



BUILDING GOD'S CHURCH TOGETHER

**A 4-SESSION STUDY ON GOD'S VISION
FOR FLOURISHING MINISTRY PARTNERSHIPS
BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**



TRANSFORMED
& Transforming

FOREWORD

This Bible study and the process called Building God’s Church Together are part of the broader vision of Women’s Transformation and Leadership, an initiative that is part of Transformed & Transforming, the RCA’s 15-year vision for ministry (through 2028).

Women’s Transformation and Leadership is tasked with helping the RCA pursue the vision for the full inclusion of women’s gifts and influence in all areas of the church. This includes equipping congregations to welcome women’s gifts and creating healthy ministry environments for women’s gifts and leadership to be nurtured and developed. The ultimate goal, then, is a thriving ministry partnership where both women and men can flourish, and together they can build and strengthen the church body for mission in the world. This model for a healthy ministry environment is especially needed now, at a time when many cases of harassment and abuse are coming to light (as seen in the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements).

Using Isaiah 43:19, Joel 2:28-29, and Matthew 9:37-38 as our scriptural references, we believe that God is doing a new thing, that it is springing forth, and that God will continue to make a way for us as we navigate through the wilderness—and that, just as Jesus told his disciples, the harvest is plenty but the laborers are few. We need both men and women to be raised up and sent forth to shine Christ’s light and love into a broken, hurting world so loved by God.

When our guiding coalition (made up of a cross-sector mixed-gender group of RCA leaders from across the denomination) started working on this over a year and a half ago, we only knew that the Holy Spirit was calling us to create something life-giving and meaningful to help our leaders and congregations faithfully address what is mentioned above. Lesley Mazzotta, our educational consultant and lead facilitator, started working to create an outline for the process, drawing from the insights of several of our coalition members’ experiences in more traditional contexts, and we became a member organization of Christians for Biblical Equality International (CBE International).

A delegation from our coalition attended the annual CBE International conference, where our ideas were given a firm foundation and where we met Dr. Rob Dixon, who has since become an integral part of our ministry and Building God’s Church Together faculty. We then needed to add a theological/biblical scholar with strong writing skills, pastoral experience, and a high level of understanding about the diversity of RCA contexts. Enter the Rev. April Fiet, who joined our team and brought her considerable knowledge and gifts to help shape the biblical curriculum of Building God’s Church Together, including this study.

Our hope and prayer is that you and your congregation will find this study helpful and life-giving. We pray that the Holy Spirit hovers near as you gather to study and learn together, and that you will be blessed beyond measure by all that will be revealed as you engage in this resource and the other components of the Building God's Church Together process.

May the Lord bless you richly, and may this lead your congregation in being a place where everyone is able to share their gifts freely and fully, to the glory of God and the up-building of God's reign here on Earth.

Together in the Spirit's movement,
Rev. Liz Testa
Coordinator for Women's Transformation and Leadership
Reformed Church in America

INTRODUCTION

I remember sitting on the steps of the chancel in my childhood church and listening to our pastor teach us this nursery rhyme: “Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors, and see all the people.” As you recite the words of the rhyme, you lace your fingers together, with the fingers on the inside between your two hands. When the magical moment comes—“Open the doors and see all the people”—you open your hands and reveal the people (your eight fingers) who have been hidden in the “church” all along. For those of you who are familiar with this nursery rhyme, you may have even found yourselves doing the hand motions as you read the words. The words are oft-recited, and we can feel the rhythm and the rhyme, but, above all else, we know the words are true. The church isn’t just a building; the church is the people.

The church is a group of people called by God to show the world what the kingdom of God is like. We show the world by doing the things that Jesus did—by loving God and by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

We do this in myriad ways—probably as many different ways as there are congregations around the world. We do this through our ministries and outreach, through our hospitality, through our service, and through our love. We also do this through our relationships and by the ways we work together. We do this in the ways we live and work and minister together—men, women, and children working together to build God’s church.

In the first lesson of this study, we are going to take a look at the blueprint God has given us for the relationship between women and men. In the earliest chapters of the Bible, God paints a picture of what the relationship between women and men ought to look like. We will explore what that picture looks like and imagine the steps we might take to embody that picture in our churches and in the world.

God created men and women to work together as partners, and this has implications for how we work together in the church and in the world. In our second lesson, we will explore the challenges we may face as we seek to build on the foundation God has laid for the relationship between men and women.

The third lesson of this study takes a deeper look at the biblical texts that at first seem to conflict with the rest of the Bible pertaining to the role of women in church leadership. What do these passages mean? How might the way we understand these verses have an impact on the way women and men work together in the church? We will unpack them together.

Finally, what does it mean for men and women to build God's church together? What are some practical ways we can paint the picture God has given us to imitate? Lesson four will help us begin the conversation about what it looks like for men and women to work together in healthy ministry partnerships in the church.

These lessons are like a sampler; we will get just a taste, and then we will be invited to dig into the topics that we are most interested in exploring further. The companion guide in the back of this study contains helpful links to resources that can be utilized to explore each lesson more fully. We are including articles for reading, books with more comprehensive treatment of each topic, and suggested videos to use either in companionship with these lessons or as a way of further personal study.

The Bible encourages us to strive toward building relationships that reflect the kingdom of God. When our relationships begin to look like what God intends, women and men will be freed and empowered to build God's church together.

At the beginning of each lesson, I have included a possible opening liturgy, some suggested songs and a prayer that your study group may use to open in prayer together. Participating in a liturgy like the ones I have provided may or may not be a familiar practice to you. I have found that the act of joining our voices together in song, word, and prayer has a way of drawing us closer together. I hope you will make use of these liturgies however best suits your purpose, but I also encourage you to reach outside of your comfort zone.

This Bible study was written after the Building God's Church Together launch event in Orange City, Iowa, as an expansion of a Bible study that was shared there. At this event, men and women gathered to worship, to read Scripture, to share experiences together, and to learn more about what God's design for the relationship between men and women looks like. This study is intended to help congregations, small groups, and even individuals begin a journey of exploring the vision God has for the relationships between women and men, in ministry partnerships and in life outside the church.

