

WHERE MERCY FAILS

Darfur's Struggle
to Survive

By Chris Herlinger and Paul Jeffrey

Guide for Individual and Group Study

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The meditations found in the Beginning/Opening and Ending/Closure sections are excerpted from the identified exercises as they appear in *Wellsprings: A Book of Spiritual Exercises* by Anthony DeMello (Doubleday: New York, 1984).

A Prayer attributed to Saint Francis is from *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1979).

INTRODUCTION

This book is an exercise in journalism, both in words and images, about the nature of the Darfur crisis and the failure of governments and international institutions, despite considerable pressure from activists, many from faith communities, to set it right. It is a complicated story, and we don't pretend to present a definitive history or a comprehensive visual record. This is simply a glimpse of what we have seen on assignments to Darfur and Chad between 2004 and 2008, and a reflection on what that means for the international community.

from the Introduction to *Where Mercy Fails*

As such, *Where Mercy Fails: Darfur's Struggle to Survive* certainly stands solidly on its own merits among the growing body of work on the crisis in Darfur. To read this book is, for most of us, to open a window on a world so far beyond our experience as to be nearly out of reach.

Most of us, thankfully, can hardly begin to conceive of the horrors visited on the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa people, or imagine the paralyzing sense of encroaching hopelessness. This means, often, that we can easily spare ourselves any urgency to connect with it in a meaningful way. Instead we simply content ourselves with (real, even deeply held and genuine) gratitude for what we have, (*There, but for the grace of God...*) and replace any impulse toward real engagement with a simple click forward to the next channel, the next Website, the next hot-topic blog.

When we do choose engagement, the temptation in the face of a problem so vast, a situation so complex, a reality so seemingly devoid of hope, is to manage it intellectually—to chase the palpable heartache and the soul-bruising discomfort up out of our hearts and into our heads. For good or bad, the human instinct seems to be to try to untangle the knots in our stomachs using the nimble fingers of intellect—to make the pain manageable in the lower-risk field of *words*.

So, a study experience has the inherent danger of disarming a potent subject through the act of mere conversation about it. We hope your experience of *Where Mercy Fails* is more than that. The pages that follow invite you to a truly *felt* encounter and encourage an *active* response that goes beyond discussion, beyond mere comprehension.

USING THIS RESOURCE

In the pages that follow you will find suggestions for working with *Where Mercy Fails* and with the topic of the crisis in Darfur. Ultimately, we hope that the experience brings you into closer communion with the world community in our collective response to what is a horror of great depth and global significance.

This guide contains plans for a 6-session individual or group study based on the text of *Where Mercy Fails*. These sessions are structured so that they can be used in at least three different ways:

- as an entirely individual experience where you work through the material on your own and at your own pace, or
- as a group study or book club experience—with or without a designated leader, or
- as a teacher's curriculum resource for presenting a unit on the crisis in Darfur to groups of students ranging in age from late adolescence through adulthood.

There is more material in each session plan than is appropriate for a typical 45 minute to 1 hour study-group session. Likewise, 6 sessions may be more contact with this book than your group structure allows. After reviewing the entirety of these session plans, feel free to choose only the content that best serves your group's needs.

We encourage tailoring the overall experience and each session by choosing the elements that seem most appropriate for your situation. For newer groups—those least accustomed to sharing with each other—and particularly for groups of teens or young-adult participants, we recommend including at a minimum the activities from the Individual and Group Response sections and one of the Topics for Discussion/Sharing.

For groups interested in a more spiritually reflective and integrative experience, add the Beginning/Opening and the Ending/Closure sections. In order to facilitate outside-of-session contact with the materials, or to deepen your own individual experience, choose the Invitation to Journaling and Reflection, and Contemplation sections.

The bias of the session plans is decidedly, intentionally and unapologetically in the direction of lifelong Christian faith formation. Each session contains more or less overt references to Christian tradition and Christian faith practice. But, most of what is included as “Christian” content is also reflective of values that are woven deeply into our larger cultural fabric. That is to say, even if Christian faith formation is not your expressed goal, we hope that you would find in these pages content that reflects some of our most basic shared values as human beings.

CONTENT OF EACH SESSION PLAN

Beginning/Opening

This section includes a meditation for group gathering and centering and selections of inspirational text to be read as an opening prayer. (You may also use the meditation to bring yourself or the group back to a still point *within the session* as needed or desired.) We encourage you to use the opening reading as a springboard for your encounter with each chapter’s thematic material.

