieces of paper and pencils for each, a large “burning bowl” with a cover, a Bible. Light the room with lavender scented candles. Place boxes of tissues around the room.

Introduction:

The leader invites participants to re-introduce themselves.

Leader:

The God in me greets the God in you. We return to our circle of sisters, embraced in the warmth of Jesus Christ, our circle of confidence and safety, our circle of respect and confidentiality, our circle of brokenness and healing. We have prayed to have the wings of a dove, to fly away to a place of peace. Yet we are still not free! Here together within a community of sisters and our children, we share the pain of domestic violence, often accompanied by feelings of anger, frustration, shame and fear. We seem unable to fly away. We seek to open ourselves to the powers of healing within and among ourselves as we break the ties that hold us down.

As we light the lavender incense, as we sing our song, let us breathe deeply to calm and clear our minds of the daily clutter.

Song:

Peace Is Flowing Like a River - 3 verses.

1. **Peace** is flowing like a river,
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

2. **Love** is flowing like a river,
flowing out from you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

3. **Healing's** flowing like a river
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.

4. Hum through the melody.

Prayer:

Let us pray together to trust that God always treats us with love and open ourselves to God's guiding wisdom as we say:

"I praise you, God,
for being my guide.
Even in the darkest night,
your teachings fill my mind.
I will always look to you,
as you stand beside me and my children
and protect us from fear.
With all my heart,
I will celebrate,
and we can safely rest." (Ps. 16: 7-9) (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p.51.)

Now breathe deeply again and ask yourself:

How am I still connected to my abuser?
What is it that still affects my emotions?
What binds me to his abuse? It may be his being a "good father" to my children, my desire to prove my love, or my fear of having to start a new life on my own.

As you answer these questions openly, let yourselves know what is holding you. (*Distribute small pieces of paper and pencils.*)

- Write the answers on the piece of paper. Fold it and place it into the bowl.
- Take a piece of yarn and tie it around your ankle or wrist. Think about this shackle and name it. Be mindful of its presence during the video and discussion.

View Video:

Wings Like a Dove

Part III - Blessed Are the Children (Scripture does not condone violence)

Part IV - Forgiveness and Accountability (Change, Repentance, Forgiveness)

Discussion:

1. How are children hurt by living with violence?
2. Delia, in the video, says, “When he was in a good mood, he was a good father.” How do you feel about this statement? Can you understand how she can feel that he was both a good and a bad father? Has this been a problem for you? How?
3. The abuser has to take responsibility for his actions, and change. Forgiveness is a process that depends on repentance and change in the abuser before healing can occur. Why is it difficult to confront your abuser and hold him accountable? What does forgiveness mean for you?
4. What does “spare the rod, spoil the child” mean to you?
5. Why would an abuser repent?
6. How does “being sorry” and having “true repentance” differ?
7. When a man expresses sorrow and stresses how much he loves his partner, Lewis, in the video says, “He’s trying to protect his stash.” What does he mean?
8. Is forgiveness always possible?

Closing Prayer and Ritual:

As we close this session let us remember that to forgive another is healing for ourselves and for our children, but forgiveness does not forget the abuse. With the support of others we can live through the pain and turn our lives around onto the path guided by the wisdom of God.

Let us pray.

“In her right hand Wisdom holds a long life,
and in her left hand are wealth and honor.
Wisdom makes life pleasant and leads us safely along.
Wisdom is a life-giving tree,
the source of happiness for all who hold onto her.
By wisdom and knowledge God created heaven and earth.
By understanding God lets the ocean break loose
and clouds release the rain.” (Proverbs 3: 16-20)
(Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p. 58.)

(Each participant takes scissors, cuts the yarn and places it into the bowl, lights a candle from the one on the table and carries it back to her place.)

The God of Wisdom speaks:

“Women, use common sense and sound judgment!

Always keep them in mind.

They will help you to live a long and beautiful life.

You will walk safely and never stumble;

You will rest without a worry and sleep soundly

So don't be afraid of sudden disasters or storms that strike
those who are evil.

You can be sure that God will protect you from harm.

And God will give you the wings of a dove to fly off to a place of peace.”

(Proverbs 3: 21b-26) (Taken from *The Lord hears Your Cries*, p. 59.)

Song:

Peace is Flowing Like a River. Verses 1, 2, 3

(Facilitator ignites the contents of the bowl with the table candle while all sing.)

(All blow out the candles as they sing verse #4, Alleluia.)

Leader:

Now go in peace. Take this candle you have blown out as a symbol of your ability, in God's wisdom, to release yourself from fears and unhealthy relationships.

