

Direct your heart to her, Take counsel, Speak Out: A Bible Study on Judges 19:1-30

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OBJECTIVE

This is a sad story. Before we start this lesson, it is important to know that this bible study does not aim to redeem the horrific treatment of the unnamed concubine woman through the resurrection of Jesus. This sad story will never have a happy ending. Rather, as Biblical scholar Phyllis Trible suggests, the Bible should be seen as a mirror. "If art imitates life, scripture likewise reflects it in both holiness and horror."¹ The aim of this lesson is to allow our reflections of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19 to reveal insights that may inspire repentance and action. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 suggests, repentance leads to new beginnings. Thus, Holy Spirit combined with critical reflection can make a sad story yield new beginnings and imagination for what could and should be.

AUDIENCE

This Bible Study was written for ABWM groups which are comprised of women. However, this study can be modified and used for anyone. Leaders should be aware of the diversity that may be present in the room. Participants may be persons affected by domestic violence, persons discovering that they have been affected or persons seeking to learn and gain a theological perspective on domestic violence. Best suited for women 18+.

FOCUS VERSES

When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. Then he commanded the men who he sent, saying, "Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, 'Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out. (Judges 19:29-30 NRSV)

¹ Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Overtures to Biblical Theology)* (Kindle Locations 88-89). Kindle Edition.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES NEEDED

- Bibles (NRSV preferred)
- Have a pastoral care practitioner or counselor present as support as this Biblical narrative can be triggering. If such persons are not available, provide contact information.
- Hat
- Pieces of paper
- writing utensils

ENTER

Ice Breaker: Fear in a Hat

Welcome the participants to sit in a circle and give each person pieces of paper and a writing utensil. Invite the participants to write down their personal fears around discussing the topic of domestic violence. Circulate the hat and have each participant take out a piece of paper that is not their own. The participants in turn should read the fear aloud to the group and explain how the person who wrote it may feel. Let participants know that this story may be triggering and is very graphic. Encourage and welcome them to leave the room if necessary and/or meet with care practitioner for a debrief during or after the study. Close the ice breaker with the opening prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

O Still Speaking God,
We have openly shared our fears with you
And with one another.
We can courageously approach your Holy Word
because you have promised to be with us. We ask that your
Holy Spirit will guide us and strengthen us as we gather around to
read a sad story. Enable us to grow in love and understanding for those affected by domestic
violence. Create in us, O God, clean hearts and minds. We desire to be your voice and feet in the
world until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.

SONGS

Leader can incorporate music:

- "Behind the Wall" Tracy Chapman
- Brave by Sara Bareilles
- I Want Jesus to Walk With Me
- A broken wing by Martina McBride

EXPLORE

Understanding the text (For Leader to incorporate into conversation)

- The rape, torture and dismemberment of the unnamed woman takes place in a society that is in chaos. Israel is without a king and all the people did what was right in their own eyes.²
- A Levite has an honored place in society that sets him above all other males; a concubine has an inferior status that places her beneath all other females. Legally and socially, she is not equivalent of a wife but is virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes.³
- **The rape of one woman led to the rape of six hundred women.** The tribe of Benjamin was conquered leaving six hundred men. To replenish the tribe, the other tribes attacked those who did not participate in the war. This led to an attack on the town of Jabesh-Gilead. Everyone was killed except 400 young virgins who were turned over to the Benjaminites (21: 10-12). The Benjaminites were unsatisfied with the 400 women. To satisfy them, the men of Israel sanctioned the abduction of two hundred young women as they came out to dance in the yearly festival of Yahweh (21:23)
- The command in verse 30, "to consider" is actually the Hebrew idiom, "direct your heart".

Read Judges 19:1-30

Share aloud or reflect:

- What initial emotions arise after reading this text?
- Does the Levite and his concubine's relationship mirror dynamics we see in abusive relationships?
- How does the context in which this story is told permit violence upon women? Does this mirror our cultural context?
- What does it mean for God to be silent in this text? Where is God?

(Leader should be prepared to address questions of God's omnipotence and sovereignty in the presence of evil. Leader should make space for feelings of confusion and anger towards God. A sovereign God's ability to accomplish all of God's purposes does not mean that humanity holds no responsibility. Humanity is responsible for wickedness and we live in a fallen world. Insert the point that the rape, torture and dismemberment of the

² Judges 17:16; 21:25.

³ See Raymond Abba, "Priests and Levites," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible 3 (hereafter IDB), ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 876-89.

unnamed woman takes place in a society that is in chaos. Israel is without a king and all the people did what was right in their own eyes.⁴ “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” Romans 8:22, NIV.

Participants may find comfort in hearing that God promised to be with us always. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” Isaiah 43:2)

- Have you seen a similar story like this in scripture? (Answer: Genesis 19:1-29)?
- What does it mean to take the story of the unnamed concubine to heart? Take counsel? And speak?