Topics for Discussion and Sharing

Here you’ll find introductory text and follow-up questions based on a selection of themes. Use these sections to deepen your encounter with the thematic content of each chapter. (For a description of a technique for group discussion see page 5.)

Individual and/or Group Response

This section includes instructions for creating a more experiential encounter with the thematic material. Use these activities on their own—particularly with teen or young adult groups—or as an “ice-breaker” introduction to the Topics for Discussion and Sharing.

Invitation to Journaling or Reflection

Each session includes an invitation to encounter *Where Mercy Fails* in the same way that people have been experience more *sacred* texts for centuries (For a description of a possible method, see page 6.) The reader is invited to identify a specific passage of text and to “listen for the voice of the God” as they read the chosen passage.

Contemplation

By way of helping people to “make meaning from the incomprehensible,” each session also pauses toward the end to ask: “What is God offering to me in this?” And, “What am I offering back to God?”

Ending/Closure

Finally, each session ends with an additional reading from scripture or some other inspired source as a way to join our hearts and minds with something larger than ourselves.

GUIDELINES FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Where Mercy Fails explores themes that are both difficult to encounter and politically charged. This study guide stimulates discussion of our individual role and responsibility in the creation, maintenance and resolution of the problems in Darfur. Creating a safe space for such conversations is essential in order for individuals to be fully engaged and participate at a level that promotes growth and action.

There are several specific models for creating an environment for open discussion. Parker Palmer's "circle of trust" as explored in *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward and Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994) is described as "a space between us that honors the soul." He shows how people in setting ranging from friendship to organizational life can support each other on the journey toward living "divided no more." Eric H. F. Law has a wonderful technique for active listening in his work, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993). The technique is presented as a tool for multicultural conversations and dialogue, but it seems valuable for any number of settings and circumstances. Below is an adaptation of Law's mutual invitation technique.

1. Begin by letting everyone know the amount of time provided for the group's conversation.
2. Carefully name the topic to be discussed, the information to be shared and/or the questions to be answered.
3. Read the following directions: In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way. The leader/convener will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she invites another person to share. The person whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another person to share. If the person invited does not wish to say anything, that person simply says "pass" and proceeds to invite another to share. This process is followed until everyone has been invited to speak.

4. The process is a discipline for the group that allows everyone to share the power of selection and everyone to share the power of response. Be patient with one another. Allow time between invitations to hear what has been said. A person may wish to pass on speaking, but no one should be allowed to pass on inviting. No one should invite for another. If the person who is supposed to invite forgets to do so, remind them that they have the privilege of selection.

THE LECTIO DIVINA METHOD (IN BRIEF)

The Lectio Divina method has been described as akin to “Feasting on the Word”—a direct reference to its utility in *digesting* scripture. We believe the method has a usefulness as well as a technique for encountering this narrative of the crisis in Darfur. In our search for meaning, and in our listening for God’s calling us to action, this structure of four “moments” provides a scaffold for our experience and a method for hearing the voice of God.

The Four Moments

Lectio

This first moment consists in reading the [scriptural] passage slowly, attentively several times. Many write down words in the scripture that stick out to them or grasp their attention during this moment.

Meditatio

The [reader], gravitating around the passage or one of its words, takes in and ruminates on it, thinking in God’s presence about the text. He or she benefits from the Holy Spirit’s ministry of illumination, i.e. the work of the Holy Spirit that imparts spiritual understanding fo the sacred text. It is not a special revelation from God, but the inward working of the Holy Spirit, which enables the Christian to grasp the revelation contained in the Scripture.

Oratio

This is a response to the passage by opening the heart to God. It is not an intellectual exercise, but an intuitive conversation or dialogue with God.

Contemplatio

This moment is characterized by a simple, loving focus on God. In other words, it is a beautiful, wordless contemplation of God, a joyful rest in his presence.

