



## YHWH, the Abusive Husband? A Closer Look at Ezekiel 16 and 23

By Brian Peterson

Perhaps two of the most troubling texts in the Old Testament are found in Ezekiel, namely, chapters 16 and 23. Feminist authors often cite these chapters as evidence that YHWH is no better than a modern-day wife abuser because of YHWH's harsh treatment of his wife Israel. Now, it is true that the Old Testament does indeed contain many difficult texts that present God in a stern and disciplining fashion, but most of these texts must be understood contextually. Are feminists' conclusions accurate to the text and what we know of God's character in the Old Testament? Let's look at these concerns and try to understand these texts from their literary, historical, and covenantal perspective of the Ancient Near East (ANE). Most importantly though, we will focus on the concept of covenant where these agreements contained stipulations that assigned blessings for proper allegiance and curses for those who broke covenant.

I am fully aware and agree with feminist scholars that these texts are particularly harsh and explicit for our twenty-first-century sensibilities—but they were meant to be just as harsh

for those who heard them 2,500 years ago. No one likes to hear, or read for that matter, about brutality visited upon females or the wife of a beloved friend. I am appalled by any act of physical aggression against a woman. But is this the full picture being presented in Ezekiel 16 and 23?

Before discussing the interpretive intricacies of these passages, a few notes of clarification are necessary that will explain Ezekiel's historical context and literary style; and a brief overview of chapters 16 and 23 will enable us to appreciate Ezekiel's context and ultimately God's message.

To begin with, the presentation of Israel's history in both of these chapters is rendered in an allegorical fashion with the city of Jerusalem (the ancient capital of Israel), representative of the whole of the nation. In the ANE, cities were often presented as female, whereby the capital city of a nation was understood as being symbolically "married" to the deity of the nation. Knowing this helps us to understand the perspective of Ezekiel and the reason for his use of particular marriage language metaphorically. Furthermore, as allegories they are not to be understood literally but rather from the perspective of literary hyperbole and figurativism.

Because both chapters basically present the same issues, we will focus primarily on chapter 16 and its applicable content because of its clear marriage language. The allegories unfold as follows. In Ezekiel 16 the prophet lays out for the reader a selective history of Israel with a religious focus. In the first six verses of this chapter, Ezekiel uses a common ANE motif to describe the beginnings of the nation of Israel. Ezekiel 16:4–6 states,

As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you *while you were* in your blood, "Live!"

The abandoned or exposed child motif was often used to describe the beginnings of great leaders of the past (e.g., Moses, Sargon of ancient Akkad—modern-day southern Iraq—

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and Romulus and Remus, the mythological founders of Rome; note also the beginnings of the modern comic hero Superman). In ancient cultures, unwanted children were often left to the elements as a means of infanticide. In rare cases, the gods would intervene and cause the child to be cared for by some extraordinary means (note the miraculous intervention in Moses' situation). This inevitably led to the greatness of the child as a leader or military deliverer. What makes Ezekiel's use of this motif even more extraordinary was the fact that it was normally reserved for male children. Ezekiel's use of this literary device informs the reader that something great is planned, or expected, for this female child left abandoned in the wilderness. Indeed, the expectation for the nation of Israel was for them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for the purpose of leading the other nations to God (cf. Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9). We are therefore left wondering from the very beginning of chapter 16 as to what will become of this child. Verses 7–14 answer this anticipation by describing the marriage of YHWH to Israel in the wilderness (i.e., the Sinai covenant) and the lavish bride gifts given to her by her husband.

Reading these verses no doubt reminds us of any modern wedding and the numerous gifts bestowed upon a new bride (e.g., dresses, jewelry, house gifts, etc.). This account, however, is not from the bride's perspective but rather from the groom's. In today's world, this is a rarity. One need only turn on the TV to be bombarded by numerous reality shows focused on the bride and her wedding day. Stories about buying the "perfect" wedding dress, planning the "perfect" wedding, and so forth, help fulfill a longing in every bride to have her day turn out as unforgettable.