I am immensely grateful for the many people who have shared of their gifts and time in helping make this study available. Thank you to Rev. Liz Testa, Lesley Mazzotta, Lorraine Parker, Chris Godfredsen, Rev. Tim Breen, Dr. Rob Dixon, Arlene Waldorf, Pastor Lauralyn Vasquez, Rev. Larry Dove, Rev. Dr. Denise Kingdom Grier, Rev. Jeff Fiet, and all of the Women's Transformation and Leadership guiding coalition.

God's blessings,
Rev. April Fiet



SESSION 1

LOOKING AT THE BLUEPRINT

Reclaiming God's Vision for Men and Women

- **Genesis 1-3**
- **Joel 2:28-29**
- **Acts 2:17-21**

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible offers glimpses and snapshots of God's kingdom imagination for the world, for the church, for our relationships with one another, and for our ministry partnerships as women and men. Although many of these passages of Scripture come to us from thousands of years ago, their message is still relevant and much needed today.

Suggested Hymns/Songs:

- "For Such a Time as This" (*to the tune of "Amazing Grace"; see companion guide*)
- "Called as Partners in Christ's Service"
- "Blest Be the Tie that Binds"
- "Summoned by the God Who Made Us" (*Sing a New Church*)
- "Shout to the North"

Leader: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...'" (Genesis 1:26a).

People: **O God, may we reflect your goodness and love.**

Leader: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

People: **Together, men and women, may we reflect who you are.**

Prayer: God of all creation, we approach your Word with awe. May your Holy Spirit open our minds so that we may engage your Word with curiosity, our ears so that we may not only hear each other but also listen, and our hearts so that we may understand and grow more into the likeness of Jesus. Amen.

■ Opener

Think of someone who has been a tremendous help to you in your spiritual journey. Who was/is this person? What role did he/she play in your faith formation?

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

In Genesis 1, we find a breathtaking account of creation. Day by day, God creates order and life. Sun, moon, stars, planets, plants of every kind, and all kinds of animals are made as God speaks them into existence. When it comes time to make humanity, the rhythm of the creation account changes just a little bit, and those changes are significant.

Take a moment to read through Genesis 1:1-28 silently.

How does the creation of humankind differ from the creation of what was made prior to human beings?

Human beings are the first—and only—part of the creation to be made in the image of God. Also for the first time in Genesis, male and female are specified. In some unique way, men and women—male and female—are created in the image of God.

The very first chapter in the Bible tells us that women and men are made in the image of God. Why is this important for us to know? Should this make a difference in the ways women and men live and do ministry together?

Dr. Richard Hess explains the significance of Genesis 1:26-28 in this way:

Positive evidence for the equality of male and female is nowhere more clearly apparent than in Genesis 1:26-28. If God creates in his image, and that image is defined in v. 27 as ‘male and female,’ then the most important distinction between human beings and all other life on earth is a distinction that is shared by both male and female.¹

In other words, no matter how different each of us may be, all men and women share the most important characteristic of all: we are made in the image of God.

Men and women, made in God’s image, also were called together as stewards of creation. The text of Genesis 1 makes it clear that God created men and women to be bearers of God’s image, and their creation is followed immediately with their vocation—their calling. God called women and men to have dominion over the earth and every living thing God had made (Genesis 1:26-31). Lest we think this dominion allows humankind to do as we please with the creation, Genesis 2 clarifies what that dominion looks like: tilling and keeping the earth (Genesis 2:15). Together created in God’s image, human beings were called together—male and female—to steward what God had created.

In Genesis 1, we catch a glimpse of God’s vision for women and men. We see that women and men alike are created in God’s image, which invites us to consider how we might make that clear in how we live our lives. Genesis 2, then, gives us the opportunity to “zoom in” closer so that we can catch a glimpse of what the relationship between women and men is intended to look like on a more personal level.

Read Genesis 2:15-24.

It all begins with a problem in Genesis 2:18: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’” The man sorts through all of the birds and the animals, but “for the man there was not found a helper as his partner,” as it says in Genesis 2:20. The problem wasn’t that the animals couldn’t provide any sort of partnership or benefit to the man. Beasts of burden can provide help with agriculture and other such tasks. Animals like dogs and cats can provide companionship. And yet, the Bible says none of these was suitable as a partner.

None was suitable as a partner, which gives rise to the question: what does it mean to be a suitable partner? If we dig into the Hebrew, we find the beautiful phrase *ezer kenegdo* (AY-zer keh-NEG-doh). *Ezer* doesn’t just mean “helper”; it is a word that always means a powerful and strong help, an ally. In the Old Testament, *ezer* is most often used of God; 16 out of the 21 times the word occurs in the Old Testament, it refers to God.

¹ Richard S. Hess, “Evidence for Equality in Genesis 1-3,” CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/other/evidence-equality-genesis-1-3.

Marg Mowczko says this of the word *ezer*:

Ezer describes aspects of God's character: he is our strength, our rescuer, our protector, and our help! And *ezer* was the Holy Spirit's choice of word to describe the first woman. Eve was someone who would provide valuable and vital strength to Adam.²

If the word *ezer* was used all by itself in Genesis 2, we might get the idea that God intended for women to rule over men, but that is not the case. Immediately following the word *ezer*, the word *kenegdo* is used to clarify what kind of strong helper Adam needed. The word *kenegdo* literally means "against" or "corresponding to." The first woman was not intended to be subservient to the man, nor was she intended to dominate him. By contrast, the kind of helper that the first man needed, the kind of helper it was not good for him to be without, was one whose image and strength corresponded to his own. Perhaps this is why Adam exclaimed after the creation of Eve, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

Are you surprised by the meaning of the phrase *ezer kenegdo*? How does this phrase change your understanding of Genesis 2?

Janet George describes *ezer kenegdo* like this:

The woman was created with the abilities necessary to come alongside Adam and accomplish their God-given mission. God created men and women as equal partners, intended to work side by side.³

And, just in case we are tempted to think that the first man was intended to rule over the woman because he was created first, Genesis 2 ends with a startling verse: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (v. 24). Man is taken from the ground. Woman is taken from man. And, then, rather than man somehow returning to the ground or woman to man, it says that man returns to the woman. It is a beautiful circle that shows the interconnectedness of and partnership between men and women in the world God created.⁴

² Marg Mowczko, "A Suitable Helper (In Hebrew)," blog, March 8, 2010, margmowczko.com/a-suitable-helper.

