



2019 STUDY ON WOMEN IN
THE LIFE, LEADERSHIP, AND
MINISTRY OF OUR CHURCH

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North Atlanta 2019 Study

Women in the Life, Leadership, and Ministry of Our Church

SESSION ONE: Meet, Greet Pray

Key Scripture: Colossians 3:8-15 - But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Goal of this session: Start building a cohesive group.

Introducing the Study:

- a) The official study is the "2019 STUDY ON WOMEN IN THE LIFE, LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY OF OUR CHURCH."
- b) The elders have commissioned this study that we may continue our quest to be aligned with God in his mission.
- c) The elders commissioned 11 women from our church—women that represent a beautiful diversity of age, experience, ethnicity, and perspective—to explore this topic. After several months, these 11 women reported back to the full eldership. They shared a process that helped them journey successfully together. They came away with deep relationships, strong bonds, and greater understanding of the topic. Their top recommendation to the elders was about the process of the study, not the outcome. The elders discerned that the process engaged in by these women was healthy for the church. As a result, the elders and the Gender Task Team created a study plan for 2019. Part of this plan is the small group experience you have joined. Thank you!

Resources for this study:

- a) We will share in prayer in every session, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- b) We are asking all the groups to follow the study guide.
- c) The elders will be available for prayer and guidance.

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Ground rules for the study:

- a) Love First: We are seeking the will of God together.
- b) Speak respectfully to and about your brothers and sisters in public and private conversations.
- c) Make this a priority. Be present and be prepared.
- d) Listen to understand, not to persuade or push for an outcome you desire.
- e) Help the group stay on track.
- f) Pray: Make prayer a priority in every meeting.

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SESSION TWO: The Blessing

Being a member of our Church family is a beautiful blessing. I know we don't always feel that way. It is easy to lose sight of the beauty of the Church. My dad instilled a deep love for the Church in me. At his funeral, one of his close friends said this to me: "Your dad loved the Church because he came to the Church through Christ." I was moved by this. My dad suffered some of his greatest wounds through people in the Church who did not behave as Christ had taught them. In the minds of many, he could have walked away in disgust and been justified. But just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, my dad kept his eyes on the beauty of the Church. When we come *to* the Church *through* Christ, we will love the Church, and see the beauty of the Church.

When we seek to know God, the Church is integral to the journey. We cannot know God—as God longs to be known—apart from the Church. God has given us three gifts to know him and his will for our lives:

1. The Holy Spirit
2. The Holy Scriptures
3. The Holy Community

The Holy Spirit is God living in us. There is no greater way to know God than to walk in the Spirit. The Holy Scriptures place us in the story of God, describing for us who God is and how God lives and moves among his people. The Holy Community is the temple of the Lord, rising together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). It is in the body of Christ that we learn to discern together the way we should live, worship, and serve.

As we begin this 2019 study on women in the life, leadership, and ministry of our church, we will lean into these three powerful gifts to fully reflect the desire of God for our church. The North Atlanta women who served on the Gender Task Team shared with the elders how important it was that they came to know each other, respect and love each other, and ultimately to trust each other. This was a process of sharing and receiving each other. We will begin this first session with some questions to lay this essential Love First foundation.

1. Where did you grow up and what are some of your formative spiritual experiences?
2. Where did you learn to study the Bible?
3. Where do you do your best thinking? How important will that place be to you in this series?
4. When do you do your best thinking? How will you make the best use of these times?
5. How do you do your best thinking, and who will help you do your best thinking?
6. How will you help others in the group do their best thinking?

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SESSION THREE: Created in God's Image

Key Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27 - ²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Goal of this Session: Explore what it means for both men and women to be image-bearers of God, that God's image is fully present and evident in both men and women.

Key Themes: The Bible teaches that men and women were created by God and equally bear His image. God's intention was for the man and woman to be one with each other in His image, thereby reflecting the intimacy and love that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (Gen. 1:27). Man and woman each had a direct relationship with God, and they shared equally in having dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). However, this perfect union was ruptured when Adam and Eve sinned. The struggle for power and the desire to "rule over" another is a result of human sin. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of sin's entrance into the world and not a prescription of God's ideal order.

However, through Christ, God has brought redemption to human beings, male and female alike (Gal. 3:26-28) and has made a way for people to once again be one with him in a community of believers, the church. The Apostle Paul exhorts Christian husbands and wives to submit to one another, to love and respect each other that they might be one with each other. In this way, they model God's ideal, intimate unity among members of the body of Christ as well as the unity between the Church and Christ, its head (Eph. 5:21-33). Jesus prayed that the Church would model oneness (John 17:11, 20-23). This means we are all children of God, we are one with each other, and we are "one in Christ Jesus."

1. In Genesis 1:26, to whom is God speaking when he said "us" and "our?"
2. When did the perfect union with God, and between man and woman rupture?
3. How did God's curse of Satan and curse of the ground impact women and impact men?
4. Where did the desire to rule over another human being come from?
5. How did Christ bring redemption to man and woman to restore their equality?
6. What did Jesus pray for?

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SESSION FOUR: Building a Bridge

Key Scripture: 2 Peter 1:19-21 “We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Goal of this Session: To explore the consistency of the message of Scripture and the important purpose of different applications.

