

Iraq: A Journey of Hope and Peace
Study Guide by Peggy Gish, e-mail: peggygish@yahoo.com
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Arranged for 10 Sessions

Session One

**Chapters One: “Going”
Two: “Learning”**

Update Notes:

I write this study guide after returning from my sixth trip to Iraq with CPT, and working there a total of eighteen months since my initial trip in October 2002.

Just as in that pre-war time, we still try to do what we call “truth telling” about the conditions of life for the Iraqi people. Doctors in Baghdad now tell us that they are starting to see an increase in cancers and leukemia in Central Iraq due to the proliferation of DU (depleted uranium) and other toxic materials used in U.S. weaponry during the 2003 invasion.

Much of the suffering of the Iraqi people continues because the U.S. has done little to fulfill their promise to repair the health-related infrastructure, already in disrepair under Saddam Hussein and deteriorating further during the years of economic sanctions. In our visits this summer to Sadr City, a poorer, densely populated area of Baghdad, we saw pools of raw sewage in many streets. There was an epidemic of typhoid and 72% of the 3 million residents had hepatitis A or E, because of impure water. Cracked sewage and water pipes still lay side-by-side, polluting the water. Meanwhile, officials told us that the contract for the current sewage reconstruction project only provided for new pipes in the main streets, not the side streets. We saw no evidence of it being unsafe for construction crews to work in Sadr City, currently one of the safest places in Baghdad.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did you respond to Bush’s call for invasion of Iraq? Did you speak out individually or collectively? If so, how did that change your outlook?
2. If you had known about the CPT delegations to Iraq before the war, would you have considered joining one?
3. How should people of faith respond when other peoples are threatened?
4. Why do many Christians support our country’s war effort?
5. What did you learn about the consequences of economic sanctions for Iraqi people from these chapters? Do you think that if U.S. citizens had known these things, it would have affected their support for this war in Iraq?

6. What do you think about Amahl's statement to the team (p. 41) that we should stay and work in the U.S.?

Session Two

Chapters Three: "Beginning Steps" Four: "Staying On"

Update Notes:

Our CPT team in Iraq still rents an apartment in a residential community in Central Baghdad. Relating with our neighbors is not only an important part of our presence there, but also provides us a degree of safety.

Each time I decide to return to Iraq, any fears that I have bump up against my strong sense of calling to go. The love God keeps giving me for the Iraqi people compels me to do this work and helps me conquer my fear. Being and working in Iraq has been a gift, not a sacrifice. I keep feeling the power of God's love at work as I look into the eyes of those I am told is an enemy, listen to their pain and grief, and find friends.

Discussion Questions:

1. Has your image of the Iraqi people changed from reading these and earlier chapters? How?
2. What differences do you see about the situation in Iraq described here and what was being portrayed in U.S. media or by U.S. government at that time?
3. What particular stories or reflections in the book, inspired or spoke to you? How?
4. In making decisions, such as whether to stay on in Iraq, where do you see the line between following one's own sense of call or the wishes of your family and friends?
5. What do you think about the label "dupe" given to peace activists in Iraq or at home?

Session Three

Chapters Five: "Unexpected Death" Six: "Emergency Preparedness"

Update Notes:

In our work in Iraq we are continually encouraged by the courageous and creative Iraqis who daily risk their lives working for justice and unity in their society. One group,

the Muslim Peacemaker Team (MPT) formed in January 2004 after CPT trained a group of Shia Muslims from Kerbala, in nonviolence. Their first project was to go into Falluja in March with CPTers to tell the truth about the devastation caused by the November 2004 U.S. attacks. In May, MPTers and CPTers went in again for a clean-up project.

This summer, while in Iraq, the team heard about Cindy Sheehan, whose son, Casey, had been killed as a soldier in Iraq, and other military families have been speaking out, questioning the war effort and continued U.S. military presence in Iraq. President Bush responded with new statements justifying U.S. occupation. He called Iraq the central front on the War on Terror and said, "If we do not confront these evil men abroad, we will have to face them one day in our own cities and streets." We heard Iraqis calling this callous and uncaring, saying, "Why did Bush attract and allow global terrorists to come here? Why must we daily live in terror and insecurity?"

