



COMMUNITY CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION DIALOGUES

Series 2: Addressing trauma

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the manual

The purpose of this manual is to equip community peacebuilding champions with the guidance and tools to facilitate the second of four series of dialogues. It is assumed that these champions will have completed either the five-day conflict transformation course or the ten-day training of conflict transformation trainers course. The manual should be read in conjunction with the [facilitation guide](#) which provides further detail on the principles and concepts behind the course and advice on organising and facilitating the dialogues.

The community conflict transformation dialogues

The ‘community conflict transformation dialogues’ are a tool for use by community peacebuilders to facilitate a series of community reflections and workshops designed to help the community think about the conflicts that affect them, while equipping them to transform those same conflicts. The tool is based on an experiential education model that draws on participants’ own experience, making use of the knowledge and experience that they possess rather than relying purely on the expertise of external ‘experts’.

The dialogues comprise four series of workshops with each series made up of four individual sessions, each of which takes about two hours to complete. A series could therefore be completed in one eight-hour day; be spread over a two-day workshop; or be completed over the course of four, weekly two-hour sessions.

The first series focused on the idea of conflict as holy ground, and explored our attitudes and responses to conflict before beginning to think about how change happens and the different roles that people can play in bringing about change. This second series looks at questions of identity and the issue of trauma, exploring the way in which we respond to shocks in our lives, and examines issues of justice, mercy and truth and their relationship to peace and the possibility of reconciliation.

The first of the two-hour sessions focuses on the issue of identity and helps people to think about who, within their community, is in the margins and often excluded, and ways in which their voices can be heard. The next session uses the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel to think about trauma and how to break out of the victim/survivor cycle. The third session uses the story of Jacob and Esau to explore the subject of reconciliation and the journey involved, while the final session considers the inherent tensions within the competing demands for truth, justice and mercy in our search for an enduring and just peace.

In the third series of dialogues we focus on power, negotiation and mediation and ways of getting to win–win solutions. The final series looks at taking action, building skills in advocacy and social action and helping the community to develop their own plans to transform the conflicts that they face.

Session structure

Each session is based around a common structure:

- an opener that gets people's attention in a fun way and which sets the scene for the session
- an experiential exercise that gets people to connect with the theme from their own personal experience and which engages them emotionally with the session
- a Bible study that enables people to reflect on their experiences and to seek God's wisdom on the issue
- conceptual input that brings in external knowledge and expertise, helping to generalise the insights gained from the experiential exercise
- application, which asks the participants what this might mean for them in their context and how they might apply the learning
- a closing activity that brings the group back together and leaves them looking forward to the next session.

Each session also has an aim and a key message that summarises the main learning points from the session.

SESSION DETAILS

Session 1: Mainstream and margin

Aim: To introduce the idea that within any society there are groups that set the norms and the expectations (the mainstream) and those that have to abide by those norms but have little say in defining them (the margin).

Key message: We can all be mainstream and we can all be margin depending on the context. For a lasting peace, the mainstream needs to hear from the margins and the margins need to be included in any resolution.

Session outline:

Time	Tool
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opener: diversity welcome
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening liturgy
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village group check-in, introductions and group signs
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Series 1 revision and Series 2 introduction and structure
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential exercise: tape on the forehead
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mainstream and margin
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closed-eye exercise: mainstream and margin
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bible study: Mainstream and margin (Acts 6:1–7)
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application: who is who? and good news / bad news

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noticings and building toolbox
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing circle, look forward and closing prayer

Session guidance:

Welcome individuals as they arrive, and once everybody has arrived use the **diversity welcome** to reinforce the welcome to the different types of people in the room. Pay particular attention to anyone who may be new to the group having not taken part in the first series of dialogues. Remind them of the liturgy from the first series and say the prayers together.

Check that people can remember which village group they were in for the first series and ask them to meet together in the same groups. If there are new people, introduce them to one of the groups. If people are unable to remember, or if there are many new people, use the **transportation mixer** from Series 1 to form them into groups. Give the groups time to catch up with each other and to get to know any new members. Ask them to produce a new sign for

their village group, illustrating it with drawings of each of the group members.

Remind everyone of the topics covered in the first series and ask people to say one thing that struck them most from Series 1. Once done, you may wish to display the sheets from the end of the first series that listed the things that they identified as the main learning points then. Go on to introduce the participants to Series 2 and the topics covered in each of the four sessions. Stick up the sheets from Series 1 (or copies of them) that list how they can maximise or minimise the effectiveness of their time together, and remind them of what they said.

Bring the groups together and play the **tape on the forehead** game. Once the debrief is complete, use the drawing of a river to explain the **mainstream and margin** concept. Move directly from that to a closed-eye exercise where people reflect on times when they have been in the margin and the feelings they experienced in that situation. Collect from the group their feelings of being in the margin, of what the mainstream looked like from the margins and what, as members of the margin, they would like to say to the mainstream. Write these responses on flipchart paper and display them around the room.

Say that even the early church and the disciples experienced issues to do with mainstream and margin and introduce the **mainstream and margin Bible study**, getting each village group to do the study.

Still in their village groups, encourage them to identify who in their context is in the margins and who is in the mainstream. Get them to think about this within their household, within their church or faith group, within their community and within the country as a whole. If time is short, give each group a different context to consider (household, church etc). As the groups do this, be alert to the mainstream dominating discussions and if this happens highlight it, ensuring that the margins get the

chance to speak. You may find that the mainstream and margin categories are so ingrained in the culture that they are not always recognised (possibly because the margins have inadvertently been excluded from the course). Challenge the list, asking about age; gender; those with physical or mental disabilities; those with illnesses; those that have been sexually abused, widowed, deserted or divorced or that identify as lesbian, gay, transgender, bi-sexual, heterosexual or queer.

One you have a list of those in the mainstream and in the margins ask how many of the group appear on the mainstream list and how many on the margins list. You will usually find that a majority of the group are on both lists. Close with the ‘good news/bad news’ (see **Tape on the forehead** tool) pointing out that at times all of us are in the mainstream and at times all are in the margin, and that the feelings and advice that the group came up with during the closed-eye exercise therefore apply to us all. Use the learning from the Bible study to emphasise the key message that for a lasting peace the mainstream must listen to the margin and that the margin must be included in the design of any solution.

Spend a few minutes collecting any **noticings** from the group and continue with the list of tools.

End with a **closing circle**. Congratulate them on completing the session and explain that the next session will look at how the traumatic events associated with violent conflict can affect us and how we can break free from these destructive effects. End, if appropriate, with a prayer.

Resource requirements:

● Liturgy sheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Maximise/minimise sheets from Series 1	<input type="checkbox"/>

● Flipchart paper and marker pens	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Bibles	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Pre-prepared pieces of tape for the Tape on the forehead tool	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Pre-prepared flipchart sheets of:	<input type="checkbox"/>

○ mainstream/margin river	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ Bible study passages and questions	

Session 2: Rizpah

Aim: To familiarise people with the way in which we respond to traumatic events, to recognise them as normal responses, and to encourage people to begin to share their stories with others.

Key message: Suppressing trauma may dull the pain for a while but doing so prevents us from being healed. Healing comes when we begin to share our stories with those who can be trusted to hear us with compassion and understanding.

Session outline:

Time	Tool
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opening liturgy
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buddies: check in
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opener: peace drawing
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bible study: Rizpah (2 Samuel 21:1–14) ○ Interview Merab
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ victim/survivor cycle
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bible study: Rizpah (continued) ○ Interview the Gibeonites
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ aggressor/offender cycle
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bible study: Rizpah (continued) ○ Role play the story (Rizpah script)
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ breaking the cycle ○ David Benner
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application: buddy sharing / sentence completion

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Noticings and building toolbox
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Closing circle, look forward and closing prayer

Session guidance:

Welcome individuals as they arrive, and once everybody has arrived say the **liturgy** together. Form the participants into buddy pairs and give them some time with their new buddies to introduce themselves or check in with each other.

Open the session with the participants, in their village groups, doing the **peace drawing** exercise. After the game, invite them to notice the emotions that they felt as their drawing was destroyed. Highlight the sense of shock and loss that they would have felt and state that our experiences of violent conflict can have a similar but much deeper and more enduring impact on us. The session today will begin to explore these emotions and the trauma that violent conflict can create.

The session is based around the 'Rizpah' series of activities. An initial review of the story leads to a 'news reporter' style interview with Merab after which the **victim/survivor cycle** concept is introduced. This leads on to an interview with the Gibeonites, which is followed by a

description of the **aggressor/offender cycle**. The whole story is then dramatised using the **Rizpah role-play script**, after which the **breaking the cycle** concept (see **The trauma healing journey** tool) and the **David Benner** article are discussed.

In setting up the drama it is important to identify individuals who will be confident enough to play their parts. While there is no need to practise the drama with the actors beforehand, you will need to brief them clearly on the task.

After the drama, which is usually very powerful, allow a brief pause or period of silence before getting people into their buddy pairs. If comfortable doing so, encourage the pairs to tell their stories of traumatic incidents that they may have experienced to each other. If the pairs are not yet ready to do so, encourage them to do the **trauma sentence completion** exercise.

Monitor the mood within the buddies. If it feels appropriate, spend a few minutes collecting any **noticings** from the group and continue with the list of tools. Some pairs may have begun to share some deep experiences and so may not wish to rejoin the main group at this point. If that is the case let them continue in their pair. If many pairs are in the same situation, omit the noticings and tools list and instead move straight into the closing circle.

End with a **closing circle** during which the group may wish to pray for all those experiencing the traumas of war, dislocation and violence. Congratulate them on completing the session, recognising that the subject is challenging and that for many we may have been well out of our comfort zone. Look forward to the next session, which will begin to explore the ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation in a little more depth.

Resource requirements:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Liturgy sheets 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Flipchart paper and marker pens 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bibles 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blank paper and colouring pens or crayons 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Props for the role-play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ seven chairs ○ a robe and/or crown ○ a piece of cloth or scarf ○ a collection of sticks to represent bones 	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-prepared flipchart sheets of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim/survivor cycle ○ Aggressor/offender cycle ○ Breaking the cycle diagram ○ Benner stages of healing 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Session 3: Journey to reconciliation

Aim: To explore Biblical experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation, establishing that both take time and require ‘deep’ and often painful work.

Key message: Forgiveness is not forgetting; it does not necessarily mean that you will be reconciled but it does release the bitterness. It is about you reclaiming your status and power – no longer a victim subject to the perpetrator’s power but a survivor in your own right.

Session outline:

Time	Tool
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening liturgy
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buddies: check in
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opener: transportation mixer
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiential exercise: conflict knot
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bible study: Journey to reconciliation (Genesis 28:10–33:20 and 35:27–29)
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benner stages of healing
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application: buddy sharing
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noticings and building toolbox
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing circle, look forward and closing prayer

Session guidance:

Welcome individuals as they arrive, and once everybody has arrived say the **liturgy** together before letting people join their buddies to catch up, checking in on how each other is feeling. As always, encourage genuine sharing rather than superficial.

Use the **transportation mixer** to open the session and to get people into groups of about five. Use the activity to highlight the fact that the topic for the session is about going on a journey, a journey towards reconciliation. This is not, however, an easy journey and often there are challenging things to be overcome on the way.

Introduce the **conflict knot** and get the groups to untangle the knots that they have created. As they work to untangle themselves, watch out for different emotional reactions, frustration, anger, misunderstandings, and moments of clarity and progress followed by further periods of confusion – times when they went in the wrong direction and had to go backwards.

Once complete, debrief the exercise, inviting them to notice the emotions raised during the exercise, the actions that took place and the success or failure of their efforts. Add your observations and make the point that, much like the conflict knot, working towards reconciliation is a long and challenging process with many moments of confusion and frustration along the way.

Introduce the **journey to reconciliation Bible study**, saying that they are now going to look at a story of conflict and of a long journey towards reconciliation. Start by asking what the group as a whole knows about the story of Jacob and

Esau before recounting the story as told in the **story summary**. Tell it as if you were telling the story rather than reading a Bible passage. In smaller groups, invite them to discuss the first three Bible study questions before reporting back in plenary.

If appropriate, remind them of the stages of healing from the David Benner handout before encouraging them to consider the fourth question: *What are some of the steps or elements for reconciliation that emerge from this story which might apply to the conflicts we face in our own lives?* As before, get them to feed back their thoughts to the group as a whole.

In buddy pairs, invite them to think of a conflict that affects them or their community. Are there some steps towards reconciliation identified in this study that need to be taken in that conflict? Allow time for silent reflection and prayer.

End with a **closing circle**. Congratulate them on completing the session, recognising that the

subject of forgiveness and reconciliation is challenging and that it is a long and difficult, but ultimately liberating journey that sees you reclaiming your position as a fellow human being rather than as a victim.

Look forward to the next session, which will explore how issues such as truth, justice, mercy and peace interact on this journey of reconciliation.

