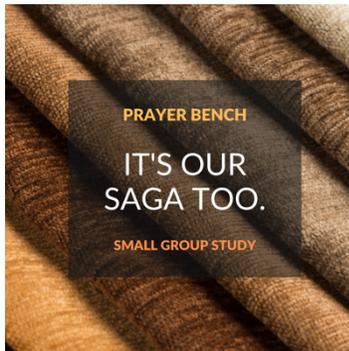


LEADER GUIDE: IT'S OUR SAGA TOO



**BELOW IS THE WEBLINK & PASSWORD
TO ACCESS THE STUDY RESOURCES**

WEBLINK:

PASSWORD:

Welcome to this Prayer Bench Small Group Study. We are many small groups, from many parts of the world, and I am grateful we meet here at the Prayer Bench.

Things to think about in Planning Your Sessions:

- This process is designed for use in person and is adaptable for a platform like Zoom.
- This session is designed for 70-75 minutes with a recommended group of 6-8 participants. You will need more time for a larger group. Giving participants the time they need and maintaining a schedule is always a balancing act. Go through the process and decide what is important to you to include. Assign approximate times and then you can be flexible and listen to where the Spirit is leading. *Suggested direction for Leaders is in italics.*
- We will be using different types and colours of fabrics to create space in each session. It might be good to look ahead and see what is needed or how you can adapt.
- Using the Check-out gives participants opportunity to name aloud what they are taking away or what might be stirring in them. It will give you information about the session and how participants are feeling. A check-out practice can take less than a minute -- and it can take much longer. You, as leader, will need to decide whether to let stories be told rather than simple words shared.
- This study uses audio recordings of the scripture readings. The content is provided in a study paper. Think about how to present the papers. One reader? Multiples voices? Silent reading?

The design of the content and process is by Janice MacLean, Host of the Prayer Bench. The papers are written by the Rev. Dr. Hugh Farquhar.

All your resources are on the SAGA study webpage. Please be in touch if you have questions or issues accessing the resources. janice@prayerbench.ca

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Preparation for Session 1

The Seeds of Violence

Leader Notes and Preparation for Session 1

Creating Your Space:

- It is helpful to have a circle of chairs for participants and a small table or bench to create a focal area. In this session you may want to use many different colours of fabrics (or scarves) to represent Joseph's coat of many colours. Alternatively, you can use a purple cloth as the colour for Lent.
- You will also need a variety of fabrics cut into 3 or 4 inch squares. These will be used in the check-in and then later as a prayer cloth to take home. There should be a good choice of colours and patterns.
- You may also want a candle to light as the beginning of the session.
- It may be helpful to have bibles so participants can follow along with the readings or ask them in advance to bring their own bible.

Things to do Before You Gather:

- Decide if you want to gather with the song suggested, or use another one, or if you will simply read the words or play a video of the song if you are able. (See the study webpage for a YouTube video.)
- Download Audio Scripture Recording #1 from the Study webpage. Test to see if you need speakers for your laptop so all can hear. It is highly recommended you download the audio recordings even if you have internet in the meeting space. See the Study webpage for direction.

- Download and print a copy of Paper #1 from the Study webpage for each participant. The session papers are also in the back of this Guide.
- Download and print Participant Sheet #1 from the Study webpage if you chose to use them. These sheets are also printed in this Leaders Guide. They offer the “Prompts for Discussion” and other take-home reflections.
- Read over the Group Spiritual Practice so you can lead in your own voice and from your heart.

Session 1: The Seeds of Violence

Gathering

Welcome participants to the circle. You may wish to gather with a song or read verse 2 from the hymn, “Let Streams of Living Justice.” You may also choose to light a candle.

For healing of the nations,
 for peace that will not end,
 for love that makes us lovers,
 God grant us grace to mend.
 Weave our varied gifts together;
 knit our lives as they are spun;
 on your loom of time enroll us
 till our thread of life is run.
 O great weaver of our fabric,
 bind church and world in one;
 dye our texture with your radiance,
 light our colors with your sun. (Text: William Whitla)

Check-In

This is a time for participants to check in, make themselves present to the group and share their voice. If the group does not know each other well, begin by sharing names. Remind the group that in check-in, we go around the circle and each one has a chance to speak. There is no crosstalk or discussion. It is often very helpful if you as leader begin. Here is a prompt.