SESSION III

Claiming God's Promises and Facing the Future

Suggested Environment:

In the same space as the first and second sessions, arrange the chairs in a circle and place a small, low table in the center. Cover the table with a green cloth and place on the table: a figure of a “freed” woman, a large rock, a jar of lavender scented oil/cream/lotion, a basket of seashells (one for each participant), a large bowl of popcorn with small bowls for each, a Bible, a lighter, lavender scented candles for room lighting. Place tissues around the room within reach of the participants.

Introduction:

The leader invites participants to say their name.

Leader:

The God in me greets the God in you. For the third time we gather into our circle of sisters, embraced in the warmth of Jesus Christ, a circle of confidence and safety, a circle of respect and confidentiality, a circle of brokenness and healing. We've prayed to have the wings of a dove, to fly away to a place of peace. We have prayed for release from the unhealthy ties that hold us captive. It is time now for us to stand in solidarity with one another, claim God's promises and face the future.

Prayer: Let us all stand with arms open in prayer. We are women of the universe. We are daughters of God. We are beautiful and loved. We are wise women, strong with the power of the Spirit! O God of all, we thank you for bringing us all together and being with us in our circle of sisters. We've come to claim your promises, those that Jesus told us about. We find our hope in His promise that sorrow will turn into joy. We remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel:

“When a woman is about to give birth, she is in great pain. But after it is all over, she forgets the pain and is happy, because she has brought a child into the world. You are very sad now. But later I will see you, and you will be so happy that no one will be able to change the way you feel. When that time comes, you won't have to ask me about anything. I tell you for certain that God will give you whatever you ask for in my name.”
(John 16:21-24) (Taken from *The Lord Hears Your Cries*, p. 63.)

God, we trust in this promise and that you will be a rock for us, solid and strong, so that we can move on into what our future holds for us. We pray in the name of Jesus our brother that we fly with the power of the Spirit to a place of peace, love and wholeness. Amen.

Song:

Peace Is Flowing Like a River. All verses

1. **Peace** is flowing like a river,
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
2. **Love** is flowing like a river,
flowing out from you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
3. **Healing's** flowing like a river
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
4. Hum through the melody.

During the video we may share the popcorn as a sign of our sharing in creativity and new ideas.

View Video:

Wings Like a Dove

Part V: Shelter from the Storm (Together with those having the same experience)

Part VI: The Future: Ending Violence and Affirming Life (Fear, Insecurity, Reconciliation or Separation; mourn loss of relationship)

Discussion:

1. As a shelter resident, how have you held onto your faith and beliefs while apart from your church community? What ideas do you have that might help others?
2. What spiritual good may come from seeking shelter from an abusive relationship? What positive values does God say a marriage is built on? (love, trust, equality) If these qualities are not present, does God expect you to take some responsibility or do you expect God to take care of everything?
3. How can your church or religious community better support women and their families who are facing abuse? How can the community at large offer help and support?

4. Why might Christian women hesitate to seek help from a shelter? Were you hesitant? Why?
5. How can shelter counselors be more understanding of the spiritual needs of abused Christian women?
6. Is reconciliation always possible? Why not? What can help a woman accept this? How can the community at large offer help and support?
7. Where did you or can you find help in the community with domestic violence and the conflicting religious issues abused women face?

Closing Prayer and Ritual:

Let us pray. O God, as we finish our time together in this circle of sisters, we're a little scared and worried. As you hear our cries and see our tears, we pray that you may give us that peace of mind that comes from leaving things up to you. Help us to live one day at a time, to find strength in you and be grateful for the advice and support of the people helping us step into the future.

Let us turn to one another and call upon the Spirit to bless us.

(The leader leads participants in laying on hands. Each person in the circle places her hand on the head of the person to each side of her.)

Please say the words of blessing after me:

May the healing love and grace of God
be in every corner of your heart,
crevice of your mind, and cell of your body.
Live free in wisdom and peace
as a strong beautiful woman, daughter of God. Amen.

Please be seated. *(Leader holds up the jar of oil/lotion and says:)*

In the past, Kings and prophets were anointed with oil to signify God's designation to them of their special mission in the world. As you sing our song, *Peace Is Flowing like a River*, I will anoint each of you, women of the universe, beautiful women, daughters of God, with the oil of strength and blessing for your mission to freedom and peace.

(Leader pours some oil into each participant's hands and says to the group:)

By this anointing you know that you are loved and supported by the loving spirit of the God within us all.

