

Helpful Hints on Using Monologues

Be creative: Allow God to show you through your imagination possibilities for staging the monologues.

- Costumes and props can be as simple or as elaborate as you choose. If you have access to full costumes from the era and feel they will enhance the sharing of the monologue, then use them. However, if you do not have access to such costumes, something as simple as a piece of cloth used for a head covering would supply the viewers with a sense of who the woman is. Allow the words to be the primary focus. A simple reading of the monologue can help the listener's see the scene in their mind's eye and understand these women in ways they never have before.
- Focus more on voice inflection, reading "with feeling," and paying close attention to punctuation for clues from the writer into the emotions being conveyed. Practice reading the monologues aloud several times.

General Suggestions for the Study Leader

Preparation:

- Be aware that God has called you as study leader for such a time as this. Find a quiet place to pray, asking God to guide you and to use you to accomplish God's purpose in this time and place.
- Read the suggested Scripture and monologue, trying to put yourself in the place of the woman, so that God can speak through her to you.
- Picture the women in your group. As you read the discussion suggestions, consider how the suggestions relate to these women. The discussion suggestions are offered as a possible guide, not a rigid set of instructions. Would adapting some of the questions and activities, or substituting others, make the study more helpful for your group? You may not need or have time to use all the questions. Pray for each woman in your group and for the leadership of the Holy Spirit in your life and in the life of each woman who will be present.
- Arrange chairs in the room where you will meet so women can see the woman who presents the monologue and each other. Check that the temperature and lighting in the room contribute to the learning environment.

Leading the study:

- Use an opening prayer or thought to help the group prepare for the monologue.
- After the monologue, pause before beginning the discussion to give women time to reflect on what they have heard and felt.
- If your group is large, you may suggest that women discuss some of their responses with partners or in smaller groups of 6-8 persons. Then each group could share a response.
- Model respect for each woman and her response.
- Give everyone who wishes an opportunity to respond.
- If one person tends to dominate the discussion, you can involve others with questions such as "How do you respond to what _____ said?" or "What ideas do others have about that?"
- Be aware that some women may choose not to speak. Help these women feel comfortable silently considering their responses.
- Do not be afraid of silence. Give plenty of time for responses and for questions women may raise related to the monologue and discussion.
- If the discussion seems to get off track, gently guide the group back with one of the suggested questions.
- Be available following the study if anyone has further questions or wishes to tell you privately about her response.

Cumberland Presbyterian Women's Ministry
2005-2006 Bible Studies

For Such A Time As This: Reaching Out to Serve!

Join with your sisters across the country in showing the love of Christ to the world as we focus together on the theme for the upcoming year. ***“For Such A Time As This: Reaching Out to Serve!”*** Women, individually and in groups, will find countless ways to reach out to others with the love of Jesus Christ. You will continue some of the ministries that are meaningful, and no doubt, some will begin new ministries this year. We rejoice with you in the possibilities!

Here you will find rich resources to encourage and sustain you in your work. We are excited about this year's Bible Study. Each study begins with a monologue from a different woman in the Bible. Thanks to ***Tiffany Hall McClung*** for sharing her talent with us as a writer. Tiffany graduated from the University of Memphis with a degree in Theatre. She attended Memphis Theological Seminary and was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in 2000 by Nashville Presbytery. She is married to the Reverend Andy McClung, who is pastor of First CP Church in Savannah, Tennessee. Tiffany and Andy are the proud parents of Ian, and will soon be welcoming another little one into their home! ***Beth Cole*** enhances Tiffany's monologues with activities and discussion questions for groups to use. Beth has made it possible for women to go even deeper into God's Word and their own spiritual reflection. Beth graduated from Union University in Jackson, TN with majors in Religion and English. She went on to graduate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville with a Master of Theology degree. She is married to the Reverend Dwayne Cole, who pastors the First CP Church in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. They are the parents of two adult children and especially the proud grandparents of Cole, who lives in Denver, Colorado.

Please feel free to use these resources to fit your interests and needs. Be sure to check out the Women's Ministry web site for more resources (<http://www.cumberland.org>, there you will find the link to Women's Ministry). This Bible Study, along with other resources specific to the yearly theme, is available through the Board of Missions for \$3.50. You can either call (901/276-9988) or use the Order Form at the end of the booklet.

You will also find at the end of the booklet, suggested calendar activities. This is provided for those groups who have found this resource helpful in the past. It is in no means, “written in stone.” Please feel free to adjust and modify your calendars to fit your group's unique needs.

Blessings as you hear once again, the stories of some amazing women of God and as you reach out to serve during such a time as this!





Hannah

1 Samuel 1; 2:1-21

Opening Prayer: “God, we thank you for the stories in the Bible of women of faith who were used by you for a particular time. Help us to listen with open hearts and minds to the story of Hannah so that her story may become our story. Amen.”

Hannah Monologue

My name is Hannah. I don't really know what to say. I have beautiful children after living so long believing I would never even have one child. I don't really believe that I was called to a certain time and place for God's purpose, but I most certainly believe that God heard my cries for help and answered my prayers in ways that I could never have imagined.

My husband, Elkanah, could never really understand how I felt. Of course, he had children of his own with Peninnah. I've been quiet most of my life. I'm more of a listener than a talker. One day I had heard enough from Elkanah and Peninnah and, at that moment, I felt like I'd heard enough from God, too. Have you ever been in a place where you just felt so helpless that you figure you have nothing to lose? Well, that is how I felt.

We were at the temple making our annual sacrifices, and I just couldn't even eat because I was sick with grief. I found myself outside praying, asking God to help me to have a baby boy, and the priest, Eli, was sitting there. I hadn't even seen him! I guess I had been pretty distraught in my prayers because the priest actually thought I was drunk! Normally, I would have been so embarrassed, I would have gotten away as fast as I could. I really don't know where my voice came from, but I heard myself telling him that I had been praying for a son and that if God would indeed bless me in this way that I would turn right around and give that son back to the work of God. The priest was so kind. He assured me that I would be blessed by God.

I would love to be able to say that I believed him one hundred percent, but I'd already waited so long. What did happen was really strange, though. A sense of peace came over me like nothing I had ever known before. I knew at that moment that no matter what happened I would be okay, son or no son. So, I went back in and had something to eat!

Well, I already gave the end away. God did bless me with a beautiful baby boy. I named him Samuel which means, “God has heard.” You have to be careful what you ask for, though. I had promised him to God, so when he was still very, very young I took him to Eli and I left him there to learn the work of God. So many years have passed and I still get tears in my eyes when I think about that day I left my baby in the care of someone else. Can you imagine seeing the greatest blessing in your life only once a year? It was heartbreaking at times.

But, as I said God gave me other children to keep me occupied and who bring enormous joy to my life. They really liked to tease Samuel when I would take him his new clothes each year at the time of the sacrifice. I'd do the silly mother thing and make him try them on in front of everyone. He still gives me a hard time for that. He has turned into an amazing man.

