

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Luke

*Discovering Truth and Healing
in Jesus' Words to Women*



LEADER'S GUIDE

 **Kregel**
Publications

Luke: Discovering Truth and Healing in Jesus' Words to Women
Leader's Guide
©2013 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

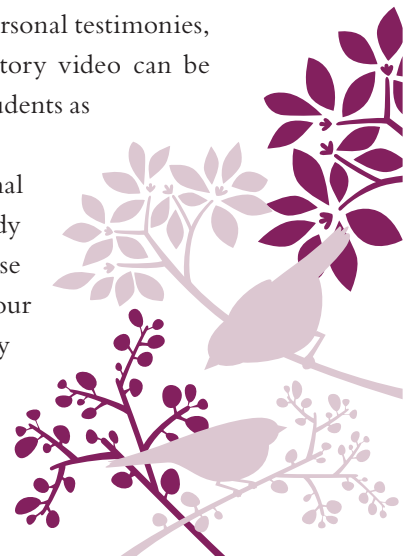
Congratulations! From all the books in the world, you have chosen to study Jesus' words to women in the gospel of Luke. God promises that when we dig into the Bible, we are exposed to truth that can heal our hurts, make us spiritually healthy, and equip us to live well.

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
it will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

As you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this overview. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader's guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson, trouble-shooting tips, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

- *Videos.* Supplemental teaching videos of various lengths are available for individual or group use at www.discovertogetherseries.com. For quick access with your smart phone or other handheld device, QR codes within each lesson correspond to these videos. These videos contain personal testimonies, related stories, and historical background. The introductory video can be used in your initial gathering to excite and inform your students as they embark on this adventure together.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply



suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.

- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” (available at www.discovertogetherseries.com) before your first gathering. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the Training Guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the Training Guide for help.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Each gospel was written to a different audience. For example, Matthew wrote to Jewish believers but doctor Luke wrote to Gentile Christians, and particularly to outcasts and women. Jesus especially wanted the *little people* to understand God's heart for them, and women were included in that category in the ancient world. They could not own property or give evidence in a trial, as their testimony was considered unreliable. Few women enjoyed the benefits of education. But unlike the culture, Jesus valued women, and Luke's pages are full of Jesus interacting with them.

This study focuses on Jesus' interaction with eleven of these women. Although they lived over two thousand years ago, they struggled with many of the same issues we face today. They dealt with fear, sin, worry, overload, injustice, greed, self-centeredness, an unhealthy desire to control their circumstances, and poor communication patterns. In each lesson, we observe Jesus interacting with a biblical woman weighed down with problems and trials. Through his wise words and tender care, these women exchanged their struggles for victory and learned to live in faith and freedom. For example, Jesus' mother Mary learned to replace control with trust, and the widow of Nain faith for fear. We can too.

Pray that Jesus' words will penetrate the minds and hearts of the women he entrusts to you, resulting in positive changes in their relationships with him and

others. Pray that they will overcome negative strongholds in their lives, enabling them to live well and serve with courage. The Savior's words work wonders!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you verse by verse through Jesus' encounter with a woman, or several women, in the Bible. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and share questions follow, guiding you through the text to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. However, occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of participants. This exercise, although somewhat speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and share questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the student from head to heart to hand. Although each lesson is grounded in Luke, occasionally we will study other related passages to complement the Luke text.

Sixty percent of Luke cannot be found in other gospel accounts so you may encounter some material that is unfamiliar. However, I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this Leader's Guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any "rough spot." It also mentions additional quality resources for further study on your own.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five-minute formal lecture, more like a pastor's Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try.

Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers,

but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts, too. So if something in you says, “teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE IDEAS

If you plan to include lecture in your format, you may want to begin with introductory comments on the person of Jesus or the gospel of Luke the first week you meet. What do the women in your group know about the second person of the Trinity? Do they understand that he is totally God and totally man in one person? Do they need insight into the place of women in the first-century Palestinian culture? Do they understand how much Jesus cares for women? What difference has a relationship with Jesus made in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a “time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- LaFever, Marlene D. *Creative Teaching Methods*. Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Ministry Resources, 1985.
- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (See also <http://christiancourses.com> for an online course.)
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY THE BOOK OF LUKE

- Bock, Darrell. "Luke." In *The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Morris, Leon. "Luke." In *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988.
- Walvoord, John, and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Wheaton: Victor, 1983.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY THE PERSON OF JESUS

- Lucado, Max. *God Came Near*. Portland: Multnomah, 1987.
- Lucado, Max. *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*. Portland: Multnomah, 1986.
- Pentecost, J. Dwight. *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1981.
- Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

- James, Carolyn Custis. *Lost Women of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Mathews, Alice. *A Woman God Can Lead*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991.

