



Seeking Peace

PARTICIPANT STUDY GUIDE: IV



Women and War: The Survival of Hope

Rationale

THIS STUDY GUIDE examines women's unique experiences of war in recent centuries and the nonviolent resistance of women of faith to war, including the historic contributions of Christian women.

Objectives

- to introduce participants to the voices of women experiencing war.
- to discern women's unique perspectives on war, while also acknowledging the burdens men bear in war.
- to speak about women's experiences of war from a Christian perspective by examining the role of two Biblical women in nonviolently resisting bloodshed.

Outcomes

- participants will acknowledge the diverse experiences of women affected by war while exploring their own memories of war.
- participants will practice dialogue about war from a Christian perspective.
- participants will learn about the unique contributions Christian women have made toward building a non-violent world.

Living, loving God,
 God of our foremothers,
 We thank and praise you
 For the power of your presence deep in our hearts,
 The vitality of your presence here in our midst,
 For this opportunity to come together to affirm our identity
 And to celebrate our common hope.
 We thank you for those gathered here today,
 For the many and diverse efforts that contribute
 Toward building a better world.
 Pour out your spirit upon us.
 Strengthen our vision.
 Sustain us with your hope
 In these changing, challenging times.
 Amen.

—adapted from Miriam Therese Winter¹



Women
of Faith
in Action



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Women of Faith in Action is a program of **WAND Education Fund** that seeks to reorder national priorities — away from militarism toward peace and real security. We do this by educating women of faith and engaging their voices and values in the political process.



WAND EDUCATION FUND

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EXERCISE 1

Biblical Women Resisting Violence

Instructions

Take a few moments to consider the sentences below. The facilitator will begin sharing her/his response, then will invite a participant to do the same. The participant may pass or share, then invite another participant to share. This process is called mutual invitation. After all have shared, the facilitator will offer a wrap-up. Read Exodus 1:15-20, then engage in a discussion of the questions that follow.

Violence is a theme we will explore at length in this session. Personal experiences with violence may surface as we discuss the violence of war. Please feel free to take a break any time you need one.

Some of the burdens of violence that women bear are _____

Some of the burdens of violence that men bear are _____

Facilitator Wrap-Up

We live in a world sick with violence. Violence affects all of humanity, but in different ways. Men are overwhelmingly the victims of violence and the perpetrators of violence. Too many boys are raised in a culture of violence that reinforces the notion that violence is a socially acceptable form of masculinity. War anchors violence into the concept of masculinity generation after generation, as they are fought primarily by young men, many of whom are forced to kill or be killed. Women are more likely to experience the violence of war as civilians, often as primary caregivers for children and elders. They are far more likely to experience sexual assault, particularly in war, and domestic violence. Despite these differences, each of us is caught in the web of violence. The good news is that God calls us to justice, reconciliation, and peacemaking. We all have an important role in confronting violence with God's love.

Read Exodus 1:15-20

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the wives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives come to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.

Discussion Questions

1. What effect might the king's proposed genocide of Hebrew baby boys have had on men? On women?
2. What role did women's faith in God and women's solidarity with women play in averting the violence the king had planned?
3. When have you chosen not to tell the truth, or the whole truth, in order to do the right thing?

EXERCISE 2

Women's War Stories

Narrator

Women have many war stories to tell. According to Sayre Sheldon, war includes women in larger numbers than ever before. In her book, *Her War Story*, a compilation of women's writings on war, Sheldon says, "When the technological advances of modern war targeted civilians, the homefront became the frontline."² Before World War II, 90 percent of war casualties were male soldiers. Today, 90 percent of casualties are civilians, 75 percent of whom are estimated to be women and children.³

Women experience war in various ways. Some have children fighting in battle, some are civilians who experience the violence of life in a war zone, some are aid workers providing care, some serve in the military, some write about war, some are refugees or prisoners of war, and some design and build weapons. Hearing a diversity of women's voices speak about war is essential to our understanding of war and peace. Hear now an excerpt from Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's "Friendly Meetings" about her experience as a woman imprisoned in Auschwitz.

Reader 1

"In Auschwitz we often organized friendly get-togethers. I remember that for the first few months of my stay here those get-togethers struck me as being indecent. How was it possible that we could sing while the sky above was red with the flames of the crematoria?"

'How can you joke, dance, and tell stories,' I asked, 'when we are enveloped in a sea of suffering, pain, and tears?'

'You will get used to it,' one of them said. Then, after a moment's silence, she added: 'If you don't get used to it you'll drop dead.'