Key Themes: An important issue is cultural correlation or *relativity*, in other words, what in scripture is cultural and belongs in the first century, and what transcends culture and is a principle for all time—a principle that must be applied to genuinely comparable situations today. There are passages where the main idea teaches Christians how to consider cultural norms so as to not scandalize those non-believers in the surrounding culture.

The reason for advocating certain behaviors for the church was “for the sake of the gospel,” or so that the gospel would be heard by outsiders. This did not mean that the message of Jesus would not cause social upheaval, nor that the cross or resurrection would be readily accepted. Our lives are to reflect who God is and should not detract from the message of the gospel. This is an ongoing direction we pursue. Let’s explore some key considerations for determining the cultural and gospel relevance of a passage in Scripture.

- It’s important to distinguish between what the New Testament portrays as issues of right and wrong for all times versus good judgment for the current circumstances (See 1 Corinthians 7:25-28). A first-century situation might not have a direct application to the twenty-first century.
- It’s important to consider where the New Testament displays continuity and where it reflects differences. For example, women were publicly teaching, praying, or prophesying in Acts 18:26, 21:9, and 1 Cor. 11:5, yet in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Cor. 14:34, the women were instructed to be quiet. Some use these texts against each other to suggest the New Testament is inconsistent within itself. However, when we see these differences, rather than attempting to do away with the differences, or suggesting one instruction of Paul supersedes another, we should take the posture of exploration. We could ask, “Why would Paul give guidance to women in one setting and then offer *different* guidance in another setting?”

The most common suggestion for interpreting his instructions to the Corinthian and Ephesian Christians is that women may have been showing disrespect to their husbands in their behavior during times of worship and were therefore told to refrain from that behavior. Women speaking in the assembly was vital to the witness of the New Covenant. Their participation gave witness to the

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presence of the Spirit in all believers as well as the restored oneness of people in Christ. Just as the prophecy of Joel promised, the participation of women was a demonstration of the indwelling Holy Spirit through the expression of gifts. According to Paul, women participating publicly is not sin.

- It's important to consider what is a matter of salvation, and what is open for more than one possible expression of the gospel. In other words, if something could get in the way of someone outside the church being saved, it is a matter of salvation. One thing is certain, the inclusive interculturalism of the body of Christ is essential to the world being saved! Jesus said the world will know and believe his gospel because of the oneness and unity of his diverse followers. This makes both diversity and unity essential to salvation—the salvation of the world. When the world sees the way women and men in the body of Christ lift each other up in mutuality and equality, they will see a life they want. Seeing men and women serving together is inviting.
- It's important to determine the cultural options open to a writer during the first century. There were few educational opportunities for women in the first century and yet there are equal opportunities in that area today. Only a few women in the Bible worked to make a living wage. Today, many women are Presidents and CEOs for large corporations.

Slavery, and the racism used to justify that hideous institution are openly rejected by most Christians today. Although we still face resistance to the eradication of the sin of racism, we have accepted the truth from God that he shows no partiality, and there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. Will we now also open our minds and hearts to the third relationship Paul addressed in Galatians 3:28—there is neither male nor female. For the sake of the gospel, now is the time.

1. What are some good reasons to explore what first century worship services may have been like and then compare them to what our worship services look like today?
2. How do power struggles in the church hinder our witness to the world? What are some practical ways we can demonstrate that we believe in the oneness taught in Galatians 3:28?
3. What are some customs and traditions we could begin practicing that would model the doctrine of oneness taught in Galatians 3:28?

About five years ago I heard a female Bible scholar give an amazing lecture at a Christian university. Her skills were spectacular. She kept even the students engaged! Her assigned topic was Melchizedek! After her message, an older brother in Christ that I have admired for many years said, "That has to be the best sermon on Melchizedek I have ever heard!" I agreed. Her skill in exegesis creativity in presentation were amazing. But I was struck by his choice of words. He did not say, "her speech," or "her lecture." He said "sermon." No, it was not on a Sunday morning, but it was a *sermon*. I remember thinking to myself that I have spent so many years separating the time and space of the Sunday morning assembly from the rest of life. This was a sermon, and she delivered it in the most faithful and convicting way. I am thankful for the perspective of this more experienced brother in Christ who pointed out the obvious to me.

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SESSION FIVE: Interpreting Scripture within the Body of Christ

Key Scriptures: The gender inclusion task team – beginning April 2018 – studied and prayed for discernment, wisdom, and guidance of the Holy Spirit as we studied these scriptures:

Genesis 1:26-28

Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-18

Romans 12:3-8

Romans 16

1 Corinthians chapters 11-14

Galatians 3:24-28

Colossians 3:11

Philippians 3:12-20

1 Peter 4:10-11

1 Timothy 2:8-15; 3:1-15

Goal of this Session: To help us imagine how a group of people in the twenty-first century could explore the Christian teachings from the first century regarding the participation of men and women in the life, leadership, and ministry of the body of Christ.

Key Themes: We are committed to being prayerful and diligent in our interpretation of the scriptures. The Gender Task Team was diligent to allow the Spirit's voice to be heard. They found agreement that:

- The Bible is the authoritative word of God.
- God's message was written down by humans within history by direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Scripture must be interpreted within the historical and literary context in which it was written.
- Principles can be explored (exegesis) and then interpreted and applied (hermeneutics).
- The modern interpretation of a text must be consistent with the original intent of the text.
- The Bible is consistent. The truth will be apparent according to the situation being discussed.