Description of The Four Moments from Wikipedi, s.v. “Lectio Divina,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina (accessed March 1, 2009)

DIRECT LINKS TO THE RESPONSE TO DARFUR

Here are links to some groups doing invaluable advocacy work on behalf of Darfur (*You may be able to link directly to these sites while viewing this document online by clicking on the Web addresses below.*):

The Enough Project
<http://www.enoughproject.org/>

SaveDarfur
<http://savedarfur.org/content>

Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND)
<http://www.standnow.org/>

Amnesty International’s “Eyes on Darfur”
<http://www.eyesondarfur.org/>

Reuters AlertNet
<http://alertnet.org/>

And here are links to groups involved in providing humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict:

Church World Service
<http://www.churchworldservice.org/>

ACT-Caritas Darfur Emergency Response
<http://act-caritas.org/>

Catholic Relief Services
<http://crs.org/>

United Methodist Committee on Relief
<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/>

Médecins Sans Frontières
<http://www.msf.org/>

SESSION | 1

CHAPTER 1: A CRY FROM DARFUR

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below, aloud, at least two times.
Pause briefly in between and at the end for a period of silence.

Cain said to his brother, Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know, am I my brother’s keeper?”

Genesis 4:8-9

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

Often a visual experience opens a conversation in a way that words alone cannot. This is the power in a masterpiece of visual art—the strength in a compelling photo. Several excellent documentary films on the crisis in Darfur capitalize on the power of visual imagery to convey snapshot pictures of the situation as it exists in Darfur. As a prelude to your group experience and as a complement to the text of *Where Mercy Fails*, arrange to watch, either alone or as a group, one of the following documentaries:

The Devil Came on Horseback, DVD, directed by Annie Sundberg, Ricki Stern (New York, NY: International Film Circuit/Break Thru Films, 2007).

Darfur Diaries: Message from Home, DVD, directed by Aisha Bain, Jen Marlowe and Adam Shapiro (Canoga Park, CA: Cinema Libre, 2006).

Darfur Now, DVD, directed by Ted Braun (Los Angeles, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007).

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

The Devil in the Details

For group study, read the following aloud:

In Chapter 1 the authors have explored some of the central issues and have provided a context for our further understanding. They have briefly answered a range of questions.

Review the list of subheadings in the section A Darfur Primer beginning on page 2 of *Where Mercy Fails*. Then, use the following to stimulate discussion:

- Name one or two items of “new information”—things you didn’t know before.
- Name one or two things you found most significant or compelling.
- Speak, briefly, to why those things made a particular impact for you.
- After reading Chapter 1, what questions do you have? What needs clarification?

Obvious Activism:

For group study, read the following aloud:

To read of these atrocities or to see them depicted visually is both a mental and a visceral experience. We not only increase our comprehension, we also feel for the people involved. Often, this feeling—this empathic link—is a powerful impetus for action. We find that we simply have to do something. In this case, the range of options includes a menu of obvious action that any individual can take immediately. (See list at right.)

Then, ask:

- What is your individual “obvious action” plan?
- What commitments are you willing to make in each of these areas?

Invite members to share their plan with the group. This may take the form of a group contract or shared agreement wherein each member makes a commitment to follow through and report on their individual progress.

Categories of “Obvious Activism”:

- **Seek Information/Become Informed:** We live in an age of extraordinary and unprecedented access to information. Use the Bibliography at the end of the book (p. 148) as a starting point for seeking and finding additional information. Then, search online for additional sources and links to like-minded community.
- **Identify Power/Speak to Power:** Experts agree that any solution will require that those with power take action. Locate the names and contact information for your state and federal government officials. Identify other organizations who might share your interest or involvement in resolving the situation in Darfur (your local house of worship, university activist groups, service clubs, professional associations, prayer groups, online social networks). Determine how best to add your voice to theirs and vice versa.
- **Claim the Power of Money:** In addition to other, more direct action steps, use money—often our most efficient and effective action surrogate—as a way to communicate and participate. Decide where and how (humanitarian aid, vs. political activism, for example) you’d like your money to speak for you. Then, express the value you place on the work being done in service of the people of Darfur concretely through donations, sponsorships, contributions, partnerships, subsidies, etc.
- **Share the Truth/Share the Burden:** Permission for tyranny and denial of wrongdoing thrive under conditions of secrecy and separation precisely because what is required for justice is a concerted and collective—rather than simply individual—response. Bring the story of the crisis in Darfur into the context of your relationships with others (friends, spouses/partners, family members, coworkers, neighbors). Disallow the strategy of secrecy and separation by practicing world community at the level of individual relationship.

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Identity

Begin by asking each member of the group to give three significant identity labels—identifier words with a mutually understood meaning—that they use to describe themselves (e.g. *American, woman, Christian; teacher, artist, father; athlete, son, student*).