- Choose a square of fabric (see “Things to do before you gather”) with a colour or pattern that helps you describe how you feel entering this season of Lent.

Once everyone has shared invite participants to keep their fabric to use as a prayer cloth during Lent. There is information about Prayer Cloths in the Participant Take Home Sheet.

Norms

Take five minutes as a group to discuss the norms or expectations that would make this group a good experience for all. Ask questions like these: What helps you get the most out of a group like this? What helps you feel comfortable in a small group? What agreements help make this time safe and the best it can be for all of us? Record the responses.

Listening to the Scripture Audio Recording

Explain there are two scripture readings to hear with a pause in between. The first reading is from Genesis 37:1-24 and the second from Luke 22:63-65 if participants want to follow along in their bible.

Read the Study Paper

Explain the study papers are written by the Rev. Dr. Hugh Farquhar. (See biography on the study webpage.) Hand around copies of “Session 1: The Seeds of Violence” so participants can follow along with the Reader.

The Reader should have the paper in advance and practice reading it. The Reader can read more slowly than feels natural so the words can be absorbed.

Invite participants to take a moment or two to highlight or underline phrases important to them or draw an exclamation point(!) by a new or surprising thought.

Prompts for Discussion

Choose one or two questions most relevant to your group or invite participants to respond to a question of their choice. The questions are printed on the Participant Page.

1. Invite participants to share one or two highlighted/underlined phrases and why they noted them as important. Where were the exclamation points marking a new or surprising thought? What invitations did you hear in these exclamation points?
2. What is breaking your heart as you reflect on violence in our society?
3. Hugh writes that we are called “to recognize ways in which we all contribute to violent and death dealing structures in the world.” Give examples of how this is true. Who are the prophets of our day drawing attention to this?
4. In what ways are gossip and insults a form of violence? What practices or strategies help you to respond to gossip or insults when you hear it?
5. You may have heard this quote by an unknown author: “*Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?*” How might this be

shaped as a Lent spiritual practice?

6. What are we doing as a community of faith to curb violence in our community and in our society?

Group Spiritual Practice Breath Prayer

The leader might introduce the group spiritual practice with words like this:

Hugh calls on us to nurture the seeds of the Spirit. He quotes Galatians 5:22-23.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ..."

We can use our breath to pray a measure of healing and blessing on our world by nurturing one of these "seeds of the Spirit" in ourselves this Lent.

Settle comfortably in your chair, become fully present in your body. *(Allow a few moments of silence)* Invite your attention to gather in the region of your heart. *(Allow another moment of silence)*

Listen again to the scripture verse. Is there one fruit of the Spirit calling out to you? A seed you claim for yourself, and which, through you, you will offer prayer to a person, place, or situation in our world today?

(Silence before reading. Read slowly, give a bit of space between each gift.)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control ..."

Pay attention to your breath. Breathing in. Breathing out.

Breath in the gift you claim and chose to offer to the world ... It might be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ..

Breath out your gift to a person, place, or situation in the world.

Continue now breathing your prayer in silence for one minute *(or however long you choose.)*
Breath in. Breath out.

Tend the time well as not everyone likes silence and participants need to trust that one minute is one minute not two or five!

To end you might say: May it be so. Amen.

Closing

Remind people of the squares of fabric square they chose at the beginning. You might want to say something like this:

This prayer cloth can hold an intention for this Lent season. You can take it home and put it in a place to remind you to pray with your breath. You might want to write prayers or words on it, expressing your commitment to spiritual renewal and curbing the seeds of violence within us and around us.

Use it to hold a candle while you reflect on our ancient stories. Use it, perhaps, as a bookmark if you take on learning about modern day prophets and their call to curb violence in our society.

Hold your prayer cloth. It holds the intentions of your heart.

End with a Blessing on the Prayer Cloth.

Ageless One,
in Joseph's life, in Jesus' death
the seeds of violence lay.
Inspire us this time of Lent
to look inwardly and act outwardly in caring ways.
Bless now our Lent intentions held in these prayer cloths.
In Jesus name. Amen.

One Minute Check Out

Invite participants to take a moment to reflect on the session and allow one word or phrase rise in their heart that describes the feeling they are taking home. Go around the circle and ask participants to share their word or phrase without explanation.