I got used to it. After eight months in Auschwitz, I could look at the dead with indifference. When a corpse was lying across my path I did not go around it any more, I simply stepped over it, as if I were merely stepping over a piece of wood. I sang along with the others, and I laughed when I heard a good joke. I even told jokes myself.

Then I really understood that my ability to adapt to just about anything was a most useful talent. Was this good or bad? It was difficult for me to know."⁴

Narrator

From a nurse who tended to soldiers on the Pacific battlefield in World War II, and at the age of twenty aided those wounded by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, comes Kikue Tada's piece "The Scars Remain."



Reader 2

"Hiroshima—a city proud of its abundant greenery, blue skies and its seven rivers forming a beautiful delta—was converted in an instant to scorched earth by the atomic bomb. Even now, I cannot forget the scenes I saw then, scenes beyond the power of pen or tongue to describe.

I recall a screaming baby trying to nurse at the breast of its already dead mother. Could there possibly be any scene more inhuman than this?

Though I was subjected to massive doses of secondary radiation while at the hospital, I still hoped to lead a normal, happy life, and eventually I got married. Not long afterward, however, I began suffering from damage to my liver, kidneys, and abdomen. I had two operations on my ovaries. I became feverish and nauseous.

Because I was constantly in and out of the hospital, my husband and I got a divorce. Physically frail and with two dear daughters to raise by myself, I sometimes thought of suicide. But each time the children encouraged me by saying we would be all right if we all worked together.

Every year on August 6, great crowds of people gather in the Peace Park in Hiroshima. I wonder if they really understand what we victims feel. Can their prayers really contribute to worldwide peace? I have my doubts. But, as one of the few remaining victims of the bombing, I intend to go on telling my story as long as there is life left in me."⁵

Narrator

Currently poised at center stage of the "bloody global drama" of modern times, cultural conflict persists in fanning the flames of hatred and dividing humanity by religion, race, and nationality.⁶ Many cultural hot spots produce the devastating plague of genocide, which has ravaged the people and the lands of Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and now the Sudan (among others). From a woman named Aloyeh living in a refugee camp in Darfur, Sudan comes a 2005 field journal conversation.

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EXERCISE 2, continued

Reader 3

“It was the harvest season, and we were all happy and working hard in the fields. But one morning, very early, everything came to an end for us...Three hundred men on camels, horses, and foot came with guns and spears to attack us. I was out by the well getting water for the morning when they came. Five of the attackers came to me with guns. Three of them raped me, while the other two stood guard. I could not escape and there was no one to help me. Things are better here. We feel safer in the camp now that international aid organizations have come to help, but everyday we must leave the camps to collect firewood and risk being attacked again..”

Narrator

In wartime, mothers often identify with mothers, even across battle lines. From such a mother comes Huong Tram’s poem, “The Vietnamese Mother.”

Reader 1

One night in late 1965
 A Vietnamese mother received a letter
 From her beloved child in the battlefield
 Telling her of his first memories of war.
 He’d seen a young American soldier agonizing
 As he let out his last sigh.
 “Oh Mama!” the American had cried.
 Tears filled the Vietnamese mother’s eyes.

Seven years later
 Waiting for her son’s letter
 Her hair now white
 When a letter finally arrived. But
 Not his handwriting this time.
 Strange feelings
 Her heart tightens
 A friend of his writes
 “Oh Mama!” he cried before he died
 bathed in moonlight.
 Day after day she reads the few letters since 1965
 Again and again she cries
 For her lost son
 And for an unknown American mother
 Who lost her beloved child.”⁸

Narrator

The voices of Iraqi women are particularly important to our nation’s conversation about the ongoing war in Iraq. In the Stronger Women, Stronger Nations 2008 Iraq report, Women for Women International conducted a survey of over 1,500 Iraqi women. Key findings include the following:

- 65.3% of respondents said that, overall, the presence of U.S./U.K. security forces is worsening security in Iraq.
- 67.9% of respondents stated that their ability to walk down the street as they please has worsened since the U.S. invasion.
- 63.9% of respondents stated that violence against women is on the rise.
- While 72.7% of respondents said that in the future there should be one unified Iraq with a central government in Baghdad, only 32.3% of respondents thought there would be a unified Iraq in five years.

The stories of women in Iraq are difficult to uncover. From an anonymous University professor in Baghdad comes “The Unconquerable Iraqi Woman.”

Reader 2

“Under the previous regime, the Iraqi woman endured every type of hardship one can imagine. Saddam encouraged her to take part in all fields of knowledge and to work in all types of jobs. That was not because he believed in the rights of women, but because he took the men away and over-occupied them in his whimsical wars...

