

THE OTHER DISCIPLES OF JESUS

Women in the New Testament



UMTATA WOMEN'S THEOLOGY BIBLE STUDY BOOKLET No. 3
Published by the Umtata Women's Theology Group
P.O. Box 65, Umtata 5099, South Africa

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The women of our **logo** represent both our diversity and our unity. The circle represents the circular form in which we meet, but, just as it is incomplete, so is our circle, because we open to having others join us. We are not sitting passively but are actively sharing and educating both ourselves and others. Our enlightenment is evidenced by the sun and its rays.

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The biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Introduction

With booklet 3 we continue our studies of women in the bible, focussing on new testament women. From the testimonies of the women within our own Umtata women's theology group, we believe that these bible studies are meeting a need by providing a forum for discussion. Many women have expressed the release they feel by discussing issues together and exchanging opinions.

We are encouraged that these women's theology bible studies are gaining a wider circulation as people spread the word about them. We the writers have been deeply enriched by our personal study and by the stimulating discussions in our group.

Although entitled "women's theology" booklets, these studies are not only for women. Indeed, we believe that the men and youth groups within the churches can benefit greatly from studying these well-known passages from the perspective of women. May god's word challenge each of us anew!

We encourage you to write to us to convey any criticisms, suggestions or other comments that you might have. Please address your correspondence to

The Editor
Women's Theology Bible Studies
Box 65, Umtata 5099, South Africa

How to Use These Studies

Before the discussion group meets. We hope that all of us using these studies will have our own booklets. This gives us opportunity beforehand to read the suggested Bible passages and the background material and to think about the questions given in each study. Developing our thoughts and questions in an attempt to apply the material to our situations also gives us confidence to make a contribution to the discussion.

When the group meets for discussion. It is helpful to have an alternating leadership. The group can choose someone to lead the first study and someone else to lead the next. The leader has the option of using the discussion questions which are provided and to which the participants have already given thought. However, the group has the freedom to choose which questions or issues they wish to discuss.

We are all learners. When we have opportunity to lead, let us encourage the participation of everyone rather than dominate the discussion ourselves. We hope that each of us feels free to contribute to the discussion, making comments, asking questions or sharing from our experiences while keeping to the point and being sensitive to the views and opinions of others. This is a place where everyone should feel accepted and valued!

In these studies we sometimes ask you to question the traditional, masculine interpretation of the Bible. At the same time, we invite you to question our interpretation. It is our prayer that we all experience freedom as we listen to God's Spirit within us while we search the pages of Scripture.

We hope and pray that you enjoy and benefit from these studies.

We also encourage you to write to us to convey any criticisms, suggestions or other comments that you might have. Please address your correspondence to

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Jesus' Women Disciples



In his day Jesus taught and commissioned the women who followed him. The purpose of this study is to show that women today should also be trained and commissioned for ministry in Jesus' church.

Our Contexts

Before we look at the lives and the times of the New Testament women who were Jesus' disciples, let us think about our own lives and times.

1. Discuss the nature of the meetings that your church holds to set policy or to appoint or elect church officers.
 - Do both men and women attend? Does everyone have a voice?
2. Discuss the roles that women perform in your churches. Do women seem satisfied with these roles? Is anyone calling for change?
3. In many churches a woman has more limited involvement than a man. Discuss the reasons for this.
4. What role(s) seem appropriate to you for women to play in today's church?
5. If your church does not have women actively involved in church activities, what can you do about it?
6. Perhaps we disagree on the role women should play in our churches: Some feel women should not lead; others feel that those so gifted and trained should be given the opportunity.
 - Discuss what we can do when church members hold such widely-differing ideas.

7. What do *you* know about the women who were Jesus' followers?

Bible Study

This study focuses on those women who travelled with Jesus and supported him in his ministry, women who were present with him on the way to and at the cross, and women who were present at the tomb for his burial and after his resurrection. They include Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary (mother of James and Joseph), and Salome (possibly the wife of Zebedee and mother of their sons).

Let us begin by looking at some definitions:

Disciple. The word *disciple* comes from words meaning *to learn*. A disciple is a learner or a pupil, one who follows a given doctrine or teacher.

In the New Testament, *disciple* does not necessarily mean one of the Twelve. The term can be used in three ways: (1) It can indicate a *follower of a great leader* or movement, such as Moses (John 9:28), the Pharisees (Matthew 22:16), John the Baptist (Mark 2:18), and Jesus (Luke 6:13) whose disciples were usually called "his" not "the" disciples. (2) It can refer specifically to *one or more of the Twelve* whom Jesus specifically called (Luke 6:13-16), a use which occurs about twenty times in the gospels (Luke 9:54; John 6:8; 12:4). And (3) it can simply mean a *believer in Christ* (John 6:66-67).

In the early church, *disciple* most commonly referred to believers in Christ. *Disciple* is used over 230 times in the gospels, and about 200 times the reference is either not limited to the Twelve or is not clear whether they or some larger group was meant. When the words ***the disciple*** appear, they are in the gospel of John where he referred to a particular person, or they were used by Jesus in his teachings on discipleship. We conclude that the term *disciple* can include all who followed Jesus in his life and throughout history.

Apostle. *Apostle* comes from words meaning to send off or out, or to be sent by. It is a title referring to a commissioned messenger, ambassador, or delegate. Jesus was sent by God, and he sent out his disciples with his own authority to continue and to extend his mission. We should note that when Jesus chose the Twelve from among his disciples that the biblical texts designate them *apostles* (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:12-16).

Anointing. In biblical times there were two kinds of anointing. The *secular* kind was cosmetic, or medicinal, or for celebration. In *religious* anointing, both objects and people were consecrated by this rite. *Biblical* anointing symbolised the coming of the Holy Spirit upon a priest, monarch, or prophet. In Isaiah 61:1 we read that the Messiah will be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, and in Luke 4:18-19 Jesus affirmed that he was in fact the one to fulfill this prophecy. The anointing of the dead with perfumed oils and ointments was a common practice and had religious significance (Luke 23:55-56).

Let us also note when Peter addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost that he quoted from Joel 2:28-32, saying, “*Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit*” (verse 18 of Acts 2:17-21). The word for *to pour* is the same as in some of the uses of *to anoint*. In the church today the Holy Spirit continues to fill and to minister through *both men and women*.

Women as disciples and apostles

We may wonder whether women were some of Jesus’ disciples and apostles. From the definitions above, we can conclude that they were.

Women were taught by Jesus. Read Luke 8:1-3. Just as the Twelve learned from Jesus in their travels, so would have the women who travelled with them (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3). Also, Jesus commended Mary for sitting *at the Lord’s feet* (Luke 10:39), the term being a rabbinical phrase meaning to study with that person.

Women were there at most of the crucial times in Jesus' life. Read Mark 15:40-41. They supported him by their presence, vigil, and mourning. After the burial, they returned to place spices on Jesus' body.

Women were the first to witness, believe, and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected. Read Luke 23:54-24:12. Each gospel writer places the women at the tomb first on that Sunday morning. There they heard that Jesus was alive. There is evidence that they believed. Mark reported that they were afraid and told no one; the other gospel writers reported that they told the men, but the men did not believe them. However, Peter and John were curious enough to investigate for themselves.

The women were sent by an angel and by Jesus himself to tell "my brothers" Read Matthew 28:5-10. The women's witness was not believed. This probably is not surprising, considering that the Law did not permit women to serve as witnesses. Let us note, however, that Jesus went beyond the Law and sent out women as his first witnesses. His commission that day made them apostles—sent ones. For two thousand years this fact has been totally ignored. It is revolutionising to think of women, always second-class citizens, as being the first to witness the resurrection and the first sent to tell of the resurrected Christ!

We are well aware, however, that women were not among the Twelve. We do not know the reasons for this, but we can suggest some possibilities related to the context of the first century. As we have shown in *Women, the Bible and the Contemporary Church*, Jesus had already gone against many of the customs and attitudes of his day with regard to women. As a result of his association with various "outcast" people or second class citizens, he was often criticized for mixing with disreputable people. The rabbis of his day did not allow women to be part of their disciples, not even in the wider circle of followers. Jesus, however, had close relationships with several women and, as we have seen, included them among his followers. Perhaps including women among the Twelve would have made his ministry impossible in that context.