Come to think of it, maybe my blessing *by* God was in some way also God *using* me at a particular time in a particular place to accomplish part of God's plan. What greater contribution than giving your children? I never really thought of it that way before.

Discussion Suggestions (Hannah):

Remind the women that our Women's Ministry theme this year is "For Such a Time as This: Reaching Out to Serve." Recall that Hannah stated in the beginning, "I don't really believe that I was called to a certain time and place for God's purpose." Encourage women to discuss: "How do you respond to those words from Hannah? Have you ever doubted with Hannah that God called you to a certain time and place for God's purpose? What may have caused you to feel like that?"

Recall that Hannah asked: "Have you ever been in a place that you just felt so helpless that you had nothing to lose?" Invite each woman to choose a partner sitting near her and talk about a time when she experienced those same feelings. (If a woman does not feel comfortable talking about these feelings, she may silently recall them as she listens to her partner.)

Comment: "Where did Hannah turn when her feelings of hopelessness and emptiness seemed overwhelming? What are some words you would use to describe her praying? What can we learn from Hannah that can help us when we pray?"

Ask: "What did Hannah come to understand about God using her in a particular time and place to accomplish God's plan?" Guide women to brainstorm ways that we can give our children (whether children in our family or those we nurture at church) to God. (You may wish to list the responses on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.)

Invite the women to join you in a time of guided silent prayer (as you pause between each statement):

"Thank God for the example of Hannah and the way God used her to help accomplish God's plan."

"Bring your needs, whatever they may be, honestly and boldly to God knowing that God hears your prayer and cares for you."

"Talk with God about how you will respond to God's blessing by giving your children or other gifts of God's grace to God to use in accomplishing God's purpose for such a time as this."



Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-19, 41-51; John 2:1-11; 19:25-27

Opening Prayer: “God, help us to listen to the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as if we had never heard it before. As we hear how you used Mary for a certain purpose, help us learn how you would use us for your purpose. Amen.”

Mary, the Mother of Jesus Monologue

I have a pretty easy answer for a question about being used at a certain time for a certain purpose. I am Mary, the mother of Jesus. I guess I could stop there. I was used by the Holy Spirit to bring the Messiah into this world. I still don't understand it, but I've learned that I don't have to understand it.

It is quite a story really. When the angel came to me and told me about Jesus, I was terrified. I was so young, so immature, so not married! Joseph was a wonderful man, but I could never have expected him to stay with me knowing that the child I carried was not his. But, by the grace of God, he did stay with me. He cared so very much for Jesus. I loved watching him teach Jesus carpentry. I could sit for hours watching them work together. To me, it was beautiful.

There were times when Joseph and I were at our wits end with him, though. Now, I can see better what was happening, but at the time he felt like a handful of a boy! I will never forget losing him on our way back from Jerusalem. There were so many of us walking together. I thought he must be with Joseph. Joseph thought he was with me. When we met up again and realized he was with neither of us, we panicked. We knew how special he was. At least, we knew as much as our minds could grasp right then. We were sick with worry and fear. How could we have let something happen to this beautiful and special boy?

We retraced our steps and there he was sitting in the temple engaged in a heated debate with the rabbis. I was furious. All this time I was so worried and he was just sitting there not thinking a thing about it. When he told me that I should have known that he would be in his father's house, I had very mixed emotions. First, I was just more angry. How could he talk to his mother this way? But then, something clicked within me and I began to truly see Jesus for who he really was. I realized that he wasn't ever mine to begin with and, of course, he was right where he was supposed to be. We made it through that day and many other days of not fully understanding his choices.

I think sometimes my mothering him grated on his nerves a bit. But even the mother of the Messiah can sometimes see things that will be good for her son. Take that wedding miracle, for example. His human side had him so afraid. He didn't think he was ready to perform any miracles. Well, I had been watching him his whole life. I knew it was time. He didn't like it, but I pushed him to discover who he really was. And, of course, he performed the miracle and went on from there to do so many others. He has helped so many people.

My heart swelled with pride more and more. It continues to do so. It was never an easy life, this life called to be the mother of Jesus. No, it was never easy. But, oh, how glorious!

Discussion Suggestions (Mary, the Mother of Jesus):

Comment: “We may have favorite mental pictures of Mary, the mother of Jesus. After hearing her story in her own words, you may now have some new pictures of Mary. I wonder what you learned about Mary through her story that you had not thought about before.” Invite women to share new insights about Mary and God’s calling her to be used by God in a particular way as the mother of Jesus.

Suggest: “Let’s compare Mary’s experience in following God’s will to our own experiences in answering God’s call to a particular time and purpose. In what ways are our experiences like Mary’s?” As women share their ideas and as you pick up on new insights they learned about Mary, you may also want to guide them to explore the following ideas:

When may you have felt afraid and unready to respond to God’s call?

When may you have felt that you did not understand why God was calling you or what God was calling you to do?

How has responding faithfully to God’s call helped you to see Jesus for who he really is?

In what ways would you agree with Mary that answering God’s call may not always be easy, but it is glorious?

Say: “As we listened to Mary’s story, we found her growing in her understanding of God’s purpose for her life and for Jesus’ life. Let’s talk about how we can use each of the following avenues to grow in our understanding of God’s purpose to use us for such a time as ours.” (You may want to lead the whole group in discussion or assign each topic to a small group to discuss and then share with the whole group.)

Bible study

Prayer

Worship

Time spent with other believers

Serving others

Use Mary’s prayer and response to the angel’s announcement for a time of guided prayer. Invite women to listen to a part of Mary’s prayer and then silently voice their corresponding prayer. (Pause between each of Mary’s statements to give women time to pray.)

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” (Luke 1:46-50)

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Lk 1:18)



Woman with Hemorrhage

Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48; Matthew 9:20-22

Opening Prayer: “God, help us listen for your voice as we listen to this monologue. Help us to hear you speak a personal word to us through her words about you calling her to a certain time and place for your purpose. Amen.”

Woman with Hemorrhage Monologue

They call me the hemorrhaging woman which is so funny to me now because, of course, it just isn't true anymore. Was I called to a certain time and place for God's purpose? I'm beginning to wonder.

What I know most about in this world is loss, desperation, and restoration. Talk about desperate! I had been bleeding for twelve years - twelve long years. In those twelve years, I not only lost a lot of blood, but I lost everything. Because of the purity laws I was forced into seclusion. No one wanted to be near me. They were sure that I had done something horrible to have deserved such an affliction from God. To be completely honest, I had been asking God for quite some time what I had done to deserve it. More like yelling at God about it, I guess.

I not only lost my family and friends, but I spent all of my money on doctors who did me no good at all. In fact, they seemed to just take my money and make things worse. Some days I didn't mind though. They were just about the only other people I ever had the opportunity to talk to.