STUDY PAPER for Session 1: The Seeds of Violence

By Hugh Farquhar

Genesis 37:1-24; Luke 22:63-65

Asked to draw his favourite Bible story, a little boy drew an animal and coloured it green, red, and purple. "What is it?" the teacher asked. He replied, "It's Joseph's goat of many colours."

To get into the story of Joseph, we need to let our imaginations take us to the land of Canaan about 1600 years before Jesus. There we find the family of Jacob and his twelve sons, all of whom were involved in the sheep-raising business. The youngest of the sons was Joseph – he was seventeen years old when the story begins. There were some problems in the family that I'm

going to refer to later. They resulted in the brothers ganging up on Joseph, first throwing him in a waterless pit, then selling him into slavery. They soaked his robe in goat's blood and took it to their father who assumed that Joseph had been torn to pieces by wild beasts.

Dynamics were at work through the various characters in the story that led to the violence that Joseph suffered.

To begin, take a closer look at Joseph himself. He's often portrayed as the innocent victim in accounts of the story but was he? Or was he a bit cocky! There's a line that catches my attention, "Joseph was shepherding the flock with his brothers . . . and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father." What were they doing that required Joseph to snitch on them? The verse suggests that he was quick to get some damaging information about his brothers into his father's ears – could it have been to enhance his own standing in his father's eyes? (That's often why people communicate gossip that denigrates another – it helps to build them up in comparison to the person they're talking about.)

Then, there's the matter of the dreams. One wonders why he had to be quite so vocal about their content, especially since they suggested that his brothers would one day be subservient to him. Did he gloat about that? I wonder too if he didn't flaunt the fact that he was his father's favourite. Notice that when his father asked him to visit his brothers in the fields, he took care to wear the special coat his father had given him. I realize that this is all circumstantial evidence, but I think it indicates that Joseph as a youth was somewhat arrogant and conniving. He certainly rubbed his brothers the wrong way.

His brothers' attitude left something to be desired too. The word "hate" – a strong word in Hebrew – appears twice during two verses: "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably with him" and "Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more." Verse 11 states, "His brothers were jealous of him." These emotions festered until they erupted in the violence that landed Joseph in the pit and then in the Egyptian slave market.

What about Jacob's part in the story? Much of the trouble seems to relate to the famous coat of many colours. "Now Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his children . . . and he made him a long robe with sleeves – a coat of many colours." Not wise parenting! His favouritism automatically provoked bitterness in the brothers. Jacob should have known that such a blatant display of his special affection for Joseph would interfere with healthy relationships in the family. There was a lot going on in this family.

A variety of human flaws represented by Joseph, his brothers, and their father, were the seeds that sprouted and led to an ugly and tragic event. The flaws did not always lie in the seeds themselves, but in that they were not processed maturely. Where the brothers are concerned, there was a certain legitimacy to the human emotions they experienced. The problem lay in the choices they made to allow those seeds to germinate into conflictual actions.

It's these same seeds sprouting actions that wreak havoc in the world today.

They are the chosen actions that put Jesus on the cross. Some people spread malicious rumours about him and what he was saying and doing. Some, in Jesus' own words, "were sure of their own goodness and looked down on everyone else." Some in the religious establishment couldn't stand to see him winning the hearts of the people. There was the hatred that stimulated more hatred, as hatred always does, until it came to a climax. "The men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, 'Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?' They kept heaping many other insults on him." (Do we think of insults as a form of violence?) We know what followed - all the violence that accompanied his torture and death.

The seeds of violence are the same today as they were then, evidenced in both ancient stories – pettiness, pride, jealousy, insensitivity, greed, and hatred – the seeds of violence acted on in interpersonal relations as well as in the corridors of international affairs where human dignity and human community are destroyed.

The recipients of this violence are many – wherever people are mistreated, flung into a pit, sold into slavery, tortured, humiliated, or eradicated by modern means of extermination. They may wear the face of an abused woman close to home or of an Asian, black, or indigenous person at a distance. But it is Christ alive in them who bears their bruises and calls us to recognize ways in which we all contribute to violent and death dealing structures in the world.

Lent has traditionally been regarded as a time for self-examination and spiritual renewal. This is a good time for us to examine our hearts and see, in the light of Christ's true humanity, what seeds lie planted there and to nurture within us the seeds of the Spirit - "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

And Lent is a good time for us to wonder how else as Christians we can contribute to curbing violence in our society.