I was recently married and the above text reminds me of my desire to find the right gift for my beautiful bride; I wanted to give her the best I

could afford. The pride I felt that this woman had agreed to marry me filled me with excitement and awe. You can almost feel the same emotion in YHWH as the prophet rehearses the history of YHWH's acts of love to his beloved bride Israel. We wait with baited breath for the happy-ever-after account to unfold. Unfortunately, this does not happen. No sooner had YHWH entered into a marriage contract with Israel before we find out

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that his beloved bride turns her back on her husband and plays the harlot with other lovers (i.e., the nations: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon). Israel scorns YHWH and takes her bride gifts and gives them away to her lovers (vv. 15–31). At this juncture we see that the prophet uses explicit sexual language to shock his listeners with the reality of their sin. Indeed, idolatry presented with the metaphor of harlotry and unfaithfulness dominates the central portion of chapter 16. We begin to sense the rapid change from the excitement and anticipation of the early verses of this chapter to the shock, disappointment, and anger of YHWH, the beloved husband in the story.

In verses 32–43, YHWH's anger is made manifest as he allows his unfaithful wife to be stripped by her lovers. They also proceed to perpetrate violent acts against her. It is these texts that have caused the most trouble for readers (especially feminists). How could YHWH behave so harshly and brutally toward his beloved bride whom he is supposed to love? The answer comes from ANE marriage contracts and the historical context. In this vein, the prophet does

give us a hint in 23:24 that YHWH will judge Israel according to the "customs" of the nations. It is these customs of marriage and divorce contracts and treaties that play out in these two chapters.

Neo-Assyrian (912–612 B.C.) and Neo-Babylonian (612–539 B.C.) marriage contracts give us a glimpse of YHWH's actions as presented by Ezekiel. In these contracts, we find that most women who desired to get married had to enter into a contract with the husband much like our marriage covenants and prenuptial agreements today. It is important to remember that these contracts were willingly entered into (much like Israel had willingly entered into covenant with YHWH). These contracts offered a measure of protection for both the husband and the bride. Marriage gifts given by the husband could be taken back if the wife was unfaithful whereas dowries, taken into a marriage by the bride, were to remain with the wife in the event of a divorce in order for her to support herself. Along with financial and material considerations, there were also stipulations (curses) included as warnings against infidelity. It must be noted here that these warnings often predominantly focused on restrictions and warnings to the female as opposed to the male. While we may see these as being unfair today, in the patriarchal cultures of the ANE, purity of lineage was paramount. Land and estates were passed down through the male line and the bloodlines needed to remain pure and certain. These contracts included stiff and cruel penalties in order to assure fidelity through fear of painful retributive acts. These acts included mutilation of the female (e.g., cutting off of the nose, ears, breasts, etc., cf. Ezek. 23:25) and in worst case scenarios, the death penalty (by drowning, stoning, or being thrown off high places such as a cliff or tower). We can be thankful these acts are not included in today's marriage contracts.

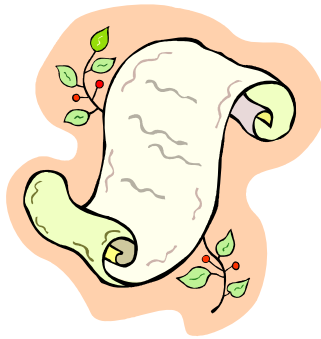
While physical torture has been erased, anyone who has gone through the pain of divorce, infidelity, or abuse has felt the emotional and physical pain that accompanies broken marriages and relationships.

In Ezekiel and in our understanding of Israel's covenant with YHWH, we find that this type of marriage covenant with its accompanying curses has many parallels with the stipulations of the Sinai covenant found in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Here we also find the blessings that are bestowed upon Israel for obeying the covenant—blessings that far outweigh the curses for potential bounty and benefits to Israel.

As noted above, one of the curses that appears in 16:39 and 23:26, and many of the other classical prophets, is the idea of “stripping” unfaithful Israel—a concept absent from the curses of the Law. Once again, the answer to this dilemma appears to rest in ANE marriage contracts. Public stripping of the wife in the event of divorce, especially due to infidelity, was one of the main curses of these ANE marriage contracts. Stripping was allowed especially if the woman initiated the divorce or had committed adultery. In this situation, the husband would strip his wife (symbolically representing the removal of the marriage gifts) and send her away “empty,” a common ANE term in this context. The wife was entitled to only what she brought into the marriage. By rereading verses 1–6 of chapter 16, we find that Israel had absolutely nothing to bring into the metaphorical marriage. YHWH was therefore fully within his legal rights to remove everything from his bride, Jerusalem.

