



NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

TRAINING FOR WOMEN LEADERS



A program of activities and teaching to equip Christian women to understand their calling to be leaders

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Please use these extra resources and teaching notes to help you lead the group effectively.

Each note corresponds with a session/activity in the teaching materials.



Thanks to Alison Allen, Amanda Jackson, Lucy Lennard and Trina Simpson for their contributions, and to many others who kindly added their perspectives.

DAY ONE

How do I see myself? How does God see me?

SESSION 2 / ACTIVITY 3: How did Jesus see women?

THE ADULTEROUS WOMAN (John 8:1-11)

Unusually, this woman did not come to Jesus by choice, but rather was brought before him by Pharisees. Having been caught in the act of adultery, she must have been afraid and ashamed. She finds herself in the midst of a crowd with Pharisees trying to get Jesus to condemn her to death. Jesus seems at first almost to ignore her. He is concerned to deal with the situation and with the attitudes of the Pharisees first. His famous challenge in v.7 releases the woman from the apparent death sentence without negating the law. Jesus' first words to the woman herself are in the form of a question, inviting her to lift her head and respond. He could see for himself that everyone had left; he could have skipped straight to the command: "go and sin no more." But instead he encourages the woman to speak, conferring a sense of worth and personhood to her.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (John 4:5-30)

This lady's encounter with Jesus had such an impact on her that within minutes she has gone from going to the well in the midday heat to avoid meeting people to running back into town and telling the men (NASB) what has happened. The very fact that Jesus spoke to her - a woman and a Samaritan - was shocking. John's comment about the disciples' amazement to find Jesus speaking with a woman (v.27) reflects the standard reaction of his culture. Yet Jesus not only speaks to the woman, he begins by asking her for help (v.7). He then hints at who he is and what he is offering (v.10-14). Indeed, to this woman he makes possibly his most direct declaration of who he is (v.26). What impacts her so profoundly, though, is most likely Jesus' intimate knowledge of her life and his willingness to enter into conversation with her in spite of this. We can surmise from her being at the well alone at midday that she has often suffered rejection because of her lifestyle. Jesus knows all about her, yet he still listens to what she has to say and enters into a theological discussion with her. He does not write her off as a person because of her sin. She is so changed by her encounter that she converts many others (v.39).

MARY, JESUS' MOTHER (Luke 2: 41-52; John 2:1-11; John 19:25-27)

We learn a lot about Mary in the gospel accounts of Jesus' conception and birth, but here we want to focus on Jesus' own relationship with her. We see her concerned when Jesus' stays behind at the temple instead of leaving with his relatives. Jesus appears to speak to her abruptly, even disrespectfully. On the other hand, perhaps he is genuinely surprised that she does not understand his priorities. At the wedding at Cana, Mary seems to be pushing him forward, like any mother might! While Jesus clearly isn't too happy about this, he acquiesces and does what she wants. Even on the cross, he is concerned for her and thinking of his responsibilities towards her as the firstborn son. Note that Mary was present in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14); she continued to be among those who believed in him following his death and resurrection.

MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOHN (Matt. 20:20-28)

All the Bible tells us about this mother is her desire for her sons' advancement. She comes to Jesus in a humble attitude, bowing to him, possibly afraid. Jesus asks what she wants. He listens to her. Rather than rebuke her, Jesus asks if they are willing to share in his suffering. We generally imagine him turning from the mother to the sons at this point. But perhaps the question was addressed at all three; after all, the mother too would suffer as she watches what happens to her sons. Jesus then turns the issue into a teaching point for the whole group, rather than focussing on the mother's error in asking such a thing.

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW (Matt. 8:14-15, Mk. 2:29-34, Lk.4:38-41)

The healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law occurs at a very busy period in Jesus' ministry. Jesus must have needed some rest and refreshment. Yet he has compassion and heals her, apparently as soon as he enters the house. We are told that she immediately got up and waited on Jesus and his disciples. This is to emphasise the extent and speed of the miraculous healing, not to suggest that Jesus healed her in order to get his supper served more quickly! There would have been others in the household able to cook and serve a meal. He set her free from illness in order that she could return to her normal way of life. She then had to deal with many others coming to her home seeking Jesus. Having been healed herself, she had the grace to open her home to those in need of healing.