The task team's study of each passage included a determination of the background of the book of the Bible in which it is found. The book was studied overall in order to establish the context of the particular passage under consideration, and then it was read and discussed verse by verse. This process was led by a member of the group. All participated in discussing and questioning the text and contributing relevant materials from their individual preparation. We recognized the *many* women who are *already* using their gifts to strengthen our church and reach out to the world. Our hope is that through this study we will expand the involvement of all in the life, leadership and ministry of our church without gender bias.

1. Why is it important to understand the meaning of any passage of Scripture?
2. Is it possible that a scripture is discussing something specifically for one church that has nothing to do with a church in another location? (Consider Paul's instructions to various churches.)
3. How do you interpret the Scriptures? (How do you do your best thinking about Scripture?)
4. Scripture was received, written down, collected into the canon, and *shared with the church by the church*. Why is it important to interpret Scripture within the body of Christ?

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SESSION SIX: Jesus Elevated Women

Key Scripture: John 4:27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Goal of this Session: To explore how following Jesus means working to restore the value God bestowed on both men and women at creation.

Key Themes: In his life on earth, Jesus accepted women as disciples and supporters of his ministry. He interacted with women in a way which was drastically counter to the culture in which he lived (John 4:9). Jesus was very often in the company of women who traveled with him, served him, and worshipped him. Women were first to announce his resurrection to the eleven apostles. In the Gospels we see Jesus:

- Having conversations with women (John 4; Matt. 15:21-28; John 11:21-27).
- Touching women as he healed them (Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 13:13).
- Defending women from criticism and accusation; offering salvation (John 8:1-11; Luke 7:36-48).
- Accepting worship from women (John 12:1-7; Luke 23:27-28).
- Accepting women as disciples (Luke 10:38-42; Luke 8:2-3; Matt. 27:55).
- Commissioning women to be witnesses of the resurrection (Matt. 28:8-10).

Coming as a descendant of Abraham and Son of David, Jesus was an observant Jew. He frequented the synagogue (Luke 4:16); he taught in the Temple Courts (Mark 14:49); he quoted from Jewish scripture more times than we can reference; he observed the Feasts (the Passover, John 2:23; the Feast of the Tabernacles, John 7:2); he paid the Temple tax (Matt. 17:27). Yet, he purposefully departed from the Jewish customs for men which restricted interaction with women. It appears from those passages, and by his example, Jesus was an advocate for cultural change. Jesus, as a messenger from heaven, declared that women are truly daughters of God, loved and accepted by their Heavenly Father.

1. Describe the accepted culture for women during the time Jesus was on earth.
2. How did the women with Jesus act contrary to that culture?
3. What was the demeanor of the women who accompanied Jesus?
4. How did Jesus show his acceptance of the women who followed him?
5. What were Jesus' followers learning from him about the place of women in his kingdom?

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SESSION SEVEN: The Promise of the Father

Key Scripture: “Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. ³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ³² And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.” (Joel 2:27-32).

Goal of this Session: To explore the meaning of Joel’s prophecy that came true on the Day of Pentecost, describing how the promised Holy Spirit would be evident in the life of the New Testament Church.

Key Themes: When the Church was launched at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:16-18). In the New Testament, men *and* women prayed and prophesied in the church (Acts 2:17-18, 1 Cor. 11:4-5, and 1 Pet. 2:9-10). Acts 2 is formative for the Church. In this chapter, the Holy Spirit, who had been promised by Jesus before his ascension, comes down upon believers. It is theologically significant that women are specifically included as recipients of the Spirit in the telling of the story. We note the following:

- Women were among the disciples who were waiting and praying (Acts 1:3-5; 13-14).
- The prophecy of Joel, quoted by Peter, says, “*Your sons and daughters will prophesy; ...even on my servants both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit*”
- The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised “*for you and your children and for all who are far off,*” inclusive of men, women, slaves, and Gentiles. (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all in the community of believers, those redeemed by the blood of the lamb, without giving preferential treatment based on gender (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Cor. 12:7, 11). Every believer is to offer his or her gifts for the benefit of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

1. How do we know that God kept the promise he made through the prophet Joel?
2. With the coming of the Church as described in Acts 2, what difference did Joel’s prophecy have on the future of the Church?
3. How were women formerly excluded because of the Law, culture, and tradition?
4. How can North Atlanta reflect the promise God fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out?
5. How might our inclusion of both women and men in using the gifts they receive from the Holy Spirit demonstrate our trust that God keeps his promises?

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SESSION EIGHT: Spiritual Gifts and Conduct (Part One)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:22b-23 “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Goal of this Session: To explore the difference between restricting the use of gifts versus restricting the manner in which those gifts are expressed.

Key Themes: In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses problems that had been brought to his attention. We know that some in the church talked with him personally while someone else wrote a letter outlining some of their problems. We don't have the letter the church wrote to Paul, so reading Paul's responses is somewhat like hearing one side of a phone call. He addressed division, immorality, legal disputes, marriage, idol feasts, proper conduct observing the Lord's supper, head coverings, and spiritual gifts.