I do have to give credit to one of them, though - the last one I saw. He told me the most amazing stories about this man named Jesus. The doctor had seen Jesus heal a blind man. He told me that he believed this Healer was the long-awaited Messiah. And, he told me where I could find him.

I shouldn't have been in that crowd. If I had been recognized I could have suffered even greater isolation - or worse. But at a moment of complete desperation the consequences are of little concern. All I could think about was that if this Jesus was truly the Messiah, then I knew he was the one person who could help me.

I shouldn't have touched him without his permission, but again, I wasn't thinking too much about the rules. I thought if I could slip into the crowd and just touch his clothes, well, I just knew that even touching the *clothes* of the Messiah would be enough to heal me. I didn't want to bother him. I was just going to slip through, touch him, and slip out again.

Maybe you will find this hard to believe, but as soon as I touched him – as soon as I touched him – I felt different. The blood dried up, and I knew I had truly been healed by the Messiah himself.

That was amazing enough, but then he turned around and asked who touched him. There was a huge crowd! Everyone was touching him. How did he know? But, somehow he did know. He knew *my* touch.

Oh, I was terrified, but I knew for certain who he was now, and I knew I had to speak up. I was wishing that I had just asked him first. I was so scared, not knowing what to expect.

Then, I still can't even believe this really happened, Jesus looked me in the eyes and called me, “Daughter.” Have you ever had someone say just exactly what you needed to hear? I can't find a way to make you understand, but I'd been without a family for so long and the Messiah brought me back. He made me family. He called me, “Daughter.” It was the most incredible moment of my life. I only hope that other women will learn that to boldly approach the Messiah is nothing to be ashamed of. It will bring blessings beyond your dreams. Do you understand? He called me, “Daughter.”

Discussion Suggestions (Woman with Hemorrhage):

Invite discussion of the following: “What conditions caused the woman to be isolated from other people? What conditions today may cause women to feel isolated from other people and perhaps from God? Can you recall a time when you felt isolated from others and from God?”

Ask: “What do you think gave the woman the courage and faith to reach out to Jesus? In what ways were her actions a kind of prayer? What were the results of her action prayer? What have been the results when you reached out to Jesus?”

Ask: “What difference did it make to the woman that Jesus called her ‘Daughter?’ How do you think this woman was called to a certain time and place for God’s purpose? How do you imagine she lived out that calling?”

Spend the rest of the time in reflective prayer. Encourage the women to sit comfortably with their eyes closed, to still themselves, and to allow God to speak to them through this prayer experience. Read the following directions, allowing time for all who wish to respond silently and aloud.

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ addressed to you. ‘Daughter.’ Repeat the word ‘Daughter’ silently to yourself several times during a minute of silence.” (After the time of silence signal for all to repeat the word “Daughter” aloud.)

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ again as Jesus’ personal word to you. ‘Daughter.’ Silently and prayerfully consider how Jesus’ calling you ‘Daughter’ touches your life today.” (After a few minutes of silence invite anyone who will to share how Jesus’ word “Daughter” touches her life.)

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ again. ‘Daughter.’ Prayerfully consider whether this is Jesus’ personal invitation to you for such a time as this.” (After a time of silence, invite anyone who wishes to speak her sense of invitation and response to God’s call.)

“Pray silently for Jesus to empower you and others in the group to live as God’s daughters for such a time as this.”



Syrophoenician Woman

Mark 7:24-30

Opening: “Give your imagination free rein and put yourself in the place of the woman whose story you are about to hear. What do you see and hear? What emotions do you feel as she tells her story of being called for God’s purpose?”

Syrophoenician Woman Monologue

I’m that Syrophoenician woman. Maybe you’ve already heard my story. I understand I was the topic of a lot of gossip because of what I did. When I think about ways God has used me for a particular work, I can only think of my daughter. I never understood fully what was wrong with her, but she wasn’t herself. The only way I know to describe it is that she was afflicted by a demon. I could look into her eyes and see that something was really wrong. Those were the saddest days of my life. I wanted so badly to help her and there was nothing that I did that helped her at all.

Until – until I heard that he was at a nearby house trying to rest. Everyone had been talking about him. I heard miraculous stories of healings from all kinds of afflictions.

Well, the part of the gossip that is true is that I’ve never been one to keep quiet much. If I think it, I usually say it. You always know right where you stand with me. I’ve made a lot of people uncomfortable in my day. I’ve never really “stayed in my place,” if you know what I mean.

So, I marched myself right over to the house where he was staying. I know most people would have left him alone, let him rest and get away for a while. But, my daughter had suffered long enough already. Waiting one more day was not an option.

I could tell when I walked in that he was very tired. He had to be. The stories of his sermons and travels and healings were growing every day. I know he needed some time to rest, but I just had to give it a try. I walked right up to him and asked him to heal my sick daughter. I didn’t know what to expect from him. I knew I was taking a big chance by even being there.

Well, his response was not what I had hoped for, but it was what I would have expected from a Jewish man. He told me that “the children” get to eat before “the dogs.” I guess he wanted me to wait, to not expect something to happen immediately, but I wouldn’t give up. I don’t think I was at all what he expected because the first thing that I thought is what flew out of my mouth. “But even the dogs get crumbs under the table.” Ha! That must have shocked him because for the first time he looked into my eyes. But then, the biggest smile came across his face and he said those words I had longed to hear. “Your daughter is well.”

I don’t even remember if I thanked him. I ran straight home and my daughter was back to her old self, a true miracle. I know God could have healed my daughter in some other way, but I do have so much joy in thinking about God using me and my loud mouth to bring healing to her life. To my life too. Those times before were no fun, but that experience transformed all the pain, all the anguish and showed me that God can use each and every one of us. And, that truly is a miracle.

Discussion Suggestions (Syrophenician Woman):

Ask: “As you continue to imagine yourself as the Syrophenician woman, what do you see? What do you hear? How would you describe yourself? What do you consider your greatest need?”

Continue: “As the woman with a deeply troubled daughter, what barriers did you have to overcome to approach Jesus? What factors enabled you to approach Jesus? How did you understand Jesus’ words that the children get to eat before the dogs? How did these words make you feel?”

Ask women to continue to imagine themselves as the woman from the monologue: “What gave you the courage to challenge Jesus’ statement? Can you describe your feelings when Jesus spoke the words, ‘Your daughter is well?’ How would you say that God used you for such a time and place to accomplish God’s purpose? In what ways was this a miracle?”

Ask women to discuss: “In what ways are you like this woman? What barriers may keep you from approaching Jesus? What about your own personality, gifts, talents, and experience enable you to approach Jesus on your behalf or on behalf of others? How can God use your personality, gifts, talents, and experience for such a time as this? How would you consider that a miracle?”

Guide the women to pray in the following way:

“Imagine Jesus standing before you and asking you: ‘(*Your name*), what is your deepest need? What do you need for me to do for you?’” (Give plenty of time for silent reflection and prayer.)

