



Equipping Women to Serve

*Helping Women Develop Effective Ministries
within the Local Church*



Equipping Women to Serve (previously published as *Women Serving Women*)

Copyright © 2003 by Entrust (formerly BEE International)

Revised Edition Copyright © June 2011, August 2018

P.O. Box 25520, Colorado Springs, CO 80936-5520, USA

www.entrust4.org

All rights reserved, including translations.

Thank you for choosing Entrust leadership training materials. May the Lord use these time- and culture-tested materials to help you be as effective as possible in your ministry.

To preserve the quality of these materials and to help you be successful in multiplying this material to further generations, we encourage you to be involved in many training opportunities where you will be coached in the most effective facilitating methods. The principles in this study are most transforming when discussed in a safe, respectful, trusting environment guided by a facilitator skilled in asking open questions that allow participants to grapple with and apply the principles.

In an effort to strengthen Christ's church and to provide quality training in a multiplying process, Entrust offers materials for small group training. We make these materials available to approved Entrust facilitators or those attending Entrust training modules. We ask that you honor Entrust, the copyright holder, in compliance with U.S. copyright law, which includes (but is not limited to), the following:

1. Training materials (hard copy or electronic) may not be altered without written permission from Entrust.
2. Quotations or paraphrases of 1,000 words or less must be properly credited to Entrust.
3. For quotations or paraphrases exceeding 1,000 words, written permission must be obtained from Entrust.
4. Printed materials may not be duplicated.
5. Digital files may not be shared. The purchaser of the digital file may print one personal copy.
6. Those outside the U.S. in possession of digital English files may only print a specific number of copies as agreed upon in writing with Entrust for the purpose of facilitating their small group.
7. Permission to translate materials into another language must be obtained from Entrust. In translating the course into other languages, it is acceptable to clarify cultural or language adaptations that do not change the meaning of the material. Contact Entrust for translation permission and procedures (permissions@entrust4.org).
8. While facilitators may personalize the actual teaching of the material with their groups, the published content may not be altered without written permission from Entrust.

May the Lord teach and guide you as you study.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Table of Contents

Course Objectives vii

Workbook Icons ix

Understanding God’s Plan for Women

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation for Women in Ministry11

Looking for Answers12

God’s Design14

A Biblical Women’s Ministry Blesses the Church28

Lesson Summary.....30

Lesson 2: Walking Side-by-Side33

God’s Parental Love for Us35

A Few Biblical Examples of Women Walking alongside Others.....37

Specific Ministry to Which Women Are Clearly Called39

The Scope and Influence of Walking Side-by-Side.....49

Lesson Summary.....58

Discovering Our Part in God’s Plan

Lesson 3: Making Disciples61

What Is a Disciple?63

Personal Discipleship.....66

Principles of Discipleship71

Lesson Summary.....84

Lesson 4: Reaching Out.....87

Biblical Encounters with Jesus89

Obstacles to the Gospel.....91

Sharing Christ through Personal Story93

Sharing Christ through Scripture96

A Plan of Growth for a New Christian102

Culturally Appropriate Ways to Share Christ.....103

Lesson Summary.....106

Lesson 5: Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts.....	109
Scripture Passages on Spiritual Gifts.....	111
Purpose of Spiritual Gifts.....	112
Specific Gifts	114
Determining Our Spiritual Gifts	132
Developing Our Gifts.....	134
Lesson Summary.....	136
Lesson 6: Valuing Temperaments	139
Surveying the Basic Temperaments.....	141
Classifying the Temperaments of Biblical Characters.....	144
Strengthening Teams	152
Lesson Summary.....	155
Appendix 6.1 The DISC in Action	159

Building Skills to Accomplish God's Plan

Lesson 7: Creating an Effective Team	163
What Is a Team?	165
The Benefits of Teams	169
Building a Productive Team	173
Equipping the Team.....	178
Dealing with Team Dysfunctions	182
Lesson Summary.....	184
Appendix 7.1 Code of Conduct	187
Lesson 8: Becoming a Servant Leader	189
Leadership Styles	191
Biblical Leadership.....	193
Important Aspects of Leadership.....	199
Developing Leaders	211
Leadership Challenges	212
Lesson Summary.....	215

Impacting the Kingdom to Fulfill God's Plan

Lesson 9: Exploring Our Calling.....	219
Our Life Stories.....	220
Our Unique Call.....	230
Dreaming Big Dreams	232
Evaluating Our Current Situation	234
Lesson Summary.....	241
Appendix 9.1 Exploring My Calling	243