Resource requirements:

● Liturgy sheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Flipchart paper and marker pens	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Bibles	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Pre-prepared flipchart sheets of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bible study questions ○ Benner sStages of healing 	<input type="checkbox"/>

Session 4: Truth, mercy, justice and peace

Aim: To get people to think of the relative roles of truth, mercy, justice and peace in transforming conflict and to begin to think about the order that these might appear within their own context.

Key message: For conflicts to be transformed and relationships re-established, all four 'characters' (truth, mercy, justice and peace) need to be addressed but these can take place in any order and may be cyclical – coming around to deeper levels of treatment at different stages.

Session outline:

Time	Tool
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opening liturgy
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buddies: check in
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opener: paper throw
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiential exercise: Psalm 85:10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TV interview
20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conceptual input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ time and reconciliation activity
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application: time and reconciliation activity – questions
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Noticings and building toolbox
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflection with buddies
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revision, closing circle and closing prayer

Session guidance:

Welcome individuals as they arrive at this last session in Series 2. Once everybody has arrived, say the **liturgy** together before letting people join their buddies to catch up, checking in on

how they are feeling. As always, encourage genuine sharing rather than superficial.

Get everyone to rejoin the main group and to stand where they are, without adjusting their position or the direction they are facing, before playing the **paper throw** game. Use the game to introduce the topic of fairness, of justice and of mercy before starting the **Psalm 85:10** activity. Get each character (Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace) to select a spokesperson and use the TV interview technique to gather the character's views. Ask each spokesperson to assume the character and speak as that character as they answer the questions that the group has been set. Ask follow-up questions to delve a little deeper. Once complete, invite the four characters to form a circle with their right hands inward and touching. Ask them to circle around. What do people see? All four are present but you only see one or two at a time. Make the point that reconciliation can be like that. It is a dance in which all of the characters are required but in which one or the other is in front at any given time.

From **Psalm 85:10**, move on to talk about the order in which the four characters can appear, asking which people think should come first and

which last. Complete the **time and reconciliation** activity.

For application, get them in groups to complete the questions in the group discussion part of the time and reconciliation activity before spending a few minutes collecting any **noticings** from the group and continuing the list of tools.

Congratulate them on completing not only this session but also the second of the four series of dialogues — they are now halfway through the full set. Invite them to meet with their buddies and discuss the main things that they learnt from each session. Collect these thoughts from the buddy pairs, writing them on some paper.

Once complete, review the list that they have come up with and then revise the key messages from each session:

- We can all be mainstream and we can all be margin depending on the context. For a lasting peace, the mainstream needs to hear from the margins and the margins need to be included in any resolution.
- Suppressing trauma may dull the pain for a while but doing so prevents us from being healed. Healing comes when we begin to share our stories with those who can be trusted to hear us with compassion and understanding.
- Forgiveness is not forgetting; it does not necessarily mean that you will be reconciled but it does release the bitterness. It is about you reclaiming your status and power – no longer a victim subject to the perpetrator’s power but a survivor in your own right.
- For conflicts to be transformed and relationships re-established, all four

‘characters’ (truth, mercy, justice and peace) need to be addressed but these can take place in any order and may be cyclical –coming around to deeper levels of treatment at different stages.

Encourage them to put what they have learnt into practice and to share their knowledge with family, friends and neighbours.

Tell them that the next series will be looking at issues of power and will begin to come up with practical actions and approaches to addressing conflicts, through negotiation and mediation and ways of getting to win–win solutions. Tell them when the next series will take place and, if comfortable doing so, invite suggestions as to how the sessions could be improved.

End the series by bringing them together into a **closing circle**, and do a closing activity. End with a prayer.

Resource requirements:

● Liturgy sheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Flipchart paper and marker pens	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Bibles	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Scrap paper and bin or bucket	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Labels for truth, justice, mercy and peace	<input type="checkbox"/>
● Pre-prepared flip-chart sheets of: ○ Psalm 85:10 questions	<input type="checkbox"/>

TOOLS

Session 1

Liturgy

Morning Prayer

All to join in the words in **bold**

**In the name of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
Three in one, One God, forever and ever
Amen**

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek:

**That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;
To behold the beauty of the Lord
And to seek God in God's Holy Temple**

Who is it you seek?

We seek the Lord our God

Do you seek God with all your heart?

Amen, Lord have mercy

Do you seek God with all your soul?

Amen, Lord have mercy

Do you seek God with all your strength?

Amen, Christ have mercy

To whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

**And we have believed and have come to know
that you are the holy one of God**

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory

Scripture Reading

Reflection – 5 minutes

Prayer

**May the strength of God pilot us.
May the power of God preserve us.
May the wisdom of God instruct us.
May the hand of God protect us.
May the way of God direct us.
May the shield of God defend us.
May the host of God guard us
against snares of evil
And the temptations of the world.**

Christ as a light

Illumine and guide me.

Christ as a shield

Overshadow me.

Christ under me;

Christ over me;

Christ beside me on my left and my right.

This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful.

Be in the heart of every man who thinks of me, in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, in every eye that sees me and in every ear that hears me.

This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful.

Christ as a light;
Christ as a shield;
Christ beside me on my left and my right.

Evening Prayer

All to join in the words in **bold**

The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end

Confession

Most merciful God, we confess to you before the whole company of heaven and one another, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed and in what we have failed to do.

Forgive us our sins, heal us by your Spirit and raise us to new life in Christ.

Amen

Hymn

We say together:

**Before the ending of the day
Creator of the world we pray
That you with steadfast love would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep**

**From evil dreams defend our sight
From fears and terrors of the night
Tread underfoot our deadly foe
That we no sinful thought may know**

O Father that we ask be done

Blessing

May God bless us
That in us be found love and humility
Obedience and thanksgiving
Discipline, gentleness and peace.

**In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Amen

**Through Jesus Christ your only Son
And Holy Spirit by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death**

The Responses

Into your hands O Lord I commend my spirit
For you have redeemed me Lord God of truth
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

Into your hands O Lord I commend my spirit
Keep me as the apple of your eye
Hide me under the shadow of your wings

The Collect

Visit this place O Lord we pray
And drive far from it the snares of the enemy
May your holy angels dwell with us
And guard us in peace
And may your blessing be always upon us through
Jesus Christ our Lord

The Conclusion

In peace we will lie down and sleep
For you alone Lord make us dwell in safety

Abide with us Lord Jesus

For the night is at hand and the day is now past

As the night watch looks for the morning

So do we look for you O Christ

Come with the dawning of the day

And make yourself known in the breaking of the bread

The Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you

Wherever He may send you

May He guide you through the wilderness

Protect you through the storm

May He bring you home rejoicing

At the wonders you have seen

May He bring you home rejoicing

Once again into our doors

**In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Amen

Transportation mixer

Use this tool either as an energiser or as a way of forming groups.

All participants stand up in a place where there is sufficient space for them to move around. The facilitator will call out different modes of transport, and people have to move around the room pretending to be that mode of transport. The game should be adapted to use local forms/names of transport. However, the basic forms are:

1. 'Foot'. People walk around the room by themselves.
2. 'Bicycle'. People pretend to cycle around the room by themselves.
3. 'Motorbike'. People form pairs and zoom around the room with one person driving and the other 'seated' behind them.
4. 'Taxi'. People form groups of four or five and drive around the room with one person driving, one 'seated' next to them as a passenger and three 'sat' behind as if they are in the back seat of the car.
5. 'Minibus'. People form groups of about eight and drive around the room with one person driving and the rest spread across the passenger seats.

When used as an energiser, the facilitator should move between different modes of transport several times. If used as a way of forming groups, the facilitator should specify 'government safety rules' for who can go on a minibus. These 'rules' can specify the maximum number of people (ie the desired group size) and the gender and/or age-group mix (or any other relevant category such as faith group, denomination, home region, tribe etc). The game ends with the facilitator calling out 'minibus', at which point people form groups of the desired combination.

Diversity welcome

The intention of the ‘diversity welcome’ is inclusion. The idea is to name – and welcome – each person or set of people in the room according to their particular identity. The welcome can be long or short. The more aspects of what is present in the room are named, the more the participants are likely to feel welcome in their diversity. The welcome is a ritual, so don’t be bothered by the repetitive phrasing. Take your time with it!

You will want to add or subtract based on what margins are important for the group. The common element is to inclusively name the range with a genuine ‘Welcome!’

You might like to prepare notes to remind you of a few you don’t want to forget. Feel free to give up the script, take your time, use your own style, bring your own energy into it, and look at the participants as you continue your welcoming. It can be a surprisingly tender experience, for facilitators and participants. Enjoy!

Options that you might want to include are:

‘Welcome to...’ (and then facilitator names)

- people of all genders (this may include people who identify as women, men, trans, gender-queer, or others)
- people of African descent, Black, African-American, Asian descent, Arab descent, European descent, those who identify as Hispanic, Latinx, people indigenous to this land, and people of mixed, multiple descents
- languages spoken here (try to know as many ahead of time or ask people to name them): Spanish, English, indigenous languages, sign language etc
- people from... (specifically name cities/states/provinces/countries represented)
- people with disabilities, visible or invisible
- people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual, queer, or others for whom none of the labels fit
- your bodies and the different ways you experience yours (this may include chronic pain, strength, tension etc)
- survivors
- people who identify as activists, and people who don’t
- people who are single, married, partnered, dating, and in monogamous or polyamorous relationships
- those who are sexually active and those who aren’t
- those in their teens, 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s (depending on group)
- those who feel... (name the emotions: joy & bliss, grief, rage, indignation, contentment, disappointment)

- those who support you to be here
- your families – genetic and otherwise
- people with different faiths, religious traditions, faith practices, private practices not belonging to a tradition; agnostics, atheists and seekers
- those dear to us who have died
- our elders: those here in this room, in our lives, and those who have passed away.

Tape on the forehead

You need to prepare the tape for this exercise in advance, with enough pieces of masking tape to give one to each person. Draw one different coloured shape on each piece of tape. Make five to eight of each shape (red triangles, blue rectangles, green parallel lines etc). Then make two or three unique shapes (a circle with two arrows coming out of each side). You'll need to have the tape on a surface from which it will come off easily – a clipboard, hymn book, or leather or plastic notebook. Depending on the number of participants, you will want at least three large groups and two unique individuals. If you have more than 50 people the logistics become more difficult.

Introduce the activity as a game, but don't say too much. Get participants to stand in a large circle or 'U' shape and ask them to close their eyes. Tell them you will put something on their forehead, but they need to keep their eyes closed until you tell them to open them. You could get a volunteer or co-facilitator to help put the tape on people if you have a larger group. At the end you could put tape on the one helping you (with their eyes closed, of course).

Then tell people to open their eyes and 'without talking in any language, form groups'. Nothing more or less. Then just observe and be patient. Let things develop. Sometimes people will go one way, then shift around to something else. Give it all time. Watch the dynamics, especially around the unique individuals. What is their experience?

After things seem to reach a point of balance or conclusion, call an end. Then begin the debrief with people still standing where they have ended up.

As always, the first question to ask is 'What happened?' Let people talk about it – anybody who wants to start. Then steer the debrief to the larger groups first, asking questions like 'How did you come together?' 'What did it feel like?' 'How do you feel now?' Try to ignore the unique ones early in the debrief in order to establish the mainstream experience and feeling. Then, having questioned all the larger groups, turn to the unique ones: 'What about you?' 'What was it like for you?' As they talk, feel free to prompt with questions about particular things you observed that they or the other groups did or didn't experience. Whatever happens can be a learning opportunity. You can ask questions like 'Have you experienced or witnessed these dynamics in other settings? What was it like?'

When you have completed the debrief, ask them to sit down and then introduce the concept of mainstream and margin.

Mainstream/margin concept introduction

Draw a river on a piece of flipchart paper (you can prepare this in advance) and talk about how parts of the river flow faster than others – in some places the water even flows backwards. The main part of the

river – the mainstream – is where the power is. Societies tend to be like this river as well, with part of society seeming to be the most active or powerful while others can feel left out, excluded and left behind. We refer to this as the ‘mainstream and the margin’. The mainstream are the ones who decide the rules of society, what is and is not acceptable, and how people should and should not behave. The mainstream sets the culture while the margin are those who have to abide by the rules that have been set for them. Stress that the mainstream does not have to be the majority – indeed it often isn’t. Think of apartheid South Africa or of colonial times (if relevant): the colonial powers were never the majority in the country but were the ones who set the rules.

Highlight that a person can be mainstream in one way and margin in another at the same time, depending on what characteristics you are looking at. And if you are mainstream in this group, there are other groups in which you are the margin. We all have experiences in being in the mainstream and in being in the margin.

Mainstream and margin for the context

At this stage you may wish to get the group to reflect on their own environment. Invite them to think of who, in their context, is in the mainstream and who is in the margin. Elicit lists of both. Encourage them to think of gender and age if it doesn’t come up, as well as education level and language; faith group, tribe or ethnicity should also be explored. Once you have the list, ask how many of them are in the mainstream and how many are, or have ever been, in the margin. You will usually find that the majority have been in both groups (or will be – both youth and the elderly are often in the margin as are women, while men will usually be in the mainstream).