“Identify how you wish to address God in prayer. You may choose Jesus, Loving God, Lord, or some other name for God that has special meaning for you.”

“Combine your name for God with your deepest need in a single short phrase. Sit quietly and repeat the phrase several times until it takes root deep in your heart.”

“Repeat your chosen name for God and your phrase. Then ask God how this prayer relates to God’s using you for God’s purpose in such a time as this.”

“Thank God for hearing your prayer and for the miracle that God is working in your life for such a time as this.”



Abigail 1 Samuel 25

Opening Prayer: “God, we ask you to guide us as we hear the story of one of the lesser known women of the Bible. Be our teacher as we hear and learn from Abigail’s story about how you are calling us to serve others in our time. Amen.”

Abigail Monologue

My name is Abigail. Like so many others, I found myself doing something that I really shouldn’t have been doing. I was married to Nabal who was truly a fool. He was never happy, always yelling. But, I do have to say that he had done well for us. We had a nice life. And, then one day that fool opened his mouth to the wrong men – David’s men.

One of our shepherds knew that going to Nabal would only make things worse. He came to me instead and told me what had happened. He also said that he was sure David would be back to kill us all for what Nabal had done.

Sometimes you just have to take matters into your own hands. I gathered up food and wine as a peace offering and I headed out to meet David and his men before they could get close enough to do any damage.

I was terrified, but I knew it was our only chance of surviving. Really, when I saw David’s men come over that hill, I realized how close to the end we were. He was so very angry, and he was ready to take action.

My legs and hands were trembling, but I spoke right up and begged him to have mercy on all of us. I told him that acting in anger would only hurt him in the long run. I apologized for the rude behavior of my husband, and I offered the supplies I had brought for him.

I’ve always been good about finding solutions to problems. Nabal wouldn’t have wanted anyone to know just how much I did to take care of the business. I know men, too. And, sometimes a smile can go a long way with a man!

So, I smiled up at David as I knelt there pleading for grace. And, when he smiled back, I knew we would be okay. I never dreamed things would turn out as they did, though.

I knew I had to tell Nabal what I had done. I also secretly hoped he would realize how close he came to losing everything because of his foolishness. I waited until the next day because he was having a feast and was quite drunk when I returned. After a good night’s sleep, I approached Nabal and told him everything. Within minutes he was in a coma. Within days, he was dead.

I couldn’t believe it. I wondered if I should have kept it all to myself. Had I killed him? All of my friends tell me no. They say that God took care of him for his foolishness. I still don’t know what to think about all of it.

I thought I had saved us, and then my husband died. I didn’t know what I was going to do without him. Even in his foolishness, he took good care of me. I was afraid, but then I received word that David wanted to make me his wife. I couldn’t believe it, but I jumped at this opportunity to be well cared for as one of the King’s wives.

Was I used for a particular purpose? I really don’t know how all that works. I’m just glad that God helped me to have the courage to go out and face David and his men. So many innocent people would have suffered otherwise. I’m thankful David had ears to hear what I said. – Foolishness transformed!

Discussion Suggestions (Abigail):

(Identify agencies in your community that work with persons who have experienced abuse and violence. Learn about opportunities for women to volunteer through these agencies. Be sensitive to the security and privacy needs of persons these agencies serve.)

1. Inquire: "What is your response to Abigail's story? Why do you agree or disagree with her words that she found herself doing something that she shouldn't have been doing? Perhaps we have found ourselves in situations where we felt that it was necessary to take matters in our own hands. Can you think of situations where it's necessary to do this?"
2. Ask: "What were the risks of Abigail taking charge of things? What may be some of the risks when we take charge? Why do you think Abigail felt that she must speak and act for God in spite of the risks? What were some positive outcomes of what Abigail did? What may be positive outcomes of our actions when we speak and act for God?"
3. Comment: "Abigail has been called a model: a model of one who speaks and acts for God, a model against violence, a model peacemaker, and a model of courage. What about Abigail do you think supports her being called a model for us?"
4. Encourage women to identify and discuss situations where we can speak or act against senseless violence and for peace in our time and place such as in our home, work, school, church, neighborhood, community, world?
5. Report on the agencies you identified that work with persons who have experienced violence and abuse. Guide women to talk about how individuals or your group might volunteer through these agencies or other groups the women mention. Seek God's guidance and make plans to follow through in service.
6. Invite women to pray with you the prayer that is often called the Prayer of St. Francis:
*"Lord, make me an instrument of Your Peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is discord, harmony. Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sorrow, joy.*

*Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen"*



Deborah

Judges 4—5

Opening Prayer: “God, help us to be aware of ways you are working in our lives for such a time as this as we hear the story of Deborah. Amen.”

Deborah Monologue

My name is Deborah. Sometimes I’ve been known as “woman of fire.” I guess that is a good thing. I suppose I’ve been called that because I’ve never been afraid of very much. I think it was this quality that made people trust me as a judge. I wasn’t afraid to speak the truth, no matter who was standing in front of me.

I’ve heard the voice of God speak for as long as I can remember. I don’t mean this metaphorically either. I literally hear God, and God is who I listen to in order to make the best judgements. Most of the time anyway. I try my best. I guess a lot of us do.

I wasn’t afraid to go into battle either. I think Barak thought I would be. When I told him that God had said it was time for Israel to go to war with Canaan, he slyly said he would go *if* I went. I’m sure he thought that he would get out of it easily by saying that. But, I was not afraid. I knew God was in control. I also knew that God was using us women in a very real way in the world. I wanted to make myself available for God to use me in whatever way God wanted.

I didn’t enjoy the battles. I won’t say that I’m happy all of those Canaanites were killed. I don’t think God is ever happy when lives are lost. But, God did take those moments and transform them – made a better life for the Israelites.

And, as I had predicted, a woman brought an end to the tyranny led by Sisera. No, it wasn’t me. It was Jael. She killed Sisera with her own hands. I can’t even imagine what that must be like. I imagine that she has nightmares about that to this day. It certainly isn’t a pretty picture, but it is what brought victory and freedom to the Israelites.

So, Barak and I wrote a song about it. We sang and danced in victory when we heard what had happened. I hurt for the Canaanites left behind, those who lost husbands, sons, fathers, I really do. I pray for the day when war will be no more, when we can all live in peace together. But, after being oppressed for twenty long years, it was time to stand up and do something about it. And, I really felt God leading me to this. I felt it was the right thing to do.

I believe Jael was brought to a place for “such a time as this.” It has haunted her since, but I believe she was an instrument of God. Was I? I suppose without my guidance, the battle would have never begun. I suppose God called me to be there, to be a leader for the people. First, by offering wisdom as a judge and then by being brave enough to accompany Barak into battle.

I still prefer sitting under my palm tree and listening to folks try to work out their differences. But, if God called me, I would go again. I will try to always go as God leads me. Woman of fire or not.