Table of Contents

Appendix 9.2 Evaluating My Current Situation	245
Lesson 10: Moving Forward: Now What?.....	247
Foundation of All Ministry	249
Inviting Others to Join in Ministry	251
Creating a Plan	257
Lesson Summary.....	268
Appendix 10.1 Resource and Needs Assessment	269
Appendix 10.2 Questionnaire	279
Appendix 10.3 Getting Started with a Plan	283
Appendix 10.4 Sample of a Large Church Activity Plan	285

Additional Lessons

Lesson A: Living Alone	299
Understanding Life Alone.....	300
Biblical Views.....	307
Blessed in Singleness	312
Contentment.....	313
Navigating Living Alone	315
A Supportive Church Community	326
Lesson Summary.....	328
Lesson B: Living with Others	331
Understanding Life Together	332
Life Stages	334
Marriage	338
Blessings of Living with Others	342
Living Well with Others	344
Navigating Living Alone	345
Contentment.....	347
Lesson Summary.....	352
Lessons C: Using Challenges and Conflicts to Grow.....	355
Biblical Principles	356
Perspectives.....	359
The Power of Words	362
Resolving Conflict	365
The Centrality of the Gospel.....	369
Seeking Reconciliation	371
Lesson Summary.....	373
Appendix C.1: Words	375

Course Objectives

Equipping Women to Serve is the last module of Women-to-Women Ministry Training designed to prepare women for ministry within the local church. This course is comprised of four sections: Understanding God’s Plan for Women, Discovering Our Part in God’s Plan, Building Skills to Accomplish God’s Plan, and Impacting the Kingdom to Fulfill God’s Plan. The objectives for the module are given below.

When you have completed this course, you will be able to

- explain the biblical perspective on God’s design for women and the biblical basis for women in ministry
- discover and articulate who God uniquely made you to be
- define how to live out your unique calling to be a disciple and make disciples
- recognize the uniqueness and variety of individual members within the body of Christ
- participate actively in culturally sensitive evangelism
- evaluate how personalities and spiritual gifting impact team building
- prayerfully prioritize a God-given pace and agenda
- design and facilitate a lesson plan for an EWS lesson and a passage of Scripture
- demonstrate a deepening relationship with Christ by stepping out in faith to obey Christ’s call
- invest intentionally in other women’s lives for the purpose of moving them toward deeper understanding of Christ and multiplying disciples

Learner-driven, lifestyle-driven, locally-driven—these distinctives of Entrust permeate all we do. Just as your first group of facilitators sought God about those three things as they prepared to lead

Facilitating Relational Learning, the facilitators of this module do the same. After assessing the needs of your group and based on whom you minister to, your lead facilitator will decide whether or not to include the additional lessons found at the end of this workbook in your module. Even if you do not use them in the module, you have them for your personal study.

A suggested order for including the additional lessons is

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation for Women in Ministry

Lesson 2: Walking Side-by-Side

Lesson 3: Making Disciples

Lesson 4: Reaching Out

Lesson 5: Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts

Lesson 6: Valuing Temperaments

Lesson A: Living Alone

Lesson B: Living with Others

Lesson 7: Creating an Effective Team

Lesson C: Using Challenges and Conflict to Grow

Lesson 8: Becoming a Servant Leader

Lesson 9: Exploring Our Calling

Lesson 10: Moving Forward: Now What?

As the last module of the Entrust training curriculum, *Equipping Women to Serve* is the culmination of your hard work and dedication. We at Entrust want to congratulate you on pursuing training that prepares you for ministry in your local church. May the Lord be pleased, and the saints be blessed by the work of your hands. This is our prayer.

Workbook Icons



Assignments

Assignments are questions or tasks related to course content. Written responses are required and should be recorded in a separate notebook.



Personal Reflection

Reflections give an opportunity to reflect on scriptural truths or character traits as they relate to one's walk with God. The focus is on personal application. A written response may be requested.



Adoration

These instructions are designed to lead you in worshipping the Lord with reference to course content. The focus is on God. No written response is required.