³ Janet George, Still Side by Side, 2016, CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/SSBS-a4-ENGLISH-complete_web.pdf.

⁴ Hess, "Evidence for Equality in Genesis 1-3."

But we know the story of creation does not end here with man and woman as equal partners. Together, man and woman disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, and together they faced difficulties as a result. The blessings of God—to be fruitful and multiply, and to till and keep the earth—were blemished by the curse. Working the ground would be done with toil and difficulty. The pangs of childbirth would be multiplied. And the partnership between man and woman would be marked by hierarchy, rather than the equality God intended. As God said to Eve, “In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).

The partnership between equals that God had intended would now be a struggle to maintain, rather than the blessing it was meant to be.

The story could have ended here with the curse of Genesis 3, with woman and man no longer freely sharing as partners and with a hierarchy set into motion. But is that what God intended? After the fall, was God’s design no longer that woman would be a suitable helper to man with a strength corresponding to man’s own? Was partnership between women and men forever replaced with competition and a struggle for power?

As we read the account of the fall in Genesis 3, it is important for us to consider whether verses 16-19 are intended to be descriptive or prescriptive. Is God describing what will happen between men and women because of sin entering the world, or did the fall fundamentally change what God intended the relationships between men and women to look like? Was God’s vision for men and women replaced with something entirely different? We must continue reading to find out.

Throughout the rest of Scripture, we catch glimpses of God’s repeated desire for women and men to work together in healthy partnerships. We find women given positions of great authority and power in a day and time when that was extraordinarily uncommon.⁵ We find men celebrated for their compassion and care. We see examples of women and men working together in ways that support and encourage one another. And twice we encounter prophetic words of Scripture speaking the truth about a day when women and men will join their voices together through the power of the Spirit.

⁵ **Extraordinary Stories about Women in the Bible:** In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, it is not always easy to catch the vision God has for women and men. Women are often nameless, and their stories are often painful. However, into the midst of these difficult stories, we find God calling Deborah to judge Israel (Judges 4-5). We are amazed as King Josiah seeks out the prophetess Huldah to explain the law to him (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22). And we celebrate the way God worked through the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah to subvert the plans of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-22). God called women to be prophets, to be leaders, and to have tremendous influence. These powerful stories remind us of God’s creation vision from Genesis 1. Men and women are created in God’s image and have been given extraordinary gifts to use in the world.

We first encounter these words in the book of Joel:

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.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
(Joel 2:28-29, NIV)

In Joel 2, we find a world laid waste. Destruction and desolation are everywhere. It is into this barren landscape that the words of Joel 2:28-29 are spoken, words of life and hope and restoration. These words echo the promise and blessing of creation that male and female are both created in the image of God. Into the desolate and despairing world, the Spirit will be poured out on all people—male and female, young and old, servant and free.

Why do you think God gave this image of the Spirit poured out on all people—male and female—to a people who had been left with almost nothing? How does this vision in Joel 2 speak to you today?

Joel 2 is both a promise and a reminder: a promise that a new day is coming and a reminder of the beautiful picture of creation. Long ago, men and women had been created in God's image, and a day will come when women and men will again embody that image in the way they work together as partners in God's work.

This vision was so important that we find it again in Acts 2, on Pentecost, the day that has sometimes been called the birthday of the church. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples no longer knew what it meant to follow Jesus and walk in his ways. When they received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the very first sermon given leaned on the words of Joel 2.

Read Acts 2:17-21.

What is the significance of Joel 2 being quoted on Pentecost? What did these words mean for the early church? What might these words mean for the church today?

God's vision for men and women in Genesis was not something that was forever lost in the fall. Time and again, God has repeated the vision for us so that we might see it and embrace it. Once we've studied the blueprint of God's design for healthy and flourishing partnerships between men and women, we can begin to ask questions about how we can build it.



SESSION 2

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Finding Solid Ground in an Unsteady World

- **Genesis 3**
- **Matthew 20:20-28**
- **Galatians 3:25-29**

From Genesis to the prophets, the Old Testament communicates God's vision of a partnership between women and men, though sometimes that vision is difficult to see as many stories instead illustrate the tragic reality of the curse. Even still, God's vision is there, and we are invited to see it and make it our vision, too. This vision is repeated on Pentecost as the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. But, even if we share God's vision for healthy and flourishing partnerships between women and men, it can be difficult to figure out what that might look like today. Before we can build together, we have to set a firm foundation in an unsteady world.

Suggested Hymns/Songs:

- "For Such a Time as This" (see companion guide, Session 1)
- "They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love"
- "Help Us Accept Each Other"
- "In Christ There Is No East or West"
- "Summoned by the God Who Made Us" (*Sing a New Church*)

Leader: We are "all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26). No longer should we be divided.

People: **"There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female"** (Galatians 3:28).

Leader: We are all one in Christ Jesus.

People: **Help us to see the image of God in each other. Lord, make us one.**

Prayer: God of all creation, we approach your Word with awe. May your Holy Spirit open our minds so that we may engage your Word with curiosity, our ears so that we may not only hear each other but also listen, and our hearts so that we may understand and grow more into the likeness of Jesus. Amen.

■ Opener

Think about men and women from the Bible who “broke the mold” or did not fit cultural expectations. What might God be encouraging us to learn through these people?

Read Genesis 3:9-19.

In Genesis 3, we find the unraveling of the goodness of God’s creation. When Adam and Eve eat from the tree they were forbidden to eat from, sin enters the world. The blessing “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28) is now marked by increased pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16). God’s divine vocation/calling for humankind to “till and keep” the earth (Gen. 2:15) is now marked by a curse on the ground and increased toil and hard labor (Gen. 3:17).

Even though Adam and Eve are not directly cursed—only the serpent and the ground receive a curse—they face difficulties in their life together. They face increased pain and burden in bearing children, in working, and in their relationship with each other. Even though the woman will desire her husband, Genesis 3:16 adds “and he will rule over you.”

In session one, we explored God’s design in Genesis 1-2 for men and women to flourish in healthy partnerships. Genesis 3:16 seems to change all of this. Rather than a partnership, there is a struggle. How have you experienced this tension between God’s design for men and women and the struggle for power that came as a consequence of the fall? List 3-5 ways.