Women as students and intellectuals

Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:39) both *sat* and *listened* at Jesus' feet. The phrase *sat at his feet* was the term used to study with that person; *listened* emphasises the fact of one's acting like a disciple of a teacher or rabbi. Martha's complaint to Jesus about Mary may have indicated her feeling that Mary should not try to be scholarly.

However, Jesus responded by refusing to force on all women the role of housekeeper. He respected Mary's intellect, encouraged her to think, and permitted her to set her own priorities. He said that she had chosen the better part, and it would not be taken from her.

When we remember the Law's restrictions on women studying Scripture under rabbis, we are aware of the liberating effect of Jesus' words and actions. Jesus' insistence that women be taught and encouraged to think encourages modern women to develop and use their intellectual abilities.

Women as individuals

John's account of the reactions of Martha and Mary to the death of their brother Lazarus, and Jesus' differing responses to them, further reinforces the personhood, the individuality, and the deep spiritual understanding of women. Jesus met Martha and Mary separately that day, but each commented to him, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died*" (John 11:21, 32).

Martha met him outside, on the way to her home, and ended her comment by adding, "*But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.*" Jesus responded by carrying on a deep theological discussion with her about the resurrection. She concluded with a decisive profession of faith, "*I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world*" (John 11:27). Whereas Peter's confession of faith (Matthew 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; John 6:69) is well known and often repeated, Martha's similar confession has gone unnoticed.

Martha seems to have been a logical person, outward looking, someone who saw what needed to be done and did it. Since the death of Lazarus she had probably been seeing to the needs of other

people. She was also able to express profound spiritual insights, “*You are the Messiah*” (11:27). Jesus responded to Martha on an intellectual level. He accepted her where she was, with her lack of a full spiritual understanding, and he gave her new insights.

Mary, however, had been inside the house, sitting with people who had come to comfort her. She came out to meet Jesus, also saying to him, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” Jesus responded to Mary by weeping with her.

We noted that Jesus encouraged Mary to think and to grow intellectually. She seems to have been more emotional and more inward looking than her sister. She was crying because Lazarus had died. She needed the support and the companionship of those who came to console her, and Jesus met her on that level.

A woman as an anointer

We have seen that one significance of anointing was a recognition of a person as a prophet, priest, or monarch. The gospel record shows no man anointing Jesus. Jesus the Messiah was anointed by a woman.

In two of the gospel accounts (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9), a woman anointed Jesus’ head. It is unclear whether she is Mary of Bethany who in John 12:1-8 anointed Jesus’ feet. In the fourth account (Luke 7:37-50) a *woman who was a sinner* anointed Jesus’ feet with ointment after wetting them with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and kissing them. This woman probably was not the same woman as in the other accounts. She was a sinful woman, and Jesus responded differently.

Mary, as one who was intensely interested in Jesus’ teaching and who felt the loss of her brother deeply, seems, like Martha, to have shown profound insight into Jesus’ true identity. Perhaps less articulate than Martha, she chose to express her faith by an act—by anointing his feet with costly perfume. To Jesus this was a preparation for his burial. For Mary this act may have been an equivalent of Martha’s declaration, “*You are the Messiah.*”

A woman as a leader

Another of Jesus' women disciples was Mary Magdalene. She was from the town of Magdala in Galilee. Although we are told that Jesus had cast demons from her (Luke 8:2), it does not seem likely that she was the one known as the sinful woman of Luke 7:37. However, even if she were, Jesus' power could have transformed her life.

Mary Magdalene is named in all four of the gospels and appears in twelve references. Except for the Luke 8 passage where she accompanied Jesus and contributed to his support, all are in connection with her being at the crucifixion, observing his burial, or seeing the empty tomb and the risen Lord. The lists are presented by four different gospel writers, each list being different but placing Mary Magdalene first or alone, except for John 19:25 which focuses on Mary mother of Jesus.

It was widely held in the early church that because Jesus appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene she held a place of honour among the early Christians. She was sent by Jesus to witness to the male apostles (John 20:17), so on her, as on Jesus' mother, was bestowed special honour.

Mary Magdalene must have loved Jesus dearly, and his special attention to her showed that he loved her and accepted her as a disciple.

1. With which woman here, Mary, Martha or Mary Magdalene, do you most closely identify? Why?
2. Have you thought of these women as apostles and anointers? as scholarly and articulate? as spiritual and gifted leaders?
3. How significant do you consider the anointing act?

Some Modern Implications

In our contexts, women are given greater freedom, and yet our churches often hold women back, claiming both biblical and cultural reasons. This is contrary to the actions of Jesus who went far beyond the culture and the scriptural understanding of his day in encouraging women to move beyond their traditional roles and be further educated, listened to, given responsibility, and allowed to minister to the needs of people. If for the last twenty centuries our churches had been as bold and innovative as Jesus, women would not have been oppressed for so long in both church and society.

- ◆ Jesus' attitudes of acceptance of, interest in, and concern for women are not the features of the male-centred churches of today.
- ◆ Women have shown courage and willingness to bear the cross, to sacrifice, and to be servants, which is the essence of leadership; yet they are denied leadership.
- ◆ Women's loyalty to Jesus then, as now, is obvious. Yet women are treated as not being sufficiently responsible (response-able) to lead churches or to be office-bearers. Ironically, without the participation and support of women, the church would long ago have collapsed.
- ◆ If churches deny women positions of leadership on the grounds that the Twelve were men and not women, they must also be sure to select *Jewish* men for their leaders.
- ◆ In South Africa and elsewhere, women are not encouraged to be theologically educated. The level and social function of women's groups within churches are such that women are not given the tools/skills/learning to make significant contributions. They are kept busy at some other activity while the men are making decisions. When given opportunity to interact, they often lack the confidence to be full participants.

- ◆ Although some of us are content continuing only as servants in our churches, others of us sense God's call to learn and to lead as well as to serve and to follow.

Some Further Discussion Questions

1. How can women overcome the present restrictions and break into existing structures?
 - What further response do you have to the implications above?
2. The Twelve did not believe the testimony of the women that Jesus really had arisen. Luke 24:11 says that the women's words *seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them*.
 - In what ways are we as modern women brushed aside because of our insignificant ideas or "idle tales"? How do we respond? How can we change these stereotypes of women?
3. Women supported Jesus' ministry and accompanied him in his travels. When God calls *us* to full-time ministry or to involvement in the church, how do we also manage our homes and families?
 - Do men experience this same conflict? Explain.
4. We see that Jesus affirmed persons in their quest for theological understanding. This was totally against the culture of that day. Even Martha as another woman could not understand Mary's total absorption with the teachings of Jesus.
 - What obstacles do modern women face who wish to study theology, preach, and give pastoral care?
5. Because there were no women included among the Twelve, many think that this is a God-given reason for **not** ordaining women as ministers or priests today. Share your views.

6. Mary Magdalene seems to have played a leading role amongst the women disciples. In today's churches there also are women with leadership gifts.
 - Relate again how leaders are selected in your church. To whom are they accountable? If you want to make changes, how do you go about it?

7. Martha is often portrayed as being critical of Mary for not sharing in the household chores. Perhaps Martha too wished to learn from Jesus, but, if she had, the mundane tasks of preparing food would have been neglected.
 - What similar situations arise in our modern contexts where women are confined to the kitchen or the creche while men discuss and make decisions affecting the life of the whole church?

8. How can we change the situation so that women are involved in decision making, and men are given more opportunity and encouragement to serve both at home and in the church?

The Samaritan Woman

2

The purpose of this study is to learn from Jesus ways of relating to people—people perhaps whom we do not like and people who may be the outcasts of society.