Understanding God's Plan for Women

Lesson 1: **Building a Biblical Foundation for Women in Ministry**

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson, you will be able to

1. describe how women are viewed in your culture
2. summarize how God sees women, related to
 - his image
 - the Trinity
 - his commission
3. contrast God's design for creation in the garden with our fallen world
4. explain the biblical perspective on women with supporting Scripture

Lesson Outline

Looking for Answers

God's Design

Affirmed by Design

Affirmed by Old Testament Examples

Affirmed by Jesus in the New Testament

Women in the Early Church

Esther

A Biblical Women's Ministry Blesses the Church

Lesson Summary

Natalie stood amid the chaos from dinner. It looked like every plate and cup was dirty. As she started

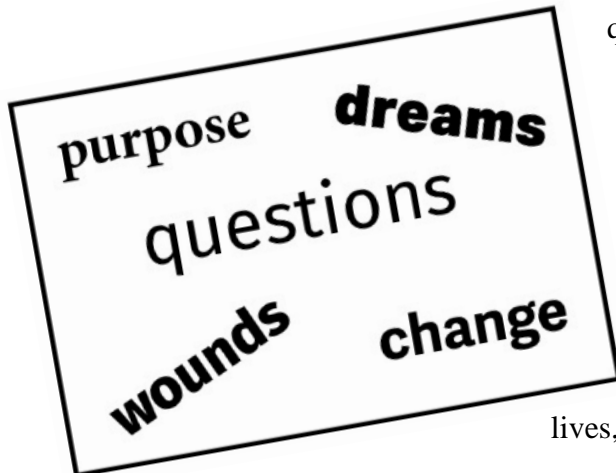
washing dishes, she began thinking about what she should do with her time now that all five children were in school. She always enjoyed the choir at church—but she couldn't carry a tune. She knew they needed Bible study facilitators for the women's groups. Should she do that? Although she had been in several studies, she had never led one before.

Did she have the skills to do that? Would they teach her how to do it? What about being a Sunday school teacher? She had fond memories of her own teachers who had poured into her life when she was young. But again, she wondered if she had the skills for it.

Questions swirled inside Natalie's head. How do people learn to do these things? Do they just know how to do them? How could she learn? Who could teach her?

Looking for Answers

Women today are asking many questions. Not just the questions Natalie asked about how to serve in her church, but they are asking questions about vocations, relationships, children, and spiritual matters. It often feels that there are more questions than answers.



And then there are the questions that result from living in a fallen world. Painful, unmet expectations haunt us. We are living lives we did not expect to be living. We have dreams that have never come true, prayers that have never been answered. We wonder why God seems so silent when brokenness invades our

lives, and we long to understand why.

Amid all these questions churning inside us, our culture swirls around us. Our twenty-first century culture immerses us in change that seems to be accelerating. In many parts of the world, women have more access to education than ever before; women have started home businesses to lift their families out of poverty. In some parts

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation

of the world, women have more freedom to travel and a greater voice in family affairs.

But at the same time, some things have not changed at all. Men and women continue to struggle to understand each other and work together well. Women are still facing uncertainty in their identity, their purpose, and their roles. Where do we go for answers?

The one unchanging source of answers is an ancient Middle Eastern book written in an era totally different from ours. As Carolyn Custis James says in her book, *Half the Church*,

...as Christians we owe it to ourselves and to our daughters to find out if the ancient message for women in the Bible is still relevant in the twenty-first century or if, as many suggest, we have outgrown its message. Does God's vision for his daughters equip us to move boldly into the future or summon us to retreat into the past? Does it break down when things go wrong for us, or is it robust enough to remain intact no matter what happens? Is his vision big enough to include every woman's story from the beginning to the final chapter?¹

Is God big enough to provide a purpose for women all around the world in all kinds of different circumstances and at all times?



The resounding answer is YES! This module addresses these questions as we explore God's view of women and the vast global vision that God has prepared for his daughters.



- A. How does your culture view women?
- B. In what ways are expectations for men and women the same?
- C. In what ways are they different?
- D. How have perspectives regarding women changed in the last twenty years?
- E. How do you think your generation has understood the contributions of women to the work of God's kingdom?

God's Design

As we examine what the Bible says, we will discover God's big vision for women. God affirms women by design, by biblical examples, by Jesus' example, and by scriptural commands. We will see that women are crucial to God's essential, eternal kingdom work. Healthy churches need both healthy men and healthy women.

As we progress through this study, looking at the Scriptures with fresh eyes, we may find our perspectives stretched as the Holy Spirit does his good work in us through his Word and his people.