Another troubling feature of this passage is the notation that YHWH allows the lovers of wayward Israel to do the stripping. While ANE marriage contracts allowed the husband to carry out the curses of the contract, in a masterful twist of irony, the prophet heightens the insult to the adulterous

nation by altering the ANE marriage law and allowing the lovers to carry out the punishments. YHWH chose to enact his divorce proceedings by employing the very nations whom Israel had longed to be like and with whom she had been unfaithful. Therefore, as



YHWH's instruments of punishment (cf. Ezek. 21:19–21), it is only appropriate that these foreign “lovers” enact the curses of the broken covenants. It must be pointed out that even these “lovers” of Israel would not go unpunished for their harsh treatment of Israel—YHWH would judge them as well (cf. chs. 25–32, 35, esp. 38–39).

Let us now turn to chapter 23 to complete the picture. Chapter 23 is basically a rerun of chapter 16, but rather than solely stressing the idolatrous practices of the nation, the prophet stresses the alliances Israel forged with her neighbors. In this chapter, the perspective is again in allegorical fashion; however, it focuses more on political rather than cultic infidelity. While it is true that these two aspects cannot be separated for the religious relationship between the nation of Israel and YHWH, in the case of Israel's interactions with the nations, this is an appropriate means of describing the political intrigues between Israel and her neighbors. She longed for these alliances as a means of “protection” and as a way to be like the nations. Unfortunately, many times Israel became a vassal state (i.e., under the rule of these stronger neighbors). Despite the numerous warnings of YHWH through the

prophets, Israel rejected her husband and continued making covenants and treaties against the command of the Lord (e.g., Deut. 7:2). It was after entering into these foreign covenants that Israel realized her mistake, which many times came too late (23:17). When Israel tried to break these covenants, the nations had every right to punish their wayward vassal. It is for this reason that the punishment becomes so fitting in these two chapters. Ezekiel shows that the punishment of exile and war suffered by Israel was due to her own acts.

Finally, the idea that YHWH later took back his unfaithful wife after his anger had been assuaged has also caused consternation and concern for modern readers. Some note the many parallels to modern-day abuse cycles. In general, this cycle has four parts within an established relationship:

- 1) An act of abuse, where constant fear is felt by the innocent party
- 2) A cooling off period (i.e., the abuser's anger is abated)
- 3) The abuser's “sorrow” for the abuse and a wooing back of the abused with promises of a changed lifestyle
- 4) The return of the abused to the abuser

First, in modern abuse cycles, the innocent victim is exactly that, innocent of the abuse—Israel was not. Moreover, Israel was *not* fearful of YHWH—a systemic problem that highlighted Israel's relationship with YHWH. Second, under ANE covenant law, YHWH had every right to be angry (it was not a falsified or trumped up anger or a drunken rage) and to demand the punishment of his unfaithful wife. His wife had been unfaithful numerous times, had sold herself into prostitution, had killed his children (i.e., child sacrifices, cf. 16:36), and rejected his admonitory actions. Third, as we have noted above, marriage contracts today are

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not the same as in Ezekiel’s day, which allowed for brutal curses, curses Israel knew would be enacted but still refused to accept. Interestingly, Israel’s ambivalence to the promised curses was due primarily to YHWH’s longsuffering, which Israel had mistaken as a sign that YHWH would not act (cf. Ezek. 20). Fourth, YHWH acted out of love for his bride by taking her back even though she had repeatedly been unfaithful to him (Hosea 1–3 is an excellent picture of this reality)—this is not the same picture as in modern abuse cycles. The abuser is rarely if ever the one who is wronged by infidelity. Fifth, these texts are only metaphors and therefore must be understood as only *representative* of Israel’s relationship with YHWH. Finally, once Israel rejected YHWH’s covenant and his love, she opened herself up to the hostilities of other lovers. Unfortunately, in the ANE, the only protection a woman had was that of her husband, brother, or father. If a woman had no male protectors, then she was vulnerable to the attacks and abuses of other males. Israel, being an “orphan” (cf. 16:1–6) had only YHWH as a protector. When she left this protection and played the harlot (cf. 23:25), she in effect became the same as a harlot in the ANE. They were not protected and often suffered brutalities at the hands of men.