Since the payment of the enlisted soldier was low, an Iraqi woman had to provide for her family. She had to work in the morning, do all the necessary errands, and take care of the family members: kids, parents, younger siblings, etc. Then, when the absent soldier came back physically or psychologically wrecked, she had to encourage him and lift up his morale, in spite of her own fatigue. If the man happened to be against the regime, this led to catastrophe. The woman had to suffer the imprisonment, torture, or execution of her man, or be the victim herself...

Moreover, because of the weapons of mass destruction that were thrown all over Iraq, the Iraqi environment has been seriously polluted. [Editor’s note: The writer here refers to depleted uranium that is used in U.S. bombs.] Because of that pollution and the imposed sanctions, healthcare has deteriorated perilously. After all these wars, now the Iraqi woman has to watch over her crippled husband, severely sick children, and diseased parents; and then, suffer herself from all kinds of cancers.

After the end of a third devastating and more destructive war, the Iraqi man came back to his woman: broken, unemployed, sick, crippled, or even dead. Exhausted, fatigued, and even sick nowadays, the Iraqi woman has to go on and look for the future. How? Probably by relying on the qualities that God has bestowed on her.”⁹

Narrator

Since 2003, over 160,000 U.S. women have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, four times the number of women who served in Desert Storm. According to a 2003 report financed by the Department of Defense, nearly a third of women veterans seek-

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EXERCISE 2, continued

ing health care through the V.A. said they experienced rape or attempted rape during their service.¹⁰ Military women have “flown fighter jets, commanded battalions, lost limbs, survived stints as P.O.W.’s, killed insurgents, and also come home in flag-covered caskets.”¹¹

On November 12, 2004 Army Captain Tammy Duckworth lost both of her legs when the Black Hawk helicopter she was co-piloting was fired on by Iraqi insurgents with a rocket-propelled grenade. Duckworth received a Purple Heart, an Air Medal, and an Army Commendation Medal. She currently serves as the Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and continues to serve as a Major in the Illinois Army National Guard. In her foreword to the book *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq*, she shares part of her story:

Reader 3

“I will always place the mission first. I will never quit. I will never accept defeat. I will never leave a fallen comrade. These statements are portions of the Soldier’s Creed. They are referred to as the Warrior Ethos. These words were a lifeline that helped me survive my injuries... They are gender-neutral statements that get at the heart of what it means to be an American Soldier today. I am not a fan of being identified as a woman anything. I worked so hard not to be different from the other Soldiers for most of my career...

In my first week at Walter Reed, I was in so much pain that I found myself counting to sixty over and over again. I didn’t have the strength to survive the day, but I was pretty sure I could survive sixty seconds... During this time, Sergeant First Class Juanita Wilson came to me in the Intensive Care Unit. She looked down at me in my bed and said, ‘I know you are hurting. It will get better. Can I stand here for you?’ She then took off her artificial arm and stood next to my bed for hours, day after day, as I counted. She radiated a peace and serenity that kept me going. She was the only one who could do that for me, a fellow amputee, one Wounded Warrior reaching out to help another. Later, she came to my room, decorated it, and washed my hair. The men all had their heads shaved, but my hair had not been washed in weeks. Sometimes it does take another member of the sisterhood to understand what another woman needs to feel better. She even used conditioner!

This nation is a remarkable place where little girls can grow up to be whatever they want to be... nurses, fire fighters, or, yes, even helicopter pilots. God Bless America.”¹²

Reader 2

Survivors of war’s violence are the first to proclaim that women cannot remain silent if we hope to build a more peaceful world. Zainab Salbi, founder and CEO of Women for Women International, writes: “War often enters homes through the kitchen door. Women sense war’s onset early, as they deal with

shortages of food, the closing of schools, and often their own reduced freedoms. Where oppression of women is growing, oppression of society at large is likely at hand... Through their stories, women help us understand the real costs of war, the interruption to the basic commerce of daily living, the way it upends families and downsizes even the most modest dreams. Through their stories, we also learn how to rebuild a country, a community, and a family... The stories they tell are of incredible loss and cruelty, but they reveal an equally incredible degree of courage and creativity that shows women in their full agency, not merely as victims.”¹³ From Leymah Gbowee, Vaiba Flomo, and others comes this account of Liberian women who came together to pray for peace, then staged a silent protest outside of the Presidential Palace. During stalled peace talks, they nonviolently forced a resolution.