Adoration

Take a moment to pray now for God’s Spirit to bring us into a deeper understanding of God’s purposes. Ask him to prepare our hearts and minds as we explore this topic.

Thank God for making you a woman, for who you are.

Affirmed by Design

Beginning in Genesis, we discover God’s original design and purpose for humanity, male and female.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:26-28

We first observe God in community with himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), creating mankind in his image. The interaction, communication, and collaboration within the Trinity reflect the intrinsic connection of God’s image and community—one God but three distinct persons, mutually loving and working together as one, perfectly aligned in purpose.

Additionally, from the beginning the image of God is reflected by human beings, both male and female. The act of creation of man and woman to reflect God’s image is done in community as well—male and female as mankind in two persons. We discover in these verses that woman bears God’s image equally with man. This gives her great worth and dignity. As image-bearers, we reflect our creator individually but also in our relationships with each other. Jesus

prays for his disciples in John 17:21 “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” We are God’s representatives here on earth. We reflect our creator to a watching world as we interact, value one another, and work together in kingdom work.



Read Genesis 1:26-28.

- A. What do you think it means to be made in the image of God, to bear his image?
- B. How does our identity, based on God himself, bring hope and purpose into our lives?
- C. What privileges and blessings are yours as God’s image bearer, as his representative amid the brokenness of this world?

From Genesis 1:26-30 we also learn that woman shares with man the responsibilities assigned by God in creation. Responsibilities are given to both.

Verses 28-30 command *both* man and woman

- to be fruitful and multiply
- to fill the earth and subdue it
- to rule or have dominion over creation
- to enjoy the fruit of the earth

God makes both man and woman in his image and gives them these significant tasks. What does this imply about the value and ability of both men and women?

- Woman is equal in nature with man as a human being with intellect, emotions, will, and spirit.
- It is not *only* man or *only* woman, who can fulfill God’s commission. These tasks are given to them both as a part of

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation

community that involves both male and female. Male and female complement each other as image-bearers.

- Both man and woman reflect the glory of God individually and in unique ways. Marriage itself can also reflect the glory of God, but neither man nor woman is defined by marriage. Unmarried men and women are both able to reflect the image of God.



- A. Why do you think God chooses to give man and woman these responsibilities together?
- B. What do you think it means to be fruitful and multiply?
- C. What do you think it means to rule and subdue?
- D. What difference does your gender make in Genesis 1:26-31?

Let us further consider the passages in Genesis that speak to our original design by reading Genesis 2:15-25.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while

he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

*“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”*

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

As we read these familiar verses, a closer look at some of the original Hebrew words helps us to understand the impact of God’s creative power in making mankind.

Jeanne Hendricks describes the moment Eve is created in her book *Women of Honor*.

In the original Hebrew God used two different words to describe the creation of Adam and Eve. In creating the man, the ordinary word for “make” is used, such as one would describe the molding of a clay pot. In portraying Eve’s appearance, however, the verb used means “hand-crafted,” or, literally, “built.”²

On the sixth day, God

scooped up dust from the ground, formed a man and breathed into him His heavenly breath; whereupon man became a living soul. The woman He brought was custom-fit for the man’s need for beauty, for fun, for challenge, for fellowship; she was the imprint of the Almighty.³

ezer—help, succor, aid

Strong’s Concordance

On the sixth day, Eve is the last creation act of God. The Lord God sees that what he has made is very good. God rests on the seventh day and declares it holy.

God calls the first woman *ezer*—a name that is most often used in the Old Testament for God himself. This word is hard to translate into English—most translations use the word *helper*. The descriptor in Hebrew is *kenegdo*. So verse eighteen says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation

make him an *ezer kenegdo*.” These two words have been translated in multiple ways—suitable helper, helpmeet, companion corresponding—none of which fully capture the meaning of these two words.

As Carolyn Custis James writes,

*Focus on the wife as her husband’s helper has led to the belief that God gave primary roles and responsibilities to men, and secondary, supporting roles to women. It has led to practices that communicate that women are second class citizens at home and in the church. None of this is true. There is nothing second class about God’s vision for his daughters, and the ezer holds the clues.*⁴

Let us start by talking about *kenegdo*. *Suitable* can be taken in many unhelpful ways.