So where does that leave us in answering the question as to the nature of YHWH as an “abusive” husband? One cannot read these difficult chapters apart from under-

standing the rest of the history between Israel and her husband and the ANE context. Ezekiel is writing to a hard-hearted people who needed to be shocked out of their lethargy. They were guilty of breaking their covenant with YHWH and no matter how “innocent” they may have thought they were, they were nonetheless guilty. Therefore, using the covenant

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as a backdrop to his allegories of 16 and 23, Ezekiel adopted literary and legal concepts of his period (and land of exile, i.e., Babylon) and applied them to Israel’s relationship with YHWH. In the same way that women of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods willingly signed and entered into marriage agreements, so too had Israel willingly entered into a covenant with YHWH, agreeing to abide by its stipulations. When Israel reneged on her end of the agreement, YHWH had been painfully longsuffering with her, hoping to woo her back to his side. When she ultimately refused these acts of patient love, YHWH allowed the curses of the covenant to take effect. Only after these curses were complete, did YHWH once again stretch forth his hand and take back his unfaithful wife to show his willingness to keep his side of the covenant.

The picture of YHWH’s love for his bride, Israel, is strikingly similar to Jesus’ love for his bride, the church, and by extension the individual believer. Often we cry out to God in moments of trials (most often the product of our own desires and sin), wondering where he is. Many times he allows us to grow through these hardships, and yet is there ready to take us back when we reach for his loving hand. The idea of “abuse” is often misused in today’s society. The truly innocent who are abused need our love and help. But make no mistake, those of us who have willingly entered into relationship with God through our acceptance of Jesus’ completed work on the cross will experience the disciplining “hand” of a loving Father who desires us to grow and mature into his image (Heb. 12:5–11). Israel rejected the numerous attempts by YHWH to help them turn from their sin. It was only after their repeated rejection of his reproof that the curses of the Law played out. Many Israelites died in their sin, unwilling to admit their failure to love YHWH and to keep his covenant.

If we can learn one lesson from this example, it is that we must be diligent and pray that we will not continually reject the loving advances of our heavenly Father. If we do, we face the fearful reality of the “curses” of the “Law” of God, namely, eternal separation from him. YHWH was not an “abusive” husband but rather the picture of a patient husband, scorned once too often! ❧

## Abuse is not Intimacy

By Elaine Storkey

Years ago, I was challenged at the end of a talk to make a response to St. Peter’s insistence that women are the “weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7). The questioner

clearly saw this as implying some kind of female inferiority that was incompatible with the gender egalitarianism I was expounding. This week the issue came up again in a

very different context. St. Peter wasn’t mentioned, but the underlying ambiguity was evident enough. A report published by the University of Bristol and the National Society for

the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) surveyed 1,300 youngsters aged between 13 and 17 and found that 90% of the girls had been in an intimate relationship. One third of the girls had suffered sexual abuse in the relationship, with 17% saying they were forced to have sex. A quarter of the girls reported violence at the hands of their boyfriends, and one in 16 said they had been raped. Experiences from some of the boys in the survey also indicated the presence of violence, although in much smaller proportion, with one in 17 saying they had been pressured into having sex. In the words of one commentator, the report showed “immense peer pressure” among teenagers to behave in certain ways, resulting in “disrespectful or violent relationships with girls often bearing the brunt.”

The findings have produced some stunned responses, even from those who commissioned the research. Professor David Berridge was shocked to find exploitation and violence in relationships starting so young and described the rate of violence as “appalling.” Diane Sutton, head of NSPCC policy and public research, was shocked that “so many young people view violence or abuse in relationships as normal.” And indeed, shocking it is. That such abuse should be identified as intimacy is a denial of human value. Yet this is not a prob-

lem that originates with teenagers but is often handed down by those who are older. The two groups of girls who were found to be particularly at



risk were those with older boyfriends and those who had already experienced violence from adults within their family. The witness of domestic violence toward a mother was also a factor. It seems part of a societal legacy of relational dysfunction and disrespect, which all too quickly creates a pervasive culture of abuse. Perhaps we should not be so surprised when this is mirrored in the experiences of teenage intimacy.

So how should we respond as Christians? It goes without saying that we need both to teach and to model something better—relationships that are committed, faithful, respectful, safe, and noncoercive. Clearly, we should actively pursue the fruits of the Spirit in our own marriages and friendships. The very least the church could do is to open a new

window on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, “against which there is no law.”