WOMAN WITH BLEEDING (Mt. 9:20-22; Mk.5:25-34; Lk. 8:43-48)

This woman has suffered much not only because of the haemorrhage itself but also because of the medical treatment she has received. She is desperate and has lost faith in both the desire and the ability of people to heal her. When she hears about Jesus, she becomes convinced that he can heal her, but not that he would want to. So she pushes her way through a crowd to get close enough to touch him without having to ask him to touch her. Jesus immediately senses what has happened and stops. He knows that her affliction has already been healed instantly, but he wants to heal her emotionally and psychologically too. Trembling and fearful of rebuke, she confesses in front of everyone. Jesus praises her faith and speaks peace to her. She must have gone away rejoicing not only to be healed but also at his words of affirmation. We do not know what happens in her life following this incident, but we can imagine how different the outcome would have been had she simply crept away with her physical healing.

WIDOW WHOSE SON DIED (Lk.7:11-17)

Jesus saw this lady taking her only son to his grave. He understood not only her grief but also the fact that this death would leave her with no income and no one to care for her. So, completely unbidden, Jesus steps into the situation and brings the son back to life, giving him back to his mother (v.15b).

SINFUL WOMAN (Lk. 7:36-50)

As Jesus reclines at the table, this woman takes up the position and role of a servant. But instead of washing his feet with water, she uses her own tears. She has bought a whole jar of perfume to pour on Jesus' feet in a huge act of blessing. In John's account of the story, Jesus makes it clear that the woman understands that he is going to die soon - in other words, she has insights that the disciples do not have. We are not told the detail of her sin; just that she is a sinner. And we are not told what motivates her to come weeping to Jesus, but we can surmise that he has restored her self-respect, loving her while others judge. Jesus takes this woman to teach the Pharisee an important lesson: it is those who understand the depths of forgiveness who will love deeply. He then goes on to publicly declare that the woman's sins are forgiven, shocking those present, but allowing the woman to walk away with her head held high.

SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN (Mark 7:24-30)

This is a difficult passage as Jesus appears to demonstrate racism and an unwillingness to heal! This seems unlikely to be the motivation for his responses, given his words and actions in other places, but it is hard to say why he treats this particular lady in this way. Yet her faith seems to be unshaken and her response displays intelligence and humility. She is sure not only that he can heal her daughter, but also that her being a gentile will not prevent him. It is clearly the woman's race rather than her gender which makes Jesus appear reluctant to heal. He honours her for her response and heals the daughter in her absence, encouraging us all to continue believing and asking even when our healing seems delayed.

SESSION 4 / ACTIVITY 1: Tricky Bible passages

GENESIS 1-3

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING: Eve is created to be a helper.

So does that mean she is second and less important or lower in hierarchy?

Male and female were created as equal expressions of God's image.

First, man ('adam), a generic term meaning the "human person," is created in God's very own image (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2) - male and female. This equal partnership between man and woman is also present in the retelling of the creation story in Genesis 2. Here the man is found in need of a companion, but none of the creatures God has created qualify (Genesis 2:18–20).

Genesis 2 also indicates that the woman partner with the man will be an appropriate "helper" (Genesis 2:18). The word "helper" ('ezer), when used of a person in the Old Testament, always refers to God (in 29 places) apart from one reference to David. The word "helper," then, is not to be understood as an expression of submission and service to man; rather, the woman as helper serves God with man. The idea is not of a subordinate who carries out menial tasks for the man, but rather that the woman comes alongside the man and they work together.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING: Eve sinned first

The woman and man sin together (Genesis 3:1–7). Although it does not show in English translations, the serpent addresses the woman with the plural "you." Genesis 3:6 states that the woman "gave some [of the fruit] to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." The fact that the man was with her (a phrase sometimes omitted from English translations!) indicates that both partners are together involved in disobedience to God. This is also seen by the fact that it is after both ate that it is said: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened" (Genesis 3:7).

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING: God decreed that man would rule over woman

The statements of judgment for disobedience (Genesis 3:14–19) brought about a supremacy/ subjection relationship between man and woman. The pronouncements God makes after Adam and Eve's sin are more a description of the consequences of sin than a prescription of what must happen. God is not saying that He wants Eve to be subordinate because of her sin, but rather that the subjection of woman will be a natural outworking of the presence of sin in the human race.

SESSION 4 / ACTIVITY 2: Early Church Practices

NOTES ON KEY NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES:

ACTS 1:12-14

1. The women were with the apostles and Jesus' mother and brothers.
2. The women are included with the apostles; other male disciples are not present. There seems to be equality among them.

The men and women were all together. They were praying together.

The women's role does not appear any different from that of the men present. It is Peter who takes a lead (v.15), but the "they" of verses 23-26 includes all those present whether male or female.