Our Contexts

1. Are there people in your community who are looked down upon or rejected in some way? Name as many groups as you can.
 - Why are they despised?
2. Are attempts being made to change attitudes toward these groups? If so, what attempts are being made, and by whom?
3. How do you regard persons whose beliefs and lifestyles are more liberal, or more conservative, than yours?—with understanding? tolerance? contempt?
4. Are you involved in some way with anyone who might be considered a social outcast?
 - Do you think of them individually, or as a group?
 - Speculate what Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman might have to teach us.

Introduction

During his ministry Jesus met many women whose names we do not know. Some are identified by the places where they lived or by their ethnic origin. Others are known by their relationship to a certain man or by their lifestyles. Some were healed or forgiven or taught by Jesus. Others gave him hospitality and showed their love for him in a variety of ways. With some women Jesus carried on deep

theological conversations. One of these was a woman of Samaria, the subject of this study.

Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom and the territory surrounding it (see map on the next page). On the way to Galilee Jesus went through Samaria which was the shortest route joining Judea and Galilee. Some biblical scholars think that this route was rarely used by the Jews because they wanted to avoid contact with the Samaritans. The wording that Jesus *had to go through Samaria* in verse 4 indicates a kind of urgency to use this route.

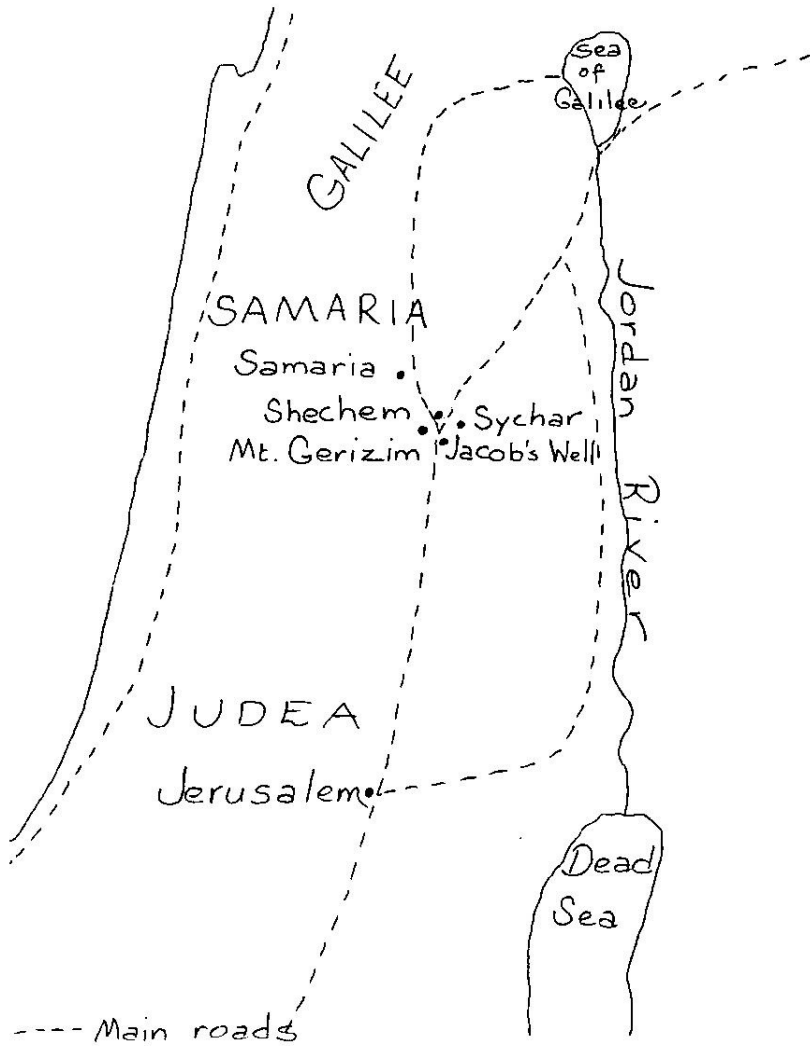
The Samaritans were the inhabitants of Samaria. They had a long history of severe persecution, invasions and destruction of their cities. In 722 B.C. five different nationalities of colonists were brought into their area. They later intermarried and were no longer considered a “pure race” or an independent nation. However, they continue to exist as a minority people in modern day Israel and the Palestinian West Bank.

Mount Gerizim was mentioned by the woman as the place where the Samaritans worshipped. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when the exiles returned to Jerusalem, the Samaritans offered to help rebuild the Temple. When they were contemptuously refused, they turned bitterly against the Jerusalem Jews and built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim about 450 B.C. It was later burned by the Jews, rebuilt, and finally destroyed in 484 A.D. for political reasons. Even today the Samaritans ascend this mountain to keep the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

Sychar was a city in Samaria. Just before reaching Sychar the road forked, and at this fork was a well, known as Jacob’s Well.

Jacob’s well was 100 feet deep and inherited by the descendants of Joseph (Gen 48:22; Josh 24:32). The well was located about two miles from Shechem, now called Nablus. It was well dug, lined, and the top had a stony surrounding.

Map of Palestine in New Testament times



Bible Study

Read John 4:1-42

Jesus broke down barriers between Jews and Samaritans and between men and women in this story. The Jews called the Samaritans “the foolish people who live in Shechem.” Samaritans were despised (1) because of their view of Scripture, (2) because they were a “mixed race”, and (3) because of their historical animosity toward Jews.

With Jesus’ simple request for a drink of water he broke two strongly-ingrained cultural taboos. A man, especially a rabbi, would not speak with a woman in public, and a Jew would not share a drinking vessel with a Samaritan. Jews believed that a Samaritan woman would continually menstruate from childhood. So not only would her drinking vessel be unclean because she was a non-Jew but also because of the Jewish law regarding menstruation (Leviticus 15:19-28). When people travelled they usually carried their own buckets made from the skins of animals so that they could fetch water from any well without contamination. The woman was surprised when Jesus asked for a drink from her, a Samaritan. The disciples were astonished to see Jesus speaking with a woman.

Jesus took the initiative in this encounter, breaking down three barriers: (1) between men and women, (2) between different cultures/races, and (3) between different religious beliefs.

The Samaritan woman’s questions and discussion lead us and all of John’s readers on a discovery of who Jesus is. In John’s gospel the first time Jesus revealed himself as a Messiah was to this woman of Samaria. In this story John made use of a woman’s growing theological insight to further the purpose of his writing the gospel (John 20:31).

The woman first recognised Jesus as a *Jew*, perhaps by his dress or speech. When Jesus referred to his own special identity and abilities she addressed him as “*Sir*,” a more respectful term. When Jesus

revealed his knowledge of her personal life she perceived that he was a “*prophet*,” and she began to talk about their different beliefs. As Jesus went on to explain that true worship was not that of a place but rather of spirit and of truth, she recognised him as a special person, one who might even be acknowledged by the Samaritans as the *Messiah*, the *Christ*. At this point Jesus knew the woman’s secret and she knew his. She went off to share her good news. When the Samaritans returned and heard Jesus for themselves, they were convinced that he was the “*Saviour of the world*.”

In this passage, Jesus also speaks of himself as living water.

Living water is a familiar symbol in the Bible. The Jews often spoke of quenching the thirst of the soul for God with living water (Jer 2:13). Living water was flowing and could be used for ritual purification. It was connected with the wisdom of the law, eternal life and at times as the Holy Spirit of God. When Jesus went on to claim that he could give her water which would banish her thirst forever he was claiming to be the Messiah (Is 49:10).

The woman’s response “*give me this water so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water*” (vs. 15) has been described as total ignorance, or as a way of ending a conversation which was getting too deep for her. In reality, it is similar to the questions of both Nicodemus and Jesus’ disciples. Nicodemus asked, “*But how can someone be born when he is old? . . . Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?*” (John 3:4). Jesus’ disciples asked, “*Surely no one has brought him something to eat?*” (John 4:33). They did not understand Jesus’ real meaning. Perhaps this was a tool used by the writer of the gospel to highlight the difficulty a variety of people had in understanding Jesus and the true meaning of his teachings.