*Kenegdo indicates the ezer is the man’s match—literally, “as in front of him” . . . Victor Hamilton puts it: “[Kenegdo] suggests that what God creates for Adam will correspond to him. Thus the new creation will be neither a superior nor an inferior, but an equal. The creation of this helper will form one-half of a polarity and will be to man as the South Pole is to the North Pole.” She will be his strongest ally in pursuing God’s purposes.*⁵

Ezer appears a total of twenty-one times in the Old Testament. It is found twice in Genesis for the woman (2:18, 20), three times for nations Israel appeals to for military aid (Isa 30:5; Ezek 12:14; Dan 11:34), and sixteen times for God as Israel’s helper against their enemies. All the uses of this word indicate that the *ezer* is someone who can offer true help; they can provide the assistance and relief that is needed.

Because *ezer* is often used as a cry for help in the midst of battle, the word has a military connotation. It most often used while appealing to God for deliverance. God is Israel’s *shield and sword* (see Deut 33:29; Ps 115:11) and *better than chariots and horses* (see Ps 20:7). As Carolyn Custis James says,

Putting the facts together, isn’t it obvious that the ezer is a warrior? And don’t we already know this in our bones? God created his daughters to be ezer-

warriors with our brothers. He deploys the ezer to break the man's aloneness by soldiering with him wholeheartedly and at full strength for God's gracious kingdom. The man needs everything she brings to their global mission.⁶

1.4



Read Genesis 2:18-23.

- A. In what sense is the man alone?
- B. Why do you think God gives Adam the job of naming the animals?
- C. If an *ezer* is a warrior, how does this idea impact your understanding of the creation of woman?
- D. In today's culture, what might this concept of *ezer* look like?
- E. How does it make a difference for you?

God has kingdom-sized purposes for his created human beings, male and female. God's view of women is lofty with expectations beyond ours. He needs his people, men and women, to be fully engaged in the task before us.

When half the church holds back—whether by choice or because we have no choice—everybody loses and our mission suffers setbacks. Tragically, we are squandering the opportunity to display to an embattled world a gospel that causes both men and women to flourish and unites us in a Blessed Alliance that only the presence of Jesus can explain.⁷

The Fall

Adam and Eve have everything they need in the garden. But their enemy is plotting. Satan enters, and they eat of the one fruit God commands them not to eat. God is specific in his response to their disobedience in Genesis 3:14-19. God says to the woman in verse

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation

sixteen, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

The word *desire* is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 4:7 when the Lord rebukes Cain. “Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you but you must rule over it.” *Desire* in these two passages speaks to an unhealthy ambition to take over.

Because of the Fall, we see women wanting to control men, to compete with men, to take over and be in charge instead of working together with men in God’s family as brothers and sisters. Likewise, men post-fall dominate rather than co-rule with women.

God has designed men and women to work together in the church, to complement and complete each other. What would our world look like without the Fall, without sin? How would men and women work together?



- A. Describe what is lost in the Fall.
- B. How has the Fall affected our perspectives and our relationships?

The kings and priests in the Bible are men; most of the prophets are men, and all the twelve apostles in Jesus’ inner circle are men. But we also see women in key roles in the Bible.

Affirmed by Old Testament Examples

The Old Testament is filled with women who trusted and obeyed God in a wide variety of ways. God uses women from every walk of life to participate in his purposes. As we look at the following passages, add any additional observations to these listed.

Miriam (Exod 2:1-10; 15:20-21; Mic 6:4)

- Moses and Aaron’s sister
- approaches Pharaoh’s daughter with an offer to provide a Hebrew wet nurse for the baby boy in the basket (Moses)

- prophetess (one who speaks God's Word)
- leads the women in praising the Lord after the Egyptian army perishes in the Red Sea
- is a leader in Israel

Rahab (Josh 2:1-24; 6:22-25)

- prostitute who hides the Israelite spies and directs them to safety
- testifies to what she has seen God do for the Israelites; understands that God had given them this land
- saves her household from destruction
- lives among the Israelites because she hid the spies

Deborah (Judg 4:4-14; 5:1-3, 7)

- prophetess who leads Israel; under her leadership Israel enjoys peace for forty years
- a judge—people come to her to have disputes settled
- sends for Barak and tells him to lead the army; he is unwilling to do so without her there
- praises God with Barak for the victory

Abigail (1 Sam 25:1-42)

- rescues her household with great courage, wisdom, and initiative
- gives David wise counsel, keeping him from bloodshed, turning him aside from taking murderous revenge
- becomes David's wife after the death of Nabal

Huldah (2 Kgs 22:11-20; 2 Chr 34:14-33)

- prophetess who lives in Jerusalem
- gives God's counsel to King Josiah when he is deeply convicted after hearing the law for the first time
- states that God is going to punish the people for their idolatry
- further states that God has heard King Josiah's repentance and therefore will not bring disaster during King Josiah's lifetime

1.6

- A. What do these women have in common?
- B. Which of these women do you most relate to? Why?
- C. What other women in the Old Testament do you admire? Why?