Reader 4

“Money. Greed. Ethnicity. Absolute Power. There is nothing that should make people do what they did to the children of Liberia. The warlords will give these boys guns and send them off.

April 1, 2003. I get this call from Asatu. She said, ‘The war is closing in.’ We needed to do something forceful, more dramatic. We decided to take a protest. We went back to the Bible. We saw what Esther did for her people, that she went in sackclothes and ashes, saying, ‘I mean it.’ We wore plain white clothes with the hair tied. We wore the white, saying to people we were out for peace. And this is how we decided to sit at the fish market every day. Thousands of women went. It was the first time in our history in Liberia where Muslim women and Christian women were coming together. And we had a big banner that said: The women of Liberia want peace now. Charles Taylor said, ‘Those who think they can come out in the street to embarrass themselves, come out! I’m waiting for you... Nobody will get into the street to embarrass my administration.’

We were not afraid. My mother was like, ‘They will beat you people, they will kill you.’ And we said, ‘Well, if I should get killed, just remember me and that I was fighting for peace.’ Going to meet Taylor was the moment that I’ve lived for.

July 21, 2003: A missile had landed inside the American Embassy compound where many displaced Liberians were staying. I was just raging inside. So I said, ‘Today is showdown. Send for more women.’ I told the women, ‘Sit at the door and loop arms.’ One woman can change anything, but many women can change everything.”¹⁴

Narrator

In her introduction to *The Other Side of War*, Alice Walker writes, “what is happening in Africa and elsewhere is because the men did not listen to the women, and the women did not listen to the women either, and because the people did not listen to each other and themselves, and because nobody listened to the children

—continues

EXERCISE 2, continued

and the poets...

It is essential to remember what so many in the world, especially women, are losing to war. The simplest necessities and pleasures: a flower, an egg, a child's smile, a partner's caress, sun on our faces, clean water to drink, an unbroken night's rest, a private moment to lend wings to our dreams. These are our birthright. As are a place of our own, sufficient food, a sound education, freedom from assault, excellent medical attention. All these things are within reach, costing far less than the massively overproduced weapons that are stockpiled or horribly in use around the world. It is our duty to demand these things, not just for ourselves, but for everyone on this small planet.

How far we have fallen as a species from what we assumed was our innate integrity, decency, and dignity as human beings. How driven we have become by a self hatred that has set us pitilessly against ourselves. Because, in fact, there is no 'other' anywhere. It is always us and only us that we wound when we harm another. There is no way to be separate from the rest of creation. We indulge the fantasy of being separate to our own peril.

It is...our addiction to war as a method of resolving conflict that spreads this carnage and suffering...Will our disbelief, confusion, and fear only be activated toward change when we hear the sound of the killers at our own door? How can the world live without war? Someone must know. Is it possible that women have always known? We, having been so nearly destroyed, can use what we learned from our destruction to start the world again."¹⁵

Recommended Resources

Books

Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq by Kirsten Holmstedt

Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation by Miroslav Volf

Her War Story by Sayre Sheldon

The Other Side of War: Women's Stories of Survival and Hope by Zainab Salbi

Powder: Writing by Women in the Ranks, from Vietnam to Iraq Edited by Lisa Bowden and Shannon Cain

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini

Plays and Films

Necessary Targets by Eve Ensler

Pray the Devil Back to Hell produced by Abigail Disney, directed by Gini Reticker: www.praythediabacktohell.com

Organizations and Websites

Service Women's Action Network (SWAN): www.servicewomen.org

Women for Women International: www.womenforwomen.org

EXERCISE 3

Faithful Witness to Christian Peacemaking

Instructions

Select one of the items below to take action as a group. Close by inviting participants to read aloud the closing litany of faithful women.

Taking Action

1. Performance of "Women's War Stories"

Offer a dramatic reading of "Women's War Stories" for an adult (or high school) Sunday school class, Lenten series, inter-faith event, Women's History month program (March), international peace day commemoration (September), Hiroshima remembrance (August), or other significant occasion. For grassroots perspective on how to organize this, contact Kit Frisinger of Oregon WAND at 541-338-8605.

2. Sponsor Women Survivors of War

Visit the website of Women for Women International at www.womenforwomen.org to sign up to sponsor a "sister" in the field. For \$27/month, you can support a woman survivor of war by funding direct aid, skills training, rights education, leadership training, micro-enterprise and small business development. Your monthly correspondence can foster a meaningful relationship that also provides emotional support.