Closed-eye exercise

Reinforce the learning by moving into a closed-eye exercise. Ask people to close their eyes again (tell them that you are not going to do anything to them). Encourage them to relax. Then ask them to remember a time when they felt they were in the margin; where they knew they were on the edges of the group; that they didn't really belong. Ask them to think of a specific experience where they keenly felt their marginalisation. Guide them in thinking about what things looked like, sounded like and felt like. What was said? What was done? What did you do? How did you feel? What was it like for you to be in the margin? Gather the responses to the questions so that you have a full sheet of impressions of being in the margin.

Then ask them, from their position in the margin, what the mainstream was like. How would you describe that mainstream person or group? What was their attitude? How did they act? How did they come across to you? Write their feelings and perceptions of the mainstream on another sheet of paper.

Finally, ask them what they wish they could say to the mainstream person or group so that they would be better. If you could safely say what you wanted to say, what would it be? Give plenty of time for people to use their imagination and reconnect. Write on a sheet of paper the things that they would want to say to the mainstream.

When this is finished, tell them there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that we are all like this (point to the mainstream description and read out all the awful stuff). The good news is that we can learn from our margin experience so we can act better when we are in the mainstream. We can teach ourselves to... (go through the list of things they wanted to say as margins to the mainstream).

Bible study: Mainstream and margin, a conflict in every group

(Acts 6:1–7)

This Bible study can be used as part of the ‘mainstream and margin’ theme in conjunction with the **Tape on the forehead** tool.

Background

The early chapters in Acts describe the life of the young church after Jesus had ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The followers of Jesus experienced a sudden growth in numbers. The core group was made up of Jewish people who spoke Aramaic, a derivative of Hebrew. They were sometimes referred to as ‘Hebrews’. The newcomers to the community included many travellers from distant regions who had come to Jerusalem for religious pilgrimage or business. They heard the gospel at Pentecost or shortly thereafter and became followers of Jesus. These people were also Jews, but they were part of the Jewish diaspora – those who had been scattered over the centuries following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. They had settled in many cities throughout northern Africa, southern Europe, the Middle East and western Asia. They spoke Greek as their common language, which was the cosmopolitan language of the day. So in Jerusalem, these diaspora Jews who became followers of Jesus were called ‘Hellenists’, because they spoke Greek. Following Pentecost, the new community began sharing their belongings and taking care of any in need (Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–37). Many people sold their lands and other possessions. The money was given to the apostles who then saw that it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Study process and questions

Prior to studying the passage, make a brief presentation about ‘mainstream’ and ‘margin’ (see the tool **Tape on the forehead**). The passage provides some examples of people trying to work positively from both mainstream and margin positions. Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage using the questions below. Allow 20 minutes, then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions to use in the small group study

1. Identify the parties to the conflict. What is the immediate issue? What are the underlying concerns for both sides?
2. Which group could be considered ‘mainstream’ or at the ‘centre’ of the community? Why?
3. Which group could be considered on the ‘margin’ or on the edges of the community? How did they experience being on the edge or the margin?
4. How aware was the ‘mainstream’ group of the experience of those on the ‘margins’? How did that awareness change?
5. In what way did the decisions made affect the mainstream and the margins? The names of the seven people chosen are all Greek names. Does that signify anything about the nature of the

resolution achieved? Were there other people on the margin that were missing in the solution? What implications do you see for those missing people?

6. What other ways, if any, did the decisions made not address issues of both those in the mainstream and in the margins?
7. What did those at the margins do that was most helpful?
8. What did those in the mainstream do that was most helpful?

Key points

One way to understand the dynamics of the conflict in this story is in terms of ‘mainstream’ and ‘margins’. The mainstream is the part of the group that sets the values, rules, traditions and customs that predominate in the larger group. The mainstream may be the majority group, but not necessarily. The mainstream could be a numerical minority that still has the power to set the way things go in the group. The interests of the mainstream are what the group recognises as the valid priority interests for the whole group. The mainstream may be a ruling or culturally dominant ethnic group; the parents in a family; the governing body of a church; or the administration of an academic institution. The margins are the individuals or groups who have values, customs and ways of being that are alternatives to the mainstream. Every group has a mainstream and a margin. People may be in the mainstream in one setting, and in the margin in another. Furthermore, one person may be mainstream in one way in a particular group, and margin in another way in that very same group (for example, a college-educated woman in a church group may be mainstream because of her education, and margin because of her gender). Every one of us has the experience of being mainstream in some setting and margin in some other setting.

Lesson insight: We can learn from our experience of being in the margins how to listen better and act more justly when we are in the mainstream.

The mainstream is unconscious of its privileges and rank within the group. The mainstream is also unaware of the experience of the margins. The margin, however, is distinctly aware of both their own and the mainstream’s values and beliefs because they have to consciously function in relationship to the mainstream, because the mainstream sets the ways for the group to operate. The Hebrew Christians, including the apostles, had no awareness of the suffering of the Hellenistic widows. We don’t know how the matter of the neglect of the widows actually came to the attention of the apostles. Perhaps the widows complained directly. Perhaps a Hellenistic community leader brought the complaint. Perhaps there was a sensitive Hebrew who picked up the concern and brought it to the apostles. However it happened, the apostles did not get defensive or criticise the one bringing the complaint. Instead they listened and then acted appropriately to address the concern. Listening is the best first step in countering the unconsciousness and unawareness of the mainstream.

Lesson insight: The first and best step the mainstream group can do in a conflict is to listen!

When a conflict involves structural injustice such as in this case, some sort of structural change must be included in the solution. In the Acts 6 story the Hellenistic widows were being neglected, so the structural change involved both the establishment of a new position in the church to handle assistance to the needy, and giving power to the neglected community in the new structure. All those chosen to administer the new programme were Hellenists who had been neglected.

Lesson insight: Resolving conflicts rooted in injustice means involving the margins.

After the conflict is resolved, verse 7 tells about the dramatic expansion of evangelism. A conflict takes a lot of a community's energy, focusing energy inward on the conflict. When the conflict is resolved, the energy can then be turned outward in creative endeavours.

Lesson insight: Good conflict resolution releases the energy used in conflict for other activities.

Noticings

'Noticing' is a way of examining something in an open and non-judgemental way. It can be an elicitive and democratic way of exposing issues, insights, questions or confusions, all of which enhances learning. It is different from commenting as there is no assessment, assumption or value judgement associated with it and so it leaves room for discussion without any sense of bias or constraint. While we are all fairly good at offering our thoughts and comments on something, we are less skilled at simply noticing and so it is a skill that requires practice.

Examples

- Evaluation: 'I really liked it when you asked Joe to speak up because the rest of us could then hear him more clearly.'
- Noticing: 'I noticed that you asked Joe to speak up – what was your intention in doing that?'

- Evaluation: ‘Getting us all involved in the opening activity was a great way to start the session – it was great to have a laugh.’
- Noticing: ‘I noticed that you started the session with a lighthearted opening activity. This caused a lot of interaction and noise but you then stopped it quite abruptly. Why did you choose that particular activity and why did you stop it the way that you did?’

Comments or evaluative statements usually tend to close off discussion as they can appear to be a final statement or summing up. Noticings are more open and by contrast tend to invite thinking and discussion.

When using noticings, facilitators should frame the question so that the noticings are focused: ‘What did you notice about X?’ where ‘X’ might be group dynamics, the behaviour of the facilitator or of participants, the process or impact of an activity, the design of a session etc.

Closing circles

‘Closing circles’ are used to bring the sessions to an end, bringing everyone together for a final short closing activity. Some ideas are shown below. However, do use your own experience and imagination to create other exercises.

Affirmation circle

Stand in a circle. Each person gets a chance to share something they have appreciated about the person to their right. Then the person to their left affirms. (In this way, people give an affirmation and then get an affirmation, so they’re not thinking of something to say while they’re getting an affirmation.) Give people a minute to think of something and then, starting with the facilitator, go completely around the circle.

Closing word

Go around the circle with each person saying one word (or phrase) representing something they learned today; or the attitude they hope to bring tomorrow; or something they appreciated about themselves that day; or some way that they shined today; or something they hope to learn tomorrow.

Group stretch

Stand in a circle and get everyone to do the biggest stretch that they can, raising their arms in the air and ending by shaking all over in the same way that a dog shakes when it comes out of the water. You could get them to shout ‘yes’ loudly as they shake.

Lifting the world together

Stand in a circle. Announce: ‘I have terrible news. The sky has fallen down! It lies before us: there is the sun, and the moon, and there are the clouds. We need to carefully lift the sky back into place. To do that, we need to lift it up from the ground all together – we cannot have pieces sliding off because we’re uneven.’ Demonstrate raising the sky from your knees, to up above your head, to tossing it into the air.

Explain that the sky sticks better when you yell, so as you toss it into the air you all need to yell really loudly. (Note physical abilities and height, and be sensitive to those.)

Massage backs

Stand in a circle facing left. Everyone rubs the back of the person in front, then turns around and rubs the back of the person on the other side.

Pass the egg

Hold a raw egg in your hand, and comment on how fragile it is and yet how valuable with the life inside it. Comment how this can represent us/our community/our families/our health and well-being/peace etc as appropriate and then pass it carefully to the person next to you. Pass the egg all the way around the circle.

Pass the electrical pulse

Stand in a circle holding hands. The leader squeezes a hand on one side in a simple pattern. The person receiving the squeeze then squeezes the hand of the next person in the same pattern. The pattern (pulse) gets passed around the circle. Once it is well on its way, the first person sends a different pattern in the other direction. Try to make them cross, whenever they meet.

Passing the peace

Stand in a circle. The leader cups their hands as if they are holding something very valuable but fragile and elusive; something that might easily be lost or damaged if not handled with extreme care. The leader carefully passes this to the person next to them saying, 'I give you the peace of the world'(or something similar). The peace is passed around the whole group and at the end can be released by being thrown into the air as if it were a dove.

Peace forever chant

Get the group chanting '*amani milele*' (which means 'peace forever') and then get them to chant the phrase in as many other languages as are known to people in the room.

Postcard

Stand in a circle. Give one minute for everyone to come up with a picture that might appear on a postcard that they would send someone to describe their learning for that day. Go around and share the picture that would be on each person's postcard.

Snowball fight

Get each person to write a word or words on a piece of scrap paper that summarises either what they have learnt or how they are feeling (alternatively it can be a word of affirmation for someone in the group). Scrunch the paper up into a ball and then encourage the group to have a snowball fight,

throwing the scrunched-up paper at each other. After a minute or two ensure everyone has a piece of paper and then encourage them to unfold it and read out the word or words on it.

Song

Close with a song you know and can easily teach. Call and response songs are great (where the facilitator calls out a line and the participants respond with the same line), since they take less time to learn and people tend not to get into the 'performance' of the song as much.

Web of peace

Stand in a circle with a large ball of coloured wool or string (preferably multicoloured). The leader throws the ball to a person roughly opposite them but holds on to the end of the wool or string. The person who catches the ball holds the string so that it is fairly taut between the leader and them and then throws the ball to another person approximately opposite them. This is repeated until everyone is holding a 'peace' of the string or wool and a criss-crossing web has been formed that joins all the participants together. Once complete, get people to lower the web gently to the floor and step away.

Session 2

Peace drawings

The peace-drawing activity is done in small groups and can be used as part of an early exploration into peace and conflict, and the emotions and feelings raised during conflict. It works well with the **Conflict is...** tool and also as part of an introduction to trauma or forgiveness and reconciliation.

Ensure that each person has a clean sheet of paper and that each small group has a good selection of coloured pens, pencils or crayons. Tell everybody that they are to draw a picture of what they envisage as a peaceful place. It can be anything, but it must be something that they associate with a sense of peacefulness. Reassure them that this is not a drawing contest – nobody needs to be an artist. Give them up to five minutes to complete their drawing, and then elicit feelings from the process from a few people in the room. This creates a deeper sense of what peace looks and feels like before moving on to the next stage. Then tell them that they are to pass their drawing to the person in their group who is on their left. Once everyone has passed their drawing on, tell the new person that they are to do whatever they can to ruin the picture of peace that they have been given. This normally generates a few gasps in the room and quite often a reluctance to comply. Insist that everybody wrecks the peaceful picture. Once this has been done, ask people to note the feelings and emotions that came to the fore. Don't collect responses at this stage but just ask them to notice their feelings.

Once all the pictures have been wrecked, pass the wrecked pictures on to the next person to the left in the group. Tell them to do whatever they can to repair and restore the picture of peace; to recreate peace. Give them a few minutes to attempt this and then gather feelings from the groups.

- What did it feel like to have someone wreck your beautiful drawing of peace?
- What did it feel like to wreck the picture?
- What did you think or feel when asked to repair or recreate the picture of peace?
- How easy was it to rebuild peace once it had been destroyed?

Gather the answers and then get the participants to draw out any insights that the exercise may have given them about the nature of peace and conflict, the emotions and passions that they cause and the feasibility of forgiveness and reconciliation in the light of these emotions.