LESSON 1

Replace Control with Trust

GET ACQUAINTED

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend some time getting to know one another. For example, you might ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice breaker games.

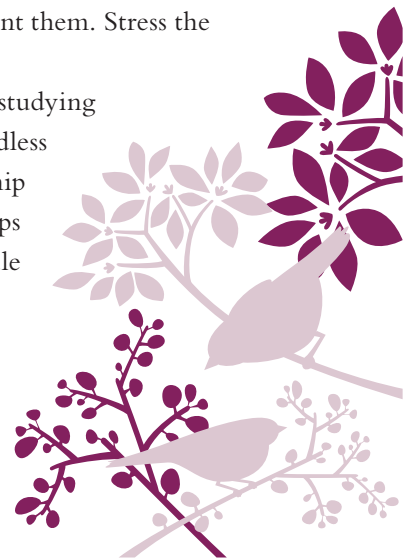
For an extended community builder, ask each woman to exchange shoes with another woman in the group. Don't force women to actually wear the shoes but instead just to slip them on once. Talk about how it feels to try on something new that may not be the fit or style they usually wear. Relate the exercise to the upcoming study during which the group will learn about women in the Bible who overcame challenges, replacing old actions and attitudes with new and better ones.

Discuss emotions that accompany leaving old habits behind and adopting new ways of feeling and thinking. Talk about the reality that, initially, change often feels uncomfortable, especially if we have hung on to those negative actions and attitudes for a long time. However, as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work in our lives to change us for good, we can expect by-products of joy and health. Encourage the participants to prepare themselves for the study by asking God to make them willing to change. Pray for one another as you close.

GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.



DISCUSS LESSON 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Explain that lesson 1 covers the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Paraphrase the introductory section and ask the first question. This is an observation question and I suggest that you don't spend too much time on these kinds of questions. You may want to simply focus on the second part of the question, *What surprises you about Mary's response to the angel's announcement?* Spend more time on the share and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (What does the text say?) and interpretation (What does the text mean?) questions. If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you run out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 chronicles significant events in Mary's life as her role changes from that of Jesus' mother to his disciple. The events include:

- Gabriel's announcement, Mary's response, and her song
- Mary's visit with Elizabeth
- The birth and dedication of Jesus
- The escape to Egypt and return to Nazareth
- Mary's response to losing Jesus in Jerusalem
- Mary's concern for Jesus early in his formal ministry
- Mary at the cross
- Mary's joining the other disciples as they await the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem

Each section of the lesson illustrates a step in her journey from control to trust. Like all mothers, she must let go of the Son she loves so dearly so that he may become the Man he was destined to be. Mary's spiritual maturity is evident from the beginning, especially since she is a teen when she gives birth to Jesus. Nevertheless, throughout her story we glean hints of her struggles to give up control of her unique Son. After the resurrection, we find her waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem with the other disciples, finally aware of the "big picture" of all God was doing in the life of Jesus and her family. She changes roles from that of mother to disciple. She learns to trust.

We must each follow in her footsteps as we learn to relinquish control to God and trust him with our lives and the lives of those we love. This story relates to a mother, but the lessons are universal for all women, whether they ever bear biological children or not. Be sure to emphasize this truth, especially if your group includes women who are not mothers. Otherwise they may feel the study does not apply to them and drop out.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Students are often confused about the status of Mary and Joseph's relationship before Jesus was born. Understanding engagement and marriage customs during this time is helpful. In the Jewish culture, marriages were arranged by parents and the couple was betrothed or pledged to each other for as long as a year before the consummation of their marriage. However, this betrothal was much stronger than engagements today. The two were legally considered husband and wife, and addressed one another that way, though they did not live together until after the wedding. If questions arise, present this information, or give a participant the opportunity to answer the digging deeper question on page 18, which addresses this issue.