But we might also need to revisit that statement by St. Peter. Within his culture the woman was indeed the “weaker vessel”; not spiritually, but within the structures of patriarchal society. Today also, women might still be said to be “weaker”—not in any sense of inferiority or inadequacy, but in the cultural sense of economic and physical vulnerability. Yet women’s sexual vulnerability is no justification for discrimination or stereotyping, even less for abuse. There should be no incompatibility between promoting an egalitarian society that celebrates difference and acknowledging that girls have always been in need of protection. The two go together. The problem comes when male power and gender violence are accepted as normal, and we fail to censure those who are predatory and abusive. St. Peter had a better idea, and we would do well to acknowledge it: that men should live considerately in relationships and “bestow honor” on women. ☪

*This article originally appeared in the Church Times (September 2009) and is reproduced here by permission.*



## We Don't Walk Alone

*By Shirley Vogel*

*“I am with you always...” (Matt. 28:20)*

**L**ife can be tough, unbearable, and we find ourselves in situations we never thought would be ours. I’m writing especially of the incredible misery and pain of people doing their best to survive abuse inflicted by a spouse, parent, child, other family member, a friend,

or stranger. Many of us weep for you and your families, but no one who has been spared this incredible agony can fully understand your despair. I can’t, but I can share what I’ve learned about Jesus who promised never to leave us. Although my challenges are different, I pray that you can wrap my

experience of God’s love and faithfulness around your fears, losses, pain, and questions. My challenges include my husband’s classic midlife crisis, which ended our 27-year marriage, open heart surgery to correct congenital defects, and a stroke—but it didn’t end there. Two years after

the stroke, while speaking with a friend, I suddenly felt for a few seconds as if I “wasn’t there.” Startled, I thought, *what was that?* Two weeks earlier I had experienced blurred vision, also lasting only a few seconds, but I knew both symptoms could indicate further blood clots. When our conversation ended, I contacted my doctor who examined me and ordered repeat MRIs of my brain and brainstem to rule out further stroke damage. After that, I would see a cardiologist in Boston to determine whether my symptoms were due to changes in my mitral heart valve. My doctor said this was a strong possibility and, if so, more heart surgery would be necessary to replace the valve. Driving back to my church office with this possibility weighing heavily on me, I tried to remain calm, but my emotions somersaulted. “Why, God? And what about ‘wHispers’—the ministry you gave me!”

It was late afternoon when I returned to work, but unable to concentrate I went to nearby Breakwater Beach, which was deserted except for a few seagulls. It was low tide, and walking out on the ocean’s bottom for almost an hour, I sidestepped tidal pools and the occasional scurrying hermit crabs. I just walked and tried not to think, but when I returned to shore, I let God have it!

Sitting in the sand, I complained, wept, and told God how disappointed I was—not so much afraid but not ready to face yet another medical challenge. And as if God didn’t hear me the first time, I cried out again, “Why, God? I’ve worked so hard on this ministry and I finally have everyone in place—even a starting date! Why would you permit something to interfere? Father, you’ve given me a passion to help women who are in the place I used to be. I want them to know you—your love, grace, mercy, faithfulness....” My tears and questions continued until finally I was exhausted and still. It was then God

whispered again, and this was one of his sweetest: *I still walk on water.* Instinctively, I looked out at the bay as if I might see Jesus. I didn’t, but he continued to whisper, *Shirley, whatever waters come your way, I’ll be walking on them with you.* Of course, I did what I do best when God reveals himself in such a unique manner: I wept with tears of joy!

Then I sat in silence, hardly believing what had just happened. Jesus had shown me in a very intimate way how much he loves me and cares about every detail of my life. My situation hadn’t changed, but the frustration was gone. With all of my heart, I knew Jesus was walking with me; and no matter how rough the waters became, he wouldn’t let me sink in self-despair. He was my lifeline! A quote from Donna Wallis describes my experience with Jesus at Breakwater Beach: “Sometimes God calms the storm, and sometimes he lets the storm rage and He calms His child.” I was reluctant to leave, but also eager to reread Matthew 14:28–33:

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

I’ve learned at a deeper level that storms in my life can’t overwhelm me—unless I take my eyes from Jesus. When I focus on him, the waves are calmed by the peace I have in the Lord.