Typically people will comment on the fragility of peace and how much easier it is to break it than to rebuild it. The scale or challenge of the rebuilding task may also be noted, alongside a feeling that the task is impossible; that restoration is simply not possible.

It may be helpful to tell people about the ancient Japanese practice of Kintsugi. This involves taking something that has been broken (eg a pot) and repairing it with a paste containing powdered gold. The cracks in the repaired pot can still be seen but they are now filled with beautiful seams of gold that glint in the light. The scars can still be seen, but through the restoration process they have become something beautiful that adds to what was there before. Good conflict transformation can do the same.

Bible study: Rizpah – a grieving, angry mother rises up

(2 Samuel 21:1–14)

Background

During the Israelite conquest of Canaan, the Gibeonites secured a peace agreement with the Israelites by deceitful means (see Joshua 9:3–27). Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites to let them live – an agreement viewed as holy and not to be violated. Evidently there was a massacre of the Gibeonites under the reign of King Saul. Saul and three of his sons, including David’s friend Jonathan, were later killed in battle by the Philistines. David became king and the protector of Jonathan’s crippled son Mephibosheth. Saul’s surviving concubine, Rizpah, had earlier been used as a possession symbolising growing political power in a struggle between Saul’s son Ishbosheth and his general, Abner (2 Samuel 3:6–11). By the time of this story, David is in control of his kingdom, having survived various wars of consolidation and a number of revolts.

Study process and questions

Break into groups and ask the groups to read and discuss the passage, using the questions listed below to guide them. Allow 30 minutes for the groups to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions to use in the small group study:

- The original incident of Saul’s violence against the Gibeonites is not told in the Bible, except for the reference to it in this passage. What do you think happened? (See Joshua 9.)
- What bargain did David make to appease the Gibeonites? Who was to suffer in the newest round of violence? Is there any indication that these individuals were responsible for the initial incident of violence? Why would the Gibeonites and David feel that such an action would make the situation ‘better’? How is David in the mainstream in this story? How does he act towards the margins?
- Who is Rizpah? How is Rizpah in the margin in this story? What action did she take? Was this a public action? Was she doing more than grieving for her loss? How is her choice different from the choice made by Merab (Michal), the other mother in the story? What inner issues do you think Rizpah might have had to face to act as she did? What gave her energy and courage for her action?
- What impact did Rizpah’s action have? How does David as a mainstream person respond to Rizpah as a person in the margin? What does it signify for David, who handed the men over for execution, to bury the bodies with royal dignity?
- Where is God in the story? Does God condone the deal made between the Gibeonites and David? When does the divine blessing return to the land? How is religion used to justify political actions?

Ask participants to get into groups of two or three to discuss where Rizpah might rise up if she came back today. Who would she be with? What might she do?

Key points

David sacrificed the lives of Saul's descendents while operating within the framework of mainstream political power. He was completely focused on solving the political problem of the Gibeonites, as well as perhaps protecting his own throne from possible threats from descendents of his predecessor, Saul. David evidently gave no thought to the impact of this massacre on the mothers of the dead or on the innocence of those being sacrificed for political expediency. Injustice is often a result of the blindness of the mainstream to the values, needs and concerns of the margins. Merab took no action to counter the injustice, so she remained part of the invisible, silent margins. Rizpah exposed the injustice for what it was, refusing to let the mainstream represented by David go on with business as usual. She made the injustice experienced by the margins visible and poignantly plain.

Lesson insight: The mainstream will often persecute the margins, so the margins must stand up for themselves to challenge the unjust situation, structure or actions.

Mothers have sometimes mobilised in the face of violence to speak against violations of human rights that have claimed or threaten to claim the lives of their children. Three examples stand out:

1. The 'Mothers of Plaza de Mayo' in Argentina mobilised in the 1970s during that country's 'dirty war'. Tens of thousands of young people 'disappeared', seized by members of the military. They were never seen again. People were killed and buried without record or dropped from helicopters into the ocean. When the mothers received no explanations for the disappearance of their children, they began to mobilise. They held silent vigils every week in the capital city, carrying photos of their missing children. They continued their actions despite severe repression, becoming a moral voice for the nation that eventually brought an end to the military's reign of terror.
2. The mothers of the 'disappeared' in El Salvador mobilised between 1977 and 2006 to pressure the government for information about their missing relatives. They became one of the strong voices for human rights and an end to the war in that country.
3. The Naga Mothers Association began as a women's social group in Nagaland in northeast India in 1984. They began going to Indian army bases and police stations to gather bodies of Nagas slain in the war, which had been ongoing since 1955. Nobody else would openly claim the bodies for fear of being harassed by the soldiers. The women came to bury the bodies properly according to their culture, wrapping each person in a newly woven shawl. As the number of Naga dead increased, the mothers then began raising their voices and engaging in political actions for an end to the violence. The Naga Mothers Association has become a consistent voice for human rights and peace.

Lesson insight: The energy of a mother's love can become a powerful force for justice and peace when she is faced with actual or threatened violence against her children.

Rizpah's action was long-term and public. She kept her vigil from the barley harvest till the rains came (v10), keeping the deaths of her sons before the people of Israel. When David came to Rizpah and buried her sons, David's action was public. He was publicly changing his policy, doing an action of repentance in response to Rizpah's witness.

Lesson insight: Public nonviolent actions can sway the hearts or at least the policies of the powerful.

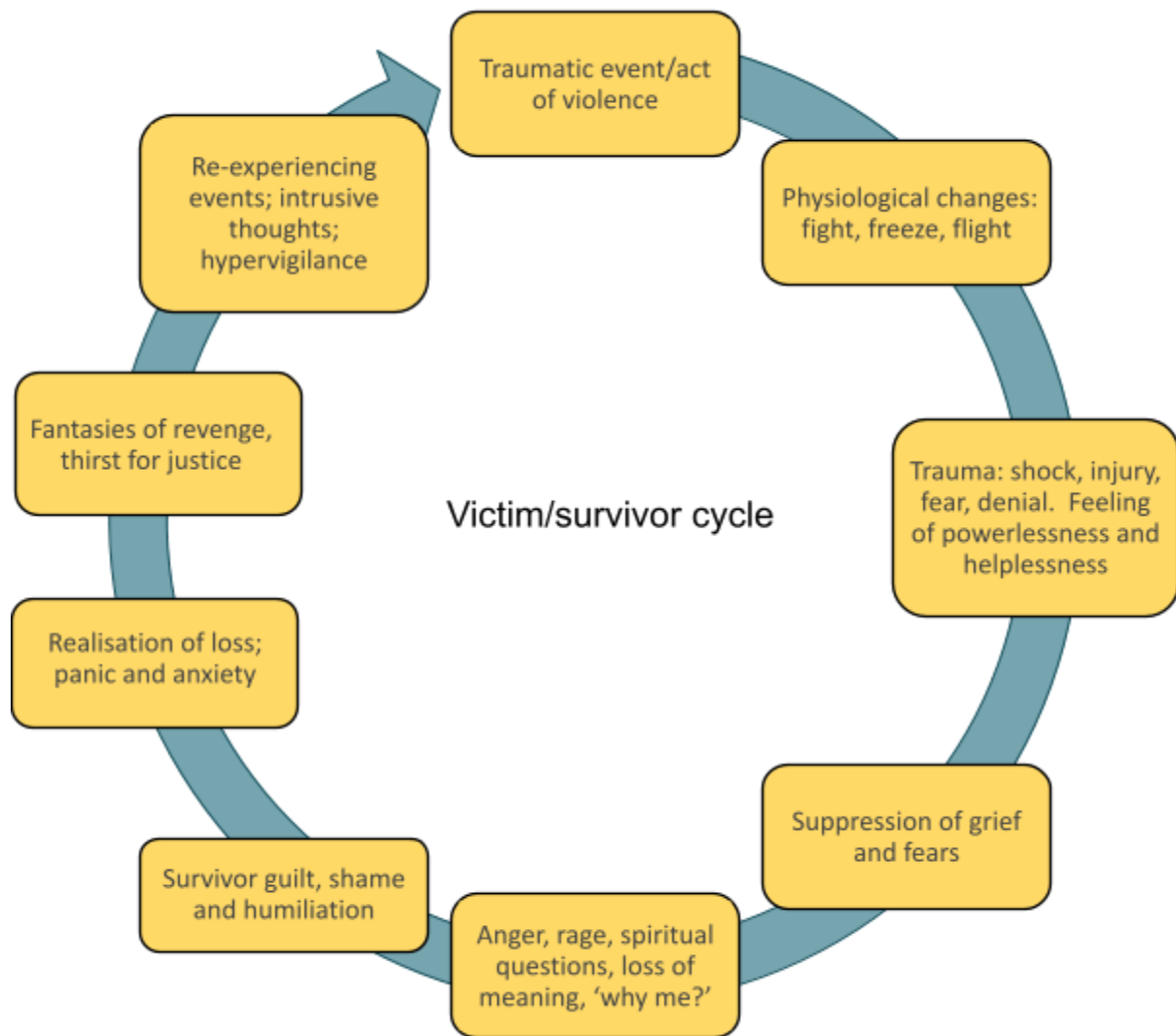
The political deal made by David and the Gibeonites was cloaked in religious language. The seven young men were slaughtered 'before the Lord' (verses 6 and 9). Although in the story God raised the original problem of the unresolved massacre of Gibeonites by Saul as the cause of the famine (v1), God does not respond to the slaughter of Saul's descendants by lifting the famine. Evidently David's action was not what God wanted. However, when David repented publicly in coming to Rizpah to bury her sons with honour after she had exposed the ugliness of the political violence, God then blessed the land.

Lesson insight: God's blessing is brought not by more violence but by ending the cycle of violence.

Victim/survivor cycle

Explain the victim/survivor cycle

Following a traumatic or violent event, our body reacts immediately and without conscious thought. We tend to automatically do one of three things: fight or resist; freeze (becoming immobile); or flee. This is an immediate bodily reaction designed to give us the best chance of survival and over which we have little control. After this the shock of what has happened begins to come out. We feel a sense of fear and powerlessness, and in extreme cases we can enter a phase of denial where our brain blanks out what happened to us. We can deny the reality of what happened.

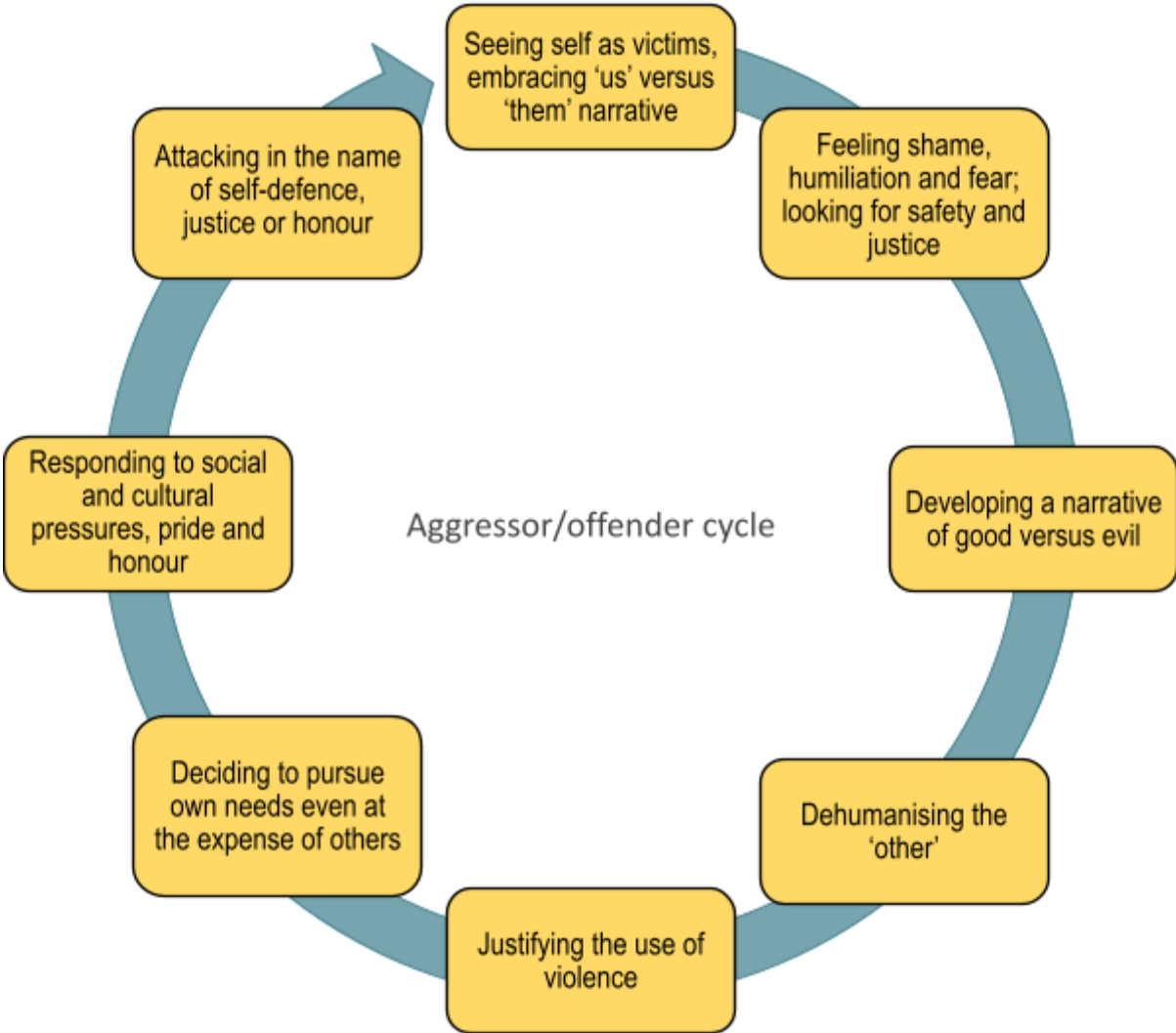


Depending on our culture, and the attitudes of those around us and the level of stigma that may be associated with what happened to us, we can suppress our feelings, pushing them deep inside and locking these powerful and natural emotional responses within us. This becomes a breeding ground for a deep-seated anger and rage at what happened to us, which can erupt at times – often from fairly minor triggers. We can also find that our core beliefs, our faith and our sense of who we are can be challenged. Why me? How could God allow this? What have I done to deserve this? Consequently, many of the structures that we have used to support us fall away and we can feel very alone, lacking self-esteem and self-confidence. We can feel shame, guilt and humiliation, and be unable or unwilling to engage with society.