As Paul addresses problems in the church at Corinth, he gets to disorder in the worship assembly, which was hindering the testimony of the church to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:24-25). His instruction concerns “everyone” (14:26), and says that “when the church comes together, everyone should have a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation done for the strengthening of the church.” Both men and women were called to share their spiritual gifts.

About the problem of disorder, Paul gives the same instruction to several groups—keep quiet (or “hold your peace”). The ones told to keep quiet include those who were speaking in tongues when there was no interpreter present (verse 28), a prophet continuing to speak when another prophet had received a revelation (verse 30), and certain women (or alternately, wives [perhaps of the prophets who were speaking]; there is one word in Greek which is translated “women” or “wives.”) The NIV translators supply “be silent” in verse 34 for the same Greek word translated “keep quiet” in verse 28 and “should stop” in verse 30. Whatever Paul's instructions mean for the prophets and those speaking in tongues is the same for the women of verse 34.

Since Paul, in 1 Cor. 11, allowed women to pray and prophesy in the church, we do not take the instruction to 1 Cor. 14 to be universal for all women for all time. Paul tells the women to make their inquiries to their husbands at home; we know that the disorderly women toward which this instruction was aimed were married, perhaps to the prophets who were speaking. In verse 33, when Paul says, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should (keep quiet) in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says,” he is describing the customs of the times. “The law” referred to is believed to be Gen. 3:16, “and he will rule over you.” We may conclude that Christian

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women are counseled to **behave in a culturally appropriate way**. In a culture modeled after a dominant male/subordinate female pattern, women submitted in order **not to hinder the witness of the gospel**.

There is no doubt that this passage was situational, but the principles can be applied in the church today. Those contributing to disorder in the church, especially disorder which is detrimental to the ability of the surrounding community to hear the Gospel, should be told to keep quiet and hold their peace.

1. Discuss situational instructions in Scripture. What are some *situational* instructions in Scripture that can still apply *in principle* today?
2. How might Christians today make situational, cultural, and temporary adjustments in order to share the gospel?

For example, a friend of mine from college became a missionary. The people group he served had a tradition. When the men gathered to solve a conflict, they held hands the entire time. He was not used to this. He did not grow up this way. But he realized that if he was going to be an active part of this people group, he would have to learn a new custom. When he described this to me, he compared it to 1 Timothy 2:8. While it is true that this verse instructs the men to “lift holy hands to pray... free from anger and controversy,” these men, by *holding hands without anger or controversy*, were accomplishing the same godly purpose. He had to humble himself, recognize the value of their custom, accept that they were accomplishing what God was after in the first place, and then learn to participate. He was received warmly.

In 1 Corinthians 14:29-35, Paul gives the Corinthian Christians stern guidance because they had allowed pride to lead them into disorder. The Corinthians needed to be humbled and reminded that the assembly was not for grandstanding or attention-grabbing confrontations. Rather, the assembly was for sharing, loving, upbuilding, strengthening, comforting, instructing, worshipping, and witnessing to unbelievers. When Paul tells the wives to be “silent” and “ask their husbands at home,” he is not abandoning his teaching in chapter 11 or 14:26. He is not going against the commands, examples and inferences in Acts or his other letters. *Women and men are both filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted by the Holy Spirit to pray and prophesy*. But Paul is teaching them about how to restore a God-centered atmosphere to their assembly.

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Two Important Questions about the Meaning of “prophesy” and the use of “brother.”

1. **What does it mean to prophesy?** A very important question often raised is, “What is meant by prophesying?” Was this a miraculous gift that no longer applies to the church today? First, the gift of prophesy, like all the other gifts, *is miraculous* in that it is a gift from God. All gifts we receive from God—including salvation and prayer—are miraculous since without the miraculous power and love of God, no one could be saved and none of our prayers would be heard. Paul writes about gifts of the Holy Spirit in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12-14. These gifts include teaching, encouragement, leading, evangelizing, giving, speaking in tongues, interpreting, healing, prophesy, administration, guidance, serving and showing mercy.

Some suggest that prophesying was restricted to the first century because it was needed only until the New Testament was completed. They point to 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. Others point out that Paul writes—in this same passage—that “knowledge” will also “pass away.” We do not believe that *all* knowledge passed away when the canon of the New Testament was completed. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is in the context of chapters 12-14. The Corinthian Christians acted like prophesy, speaking in tongues, and having special knowledge elevated *them* instead of elevating *God*. Paul teaches that while love is eternal, prophesying, speaking in tongues, interpretation, and knowledge are gifts given to the church by the Holy Spirit to empower us to accomplish God’s mission *right now*. Not everyone has these gifts, but that does not mean that no one has these gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31).

Secondly, prophesying is explained in 1 Corinthians 14 as being for strengthening, encouraging, comforting (14:3), edification (14:4), instructing (14:19), convicting of sin (14:24), and for building up the church (14:12, 26). The Corinthians should be eager to prophesy (14:39). Prophesying is not so much about *telling the future*. It is about *forth-telling* the will of God in the present. Prophesy did not replace or supersede Scripture, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Scripture and the prophets were always in companionship to bring people to God for *relationship* and to grow in *discipleship*.