The historical conflict between Samaritans and Jews over the ‘proper’ place to worship God provides Jesus with an opportunity to teach about what true worship entails. The woman was shown that the *place* of worship was unimportant. Worship has more to do with one’s inner life, and with one’s

willingness to follow God in obedient discipleship and service in one's daily life.

Finally, the woman becomes an evangelist, sharing the Good News of Jesus with her community. In the gospels the despised Samaritans were often portrayed as being closer to understanding the truth than were the Jews. In Luke 10:33-37 the "good" Samaritan, in contrast to the priest and the Levite, was an example of love of one's neighbour. On another occasion the only leper who returned to thank Jesus for healing was a Samaritan (Luke 17:16). In the account of the Samaritan woman, the Samaritans were portrayed as the ones ready to receive the Good News and who believed because of the testimony of the woman.

The word "*evangelist*" means "one who announces news." The woman was an evangelist. She was bearing witness to Jesus through her preaching, bringing others to believe in him through her word. We also note the confidence of the Samaritans as they saw themselves being incorporated into the new community of the people of God, though they were so despised by the Jews.

It is generally accepted that the Samaritan woman was an immoral person. This is based partly upon Jesus' statement "*[Y]ou have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband*" (verse 18). From this, many believe that the woman had been divorced five times. A woman would have had great difficulty in divorcing her husband even once, but perhaps her five husbands had each divorced her. Most people assume that the woman's present marital situation was cohabitation, or what is known as a "live-in."

The fact is that the biblical passage does not indicate whether this Samaritan woman was moral or immoral; Jesus did not judge her moral character. His tone of voice may have shown deep compassion and concern rather than condemnation. He made no statement about adultery or forgiveness. This woman of Samaria may have been a victim of circumstances beyond her control rather than an immoral woman.

1. Perhaps she was barren and five husbands had divorced her.
2. Perhaps her husband had died and she had been handed from brother to brother following the levirate custom. The Jewish Law provided that if a man died having no children, his brother should marry the widow. (“Levirate” comes from “levir,” meaning “a husband’s brother.” See Deuteronomy 25:5-10.) Perhaps the last male in the family line had refused to marry her.
3. Perhaps she was now living with a sick male relative. Perhaps she was at the well at noon because she had gone to the fields early and had to return to care for an invalid at home. This would explain why she was not at the well in the early morning or evening, like the other women would have been.

There are many possible reasons for this woman's situation to be as it was. Furthermore, the response of the Samaritans to the woman's invitation was immediate. It is hard to believe that they would have responded so quickly had she had such a questionable reputation.

We suggest it possible that this woman of Samaria was a hard-working, caring person, who was already a respected leader in this Samaritan town.

1. Why do you think Jesus treated this woman so differently from the way other men of his day treated women?
2. Some people think that the woman was unable to understand Jesus' true message so changed the subject. How sincere and intellectually capable does she seem to you?
3. How do you understand her request for living water (vs. 15)?
4. What new insights did you gain in reading the story of the woman of Samaria?

5. Why do you think she and so many other women in the Bible are not named?

Although they will not be included in this study, you may wish to read about these other nameless women in the gospels:

- ◆ The bleeding woman (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48)
- ◆ The adulterous woman (John 8:1-11)
- ◆ The sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50)
- ◆ The Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28)
- ◆ The bent-over woman (Luke 13:10-17)
- ◆ The generous woman (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4)
- ◆ The widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
- ◆ Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39)
- ◆ The maids at Peter's denial (Matthew 26:69-71; Mark 14:66-69; Luke 22:56-59; John 18:16-18)
- ◆ Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19)
- ◆ Jesus' sisters (Matthew 13:55-56; Mark 6:3)
- ◆ Mother of James and John, wife of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20-23; Mark 10:35-40)

Water of Life

New words and adaptation of
John 4:7-26 by John Ylvisaker

Traditional music
Arr. by John Ylvisaker



- 1 A _____ wom - an of Sa - mar - ia came to where the
- 2 _____ "If you knew who speaks to you a _____
- 3 The Sa - mar - i - tan wom - an want - ed this _____
- 4 _____ Fin - al - ly Je - sus told _____ her ' ev - 'ry.
- 5 She _____ drop - ped her jar and ve - ry quick - ly _____



well of Ja - cob lies. Je sus _____ said, "Give
Man, who is a Jew, you'd ask Him _____ for the
wa - ter, don't you see? But Je - sus _____ ask - ed her,
thing that she had done. And the Sa - mar - i - tan
ran to tell the town. You know that _____ man - y Sa -



Me a drink!" and the wom - an was sur - prised!
wa - ter of life, and He'd give it un - to you."
"Won't you please bring your hus - band un - to Me?"
wom - an knew that the Pro - phet now had come.
mar - i - tans be - lieved what she had found.



They who drink of the wa - ter of life,
They who drink of the wa - ter of life will nev - er thirst a - gain.



They will nev - er thirst a - gain.
They who drink of the wa - ter of life will nev - er thirst a - gain.

This is a very simple, repetitive tune which should invite lots of improvisation and harmonization. One way to sing the song is to have a leader sing the first line and have the audience sing it back with harmony. It's called "lining out" the tune, a style of singing we seldom use, since we always seem to have printed lyrics in front of us.

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Some Further Questions

1. This story is a very familiar one. We have questioned some commonly-held views about the woman of Samaria. What new insights have you gained? With what do you agree or disagree?
 - Do you think her neighbours would have been convinced by someone they considered immoral?

2. Jesus *asked* for a drink from a woman and from her drinking vessel, both of which were considered unclean by the Jews. For us today eating and drinking together at the same table signifies true equality and acceptance.
 - Who are the people in our communities with whom it would be difficult to share a common cup or eat from the same plate? How can we break down this barrier?

3. The Samaritans were looked down upon because they were seen as a racially-mixed group, and because their religion was considered untrue. What modern examples are there of people looking down on others' race? their religion?
 - What is the role of our churches among people with different religious and political beliefs?

4. What can the church learn from Jesus' actions in this passage about how to relate to women? What can women learn from this passage with regard to the way they treat other people?

5. We have challenged the view that the Samaritan woman was immoral. Regardless of her status, Jesus accepted her as she was, knowing everything about her. Throughout history immoral women or prostitutes have been looked down upon by society in general and yet sought after and used by men. Jesus associated with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34), and he called for equal accountability from men and women (John 8:7).
 - At the beginning of this study we discussed the reasons that women become prostitutes. What are our attitudes toward prostitutes and immoral women? How can our churches be involved in helping rather than condemning them?

Women in the New Testament Churches

3

The purpose of this study is to understand the roles and influence that women had in the early church and why their involvement eventually lessened, and then to consider what our response and involvement ought to be.

Our Contexts

1. Women have long been going to other countries as missionaries. Women are frequently *missionaries* but less frequently members of the mission boards which send them. What is probably the reason? What do you think about this?
2. Women missionaries probably outnumber male missionaries. Do you find this unusual? How do you explain it?
3. Some churches have women as their leading ministers. Do you know of any? If so, what is your impression of this?
4. Give examples of prayers, hymns and Bible verses that refer to “men,” “brothers” and “sons” rather than to “people,” “siblings” and “children.”
5. We have both wealthy people and poor people in our churches. How do we regard each? What do we expect of each?
6. When you think about the epistles (the letters of Paul and Peter and others in the last half of the New Testament), what women come to your mind? What did they do?

Introduction

When we read about women in the gospels earlier in this booklet, we observed that there are sizeable sections in the gospels referring to women as disciples or students of Jesus. There are also several stories about specific women. However, this is not so in the remainder of the New Testament.

The Acts of the Apostles is an early account of the formation and development of the early Christian community and how it spread from Palestine to Rome, the capital of the world at that time. The book of Acts covers the first 30 years after Jesus' death, and was probably written 65-75 A D, at the same time as the earliest of the gospel writings, that of Mark.

The letters, or epistles, were written to churches and to individuals and dealt with situations and problems which were specific to those people or communities. Those which were definitely written by Paul are the earliest Christian writings, being written *before* the gospels, about 50-60 A D.