We can feel a sense of loss and panic in recognising what we have lost – not least our confidence. How will I survive? What can I do? We can become increasingly anxious – even paranoid – feeling that everyone is out to get us. In among this storm of internal emotions, we entertain fantasies of revenge, of getting even.

Without sharing our pain, this internal battle goes on: fear, pain, anger, shame and guilt. No matter how hard we try to suppress them, the feelings emerge, sometimes as physical illnesses and sometimes as flashbacks or nightmares, intrusive thoughts or even voices. Our anxiety and paranoia grows and we can become hyper-vigilant, convinced that there are threats all around us.

Aggressor/offender cycle



This diagram follows on from the victim/survivor cycle and leads on to the 'Breaking the cycle' diagram. It can be explained as follows:

After a traumatic incident, people often entertain fantasies of revenge against those who have hurt them. Fear of what happened to them happening again can make them feel very anxious and paranoid.

These feelings can be made worse by bad dreams or flashbacks of what happened. They begin to develop an attitude of 'us versus them', becoming frightened of those who are different.

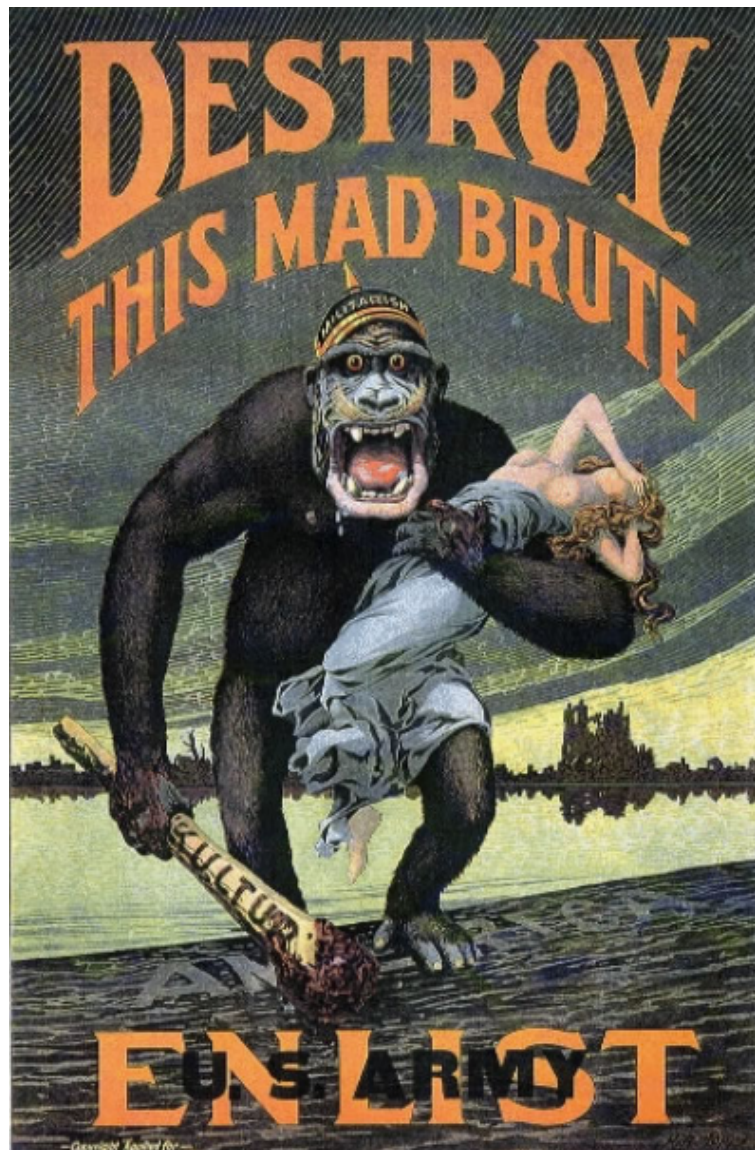
These feelings of fear and anxiety are often combined with feelings of shame and humiliation and a desire for both safety and justice. They begin to form a story based around good versus evil, with themselves being the victim of evil people. This can then be fed by stories, often fed by opportunistic leaders, that suggest that these 'others' are in some way no longer human. In Rwanda, for example, the Tutsi people were described as 'cockroaches', while in Europe in the First World War the German soldiers were depicted in propaganda posters bayoneting babies or as a drooling mad-eyed monkey (see right and overleaf), while other posters suggested that those who failed to fight would be seen as weak by their children.

Once those who have harmed you are seen as no longer human, it becomes easy to justify the use of violence against the group as a whole. It is no longer the individual culprits who are to blame and who should be held to account, but the whole group. The desire for 'justice' then becomes a drive that must be satisfied even if other parties not involved in the original offence will suffer.

This can be fed by social pressure from your own group, which argues that failing to stand up against this perceived threat is a form of cowardice and that if you don't take revenge you are failing your own side, suggesting (if male) that you are not a 'real man'; that you have no honour.

Acts of revenge then take place, often in the name of 'justice', 'honour' or 'self-defence'.

And so the cycle begins again – point back to the victim/survivor cycle.





Rizpah role-play script

This script is based on the story of Rizpah as told in 2 Samuel 21:1–14. This script can be used as part of the sessions on trauma. The narrator does not need to follow the script rigidly but can express the story in their own words if preferred. The cast should improvise around the script, acting out the actions in the story.

Cast

- King David – try to find something that might represent a kingly robe or crown.
- The Gibeonites – two or three people.
- King David’s soldiers – two or three soldiers to drag out and execute the remaining sons of Saul.
- The seven sons of Saul – drag these out from the participants – they don’t need to be forewarned.
- Rizpah – this needs to be a strong actor who will really get into the role of public mourning and driving away the birds and dogs. She will need a scarf or cloth as a prop.

Props

A few props can add to the power of the role-play:

- seven chairs in a row representing the place of execution
- a robe or crown for King David
- a piece of cloth or scarf for Rizpah
- a collection of sticks to represent the bones of the sons of Saul and of Saul himself

Script

The story begins with a famine plaguing Israel. King David prays to ask God what the problem is.

[King David adopts a position of prayer]

God says there is ‘bloodguilt’ on the land. Innocent blood had been shed. Gross injustice and terrible violence had taken place and never been addressed.

What had happened is that King Saul, David’s predecessor from another tribe, had massacred the Gibeonites, engaging in what we would call today ‘acts of genocide’. The Gibeonites were an ethnic minority who had made a covenant of peace with Israel during the invasion of the Promised Land under Joshua. The story of that peace covenant is told in the book of Joshua, chapter 9. But Saul violated that covenant in an old-fashioned expression of ethnic cleansing. The Gibeonites were massacred, and God became the only advocate for these forgotten victims. God cursed the land that had committed this brutality, even though they were God’s special covenant people.

So when David heard from God that this was the problem, he got together with the surviving Gibeonites to see what they could do to set things right.

[David confers with the Gibeonites]

And David and the Gibeonites chose a solution that was old back then and has been continued to this day. They decided to deal with the old violence of the past by committing new violence in the present. The Gibeonites who had been so awfully wronged wanted revenge. 'Give us the male descendents of Saul – kill them for us!' So David did.

Seven of Saul's sons and grandsons were taken by David's men and killed. They were butchered in public and their brutalised bodies were left out on public display.

[The soldiers drag out seven of the participants, seat them in the seven chairs and execute them; the 'dead' sons of Saul remain slumped in the chairs or on the floor]

The Bible says they did this 'before the Lord', as a religious act. But God is silent – God does not lift the curse upon the land. Evidently, the murder of these children was not God's way of lifting the bloodguilt.

But then, in the wake of this awful violence, a mother – a courageous mother – changes the story. One mother, Merab, who lost five sons that day, simply disappears from the story. Merab becomes that eternally grieving, silent mother who fades away in the overwhelming sorrow of her loss.

But the other mother, Rizpah, transforms the entire story. Two of her sons were executed. She feels the same sorrow as Merab. Perhaps besides sorrow she feels anger at the injustice of her loss. But unlike Merab, Rizpah does not fade away. Rizpah instead comes out into the public space where the bodies of her sons are displayed. Rizpah, with a mother's grief, a mother's anger, a mother's courage, begins a public vigil over the bodies of her boys.

[Rizpah begins to mourn, driving off the birds and animals]

She spreads a rough cloth on the ground and stays there, keeping the dogs away, and scaring off the birds that circle around the bodies. She keeps that vigil out in public, day after day, night after night.

There is only one verse about her action. That verse says she began at the start of the barley harvest and continued till the rains fell. It is thought that the barley harvest began in late April or early May, and the rainy season started in late October or early November. One verse, but many months.

Imagine Rizpah there by the bodies of her sons – April, May, June. What is happening to those bodies? What do the women in the town do? 'Rizpah, come home. You've grieved enough. It's time to get on with your life. You can't bring your children back to life by this wasting of yourself.'

But Rizpah continues – July, August, September. The bodies have disintegrated in the open air and are nearly bones now.

[At this point the 'bodies' can be replaced by piles of sticks or twigs representing their bones]

The town's people all think she is crazy, she's a madwoman. But she continues – October, November.

And finally David hears about her vigil. David hears and is moved in his heart by this mother. David comes.

He comes publicly to the mother whose sons he ordered to be executed. He publicly gathers their bones. Then he gathers the bones of Saul and his other sons who had perished in the battle of Gilboa, but had never been properly buried.

[David comes to Rizpah, they talk, David goes and collects the bones of Saul and the seven sons and then, with Rizpah, buries them. You will need additional sticks 'offstage' representing Saul's bones]

And David buries them all appropriately and with due respect in the land of their family.

Then God heals the land. God did not heal the land in response to David's executions. God healed the land when David reversed his policy of violence and came publicly to Rizpah. He came, I believe, in repentance and humility. David came to the sorrowing mother in her vigil, and he tenderly dealt with the bones of her children. The violence was over. The cycle of revenge and retribution was broken. Grief was given an expression that could bring healing at long last.

It's a strange story, and Rizpah's action gets just one verse. But her action transforms the whole story. David changes, and from his change, inspired by Rizpah, the land is healed.

Additional discussion points

For us as Christians, however, the key question to ask is: Where was God in this Bible story?

We saw God at the beginning, raising a problem to David. God brought to David's attention a terrible injustice that had not been put right. God was an advocate for those who had been victimised. The next time God enters the story is right at the end. God doesn't come in with healing when David and the Gibeonites exact revenge, repaying Saul's violence with their own violence. Instead, God comes in months later after the grieving mother Rizpah bore tragic and persistent witness to the cost of this cycle of violence. God comes in after Rizpah's vigil brings about a complete turnaround in David's kingly action. God comes in to heal the land when the cycle of violence is halted, thanks to a mother who made her grief the stopping place.