It is not clear how many women were present or who they were. Besides Jesus' mother, it seems likely that they included the women who had travelled with Jesus and his disciples. The wives of some of the apostles (1 Cor. 9:5) may also have been present. The apostles themselves are named, while the women are not. However, this emphasises the role or position of the apostles only, not of men in general: v.15 tells us that there were 120 persons present.

ACTS 2:1, 17-18

1. "They" in v.1 includes the women mentioned previously in 1:14. They were included in the outpouring of the Spirit. Joel's prophecy includes sons and daughters, men and women.
2. The filling of the Holy Spirit and His gifts are for all, male and female alike.

The women were again present with the men when the Holy Spirit was poured out. All received the Holy Spirit. Both men and women (of any age) can prophesy and receive dreams and visions.

GAL 3:28

1. In Christ there is neither male nor female – we are all one.
2. This suggests that men and women do not have different roles.

All are heirs of Abraham (v.29) meaning that men and women are included in all the promises made to Israel.

ACTS 16:13-15

1. It was women who gathered to pray. Lydia was a businesswoman who was seeking God. She became a Christian and was baptised, along with her entire household. She then invited Paul and his companions to stay in her home.

It seems that only women had gathered at the place of prayer found by Paul and his teammates. Paul sat down with them and spoke to them about the gospel. Lydia is described as a "worshiper of God" and offered hospitality to Paul and his team.

2. Paul presented the gospel message to her and the other women just as he would have done to a group of men. He was looking for people who worship God rather than a specific gender.

ACTS 18:1-3

1. Priscilla and her husband Aquila had recently come to Corinth where they met Paul. Paul stayed with them and they worked together making tents. Both Aquila and Priscilla were tent-makers. When Paul left Corinth, continuing his missionary journey, they travelled with him.

2. Priscilla and Aquila appear to do the same job and Paul seems to treat them as a unit. The fact that Priscilla's name is given first in verses 18 and 26 may suggest that she was more of a leader or better known to readers of Acts.

They are always mentioned together in Scripture: in verses 1-3 as tent-makers and in their offer to Paul of hospitality. In verse 26 they are working together to teach Apollos.

1 COR. 7:1-5

1. A wife is to fulfil her duty to her husband. She does not have authority over her body, rather her husband does. However, these statements are also reversed.
2. All of Paul's instructions in this passage are mutual.

In these verses Paul is advocating equality within marriage, with mutual consent and mutual giving stressed. Verses 1-2 (like v.7-8) suggest that Paul would rather people remained single like himself, but he emphasises that they should marry and remain faithful in marriage if they are not able to stay single.

There was a great deal of sexual immorality in Corinth, including prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite. What Paul was advocating was radical within the Corinthian culture.

COLOSSIANS 3:18 / EPHESIANS 5:21-33

The first thing to note here is that these passages address the relationship between a husband and wife, not the role and position of women in the church or the world of work more generally. The Ephesians passage is more detailed, so we will focus on it.

In Ephesians 5:21 Paul instructs all Christians to submit to one another. He then goes on to address wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters separately. If we are all to submit to one another, "submission" clearly cannot mean blind obedience and servitude. It would be impossible for us all to be obeying each other. All of us are to submit "out of reverence for Christ."

There were several verbs available to Paul in Greek if he wanted to command wives to obey (see John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women*, p.39), but Paul chooses a word which would not have been used for the obedience required of a slave or a child. He then chooses to use this verb in the "middle voice", essentially appealing to wives to submit voluntarily. Bristow suggests a better translation would be "give allegiance to", "tend to the needs of" or "be responsive to". Such submission on the part of a wife to a husband who loves her "...as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." is not difficult. In fact, it seems the husbands face the greater challenge here.

Ephesians 5:23 states that "the husband is head of the wife". There were two Greek words for "head" available to Paul. The first is "arche", meaning head in the sense of first, both chronologically (like the English prefix in archetype or archaeology) and relating to importance (we still see this in English in words like archangel or archenemy). Paul, however, used the Greek word "kephale", which was used for the head of the body or meaning "foremost" in terms of position: it would be used for the cornerstone, for example. "Kephale" was never used to mean boss or ruler, but was used in the military for the first (the leader) going into battle. It wasn't a military title, just a description of the one who went ahead. So Paul specifically chose the word for "head" which did not mean "ruler". So the husband is to be "head" of the wife not by ruling over her (see Mark 10:42-45), but by loving and serving her, following the example of Christ.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-15

Verses 1-7 talk about prayer, so this is the context in which we are to approach this passage. Verses 8-10 then offer different instructions for men and women. Instead of praying, men are likely to be tempted to use their hands – either to fight or to attempt to fix the situation. So they are encouraged to lift their hands in prayer. Women are likely to be tempted to focus on their appearance, so Paul tells them that their actions are more important than how they look and dress. Verse 9 begins "likewise" or "in the same way". This indicates that Paul's point is that everybody – men and women alike – should be praying.