The New Testament writings are windows that enable us to learn about the development of the early church and the role of women within it. We can also see that the roles of teachers and ministers in the church were beginning to change. At first *anyone adequately equipped* could teach and minister. Eventually ministry in the church became a *specialised church leadership* based on sex and age, as in 1 Timothy, chapters 2 and 5.

- What do you think might be the reasons that fewer women are mentioned in the epistles than in the gospels?

Bible Study

What seems significant about each woman appearing here?

The role of women in the early church

There is no doubt that women made significant contributions within the early church. Throughout the New Testament, references are made to specific women and to women in general who ministered in some way. However, the actual contributions they made are mostly unknown because we have so few sources, and those sources are male centred. Women were likely not involved in writing the New Testament books, so the viewpoint emerging favoured men rather than women. This should not be taken to mean that the few women whose stories have survived and appear in the record were extraordinary; rather they were representative of the host of Christian women at ministry in leadership roles in the early church. Those who appeared were probably the “tip of the iceberg.”

Women as early converts to the faith

The book of Acts records women *and* men as early converts to Christianity. Women were among those receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (1:12-2:4; 2:38-40) and are mentioned among the first converts to Christianity (5:14). Some of those becoming Christians were upper-class Greek women (17:4,12,34). Women were also among those persecuted by Saul (Paul) before his conversion (8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5), and after his conversion he preached as readily to women as to men (16:13). Also, women were among those who opposed his ministry in Antioch in Pisidia (13:50). Women thus played a key role in these developments in the early church.

Read Acts 16:11-15

Women as wealthy and influential supporters of the church

Lydia is well-known in Acts as the first convert to Christianity in Europe. She was a businesswoman in

Philippi and a supporter of Paul's ministry. In the neighbouring cities

of Thessalonica and Berea there were also **other women**, who are mentioned in Acts as “prominent” women of the day (17:4,12,34).

Lydia herself came from Thyatira in Asia Minor. She was a salesperson of purple-dyed goods, which were luxury items. She brought her goods from Thyatira to sell in Philippi. She may have been quite wealthy, as considerable capital was needed to operate her business.

Paul and his companions were at Philippi looking for a place to pray at the riverside, and they talked with the women they found gathered there, including Lydia (16:13-15). She responded to Paul’s message, and she and her household were baptised. Thereafter she invited Paul and his party to stay at her house. Her hospitality made it possible for Paul to minister in Philippi without having to provide for his own living as he did elsewhere. Nowhere else did he allow the church to support him. It is also interesting to note that Paul himself did not mention Lydia in his writings.

Read Acts 18:18-26
Women as leaders of house churches

Occasionally New Testament references are made to someone “*and the church in your/his/her/their*

house.” As there were no “church halls” at that time, people met in each other’s houses. These “house churches” were the Christian churches of that time. In these house churches the Christians preached the word, worshipped, and celebrated the Lord’s supper. House churches seem to have been provided by the more affluent converts who had the space and the financial means to share with the others in the Christian community. As we have noted, wealthy and prominent women were among the early converts. They played significant roles in establishing and leading house churches.

We have already seen that in Philippi Lydia opened her home to Paul and his companions. In Laodicea, **Nympha** had a church *in her house* (Colossians 4:15). The house church in the home of **Apphia**

(Philemon 2) may have been in Laodicea or in Colossae. In Jerusalem, **Mary**, the mother of John Mark, owned a house where the early church met (Acts 12:12). Probably the couple about whom we have the most information is **Priscilla** (or Prisca) and Aquila who had a house church in their home, first in Corinth, and later in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-26; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5). In addition, there were household conversions and house churches named after men in which women participated (Acts 10:1-49; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Social and religious clubs were popular those days. Club membership usually ranged between three and fifty. Some clubs were restricted to a specific group of people: those of a certain ethnic group; people of high status; lower-class people; or women only. Other clubs had fewer membership restrictions. Sometimes a wealthy woman joined a club to become its “founder” or “patron.” She donated funds for a specific cause and in return expected recognition. The house churches resembled these clubs in many respects but generally had more open policies than did the clubs. A rich convert may have thought of himself/herself as joining a club and expecting to be its patron, and he or she would, in fact, have had more influence in dealing with governments and courts. However, the Christian community tried not to give its rich members special honour. (See James 2:1-4.)

As the house church movement spread, several house churches could come together as “the church” of a city like Corinth. Perhaps it was this diversity of house churches that was the basis for the many dissensions which occur in the epistles.

In our contexts today, the “house church” movement is experiencing a revival. In some of the established churches (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian) and in the African Independent Churches, many people meet part of the time or all of the time in “house churches.”

Read Romans 16:1-16
Women as church workers

Women were active in the early church. In *Women, the Bible*

and the Contemporary Church we presented some of them as New Testament examples of the ministry of women in the early church. We refer to them again here as well as to list others.

- **Missionaries and evangelists.** The Christian movement, like Judaism, was spread by travelling missionaries and business people who relied on the hospitality and support of house churches. Just as Jesus sent out people two by two, so also the Christian missionary movement spread. It is likely that the missionary partners were *at first couples*, like **Priscilla and Aquila**, and **Andronicus and Junia** (Romans 16:7) who had become Christians before Paul, and who had worked together and shared imprisonment with him. Paul also mentioned **Philologus and Julia** and **Nereus and “his sister”** (Romans 16:15) who may have been missionary couples like Priscilla and Aquila. The title given to the woman (whether Priscilla or Junia or Julia) is not that of a wife but a title indicating her partnership in the gospel. Just as “brother” is used to indicate the member of a particular group, so the term *sister* can be understood *co-worker*.

We are told that Priscilla and Aquila were living in Corinth when Paul arrived there on his first visit. He was a tentmaker as were they, and he lived with them and worked with them, and they participated with him in evangelism. When Paul left for Ephesus, they travelled with him. Later Paul went on to Jerusalem, but they remained, building the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:1ff).

- **Workers and Co-Workers with Paul.** House churches continued well into the third century. The list of people to whom Paul sent greetings in Romans 16 includes ten women. Among others, Paul commended **Mary**, **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, and **Persis** for having worked hard. There is evidence that women worked with Paul on an equal basis. For instance, he says of **Euodia** and **Syntyche** that they worked side by side with him (Philippians 4:2-3). The word Paul used regarding their work alongside him is so

strong that it cannot mean simply providing food and shelter for him and the other men; it involved preaching and teaching and spreading the gospel, just as Paul and Clement were doing. Obviously, the influence of Euodia and Syntyche on the Philippian church was so great that their dissension could bring great harm to the Christian cause. He asked them by name to settle their differences, reminding them of their partnership and their commitment.

- **Teachers.** It was while **Priscilla** and Aquila were in Ephesus that they came into contact with Apollos, a brilliant, eloquent man from Alexandria. Priscilla seems to have been the main one to teach him *the way of God to him more accurately* (Acts 18:26), since she is named before her husband, as she also is in Romans 16:3 and 2 Timothy 4:19. Usually a wife's name came after her husband's, if at all.
- **Deacons.** The term *deacon* is equivalent to *servant*. We read in Acts 6-8 of the institution of the office, and the functions performed by the seven men who were chosen. The functions included solving the problem of the widows (6:1), serving at table (6:2-3), and preaching and leading, e.g., Stephen (6:5,8-7:60), and Philip (6:5, 8:5-6,26-40).

Women as well as men served in the early church in the ordained office of deacon. In 1 Timothy 3:1-11 the characteristics necessary for bishops, deacons, and women deacons are listed. The Greek word for "deacon" must be translated in the same way whether it refers to a woman or a man.