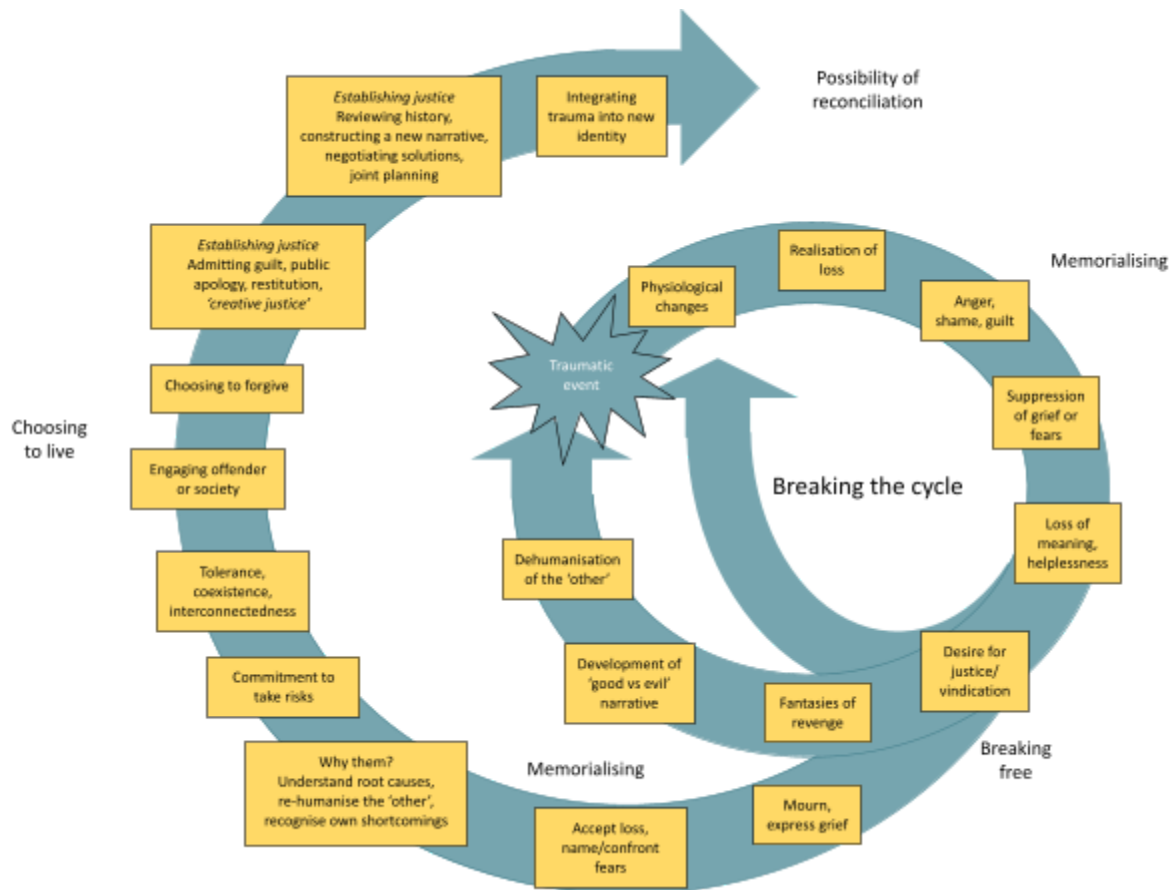
The trauma healing journey – breaking the cycle

The 'Breaking the cycle' diagram follows on from the aggressor/offender cycle and the victim/survivor cycle. The diagram can be explained as described below.

Begin by quickly revising the inner circle, which is a shortened version of the victim/survivor and the aggressor/offender cycles. Note how you can get trapped in a cycle of violence as victims can become aggressors, and then cause new victims. To break this cycle we need to be able to break free. (It is important to note at this point that not all survivors become aggressors. However, many aggressors have been survivors, some – even many – simply stay in the victim/survivor cycle.)

The first step in this process of breaking free is to recognise and name the trauma that we have suffered and to mourn for what we have lost. Instead of bottling up our emotions inside, we need to find a safe space where we can express our emotions, to grieve and to mourn for what we have lost. Telling your story in a place where it is safe to do so and with one or two people that will not judge but empathise with your pain is an important first step.

As part of this you can recognise what it is that you have lost through this traumatic experience. It may be something tangible, such as your home, your land or a family member, or it may be something less tangible such as your sense of dignity or worth or your self-confidence. Name these things and share how this makes you feel.



The next step is to avoid getting trapped in the 'why me?' question but instead to ask 'why them?' What happened to get them to believe that their actions were justified? In doing this recognise that they too are human beings and may have suffered (point to the aggressor/offender cycle to reinforce this). Recognise that the group to which you belong may not be entirely blameless. Perhaps there were things in the past that your group did that were not helpful, or perhaps there were things that they could have done but didn't do.

You can then move on to a phase of reconnecting with the other group, recognising that this involves courage and the need to take a risk. Rather than living completely isolated and separate lives you begin to coexist, to engage with society and look for opportunities to connect with people from the other group. In so doing, you counter any tendency to dehumanise them.

You can also choose to forgive, recognising that in forgiving you are not forgetting what happened, nor are you saying that what happens doesn't matter. What you are doing in forgiving is letting go of the hold that the offender has over you, so that you are no longer a victim held back by the pain of what happened to you but a survivor acting in your own strength. Forgiveness is not easy and takes many years – often about a decade – before what starts as a conscious decision to forgive moves from being an idea in your head to a way of being. It has, however, been shown to be a vital step in healing from trauma.

At this point various forms of justice may, or may not, come into effect. There are times when justice remains distant or elusive. But whether justice has been found or not, it is possible to tell a new story that doesn't see one side as evil aggressor and one as innocent victim, but which recognises the complexity of what has happened to both sides (the aggressor/offender cycle) and the pain that has been suffered by all – without diminishing the horror of what happened.

In time this may or may not lead to reconciliation between survivor and offender.

Breaking the cycle is not easy, nor is it quick. It is also unlikely to be a linear journey and there may be times when it feels that you are moving backwards rather than forwards. It begins, however, by recognising and naming what has happened to you, mourning the loss and sharing your story with trusted friends. Unless you break the cycle you will be trapped in an endless cycle of violence.

(The handout 'Dr David Benner: Healing emotional wounds' describes this process in more detail.)

Dr David Benner: Healing emotional wounds¹

Dr Benner suggests that there are three steps to healing emotional wounds:

1. Re-experiencing the pain
2. Reinterpreting the hurt
3. Releasing the anger through forgiveness

When someone experiences an emotional trauma, they have suffered a loss. They become diminished by the experience and feel less than they were. The process of healing is therefore similar to that of mourning. We feel vulnerable, sad and alone. This then moves rapidly into anger, which is a form of anaesthetic acting as a distraction from the pain, taking our attention away from ourselves onto another. Anger is not necessarily bad as it can stimulate action, which can be a route through the grieving process. However, we tend to alternate between an externally focused anger and an internally focused sadness. If we remain in introspective sadness we can descend into despair and, as emotions shut down, into depression. Depression is in fact a form of hidden anger – anger with oneself. Anger can also masquerade as suspicion, mistrust, jealousy, self-pity, cynicism, passive-aggressive responses, impatience and irritation.

Trauma is the loss of a safe space to retreat to when dealing with emotions. Responses alternate between re-experiencing the trauma, and emotional numbness, social isolation and estrangement; we lead a robot-like existence. This will lead to restabilisation, but this is often masking the trauma not healing it. Time does not heal; it helps but is not sufficient. Alone, it leads to the elimination of feelings through repression, denial or other mental defence mechanisms. Denial is refusing to consciously acknowledge the experience or aspects of it. This distorts our perception of reality and if continued can prevent healing. Repression can be the result of denial, permanently blocking our memory but not necessarily the emotional baggage or consequences. This takes huge mental energy and leaves a person depleted. Rationalisation is excuses that distort reality, that minimise the unpleasant aspects – pretend they don't matter. Emotional insulation leads to split personalities where we shut down our pain and

¹ Adapted from Benner D (1990) *Healing Emotional Wounds*, USA: Baker Publishing Group

eliminate all feelings. This blocks growth and prevents healing. There are three steps to healing emotional wounds:

Re-experiencing the pain

The first step in healing emotional wounds is, perhaps counter-intuitively, to re-experience them. When trauma happens to us our body immediately finds ways to numb the pain and to avoid the hurt. This is a necessary survival response, but suppressing the pain and the hurt does not lead to healing and if not addressed can lead to damage. It is like a balloon that is slowly being filled with water; the balloon expands and expands but ultimately will burst. It is important therefore to release this pressure. Trauma is loss and we need to mourn that loss.

There are typically three stages of mourning and we need to move through those stages without getting stuck. Often we start with an emotional numbness – the result of denial (part of our survival response), but this can then move into distress where we can alternate between anger and depression; finally we move into restabilisation, which is the ability to recall the event without being flooded by grief or pain.

To move through this process we are encouraged to recognise the feelings that the trauma brings out in us and to re-experience them without hiding from them or denying them as we may have done at the time. We are encouraged to tell our stories, to write about what has happened to us and to talk about it to others – hurt is interpersonal and so our healing too should be interpersonal. We need to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) – the listener takes on some of the burden. Share with people not just with God – hugs need a face! In doing so, it is important to recognise what it is that we have lost: our self-esteem, our worth, confidence, value, purity, wholeness, childhood, innocence... This is an emotional work – we don't need to be victims of what has happened to us – experiences don't make us who we are but our reactions to them do. When the incident happens, we find ways to numb or avoid the pain – this time we need to face up to it. Mourning helps with healing; avoiding our grief retards it.

Reinterpreting the hurt

Healing also requires our intellect, not as rationalisation but as affirming reality – bringing truth to bear – understanding the whole experience of our hurt. Bring the monsters into the light of truth and they become less fierce – they shrink. Remember what happened and see how this has shaped our attitudes and behaviours; reinterpret the false rationalisations and the blame or self righteousness where that exists. Recognise misperceptions and false memories; stop thinking through the lens of hurt emotions and see clearly. Knock down the false picture of the other that we may have created. Avoid falling into the villain and victim trap and instead begin to see that the other is also like me, they too are damaged and have hurts (though this doesn't excuse what they did). Recognise that just as they are like me, so too am I like them – I too cause pain and hurt. Think through times when we did this – what caused us to act like that? In doing this we begin to identify with the person that hurt us. We may not have done what others have done but we are capable of it; in recognising this, forgiveness is no longer an act of condescension. Recognising that we are like the other is very hard, and we need to ask God to help us see through his eyes. As we examine, we generate an accurate recall of the incident leading to an identification with the one who hurt us. We have an accurate perception of both them and me, and as a result hate thaws and compassion grows.

Releasing the anger through forgiveness

The third step is to release the anger; this is where the will is brought into play. Expressing anger is not the same as releasing anger; expressing anger may often make me feel better about myself, and it may

give me the impression of power and of progress and provide temporary relief, but it will not bring healing. Healing comes through releasing anger and that comes through forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift of God but it is also an act of will, a combined act between God and us. As we decide to forgive and pursue forgiveness, God works in us and through us to bring release, freedom and healing. Resentment is a poison that works within us, slowly destroying us from the inside. There is, therefore, an urgency to forgiveness, as the longer we delay the deeper the poison can sink. However, there is also a risk in forgiving too quickly. If we forgive too early we are not really aware of what it is that we are forgiving and so our forgiveness can be partial; rather than releasing the hurt and the pain and bringing healing, premature forgiveness can simply mask the pain and delay healing. We need to be quick to forgive but not too quick. We need first to re-experience the pain and reinterpret the hurt so that we are forgiving from a point of knowing what we are forgiving.

Forgiveness is hard so we resist it. By not forgiving, we can hold a grudge and this can give us a sense of power over the person who hurt us. By holding on to the grudge we feel a sense of moral superiority that makes us feel better about ourselves. Choosing to forgive takes away that sense that we have a right to respond. However, forgiveness is not a form of manipulation, a means of getting others to conform to our wishes. It has to be given without strings; it can be rejected. Some argue that we should not forgive unless we see the perpetrator acknowledge the harm that they have done and display at least a glimmer of repentance. But this places us back in the hands of the perpetrator; we become dependent on them and their decision. Forgiveness is part of God's grace and so we should forgive regardless of the attitude of the perpetrator. Our task is to forgive and in doing that, regardless of the response of the offender, we are set free and can be healed.

Forgiving does not mean forgetting. Forgiveness is about remembering but being able to do so without malice. Forgiveness does not mean excusing what was done; forgiveness is required because the act was inexcusable. Forgiving someone does not mean that you are reconciled to them or that you trust them. They may be prone to the same temptations and responses again. The memory of what happened remains, so we are not expected to be foolish or naïve but to act wisely in our relationship with them. Forgiveness releases us from the malice, not the memory. Forgiveness is about surrendering the right to retaliate. It is about surrendering the claim we have over the one who hurt us; it is seeing the books as balanced and about giving blessings rather than paying back evil with evil.

Sentence completion

Sentence completion is a simple and useful tool to structure discussions within small groups and buddy partners. It can be a helpful way of encouraging people to move to a deeper level of engagement. The facilitator should identify the sentences in advance and write these on a piece of flipchart paper. Individuals then have to complete the sentence, speaking to the rest of the group or to their buddy partner. It is generally sensible to keep the number of sentences to a maximum of three or four.

For an *opening session*, sentences might include (choose up to three):

- Some wishes that I have for these sessions are...
- Some worries or concerns that I have about these sessions are...
- I might 'tune out' or reduce my engagement with the sessions by...
- A way that I might need support in these sessions is...
- I might resist that support by...