Record answers on a flipchart or whiteboard.

Then, after reading Chapter 1 of *Where Mercy Fails*, ask:

- What are the identity labels in the Darfur narrative? (e.g., *Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa, Refugee, IDP, Christian, African, Arab, Janjaweed*)

Record these as a second list.

Referring to the first list, ask:

- What else is there to know about each person present in our group that is not accounted for in our identity labels?

Invite participants to share *something else* about themselves and to share something they might know about other group members.

Then, referring to the second list, ask:

- What do we miss in understanding a person or their experience if we only know them by these labels?

Consider specifically the use of the following labels: refugee, IDP (*Internally Displaced Person*), victim, *Janjaweed*.

Ask:

- How does the use of these labels bias our *perception of* these people?
- How does the use of these labels bias our *response to* these people?

Refer to the section in Chapter 1 on the role of ethnic identity (p. 3). Discuss:

- How have identity labels been used to create and/or maintain the crisis in Darfur?
- How do constructs of identity keep *us*—individually and collectively—at a distance from this crisis?
- Where and how are we vulnerable to *us and them* thinking?

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, *Wellsprings*, The Surrender, p. 192

Select either a passage from Chapter 1, a particularly compelling passage or image from one of the suggested documentaries, or any of the photos found on pages 43 through 114 of *Where Mercy Fails*. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

“...Stuck between a past they don’t want to remember and a future they cannot see or even glimpse...”

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 1, p. 2

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end.

...and the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

Genesis 4:10-12

SESSION | 2

CHAPTER 2: A TINDERBOX OF WAR AND DREAD

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below at least two times.
Pause briefly in between and at the end for a period of silence.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Matthew 25:34-40

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

Genocide and Objectification

For group study, read the following aloud:

Rather than continuing to debate whether the crisis in Darfur meets the international definition of genocide, let us instead consider what makes this violence possible, namely objectification, and then examine our role in its continuation.

Objectification: *to degrade a person to the status of a mere object.*

Murder, rape and the wholesale destruction of lifestyle and livelihood are among the most extreme potential consequences of objectification. And there is little to credibly dispute the record that the people of Darfur, so objectified, are, in fact, enduring these extremes of violence.

Ask:

- How is such objectification possible?
- What is in the hearts and minds of the persecutors that allows for objectification and its consequences to occur?

Continue, aloud:

The Janjaweed are in effect saying to the people in the Darfur region “Your human lives are of no significance.” As the conflict deepens, these people (Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa) are increasingly responding in kind with retaliatory violence of their own. Through inaction—the good efforts of activists and others notwithstanding—the world community of nations communicates agreement that these lives fail to reach a certain threshold of significance.

Then, ask:

- Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What are your feelings in response to this statement?
- What is the mechanism by which our objectification of these people might contribute to the more violent objectification happening there?
- How is this dynamic in play with regard to other social causes with which we may currently be concerned?
- What is the solution to the problem of *our* tendency toward objectification?

The Meaning of Home

For group study, read the following aloud:

From the comfort of our living rooms, or as depicted on our wide-screen television sets, we see the people of Darfur first across a vast disparity of wealth. Through that lens, they can be for us just “those poor people who live in mud huts somewhere in Africa.” And, we are tempted to notice relatively little contrast between those huts and the tent cities of the refugee camps. The difference as they might perceive it: One is home, the other is not. What we do have in common, then, may not be a parity of economic resources, but a deep emotional investment in the place we call home.

Then, discuss:

- Of what importance is the notion of home to you in your daily life?
- What have you associated with the idea of home?
- What would be lost if suddenly you were uprooted from every facet of that definition?

Invite participants to write down several one- or two-word completions of the statement, *Home is...*

From that list, suggest crossing off only the items that you imagine the people of Darfur would not hold in common with you.

To that list, suggest adding items you imagine would be added by the people of Darfur.

Finally, invite participants to cross off only those items that they, then, would not hold in common with the people of Darfur.

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Use a Picture to Tell a Story

Individually or as a group, review the photographs from the center section of *Where Mercy Fails* (pp. 43-114).

For group study, give the following instructions aloud:

Identify any one particular individual in any one of the photographs. Create a story about this individual. Narrate their day, describe their family, their living situation, their relationships, their hopes, joys, dreams and accomplishments, challenges and struggles as you imagine them to be.