(The leader takes the basket of sea shells into her hands and says to the group:)

Traditionally in many cultures, a shell is given to a person on a journey. It helps you to gather the life-giving resources you need on the journey (as in dipping for water from a stream, etc.) When you show the shell as a sojourner in a new place, the faithful help you meet your needs as you continue on your way. This tradition compels them to embrace you. With this shell I send you on your way into your future life - not alone, but in knowing that God is always with you.

(Leader distributes a shell and embraces each while the group sings.)

Song:

Sing *Amazing Grace* or another inspiring song chosen by leader.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Helpful Scripture Passages

APPENDIX B: Denominational Statements

APPENDIX C: Song for Reproducing, *Peace is Flowing Like a River*

APPENDIX A: HELPFUL SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Psalm 7. 1-4, 6, 8-11

You, Lord God
are my protector.
Rescue me and keep me safe
from all who chase me.
Or else they will rip me apart
like lions attacking a victim,
and no one will save me.

...

I am innocent, Lord God!
Do something!
Attack my furious enemies.
See that justice is done.

...

Our Lord, judge the nations!
Judge me and show that I
am honest and innocent.
You know every heart and mind,
and you always do right.
Now make violent people stop,
but protect all of us
who obey you.
You, God, are my shield,
the protector of everyone
whose heart is right.
You see that justice is done,
and each day
you take revenge.

Psalm 32. 7-8

You are my hiding place!
You protect me from trouble,
and you put songs in my heart
because you have saved me.

You said to me,
“I will point out the road
that you should follow.
I will be your teacher
and watch over you.

Psalm 30. 1-5

I will praise you, Lord!
You saved me from the grave
and kept my enemies
from celebrating my death.

I prayed to you, Lord, God,
and you healed me,
saving me from death
and the grave.

Your faithful people, Lord,
will praise you with songs
and honor your holy name.
Your anger lasts a little while,
but your kindness lasts
for a lifetime.
At night we may cry,
but when morning comes
we celebrate.

Psalm 145. 13-21

Your kingdom will never end,
and you will rule forever.

Our Lord, you keep your word
and do everything you say.
When someone stumbles or falls,
you give a helping hand.
Everyone depends on you,
and when the time is right,
you provide them with food.
By your own hand you satisfy
the desires of all who live.

Our Lord, everything you do
is kind and thoughtful,
and you are near to everyone
whose prayers are sincere.
You satisfy the desires of all your

worshippers,
and you come to save them
when they ask for help.
You take care of everyone
who loves you,
but you destroy the wicked.

I will praise you, Lord,
and everyone will respect
your holy name forever.

John 14. 27

I give you peace, the kind of peace
that only I can give. It isn't like the
peace that this world can give. So
don't be worried or afraid.

Numbers 6. 24-26

I pray that the Lord
will bless and protect you,
and that he will show you mercy
and kindness.
May the Lord be good to you
and give you peace.

APPENDIX B — DENOMINATIONAL STATEMENTS

Introduction¹

Christianity is made up of many denominations, each with strong traditions of faithful study and interpretation of Biblical scriptures as well as God’s continued work throughout history. Over the past 2000 years, Christianity has stretched and grown in understanding and doctrine as the Holy Spirit leads. Christianity has also become a complex multitude of denominations, sects, doctrines, beliefs and communities. Within the whole of Christianity, there are many different ideas, positions, interpretations, and understandings on almost every issue.

When using this curriculum with Christian women, it is important to be aware of these differences and deal with them respectfully. The following are some reflections and quotes that may be of assistance.

Abusive Relationships

This is one issue on which ecumenical and evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics all agree. Whatever position a denomination takes on gender roles within a relationship, all three major streams of Christianity condemn physical or emotional abuse or coercion in any relationship.

A. Ecumenical Protestants

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in its statement, *A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions*,² expresses a position on abuse with which most ecumenical Protestants would concur. They write: “Abuse can be physical, verbal, psychological, or emotional. Sexual abuse is the sinful use of power to dominate or control another person sexually. Victims of abuse are vulnerable because of their age, status, and emotional or physical condition. All forms of abuse are sinful — whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether by a spouse, family member, person in authority, date, acquaintance, or stranger.”

¹ The following is adapted or taken from “*A Facilitator’s Guide for Work with Christian Youth*” that accompanies the video series on healthy relationships for youth, entitled “*Love – All That And More.*” © 2000, FaithTrust Institute, 2400 N. 45th St., Suite 10, Seattle, WA 98103, (206) 634-1903, www.faithtrustinstitute.org

² *A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions.* As adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on November 9, 1996.