In question 20, students are asked why Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem. The note in the question should help the women understand that to move back to Bethlehem would have posed a danger to Jesus. A crazy man, Herod's son Archelaus, was ruling over the southern territory near Bethlehem, a suburb of Jerusalem. He likely would have been as paranoid about a new king as his father. Moving back to the northern district of Galilee to the town of Nazareth meant less danger because it was ruled by Antipas, a saner son of Herod. This move also fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23).

Questions under "A Family's Concern" (pages 22–24) provide unique insight into Mary's concern for Jesus during his formal ministry. When she and the rest of her family heard that her Son's ceaseless activity prevented him from taking proper care of himself, she decided to intervene, as most caring mothers would. The phrase *He was out of his mind* probably means that they surmised he had lost all sense of reason and balance and needed to come home. However, Jesus had no intention of coming home.

The dialogue that follows in Mark 3:31–35 was undoubtedly painful for Mary and her family. Her role was changing from that of concerned mother to sister. Note that Jesus included women in verse 35 whereas the word *sister* had not been used in verses 32 and 33. This addition is significant not only for Mary but for all women for all time. Jesus intentionally added this one little word to encourage Mary and all women, illustrating that he considered women to be valued members of God's family, too.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Play a DVD of a dramatic monologue of Mary by Christian dancer/actress/writer Naima Lett titled *Shattered Silhouettes: Women of the Bible*. (Other biblical women characters on the DVD include Eve, Jezebel, Leah, and Tamar.) If you are a large ministry, invite Naima to perform live for your women, and invite other women

in your community to join you for a memorable and inspiring event. For more information, visit <http://naimalet.com>.

- Most of these lessons are introduced and concluded with stories and poems. Encourage the women to look for similar stories or poems on the lesson topic to share with the group. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, ask the women to make copies or e-mail them for participants to read outside group time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week, as a review of what you learned.
- Each lesson ends with a question asking the women to pen a note to the woman they have just studied. Give each student decorative stationery at the beginning of the study to write her notes on. Think about ways to use these notes during the study or as you conclude.

LESSON 2

Swap Fear for Faith

LESSON PURPOSE

We live in a fallen world where bad things happen to good people. As a result, life is full of fearful circumstances. Learning to overcome fear is a challenge for many women, and this lesson is designed to help.

LESSON CONTENT

The lesson begins with Jesus' healing of a Roman centurion's servant. A centurion was a Gentile, a Roman army commander responsible for a group of one hundred soldiers. Although the primary focus of the lesson is the widow of Nain, it's important to study the centurion's experience first in order to compare the two miracles. In divine literature, the author often places two accounts together to emphasize a comparison or contrast. In this instance, Jesus first heals the servant of a Gentile centurion, a commander who exhibits great humility and faith, in contrast to the Jewish leaders who insist that Jesus owes him a miracle because he has been a friend to Jews.

After healing the centurion's servant, Jesus travels to Nain, where he raises a widow's son from the dead. In contrast to the centurion, the widow of Nain is not described as a woman of faith. The author tells us nothing about her spiritual condition. He only tells us about Jesus' compassion on her regardless of her spiritual status. His heart goes out to her because of her circumstances, and Jesus responds by healing her son.

The latter part of the lesson asks the students to contrast and compare the two miracles. The point of the lesson is to help women see the grace of God for all people despite their unworthiness. Grace is defined as God's unconditional love and unmerited favor for the undeserving. Many women carry wrong views of God in their heads and hearts, believing that he is harsh and angry. This lesson helps them understand God's great love for all his creatures, but especially for the helpless and the outcast and, again, despite their unworthiness. None of us measures up to God's standards, and this realization is the first step to understanding and accepting his grace, a covering for our sin. This first step ultimately leads to faith and obedience out of gratitude for what he has done for us.



TROUBLESHOOTING

In question 14, women are asked to analyze Luke 20:47 and discuss how the Jewish leaders treated widows. The passage says they *devour widows' houses*. Jesus pointed out that the Jewish leaders, who were supposed to protect needy women, took advantage of their plight, expelling them from their homes for profit.