2. **Why do some English translations use the word “brother”** by itself in these passages while others use “brother and sister” (14:6, 20, 26, 39)? The word in the original Greek of the New Testament is *adelphos* (brother). *Adelphos* is used in these passages to mean both men and women, just like we use the word “brotherhood” when talking about the worldwide fellowship of churches. When we say “brotherhood,” we mean brothers and sisters. Another example could be helpful: When astronaut Neil Armstrong radioed back from the moon, “One small step for [a] man, one giant leap for *mankind*,” he was not restricting “mankind” to males but was inclusive of men and women. When Paul uses *adelphos* in 1 Corinthians 14, he is using it in the same way, inclusive of men and women. Clarifying this *collective use* of the word are his statements in 14:20, 24, and 26 where he is addressing *everyone* in the assembly.

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SESSION NINE: Spiritual Gifts and Conduct (Part Two)

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Goal of this Session: To explore a second example of how men and women in the church consider culture and the nature of their behavior when exercising their gifts and sharing the message of Christ in the world.

Key Themes: Paul wrote to his “son in the faith,” Timothy, whom he had assigned to Ephesus (1 Tim 1:2-3). In 1 Tim. 2, Paul addresses some issues which had arisen in the church which were detracting from God’s desire to bring all people to be saved and to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:1-4). Paul counsels “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness (1 Tim. 2:2).” Toward this end, he admonishes:

- The men to pray without angry conflict and disputing.
- The women to do good deeds and not wear expensive clothing or dress indecently, but in a way *appropriate to their culture* for women who worship God.
- The women to learn, but in quietness and full submission (as was appropriate to the culture). “*Learn*” suggests that the women be allowed access to religious education—a new privilege, counter to their culture—so they needed to learn “*in quietness and submission*” so as to not hinder the reputation of the gospel in the community.
- In verse 12, Paul counsels quietness (NIV translates the word as “silence” in 2:12 and “quiet” in 2:2). There are three possible interpretations for the Ephesian church from the original text:
 - 1) That Paul permits no woman to teach a man. (Not teaching at all, with men present, is not consistent with 1 Corinthians 11, 14, or Acts 2.)
 - 2) That Paul permits no wife to teach or have authority over her husband. (A wife not usurping authority over her husband in the assembly is consistent with 1 Cor 14.)
 - 3) That Paul permits no woman (wife) who teaches to have authority over a man (husband) but to teach in a quiet spirit as is becoming of all believers—2:2. (A woman/wife teaching, but with the gentle and peaceful spirit commanded for all believers in 1 Timothy 2:2 would be consistent with 1 Corinthians 11-14, and Acts 2.)

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Paul closes this section with a confusing reference to Eve. It is important to note that it was *not confusing to Paul's audience*, the Ephesian church. They were able to connect the dots between this obscure reference to Eve and their errant behavior. So, what is Paul driving at when he refers to Genesis 3? Biblical scholars do not agree, but there are some consistent themes in their explanations. First, Paul is a first-century Jewish rabbi, brought up as a Pharisee. His upbringing is patriarchal, and his training is in Jewish Midrash. In the tradition of Jewish scholarship, interpretation of Scripture is a fluid process where there is not just one possible meaning that can be attached to an Old Testament passage.

Second, as is clear from 1 Timothy 5:1-16 (especially verses 13-16), there are some ungodly influences among the women in Ephesus that had to be addressed (This is also true for the men as is evidenced throughout the letter). These ungodly influences are subverting the life of the church and diminishing their witness in the community. Paul uses the example of Eve to humble the specific negative female influences. Like Corinth, it may have been a situation where women (wives) were demeaning their husbands publicly, and Paul was rebuking them. Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:13-15 is similar to 1 Corinthians 11:5-10, 13-15, and yet contradicts with 1 Corinthians 11:11-12.

This apparent contradiction is not actually a contradiction at all. The women who are instigating divisive trouble in their churches are called on to humble themselves and live decently and in order. But these same kinds of instructions are given to men who are perpetuating disorder. They, too, are called on to "be quiet" when it is not their turn to speak. They are called on to lift up holy hands without arguing. They are all called on to live "peaceful and quiet lives," and this word quiet is the exact same word for what the women are supposed to do (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

This is not a reversal of Paul's teachings that women pray and prophesy in the church (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Corinthians 11, 14), but it is a call to model the Spirit of Christ when exercising their gifts and carrying out their daily life. When Christ-honoring behavior is abandoned for personal ambition, God tells everyone—men and women—that it is time to be quiet. How would an Ephesian Christian woman who is caught up in idle talk and house-to-house ungodly conversation be restored to a life that reflects the Lord? Paul says they need to quit living for external appearances, quit going from one conversation to the next tearing others down, and start tending to the needs of others, whether it be their aging parents, their husbands, or their children.

We must put ourselves back into the first-century context where women had very few economic options beyond marriage. This made them very vulnerable to the pressures of the underside of society. Paul's guidance for them is in sync with their social context. These are not instructions for all time, but they are general principles that guide Christians in all generations. Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2 are not meant as a literal guide for every church in every place and time. Let's consider some examples:

1. Saved through childbearing (2:15). Some women are unable to have children, and some choose to not have children. If we took 2:15 literally, those women who do not bear children would not be saved. Paul isn't writing to all cultures in all times to give a plan of salvation that includes a requirement for women to have babies. This is directed to the Ephesian women, expecting them

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to live in such a way that the word of God and the church of God not be slandered (5:14).