Phoebe was probably a wealthy woman, perhaps a widow, who was important in the church at Cenchrea, the seaport of Corinth. She was the only person in Paul's writings to receive an official letter of recommendation, and she heads the list of those having received greetings in Romans 16 where Paul gave her three titles: sister, deacon, and benefactor or patron. She received these titles because her service and office were

influential in the community. However, these titles are generally down-played and left unacknowledged, probably because she was a woman. When a man was involved, the term “*deacon*” was used, but in Phoebe’s case the word for “*deacon*” is usually translated “*deaconess*,” “*servant*” or “*helper*.” Biblical commentators have tended to give to her the duties of deaconess that appeared in later centuries rather than to present her as a church leader. Let us note, however, that the New Revised Standard Version does reflect her true position by its reading “*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae*” (Romans 16:1). Because “*deacon*” was used of a person entrusted with preaching and tending churches, Phoebe may have been regarded as an official teacher and missionary in the church of Cenchrea. Phoebe and Paul seem to have had a patron-client relationship, with Phoebe the patron. The particular word used in Romans 16:2 has been translated “*has been a great help*.” In the literature of that day it meant patron or benefactor.

- **Prophets.** *Mary*, Jesus’ mother, and *Elizabeth*, her relative, both made prophetic proclamations (Luke 1:42-55). *Anna* was a prophetess who lived in the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Philip the evangelist had **four daughters** who prophesied (Acts 21:7-9).
- **Widows.** Widows in the New Testament were not only objects of charity; they also formed one of the earliest “orders” of women in the church. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10 a distinction seems to be made between women whose husbands were dead and who needed support, and the “order” of widows who devoted their lives to serving the Christian community and in turn were supported by it. In the story of *Tabitha*, or Dorcas (Acts 9:36ff), it is apparent that the widows were banded together under their leader Tabitha, and that a distinction was made between widows and other believers (v. 41).

1. What particularly impressed you about these New Testament women and their roles?
2. What scope of ministry did early church women seem to have?
3. Describe the growth of the church as you understand it here.

Problems Encountered in This Study

Andocentric (male-centred) language

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and only later translated into other languages. In both New Testament Greek and English, certain words (such as “*the saints*,” “*the elect*,” “*brothers*,” and “*sons*”) are masculine, whereas, in fact, they include both men and women. Although grammatically they are masculine words, their meaning includes both male and female church members. However, when scholars discuss leadership titles (such as “*apostle*,” “*prophet*,” “*teacher*,” and “*deacon*”), they assume that these terms apply only to men despite clear instances in the New Testament where such grammatically masculine titles applied to women also. We noted this above in reference to Phoebe.

Bible commentators seem to take for granted that the leadership of the early church was in the hands of men, thus assuming that those women mentioned in Paul’s writings were the helpmates and assistants of the apostles, especially of Paul. However, texts like Romans 16:1-3,7 suggest that leading women in the early church did not owe their positions to Paul and that he worked alongside them and acknowledged their authority.

Also, as we noted earlier in this study, the women whose stories appear should be thought of as representative of other women leaders whose names may not be mentioned. However, probably a woman was mentioned specifically because the writers considered her exceptional *or* because her actions created problems. Consequently, normally women were seldom mentioned.

Cultural assumptions that women could not be leaders of men

Jesus taught an upside-down gospel where the greatest should be the servant of all. Also, his dealings with women and Samaritans and other “lowly” people showed the equality with which he regarded all people.

With Jesus’ example and teachings, and with the message of the apostles (such as Paul’s emphasis in Galatians 3:28), it should have been obvious that men, women, Gentiles, and even slaves such as Onesimus (Philemon 10) were to be regarded as equals who would receive spiritual gifts to be used in the community of faith. There *are* indications in the earliest Christian communities, like that of Corinth, that leadership was decided by the discernment of gifts.

Long-standing cultural customs of male domination, however, seemed to stifle the call to equality, and in the pastoral epistles we note a movement away from shared leadership toward leadership based on age, sex and social status. (See 1 Timothy 5.) In the Apocryphal books and other works written about the same time as the epistles, we discover a trend toward male control of the church, with women being allowed only to teach one another, give hospitality, and nurture other women and the children.

It is amazing that both men and women, almost 2000 years later, can interpret the word “*deacon*” when used of a woman to mean an assistant, whereas “*deacon*” when used for men means leaders and baptisers and those serving the Lord’s supper.

1. What is your response to the masculine terms used in hymns and sermons, and the male domination evident in most of our churches?
2. Think about the women of the New Testament. Discuss the similarities and the differences between the women of the gospels and the women of the epistles.

Some Further Discussion Questions

1. Christians sometimes find that they gain more spiritual support from a small group meeting in a house than they do in a large worship service.
 - Share your experiences whether you are a member of the more “established” churches, or the African Independent Churches, or the new “charismatic” churches.

2. New Testament Greek and English are not well equipped for non-sexist communication. Usually only male pronouns such as *he*, *his*, and *him* are used in the New Testament and in our churches.
 - Some women feel excluded from total participation in the church when sermons, hymns, and Scripture readings refer solely to men of God, brothers, and sons. How can we as women help to change this?

3. What were the roles of widows in the early church? To what extent do widows in our churches today feel a vital part of the church family? What roles can and do widows today play?

4. In the early church there were prominent wealthy women who had great influence.
 - How influential are wealthy people today when it comes to decision-making in our churches? Is having wealth an advantage or a disadvantage in our churches?

5. We have seen that throughout history, and even in the early Christian movement, it was extremely difficult for men (and women) to affirm the leadership gifts of women, especially when women would be leading men.
 - What are the reasons for this? What specific actions can we take which will help to move our churches toward the New Testament intention of shared leadership based upon the *gifts* of all members, whether rich or poor, young or old, educated or uneducated, male or female?

Women and Spiritual Gifts

4

The purpose of this study is to understand what spiritual gifts are and then to consider how we as women can fully exercise our God-given gifts.

Our Contexts

1. Discuss the scope of the ministries that are performed in your church by all its members.
2. What involvements do you personally have in both your church and the community?
3. Are there other ways in either church or community that you are not involved but would like to be? What are they? What prevents you?
4. Do you see your community service as service to God? Explain.
5. Share things that you think you are relatively good at doing, and then things that you do not like to do or feel you do poorly.
 - Perhaps others wish to respond as each shares.

Introduction: the Holy Spirit, the Church, and Spiritual Gifts

A spiritual gift is a special gift which God has given a Christian that enables her or him to perform a particular ministry in the church. Some of the spiritual gifts are the Holy Spirit's enhancement of a person's natural gifts or abilities. Other gifts are supernaturally given and beyond the control of the individual. A Christian may have one or more of these gifts of ministry.

The term *spiritual gifts* comes from the Greek word *charismata*. It appears in the New Testament only in Paul's writings about the church (i.e., Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:4), and in 1 Peter 4:10. In other passages another word for *gift* is used.

Spiritual gifts are God's gifts to people when they become part of the Body of Christ. These gifts cannot be isolated from the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work in the church. The Holy Spirit uses spiritual gifts in the church to edify, build, unify and teach its members (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 14:26).

We understand spiritual gifts in terms of the nature of the church. The church is the Body of Christ composed of different parts, or members, each of which is necessary to the Body. These members depend upon each another (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, especially verses 14, 15, 25-27). This implies that all those who have been baptised in the Spirit, male or female, Jew or Gentile, are necessary parts of the Body and are also bearers of spiritual gifts. Therefore, spiritual gifts are as varied as are the church's members. Spiritual gifts can be categorised in various ways: as "natural gifts" (eg, teaching) and "extraordinary gifts" (eg, healing); or as "concerning the practical aspects of church life" (eg, leadership), and "concerning the ministry of the Word of God" (eg, teaching). Each category includes a variety of gifts. (See 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 28-31; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:8-11.)

We note in Paul's early writings to newly-founded churches such as the Corinthian church that there is no mention of church offices such as elder or bishop. Instead, the structure or ordering of the church was charismatic. That is, emphasis was placed on the gifts people showed they had rather than on the offices to be filled. At the time that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the organisation of the church had not yet become institutionalised. Specific offices had not yet been established, nor were appointed officials ruling the churches. It was acknowledged that some Christians had received the gift of leading the church and had liberty to exercise it.

In time, however, the gift of leading the church became so closely identified with certain individuals that they became recognised officials in the church, fulfilling well-defined duties in the administration of the

Christian community. Still later, offices were emphasised in such a way that gifts were neglected. As only men could hold offices in the church, women were largely excluded from the work of ministry.