Question 28 raises the issue of why bad things happen to good people. Dig into this topic. Some participants are probably wrestling with this issue, wondering why Jesus healed this woman's son but not all sick sons. Draw out mature women who have walked with God through suffering and trials. Help the group to see that, although he did not promise we would be spared suffering, God does promise that he will be with us through it. He may not change the circumstances but he will ultimately bring good out of bad. Lesson 7 ("Overcome Injustice with Prayer") will address this topic in more depth.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Secure a recording of *Your Kindness* by Leslie Phillips and listen to the lyrics. Then discuss how the song relates to the lesson.
- Print the poem *If Only I Had Known You*, which appears at the end of the lesson, on a laminated card and attach a small bucket to the card. (The author's website, <http://www.godthoughts.com/fanfr.html>, gives you permission to copy the poem, requesting that you keep the name and copyright notice with each poem.) Give this creation to the women to take home and display as a reminder of God's tender compassion.
- At the end of the lesson, ask each woman to write her greatest fear on a slip of paper. Put a bucket in the middle of the room and place the papers in the bucket. Then find a way to dispose of the papers—bury them, burn them, etc. Conclude this exercise with a time of prayer to overcome fear.

LESSON 3

Tame Sin with Gratitude

LESSON PURPOSE

Lesson 3 is designed to convince women to lay their sin at the feet of Jesus, even blacklist sins such as abortion and sexual sin. Jesus' encounter with this woman shows us that he desires to forgive us, cleanse us, and help us stop destructive actions and attitudes—if we will ask. Mark 2:1–12 shows his *power* to forgive sin. Help women do business with God so they can overcome the sins and shortcomings that shackle them.

This lesson also encourages unbelievers to trust Christ for salvation. Pray for women in your group who you think might not be Christians. Be available to answer questions, explain the gospel in more detail, and pray with them if they are ready.

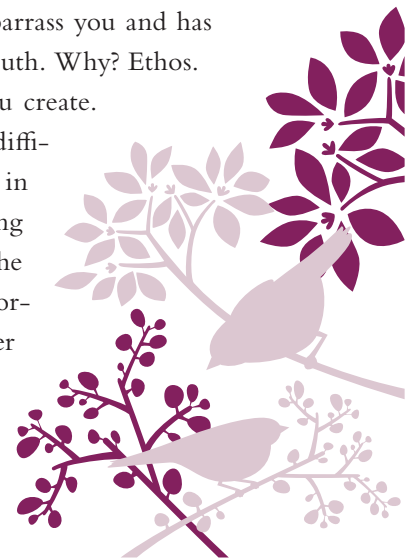
This lesson can transform the lives of women who have never dealt with past sins. It is imperative that you set an atmosphere where each one feels free to be vulnerable with the group. What kind of environment will you create so that women will open up when they normally hide? Don't ask women to give specific details about their sins. But create a place where they will feel loved and be willing to tell Jesus, if no one else.

CREATE A POSITIVE GROUP ETHOS

Ethos (e-thas) is the distinguishing environment or atmosphere of a group. Its character, if you will. As the leader you set the ethos and, although you cannot see it, women respond or shut down in response. Every home has ethos. In some homes children experience unconditional love and fair discipline. As a result they usually grow up confident and secure. Other homes exude a chill—children walk on eggshells, knowing that performance earns affection, easily withdrawn when they mess up.

Ethos impacts classrooms. In some classes, you are comfortable asking questions, even dumb ones. You know the teacher won't intentionally embarrass you and has your best interest at heart. In others, you don't dare open your mouth. Why? Ethos.

Women in your small group are influenced by the ethos you create. Will it be a place where women can voice their deep hurts and difficult questions? Can women be honest and do business with God in your group? Only then can the process of forgiveness and healing take root. To learn how to create positive group ethos, review the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders," focusing on the importance of affirmation and controlling your own talking. Remember



the group time is not about you! It's about giving women a safe place to discuss what *they* learned, try out *their* new ideas, and articulate *their* convictions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 29 refers to Mark 3:28–29 where Jesus talks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit—the only unforgivable sin. Explain that the Holy Spirit testifies and woos everyone to love God and accept his salvation through Jesus Christ. We blaspheme the Spirit when we belligerently refuse to listen to God and reject his saving grace in our lives. Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is refusing to accept what Jesus did on the cross for personal salvation.