Discussion Suggestions (Deborah):

Comment: “Deborah said that she had heard God speak to her all of her life. Recall a time and circumstance when God spoke to you. How did God speak to you? What was your response? What were the results of your responding to God’s speaking to you? Who would like to tell about that experience?”

Deborah also said that she listened to God to make the best judgments. Guide women to discuss: “How has listening to God helped you to make good judgments? How has God guided you when you had to make difficult decisions? When have you had to put the needs of others ahead of your own comfort, safety, and perhaps principles you valued? How can we know and follow God’s leadership in such times?”

Deborah acknowledged that she did not act alone in accomplishing God’s purpose to free the Israelites from the long years of severe oppression. Ask: “Name some ways you have worked with others to accomplish God’s purpose that you could not have done alone. Where do you see needs right now that God might be calling you to meet, and how could you encourage other women to join you in meeting those needs?” Note that Deborah, Barak, and Jael each brought their own abilities and personalities for God’s use. Each was unique and necessary. Guide women to talk about how they can bring together their abilities and personalities in mission, service, and outreach in your community. How can they work together to accomplish God’s purpose for such a time and place as this?

Recall that Deborah and Barak celebrated God’s using them to give God’s people victory and freedom from oppression. Ask women to consider whether we are often so busy planning our next project or task that we may fail to acknowledge and celebrate ways God has used us victoriously to help accomplish God’s plan. Invite members to brainstorm ways we can celebrate and give praise to God for being at work in our lives as we listen and serve God.

Choose at least two or three of the ways suggested to celebrate right now. Joyously praise God and celebrate God’s work through your lives for such a time as this.



Sarah

Genesis 16; 17:1-22; 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Opening Statement: “Faith has often been compared to a journey. As you hear Sarah’s story, listen for how her story tells of her faith journey. Pray that God will help you see your own faith journey in a new light.”

Sarah Monologue

I am Sarah. My life has been full, to say the least. My husband is Abraham. Yes, that Abraham – Father Abraham and all. Our life still amazes me. God blessed us in so many ways, even when we made so many mistakes.

Well, I think everyone in the world heard about the old woman giving birth. Beautiful Isaac, what a true blessing. I never dreamed I would have such an experience. It was amazing.

You know these folks who tell you that you must have faith in order for God to bless you? Well, I believe that to a certain extent. But, I will tell you, I never believed that I would really give birth to Isaac. In fact, when those mysterious men first told Abraham that I would, I laughed and laughed at the silliness of such a notion. We know now that those men were sent straight from God, but at the time it all felt like a bizarre dream. And, of course, too good to be true.

In fact, even after I was pregnant, I couldn’t believe I would really be able to have the baby. I worried every day that something would happen, that I would miscarry. I was hard for me to believe that everything was going to be okay. In fact, Isaac was three years old before I stopped constantly having the sense that he would be taken from me at any moment. It got better, but I do have to say that it has never gone away completely.

So, don’t let anyone tell you that if your belief is weak, God refuses to answer your prayers. I know it may be surprising to hear someone like me say such things, but my belief or faith has been weak all my life. That isn’t to say that I didn’t follow God. Abraham and I tried to go where God called even when it meant leaving all we knew and not knowing where we were going. So, I’m not saying that my doubts kept me from following, but they did keep me wondering about what was going to happen. I was always questioning.

And, now I look back and see how my lack of trust in God caused me to try to make things happen on my own. Rather than trusting and listening for God’s plan, I would come up with a plan and try to get God to fit into it.

I really regret how I treated, or mistreated, Hagar and Ishmael. I was just so lost and confused. I thought the answer to not having any children of my own was to have Abraham and Hagar have a child together. It was a rash decision, to say the least. And once it had all happened Hagar and I just could not get along. I, of course, was jealous. And, I think she began to feel like I was less of a person because I was unable to get pregnant and she was. I’m sure she felt used too. And she had every right. I was so mean to her after all that happened. I just couldn’t bear the thought of it and she and Ishmael were constant reminders.

Oh, how Abraham loved me. He would do just about anything for me. I know it broke his heart when I made him choose either me and Isaac or Hagar and Ishmael. I was so caught up in the moment. To be honest, I was only thinking of myself and my son. Yes, that is still one of my biggest regrets.

But, I also know that I have been forgiven by the God who loves us more than we can understand. I have grown to trust God more and more. And, God continues to bless me. It may be through a place. It may be through an experience. Or, of course, it may be through other people. Even after all my mistakes, God is faithful to me. The blessings - oh how they come!

Discussion Suggestions (Sarah):

(Provide a chalkboard and chalk or a large piece of paper and felt-tip marker. Also provide pencils and paper for each person.)

Ask: “How would you compare faith to a journey? What traveling words would you use to describe your journey of faith?”

Comment: “Sometimes it is helpful to chart a faith journey so we can see where the person has been and how God has acted in the daily events of life. Let’s chart what we know about Sarah’s faith journey from hearing her story.” As women call out major events in Sarah’s life, list them horizontally on the chalkboard or large piece of paper. Guide women to discuss the high and low points in Sarah’s journey and indicate these with up and down marks on the list you made. Encourage discussion of Sarah’s times of weakness, disbelief, jealousy, mistreatment of another as well as her times of claiming God’s blessings. Ask: “As you look at the ups and downs of Sarah’s faith journey, where do you see God opening up possibilities for blessing even when Sarah had difficulty seeing hope for the future?”

Give each woman a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask each woman to list horizontally major events in her life. When the major events are listed, ask women to indicate both high and low points in their faith journey. Encourage women to reflect on times when God’s strength was apparent in their weakness, when God forgave them for mistakes, and when their faith grew stronger because of God’s faithfulness. Encourage women to recall times when they were able to be a blessing to others through service and outreach. Ask those who would like to share highlights of their faith journey with a partner or the larger group.

Close with a time of guided prayer with some of these elements:

Ask God’s forgiveness for mistakes, lack of faith, and so forth.

Thank God for being with us every step of our faith journey.

Ask God to strengthen us, to help us see hope for the future, and to respond to God’s calling us to be a blessing for such a time as this.



Woman at the Well

John 4:1-42

Opening Prayer: “God, help us to enter actively into the story of the Samaritan woman so that you can speak to us through her testimony. Amen.”

Woman at the Well Monologue

I am the woman at the well – a Samaritan woman. A woman cursed with a lack of stability. A woman who knows the ways of God. Although none of us can understand those ways, I can hold my own in a conversation about faith. My people worshipped God on the mountain. The Jewish people worshipped God in Jerusalem. Because of this difference, our people hated one another. The feud was terrible. We would not even speak to each other.

That is why he took me by surprise. A Jewish rabbi talking to me? This was against everything I’d ever seen or been taught. He should not have been speaking to me. To do so meant shame being brought upon him. But, he spoke to me nonetheless. And even asked me for a drink of water. Well, to speak to me was one thing, but to ask to drink out of my same cup was too amazing to me. I couldn’t believe this man, so I just called him on it.