Make no reference whatsoever to their experience of violence or to the effects of violence on the day-to-day lives. Tell a story based on your perceptions of their reality that is entirely free from references—direct or indirect—to the violence they may have witnessed or endured.

Then, individually or as a group, consider the following:

- What makes this easy?
- What makes this difficult?
- How is the life you have imagined for them similar to the life you have lived?
- How is it different?
- What insights have you gained?

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, Wellsprings, *The Surrender*, p. 192

Select a sample passage from Chapter 2. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

“That’s a place in the world which is no longer there.”

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 2, p. 15

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end.

“Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You are the accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Matthew 25:41-46

SESSION | 3

CHAPTER 3: SOUNDING THE ALARM

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below, aloud, at least two times.
Pause briefly in between and at the end for a period of silence.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:3-10

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

A Compelling Relationship with the Problem

For group study, read the following aloud:

*Throughout the universe of response to the crisis in Darfur are stories of people who have developed what can best be described as a compelling relationship with the problem. The authors of *Where Mercy Fails* remain in compelling relationship with the problem. Likewise, they describe, for example, General Dallaire's experience (p. 31-34), and recall the story of Brian Steidle (explored in full in the documentary *The Devil Came on Horseback*). The movie *Darfur Now* profiles five more individuals with similar compelling relationships.*

There is a rawness, a depth of emotion and a vulnerability in these stories, as if what had insulated these people from the problem had been stripped away, leaving them in contact with an inescapable truth and relentless sense of obligation. Their motivation for action on behalf of the people of Darfur seems to have been revealed rather than instilled—a manifestation of a felt unity rather than a result of mere persuasion.

In contemplating these stories, ask:

- What has been stripped away? What was once there that is now absent for each person?
- What presents itself as “in the way” of our own compelling relationship with the problem?

Ultimate Success

For group study, read the following aloud:

But final success would only come, Hanis continued, “With the cessation of violence and power sharing among the warring factions in Darfur.” Of course, there was also the issue of the “full, free return” of those displaced back to their home villages. “Ultimate success is still a long way off,” Hanis concluded.

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 3, p. 34

Continue, aloud:

Consider the condition of “ultimate success” in relation to the crisis in Darfur. Given the vast and complex interplay of forces involved, any definition will be only a snapshot in time, a cross section of competing values.

Invite participants to consider:

- What does ultimate success look like? What would you add to Hanis' definition?
- What are our biases and values as we envision a future beyond the crisis?
- Which values are likely to compete for attention in determining the future beyond the immediate crisis?
- What is your imagined role and your relationship to the people of Darfur under conditions of ultimate success?

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Scaling Our Own Relationship with the Problem

Begin by drawing a line on a whiteboard or flipchart describing a continuum from *Not at all engaged* to *Very engaged*.

Not at all engaged..... *Very engaged*

Invite each participant to place themselves on this continuum of engagement with regard to the crisis in Darfur.

Emphasize that engagement with the problem is not the same as ultimate responsibility for the problem or its solution. Participants simply indicate what they feel, on an emotional level, in terms of their own involvement. **Note:** it may be easier to begin by scaling your involvement with a more neutral subject, for example: sports, music, cooking, etc.

After each person places themselves on the continuum, invite each participant to each of the following exercises:

- Describe specifically in behavioral terms what it would mean to take only the least noticeable step in either direction.
- Locate also at which point your own fears are triggered. Describe your fears about increasing your involvement with the problem.
- What does your individual practice of faith have to say that might be of service in addressing your fears.

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, *Wellsprings*, The Surrender, p. 192

Select a sample passage from Chapter 3. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

“I think there’s a momentum with humanity that’s evolutionary... the sense of humanity that is really becoming one, beyond borders and ethnicity. Some of that feeling comes from the astronauts in space who saw no borders.” He paused. “That’s why human rights are so important. If a child in a displaced camp in a terrible situation is able to laugh at something funny and my child with all the advantages, can laugh at the same thing—well, they’re the same. It’s what surrounds them that makes the difference.”

General Roméo Dallaire in
Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 3, pp. 32-33

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:3-10

SESSION | 4

CHAPTER 4: CALLING THE FAITHFUL

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below, aloud, at least two times.
Pause briefly in between and at the end for a period of silence.

