

Further Information for Leaders and Facilitators

General Guidance

General tips and guidance about how to organize an event and facilitate discussion are contained in the *Scripture & Violence Event Leader's Guide*, available at www.scriptureandviolence.org.

While the current module can be used on its own, it may help the quality of your discussion to have your group watch the introductory videos on our website first, or to read some of our other introductory resources. Scriptural interpretation is a complex process, and the relationship between scriptural texts and real-world actions is multi-faceted. Our introductory resources give a brief overview of key concepts and ideas.

Tips and Guidance on Module Questions

Here are some tips and guidance on the questions posed in this module.

In order to allow participants to make their own discoveries, it is best to read the scriptural passage and discuss the questions in an open-ended manner first, before referencing these notes. Often, group members will come up with these ideas themselves, as well as many other interesting thoughts and questions that are not discussed below.

This guidance is not meant as a set of “answers” that participants need to reach, but is designed to help leaders feel confident facilitating discussion. Leaders do not need to be “experts.” The group can have a stimulating discussion, even if some questions arise that no one in the group is able to answer.

Participants should generally be allowed to discuss freely. Leaders should draw upon the material in these notes primarily when the conversation gets stuck.

Getting Familiar with the Text

1. *What are some similarities in the instructions for wives, children, and slaves? What are some differences?*
2. *What are some similarities in the instructions for men in their roles as husbands, fathers, and masters? What are some differences?*

Questions 1 and 2 are designed to encourage participants to pay close attention to the details of the text. They can be answered simply by reading the text.

3. *What sort of household structure does the passage envision? What sorts of households are not in view in this particular passage?*

Question 3 draws attention to the fact that the passage only has one particular type of household in mind – a household with a male head of household, in which there are children and slaves. In the ancient world, there were also other types of households, including households with no children and/or no slaves, or which

were headed by a woman. Such households are not discussed by the author of the text. This could indicate that the author's motivation is less to regulate all possible types of household dynamics, and more to portray Christ-followers as living out some ideal type of household relationships.

Digging Deeper

4. *For a text written in the 1st century CE – and presumably written by a man who was not a slave – the vision in Colossians of how members of the household should relate to one another is not usual. To the extent that it affirms hierarchical household structures, it is merely reaffirming structures that were already common in the wider society, not suggesting a new sort of structure.*

- a. *How does the passage strike you differently if you read it as reaffirming a common household structure, rather than as proposing a new or different household structure?*
- b. *How does it look different to read the passage against the backdrop of a 1st century society, rather than reading it as if it had been written today?*

Question 4 is designed to highlight the importance of first reading the passage in light of the historical context in which it was written – in this case a 1st century society – rather than interpreting it as if it had been written today. In some contemporary contexts, a text like this might come across as reactionary, but that would probably not have been the impression it made on ancient audiences. Many members of ancient audiences might have considered the ideas expressed in the passage to be normal and not particularly noteworthy. For many of them, following the author's instructions would not have meant they needed to change their behavior at all.

5. *We cannot be sure why the author of the passage chose to write it, but one possibility is that he wanted to encourage Christ-followers to have the sorts of household relationships that would be admired in wider society – at least by people from certain social circles. This might have been especially important to an author writing in a context where Christ-followers were a small minority who were often treated with suspicion and hostility by their neighbours.*

- a. *From your perspective, what are the pros and cons of trying to live in a way that “outsiders” will respect and admire?*
- b. *Can you think of any contemporary analogies for religious communities today?*

Question 5 invites participants to think about why the author might have written the passage. At first glance, some participants may have assumed that the author was very concerned about preserving hierarchical household structures for their own sake. While some element of that may have played into the passage, it seems likely that there were additional motivations, such as a concern for how Christ-

followers looked to their neighbours. The text was probably written for Christ-followers from gentile or non-Jewish backgrounds, whose decision to follow Christ would have already involved a major shift in lifestyle: they will have had to give up honoring all the various gods and goddesses who were honored in their (polytheistic) families and social networks. For their neighbours, this change in behavior often seems to have raised hostility and suspicion. In this context, it is understandable that leaders of Christ-following communities might have wanted their people to come across to “outsiders” as model members of society in other ways.

6. *What concerns does the passage raise for you, or do you think it might raise for people in your society today? Discuss.*

While the passage might have seemed “normal” for many members of ancient audiences, it often makes people today feel uncomfortable. Take some time to share and discuss participants’ feelings about the passage.