Genesis 3:16, “and he will rule over you,” has been interpreted throughout the years by some as a biblical mandate, that even though women and men originally were intended to be partners, the entry of sin into the world changed God’s intended

¹ Lynn Japinga, *Preaching the Women of the Old Testament: Who They Were and Why They Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

relationships between women and men. Is this consequence of the fall—the rule of man over woman—something Christians are supposed to embody?

Philip B. Payne writes this:

Since man's ruling over woman—even good rule—is a result of the fall, man must not have ruled over woman before the fall. Furthermore, Christ, the promised seed of the woman, has overcome the fall (Genesis 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:45). New creatures freed by Christ should not foster any of the tragic consequences the fall introduced, including man's rule over woman.²

In other words, if Christ overcame the fall, we should no longer continue living as though we are bound by it. God created men and women for healthy and flourishing partnerships, and the church is called to lead the way.

How might the church lead the way in modeling healthy and flourishing partnerships between men and women?

Even with the clear and repeated vision from God of partnership between women and men, there are many challenges or setbacks to laying that solid foundation in this world. The effects of sin and the fall reach throughout the world and in our relationships as well.

Even Jesus's disciples were not immune. Though Jesus taught about becoming a servant, about loving one another, and about being citizens of heaven rather than of this world, his disciples still struggled to comprehend what that might mean. They were still caught up in thinking about authority, power, and control.

Read Matthew 20:20-28.

The disciples observed the way power and authority worked in the world and assumed the same power structures were at work in the new kingdom as well. Instead, Jesus flipped their expectations upside down. Power and authority does not mean ruling over each other, but serving each other. Strength is not lording it over each other, but giving of ourselves to each other.

² Philip B. Payne, "Examining the Twelve Biblical Pillars of Male Hierarchy," 2012, CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/other/examining-twelve-biblical-pillars-male-hierarchy.

What kind of relationships between men and women do you see most often in the world today? A relationship of partners? A struggle for control?

What kind of relationships between women and men do you see most often in the church today (partnerships, imbalances, or other)? Are they the same as what you see in the world, or are they different? How might Jesus's teaching in Matthew 20 have an impact on the way women and men work and minister together?

All people are created in God's image, and God created men and women to work together in healthy partnerships. But, all too often, relationships between men and women are marked by struggle, control, and even abuse, rather than the wholeness and mutuality that God intended.

In 2017, a surge of painful stories of abuse and harmful encounters overwhelmed news outlets and social media. The #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements have highlighted the brokenness in far too many relationships. The devastation and loss are incalculable. We know that these stories of harm and hurt are nothing new. They have happened for too long, and we even see these kinds of relationships of pain play out throughout the pages of Scripture. What has changed is that important and difficult conversations finally are happening.

If we believe that God designed men and women to be partners, and if we believe that God still calls women and men to these healthy partnerships even in a fallen world, it is imperative that the church do the work to create relationships of health and mutuality, rather than relationships of power and control.³

³ #WeAreSpeaking is a statement and a commitment that arose from within the Reformed Church in America to address the pain and abuse being revealed in the church and in the world. If you would like to do further study on this, or if you are looking for steps your ministry or ministry leaders might take in this area, resources are available for you in the companion guide.

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How might God be calling you individually or with your study group to lay a foundation of mutuality and partnership between women and men in an unsteady world marked by abuses of power?

In an unsteady world, it is crucial that we begin with a solid foundation, and there is no better foundation upon which to begin than Jesus. It is Jesus who overcame the curse. It is Jesus who brings life out of death. It is Jesus who unites us all and invites us all to join him in a better way (1 Corinthians 15:21-28).

As it says in Galatians 3:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

(Galatians 3:25-29)

Have you ever had an experience in worship where “you are one in Christ Jesus” felt real to you? If you feel comfortable, share this experience with the group. Where (or in what activity) do you most experience this unity?

Experiences of true unity in Christ can seem to transcend this world and help us experience the kingdom, even if only for a moment. Paul shares this kingdom vision—this reminder of God's intention for humanity—in Galatians 3, a moving passage that tears down what divides people from one another. “No longer male and female” brings us right back to the story of creation and the partnerships that God intended between men and women. In the Greek, it does not say that there is neither male nor female, as if that meant women and men had become suddenly exactly the same.

Rather, “no longer male and female” urges us to cast off any hierarchy or effects of the fall and return to God’s intention for men and women—that we would work together as partners, each of us strong and capable.

A well-known prayer exists that many men have said over the last two thousand years (or more). The prayer goes like this: “Blessed are you, God of the universe, who has not made me a Gentile, who has not made me a slave, who has not made me a woman.”

It seems very possible that the apostle Paul was aware of this prayer when he wrote the words in Galatians 3. In Christ, there is no more jockeying for position and authority. In Christ, there is no more division and separation. In Christ, no longer is lording it over each other the way we are called to live. In Jesus, we are one.⁴

This is the foundation we need, and this is the foundation on which we are called to build the church together.

⁴ Margaret Mowczko, “Galatians 3:28: Our Identity in Christ and in the Church,” CBE International (blog), January 5, 2014, www.cbeinternational.org/blogs/galatians-328-our-identity-christ-and-church.



SESSION 3

MANAGING THE SETBACKS

Unpacking Two Complicated Passages

- **1 Corinthians 14:33-36**
- **1 Timothy 2:8-15**

We have taken a look at the blueprint of God's design for men and women, and we have started the work of building a solid foundation in an unsteady world. But, no construction project is without setbacks. God's abiding and life-giving vision of healthy male-female partnerships seems so clear and repeated throughout the Bible. And yet, there are a few passages that seem to convey the opposite message. How do we engage these Scriptures and understand what they might mean? As we explore these passages in depth, we will begin to see that even these complicated passages share God's vision of equality. We just need to take a closer look.

Suggested Hymns/Songs:

- "For Such a Time as This" (see companion guide, Session 1)
- "Summoned by the God Who Made Us" (*Sing a New Church*)
- "Come, All You People"
- "Open Our Eyes"
- "Blest Be the Tie that Binds"
- "Step by Step"

Leader: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God"
(1 John 4:7).

People: **Help us, Lord. Lead us and guide us by your love.**

Leader: "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

People: **Help us, Lord, to love as you love us.**

Prayer: God of all creation, we approach your Word with awe. May your Holy Spirit open our minds so that we may engage your Word with curiosity, our ears so that we may not only hear each other but also listen, and our hearts so that we may understand and grow more into the likeness of Jesus. Amen.