Just then, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.
“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

Luke 10:25-28

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

God Roots

For group study, read the following aloud:

Activists like Cory Smith believe that there has long been a need for planting “God Roots” within what has been a predominately secular human rights community.

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 4, p. 38

Continue aloud:

Chapter 4 goes on to describe the quality of endurance and the sense that we are our brother’s keeper as two of the principle contributions that people of faith and faith-based organizations can and have contributed to the human rights movement.

Then, individually or as a group, consider the following:

- What other “God Roots”—reflections of faith and faith practice—do you see as important and perhaps missing from our collective response to Darfur?
- How do you see these other “God Roots” functioning in real life practice in our here-and-now responses to the crisis in Darfur

Reconciliation

For group study, read the following aloud:

In a most general sense, to reconcile means simply “to bring into changed relationship.” In many cases—and especially in this case—this is accomplished through a mechanics of forgiveness. A definition and usage based in New Testament scripture, suggests that to reconcile means to be “brought into right relationship with God.”

Ask group participants to respond to the following:

- What changes in relationships are indicated among the parties within the conflict? among the parties outside the conflict? between those within and those outside?
- What is your working definition of *forgiveness*? When is forgiveness an appropriate response? When is it not?
- How does the crisis in Darfur inform *our* relationship with God?
- How *are we* in right relationship with God with respect to the issues here? How *are we not*?
- How do we *know* when we are in right relationship with God? How do we *know* when we are *not*?

The Merciful One

For group study, read the following aloud:

It is convenient and seductive to imagine ourselves in the role of the Good Samaritan when we project that scripture story onto our position relative to the conflict in Darfur. We are romanced by the notion of identifying with giving, compassion and benevolence.

What if, instead, as we project the story, we imagine ourselves in the role of the one beaten and left at the side of the road. Imagine that we are the bruised and battered, isolated and alone in our experience—bereft of hope and at some considerable distance from the way we’d like to be. As a metaphor of the spirit, this is certainly not far off for many of us.

Imagine then, that the story of the crisis in Darfur is what finally stops to care for us—the agent of nurturance, the giver. Imagine that other things have come and gone from our lives leaving us untouched, unmoved, unnourished, uncared for. What if the story itself, the horrific detail of the narrative, is the Merciful One—God’s surrogate and our true neighbor.

Invite participants to consider:

- What nurturance have you received from even small contact with the crisis?
- How have your wounds been bandaged and healed?
- What kind of long-term care has been purchased for you by the story of this crisis?
- How do we express our gratitude for having been cared for in this way?

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Reconciliation

Write the word *reconcile* in the center of a whiteboard or flipchart.

Invite participants to find the word *reconcile* in a dictionary. Use several different dictionaries if possible to generate a broad selection of definitions. Write the variety of definitions in the space surrounding the word *reconcile*.

Ask:

- How does each of these definitions apply to the situation in Darfur?
- Of these, which has the greatest priority? the least?

Or, invite participants to look up the word *reconcile* in a thesaurus. List the synonyms and near synonyms on a whiteboard or flipchart, e.g. *reunite, resign, harmonize, adapt, settle*

Thesaurus Prayer

Invite the group to use each word from the thesaurus exercise above to complete a vision statement of your intentions for Darfur. If you wish, this may take the form of a prayer. For example:

I would like to see family members displaced from each other *reunited* with their lost relatives.

I am *resigned* to the fact that even the good things in Darfur will be different from what they once were.

I pray for the actions of the world to begin to *harmonize* with the needs of the people of Darfur.

I understand that the solution may require that the cultures of the people involved permanently *adapt* to something new.

I hope that one by one small issues of justice will become *settled*, leading to a condition of lasting peace.

Offer participants the opportunity to share their vision statements with the group. Pause after all have shared for a moment of silence.

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, *Wellsprings*, The Surrender, p. 192

Select a sample passage from Chapter 4. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

Heschel explained his activism by saying that the task of humanity “is to be a voice for the plundered poor” and that “there is no limit to the concern one must feel for (the) suffering of human beings.”

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 4, p. 42

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end:

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:29-37

SESSION | 5

CHAPTER 5: FACING THE FUTURE

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below, aloud at least two times.
Pause in between and at the end, for a brief period of silence.

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the
world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

“Christ Has No Body,” Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

What Difference Does It Make?