EXERCISE 4

Litany of Faithful Women

Facilitator: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

Reader 1: By faith Eve birthed human life into the world, becoming the mother of humanity.

Reader 2: By faith Hagar fled abuse, sheltering her son in the desert. By faith she cried out to God when her child collapsed with thirst. By faith she encountered the Holy One and spoke a new name for God.

Reader 3: By faith the midwives Shiphrah and Puah conspired to bring Hebrew baby boys into the world healthy and whole, in defiance of a violent authority.

Reader 4: By faith Moses' mother hid her baby for three months, then plastered a basket and placed her child in the river.

Reader 5: By faith the daughter of Pharaoh loved mercy, plucked Moses from the river, adopted him, and sent for a Hebrew wetnurse.

Reader 6: By faith Miriam followed her brother on the river and boldly sought her mother to nurse Moses while he lived with the Pharaoh's daughter. By faith Miriam worked with her brother to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. By faith she took a tambourine in her hand when they had crossed the Red Sea and led all the women in singing praises to God and dancing.

Facilitator: And what more should we say? For time would fail us to tell of Mary, mother of Jesus; Anna, the prophetess; Mary

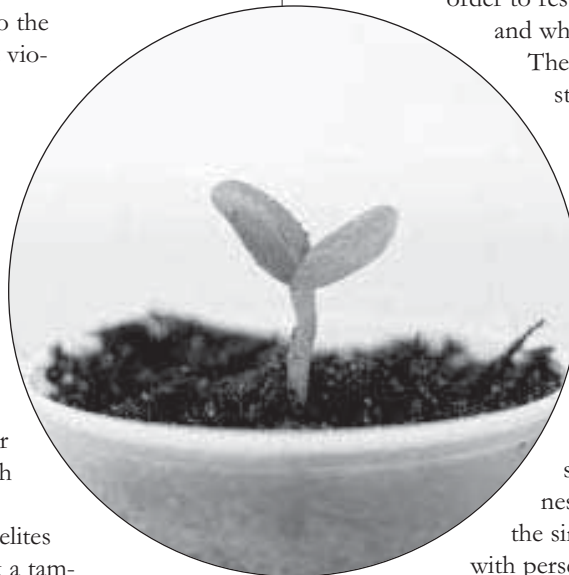
Magdalene, the disciple; Julian of Norwich, Christian mystic; Harriet Tubman, freedom fighter; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, theologian and suffragist; Fannie Lou Hamer, civil rights worker; and Dorothy Day, Catholic worker movement activist—who through faith brought down powers and principalities, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of kings, carried children through rivers, escaped the barrel of the gun, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in mercy, put oppression to flight.

Reader 1: Others were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to resurrect justice. Others suffered mockery and whipping, and even rape and imprisonment. They were flogged, they were burned at the stake, they were violated in their homes; they went about clothed with righteousness though persecuted — of whom the world was not worthy.

Reader 2: Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive the promise of peace, but God provided for them so that, together with us, the seeds of peace might break forth from the soil.

Facilitator: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us plant with perseverance the seeds of peace, looking to Jesus the author of our faith. Amen.

— Adapted from *Hebrews 11*



¹Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanPrayer WomanSong* (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 116.

²Sayre Sheldon, Ed., *Her War Story*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), x.

³Zainab Salbi, *The Other Side of War*, p. 14.

⁴Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, "Friendly Meetings," *Her War Story*, 220-221.

⁵Kikue Tada, "The Scars Remain," *Her War Story*, 235-239.

⁶Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 15-16.

⁷Cassandra Nelson, "Five Women from Godaba Village Tell Their Tragic Story," *Mercy Corps* 4 November 2004. July 2005, www.mercycorps.org.

⁸Huong Tram, "The Vietnamese Mother," translated by Phan Thanh Hao with Lady Borton, *Her War Story*, 292.

⁹Mary Trotochaud, Ed., "Personal Stories: The Unconquerable Iraqi Woman," www.afsc.org.

¹⁰Sara Corbett, "The Women's War," *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 March 2007, p. 5.

¹¹Sara Corbett, "The Women's War," *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 March 2007, p. 8.

¹²Maj. L. Tammy Duckworth, "Foreword," *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq*, by Kirsten Holmstedt (Stackpole Books, 2007), vii-x.

¹³Excerpt from documentary film "Pray the Devil Back to Hell," produced by Abigail Disney, directed by Gini Reticker, www.praythediabacktohell.com, 2008.

¹⁴Same as above.

¹⁵Alice Walker, "Preface," *The Other Side of War*, Zainab Salbi, p. 11-13.