WILL YOU PRAY TOGETHER AS A GROUP?

Lesson 3 might be a good time to discuss whether or not your group wants to pray together. Give them the freedom to decide either way. If they desire to spend time in conversational prayer, see the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” for suggestions.

RESOURCE

Dean, Jennifer Kennedy. *Heart's Cry: Principles of Prayer*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1992.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- For an ice breaker, ask the women to bring their favorite perfume or lotion, giving everyone an opportunity to smell the delightful aromas.
- Burn a fragrant candle during the lesson. (Be sensitive to allergies.)
- As a way to bond as a group, wash or massage one another's feet with scented lotion or perfume. For an extra treat, ask a massage therapist if, for free or a nominal fee, she would give short massages after group time.
- Buy small bottles of lotion from a Bath and Body store and give as gifts along with laminated cards that remind women of the sweet fragrance of Christ's forgiveness.
- Purchase or cook Middle Eastern foods to share as you discuss the lesson. Ask someone to research eating practices in first century Palestine, share what they learned, pass out recipes, and discuss as a group.

LESSON 4

Trade Silence or Aggression for a Beautiful Voice

LESSON PURPOSE

This lesson is designed to help students improve their communication skills. In the lesson's introductory section, I talk about women in my seminary courses and ministries who struggle with poor communication, a major hindrance to women's spiritual and emotional health. Many of these women—and I have struggled with this myself—say too little when it's appropriate to speak up. Causes range from temperaments to erroneous Bible teaching and faulty traditions. On the other extreme, some women say too much and they say it badly. These women are a stumbling block for other women, especially as they work with men in ministry or the marketplace.

Facilitate a discussion that will help women assess their ineffective speaking tendencies and begin healthy communication in line with biblical examples.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 4 focuses on three women:

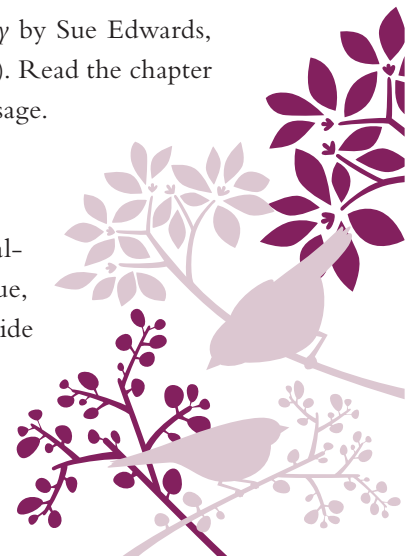
- The woman with the issue of blood
- The mother of James and John
- The Syrophenician woman

The first represents women who are shut down when they need to speak up. The second represents women who are foolish and obnoxious with their words. The third shows us a woman who models strong, wise speech, and Jesus praises her for it.

For detailed insight into the passages in this lesson, see chapter 7 in *Mixed Ministry: Working Together as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society* by Sue Edwards, Kelley Mathews, and Henry Rogers (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008). Read the chapter carefully as you prepare to lead the lesson or teach a wrap-up message.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 15 asks us to consider the role of faith in the woman's healing. Some claim that her faith healed her. However, if this were true, Jesus would not have healed the son of the widow of Nain. Guide



the women to see that our faith is not the force that heals. Rather it is the power of Jesus that heals, and he chooses how and when to use that power. Sometimes he heals miraculously. Sometimes he works through medicine, and sometimes he does not heal physically, preferring to use our responses to bring him glory and teach us in the process. The choice is his and is not dependent upon our faith. However, only through faith can we walk through trials with hope, strength, and the ability to glorify God.

Question 27 asks students to differentiate between aggression and assertion. They will probably come up with different answers. Generally, answers should correspond to the following ideas. Assertion is positive when timely. To be assertive means to express one's thoughts and ideas with clarity and conviction. Encourage women to be assertive, especially if they struggle with inappropriate silence.