To be honest, by this point, I was wondering what it was that he wanted from me. Men didn’t talk to women like me unless they wanted something. So, I asked him! I asked him why he, as a Jewish man, would be asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. He spoke in riddles at first and said something about living water that would cause a person to thirst no more. I thought he was crazy. Of course, I was a real smart mouth about it. I laughed and said to him, “Oh, please, give some of this water to me so I never have to come to this well again.” What a joke!

I never liked to go to the well early in the day when all the other women were there. I hated to hear the gossip and sure didn’t want to listen to what they had to say about me. I went in the middle of the day when I knew no one else would be there. It was always so hot then, but it was better than dealing with the harsh looks. So, it was hilarious to me that this stranger would offer water that would quench my thirst for all time. A wonderful thought, but hilarious.

And then he did something that stopped my laughter. He knew things about me, intimate things. Things that no one knew. He knew me, all of me. That is when I wondered if he were some kind of prophet. So, I asked him about the feud. I asked him to explain to me why our peoples could not get along. I asked him where the true place of worship was. Then, I couldn’t believe my ears. He basically told me that the time had come when it didn’t matter where we worshipped. He basically told me I could worship God standing right there at that well under the hot sun!

I had never heard anyone say such things. No one would dare to say such things – either Jewish or Samaritan. But, he did. And, he knew *me*. I began to wonder if this was the man we had waited for so long. Now I know that I was indeed in the presence of the Messiah. Then, I couldn’t believe that the Messiah would treat me so kindly, waste time on me. He treated me better than anyone had ever treated me.

Soon, his disciples came up and clearly did not like that he was talking to me. So I got out of there before things got ugly. I was so excited, though, that I ran right into town. I ran right into the middle of all the people I worked so hard to avoid, and I told them everything he had said. I told them that he knew things he shouldn’t have and that I wondered if this was the Messiah. And, do you know what? They listened. They actually listened to me, and they went to see him for themselves.

That day I began proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. That day people started listening. It is a gift from God that I could never find words to describe. He knew me! He knows you, too.

Discussion Suggestions (Woman at the Well):

Make three columns across a chalkboard or large sheet of paper. Label the columns:

Woman avoids villagers

Jesus' surprising words and actions

Woman proclaims good news

Fill in the columns as women discuss the transformation of the woman at the well from one who avoided contact with the people in her village to one who eagerly invited the villagers to come and see the Messiah for themselves. Why did the woman want to avoid the villagers? Why did Jesus' words and actions surprise the woman so much? How did Jesus' words and actions enable the woman to share her good news with the villagers? What difference did it make that Jesus knew her and accepted her?

Invite women to put themselves in the woman's story and discuss the following:

Who do we discover ourselves to be? How are we like the woman at the well?

Who do we discover Jesus to be? When have we experienced Jesus' acceptance even when others may have rejected us?

What do we hear Jesus speaking to us? How have Jesus' words come to us in unexpected times and places? What is Jesus' call to us for such a time as this?

What about our personal experience with Jesus can we share with others? What difference does it make in our lives that Jesus knows and accepts us? How can we invite others to see for themselves the Jesus who knows us?

Invite each woman to picture herself with Jesus in a setting from her daily life. As women imagine spending time with Jesus, guide them in silent prayer:

Be assured that Jesus knows you just as you are, accepts you, and loves you.

Bring your questions and concerns to Jesus knowing that he cares about you and your concerns.

Reflect on Jesus' call to you for such a time as this. How will you respond in mission, service, and outreach?

Think of a person who needs to experience Jesus' acceptance and love. Ask God to help you invite that person to come and see Jesus for herself or himself.



Naomi

Book of Ruth

Opening Prayer: “God, help us to learn more about you from Naomi’s story of being used to help fulfill your plan. We pray that we may be encouraged and then become encouragers through her story. Amen.”

Naomi Monologue

I am Naomi. I am King David’s great-great grandmother. That was my purpose in fulfilling God’s plan. After many sad years of famine and loss, I thought God had all but abandoned me. Now I can see that, of course, could never happen.

My husband died. Then, both of my sons. My sons’ wives had no children and the three of us were left to figure out what to do. Ruth and Orpah were wonderful to me. When I decided to return home, they left theirs to come with me. I immediately began worrying, as a mother will do. I couldn’t ask these girls to leave all they knew to keep me company. So, I stopped them and insisted that they return to their own mothers, find new husbands, and make a life for themselves. I know that some relationships between mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws can be difficult. Not my girls. They were beautiful and kind.

Poor Orpah. I could see all over her face how torn she was. She missed her home so much. I assured her that it would be okay to leave. Oh, she gave me the biggest hug and we cried! She went on her way to be with her own family.

Then, I looked at Ruth. Ruth was different. She loved me as if I were her very own mother. From the moment I met her I felt like I had known her all of my life. She truly was the daughter I never had. I only wanted what was best for her and at that moment in my life I could not see how staying around this bitter, lonely woman could help her.

There were many times Ruth’s kindness overwhelmed me. None more than that day when she refused to leave me. Her love for me was deeper than I had ever known. And, maybe her need to have me in her life was stronger than I had realized as well. She would not go home and even told me that she would stay with me until the day I died.

So, I took Ruth back to my home with me. She was truly a stranger in a strange land. But, for the most part, people were very nice to her. Everyone was so impressed with her loyalty to me that they took her in like she had been raised there.

I naturally felt responsible for her and I wanted to help her. After she told me about working in the field of Boaz, I arranged a private meeting for the two of them. I’ll be honest, I knew that it was in my best interest as well for Ruth to find a husband to take responsibility for our land and such – we called him a redeemer. I also really wanted Ruth to find the security and happiness that she deserved. And, I’d known Boaz all my life. I knew he deserved that too.

And that man has been so good to both of us. I have wanted for nothing and the family they have given me has been the greatest blessing in my life. All of my friends called Obed, Ruth’s and Boaz’s son, “Naomi’s baby boy!” I know that by blood I am not really his grandmother, but we have been as much of a family as anyone could be.

I’m proud of that. I tried to listen to God and help Ruth. Because of that, some great children were born, including David. Somehow, I know God brought me to the right time and place to use me, an old bitter woman, to make sure that happened. Yes, I am certainly proud of that.

Discussion Suggestions (Naomi):

(Provide a chalkboard and chalk or a large piece of paper and felt-tip marker.)

Ask: “As you recall Naomi’s story, what were some reasons she grieved, felt bitter, and wondered whether God had abandoned her?”

Invite women to brainstorm situations that may cause people to feel bitter and abandoned by God in such a time as ours. As women mention situations, list these on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.

Ask: “In the midst of Naomi’s grief and loss, what were some sources of encouragement for her? Even in her grief how did Naomi offer encouragement to others?”

Encourage women to discuss each of the following:

What can we learn from Naomi’s story about God’s kindness and faithfulness?