- How you could support me anyway is to...

Action planning sessions might include:

- Within the next [insert number] days/weeks/months I personally commit to... [name the action]

The session on *trauma* could include:

- In terms of the victim/survivor and aggressor/offender cycles [name the cycle], the step I find most difficult is... [name the stage in the cycle]
- The most traumatic situation I have ever experienced was...
- The loss for which I currently feel the most grief is...
- It would be helpful for me to express my grief by...
- I am afraid to/of...
- A next step in my own healing process might be to...

Session 3

Conflict knot

Form groups of up to ten people each. Get each group to stand facing towards each other in a circle. Each person should be standing shoulder to shoulder. First, instruct everyone to lift their left hand and reach across to take the hand of someone standing across the circle. Next, tell everyone to lift their right hand and reach across to take the hand of another person standing across the circle. Make sure that no one is holding hands with someone standing directly beside them.

To play, the groups must communicate and figure out how to untangle the knot (forming a circle of people) without letting go of any hands. People may need to shift their grip due to the angle of people's bodies, but they should not let go – if they do then the knot can become impossible to untangle. The game typically takes 15–30 minutes to complete, less for smaller groups. You can impose a time limit if you wish to make it more challenging.

You can use the activity as a simple energiser or as an experiential exercise. If you are just using it as an energiser, stop once the knots are untangled. If you are using it as an experiential exercise, continue with the noticings and a debrief as described below.

As the groups work, watch out for the different emotions on display. Did people become confused, frustrated or cross, or did they seem disengaged? Also observe what actually happened. Did a group go nowhere for a while before suddenly making progress, only to come to a halt again? Did they have to undo moves that they made?

Once untangled, or once the time limit has been reached, debrief the groups inviting them to notice the actions and emotions that the game induced, capturing these on a piece of flipchart paper. Add your own noticings into the discussion. Use the game to reinforce the point that progress in conflict transformation, and particularly in reconciliation, can be slow and frustrating and that it does not always end in success. Much like the game, there can be misunderstandings and confusion, wrong turns and mistakes. There may also be moments of sudden and rapid progress that may be followed by further obstacles and frustrations. However, with perseverance and patience, even the knottiest of problems can be overcome.

Bible study: Journey to reconciliation

(Genesis 28:10–33:20, 35:27–29)

Background

Isaac and Rebekah were nomadic people who lived in Canaan. Isaac's father, Abraham, had travelled from the Fertile Crescent, from the cities of Ur and Haran, down into Canaan. They were herders of sheep and goats. The conflict between Jacob and Esau begins before birth and continually deepens. Jacob manipulates Esau to trade his birthright as the eldest son in exchange for some soup. Later Jacob

defrauds his brother of his paternal blessing. Esau is so bitter and furious that he threatens to kill Jacob. Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's home in Haran, with the stated purpose of finding a wife.

Study process and questions

Ask the group what they know of the story of Jacob and Esau. Try to avoid long descriptions but elicit short, key points of the story from several different people. Spend a few minutes doing this before telling the story yourself using the tool **Journey to reconciliation: story summary**. Try to avoid reading the story directly but instead tell it using your own words as if you are a visiting storyteller.

In small groups, encourage a period of reflection and discussion using the following questions:

1. What experiences did Jacob have that eventually changed his perceptions and attitude towards his brother Esau? In what way did those experiences affect him?
2. What steps did Jacob take that moved the conflict with his brother towards reconciliation? What were the results of those actions?
3. What changed within Esau, and why? What choices did Esau make that made the reconciliation possible?

Call the groups together to report back. Ask each group to briefly describe just one experience of Jacob that changed him and how he changed. Go around each group until all the groups have shared. Use the same procedure for the steps Jacob took towards reconciliation, and the changes and choices of Esau.

Then ask: 'What are some of the steps or elements for reconciliation that emerge from this story which might apply to the conflicts we face in our own lives?'

Invite group members to think of a conflict that affects them or their community. Are there some steps towards reconciliation identified in this study that need to be taken in that conflict? Allow time for silent reflection and prayer.

Key points

Note how much of Jacob's journey towards reconciliation was a spiritual journey with God, both in the vision of the angels on the ladder to heaven and of wrestling through the night. A large part of any journey towards reconciliation is an inner transformation in which we recognise who we are (Jacob being forced to say his name – face his 'usurper' past), then receive the grace and make the commitment to act God's way. The result of Jacob's inner transformation was also a commitment to take personal responsibility for his actions, including being accountable for restoring the relationship damaged by his wrong-doing.

Lesson insight: Reconciliation is as much of an inward journey with one's own self as an outward journey with the other person.

Reconciliation takes risk. Jacob had no guarantee Esau would accept him. Jacob could have been slaughtered, but he took the risk to be open, humble and repentant. We cannot be responsible for what

the other person or group will do, but we are responsible for the choices we make, including taking the risks of the steps we can take towards reconciliation.

Lesson insight: Reconciliation in serious conflicts is never possible without someone – and in some cases everyone – taking risks to restore the relationship.

Jacob experienced a measure of reconciliation with his father-in-law, Laban, before meeting Esau. He experienced what it meant to be cheated himself (something Esau had experienced with Jacob). He faced the anger of Laban in being cheated. Jacob and Laban communicated about their conflict and feelings. They came to a mutually acceptable agreement where they could live in peace and maintain a family relationship. These all prepared Jacob for the reconciliation process for the longer and deeper alienation with his brother.

Lesson insight: Success in transforming a conflict can give us experience upon which to build as we seek to transform other conflicts in our lives.

Journey to reconciliation: story summary

Use the notes below to tell the story of Jacob and Esau with the [journey to reconciliation Bible study](#). Rather than just reading the passage, which if not done well can sap the energy from a room, use your own words to tell the story.

Part 1 – Deceit

For 20 years after getting married, Isaac and Rebecca were unable to have children. Isaac prayed for Rebecca, and she conceived twins as God answered Isaac's prayer. The children struggled within her so much that Rebecca despaired: 'If it is to be this way, why do I live?' Rebecca prayed over this difficult pregnancy. God told her that two nations were in her womb, two people who would be divided. One would be stronger, and the elder would serve the younger. When the time of delivery came, the first came out all red and hairy and was named Esau. His brother came out grasping Esau's heel. The second son was named Jacob, which means 'the one who grabs the heel' or 'the usurper'.

As the boys grew, Esau became an outdoorsman, skilful at hunting. Jacob was quiet, staying in the tents. Isaac preferred his son Esau, whereas Rebecca favoured Jacob.

One day Esau came in from the field feeling very hungry. Jacob was cooking lentil stew. Esau begged Jacob for a bowl of the stew, but Jacob bargained, 'First sell me your birthright.' (The birthright was all the privileges of being the first-born son, including receiving the main inheritance.) Esau, obviously overstating his situation, said he was about to die, so what value was a birthright to him? Jacob insisted

that Esau swear an oath, and so he did, surrendering his birthright to his younger brother. Jacob then gave Esau the stew, bread and drink. When he was satisfied, Esau went back out.

When he was an adult, Esau married two Canaanite women. These women made life bitter for Isaac and Rebecca, so there was a lot of conflict in the family.

When Isaac was old and nearly blind, he told Esau to go hunting and prepare a meal for his father. Then Isaac would give his son the paternal blessing before his death. Rebecca was listening, and after Esau went out hunting she conspired with Jacob. She told Jacob to kill two young goats so that she could prepare Isaac's favourite dish and then Jacob would receive the blessing from his father in place of Esau. Jacob protested that even blind Isaac could tell the difference because of Esau's hair and Isaac's smooth skin, and he would be cursed by his father rather than blessed. Rebecca told him to let the curse be on her and just to obey her in what she said. So Jacob killed the goats, and Rebecca cooked the meal. She got Esau's best clothes and put them on Jacob. She took the goat skins and tied them on Jacob's forearms and neck, then gave him the food to take into his father.

Jacob went to his father saying he was Esau and offering Isaac the food. Isaac wondered how it all happened so quickly, but Jacob smoothly replied that God had granted him success.

Isaac had some doubts and called his son near. He felt Jacob's arms and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are of Esau.' Again he bluntly asked, 'Are you really my son Esau?' 'I am,' Jacob lied. So then Isaac ate. When he was done he asked for a kiss and smelled the outdoors in the clothing. Then Isaac gave Jacob the blessing, thinking he was Esau. In the blessing he said he would be lord over his brothers, and that everyone who cursed him would be cursed and those who blessed him would be blessed.

Jacob had just left his father when Esau came back from his hunt. He prepared the meal and went into his father. Both were dismayed to discover the deception. Isaac trembled violently as he told that he had already given the blessing. Esau cried out loud and bitterly, pleading for a blessing. Isaac said he had already made Jacob lord. Esau said Jacob was aptly named for he had now usurped Esau twice: for his birthright and now for his blessing. He begged and cried before his father for a blessing. Finally, Isaac said Esau would live by the sword and serve his brother, but that in the end he would break his brother's yoke from his neck.

Part 2 – Flight

Esau was filled with hatred towards Jacob. He didn't want to upset his aged father, so he decided not to act until his father had died and the mourning period was finished. But he went around talking about planning to kill Jacob. Word of Esau's threats got to Rebecca, who arranged for Jacob to flee to the distant city of Haran to live with her brother Laban. She convinced Isaac to let Jacob go, using Esau's ethnically-mixed marriages to Canaanite women as her rationale –Jacob could find a wife from his own people through his relative Laban. Isaac blessed Jacob to go to Haran to find a non-Canaanite wife. Esau realised his Canaanite wives were a disappointment to his father, so he married a cousin, the daughter of Ishmael.

Jacob left his family with the double purpose of evading Esau's murderous threats and finding a wife among his own people in Haran. One night on his journey, Jacob lay down to sleep and had a dream. He dreamed about seeing a ladder extending from earth up to heaven with angels going up and down the ladder. God appeared beside him and renewed the covenant promises made to Abraham and Isaac,

promising that Jacob's offspring would be a great nation, that they would receive the land where he slept, and that they would be a blessing to all the nations. God promised to be with Jacob wherever he would go and to bring him back to this land. When Jacob woke he was filled with awe. He felt he had been in the house of God and at the gate of heaven. He set up a pillar and called the place Bethel ('House of God').

Part 3 – Love and labour

When Jacob went to Haran he fell in love with Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban. He made an agreement to work for Laban as a shepherd for seven years, but Laban tricked Jacob by giving his older daughter, Leah, to him at the wedding. Jacob stayed another seven years to marry Rachel. Jacob prepared to go back to Canaan and for another six years worked to gather a flock in payment for his services to Laban. He tricked Laban by using selective breeding to gain an extra large herd of sheep and goats at the expense of Laban's herds. Laban was very upset when he realised the deception, so Jacob secretly slipped away with his wives, children and herds. Laban pursued him, but in a dream God warned him about how he should relate to Jacob.

When Laban caught up, he and Jacob talked with great feeling about the ways they had hurt each other and the mistrust that developed. Jacob shared his feelings of fear and betrayal in all the years he had served Laban. Laban shared that Jacob's wives were his daughters and their children were his grandchildren. So the two of them made a covenant together not to harm each other and that Jacob would care well for his wives and children. Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren, and then departed.

Part 4 – Return

Jacob continued on back to Canaan. He sent messengers to Esau about his return, saying he hoped to find favour with his brother. The messengers came back warning that Esau was coming with 400 men to meet him. This terrified Jacob. First he divided all his family and herds, hoping that one group would survive. Then he prayed for deliverance. He humbly acknowledged that he was not worthy of God's love and faithfulness. He acknowledged his fear of Esau, but also his trust in God's covenant promise to him.

Then Jacob changed tactics. He sent ahead a large gift of animals from his herds and servants with a conciliatory message for Esau. Jacob hoped to calm his brother's anger, to be able to see his face and that Esau would accept him. Then Jacob sent all his family, including his children, across the river into Canaan.

Jacob was alone. Then a man came and wrestled with Jacob till daybreak. When the man could not win, he struck Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint. Jacob still would not let go until the man would bless him. The man asked him his name. Jacob said his name, which means 'usurper'. Then the man said he would no longer be called 'Jacob' but 'Israel', which means 'the one who strives with God'. Jacob then asked for the man's name, but no answer was given. The man disappeared and Jacob said, 'I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' He continued on his journey, crossing the river and limping because of his injured hip.

Jacob saw Esau coming with the 400 men. He came forward in front of his family and bowed low to the ground. Esau ran up and embraced him. They kissed and wept. Esau looked at the large family Jacob had and was introduced to them. Esau asked about all the gifts sent, and Jacob said he hoped to find favour. But Esau said he had enough and told Jacob to keep his herds and gifts for himself. Jacob asked Esau to

keep his gifts, for in his mind seeing the face of his brother Esau was like seeing the face of God. God had dealt graciously with him and he experienced that same grace from Esau. Esau received the gift.