In contrast, aggression reeks of edginess, hostility, and anger, seldom a godly response. I have never seen Christian men respond positively to an aggressive female. Assertion is wise speech under control. Aggression asks for a fight and feels out of control. All women may not agree with these definitions. Don't let the conversation become argumentative, but instead allow for differing opinions. My hope is that as women consider what they have studied and heard, they will choose to work hard to master healthy communication patterns in both their interpersonal and working relationships.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Play a film clip that illustrates women's different communication patterns. Discuss what you have seen.
- Locate verses on good words from Proverbs. For example, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (25:11 NIV 1984). For other verses, see lesson 7 in my study *Proverbs: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012). After choosing a proverb, laminate it on a bookmark to remind the women of the importance of healthy communication patterns.

LESSON 5

Exchange Worry for Peace

LESSON PURPOSE

The English word for *worry* comes from the root word *to strangle*. Worry strangles, ties us up, and hinders us from making wise decisions and living boldly. God's grace does not extend to the future; we go there alone and ill-equipped to cope. But many women wrestle with worry. Jesus' words can help. Create an ethos where women can be honest about their worries, challenging one another to overcome this destructive habit. Help them find God's peace instead.

LESSON CONTENT

The biblical women highlighted in this lesson are Mary and Martha. However, as we have seen in other lessons, the passages that border this well-known text help us understand the author's full intent. Therefore, lesson 5 begins with Jesus' conversation with an expert in the law, leading to Jesus' teaching on the Great Commandment (Luke 10:27) and the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37). Both texts help us understand the interplay among three important spiritual truths: loving God, authentic service to others, and overcoming worry. Taken together, these three facets lead to a meaningful life of peace. This lesson weaves these concepts together in an effort to help women understand the connections and live them out.

Help the group discover that peace follows learning to love God with all our hearts, souls, strength, and minds and to love others as ourselves. This is the Great Commandment. To experience peace, we must express that love through service according to our gift-mix. Ministering for God in some capacity results in meaning and fulfillment—a sense that we are doing something good in a topsy-turvy world. We are doing something about the dysfunction and chaos. Our service helps us rest, knowing we are doing our part to make the world a better place. When we live out of love and learn to serve well, peace floods our lives and worry fades. All these concepts are packed into Luke 10:25–42, and it's no accident that the author placed them side by side. Overcoming worry is not simply exhibiting will power, and it does not come quickly. It's the fruit of a life lived God's way, resulting in peace that passes understanding. You may want to wrap up the lesson with a message showing the women how all these pieces fit together to free us from worry and help us rest in Jesus.



RESOURCES TO STUDY MARY AND MARTHA

Edwards, Sue, Kelley Mathews, and Henry Rogers. *Mixed Ministry: Working Together as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008. (Read chapter 2.)
James, Carolyn Custis. *When Life and Beliefs Collide: How Knowing God Makes a Difference*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The parable of the good Samaritan is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. However, many overlook the importance of the nationalities and vocations of the three men who saw the victim. In question 6, students are asked to consider the significance of these nationalities and vocations. During the time of Jesus, Jews ostracized Samaritans as racially and spiritually inferior. Jewish leaders prided themselves on their pedigree and privileged relationship with God.

It is no accident that Jesus identifies the man who stopped to render aid as a Samaritan. Jesus declares his love for all peoples regardless of pedigree and privilege. One would expect the Jewish priest and the Levite to stop and help, living out the Great Commandment, but their indifference speaks volumes. The hero of the story is a “little person,” in accordance with Luke’s theme.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Give women in your group the opportunity to take a spiritual gifts inventory. Discuss what each woman learned about herself and her unique design.
- Instead of discussing a new lesson, next week take a field trip to serve in a nursing home, homeless shelter, or other project of your group’s choice. Upon returning, debrief concerning your observations and feelings as you served together. Discuss the kind of ministry that each woman enjoys most, and encourage her to pursue that kind of ministry in the future.
- Do any of the women in your study enjoy drama? Do they like to write plays? If so, ask them to form a team for the purpose of dramatizing what they learned in the lesson. Don’t limit them to biblical times but give them the option of creating a contemporary piece if they prefer. A drama can be elaborate or simple, with costumes and memorized parts or simply an impromptu reading or role play. Adapt this idea to your particular group.