The admonition to women to dress modestly is particularly significant in Ephesus, where Timothy was leading the church, as the temple of the goddess Artemis dominated the town. The cult of Artemis was associated with immorality and extravagance in dress was associated with the cult.

Moving on to verse 11, we often hear the emphasis placed on "quietness and full submission". Let us note, though, the significance of Paul's saying "A woman should learn..." This would have been completely counter cultural in that society. Paul is saying that a woman can be a disciple and learn!

The word "quietness" in verse 11 is related to the word Paul uses in verse 2 for a "quiet" life, i.e a life characterised by harmony rather than hostility. It is similar to Paul's admonition to the men that they pray "without anger or disputing." In encouraging a woman to learn in quietness and submission, Paul was simply describing the teachable attitude any disciple should have.

It seems likely that the section in which Paul talks about "a woman" rather than "women" is referring to a specific woman who has been teaching heresy. There are a number of similar passages in Paul's letters where he seeks to silence those who teach lies. Paul is not prohibiting godly women from teaching, but rather stopping the influence of a heretic and demanding that she learn instead of teach. The word "profess", used of all women in verse 10, makes it clear that women in general are expected to talk about their faith.

There are a couple of ways of understanding verses 13-14. It is possible that Paul is addressing the content of the heretical woman's teaching, as we know that there were false teachings about creation in Ephesus. Paul says that Eve sinned because she was deceived, not out of disobedience. Adam, who was created first, was responsible for teaching her God's command. Paul may be drawing a parallel between Eve's deception and that of the heretical woman at Ephesus. He is not suggesting here that all women are more easily deceived.

Verse 15a is often taken to suggest that having babies makes women more likely to be saved! Besides being unfair on single women and those unable to conceive, this is clearly unbiblical. We know that we are all saved by grace, men and women alike. In fact this should be translated "the childbearing." Paul is continuing the allusion to Eve, who is told "I will put enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between his offspring and hers; he will crush the serpent's head and the serpent will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This was the first prophecy of Christ's coming and Paul uses it to suggest that the heretical woman can be saved through the Child who was born.

In verse 15b Paul then returns to the plural, to include all women in the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. The four characteristics he mentions – faith, love, holiness and propriety – mirror those set out in 1 Timothy 1:5: "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

SESSION 5 / REFLECTION: Mary and Martha

LUKE 10:28-42

Mary and Martha lived in Bethany together with their brother Lazarus. We will look in more detail at the events surrounding his death and resurrection in a later session. The story we are looking at now takes place earlier. It is a very well-known passage and is usually used by preachers today to show that learning, worshipping and/or spending time with Jesus are more important than practical jobs. Martha tends to be portrayed negatively, while Mary is praised.

At no point are husbands or fathers mentioned in relation to Mary and Martha. It is therefore possible that they were young single women whose father had died, or that they were older widows who had not remarried. Another possibility is that they were members of a sect within Judaism which advocated celibacy. Such a sect is known to have existed in Bethany and to have run there a hospice for the poor.

Martha was almost certainly the elder sister as she is always mentioned first. In Luke 10 it is Martha who is said to have welcomed Jesus into her home. Martha was the head of the household. In fact, her name may be a title as it is the feminine form of an Aramaic word for "lord" or "master."

In Luke 10 Martha is caught up with the work involved in receiving Jesus and his disciples into her home. They were a large group and a meal must be prepared. As the elder sister, Martha shouldered more of the responsibility than her sister. Hospitality was an important duty in the culture of the day, as it remains in many cultures now. What Martha was doing was by no means wrong; it was important that guests were well received.

Where Martha does seem to go wrong is in her attitude. She is angry with her sister for not helping, and not even noticing that her help might be required. Jesus says that Martha is "worried and bothered" (v.41). The responsibility is stressing her. Her role as hostess is important, but she is not able to carry it out joyfully.

Mary, on the other hand, seems blissfully unaware of the many tasks that need doing. She is simply enjoying the moment; enjoying the presence of Jesus and the opportunity to listen to him and learn. We are not told how she responds to Martha's intervention.

Jesus wants Mary and Martha to learn – to sit and reflect, a radical concept for women in that time. So Martha is missing out on the better thing – learning from the master.

DAY THREE

Practical Leadership Skills

SESSION 1 / ACTIVITY 3: Rebekka and Zebedee's wife

GENESIS 27

Rebekka detected her sons' true worth, but went about things the wrong way.

