

LOVE SHOULD NEVER HURT

Bible Studies for Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Month



Design by Crazy Old Lady of Peace

INTRODUCTION:

The Queensland Government has designated May as Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month. This month is set aside as a time to particularly focus on the causes and prevention of domestic and family violence and abuse.

Domestic and family violence (DFV) occurs when one person in an intimate personal, family or informal carer relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the other person.

It is estimated that one in 6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner (ABS 2017b). Family, domestic and sexual violence happens repeatedly—more than half (54%) of the women who had experienced current partner violence, experienced more than one violent incident (ABS 2017b).

In 2017 the General Synod established a National Family Violence Working Group. The Group's role includes recommending curriculum content and/or guidelines to address unhealthy views about power or the marginalisation of women and other survivors of family violence.

In the Anglican Church Southern Queensland (ACSQ) our own Domestic and Family Violence Working Group supports the role of the National Group, overseeing the development of policy and resources such as these studies.

It is hoped that parishes will use these materials to begin or continue the work of engaging with Domestic and Family Violence and abuse using the resources and traditions of our faith. Our most important task is learning to listen to survivors, including those within our own faith communities.

Each of the 5 sessions in this study relates to the lectionary readings for the corresponding Sunday, and each session is complete. There

are links to online resources and extra material embedded within the studies. They can also be downloaded and printed if that is easier.

It is our hope that this study will assist faith communities within the ACSQ to engage fruitfully with a complex and urgent topic, bringing good news to those who most desperately need to hear it.

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OVERVIEW: Domestic Violence and Scripture

Despite the fact that domestic violence has been condemned by society and by the churches for many decades now, it is a problem that we are seemingly unable to adequately eradicate. In Australia, one woman every week dies at the hands of her partner and 1,600 Australian women experience sexual harassment in the workplace – not every year, but every week!

Violence against women has been very much in the news this year. Brave women like Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame have encouraged other women to speak. The very public murder of Hannah Clark and her three children has once again brought domestic violence front and centre of our attention.

Domestic violence is hidden behind doors (and often behind the semblance of a happy relationship). It can be insidious – violence in the form of coercion and control is sometimes not even identified by the victims.

The reasons why someone might hurt their most intimate partner are many and complex. They may be carrying on behaviour learned in childhood, acting from a sense of their own inadequacy or alternately from a sense of entitlement – none of which is an excuse. The recent revelations from Parliament House suggests that there is an attitude that women are “fair game,” and the murder of Hannah Clark implies a belief that women are property. Until attitudes change, behaviours will not.

Sadly, we cannot claim that belonging to a Christian family provides protection from violence.

Even though there is little in the bible to suggest that domestic violence was characteristic of biblical families the bible has been used as a justification for controlling and dominating women and for “punishing them” if they are perceived stepping out of line. A misunderstanding of forgiveness, and a misplaced conviction regarding the sanctity of marriage has meant that the church has often sent women back to their abusive husbands rather than addressing the husband’s behaviour.

A church that has focussed on appearance and which has emphasised behaviour over spirituality has fostered a culture of silence. We are embarrassed and confused about the bad behaviour of our members, we do not have the language to address abuse of any kind. Despite decades of highlighting domestic violence, it is still not a topic that we are comfortable talking about. Further, we do not have the language to respond. How do we answer a woman (or a man) who argues that the bible says that a woman must submit to her husband or that because Eve was created to be Adam’s helper, that women are somehow lesser than men.

Three passages in particular are used to justify the control of a woman by a man.

[Genesis 2](#) – the creation of Eve

It is important to remember that there are two creation stories and that in the first God creates humankind in God’s image, male and female (Gen 1:26-27). There is no hierarchy here. In the second account, woman is created to be Adam’s partner because none of the animals could fulfill that role. (Eve may have taken the apple, but Adam was weak enough to eat it so both bear the blame. In Jewish tradition, the responsibility lies with Adam – Romans 5:12.)

[Col. 3:18-19](#) (“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”) and

[Ephesians 5:22-33](#) (“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour”) have also been used to coerce a woman into compliance and to take responsibility for the violent behaviour of her partner. (She must have behaved in such a way as to provoke him.)

Those who use this verse as a justification for violence against their wives fail to see it in its context – historical and literal. They ignore the next verse in Colossians: “Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.” They also conveniently ignore verse 21 of Ephesians: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

It is helpful to understand that many scholars believe that these letters were not written by Paul but by one of his disciples. Paul has a much more egalitarian view of marriage as is seen in 1 Corinthians 7 in which the instructions for the wives are the same as those for the husband.

Taken out of context, these very few passages have done considerable damage – to the lives of those impacted by domestic violence and to the gospel message. As our studies will demonstrate, at the heart of the gospel is a message of love, respect and empowerment, regardless of gender, class or race.

HOW TO GET HELP

In an emergency call the police on Triple Zero (000).

DVConnect Womensline

1800 811 811

DVConnect Mensline

1800 600 636

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732

QLD Government DFV Pages

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/domestic-family-violence>