LESSON 6

Shape Overload into Simplicity

LESSON PURPOSE

The weighed-down woman symbolizes a woman bearing a load far too heavy for her to carry. Although the woman in the passage shouldered a physical malady, many of us stoop under the weight of spiritual and emotional concerns.

Change is accelerating so fast that many of us can't keep up. Lesson 6 challenges us to slow down and throw off whatever weighs us down. The lesson highlights several common issues: materialism, legalism, and people-pleasing. Draw out various additional stressors that tend to overload women in your group. The questions are designed to help them deal with these issues and lay them down. Help them understand that only as we shift our load onto Jesus will we be able to live simply and freely.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The synagogue ruler showed no compassion on the weighed-down woman but, instead, he exhibited irritation because Jesus healed her on the Sabbath, the day of rest (Luke 13:14). Question 13 asks the students why Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the synagogue ruler, who rescues his own animals on the Sabbath but refuses to help a miserable woman bound for eighteen years. Jesus healed this woman on the Sabbath on purpose, to confront the legalism rampant in Judaism.

RESOURCES TO STUDY ON PEOPLE-PLEASING

Edwards, Sue, and Kelley Mathews. *Leading Women Who Wound: Strategies for Effective Ministry*. Chicago: Moody, 2009. (Read chapter 3.)

Priolo, Lou. *Pleasing People*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Provide copies of *Real Simple* magazine to your group as well as other magazines that expose a different philosophy. Divide the women into teams of three or four and give each team a poster board, markers, scissors, access to these different kinds of magazines, and any other art supplies you desire. Ask each team to create a contrasting piece of artwork. On one side of the poster board, ask them to create a visual representation of the hectic life typical of many people



today. On the other side, ask them to portray a simple life without the burdens many of us carry. Ask each team to explain their project and what they learned from lesson 6.

- As a teaching illustration, wear or carry a pile of heavy objects. Label the objects with burdens you observe women in your group carrying (for example, *materialism*, *legalism*, *people-pleasing*). Discuss practical ways to rid yourself of these burdens, and as you discuss them, lay that burden down. Pray together, asking Jesus to help everyone rid themselves of unnecessary burdens and, instead, live a simple life.

LESSON 7

Overcome Injustice with Prayer

LESSON PURPOSE

How often have you heard women say, “But it’s just not fair”? We innately have the sense that life should be fair, but it isn’t, at least not yet. In lesson 7, Jesus teaches his disciples about injustice through the story of a woman and a judge. Pray that this lesson will help your group understand the connection between justice and prayer from a biblical worldview.

LESSON CONTENT

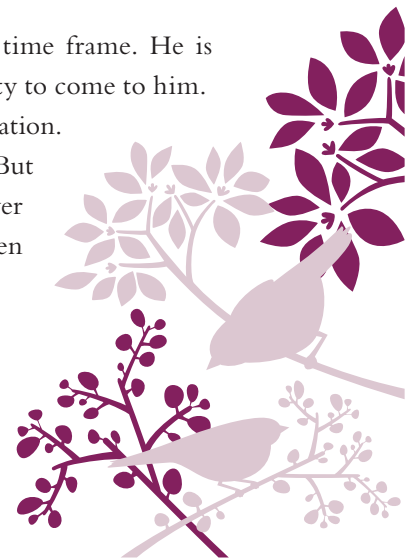
Lesson 7 is divided into three parts:

- A study of the parable of the persistent widow and Jesus’ counsel
- A study of the previous passage related to end times
- Summary questions to aid in synthesizing the concepts of justice, prayer, and the future

Like in other lessons, Luke connects seemingly unrelated passages that in reality do impact one another. Justice, prayer, and patience as we await Jesus’ return are all connected.

The widow demands justice from a stingy unrighteous judge who finally gives in to her desires because she won’t leave him alone. This text is an example of a good lesson from a bad example. God is both similar to and different from the stingy judge. God is like the stingy judge in that he also has the power to grant justice. However, God is *not* like this stingy judge in the way he cares for those who need his help. God the Father desires to give his beloved justice and “quickly” (Luke 18:8). Then why, women may ask, is justice sometimes so slow?