They continued the journey with Jacob showing humble gratitude and Esau showing kindness. Jacob settled down in Canaan. When Isaac finally died, the two brothers buried him together.

Session 4

Paper throw

Paper throw is a quick game that can be used as an opening activity. It is particularly relevant when discussing issues of fairness and justice, linking well with other topics/tools such as **Truth, justice, mercy, peace (Psalm 85:10)** and mainstream and margin.

Place a receptacle such as a bin or bucket at the front of the room and give everyone something soft to throw, such as a piece of scrunched-up waste paper. Tell them that they each have to throw their paper into the bin but they are not allowed to move from where they are currently standing or from the direction that they are currently facing. This activity will be much easier for those who are closest to the bin and who are facing it than for those further away or facing in a different direction. The game is therefore inherently unfair; a point that those in the worst positions may well point out. You can vary the game by making some participants throw with their eyes closed or with their non-dominant hand (ie left hand if right-handed) or while standing on one leg.

Once everyone has had a go (people can throw at the same time – you do not have to take turns), ask how those in the hardest positions felt. Was the game fair? Explore briefly with the group what would make the game fairer.

If linking the game with Psalm 85:10, you can add the idea of a penalty for those who fail to get the paper in the bin, which will have to be completed once everyone has had a go. Once the game is over, ask about fairness as before but also ask how they could show mercy to those who failed to get the paper in the bin. Could you perhaps let them off the penalty? What might be the implications of letting people off? Would it undermine the quality of the game?

If linking the game with mainstream and margin, you could deliberately arrange the game so that those in the margin have the most challenging throw.

Truth, mercy, justice and peace (Psalm 85:10)

John Paul Lederach tells the story about how this tool was generated in his excellent book *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (1999). In peace talks in Nicaragua, the mediators began with devotions from Psalm 85:10: 'Truth and mercy will embrace. Justice and peace will kiss.' In Spanish the words are translated very clearly into 'Truth', 'Mercy', 'Justice' and 'Peace'. Lederach related how he could hear the voice of each of these qualities in the various statements people made throughout the talks. One person would constantly hammer on Truth while another would speak for Mercy. English translations often have less blunt terms like 'loving kindness' and 'righteousness' but both come from the Hebrew word 'zedakah'.

To use the tool, write out each of the words individually on four sheets of paper and lay these out around the room, a word in each corner. Invite participants to self-select around which quality (Truth, Mercy, Justice or Peace) is most important for them. They are all good and important, so which of these four good qualities is the one that resonates deepest in us?

Once grouped, assign the groups four questions to answer:

1. If this quality was to take shape in a person today what would their message be for our context?
2. What would happen if that message was ignored?
3. Which of the other three qualities is your best friend or ally, and why?
4. Which of the other three qualities gives you the most difficulty, and why?

Bring the groups together when everyone has finished discussing the questions. Have each group select a spokesperson. Lay out four chairs at the front of the room and invite the spokespeople to take a seat. Give them name tags for their quality or character. Pretending to be in a TV studio, interview each in turn based on the four questions above. As they answer, you can probe a little deeper with each of them, challenging what they say. Possible follow-up questions include:

- **FOR TRUTH:** I work with conflict and I'm often baffled to listen to different parties in conflict. One person will tell me their truth, and another will tell me a very different truth. I can't figure out where you are, Truth. Are you two people, many people, or one? Where can I find you? Whose version of events is really you?
- **FOR MERCY:** Brother Mercy, how does your religious tradition understand mercy? Forgiveness? Aren't you a softie? Just wanting to brush things under the carpet and go on? Do you cover up an unclean wound, making things worse?
- **FOR JUSTICE:** Sister Justice, why are you so long in coming in a conflict? Why do we hear your name when the situation on the ground looks like anything but peace? Some people say that your justice actually creates injustice for someone else – how do you respond to that criticism?
- **FOR PEACE:** Everyone says they want peace, so why is it so difficult to find you? Is your peace just keeping things calm for oppressive powers so they can continue to stifle and exploit people? Is it peace at any price?

Psalm 85 gives us a vision of all four qualities being present and woven together in God's national healing. Reconciliation needs all four at some point. You can invite the four 'qualities' to form a circle with their right hands inward. Ask them to circle around. What do people see? All four are present but you only see one or two at a time. Reconciliation can be like that; a bit like a dance in which one or other of these qualities is in front at any given time.

You can do this same exercise with a Muslim group or a Christian/Islamic/Jewish interfaith group. For the Jews and Christians, you can refer to Psalm 85:10. For the Muslims, you can point out that all these qualities are names of Allah: Truth – al-Haq, Mercy – al-Rahman (pronounced al-Rahmaan), Justice – al-'Adl, Peace – al-Salam (pronounced al-Salaam).

Time and reconciliation

This activity can be used in conjunction with the 'Truth, Mercy, Justice, Peace' activity (see the **Psalm 85:10** tool) to encourage people to think through issues related to the order in which the four 'characters' appear and the tensions between them.

Place four labels around the room, one for each 'character': Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace. Invite the participants to form groups around whichever 'quality' they think should come first in a peace agreement. It doesn't matter if one quality is not chosen, but try to get at least two and preferably three

groups. If all think that Peace should come first, remove that label and get them to focus on the remaining three.

Ask the groups to agree on an order for the remaining three qualities. Invite them to discuss:

- Why do they think that the quality they selected should come first?
 - What are the dangers or risks of not putting it first?
- Why did they choose this particular order for the rest of the qualities?
 - What are the strengths of this order?
 - What are the weaknesses or risks of this order?
- Is there anything else that needs to be in place first so that this order of the qualities can bring about a lasting and just peace?
- Can they think of an example of where this order has been followed in real life?

Invite a spokesperson for each group to come forward and share their answers to the questions.

Application questions

Working in their groups, ask the participants to:

- think of examples that they have witnessed where these four characters (Truth, Justice, Mercy and Peace) have been in tension with each other (eg occasions where the desire for Truth may have hampered moves towards Peace, or when the demands of Peace have meant that Justice has been neglected, or occasions where Mercy has enabled Truth or Peace or where demands for Justice have prevented Truth or Peace)
- discuss how they could create a space in their community where these four (Truth, Justice, Mercy and Peace) could meet together and each safely take their turn.

Bible passages

Psalm 85:8–13

⁸ I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.

⁹ Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.

¹² The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.

¹³ Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Rizpah Bible study (2 Samuel 21)

Joshua 9:3–27

³ However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, ⁴ they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. ⁵They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy. ⁶ Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the Israelites, “We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.”

⁷ The Israelites said to the Hivites, “But perhaps you live near us, so how can we make a treaty with you?”

⁸ “We are your servants,” they said to Joshua.

But Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from?”

⁹ They answered: “Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰ and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. ¹¹ And our

elders and all those living in our country said to us, ‘Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, “We are your servants; make a treaty with us.”’ ¹² This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. ¹³ And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey.”

¹⁴ The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. ¹⁵ Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.

¹⁶ Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. ¹⁷ So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. ¹⁸ But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, ¹⁹ but all the leaders answered, “We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God

of Israel, and we cannot touch them now.²⁰ This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God's wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them."²¹ They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly." So the leaders' promise to them was kept.

²² Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, "Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We live a long way from you,' while actually you live near us?"²³ You are now under a curse: You will never be released from service as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

²⁴ They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this."²⁵ We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you."

²⁶ So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them.²⁷ That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly, to provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

2 Samuel 3:6–11

⁶ During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul.⁷ Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"

⁸ Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said. So he answered, "Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense

involving this woman!"⁹ May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath¹⁰ and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba."¹¹ Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

2 Samuel 21:1–14

21 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

² The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)³ David asked the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make atonement so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance?"

⁴ The Gibeonites answered him, "We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death."

"What do you want me to do for you?" David asked.

⁵ They answered the king, "As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel,⁶ let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and their bodies exposed before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul—the Lord's chosen one."

So the king said, "I will give them to you."

⁷ The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the Lord between David and Jonathan son of Saul.⁸ But the king took Armoni and

Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite.⁹ He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed them and exposed their bodies on a hill before the Lord. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning.

¹⁰ Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds touch them by day or the wild animals by night.¹¹ When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had

done,¹² he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had stolen their bodies from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.)¹³ David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.

¹⁴ They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer on behalf of the land.

Mainstream and margin Bible study (Acts 6)

Acts 2:44–45

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32–37

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"),³⁷ sold a field he owned and

brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 6:1–7

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables."³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.⁶ They presented these men

to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a

large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Journey to reconciliation Bible study (Genesis 28 to 35)

Genesis 28:10 to 33:20

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. ¹¹When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat

and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

29 Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. ² There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. ³ When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

⁴ Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?"

"We're from Harran," they replied.

⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered.

⁶ Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

⁷ "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

⁸ "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

⁹ While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. ¹⁰ When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. ¹² He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. ¹⁴ Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, ¹⁵ Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."

¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

¹⁹ Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her."

²² So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. ²³ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. ²⁴ And

Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

²⁶ Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. ²⁷ Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

²⁸ And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. ³⁰ Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

Jacob's Children

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. ³² Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

³³ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

³⁴ Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

³⁵ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

² Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”

³ Then she said, “Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.”

⁴ So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, ⁵ and she became pregnant and bore him a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” Because of this she named him Dan.

⁷ Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.” So she named him Naphtali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, “What good fortune!” So she named him Gad.

¹² Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

¹³ Then Leah said, “How happy I am! The women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher.

¹⁴ During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁵ But she said to her, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?”

“Very well,” Rachel said, “he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁶ So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. “You must sleep with me,” she said. “I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he slept with her that night.

¹⁷ God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, “God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband.” So she named him Issachar.

¹⁹ Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, “God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulun.

²¹ Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

²² Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. ²³ She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.” ²⁴ She named him Joseph, and said, “May the Lord add to me another son.”

Jacob’s Flocks Increase

²⁵ After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. ²⁶ Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I’ve done for you.”

²⁷ But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.” ²⁸ He added, “Name your wages, and I will pay them.”

²⁹ Jacob said to him, “You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. ³⁰ The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?”

³¹ “What shall I give you?” he asked.

“Don’t give me anything,” Jacob replied. “But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: ³² Let me go through all your flocks today and

remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages.³³ And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen.”

³⁴ “Agreed,” said Laban. “Let it be as you have said.”³⁵ That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons.³⁶ Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban’s flocks.

³⁷ Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches.³⁸ Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink,³⁹ they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted.⁴⁰ Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban’s animals.⁴¹ Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches,⁴² but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob.⁴³ In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Jacob Flees From Laban

31 Jacob heard that Laban’s sons were saying, “Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.”² And Jacob noticed that Laban’s attitude towards him was not what it had been.

³ Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

⁴ So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were.⁵ He said to them, “I see that your father’s attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me.⁶ You know that I’ve worked for your father with all my strength,⁷ yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me.⁸ If he said, ‘The speckled ones will be your wages,’ then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, ‘The streaked ones will be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked young.⁹ So God has taken away your father’s livestock and has given them to me.

¹⁰ “In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted.¹¹ The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’¹² And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’”

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah replied, “Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father’s estate?¹⁵ Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us.¹⁶ Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to

us and our children. So do whatever God has told you.”

¹⁷ Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, ¹⁸ and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father’s household gods. ²⁰ Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. ²¹ So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead.

Laban Pursues Jacob

²² On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. ²³ Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.”

²⁵ Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. ²⁶ Then Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You’ve deceived me, and you’ve carried off my daughters like captives in war. ²⁷ Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn’t you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels and harps? ²⁸ You didn’t even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing. ²⁹ I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’ ³⁰ Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father’s household. But why did you steal my gods?”

³¹ Jacob answered Laban, “I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³² But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself

whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it.” Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

³³ So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah’s tent, he entered Rachel’s tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

³⁵ Rachel said to her father, “Don’t be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I’m having my period.” So he searched but could not find the household gods.

³⁶ Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. “What is my crime?” he asked Laban. “How have I wronged you that you hunt me down? ³⁷ Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

³⁸ “I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. ³⁹ I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. ⁴⁰ This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹ It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

⁴³ Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the

flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us."

⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar.

⁴⁶ He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed.

⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. ⁴⁹ It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. ⁵⁰ If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."

⁵¹ Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. ⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us."

So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴ He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

⁵⁵ Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau

32 Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ² When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

³ Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. ⁴ He instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: 'Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. ⁵ I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.'"

⁶ When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

⁷ In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. ⁸ He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."

⁹ Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. ¹² But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

¹³ He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: ¹⁴two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."

¹⁷ He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ ¹⁸ then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.’”

¹⁹ He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. ²⁰ And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” ²¹ So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

Jacob Wrestles With God

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

²⁷ The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

²⁸ Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

²⁹ Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.

Jacob Meets Esau

33 Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. ² He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. ³ He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. ⁵ Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked.

Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”

⁶ Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. ⁷ Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

⁸ Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?”

“To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.

⁹ But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

¹⁰ “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. ¹¹ Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God

has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

¹² Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”

¹³ But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. ¹⁴ So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

¹⁵ Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.”

“But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.”

¹⁶ So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. ¹⁷ Jacob, however, went to Sukkoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Sukkoth.

¹⁸ After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. ¹⁹ For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.

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²⁷ Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. ²⁸ Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹ Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.