1. How do you think that church offices should be filled?
2. Discuss how this is, or should be, done.

Bible Study

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

To help us understand the variety of the spiritual gifts and some of the responsibilities that go with them, we present one possible listing.

There is overlap between some of the gifts. For instance, mercy and giving have much in common. We also point out that sometimes *the gifts themselves are described* (eg, mercy and prophecy), and sometimes *the gifts described are the persons who exercise the gifts* (eg, teacher and prophet).

Spiritual gifts, or our gifts of ministry, as we might also call them, can be described as being a special ability that God gives to each member of the body of Christ. We now list the gifts and suggest what they might mean.

1. **Apostle:** Someone who is sent with a special message. To early Christians "*apostle*" meant that the special messenger had seen Jesus. Later "*apostle*" came to mean someone who preached the Good News of Jesus to people to help them through the ups and downs of life. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 15:3-11; 2 Timothy 2:2.)
2. **Prophet:** One who feels urged by God to preach a special message in order to warn or to encourage the hearers. (See 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29; 14:3,6; Ephesians 4:11-14.)

3. **Pastor:** Someone who leads a congregation and cares for its members. (See Ephesians 4:11-14; John 21:15-17.)
4. **Teacher:** One who teaches the message of the Bible so that people learn. (See Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11-14.)
5. **Evangelist:** One who shares the gospel with people who are not following Jesus so that they become Jesus' disciples and responsible church members. (See Ephesians 4:11-14.)
6. **Missionary:** One who helps people of another culture in their Christian faith. (See Acts 8:4-5, 35, 40; Romans 10:15.)
7. **Administration:** To manage and organise the business affairs of the church. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28.)
8. **Leadership:** To lead people in doing the work of the church together. (See Romans 12:8.)
9. **Encouragement:** To help people who are worried or in trouble with words of comfort, giving them hope and faith. (See Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 14:3.)
10. **Kindness:** To feel sorry for people with problems, and to help them with kind deeds so that they feel Christ's love and their suffering is relieved. (See Romans 12:8.)
11. **Service:** To see people's needs and find ways to help. (See Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12.)
12. **Helping:** To give willingly of one's self in order to help others. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28.)
13. **Giving:** To give freely and cheerfully of what one has in order to help others. (See Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7.)

14. **Hospitality:** To provide food and lodging for those in need. (See Romans 12:9-13.)
15. **Miracles:** To do wonderful deeds supernaturally so that God can help others. (See 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-29.)
16. **Healings:** To help heal someone with or without using medicine. (See 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30.)
17. **Wisdom:** To know the right thing to do at a particular time. (See 1 Corinthians 2:1-13; 12:8.)
18. **Knowledge:** To know how to do what is best at a particular time. (See 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:8; 13:8; 14:6.)
19. **Faith:** To trust God to do great things. (See Romans 4:18-21; 1 Corinthians 12:9; 13:2; Hebrews 11.)
20. **Prayer:** To pray long and regularly, and see more answers to one's prayer than most Christians do. (See Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; James 5:14-16.)
21. **Expertise:** To do one's art or craft with great skill and care. (See Exodus 31:3.)
22. **Tongues:** To speak with sounds one has not learned, either in praying or in preaching. (See 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28, 30; 14:13-19.)
23. **Interpretation:** To explain the message someone has spoken in unknown sounds. (See 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30; 14:13, 26-28.)
24. **Distinguishing spirits:** To be able to tell whether someone is acting for God or for Satan. (See 1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1-6.)
25. **Celibacy:** To abstain from sexual activity, living happily as a

single person without feeling much temptation or regret. (See 1 Corinthians 7:7-8.)

26. **Martyrdom:** To praise God while suffering, even dying, for one's faith. (See 1 Corinthians 13:3.)
27. **Voluntary poverty:** To give to people in need, choosing to be poor and trusting God to meet one's own needs. (See Acts 2:45; Mark 10:21; 1 Corinthians 13:3.)

(With thanks to the Modified Houts Questionnaire.)

Paul seems to have given first place in the order of the gifts to apostleship and prophecy. These two gifts were regarded as the vehicles of revelation (Ephesians 3:5) and provided the foundation of the church, for the early church did not have the New Testament Scriptures.

Paul emphasised that the gifts of ministry are given to all members of the church; all belong to the Body of Christ. There is no exclusion of anyone on the basis of one's position in society. Nor are the gifts only for "Sunday use." Rather, they are for the daily life of the church. The Holy Spirit gives believers gifts, and the Spirit daily guides the Christian community.

Gifts for ministry need to be clearly understood and exercised with discernment. True spiritual gifts originate with the Holy Spirit, they build up the church, they glorify Jesus, and they are exercised in love. Spiritual gifts should not lead to division and disorder, take advantage of others, or be used as a means of gaining wealth for oneself. Paul wrote extensively to the Corinthians about their spiritual gifts because of their abuse of their gifts.

1. Do any gifts seem controversial?
2. Are any not accepted in your church? Explain.
3. What other gifts could possibly be included in the list?

Spiritual Gifts Then and Now

Old Testament women and their spiritual gifts

Although a term similar to “charismata” or “spiritual gifts” was not used in the Old Testament, it is apparent that many of the gifts which we have listed above were present in Old Testament times. Prophecy, wisdom, miracles, healings, helps, mercy and giving are all evident in the Old Testament.

Old Testament women exercised some of these gifts:

- ◆ Hannah was a **prophetess** (1 Samuel 2:1-10), as were Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). Huldah is noteworthy in that her words of judgement were based on a written document: the scroll found by Hilkiah the priest. Thus, a woman authorised the first document that would later become the core of Judaic and Christian scripture.
- ◆ The gift of **wisdom** was evident in Abigail (1 Samuel 25:3, 14-44).
- ◆ Leadership was present in Deborah, the only woman judge of Israel, as well as in Esther, a queen. (See our booklet, *Matriarch, Judge, Foreigner and Liberator.*)

New Testament women and their spiritual gifts

Spiritual gifts were first displayed in the New Testament in connection with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus instructed his apostles to stay in Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 1 that the apostles stayed in an upstairs room during this time, and prayed, along with *certain women*, Mary (mother of Jesus) and others (Acts 1:4, 13-14). On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit came to *indwell* the believers gathered together. The text gives no indication that only men received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-40). There is no indication of anyone's exclusion from this experience (2:1-4). Women received the Holy Spirit and the gifts of ministry.

As we have noted, prominent spiritual gifts among New Testament women were the **prophetess** and the gift of **prophecy**. Anna the prophetess lived in the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Mary, Jesus' mother, and Elizabeth, her relative, prophesied. Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), for example, is more like a prophetic proclamation than an ordinary song. Elizabeth was first filled with the Holy Spirit and then she too made a proclamation (Luke 1:42-45). Like all the prophets, she was God's spokesperson. Other New Testament prophetesses included Philip's four daughters who *had the gift of prophecy* (Acts 21:7-9).

The idea of women prophesying was not new on the Day of Pentecost. Peter in his sermon that day quoted from the Old Testament prophet Joel. *"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit **upon all flesh**, and your sons and your **daughters shall prophesy**,... Even upon my slaves, **both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy**"* (Acts 2:17-18, quoting Joel 2:28-29).

Another gift exercised by New Testament women was that of being a **helper** to someone, whether by serving one another or by sharing goods. The early Christian church was characterised by this gift of helpfulness. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna helped to support Jesus and his disciples from their own resources while they travelled around ministering (Luke 8:1-3). Tabitha (Dorcas) was one who was always doing good and helping the poor (Acts 9:36).

Teaching and **apostleship** are other gifts of ministry which were practised by New Testament women, some of which we considered earlier in this booklet. Among those women was Priscilla who, together with her husband, taught Apollos, an eloquent Jew, *the way of God more accurately* (Acts 18:24-26). Among the apostles was Mary Magdalene. *Apostle* means *messenger, delegate* or *sent one*, and it was to Mary Magdalene that Jesus first appeared and whom he sent to tell the others (John 20:17).

