



LAMBETH CALL BIBLE STUDY SAFE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

These Bible Study materials have been prepared as part of Phase 3 of the Lambeth Conference and the Lambeth Calls. This Bible Study is about the Lambeth Call on Safe Church. You can read the Lambeth Call [here](#).

We are aware that thinking and talking about abuse can be distressing for those who have experienced abuse or other forms of violation themselves, as well as for those who have seen someone close to them suffer due to abuse.

Please be sensitive to this and do not require all Bible study members to participate or contribute. Encourage members to take care of themselves and to take time out or leave if the conversation causes them pain or distress. If someone discloses abuse through this process, offer compassionate pastoral care and support and follow the reporting procedures in place in your diocese. For guidance on reporting processes, access the resources on the Safe Church Commission website for further guidance and assist the person to report to the police, if appropriate.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

‘Call and Response’ – The Bible Study Format

Each of the Lambeth Calls are offered to the Anglican Communion – inviting response. The Bible Study is based on a format of ‘Call and Response’. Each of the Lambeth Call Bible Studies will invite you to take three steps.

1. Hear the Call

Explore together one of the main messages of this Call and consider how scripture can guide our understanding of the Lambeth Call theme.

2. Listen to Scripture

Read and reflect on Bible passages selected to support this study.

3. Make a Response

Work out how you might respond personally to the themes in the Lambeth Call and to advancing the Safe Church guidelines in your setting.

GET STARTED

1. Hear the Call (20 minutes)

Read the Lambeth Call on Safe Church [here](#).

Watch the short clips from the Webinar recording on the theme for context.

Notice that the Lambeth Call on Safe Church declares that **Scripture bears witness to God's love for all members of the human family and to the priority given in Jesus' ministry to children, the vulnerable and the marginalised** (2.3).

Notice that the Call highlights many forms of abuse of power within society and the church. The vast majority of those who are abused are women and girls: 'Violence meted out to women and children within the body of Christ is violence done to the body of Christ. Violence takes many forms including physical, financial, emotional, psychological, intellectual, cultural, sexual and spiritual abuse'. (2.3)

There are many times when people experience abuse rather than love from members of the human family. All forms of violence and abuse can cause ongoing harm and suffering for those who are abused and those close to them.

Take time to remember and acknowledge that we who are in the church do not always fulfil the call to love one another as God loves us.

Sometimes church members and church leaders, both clergy and lay leaders, abuse and harm others in the church or in their own families. The Lambeth Call takes this abuse seriously and calls on all churches in the Anglican Communion to do the same.

It may be helpful to spend some time in silent prayer for our churches and for those who have been harmed by abuse within the church.

Abuse does not only have an impact on the person being abused. It has an impact on their families, peers and the broader community. Abuse within the church can have devastating impacts on a church community. It can destroy faith in the church and in God.

Pray for all those who are impacted by abuse. We can also pray for ourselves that we will have the courage to listen and to act in order to make our churches safer places for all.

2. Listen to Scripture (20 minutes)

Read Mark 5 verses 21 to 34

Turn to Scripture to anchor and enrich this reflection, especially to the ministry of Jesus with those who were marginalised and abused by their communities. Mark 5 verses 21 to 34 is a story which is not without its own complexities and power dynamics - but one that has much to offer as we think about what it means to love those who suffer abuse.

Some commentary on the passage

As Jesus is hurrying along with Jairus to his daughter, who is very ill, the story unfolds.

Jairus has begged Jesus to come and heal his daughter. The crowd surrounds them as they hurry towards Jairus' home but Jesus suddenly stops and searches the faces of the people pressing up against him. A hush descends, and Jesus speaks with authority and compassion. 'Who touched my clothes?'

The disciples find the question very strange. Any number of people have touched Jesus in just the last minute, what can he mean? But there is one woman who knows exactly what he means. The woman has been bleeding for 12 years. The physical suffering and inconvenience of the illness is not the worst of her story.

Due to her condition, she has been considered ritually unclean and excluded from her place of worship and from her community. The woman has also been exploited and abused. We hear that she has been to doctor after doctor. They have taken her money but she still has no cure. In fact, she is getting worse.

This is a woman who has reached the end of her own resources. But she knows what Jesus meant when he asked who touched him. She had gathered her remaining strength and courage to force her way through the crowds just to get close enough to Jesus, to touch his cloak, in a desperate hope that she would be healed. And she was.