Discussion Questions:

1. How did the death of George Weber affect the spirit of the peace team or their decision to continue the work in Iraq? How can we and others honor George's life and death?
2. How did the quotes from Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech or the witness of the Peaceful Tomorrows group speak to the U.S. pre-war threat of invasion of Iraq and its ongoing foreign policies?
3. What do you think about the role the UN had in the decision-making process concerning invading Iraq? How do you think this will affect the UN's ongoing reputation and credibility?
4. What were the most important ways the Iraq Peace Team prepared for the possibility of remaining in Iraq during the invasion?
5. What motivated Peggy to stay in Iraq, even as the war started?
6. What of the work of the Iraq Peace Team did you think was the most important or effective?

Session Four

Chapters Seven: "Bombing"

Eight: "Kicked Out"

Update Notes:

Almost two and a half years after bombing began in Baghdad in March 2003, bombing continues in Iraq. The people live with suicide bombings and street explosions caused by the armed wing of the resistance as well as U.S. bombing of population

centers, in the name of “fighting terrorism.” As during the invasion, it is mostly the common Iraqi people who suffer.

Each time I return to Iraq, I sense more heaviness of fear, discouragement, and anger among the Iraqi people. In spite of this, our team continues to receive love and warm hospitality from the Iraqi people. Because it is potentially dangerous to associate with Americans, we only go to Iraqi homes or offices with their invitations. Many Iraqis also choose not to let fear paralyze them from doing what they think is important. A number of Iraqis from various backgrounds continue to serve as an advisory group we consult with as we make decisions about our work or remaining in Iraq. They have told us that they believe CPT’s presence and work in Iraq is still important.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you see the presence of God in disasters or tragedies? If so, how?
2. How did Peggy and others on the team keep up hope in the midst of the bombing?
3. Which, if any, of the various symbolic actions taken by the team before or during the bombing, seem meaningful to you?
4. God did not prevent this war in Iraq and so far has not stopped the ongoing war in Iraq in spite of the prayers of Peggy and other concerned people. How do you understand how God hears and answers such prayers?
5. What was most amazing about the ways the group, forced to leave, were cared for on the trip? Were there ways that having to leave was a gift?
6. What was hard for Peggy about going home to the U.S. during the time of the invasion? What was hard for you during that time?

Session Five

Chapters Nine: “The Aftermath of War”

Ten: “Different Voices”

Update Notes:

Although the majority of Iraqis we talk to are glad that Saddam Hussein is gone, Iraqis now say life is worse than it was under the former leader. Lack of security is the number one complaint. They live in daily fear of kidnapping, imprisonment, explosions, or street crime, as well as the hardships of daily life due to the lack of clean water, medicines, and much electricity, to high unemployment rate and general economic depression.

Most Iraqis are united in wanting to be free of U.S. occupation, but they are divided between those who think the U.S. military should stay long enough to help curb

civil war and those who think that continued U.S. military presence would only increase the violence between the Sunnis and Shias. One Shia Kurd in Baghdad told us that “if the Americans stay, they must stop dominating and humiliating us and change the way they are involved.”

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you see the contrast between what conditions were like for the Iraqi people after the invasion and the U.S. government’s stated goal of bringing freedom?
2. Would you be thankful for a foreign country bombing and bringing chaos to your home community in order to free you of a ruthless dictator?
3. What have you found helpful in overcoming your resentment of persons who have been hurtful to you or you see as hurting others?
4. From Peggy’s account, what affects did the war and its aftermath have on women in Iraq?
5. Were you surprised by conditions or attitudes of Iraqis after the invasion? If so, how?
6. How did Iraqi’s past experience under Saddam, or the hurt they or family members received in the war, affect their point of view about the invasion?