2. The prayer for kings (2:1-2). Not every government has a royal family or a king.
3. Men lifting holy hands in prayer (2:8). Not all physical postures communicate the same thing in every culture. In some cultures, peace and a lack of hostility is expressed by men holding hands, not lifting hands.
4. Women should not braid their hair (2:9). Hairstyles differ greatly from one culture to the next and from one generation to the next. Hairstyles sent messages in Ephesus. Paintings and sculptures from first-century Ephesus indicate that braided hair sent messages about economic wealth and/or moral indecency.
5. Women should not wear gold or pearls (2:9). In our times, some of our most modest-dressing leaders, such as Barbara Bush (wife of past president George. H. W. Bush), famously wore pearls. Gold wedding bands are considered culturally acceptable for Christian woman, as are earrings and bracelets. Some gold necklaces include gold crosses. Of course, we would urge modesty in all things, including economic temperance. But to apply this teaching literally would seem to miss the central meaning of Paul's instruction. It has been my experience in the Church that women do not sense they are sinning if they wear a gold wedding band, earrings, a necklace, or if they braid their daughter's hair. These are examples of interpreting Scripture according to the culture in which we live.

These five examples make a clear case that this chapter is rooted in the Ephesian church experience. The teachings are not meant to be taken literally for all people in all places in all times. But the principles of the text are clearly applicable. We must also be faithful to the entire letter of 1st Timothy, not stopping at chapter 2 when much light is shined on the problems Paul is addressing in chapter 5.

1. Do you think this passage was written to prevent a Christian woman from sharing a message with the church or from teaching a Bible class in the church today?
2. How does your interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 concur and/or contrast with Acts 2:17-18, 1 Cor. 11:5, and 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, 26?
3. What should the demeanor be of a woman who has the gift of teaching?

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SESSION TEN: All One In Christ – The Restoration of Creation in and through the Church

Key Scripture: Galatians 3:26-28 ⁵⁰ in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Goal of this Session: To explore how the coming kingdom of God would bring an end to domination and subjugation and would renew the mutuality and oneness of creation.

Key Themes: Peter, a Jewish fisherman living in the Roman Empire, called believers to submit to ruling civil authorities (for Peter's first readers that would be pagan Romans). God's servants will silence foolish, ignorant men with their godly lives (1 Peter 2:13-17). Peter calls believing slaves to submit to their masters, even to the ill treatment of godless masters, for the sake of their Christian witness (verses 18-21). This teaching is *not* an endorsement of the institution of slavery. Rather it speaks to circumstances of the first century where both slaves and masters were becoming Christians. In Roman society, slaves were at the bottom of the heap, but in Christ, they were children of God, equal with everyone else (Galatians 3:28). They were baptized, filled with the same Spirit, and descendants of Abraham. The foundation of a new world of equality and freedom was laid by Christians in the midst of an oppressive empire.

Paul also addressed the reality of the first-century Roman empire (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1). Anyone who had been conquered by the Roman armies could have been enslaved. Even former soldiers were enslaved in Roman history, and this had led to armed revolts. Christianity grew among all cultures in the sprawling Roman Empire. Nearly all of these cultures practiced slavery of some form. Neither Paul, nor any of his contemporaries, could imagine a world where all people were included in their cultures as equals. Neither Paul nor Peter could have known how Christianity as a religion would be used by some to endorse slavery and by others to abolish it. The gospel they preached laid the foundation for a world they could not possibly imagine. In their world, conquered peoples lived under the domination of Rome. There would be no end or escape until Rome fell or was conquered.

Submission and domination were not limited to slaves. Women in many first-century Mediterranean cultures were treated like property. The severity of their domination, or the flexibility of their freedom differed from culture to culture. The book of Acts reveals this diversity. We learn of women that were leaders in the Church, leaders in business, leaders in their cities. We also find women enslaved, abused, and overlooked.

The Mediterranean region, including Israel, was dominated by a patriarchal structure. There are important differences in how much freedom and upward mobility women experienced from one culture to another. Some of these differences had to do with money, family of origin, class, and local religion. When Paul and Peter write about women, they defer to the *household codes* used by the Jews and many other cultures of their day. These household codes determined who was in charge, which child received the greater inheritance, and many other details of life.

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When we read Peter's teachings on submission in 1 Pet. 3:1-6, we are reading a reflection of these Jewish household codes. However, we see a second theme—echoing Paul—that has to do with the gospel. Peter calls wives to submit to God by submitting to their *unbelieving* husbands so they may be won to Christ by the testimony of their wives' godly lives (Cross-reference 1 Corinthians 7 for other ways to navigate being married to an unbeliever).

Notice that there is no hint in Peter's letter that women, *by their nature*, were meant to be subordinate to their husbands. In the culture of Peter's day, men ruled over women in a social structure parallel to slavery. By submitting to their *unbelieving* husbands, these women sought salvation for their husbands. To *believing* husbands, Peter says, treat your wives with consideration, respecting their weaker position. In a culture where a hierarchical model for marriage is the custom, women are weaker in social power, like slaves are weaker; but Peter advocates a more egalitarian treatment of wives. Peter counsels believing husbands to recognize their wives as co-heirs of the grace of God. Peter warns that less considerate treatment of wives will hinder the prayers of a man.