Good communication was blocked to her – her husband was blind physically and emotionally - so she felt powerless and used deception.

She also encouraged her son to use deception.

What could she have done?

1. Pray, hand it over to God.
2. Give evidence for her point of view.

And if we have no power to change things, we can trust God even if we can't trust people!

ZEBEDEE'S WIFE MATTHEW 20

Zebedee's wife wanted the best for her sons – she saw their sacrifices

But she did not have a full understanding of the sacrifices needed to be a leader in God's kingdom. She was acting out of her desire to see her own status increased as well – though we don't know who initiated the plan to approach Jesus, she willingly participated.

Mothers have to see their children truly, and as leaders we have to see our 'children' accurately – with love and insight. She saw her sons' sacrifice in worldly terms and did not stop to see that she was talking to the Son of God who had sacrificed everything!

We need to have a strong personal relationship with Jesus and to keep going back to that to resist feeling resentment when others succeed, to resist wrong ambition, and to let our view of events cloud a much bigger picture.

SESSION 3 / ACTIVITY 1: Sarai and Hagar

GENESIS 16

This is a tragic story of desperation, power and jealousy. First of all, Sarai is desperate to provide her husband with a child and heir. She knows that God has promised him a son, but she has not conceived so she decides to find another way. She encourages Abraham to have sex with Hagar: v.3 says she gave Hagar to him as a wife. Hagar is given no choice in this: she is treated as a piece of property.

When Hagar becomes pregnant, she despises her mistress Sarai who had so long been unable to conceive. It seems a sense of competition arose between the two, with Hagar feeling superior as a woman and Sarai's sorrow at her barrenness being emphasised and goaded.

Sarai, however, remains the mistress. She uses her power to treat Hagar so badly (we are not told details) that Hagar runs away into the wilderness. She must have felt very desperate to do that, risking her own life and that of her unborn child.

The angel tells Hagar to return not only to Sarai's presence but also to her service, submitting to her authority. Hagar is encouraged by the promise that her son will grow up and have many descendants.

We are not told how the relationship between the two women develops as Hagar returns and as her son is born.

Abram's role in the affair is mainly passive. He does not question his wife's suggestion of having a son through Hagar, and acts upon it as instructed. He then encourages Sarai to treat Hagar as she likes, when he sees that Hagar's pregnancy has made Sarai even more unhappy. He does not seek to protect either Hagar or his own unborn child. In verse 15 we see that it is Abram who names the son, but he does so in accordance with the word given by the angel to Hagar. It seems at this point that he has listened both to the Lord and to Hagar, which shows unusual respect for his concubine.

SESSION 4 / ACTIVITY 1: Martha and Mary when their brother dies

When Lazarus becomes ill, Mary and Martha quickly send word to Jesus (v.3). We are told only that they inform Jesus of Lazarus' illness, but their expectation is clearly that Jesus will come quickly and heal their brother.

Before Jesus even reaches the village (v.30), Martha comes to meet him (v.20). Her words are full of faith, believing that Jesus could and would have healed Lazarus: he was both able and willing to heal. She goes on to express a belief that God will always do whatever Jesus asks (v.21). She cannot at this point envisage what Jesus is about to do, so understands his reference to resurrection as speaking of the end times (v.24). She then declares her belief in Jesus as Messiah/Christ (v.27).

She tells Jesus, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." John 11:27

This statement is very similar to Peter's recorded in Matthew 16:15-17.

So Martha's is shown as having the same level of insight as the disciple who is given authority to lead the church. She certainly believes that Jesus can heal her brother but in her grief she wishes Jesus had arrived in time to save him. Jesus takes the time to increase her understanding before he raises Lazarus.

Martha leaves Jesus on the road and goes home to get Mary (v.28). She too declares her belief that Lazarus would have been healed had Jesus been present. She is unable to say much more as she is overcome by grief.

Like her sister, Mary shows insight into the true identity of Jesus when she lovingly anointed him with her expensive perfume in preparation for his death. She surely had some understanding of Jesus' coming suffering (cf. John 12:7). Mary was criticised and misunderstood because of her extravagant act of ministry, but Jesus defended her actions and prophesied, "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her".

Martha, always the more practical of the sisters, is the one who goes to meet Jesus and then brings her sister along too. While she is often portrayed negatively in the church today, the strength and depth of Martha's faith are clearly shown here. Even at a time of such tragedy and grief, she is able to make declarations of faith and trust in Jesus: both in his power and authority as the Christ and also in his love for them and desire for their wellbeing. Even when tested to the utmost, she holds on to her faith in Jesus.

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