■ Opener

What role did women play in your church when you were growing up? Were there any roles women were not allowed to fill?

Throughout the New Testament, we find women and men working together as partners to bring the good news into the world. We see the woman at the well telling her whole town about Jesus. We see Mary celebrated for choosing to sit and learn at Jesus's feet. We see Paul partnering with Priscilla in ministry and commending the ministry gifts of Phoebe to the church in Rome. We see Jesus calling unlikely people from unlikely places and professions—fishermen, tax collectors, even outcasts. This rhythm of the unlikely, whether they be women or men, being chosen to be the messengers of the good news continues all through the New Testament, with just a few verses standing out with a potentially contrasting message.

We need to treat these passages carefully, and part of being careful—going deep into the Bible—is understanding the specific situations that gave rise to these words being written. When Paul writes that women are to be silent in the churches, does he intend to communicate that women should always be silent? Is 1 Timothy 2 really about women being commanded never to teach?

These texts are complicated. We may struggle to understand what they mean as we read them, and we may also find it difficult to harmonize them with other passages of Scripture, even passages written by the same author!¹

Augustine believed that everything we need to know in Scripture is said plainly somewhere in the Bible. The difficult passages are important to wrestle with, but he also urged that we interpret the obscure passages with the clearer texts. He wrote it this way:

Accordingly the Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.²

¹ The way we interpret the Bible is sometimes called “hermeneutics.” We all use a hermeneutic—or a method of understanding—when we read the Bible, whether we realize it or not. When we approach the Scripture, we bring a lot of things with us—our childhood faith experiences, our unique gifts and talents, our experiences in the world, and many other things. See the companion guide for more resources.

² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine (Book II)*, www.newadvent.org/fathers/12022.htm. (Interestingly, Peter addresses the difficulty of interpreting and understanding some passages of Scripture, specifically Paul's teaching, in 2 Peter 3:15-18.)

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What do you think about Augustine’s practice of allowing the clearer passages to help us understand the more difficult ones? Have you ever had to use this method in your own study of the Bible?

Even though some of the passages that seem to speak against women in church leadership are not always easy to understand, as people who believe all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, we cannot ignore these texts (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As we seek to understand what they might mean, it is important to look closely at the surrounding context of these verses—what comes before and after it? It is also important to consider what was going on in the churches to which Paul was writing. What was the intention of these passages when they were written? What is the Holy Spirit teaching us through them?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33-36.

When Paul wrote this passage to the Corinthian church, did he intend for women to be silent in churches for all time? Did he believe it was shameful for women to speak in church? If we back up to 1 Corinthians 11, it does not appear that Paul intended for women to be silent in church for all time going forward or even at that particular time at the church in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul wrote this to the Corinthians: “Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.”

Praying and prophesying were visible, public acts in worship, and Paul does not condemn the Corinthian women for doing these things. Rather, he gives them instructions for how to do these things in a way that made sense culturally.

If Paul permitted women praying and prophesying in the church of Corinth, why do you think he wrote such strong words about women remaining silent in the churches?

A few theories as to why are possible. Kenneth Bailey, who spent 40 years teaching in the Mediterranean world and becoming familiar with Mediterranean culture, noted that in many Mediterranean societies even to this day, one language may have a variety of dialects. There may often be a kind of business dialect as well as a more informal, everyday dialect. Men were often more versed in the business language of the day, whereas women were far more comfortable with and used to using the everyday, informal dialect.³

In churches, men and women sat on opposite sides of the church, with all the women on one side and all the men on the other. It is quite possible that as the preacher was preaching—most certainly in the business dialect of the language—the women became bored or were unable to follow along. As the women began to have difficulty understanding what was being said, they began to converse with each other, and perhaps even began shouting questions to their husbands on the other side of the church. Kenneth Bailey had personal experience with this happening in Mediterranean churches.⁴ John Chrysostom observed this happening in churches, too, and he wrote about it in the fourth century.⁵

It is possible that Paul wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 14 to address the problem in the church of women talking during the service and causing a disruption. This fits in with the rest of 1 Corinthians 14, which also describes how to keep speaking in tongues and prophesying during worship orderly (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

Have you ever been part of a worship service when something distracting or disorderly took place? What happened? As you think about that experience, how much of the rest of the worship service do you remember? Why do you think Paul was so concerned about orderly worship?

Another theory is that Paul was condemning the Corinthians for silencing women rather than urging the women to be silent. 1 Corinthians was a letter written to the Corinthian church in response to difficulties the church was facing. When we read the letters in the New Testament, it can be easy to forget that they are one side of the conversation. We know that churches wrote to Paul as well, but we do not have

3 N.T. Wright explaining Kenneth Bailey's view on 1 Corinthians 14. "Session 5 Scriptural Teaching on Women in Leadership," Biblically side by side (video), biblicallysidebyside.com/index.php/courses.

4 N.T. Wright explaining Kenneth Bailey's view on 1 Corinthians 14. "Session 5 Scriptural Teaching on Women in Leadership."

5 John Chrysostom, "Homily 9 on 1 Timothy," New Advent, www.newadvent.org/fathers/230609.htm.

those letters. Instead, we have Paul's responses, and we have to reconstruct the churches' original concerns as we read.

At least five times in 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to quote the Corinthians and then rebukes their practices (6:12-13; 7:1-2; 8:1, 8; 10:23). These rebukes all follow a similar grammatical construction to what is present in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. In this view, Paul quotes the Corinthians' letter to him in verses 33b-35, and in verse 36, he rebukes them for silencing the women. Verse 36 could be translated: "Or did the word of God originate with you, or to you men only has it come?" To which the obvious answer would be, "No." The word of God did not originate with the men, and the word was not only given to the men.⁶

Which theory of why Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 makes the most sense to you? Do you have a theory of your own?