Some Bibles translate 1 Pet 2:16 "Live as free *men*." The word "men" is not in the original Greek text. The New International Version translates it, "Live as free *people*." Peter is teaching women as well as men about their freedom in Christ. A studied application of this teaching for today does not enforce male dominance any more than the parallel teachings enforce slavery. Christianity teaches society to value men and women equally as God's children and as the instruments through which God does his work on earth.

1. How do we see domination and submission played out in our society today?
2. How does being "in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8, 21; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12; and Galatians 3:28) affect how Christians think about dominance and subordination?

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SESSION ELEVEN: Customs, Traditions, Opinions and Freedom in Christ

Key Scriptures: Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible (1 Corinthians 9:19). “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

Goal for this session: To explore how Christians live with each other in unity when their customs, opinions and traditions are different.

Key Themes: In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul begins addressing two key subjects, and his teachings extend through the next seven chapters. Paul writes about propriety in worship and accommodating behavior. Propriety in our way of life and accommodation of others are meant to glorify God, influence non-believers to hear and receive the gospel, to build deep union with each other in the body of Christ, and to mature Christians in their union with God. Paul uses the idea of freedom to explore these subjects. Though he is free in Christ and not bound by the law, he uses his freedom to fulfill the goals he outlines in this letter. The following excerpts from this section of Scripture reveal Paul’s heart:

¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible (1 Corinthians 9:19). ²³ “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:23).

²⁹ I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— ³³ even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:29-33).

In this section of Scripture, Paul gives the Corinthians a vision for how to live in loving relationship with each other for the glory of God and the sake of the world. There are two points of interpretation that are vital to understanding these passages:

1. First, Paul is responding to the Corinthians. They are the ones declaring that “anything is permissible,” and Paul is the one responding to them with, “but not everything is beneficial, constructive, or something I should allow to have mastery over me.”
2. Second, to cause someone to “stumble” is to cause someone to stop believing and walk away from the faith. Causing someone to stumble *is not* upsetting someone’s routines or challenging their religious upbringing. Grumbling is not stumbling.

One practice addressed in this part of the letter is difficult for us because we are unfamiliar with the cultural practice of head coverings and hair lengths in first-century Rome (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). We are

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not, however, without a more modern example that could seem equally confusing. In the early to mid-20th century, women going to church were looked upon with contempt if they did not wear their best dress, shoes, hat, and gloves. That contemptuous attitude sent many women away from hearing the message of Jesus and being saved. Many felt like all the attention placed on their external appearance distracted from the true focus of Christ, the gospel, and the Church.

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul clearly describes that *both men and women* were praying and prophesying in the church assembly at Corinth. In alignment with the New Covenant announced at Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18), both men and women were commissioned and equipped by God to pray and prophesy. The issue Paul addresses is the manner in which they did it. There were head-covering customs that sent cultural messages to the world around them. It is confusing because Paul actually reverses Roman customs in regard to head coverings for men and women. The men, who would according to Roman custom wear a head covering, are commanded to not cover their heads in Corinth. The women, who traditionally did not wear head coverings for worship in Roman culture, were commanded to cover their heads. This passage is not meant to serve as a template for all the other churches in the first century or today, but the principles can guide us. Even though men and women in Christ live interdependently with each other and are mutually respectful, in Corinth their lack of mutuality and respect had led to a crisis in their witness. Paul commands both the men and the women to do something that would have been unusual in order to make a point about the impact of their lives on sharing the gospel.

Today, in our church, women do not customarily wear head coverings, but a fair application of this passage for us today would be to say, when the women pray and prophesy in our church, they should dress in such a way as to not hinder the gospel message. We would certainly agree that the same expectation would hold true for the men as well.

Paul, in most cases, was addressing the customs of that day and the conduct or behavior expected of a Christian man or woman. So, many of the passages that we have identified as prohibiting God's daughters from public ministry were not originally written for that purpose but were written to encourage self-discipline and the good of others.

1. From our study, define the problem that Paul was addressing.
2. How did the behavior of the women in Corinth cause confusion?
3. In more recent years, what are some comparable customs that we have had that demonstrate the difference between cultural practices and core principles?

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SESSION TWELVE: Husband and Wives Building Up the Body of Christ

Key Scripture: Ephesians 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Goal of this session: To explore the meaning of mutual submission.

Key Themes: With God, the truth of the inclusiveness and the oneness of all his children on earth was sealed and revealed by the redeeming work of his Son from heaven (Ephesians 2:11-3:13). However, the process of transforming those who were/are being saved into the full image of Christ is ongoing and involves continuous change. The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4:11-16 envisions a church where each member is prepared by God for works of service *"so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians does not directly address problems but seeks to expand how the church understands God's purposes and goals for the church. Ephesians 5:21-33 is a section which includes instruction for wives and husbands through drawing a parallel between the relationship of husbands and wives and the relationship between Christ and the Church. Although this section is actually about Christ and the Church (5:32), we still gain insight for the relationship of husbands and wives from this passage.

The section begins with the admonition: **"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,"** (Eph. 5:21). "Submit to one another" means a man and woman abandon the power struggle which has prevailed since the Fall in Eden and allow the lordship of Christ to be expressed in their relationship (aiming to restore the original intent of God as referenced in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 and Galatians 3:28).