Affirmed by Jesus in the New Testament

In this section, we will highlight several aspects of how Christ relates to women during his earthly ministry. These are particularly significant when we consider how counter-cultural these actions are in his day. In a culture where rabbis would rather teach a dog than a woman, and some husbands would not even speak to their wives in public, Jesus teaches women spiritual truths and speaks publicly to them. Again, as we look at the following passages, add any additional observations.

Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 2:6-7, 51; John 2:1-11; 19:25-27)

- One of God's greatest eternal works comes through a woman, through Mary—the incarnation.



- The Son of God submits to her in his humanity. He listens to her and provides for her care when he is hanging on the cross.

Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42)

- Jesus allows her into the living room to learn with the men.
- When her sister Martha rebukes her, Jesus rebukes Martha. He tells Martha that Mary has chosen what is better when Mary sits at his feet listening, rather than being consumed with her hostess duties.

Additional Examples of How Jesus Treats Women

- Jesus lets women touch him—the woman who washes his feet with her tears and pours perfume on them (Luke 7:36-50).
- He heals women: Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-42, 49-56), the woman with the bleeding disorder (Luke 8:43-48), the woman in the synagogue (Luke 13:10-17).
- He uses illustrations women could identify with: yeast, (Luke 13:20-21), pain of childbirth (John 16:21-22).
- He defends them against unjust criticism and commends them publicly: a woman pours oil on his head (Mark 14:1-9), Mary uses expensive perfume on his feet (John 12:1-8).
- Women travel with Jesus and the disciples. They provide financial support from their own resources (Matt 27:55; Luke 8:1-3).
- Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection (John 20:11-18).

Jesus cares for, values, teaches, and empowers women.

1.7

- A. Describe some ways the above examples are new or surprising to you.
- B. What other examples or observations do you have?
- C. At this point, how would you summarize Jesus' view of women?

Women in the Early Church

There is historical precedent for ministry by women. Women are active in ministry in the early church.

- in works of compassion: Dorcas, helper of widows and the poor (Acts 9:36-41)
- the first convert in Europe: Lydia, hosts the church at Philippi (Acts 16:11-15)
- co-workers of Paul in spreading the gospel message (Phil 4:2-3), including Priscilla (Many scholars believe that because her name is mentioned first it shows her significance in ministry.) (Acts 18:18-19, 24-26; Rom 16:3-4)
- friends of Paul, including Phoebe, a leader in the church at Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-16)
- prophetesses: Philip's four daughters prophesy (Acts 21:8-9)

1.8

What encourages you from the examples of women in the early church?

Esther

Let us look in more detail at Esther. She is a woman who lives in troubled political times but courageously responds to what is taking place and risks her own life in fulfilling what she believes God has called her to do. Because of her obedience, she changes the fate of her entire nation; God uses her to fulfill his purposes.

We will consider the book of Esther from three perspectives and see what we can learn about how God uses women to fulfill his purposes. We will see that he

- prepares us
- asks us to take a risk (to walk by faith)
- gives us wisdom as we seek his way

A Prepared Person

God prepares his people for what he calls them to do. He goes before them and prepares the way. He knows the difficulties that will be faced; nothing takes God by surprise. In Esther, we see God prepares her for what is going to take place.

1.9

Read Esther 1-2.

- A. In what specific ways do you see God preparing Esther?
- B. How do you sense that God has prepared you in the past for something ahead?
- C. How does it comfort you to know that God has prepared the way before you?
- D. How are you cooperating with God as he prepares you in the present?

As we reflect on how God prepares us, we can see that he has used circumstances in our lives to prepare us for our present situation.

A Risk Taker

Responding to God's invitation to participate in his purposes requires a risk; it requires faith. Even though he prepares us and brings about the opportunity, we must respond to the invitation. He does not force us to do his will. We must trust in him.

Since we do not know the future, there is a risk to our response. We must believe in God's goodness and character. We allow him to be in control; there is no guarantee that everything will turn out to our liking. We trust in his character as we walk in obedience to him.