1 Timothy 2:11-15 is perhaps the most well-known passage of Scripture that seems to prohibit women from leadership, but it is also a passage that is very difficult to understand. Twice women are told to be silent, and the reason given is the order of the creation of Adam and Eve. Most perplexing of all is verse 15: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." A variety of interpretations have been offered about what verse 15 might possibly mean. It has even been suggested the "childbearing" could be translated as "the childbirth," which would be a reference to the birth of Christ.⁷

Verse 9 prohibits braided hair, pearls, gold, and expensive clothing. Most scholars agree that this was a cultural prohibition that no longer applies today. Douglas Groothuis argues that "it is inconsistent to regard the dress code in 1 Timothy 2:9 as culturally relative, and therefore temporary, but the restriction on women's ministry as universal and permanent. *These instructions were part of the same paragraph and flow of thought*" (emphasis mine).⁸

6 Kirk MacGregor, "1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device," Priscilla Papers, CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/1-corinthians-1433b-38-pauline-quotation-refutation-device.

7 Marg Mowczko, "Chastity, Salvation, and 1 Timothy 2:15," blog, January 27, 2016, margmowczko.com/chastity-salvation-1-timothy-215; "Christmas card: Mary and Eve," (poem to accompany Mary and Eve painting) www.monasterycandy.com/Detail?prod=49.

8 Gail Wallace, "Defusing the 1 Timothy 2:12 Bomb," The Junia Project, January 15, 2014, juniaproject.com/defusing-1-timothy-212-bomb.

As we seek to faithfully understand Scripture, it is important to use a consistent method of interpretation. We cannot pick and choose which passages of the Bible to apply to our lives. Instead, as we seek to understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches—and to us—through the biblical text, we must consider context, and we must interpret as consistently as we can. We also cannot interpret alone. As we strive for faithful and consistent interpretation, we must interpret in community.

Often, conversations about 1 Timothy 2:8-15 center on the repeated emphasis on silence, but it was far more revolutionary that women were told to learn. Tania Harris writes this:

“For women in the church of the first century, the idea of learning was an outrageous one. It was the men who learned, not the women. Women stayed home from the synagogue; they didn’t speak in public or occupy themselves in things of the Law. To a first century female, Paul’s admonition to quietness was nothing new. It was the call to learn that was the shocking wake-up call.”⁹

Imagine hearing for the first time that you are encouraged to learn! In Ephesus, at the time 1 Timothy 2 was written, the cult of Artemis was popular, and it seems that false teaching was beginning to infiltrate the church. Women who had become caught up in some of these false teachings were beginning to usurp authority from those who had the proper knowledge and qualifications. These women are urged to remain silent so that they could learn. You can’t teach until you have first learned.¹⁰ The word for “authority” here in 1 Timothy 2 is not the simple word most often used. It is a word of aggression, violence, and domination. God’s design for men and women is one of healthy and flourishing partnerships. Anytime there is an imbalance or misuse of power, it is against what God intends for women and men in their life and ministry together.

What did you learn from these passages that you will take with you when you leave this study? How does the knowledge of what was happening culturally around these churches help your understanding of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2?

⁹ Tania Harris, “Why Women Need to Learn in Quietness and Submission,” The Junia Project, July 26, 2016, juniaproject.com/why-women-need-to-learn-in-quietness-and-submission-1-timothy-211.

¹⁰ Marg Mowczko, “1 Timothy 2:12 in Context: Artemis of Ephesus and Her Temple,” blog, April 17, 2013, margmowczko.com/1-timothy-212-in-context-2/.

In 1991, the Commission on Theology presented a paper to General Synod entitled “The Role and Authority of Women in Ministry.” In this paper, the Commission on Theology affirmed the vision of Scripture for partnerships of mutuality between men and women. The Commission on Theology said it this way:

In sum, the authority of women and men in ministry is given to them by the triune God, who is the author of the first creation and the finisher of the new creation which exists within and beyond human history. Those called by God are called to exercise their authority in a way which builds up and makes new and seeks goodness and delight, wholeness and harmony, equality and productivity. As God welcomes and persuades men and women into partnership, so must those who represent God. As God opposes all partnerships which misunderstand or abuse the servant authority made manifest by Jesus Christ, so must women and men who share in Christ’s ministry.¹¹

Believing in the full gifts and calling of women in the church does not require sacrificing a high view of Scripture. One can take Scripture seriously as the ultimate authority in her or his own life and still come to the conclusion that God has always intended for men and women to work together as a pairing of equals rather than an imbalanced pairing. The church needs everyone to work together, to use their gifts, and to proclaim the goodness of God. Otherwise, it would be like trying to work with one hand tied behind our backs.

¹¹ Commission on Theology. “The Role and Authority of Women in Ministry,” Reformed Church in America, 1991, images.rca.org/docs/women/authoritywomen.pdf.

SESSION 4

GETTING TO WORK

Building God's Church Together

- **Luke 10:1-2**
- **1 Peter 2:4-5**
- **Romans 16**

We have unfurled the blueprint of God's design for the relationship between men and women, and we have seen the radical and transformational call to healthy and flourishing partnerships. The call to partnership God has given to women and men is not always easy in an unsteady world, but with prayer and study, care, and mutual encouragement, we have begun to build on the foundation that Jesus has already laid. As people who care about the whole of Scripture, we have started to dig into the passages most commonly used to prohibit women from church leadership. We've faced the setbacks and are ready to move ahead as builders of God's church.

Session 4 takes all of these things and encourages your study group to ask, "Now how do we—women and men—build God's church together?"

Suggested Hymns/Songs:

- "For Such a Time as This" (see companion guide, Session 1)
- "Gather Us In"
- "The Servant Song" (sometimes called "Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You")
- "Come! Live in the Light" (*We Are Called*)
- "Establish the Work of Our Hands"
- "Summoned by the God Who Made Us" (*Sing a New Church*)

Leader: Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2a).

People: **Lord, here we are. Send us.**

Leader: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2b).

People: **Lord, here we are. Send us out. We are eager to work in your fields.**

Prayer: God of all creation, we approach your Word with awe. May your Holy Spirit open our minds so that we may engage your Word with curiosity, our ears so that we may not only hear each other but also listen, and our hearts so that we may understand and grow more into the likeness of Jesus. Amen.

■ Opener

Think about a healthy male and female ministry partnership you have observed. What stands out to you about the way these people worked together? How might they help model what it means to build God's church together?

Read Luke 10:1-2.