B. Evangelical Protestants

Dr. Barrett Duke, Vice-President for Research for Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, makes a clear statement when he says, “Southern Baptists by belief and history are opposed to the physical or psychological abuse of a spouse. Marriage relationship is an illustration of the relationship between Christ and his church, which by its very nature is a relationship of love and encouragement, not abuse.”³

The Assemblies of God write, “The Assemblies of God strongly oppose abuse and the many tragic forms of dysfunction now plaguing our world. It must grieve the heart of God, who cares greatly for the downtrodden, to see one human being abuse another. It must also grieve the heart of God too if His children observe abuse and sit idly by, allowing the evil to continue.”⁴

C. Roman Catholic

In the document *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*,⁵ the authors write, “As bishops we condemn the use of the Bible to condone abusive behavior. Correct reading of the Scriptures leads people to a relationship based on mutuality and love. Again, Pope John Paul II describes it accurately: ‘In the unity of the two, man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist side by side or together, but they are also called to exist mutually one for the other.’” The document goes on to say, “Even where the Bible uses traditional language to support the social order common in the day, the image presented is never one that condones the use of abuse to control another person. In Ephesians 5: 21-33, for instance, which discusses relationships within the family, the general principle laid down is one of mutual submission between husband and wife. The passage holds out the image to husbands that they are to love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church.”

More Denominational Quotes:

1. Episcopal — 73rd General Convention Referred to Dioceses and Congregations

(DO73)

Resolved, the House of deputies concurring, That this 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church calls upon state governments to promote and enact statutes addressing the reduction of domestic violence and the protection of victims of domestic violence and child neglect.

³ Quoted to author of *A Facilitator’s Guide for Work with Christian Youth* over the phone 11/2000.

⁴ The Assemblies of God Perspectives: Relationships, Conduct, and Sexuality. Approved for release by the Executive Presbytery (1997).

⁵ *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, Bishop’s Committee on Marriage and Family Life, Bishops’ Committee on Women in Society and Church. Affirmed by the NCCB/USCC General Council Membership, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

(CO25)

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That this 73rd General Convention calls upon every congregation within the church to designate at least one Sunday each year during one of the following months:

- a. April (National Sexual Abuse Prevention and Sexual Assault Awareness Month) or
- b. May (Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month) or
- c. October (National Domestic Violence Awareness Month) for special prayers for all whose lives have been affected by any form of sexual, domestic, or family violence, remembering in particular those whose lives have been violated by sexual misconduct within the church; and be it further *Resolved*, That this General Convention calls upon the National Church Center to make available to every congregation within the church educational opportunities for its members about practical, pastoral, spiritual, and/or theological issues related to the problems of sexual or domestic violence and calls upon congregations to make an active and ongoing response to these problems in their local community.

2. United Church of Christ — 14th General Synod: The Pronouncement on Violence Against Women (Summary):

As Christians, believing in the sacredness of God's creation and in the equality of women and men, we are called to speak out against the physical and/or sexual abuse of any person. Because women are the primary victims of domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment, this Pronouncement calls for the United Church of Christ to increase its understanding of violence against women, provide ministry to victims and abusers, and work against violence in our society.

3. Presbyterian Church (USA)

The 191st General Assembly adopted the report of the 1979 Council on Women and the Church (COWAC) report that calls upon the church to "be a witness against sexual and domestic violence." The COWAC report concludes, "The goodness of God's creation is celebrated in healthy sexual activity sharing between mutually consenting equals in a context of respect, caring, and trust; it is denied when sexual activity takes place in a context of violence and exploitation."⁶

⁶ From *Striking Terror No More: The Church Responds to Domestic Violence*, eds. Beth Basham and Sara Lisherness, p.51. Bridge Resources, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202. © Used with permission.

APPENDIX C: SONG FOR REPRODUCING

Leaders may wish to create small cards with *Peace Is Flowing Like a River*, or another song chosen by leader to be used throughout the sessions, for each participant. The following sheet is designed so that you can print the songs back to back, four cards to a sheet.

Peace is Flowing Like a River

(First verse by the facilitator. Participants join in on verses 2 & 3 led by facilitator.)

1. Peace is flowing like a river,
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
2. Love is flowing like a river,
flowing out from you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
3. Healing's flowing like a river
flowing out of you and me.
Flowing out into the desert,
setting all the captives free.
4. Hum through the melody.

Peace is Flowing Like a River

(First verse by the facilitator. Participants join in on verses 2 & 3 led by facilitator.)

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flowing out of you and me.
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