Guide your group to see that God’s time frame is not our time frame. He is delaying justice because he wants all people to have the opportunity to come to him. When the end comes, so will the opportunity to trust him for salvation. As a result, many of us, like the widow, must wait for justice. But as we wait, we are instructed to persevere in prayer (v. 1). Prayer helps us understand God’s ways and trust him for future justice, even though we might not see ultimate justice right now.



TROUBLESHOOTING

The second question set, “Hope for Ultimate Justice in the Coming Kingdom” (page 105), covers Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God and the end times. The questions are written from a premillennial pretribulation perspective. Women in your group may hold differing views on end times literature in the Bible. If this is true for your group, prepare them to discuss this section with respect and grace, honoring all perspectives while learning more about the premillennial pretribulation view. Whether or not participants agree on these details, hopefully they can all agree that Jesus will ultimately return to bring justice and righteousness to his people. That premise alone should work to accomplish your goal—persistent prayer in the face of injustice.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- As a group, create a list of injustices the women have observed both here at home and around the world. Spend some time praying for the needs on this list. Consider sending aid.

LESSON 8

Turn Grasping into Generosity

LESSON PURPOSE

Generosity is unnatural in a fallen world. Our instinct is to hoard what we have so that we won't ever go without. But in this lesson, Jesus teaches us to look at our money and possessions from a different perspective—to be *rich toward God*. Generosity is the ultimate test of our faith. The goal of the lesson is not to *guilt* women into giving, but instead to help them understand that giving results in personal joy and freedom.

LESSON CONTENT

This lesson is divided into six sections:

- “An Amazing Display” dissects the story of the widow who gave all she had to God. Don't let a burden of guilt darken the ethos of the group. Explain that God is not asking them to give everything they have to him. He is more concerned with their heart attitudes toward what they own. Attitude is more important than amount. When the heart is generous, God will show us how to give wisely and according to our own individual situations.
- “Previous Teaching” goes back to Luke 12 where Jesus teaches a parable about a rich fool who hoards his resources but dies the next day. This passage introduces the women to the concept of being *rich toward God*.
- “A Huge Hindrance” briefly touches on the next passage, where Jesus admonishes his followers not to worry about money but instead to trust God to care for them.
- “The Parable of the Wise Manager” takes the women through the next section of Scripture, another parable related to our possessions.
- “A Parable About Equity” covers a parable in Matthew that speaks to our sense of equity and fairness and its relationship to our money.
- “Let Go” gives women opportunity to apply the texts.

The varied passages work together to help women in your group set aside their natural desire to hold on to their resources, and instead seek generosity as a lifestyle.



TROUBLESHOOTING

The setting for the questions in “The Parable of the Wise Manager” can be confusing to women today. Clocks did not exist, and a master who left for a wedding banquet might be gone for weeks. The date of the banquet was uncertain, as was its duration. As a result, the servants had no idea when their master might return, which led lazy servants to slack off. Jesus cautions his followers not to grow lazy as they wait for him to return, bringing his kingdom in the end times.

Luke 12:46 may frighten some students, leading them to believe that those who are not diligent in their work for the Master will lose their salvation. However, this interpretation would go against what the Bible says in other places. The NIV translates the verse this way: “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers” (an unfortunate translation). The last word in the verse comes from the Greek word *apiston*, where we get our word *apathetic*. A better translation would be to replace the word *unbeliever* with the words *the unfaithful*. Those who are not rich toward God won't lose their salvation but they will lose rewards at the *bema* seat for believers (2 Cor. 5:10).

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA AND WRAP-UP ACTIVITIES

- Do you know of a group of people who need help with resources, food, clothes, or, of course, cash? Brainstorm with your group and identify a project. Pool your resources and give generously together. However, make giving voluntary and anonymous. Even keep the amounts private. Some women in your group may not be able to give or, if they are married, their spouses may disapprove. Possibly a member of your group is the one who needs aid. Sensitivity is critical. However, done carefully, this project could help the group experience the joy of serving others and becoming rich toward God.

WILL YOU SAY GOOD-BYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you're excited about leading the group through another study,

you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any. (Check out my website www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering of *Luke: Discovering Truth and Healing in Jesus' Words to Women* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might read the letters that participants wrote to biblical women that you studied. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.