In 1918, T. Tertius Noble wrote the tune Ora Labora to accompany Jane Laurie Borthwick's moving hymn text about the call on all Christians to go and work in God's harvest field. Ora Labora means "pray and work," and together Noble's tune and Borthwick's text urge all Christians—men and women—to follow God's call.¹

Come, labor on.
 Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain
 while all around us waves the golden grain?
 And to each servant does the Master say, "Go work today."²

Today, over 100 years from when this hymn was first set to music, the church is still in need of the call and the encouragement to send laborers out into God's harvest field. Because the harvest is plentiful, we are called to send all of the laborers, not only some of them. We need all of us to get the work done.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read the account of the sending out of the 70 (or 72, depending on your translation). The laborers were sent out ahead of Jesus to all the places "he himself intended to go" (Luke 10:1). Jesus sent the laborers out ahead of him. The laborers would be who each person encountered before Jesus. These workers came in the name of Jesus, and they represented him.

Our calling is the same. As we go forth in our work and our ministry, whatever our particular callings might look like, we represent Jesus and what is important to him. We model this by the way we do what we do, and we model this by the way we work together. The way followers of Christ work together in the church and in the world says something to the world about what we think is important to Christ.

¹ "Ora Labora (Noble)," Hymnary.org, hymnary.org/tune/ora_labora_noble.

² Jane Borthwick, "Come, Labor On," Hymnary.org, hymnary.org/text/come_labor_on.

As people from your community observe the ministry of your congregation, do you think they would be able to see God's vision for men and women in partnership on display? In what ways? What changes might God be calling you to make as you seek to embody God's vision?

Jesus, the foundation upon which we have been called to build, is described in 1 Peter as a living stone. We, too, are called to be living stones, and it is these living stones that make up the church. Just like the church nursery rhyme (quoted in the introduction) reminds us, we know that the church is not a building, it is the people. But we may not always remember that this means that we are the stones in the church that God is building:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 2:4-5)

As living stones, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who:

- Spoke with the woman at the well and had a theological conversation with her. Jesus revealed to her that he was the Messiah (John 4:1-30).
- Went to eat at Zacchaeus's house despite Zacchaeus's reputation in the community (Luke 19:1-10).
- Listened to the woman caught in adultery. He did not condemn her but sent her forth and empowered her to live a new life (John 8:1-11).
- Appeared to Saul (who became Paul), who had been persecuting the early church, and inspired Paul to begin many churches and write many of the letters in the New Testament (Acts 9:1-30).
- Had a late night conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who wanted to know more (John 3:1-21).
- Appeared first to the women after the resurrection, and they became the first witnesses to this miraculous event (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18).

Jesus called a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds to follow him, which was a favorite criticism of the Pharisees. He broke through cultural expectations for men and women, even praising Mary for sitting at his feet and learning, a role traditionally only available to men (Luke 10:38-42). Walter Wink noted that “Jesus violated the mores of his time in every single encounter with women recorded in the four Gospels.”³ Think about other stories in which Jesus interacted with women. As we see the way Jesus walked with people and lifted them up in ways that defied social expectations, we see God’s vision for men and women in action.

As living stones who are called to be built into a spiritual house, what might it look like for us to build God’s church together?

From the earliest days of the church, men and women were working together to build God’s church. They were co-workers in the gospel, they planted churches together, and they were even imprisoned together for their faith. We have to look no further than the end of the book of Romans to get an idea of what the relationship between men and women was like in the earliest days of the church.

Read Romans 16:1-16.

Quite often, when we get to a list of names in the Bible, it is tempting to skip over them. We either do not know much about the people listed, or we are concerned we won’t be able to pronounce their names. In any case, it is very easy to believe that these lists of names have very little value.

However, in Romans 16, Paul uses some very powerful and descriptive words as he introduces his co-workers in the gospel and sends his greetings to others. This becomes apparent in the first two verses of Romans 16:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

(Romans 16:1-2)

³ Walter Wink, “Engaging the Powers,” quoted in Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 129.

Phoebe was a deacon of the church at Cenchreae. She is called a *diakonos* (*dee-AHK-ah-nahs*), a deacon, by Paul, and she is also called a “benefactor,” a word which might be translated as “leader.” Phoebe was a woman who held church office and a woman Paul recognizes for her leadership and guardianship of many, including Paul.⁴

Was Phoebe a familiar biblical woman to you? If not, what surprises you as you read the way Paul describes her?

In verse 3, Paul sends his greetings to Prisca (elsewhere called Priscilla) and Aquila—dear friends and co-workers (16:3) of Paul’s who “risked their necks” for him (16:4). Prisca and Aquila hosted a church in their home (16:5), and they are found in four New Testament books (1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19; Romans 16:3-5; Acts 18:24-28). In addition to the way they helped Paul and worked with him for the gospel, Prisca and Aquila corrected Apollos after they heard him speaking in the synagogue (Acts 18:24-28). This was a powerhouse team!

Scholars have noted that Paul lists Prisca’s name first in Romans 16 and elsewhere, a possible indication that she was either the more dominant leader or that she held a higher social status.⁵

Prisca and Aquila are unique in that they are not listed separately but together. What might we be able to learn from Prisca and Aquila’s ministry as we seek to build God’s church together?

Romans 16 lists other of co-workers and friends of Paul’s, 10 women and 18 men. This is remarkable in the ancient world, and it urges us onward as we seek to work

⁴ Linda Marion Montgomery, “Our Sister, Phoebe,” *Priscilla Papers*, CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/our-sister-phoebe.

⁵ Joe Lunceford, “Biblical Women Weren’t Always Submissive,” *The Priscilla Papers*, CBE International, www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/biblical-women-weren%E2%80%99t-always-submissive.

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together as men and women called by God. Paul lists men and women as his co-workers, his compatriots, and even his fellow prisoners. From the earliest days of the church, women and men were working together as partners and colleagues, and they even suffered together for their faith.

We cannot look at Romans 16 without also mentioning Andronicus and Junia: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was” (Romans 16:7).