Other women who were co-workers with Paul the apostle were Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3), and Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis and Julia (Romans 16:6, 12-13, 15). Phoebe (Romans 16:1), as we saw in the last study, seems to have been a benefactor or patron to Paul. She probably was an official teacher in the church of

Cenchrea. These women performed the functions of teacher and apostle in the churches whether or not they are considered as having held those offices.

One other gift that can be said to have been common among New Testament women was the gift of **faith**. There were many women who believed in Christ and who served him faithfully, among them Mary and Martha, and Lydia.

We have mentioned that at first the church did not have official offices. From the second century onwards, however, the Christian church became more institutionalised. That is, greater emphasis was placed on offices (eg, priest and bishop) than on ministries and gifts (eg, pastor, evangelist, helper). As the years went by, the church became more structured, more organised and also more worldly. Furthermore, the practice of ordination led to a gap between the clergy (priest) and laity (congregation). This trend was resisted by individuals and groups, but not even the Reformation of the 16th century, with its emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers,” was able to include women and to re-emphasise the aspects of servanthood and ministry in churches. In all of this, women and the less privileged members of society have suffered the most by being ignored and having their ministries and worth rejected.

1. What do you understand when we say that the church became institutionalised? Do you agree that this is what happened?
2. What role did spiritual gifts seem to have later in the life of the church after it became more “institutionalised”?

Theological and practical implications of Paul’s teachings on spiritual gifts for present-day Christian women

From Paul’s teachings on the nature and function of spiritual gifts, we can draw these conclusions for Christian women today.

- ◆ Spiritual gifts are not restricted to a particular group, class, or gender of Christians. Spiritual gifts are for all who believe and are baptised in the Holy Spirit. Christian women receive these

gifts and are entitled to the privileges and the responsibilities of exercising them.

- ◆ Some of the spiritual gifts are associated with the natural gifts a person has. The Holy Spirit enhances a person's natural gifts (eg, teaching).
- ◆ All church members have the potential to exercise their gifts of ministry, but they may not be aware what their gifts are.
- ◆ Many of the spiritual gifts are seemingly ordinary, like helping, giving, showing mercy, and exercising faith, and are practised every day. Today's Christian women should not think because they cannot prophesy like Miriam or Anna that they are not gifted.
- ◆ Because spiritual gifts are ordinary and for everyday use, they should be exercised every day, not reserved for special occasions, such as the visit of the bishop. Gifts are not given to a person to benefit oneself or a dignitary; they are given to benefit everyone (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- ◆ All spiritual gifts should be seen as being necessary, just as all parts of our bodies are necessary. A finger may not seem as essential to the functioning of the body as the leg, but if the finger is injured, the whole body focuses attention on that small member. Thus, the gifts may be seen as functioning on different levels, but as being of equal worth because of their essential functions in the Body of Christ.
- ◆ The gifts a person has should be recognised by the church, and the person encouraged to exercise them for the benefit of the church. However, sometimes a woman having gifts as leader or pastor and teacher may be denied ordination or ministry in those church offices. This should not prevent her from exercising the function of her gifts in some form, at the same time working to encourage changes in her church's structures of leadership.

- ◆ The gift of tongues should not be thought of as the most important of the gifts. Not everyone has the gift, and it can be abused. (See 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.)
 - ◆ Spiritual gifts complement each other; together they are complete. All are needed for unity in the church. All members are differently gifted (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). No one should covet all the gifts or other people's gifts. Because spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the whole church, they must not be abused. Using them as weapons to seize power and positions in the church causes disorder and disunity. Paul's way to avoid such disorders is to practise the greatest gift: love (1 Corinthians 13).
 - ◆ The universality of spiritual gifts implies that they are possessed by all for the sake of all. Christian women who are uninformed about spiritual gifts in general and their own in particular, or those who have decided to be silent and passive because of the patriarchy practised in so many churches, should shake off their lethargy, inform themselves, and discover and use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole church. All members, whether male or female, should be equal participants within the church.
1. Do you endorse all these implications?
 2. Can you suggest other implications for us today based on your understanding of any of the spiritual gifts?

Case Study

Elizabeth Spalding Paul

Throughout South Africa today, people meet together in small interdenominational groups to pray, worship, preach and testify. Some of these groups are an outgrowth of the life and ministry of one woman, Elizabeth Spalding Paul.

Elizabeth Spalding was born in Tsolo, South Africa, in 1906 (or 1909)

to a white man and his African wife. She grew up in the Zandukwane location but returned to Tsolo, and in 1929 married Jim Paul. They were childless, and at first she prayed for a baby. Later she changed her prayer to "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." She seems to have always been active in the Anglican church and to have taught in Sunday School.

In a dream on 13th May, 1950, she was told to prepare for visitors the next day. On the 14th she accompanied her husband to church, but halfway there, in obedience to her dream, she turned back to prepare for the visitors.

On the way home, probably meditating on her dream, she felt she was touched from behind and lifted off her feet. She cried out and fell down unconscious. She heard a voice calling her and praying.

She herself breathed "in the Spirit of God" several times, after which she was "full of joy" and then lost her senses. When she regained consciousness she refused the medicine she was offered, saying, "It is by faith that one is healed!"

She devoted herself to prayer and preaching from that day onward. People thronged to hear her. They held prayers at 6 o'clock every morning, and day after day many people came to her for help and listen to her preach. She took no credit herself. Her message was simple, clear, and Christ-centred. She gave special emphasis to the Christian upbringing of children, urging parents to train their children faithfully. She made no attempt to persuade people to join her own denomination. Therefore, no meetings were held at her house on Sundays until the evening, when church services were over.

Once a little blind girl came to see Mrs Paul, and after three days the girl found she could see. This incident is thought to have been the time that Mrs Paul began to realise that she possessed the gift of healing. People came to seek her healing powers and many were healed. She made no distinction between the preaching and the healing parts of her ministry, and her ideas about healing were orthodox. She emphasised both spiritual and physical healing, but admitted that physical healing may not always be God's will.

Mrs Paul was criticised in various ways and accused of taking money for her work. She accepted money for her travelling expenses, which were considerable. Money that people pressed on her she used to help people in need or to contribute to her church.

The Anglican church recognised her mission, and at a special service of commission in St. Cuthbert's church on 10th September, 1961, she pledged obedience and loyalty to the church in the exercise of her ministry, and was then licensed as a Lay Reader.

The Pauls eventually moved from Tsolo to Kokstad. On 4th April, 1964, Mrs Paul was tragically killed in a car accident on her way back to Tsolo for a meeting where two thousand had come to hear her.

Even today Mrs Paul's influence continues, and groups meet in various places in order to worship, pray, preach and testify. Elizabeth Spalding Paul is an inspiration to women to discover, develop and exercise their gifts of ministry. It is significant that, despite her great influence, in her church she was permitted to hold only the office of Lay Reader.

Some Further Discussion Questions

1. What are “spiritual gifts”? How are they practised today?
2. Who was Elizabeth Spalding Paul? What about her story especially interests you? What spiritual gifts can she be said to have possessed?
 - Can you provide examples of modern-day prophetesses from your experience? What problems could women such as these experience as they endeavour to minister?
3. The church today may be seen as promoting church offices, or positions, rather than spiritual gifts and each member’s exercise of them. Is this true in your church? What might be the reason for this occurrence? What is the danger if this is happening?
4. Why are so few women exercising their spiritual gifts in their churches? Do the many women’s groups in our churches equip/prepare women for the work of ministry, i.e., enabling them to identify and develop their gifts (Ephesians 4:12)? Give reasons for your answer.
5. From the listing of spiritual gifts, suggest gifts which seem to be the Spirit’s enhancement of a person’s natural abilities and those which are probably supernaturally given.
6. What *practical* steps can women take to discover and to develop their gifts? How can groups within our churches or the Christian community help us to discover and to use our gifts?
7. Perhaps the group could spend some time in identifying each other’s gifts and then go on to discuss how these gifts could be better understood, developed, and used by members of the group.

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