Read chapters 3-4 in Esther.

- A. What dangers and risks do you see Esther encountering?
- B. How does she respond to these risks?
- C. What risks/costs do you see in responding to God's invitation to serve him?

A Wise Planner

Even though God's way requires a risk, it is not a senseless risk, without thought or plan. Esther plans for what she is going to ask the king to do. She follows the counsel of Mordecai, and she requests a fast for her plan. We see God at work behind the scenes preparing the circumstances for Esther. Esther senses God's timing, and she waits. Her request to the king is presented in the most respectful of words and actions. Haman's own actions bring the wrath of the king on him, and the gallows he prepared in anger become his own undoing.

1.11

Read Esther 5-8.

- A. How do you see Esther exercising wisdom in preparing and planning for her request to the king?
- B. How do you see Esther moving ahead in wise planning?
- C. How do you see God provide as she moves forward?
- D. As you pray about what God is inviting you to, what planning and preparing on your part do you see as necessary to move forward?

In Esther we see that God uses women in significant ways to accomplish his purposes. The Scriptures contains many examples of women who serve God for his kingdom purposes.

The Bible is the redemptive story of God providing the means to restore what was lost in Eden. The precious blood of Christ has redeemed all Christians, women and men (see 1 Pet 1:18-19, NASB). Therefore, women should have a healthy sense of self-worth and feel confident to minister. In Christ, there is no superiority or inferiority based on race, social class, or gender. In Christ, we are all equal and co-heirs according to his promise (see Gal 3:26-29). In Christ, women as well as men are adopted as children of God, are co-heirs with Christ, and are called priests of God (see Rom 8:16-17; Gal 4:4-7; 1 Pet 2:9). The Holy Spirit indwells both (see Rom 8:11; Eph 2:22; 1 John 3:24). All spiritual gifts are given to both men and women (see 1 Cor 12:4-13).

A Biblical Women's Ministry Blesses the Church

It is no small matter that women make up at least half the church. In many churches, 60-95% of the believers are women. When we stop to think about it, the potential for expanding God's kingdom by mobilizing women is huge. Regardless of our background and

Lesson 1: Building a Biblical Foundation

convictions about how women serve in the church overall, the ministry of women to women is clearly biblical and essential for the sake of a healthy church. It is also an area where all gifts can be exercised.

A biblical ministry to women

- matures a large percentage of the congregation
- energizes families and the whole community
- blesses the male leaders
- creates a connectedness in the church community
- provides a wealth of kingdom resources—women who are equipped and willing to serve
- blesses the Lord

As women, we have all received different callings and giftings from the Lord. We all live in different circumstances with different personalities and personal histories. Esther changes the course of history for her nation despite significant difficulties and risks. How might we make an impact in our world as we follow God's call?

Whenever we are called to make a difference, God prepares us for the task. He develops our faith as we face risk, and he provides what we need. As God's Word gives us the encouragement and authority to offer ourselves completely for his service and to enjoy him fully, let us move ahead together to make an impact in our world in ways that glorify God and reflect his vision for his daughters. Carolyn Custis James puts it this way,

God's vision for us doesn't just reassure us that we matter and that our lives do count for something. God's vision compels us to look beyond ourselves, to ponder a picture of how things were meant to be that leaves us aching for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and to look for ways to participate in moving the world toward that goal.⁸

1A



Personal Reflection

As you reflect on the biblical examples of women in ministry, what do you believe God is asking you to do in this next season of your life and church?

Lesson Summary

- God makes men and women in his image.
- God gives the commands to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to rule over creation to both men and women.
- He identifies woman as an *ezer*.
- God uses women throughout the Old Testament to advance his plans and purposes.
- Jesus demonstrates his value of women as he interacts with them in the New Testament. Women have a significant ministry during the early church as well.
- God will use us to further his purposes as we obey and respond to him.
- God wants us as women to join him in expanding his kingdom here on earth.



Adoration

Praise God for his design for women. Thank him for the ministries he has given to women and for the ministry he has for you to do.

Pray for God's Spirit to bring us into a deeper understanding of God's purposes and to prepare our hearts and minds as we explore this topic.

Notes

¹ Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 18.

² Jeanne Hendricks, *Women of Honor: God's Incredible Plan for Fulfillment* (Gresham, OR: Vision House Publishing, 1995), 28.

³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴ James, *Half the Church*, 111.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.