

REDEEMING VIOLENT VERSES

A Guide for Using Troublesome Texts in Church and Ministry

By Eric A. Seibert

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS

This discussion guide has been created to help readers of *Redeeming Violent Verses* engage the ideas in the book more extensively. While the guide is well-suited for individual use, it is ideally designed to be used in groups. Clergy, ministry staff, and lay readers alike will benefit from it. The discussion guide has three parts, which can be used over three group sessions.

THE FIRST PART covers chapters 1–3, addressing introductory matters and laying some groundwork: Why it is so vitally important to use these difficult passages in church? What are some ways to use violent verses constructively?

THE SECOND PART covers chapters 4–6 and focuses on making applications to specific areas of ministry, namely, teaching children, leading worship, and preaching sermons.

THE THIRD PART applies the suggestions offered in the book to three biblical narratives and deals with specific issues, such as what to do with biblical texts that portray God behaving violently and how to implement the ideas discussed in this book in one's own ministry.

This guide will work especially well as a training tool in the hands of ministers wanting to help their staff and volunteers find appropriate ways to incorporate violent verses into various aspects of church life. By inviting Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, and members of the pastoral team to read the book and participate in a discussion group, ministers can use the guide to facilitate important conversations. This will enable participants to reflect more deeply on some of the key ideas of the book as they learn various ways to use violent biblical texts effectively in their respective areas of ministry.



Discussion & Reflection Guide for Small Groups & Individuals
Using *Redeeming Violent Verses*, by Eric A. Seibert

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PART 1

Laying the Groundwork

Chapters 1-3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In chapter one the author states, “In the course of a regular Sunday morning, most churchgoers are unlikely to encounter very many violent biblical texts” (p. 3). To what extent do you agree or disagree with this assertion? What violent biblical texts have you encountered in church and how have they been handled?
2. Why do you think ministers and lay leaders often avoid addressing violent verses in church? Of the reasons given in chapter 2, which are most persuasive to you (see pp. 15–18)?
3. How convinced are you by the author’s argument in chapter 2 that it is important—even imperative—to use violent biblical texts in church?
4. Chapter 3 identifies and describes seven ways to use violent verses constructively in church. Which of these do you find most interesting? Why?
5. Which of the seven approaches in chapter 3 would you be willing to try when using violent verses in church or when talking about them with others in the congregation?



PART 2

Using Violent Verses to Teach Children, Lead Worship, and Preach Sermons

Chapters 4–6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS • TEACHING CHILDREN

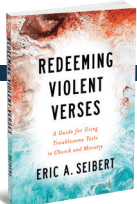
1. What kind of training have you received in teaching violent Bible stories to children? If your answer is “little” or “none,” why do you think that is? What kind of training do you think people in your position should have?
2. Should we introduce children to violent biblical texts, or is it better to shield them from Scripture’s more violent and graphic stories? What does the author suggest and to what extent do you agree?
3. Discuss Elizabeth Caldwell’s “wondering model” of teaching the Bible (see pp. 57–58). What does it involve and how useful do you think this would be for ministry to children?
4. After reading chapter 4, what stands out to you as the single most important idea to keep in mind when teaching violent biblical stories to children?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS • LEADING WORSHIP

5. When does the author suggest violent verses should not be used in worship (or at least not without providing a contextual statement)? Do you agree?
6. How likely might you be to create your own liturgical resources, such as responsive readings or prayers of confession, using violent verses? What sort of guidance was offered in this chapter for how you could do this on your own? What additional information or suggestions would be helpful in creating these resources?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS • PREACHING SERMONS

7. In chapter 6, the author offers five reasons why ministers should preach from violent biblical texts (see pp. 88–89). Are you convinced this is important, or do you think preaching from violent biblical texts might do more harm than good?
8. Five suggestions for preaching from violent texts are provided in chapter 6 (see pp. 90–100). Have you ever heard sermons that used violent verses in any of these ways? If you were planning to preach a sermon from a troublesome text, which of these five approaches might you try first?



PART 3

Applying What You Learned and Talking about Divine Violence in Scripture

Chapters 7-9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 7 applies some of the suggestions in this book to three biblical passages. Identify two or three applications you find particularly helpful. What additional ways can you envision using these particular violent passages, or other violent passages, in church and ministry?
2. What troubles you most about biblical passages that portray God behaving violently, particularly in the Old Testament, the focus of this book? How bothered are you by these images of divine violence?
3. The author claims that “violent portrayals of God in the both the Old and New Testaments distort God’s good character and do not reflect what God is really like” (p. 129). Do you agree? If not, how do you reconcile the idea that *God is love* with stories of *God acting violently*?
4. When you use biblical texts that portray God sanctioning or participating in violence, how can you help people distinguish between the way God is portrayed in the Bible and the way God actually is? How helpful is it to use a christocentric hermeneutic to sort this out? What does a Christ-centered way of reading the Bible look like to you?
5. What steps are you prepared to take to deconstruct violent views of God in your area of ministry?
6. In the final chapter, the author encourages you to develop a plan for using violent verses in church. What does that look like for you? What do you hope to do with violent verses in the next six months, the next year, the next two years?
7. Identify two or three of your biggest takeaways from this book. What lingering questions or concerns remain?