What have you learned from your own experiences about God’s kindness and faithfulness?

What does Naomi’s story tell us about God and persons working together to accomplish God’s plan?

How might we be called to work alongside God to accomplish God’s plan for such a time as this?

Refer to the list of situations that may cause persons to feel bitter and abandoned by God. As you point to each situation, ask for suggestions about how we can work with God to offer encouragement and fellowship to persons in these situations. You may want to make specific plans to carry out one or more of these suggestions.

Invite women to offer sentence prayers related to the situations listed and our opportunities to work with God to offer encouragement to these persons. Close with a prayer: “Thank you, God, that you are always kind and faithful to us. Thank you for calling us to join you in accomplishing your plan in our time. Help us to extend your kindness and faithfulness in encouragement to others. Amen.”



Mary Magdalene

Luke 8:1-3; 24:1-13; Matthew 28; Mark 16; John 20:1-18

Opening Prayer: “God, as we listen to Mary Magdalene tell her story, help us to see, hear, and feel what she experienced. Help us listen for your call to us in this time and place. Amen.”

Mary Magdalene Monologue

I am Mary Magdalene. I loved Jesus with my whole heart, my very being. I even watched as they killed him. I held his mother’s hand. It was the most heartbreaking moment, I think, in my life.

He had done so much for me. I had many problems when he met me. He treated me with love and respect. I would even go as far as to say that he healed me from within. I was welcomed into his community of followers. I became a disciple and did all I could to learn how to be more like him. I told others about the love of God as we were learning what it really meant from him.

Then, they killed him. We were all so devastated. None of us knew what to think or feel. And, we were scared. We had watched such horrors over those few days.

Because of how they had handled everything – the trial, the crucifixion – we weren’t able to prepare his body properly for burial. You see, they did everything under the cloak of darkness and he wasn’t buried until the Sabbath had begun. It was against everything we had ever been taught. So, on Sunday morning, I insisted on going to the tomb to prepare his body. It was all that I could do for him at that point.

Some others went with me, and we headed toward the tomb. Now when I think back to that day, I wonder what we were thinking. We knew that there was no way we could move the stone from in front of the tomb. I wonder now if we were called there for purposes we could not even see at the time. I wonder this because it all seems pretty silly now. I wonder what we were thinking.

Pretty soon, though, it didn’t matter what we were thinking. The whole world turned upside down when we arrived at the tomb. He was gone. He was gone! Our minds raced with possibilities. Had the Romans moved him so we couldn’t perform our religious rituals? Had someone stolen the body? What had happened to him?

We were in shock. I was a complete wreck and went off into another section of the burial grounds. That is when it happened. Someone spoke to me. Thinking it was the gardener, I asked him if he knew where Jesus was. Then, he called me by name.

Have you ever had someone know you so well that it resonates throughout your being every time they call your name? When he called me by name, something shot through me that was truly amazing. There are no words to describe this feeling. It was just how he said my name and the look in his eyes when he called out to me. All I can tell you is that at that moment I knew my Savior was alive! I hugged him and cried. Then, he asked me to go tell the other disciples.

Of course, when I told them, they had their doubts. I guess it was easy for them to dismiss me as an emotional woman. I tell you, though, when those men realized it was true, they became emotional, too.

I told everyone I knew that the Lord was Risen. I feel honored to have been used in such a way. I was one of the first witnesses to the Resurrection. And, I am so happy to have been called to such a time as that!

Discussion Suggestions (Mary Magdalene):

(You may want to print each of the situations below on a separate index card or strip of paper. Make arrangements for using the hymn "He Lives.")

After a few moments for reflection, encourage women to talk about the following:

What did you see, hear, and feel as Mary Magdalene told about Jesus' healing her and her following Jesus?

What did you see, hear, and feel as Mary told about Jesus' death and burial?

What did you see, hear, and feel as you discovered with Mary that Jesus was gone from the tomb?

What did you see, hear, and feel as Jesus spoke the name "Mary?"

What did you see, hear, and feel as you told people the wonderful news that Jesus is alive?

Comment: "We have walked with Mary Magdalene and tried to see, hear, and feel what she experienced. Now let's try to put ourselves in the place of some people today. Let's try to feel what they may be feeling. Then ask God's guidance in knowing how to call the person's name and encourage her or him with the good news that Jesus is alive." (Ask the women to form groups of two or three and talk about ways to respond to God's call by sharing the encouragement of Jesus' resurrection with one of the following):

Sheila's husband died suddenly last night.

Rhonda and Mark have just learned that their baby has a severe disability.

Nell's doctor has told her that she has a terminal illness.

Claire feels that God is calling her to be a pastor.

Nancy who is only a few months from retirement will lose her job and pension because the factory where she works is closing.

Sue's teenage son has become addicted to drugs and is involved in other destructive behaviors.

Invite each group to tell how they could respond to God's call and offer encouragement to the person because Jesus is alive.

Close with a time of worship. Use the hymn "He Lives" as a group song, solo, or from a cassette tape or CD. Then ask women to pray silently for those who need to be encouraged by experiencing as Mary Magdalene did that Jesus is alive. Invite women to silently thank God for the difference Jesus' resurrection makes in their lives.

Encourage women to share aloud, one at a time, what difference it makes to them that Jesus is alive. After each response all will join in the joyous affirmation: "Jesus is alive!"



Priscilla Acts 18

Opening Prayer: “God, help us as we hear Priscilla’s story. May we be inspired for such a time as ours by both her words and example. Amen.”

Priscilla Monologue

My name is Priscilla. I’ve lived my entire life asking myself, “What is God calling me to do right now?” I know that God uses each of us to work with God in order to complete divine purposes. I witnessed the effects of these calls time and time again. I never dreamed that I would be a leader of those early believers. It wasn’t something that my husband, Aquila, and I set out to do. We just worked hard making tents, trying to keep our business going. And, we prayed every night for God to always shine a light on the way that we should follow. That way led us straight to Paul.

Yes, that Paul. The one bold enough to call himself, “The Apostle.” Most people don’t know, but he called us that, too. Each of us in our own way were working diligently to spread the good news that we had come to live. There wasn’t one place Paul walked into that he didn’t speak the name of Jesus before he left. That is why he was in so much trouble all the time.

We had such vision back then! We didn’t just want to call on Jesus’ name, get folks excited and then leave. We wanted them to truly understand, believe, and then become witnesses themselves.

We gave up a lot for that work. Paul, Aquila, and I moved to Ephesus because we heard God calling us there. Aquila and I settled in to work with the Ephesians while Paul moved on. He was always on the move with a fire to spread the word to as many people as he could.

We stayed in Ephesus and met Apollos who was young and energetic. He had good intentions, but didn’t know the whole story. So we taught him about the Resurrection and what the life of Jesus truly means for all of us.