Some interpret the teaching "for the husband is head of the wife" as *ruler* of the wife while some see other meanings for "head." The text itself gives a clear model of headship. It says the husband is the head of the wife *as* Christ is head of his body the church. The head/body metaphor portrays a union, a mutually considerate working unit, more than a male dominant/female subordinate structure. Verse 31 invokes the Genesis passage which *predates* the Fall, "the two will become one flesh."

Paul says (Eph. 5:28-29), that husbands should love and care for their wives as their own bodies, and, in verse 33, that wives should respect their husbands. This teaching for Christian marriages, when lived out, restores intimacy, removes selfish pride, and makes irrelevant the age-old question, "Who's the boss?" The real emphasis is to teach about Christ and the Church (verses 23-25 and 33). Of course, human gender is blended together in the Bride of Christ, which is the Church for which Christ sacrificed himself. As the Church submits to Christ, Christ gives himself for the Church.

1. What are some ways the relationships of men and women have changed during your lifetime?

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2. What are some ways that women have gained a degree of equality in society?

3. What are some ways that women are still treated unequally in society?

4. How do you feel about women being treated unequally in any area of our society?

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SESSION THIRTEEN: Women who served Jesus, were healed by Jesus, and followed the Apostles as prophets and leaders in the New Testament (Part One)

Goal of this session: To explore the ways that women in the New Testament were engaged in the life, leadership and ministry of Jesus and the early church.

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, women were included in vital ways.

- The genealogy of Jesus Christ includes five women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary.
- Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:39-45).
- Anna, a prophetess (Luke 2:36-38).
- Woman with an issue of bleeding, healed by Jesus (Matthew 9:22).
- Ruler's daughter healed by Jesus (Matthew 9:25).
- An unnamed sinful woman anointed the feet of Jesus (Luke 7:36-39).
- Canaanite woman, whose daughter was healed by Jesus (Matthew 15:28).
- Jesus' mother, usually in the crowds around him (Mark 32:31-35; John 2:1-4).
- Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, who invited Jesus to their home (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44).
- A crippled woman healed on the sabbath (Luke 13:10-13).
- The persistent widow (Luke 18:1-5).
- The widow with a small offering (Luke 21:1-5).
- The Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus spoke (John 4:1-26, 39-42).
- Many women were at the crucifixion, burial, and/or resurrection of Jesus, and were the first commissioned by Jesus to tell of his resurrection (Matt. 27:55; 61; Luke 23:55; 24:1-11; John 20:1-2).
- After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18).

From the day of Pentecost

- Philip the evangelist and one of the seven (Acts 6:5-6) had four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).
- Tabitha, called Dorcas, who was always doing good, whom Peter healed (Acts 9:36-42).
- Mary, John Mark's mother, who held a prayer vigil in her home, and Rhoda, her servant girl (Acts 12:12-17).
- Priscilla and her husband Aquila, who taught Apollos the way of God more perfectly (Acts 18:18-26).
- Many "leading women" came to Christ in various cities (Acts 17:4; 12; 34).

In their culture, women were considered second-class, unworthy, and too ignorant to learn the religious tenets. Association with lower-class people and sinners was frowned upon. Why did Jesus intentionally ignore these cultural norms? Why did he reach out to them and welcome them into his presence and mission? How are we leading our culture to elevate women and engage them in the full expression of their gifts from the Holy Spirit? How can equality—modeled by the church—impact the abuse and mistreatment that women experience in our society?

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SESSION FOURTEEN: Women who served Jesus, were healed by Jesus, and followed the apostles as prophets and leaders in the New Testament (Part Two)

Goal of this session: To continue exploring the ways that women in the New Testament were engaged in the life, leadership and ministry of Jesus and the early church.

Key Themes: In Acts 2, Peter preached to the multitude in Jerusalem. Fulfillment of prophecies (Isaiah 52:7; Daniel 7:13, 14; Micah 5:2) came that day. Three thousand souls were baptized in the name of Jesus, and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter then said, ³⁹“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Just as the Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise of God in their generation, the Holy Spirit is poured out in the same way on every generation until Jesus returns that the world may know that God is making all things new. As long as God is calling people to him, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on men and women.

In Acts, Luke describes the growth of the church. He writes of the missionary journeys of Peter and Paul, chronicling responses to the gospel, some good, some bad. Consider the example of Lydia:

“One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named **Lydia**, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.” (Acts 16:14-15).

In **Romans 16**, Paul clearly tells us about many women in the early church as he was giving his final remarks to the church in Rome. These are women he addressed in that chapter, many of whom had the church meeting in their homes. He addresses “households,” which probably included women:

- **Phoebe**, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae - for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me (v. 1-2).
- **Priscilla** and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus (v. 3-5).
- **Mary**, who worked very hard for you (v. 6).
- [Andronicus] and **Junia**, my fellow Jews imprisoned with me... outstanding among the apostles (v. 7).
- **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, those women who work hard in the Lord (v. 12).
- **Persis**, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord (v. 12).
- Rufus and **his mother**, who has been a mother to me, too (v. 13).
- **Julia**, Nereus and **his sister**... and all the Lord’s people who are with them (v. 15).

1. What do you take away from Paul’s greetings to these women?
2. Are there women in our church to whom Paul would have sent greetings?