EXPRESS

1. Like the woman in Judges 19 who is without name, speech, or power, many victims of domestic violence suffer in silence. Because these women are unknown, there is no one to mourn the loss of their lives. As an expression of the text, the participants can create a funeral service. How can we eulogize the unnamed woman in judges 19 and countless unnamed women in our own context? What music would we include? What scriptures? Each participant should be encouraged to choose a name for the unnamed woman which may include singular names or names of groups who are chronically in danger of this kind of abuse—wives, girlfriends, hotel workers, immigrant women, victims of foreign wars, sex workers.
2. Compose “A Litany of Remembrance”. Have each participant contribute a line. You can adapt the **Ignatian Litany of Remembrance** (See Appendix A).
3. Another way to express taking the message of the text is to have participants examine their relationships using the *The Power and Control Wheel* and *the Equality Wheel*. To see whether or not there are more patterns of equality over abuse, or abuse over equality, go around each spoke of the wheels and circle the factors that you experience. If you lay the Equality Wheel over the Power and Control Wheel, you’ll see they are corresponding opposites. For instance, instead of emotional abuse, you’ll see respect. As you examine these wheels, keep in mind that it is rare to find relationships that exhibit no abusive patterns. So, an aim is to be in relationships that have more patterns of equality than abuse. The way to meet this aim is to empower us with awareness about the patterns of power and control. With this awareness, we can be empowered to also choose the kinds of relationships we want to be in. Emphasize that healing is often accomplished as layers are uncovered. And, that healing is hard work in which we must commit to engage.

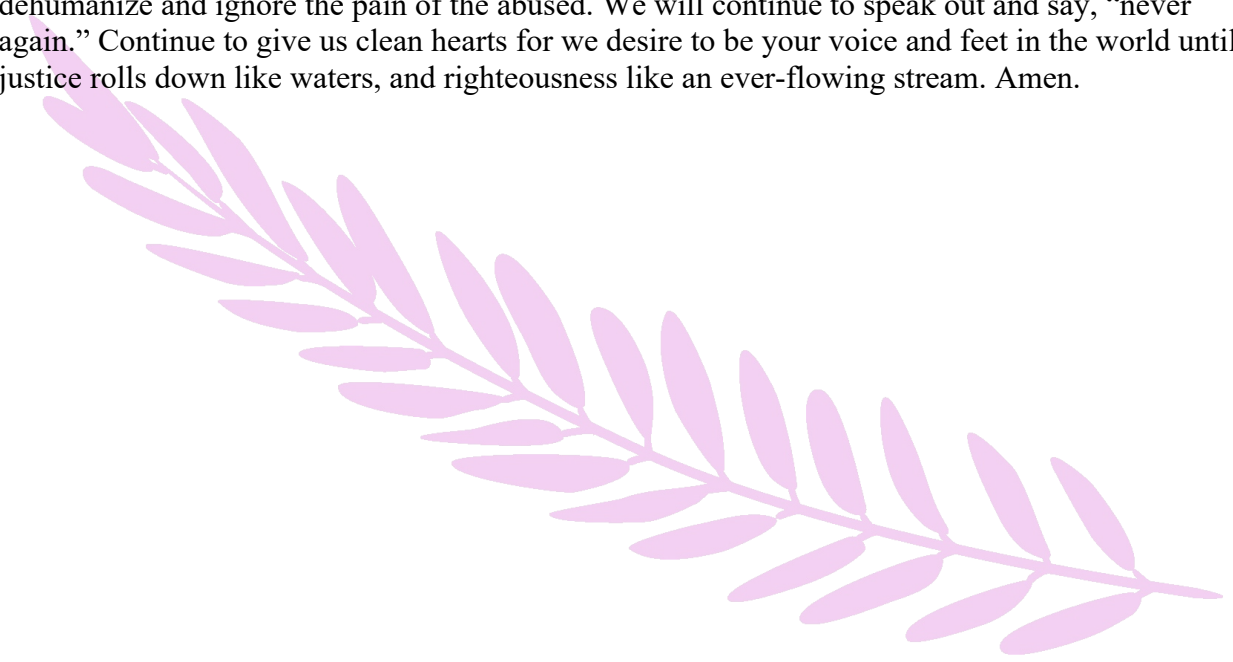
⁴ Judges 17:16; 21:25.

EXIT

- Acknowledge that participants can utilize counseling services to debrief.
- Invite participants to share any pressing questions or comments.
- Close the session with closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER:

The story of the unnamed woman in judges 19 has been told, and we return to our daily lives forever changed. God, with the help of your Holy Spirit we will direct our hearts to the women whose stories are yet to be told. With your help, we will not make the same mistakes that dehumanize and ignore the pain of the abused. We will continue to speak out and say, “never again.” Continue to give us clean hearts for we desire to be your voice and feet in the world until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.



Appendix A

Litany of Remembrance

O LORD of life, bless the memories we cherish. This day affords us a glimpse of eternity. May the sorrow we have known be softened by our sense of your infinite wisdom, your abiding love, and your eternal promise

In the rising of the sun to its setting, we remember them.

In the blowing of the wind and the chill of winter, we remember them.

In the opening of the buds in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.

In the blueness of the sky and the warmth of summer, we remember them.

In the rustling of the leaves and the beauty of autumn, we remember them.

In the beginning of the year and at its close, we remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.

When we are lost and sick of heart, we remember them.

When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.

So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us and we remember them.

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