I could never have been a part of such teaching before. It would not have been allowed. I always tell others how resurrection for each of us is not just something to look forward to in the next life. I see my life working to spread the gospel as a resurrection of sorts. I have known all my life that I was called to teach the love of God. Before, I found ways to do this with my women friends or children, but because of Jesus, I was able to fulfill this call in a way that became meaningful to me. Our services of worship became a bright light in my life as I was able to stand and lead others in worship of our very Creator. It truly felt like a new life, like breath had blown fresh through me. I believe Jesus made that possible, gave me the opportunity to stand side by side with Paul, with Aquila, to teach Apollos. And, I watched as other young women began doing the same thing.

I’ve lived my whole life asking myself, “What is God calling me to do right now?” And each answer took me on a new adventure of seeing God use me to proclaim God’s message. My prayer is that this touched others in such a way to help them go out and do the same. But, what I know is that this God-given life has touched me, and I will always proclaim that truth. Jesus has brought resurrection into our lives in the eternal realm, but also right here and right now. I am eternally grateful for that.

Discussion Suggestions (Priscilla):

(Provide a chalkboard and chalk or a large sheet of paper and felt-tip marker.)

Encourage women to discuss: “How does Priscilla’s question, ‘What is God calling me to do right now?’ relate to our theme: ‘For Such a Time as This: Reaching Out to Serve?’ In what ways is Priscilla’s question ‘What is God calling me to do right now?’ also your question?”

Invite the women to respond to these questions: “What are some ways Priscilla sought and discerned God’s call for her? Who may have been encouragers to Priscilla as she sought God’s will for her life? As Priscilla responded to God’s call, in what ways was she an encourager to others? How do Priscilla’s words about wanting to help people truly understand, believe in Jesus, and then become witnesses themselves relate to her ministry of encouragement and proclamation?”

Encourage women to brainstorm ways we can continue Priscilla’s ministry of encouragement and proclamation today. (List these on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.)

To help women discern God’s call for such a time as this, guide them in the following prayer experience:

Review God’s guidance in your life. Recall areas where you have especially felt God’s blessing and leadership. Offer thanks to God.

Prayerfully consider your interests, abilities, and spiritual gifts and how these relate to God’s call in your life.

Think about the needs of persons in your community and the world. How might God be speaking to you through these needs?

Thank God for persons who have encouraged you. How could their words of encouragement help you become aware of ways God is calling you right now?

Thank God for Jesus’ resurrection which makes possible new life and new opportunities for ministry.

Ask God, “What are you calling me to do right now for such a time as this?” Listen prayerfully and allow God to speak to you.

Encourage women to share their responses: “How has Priscilla’s example and our time of prayer inspired you to answer God’s call for such a time as this?” After each woman’s response to the question, invite all to join you in praying aloud: “Thank you, God, for your call in our lives.”



Lydia

Acts 16:1-15

Opening Prayer: “God, we thank you for stories in the Bible of women you used to accomplish your purpose. Encourage us to join these women of faith in serving you for such a time as ours. Amen.”

Lydia Monologue

My name is Lydia. I am a member of the Christian community in Philippi. I have witnessed God using someone to be at a particular place and time. I’m sure after all I’ve seen that God has even used me in such ways, but it is always hard to see that kind of thing in yourself. At least, it is for me.

What I think of is that day when Paul and Timothy and their travelling companions just showed up at our weekly prayer meeting. I still don’t know the full story of what brought them there that day, but it changed my life forever. And, do I even have to say that I mean it changed my life for the better?

Oh, it isn’t that my life was so bad before. I knew God. I had a nice home and a very successful business in fabrics. I had great friends and things were going along pretty nicely. I never even imagined it could get any better.

Paul marches into our meeting. I have to admit that at first I was a little put off by him. I couldn’t believe this man’s rudeness to interrupt and basically take over our meeting. But, soon something began to change within me. I started to really listen to what he was preaching and suddenly I felt that I was getting to know God in a whole new way. Through the Risen Christ, my life changed. An empty space from within, that I had not even known was there, became filled. From there, I began opening my home to all the missionaries coming through. Many people came to know Jesus right there in my home. What an exciting time!

Now, I’ll be honest with you. My involvement in the early church brought with it some consequences. There were certain customers who didn’t want to buy fabric from me anymore. There were friends and family who no longer would speak to me. But, the new friends and the family of the Messiah made up for all of that. It may sound silly, but it is true. It isn’t that I was not sad about those things. It is something that is hard to explain. You really have to experience it. But, there truly was a peace and fulfillment that came over me and it made the hardships easier than they would have been otherwise.

So, Paul followed where God called him. He said he had a dream of a man in our area calling him to come and help. The next day he got up and headed our way. And because of that I met Jesus and took my faith to a new level of understanding as well as of service.

These are the eternal consequences, the ones that really matter. My business is very important to me, as are my family and friends. But, my life as part of the church in Philippi is what took all the good things and shined a new light on them, the light of the Messiah. That light certainly makes everything in my life brighter and better than ever.

I’m so happy that Paul paid attention to that dream. Maybe somehow that empty space in me was calling out to him for help. Thank God for such dreams!

Discussion Suggestions (Lydia):

(You will need for each woman a pen or pencil, an envelope, and enough 3 by 5-inch index cards for herself and every other woman in the group. For example, if you have 10 women in your group you will need 100 index cards.)

Invite women to talk about the following: “How do you respond to Lydia’s statement that even though we’ve seen God use someone else in a particular time and place, it is often harder to see how God is using us for God’s purposes? How have you found this to be true in your life?”

Ask: “In what ways did Lydia allow God to use her before she met Paul? How was God able to use her in even greater ways after she came to know the Risen Christ? How has your life been changed since the Risen Christ touched your life? Who can recall a time when you felt that God was using you to accomplish God’s plan?”

Guide the following activity to affirm and encourage women to understand that God is using them to accomplish God’s purpose for such a time as this.

Give each woman a pen or pencil, an envelope, and enough 3 by 5-inch cards for herself and every other woman in the group. If your group is large, you may want to ask the women to form circles of 6-8 women in each circle.

Ask each woman to write her name on the front of her envelope and pass the envelope to the person on her right.

Suggest that because we may wonder how God is using us, this is an opportunity to tell each woman in the group how you see God using her in this time and place to accomplish God’s purpose. On an index card each woman will write a note to the woman whose envelope she is holding about how she sees God using her. Encourage women to be as specific as possible.

Guide each woman to pass the envelope she is holding to the person on her right and write a note of encouragement for the woman whose envelope she receives. Continue in this way until every woman is holding her own envelope.

Invite each woman to silently read the words of encouragement others have written about her. Then suggest that each woman write on a card, “I believe God is using me right now to . . .,” complete that statement, and then add it to her envelope. Encourage women to keep these words of encouragement to read whenever they wonder how God is using them for such a time as this.

Invite women to offer sentence prayers as a response to Lydia’s example and the affirmations they have received.