Session Six

Chapters Eleven: “Responding to Pervasive Violence” Twelve: “Disappeared”

Update Notes:

When our team went into Falluja with members of MPT in March 2005, we were eyewitnesses to the aftermath of the November 2004 U.S. attacks. We found that 60% of the buildings there had been destroyed beyond repair. A girl’s school we had visited a year before was in ruins. We saw vast areas of rubble with families living in 10’ by 14’ tents. One such family invited us in and served us tea as we listened to their story of leaving Falluja with the over 200,000 other refugees before the attack. When we said good-by, the women of the family hugged and kissed each of the women in our group and thanked us. We hadn’t changed their situation, but we cared about their pain.

Iraqis still disappear in the system. Our team continues to accompany them to places of information that they don’t have easy access to, in order to locate family members they believe to be imprisoned. U.S. forces had arrested one young man in March 2005. When we met them in June, the mother and father had gone to Iraqi and

U.S. prisons and searched all the information centers they knew, but still hadn't found him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What things contributed to the escalation of violence in Falluja in 2003? Can you see how these things relate or lead up to the U.S. attacks in November 2004 or the current situation there?
2. Think of other places in the world in the past sixty years where our government committed mass killing. How were these justified? Are they different from the mass slaughter under Saddam's regime near Al Mahaweel?
3. How does the way we relate to people in a tense crowd create either a dangerous or safe situation?
4. How is an occupation of another country inherently violent, even without the excessive violence of the occupiers?
5. What are the justifications given for the excessive use of force by occupying forces? Do you think they are necessary to bring peace and security in a volatile situation?
6. Do you see different policies or approaches U.S. forces and officials in Iraq could have taken in post-invasion Iraq that would have prevented the escalation of violence there? If so, what?

Session Seven

Chapters Thirteen: "Tell Me, Is the War Over?"

Fourteen: "Our Own Brush with Danger"

Update Notes:

Unfortunately, after two and a half years we continued to assess the situation in Iraq and say, "The war still isn't over." But it is not only the violence of American and Iraqi security forces or the armed resistance. Now many Iraqis and Internationals present in Iraq are saying that civil war has already begun on a low level even with U.S. presence. I find this tragic, since I think that it could have been avoided had the U.S. been able to turn the oversight of post-invasion Iraq to an international body of peacekeepers, something still possible in the early months. Instead the U.S. military stayed in a dominating role and over time exacerbated tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Members of our team have made a conscious choice to take the risks involved with being in Iraq. As a team, we continually evaluate our goals as well as how we can take sensible precautions, yet not let fear paralyze us and keep us from going places and doing what we think is important to do.

Discussion Questions:

1. Learn more about the effects of depleted uranium (DU) on people and the environment. What is our responsibility as Americans? What can we do about it?
2. What is the effect of violent attacks on the people nearby?
3. How do you assess the progress or lack of progress of restoring order and building up Iraqi society during that first year after the invasion? What do you think could have been done differently that would have helped?
4. How do you understand the attacks on international organizations in Iraq, such as the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross?
5. What affects did the robbery of CPT's apartment have on Peggy and other team members and their way of operating in Iraq?
6. What do you think of the team's view of what things bring security? What do you believe would give you or our country security in this time of so much fear of terrorism?

Session Eight

Chapters Fifteen: "Campaign for Justice"

Sixteen: "Collective Punishment"

Update Notes:

The CPT team in Iraq still hears about Iraqis receiving brutal treatment in the arrest, interrogation and imprisonment process by U.S. soldiers in the U.S. security system. Even more alarming right now, however is the brutality and torture at the hands of Iraqi army and police. It is commonly believed that U. S. soldiers are involved in training these Special Forces and are present as advisors in the places where much of the torture takes place. This summer we heard the story of three brothers rounded up by the members of one of these brigades, tortured and forced to make false confessions on TV that they were involved in an act of terror.

The bombing of Falluja in November 2004 was one more example of collective punishment. Since then, the U.S. has carried out similar attacks in other areas of Iraq, bombing whole neighborhoods or cities to flush out those they call "terrorists." Now this seems to be routine strategy for the U.S. military there.