For group study, read the following aloud:

What difference does it make to us if there are regions in the world in which the essential fabric of human society has disintegrated—where violence is routine, where security is not remotely a given? Aside from our learned humanitarian concerns, why should we care?

From an entirely self-centered vantage point, devoid of compassion or concern for the plight of those involved, how are our selfish interests impacted by this progressive deterioration in the capacity for the region to self-correct—to return to a condition of peace and relative equilibrium?

Ask group participants to respond to the following:

- Where and how do you predict that this situation will result in an effect that can be directly felt in our own lives? Where will the crisis in Darfur first *hit close to home*?
- What are the likely long term consequences that will impact our children and their children as a result of this crisis?

Gender, Gender Inequity and Rape

For group study, read the following aloud:

Gender and gender inequity are clearly issues of central importance to understanding the crisis in Darfur. There are significant and culturally defined differences in roles, relationships, power and status in Sudanese culture based on gender. And, through rape and rape terrorism perpetrated by the Janjaweed, the women of Darfur are objects of a particular gender-specific warfare and oppression. Notably, many women there are also finding innovative gender-based solutions and making transformative gender-informed decisions in response to these conditions and aftereffects of oppression.

Reflect on the differences in the experiences and expression of gender identity as you understand them for the men and women of Darfur.

Discuss:

- What are your thoughts about the culture-based differences in relative status, position and power of women in Darfur—those that are not a function of the particular violence committed against women by the *Janjaweed*?
- How does knowledge of women's unique experience of oppression in Darfur resonate (or not) with your *gendered* sense of self as a woman? as a man?
- What differences in values do you imagine exists between the men and the women of Darfur relative to:
 - justice
 - identity,
 - work,
 - ultimate resolution of the regional conflict.

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Reweaving the Social Fabric

Bring several 3-4 foot lengths of string or yarn to the session—allow for the possibility of more than one length of string per individual.

Invite each participant to name their length of yarn for something they feel runs deeply through an “intact” culture (safety/security, value for life, communication, relationship, etc.). Label with a piece of masking tape and marker each length of yarn or string with a one or two word description of what it represents.

Invite one person to lay out their string in a line describing the *value* it represents in their own words. The next person lays out their string as well.

Invite each participant to talk about the point of intersection. (“*Where justice and communication cross, I see statements about fairness.*” Or “*Where safety crosses trade I see the establishment of a system of money.*”)

Proceed with each person in turn weaving through another thread, identifying points of intersection. Continue at least until each person has had the opportunity to add their thread to the emerging social fabric.

Conclude by considering the following questions:

- How might the values that you have identified differ with the people of Darfur?
- What insights about the crisis or its resolution have you gained from this exercise?

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, *Wellsprings*, The Surrender, p. 192

Select a sample passage from Chapter 5. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

This is no easy matter, in part because sometimes what is called “reconciliation” is actually a kind of nostalgia for a culture that either never was or a dream of something that will never exist again.

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 5, p. 132

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end:

We awaken in Christ's body
where our body,
every most hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him.
Everything that is hurt, everything
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,
maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged,
is in him transformed,
and all is recognized as whole, as lovely,
and radiant in His light.

Adapted from a work by Symeon the New Theologian
(949-1022)

SESSION | 6

CHAPTER 6: HOPING AGAINST HOPE

BEGINNING/OPENING

Begin by coming fully into the present moment.
Set aside your thoughts and the concerns of the day.

*Prepare yourself
to fully enter
the conversation about to take place.*

Read aloud the centering meditation:

I become aware of my presence in this room,
of the sensations I experience in my body,
of the touch of the clothes that I am wearing,
and the chair I am sitting on.
I become aware of the sounds all around me
and of my breathing.

Anthony DeMello,
Wellsprings, The Redemption, p. 106

*Then, allow yourself
to open the conversation
with a spoken prayer.*

Read the passage below, aloud, at least two times.
Pause in between and at the end, for a brief period of silence.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is
hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where
there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where
there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where
there is sadness, joy.