As incredible as it seems, she knows that her body was fully restored in the moment that her fingers touched the cloth. But now she is afraid. She knows that she has challenged taboos and her touch has made Jesus unclean and so she expects condemnation. She considers slipping away into the crowd. But perhaps something in the gentleness of his voice, the softness of his gaze, the faint smile playing at his lips gives her the courage she needs to stay, and she cowers in front of him, hiding her face.

The crowd is now silent, mesmerised by what is unfolding in front of them. How will Jesus deal with this nobody, this outcast, this woman? But there is no rebuke and no harsh words.

Perhaps Jesus reaches down and takes the woman's hand, raising her to her feet. Perhaps he asks again, gazing into her eyes, with love and delight. Who is it that touched my cloak? And perhaps she gives her name. And we can imagine that moment of being seen with love.

At his encouragement, she tells him her whole story, not just about her physical affliction, but what has been done to her, how she has responded, the whole awful truth, as Jesus listens. In the presence of the community, which would have marginalised her, he listens, and in his listening presence Jesus restores far more than her body. He restores her dignity and her place in society and removes her shame. And without saying a word, he exposes the injustices of those who listen with him.

Then Jesus speaks. He calls the woman 'daughter', a term of intimacy and kinship, that tells us she belongs and she is beloved. He affirms her faith, a faith that has endured despite being excluded from the faith community for more than a decade. He speaks words of blessing, and vocation: 'Go in peace', and restores her to wholeness in every aspect of her life. 'Be freed from your suffering'.

(Kim Barker, *God's Church for God's World*, pages 98-99)

Discussion questions

- What stands out for you about the way that Jesus interacts with this woman?
- Jesus didn't need to stop. The woman's body was healed when she touched his cloak. Why do you think Jesus chose to stop?
- This woman has been abused.
 - a. Who were her abusers?
 - b. In what ways was she abused?
 - c. What was it that made her vulnerable to being the target of abuse?
- What does this story offer us when we think about Safe Church work?

3. Make a Response (20 minutes)

The Lambeth Call draws our attention to **God's love for all members of the human family**. **Take time to** remember ways that you have experienced God's love either in your own life or in the lives of those around you.

Think about the Bible passage you have discussed and what we can learn from Jesus' example.

Discuss and decide how you can act on what you have learnt from this story, in your church or at work or in the wider community. How can the church express God's love to those who have been or are being abused?

Discuss and decide how your church can ensure that it listens and pays attention to the experiences of those who have been abused.

How can the church be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond with compassion and a just process when abuse is reported?

What must we do to ensure that the vulnerable are protected and abuse is prevented?

Gather a team to read the document *Safe Church: How to Start Guide*.

Allow that team to guide the church towards adopting the Charter for the Safety of People within the churches of the Anglican Communion and implementing the Guidelines - to enhance the safety of all persons, especially children, young people and vulnerable adults, within the provinces of the Anglican Communion.

For those churches where Safe Church/safeguarding measures are already in place, what is the next step that you need to take? Safe Church work is never done. It is ongoing work to make our churches safer for all.

Concluding Prayers

Prayers for those suffering abuse

Loving God,
whose son was both victim and victor,
we cry to you for those who suffer abuse:
be with them in confusion and pain,
heal the wounds of body and mind,
break open the prisons of fear, self-doubt and despair,
and strengthen them to face fear future with faith, hope and courage.
Reach out to them with your love,
that they may be made whole in body, mind and spirit,
through the healing touch of the suffering Christ.

Amen

God, our redeemer and sustainer,
we pray for survivors of violence, abuse and neglect.
Give your power to the powerless,
your fullness to the empty of spirit.
Heal their wounds, free them from fear,
and restore them to true health.
Grant this through Jesus Christ,
the crucified and risen Saviour
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

Prayers for those who abuse

Judge of all the earth,
God of justice,
we bring before you all who abuse others.
Turn the hearts of the violent from the way of evil.
Fill them with a hatred of the damage they do,
so bringing them to true repentance
and amendment of their lives.
for Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.

Prayers from the *Occasional Prayers* section of *A Prayer Book for Australia*. Broughton Books. 1992.

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Visit the Lambeth Conference website or look at the Information Sheet on resources and ideas that accompanies this Bible Study, for more ideas and suggestions.

Share Your Story – A Message from Bishop Jo

At each phase of the Journey, you are invited to share what the Lambeth Call looks like for you in your context. You might choose to share a prayer, a photo, a short testimony or story, information about one of your projects.

Please share them via our website:

<https://www.lambethconference.org/phase-3/share-your-story/>

Or contact us on social media:

Facebook: /LambethConference

Instagram: /LambethConference

Twitter: @LambethConf