Discussion Questions:

1. What Old Testament and New Testament basis do Christians have for working for justice?
2. Are there times the use of brutality and torture in the arrest, interrogation, and imprisonment process are justified? If so, when and why?
3. What struck you when hearing the stories of those detained and their families?
4. Are there times in war zones, such as Iraq, when you think collective punishment is justified? If so, when? How is collective punishment used in our society?
5. What were the goals the team had in the Campaign for Justice?
6. What if these detainees the Iraq team advocated for were involved in the armed resistance? Should the team not have spoken out on their behalf?

Session Nine

Chapters Seventeen: “Speaking to Those in Power” Eighteen: “Lenten Fast”

Update Notes:

Speaking to those in power has recently included, for the team, talking with officials from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad about various problems we see, as well as bringing cases for investigation to offices at several Iraqi government ministries. It has also involved collaborative efforts to address abuses, such as our meetings with human rights officials of the UN. Currently these officials are seeking information and encouraging our team to write a report about cases of torture within the Iraqi security system, which could lay the groundwork for an international independent committee to come in and do an investigation.

Iraqi organizations continue to organize nonviolent public protests and vigils. Members of our team were present at an International Women’s Day vigil in March. In April, at a massive public rally, a coalition of Shia and Sunni Muslims called for an end to the occupation while also saying “no” to the violence of armed resistance groups that harm Iraqi civilians. In June, we went with a women’s group for a vigil at the Ministry of Human Rights, calling attention to Iraqi detainees and the chaos of the prison system. This summer MPT put posters around the Holy Shrines in Kerbala opposing torture and abuse of Iraqi police.

Discussion Questions:

1. How could white, North Americans use their privilege for good?
2. What should be our response to U.S. soldiers as they return home from Iraq?

3. How often do you hear people labeled the “bad guy”? What is your response to such a category?
4. Can you think of situations where you or others decided a difficult problem was a spiritual struggle? What steps did you take to deal with it on that level?
5. What methods or activities that the Iraq team used to confront U.S. officials or to carry out the Lenten Fast do you think were helpful or not in working toward their goals?
6. How are Christians today called to speak out to those in power in opposing injustice? What ways have you already done this? What further steps might you take?

Session Ten

Chapter Nineteen: “Where Do We Go From Here?” “Postscript of July 2004”

Update Notes:

In spite of the current Sunni/Shia tension, many leaders and laypersons of both groups are working to bridge the divide. On August 31, 2005, after panic, commonly believed to be triggered by a rumor by a Sunni that a suicide bomber was present, set off a stampede resulting in the deaths of around 800 Shia pilgrims. Days later, to show Shia/Sunni unity, Shia groups around Iraq held memorial services for Othman, a Sunni man who drowned after saving several of the Shia pilgrims who fell into the Tigris River from the bridge. A Sunni sheikh from Falluja donated blood to help survivors of the stampede. Other Sunni and Kurdish groups organized to send relief supplies to them.

The Iraqi team’s goals have continued to evolve. In the past year the primary goal has been to nurture the nonviolence movement in Iraq, including MPT and other Iraqi groups. The hope is to assist with training additional groups and forming an Iraqi Peace Network, continue collaborative actions, to continue truth telling, sharing stories not covered by media at home, pursue the reporting on torture in hope of preventing violence, accompanying Iraqis, and supporting the nonviolent resistance in the U.S., U.K., and Canada against the war in Iraq.

The story continues. What our nation chooses to do and what you choose to do in response could result in more suffering and death, or in reconciliation and life.

Discussion Questions:

1. As you read through the chapters, what lessons did the team learn from their mistakes or dealing with the dilemmas they faced in their work?

2. How do you understand Jesus's ministry in comparison to Peggy's description on p. 292, as well as in contrast to how modern day Christians are practicing their faith?
3. What have been your struggles in ministry? How have these struggles helped you to mature in faith?
4. How have you experienced love as being a "harsh and dreadful thing?"
5. How do you see the costs of war for Iraqis and the U.S. or other countries in the Coalition Forces? Has the reality of war been worth the cost?
6. What ways, if any, did this account of Peggy's journey, the war and the struggle of the Iraqi people change you? Where does it lead you? What will you do in response?