A Prayer Attributed to Saint Francis,
from *The Book of Common Prayer*

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING

Our Relationship with Power

For group study, read the following aloud:

There is consensus that the violence involved in the crisis in Darfur reflects a disease whose roots are deeply entangled with issues of power. At the base of the conflict is power fed by fear and by greed (fear) and by hatred (fear) and by divisiveness (fear). The authors quote Holocaust survivor Primo Levi detailing other cofactors to this disease:

Continue aloud with this from *Where Mercy Fails*:

Few countries can be considered immune to a future tide of violence generated by intolerance, lust for power, economic difficulties, religious or political fanaticism, and racist attritions. (p. 74)

Discuss:

- What do you imagine are the pathways toward immunization against fear and violence?
 - for the people in Darfur and other troubled regions of the world?
 - for our own country? community? family? relationships? self?
- What is my role in immunizing others from fear and violence?

Hope and Hopelessness

For group study, read the following aloud:

In the midst such desolate circumstances, what sustains the people of Darfur and seems, for now, to hold them just this side of ultimate demise is the commodity of hope. Hope is what remains when everything else—home, family, peace, security, personal power, control, integrity, validity, efficacy, lifestyle and livelihood—have been assaulted or stripped completely away through acts of ruthlessness.

Hope is also the spiritual currency in which our individual and meager-seeming actions are measured. Any investment in the economy of hope returns instant dividends, because to instill hope is to see it and to recognize it for ourselves, too.

Ask participants to discuss the following:

- What is the practice of giving hope?
- What is my role in giving hope?
- What is the value of hope?

Where Mercy Fails

The title of the book is *Where Mercy Fails*. The authors suggest that there are limits to what organized mercy can do.

- What does the title of the book mean to you?
- Do you agree with the assertion that there are limits to what organized mercy can do? Where would you draw those limits?
- Are there instances when a response of “mercy” may not be enough, or perhaps even do more harm than good?

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP RESPONSE

Instrument of Peace

Together, reread the opening prayer passage:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Begin to examine the notion of being an “instrument of peace.” Ask, “What is it for you:

- to sow love where there is hatred?
- to pardon, where there is injury?
- to instill faith where there is doubt?
- to give hope where there is despair?
- to shed light where there is darkness?

Invite participants to give examples from daily life where they are aware of others having been such an instrument in their own lives. Record examples on a whiteboard or flipchart.

Discuss the motive force for such an instrument:

- What is the power that is accessed to move you as an instrument toward love, pardon, faith, etc.?
- Where does that power come from? How do we recognize that power when it is present to us?
- How do we avail ourselves of this animating power?
- How might we share that power with others?

INVITATION TO JOURNALING OR REFLECTION

First, use the centering meditation for journaling to bring yourself to a point of stillness.

Begin by seeking silence.

For this, come home to yourself.

Come to the present.

Ask yourself: Where am I right now?

What am I doing?

What am I thinking?

What am I sensing in my body?

What is the quality of my breathing?

Silence cannot be induced or sought directly.

Just seek awareness—and silence will appear.

Anthony DeMello, *Wellsprings*, The Surrender, p. 192

Select a sample passage from Chapter 6. Then, using the contemplative response method described in the Introduction (p. 6), allow yourself to “listen for the voice of God.”

Our suggestion:

One day in the spring of 2008, I received an email from my Scandinavian colleague lamenting all that was wrong in Darfur and suggesting that the well-placed intentions of humanitarians and human rights workers were up against something that was perhaps insurmountable. “We’ve lost another one,” he wrote. That same evening I got off at my New York City subway station stop and saw a handmade poster inviting the public to a Darfur benefit at a local bar. I had to smile and thought to myself: *drink a beer against al-Bashir*. There was encouragement there—a kind of hope. A group of people who had probably never been to Africa, let alone Sudan, were doing a small thing to help their brothers and sisters in Darfur. And those two brief, small experiences on a single day—a pessimistic message from a friend and a gesture of human solidarity, however small and imperfect, seemed to sum up something about Darfur and its attendant responses—its double edged meanings.

In short, what has happened *in* Darfur and in response *to* Darfur tells us something at once troubling and affirming—something about ourselves, both for ill and for good, about what it means, today, at the beginning of a new century, to be human.

Where Mercy Fails, Chapter 6, p. 143

CONTEMPLATION

Begin this week's process of contemplation.

Individually or as a group, take 2 minutes to consider the following with regard to this week's session:

God brings this to my life.
What is God offering to me?
My life brings this to God.
What am I offering to God?

(Optional) If time allows, you may choose to share your thoughts with the group.

ENDING/CLOSURE

Read the following as a way of bringing this week's session to an end:

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

A Prayer Attributed to Saint Francis (cont.)
From *The Book of Common Prayer*