By medical definition, God may not have formed my heart perfectly, but I know the meaning of joy because of a defective heart! I believe that God, who makes no mistakes, made my heart according to his perfect plans for my life. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

We may cry, *Jesus, where are you?* But if we pay close attention and ask our heart questions with sincerity, we won’t miss God’s answers—even his most quiet whispers. Sometimes his answers are immediate and clear, but they often demand the quiet attention of a child focused on the Father.

What do I mean by *hearing God*? Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God!” As I spent time with God, reading his Word and being still before him, I came to the place where I could hear his whispers. Some have questioned my certainty about God speaking to me, but as I’ve heard others say, “I just know it in my knower!” I know God’s Spirit is whispering when suddenly my confusion is replaced with clarity, unrest is transformed into an indescribable peace, I feel compelled to do something I’ve never done before and feel incapable of doing, or when a new thought comes unexpectedly and uninvited—something I know is not mine! Often in quietness, words of instruction or direction are formed in my mind.

Reader, as I type these words, I’m praying for God to reveal himself to you in very special ways. May you also know his indescribable peace. May you also hear his precious whispers. Our amazing God has answers for every situation; sometimes immediate blessings; sometimes we wait for clarity and direction; but we never pass that time alone. When our lives spin out of our control, we can claim God’s promises. Some of my favorites from Isaiah are powerful and

reassuring: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be

burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God” (Isa. 43:1b–3a). God is with us! He’s never left and never will, but we must walk close enough to the Lord to hear even his most quiet whispers. May our questions about where God

is in our confusion and pain be transformed into joy-filled statements of gratitude and a real sense of his indescribable peace as we trust him for each day—no matter what! ✞

**PASCH 2011 Conference**  
**Justice for All: Overcoming Barriers to Peace and Safety in the Christian Home**  
  
May 13–15, 2011  
Columbia Bible College  
Abbotsford (Vancouver) British Columbia, Canada

The Organizing Committee and the Program Committee for the 2011 conference are hard at work planning for an event that will appeal to faith community members, clergy, victim/survivors, advocates, therapists, health-care workers, academics, criminal justice personnel and others working in the field of domestic violence. We met in Vancouver on October 21 and 22 to consult and strategize regarding this conference. At that time we selected our conference theme *Justice for All: Overcoming Barriers to Peace and Safety in the Christian Home*.

Nancy Nason-Clark, PASCH Board member and Program Committee member, was most helpful in offering ideas for innovative plenary sessions, breakout sessions, music and poetry. Barb Fisher-Townsend, Program Committee chair, has been considering constituencies to receive the call for papers, which will be sent out in spring 2010, breakout session themes and possible participants, and keynote speakers for plenary sessions. Both Elsie Goerzen, Organizing Committee member and coordinator of the Mennonite Central Committee’s domestic violence project, and Gwen McVicker, PASCH Board member and Organizing Committee member, are utilizing their many contacts to bring together a coalition of people living and working in the Vancouver area who will assist in the conference development. They brought together a large group of enthusiastic local constituents on November 4 to begin their planning processes.

The conference opens on Friday evening with the prayer session. On Saturday there will be two plenary sessions and a selection of breakout workshops, panels, and presentations. On Sunday morning there will be a plenary session, followed by a worship service and the conference wrap-up at noon.

One new addition to the PASCH conference will be *Talking Circles*, based on specific interests. These are common in indigenous groups and are a gathering of people to discuss points of commonality and/or difference. The idea is to find common ground of shared meanings and experiences in which differences are recognized and respected. The process involves listening and attending to varied viewpoints—leading to productive possibilities for change and perhaps to future conference themes.

While the conference schedule is certainly not finalized, we wish to offer breakout sessions on the following topics:

- Men who have acted abusively and batterer intervention
- The impact of abuse on children
- The broken marriage covenant
- Incest and pornography
- Other issues as appropriate

A Friday pre-conference workshop that will offer CEUs to specific target groups is to be organized. We are excited about this conference and invite feedback about topics, speakers, etc. Please contact the program chair, Barb Fisher-Townsend, at [fisher.townsend@unb.ca](mailto:fisher.townsend@unb.ca).

*Abbotsford is located on the Canada/U.S. border with Washington State about 45 minutes outside Vancouver, BC. The city, located in the heart of the Fraser Valley, has a culturally diverse population of about 145,000. It is also known as “Sport Town Canada” because of its wide-ranging sporting venues and events.*



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