While many scholars believe that Andronicus and Junia were married, the text does not tell us for sure. It is possible that Andronicus was Junia’s brother or was connected with her in some other way. No matter their connection, Andronicus and Junia had some remarkable things said about them in Romans 16, so remarkable, in fact, that for a long time Junia’s name was changed to “Junias” (a name that does not seem to have existed at that time) so that the text would read as though she were male.⁶

Paul—the same Paul who wrote 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14—calls Andronicus and Junia his relatives, fellow prisoners, “prominent among the apostles,” and he even notes that they were “in Christ before I was.” That is high praise! Andronicus and Junia were noted among the apostles, a commendation that invites us to wonder what kinds of things Andronicus and Junia did in ministry. They were highly regarded and even suffered in prison along with Paul.⁷

We have been caught up in God’s vision for men and women—a vision of healthy and flourishing partnerships—and now it is time for us to build together. This will look different for each of us and for each congregation as we consider our unique gifts, callings, and ministry contexts. But there can be no doubt that we need each other. We cannot build without each other. We cannot embody the kingdom imagination of God apart from one another.

How is God calling you to participate in building God’s church in your community? As you consider the ministries of your congregation, are there ministries that are reflecting God’s vision of healthy partnerships between women and men well? What’s going right? Are there ministries where there are gaps to be filled or areas where intentional changes might be necessary?

⁶ “Who Was Junia?” The Junia Project, juniaproject.com/who-was-junia/.

⁷ Marg Mowczko, “Junia: the Jewish Woman Who Was Imprisoned with Paul,” blog, June 10, 2018, margmowczko.com/junia-jewish-woman-imprisoned.

In the companion guide, you will find resources for moving forward with intentionality in your ministry context. Are both men's and women's voices lifted up in your setting? Are leadership gifts noticed and cultivated in both men and women? Are all gifts welcome?

We do not build alone. We have been called by God to build on the foundation Jesus has already laid. We are called to follow Jesus's example, becoming living stones who make up the spiritual house God is building. And we follow in the footsteps of many courageous women and men who have gone before us. It is not good for us to build alone. No. It is very good when we build God's church together—all of us—men and women.

COMPANION GUIDE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR DIGGING DEEPER

All Scriptures references come from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Biblically Side-By-Side is an online video series (7 videos) about biblical mutuality. The first video is available online for free. The remaining videos can be accessed for a cost of \$14.99.

Some of the hymns and songs included in these lessons may be unfamiliar to you. Many of them have excellent recordings available for free online. These work well for singing together as a group or even just for listening to as a way to enter into the time of Bible study together.

1 LOOKING AT THE BLUEPRINT

Reclaiming God's Vision for Men and Women

For Such a Time as This

text by Carol M. Bechtel

(used with permission)

Tune: *Amazing Grace*

A hymn of joy today we raise
For ministries and gifts;
For all the ways you bid us join
Your cloud of witnesses.

Your faithful life, O Christ, inspires;
Your brokenness makes whole;
Your resurrection calls us forth
And opens long-closed doors.

For all the saints whose lives shine forth
As templates of your grace,
We give you thanks and pledge our lives
In gratitude to trace.

Our world cries out to hear your name;
The Church in mission risks,
As men and women join to serve
For such a time as this.

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Additional Resources

- Biblically Side-By-Side videos - Session 1: The Need for Biblical Mutuality (this video is free). <http://biblicallysidebyside.com/index.php/courses/>
- Biblically Side-By-Side videos - Session 2: God's Original Design for Men and Women (takes a look at Genesis 1-3). (Session 1 is free. The remaining videos are available for a subscription fee): <http://biblicallysidebyside.com/index.php/courses/>

2 LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Finding Solid Ground in an Unsteady World

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Additional Resources

- #WeAreSpeaking Statement: <http://rca.org/wearespeaking>
- #WeAreSpeaking next steps: <https://www.rca.org/we-are-speaking/next-steps>

- Men, Women, and Biblical Equality—CBE International’s statement: https://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/english_3.pdf
- Biblical Gender Equality: a Summary—CBE International: https://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Booklet_web.pdf

3 MANAGING THE SETBACKS

Unpacking Two Complicated Passages

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2014. <http://juniaproject.com/defusing-1-timothy-212-bomb>.

Additional Resources

- From John Chrysostom (see above for bibliographical information): “They [the women] may all be seen here talking more than in the market, or at the bath. For, as if they came hither for recreation, they are all engaged in conversing upon unprofitable subjects. Thus all is confusion, and they seem not to understand, that unless they are quiet, they cannot learn anything that is useful.” Chrysostom observed women interrupting church services back in the 4th century, and he shared that in this homily. However, much of his writing regarding women is less than affirming, to put it rather mildly.
- Women in Ministry: Fuller Seminary: <https://www.fuller.edu/womeninministry/>
- A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry—Evangelical Covenant Church: <http://covchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2010/04/A-Biblical-and-Theological-Basis-for-Women-in-Ministry.pdf>
- Edwin G. Mulder, Participation—a Long Time in Coming!: <https://repository.westernsem.edu/pkp/index.php/rr/article/view/1126/1218>
- If you are interested in digging deeper, some great resources on biblical interpretation and hermeneutics are: *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* by Fee/Stuart; *Blue Parakeet* by Scot McKnight; *Grasping God’s Word* by Duvall/Hayes.
- Excellent resources for continued study on what the Bible says about women in leadership (and also empowering of men and women to serve together in healthy and flourishing partnerships):
 - CBE International: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/>
 - The Junia Project: <https://juniaproject.com/>
 - Marg Mowczko: <http://margmowczko.com/>

4 GETTING TO WORK

Building God’s Church Together

Endnotes

Borthwick, Jane. “Come, Labor On.” Hymnary.org. http://hymnary.org/text/come_labor_on.

Lunceford, Joe. “Biblical Women Weren’t Always Submissive.” *The Priscilla Papers*. CBE International. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/biblical-women-weren%E2%80%99t-always-submissive>.

Montgomery, Linda Marion. "Our Sister, Phoebe." *Priscilla Papers*. CBE International. www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/our-sister-phoebe.

Mowczko, Marg. "Junia: the Jewish Woman Who Was Imprisoned with Paul." Blog. June 10, 2018. <http://margmowczko.com/junia-jewish-woman-imprisoned>.

"Ora Labora (Noble)." Hymnary.org. http://hymnary.org/tune/ora_labora_noble.

"Who Was Junia?" The Junia Project. <http://juniaproject.com/who-was-junia/>.

Wink, Walter. "Engaging the Powers." quoted in Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995.

Additional Resources

Biblically Side-By-Side videos - Session 6 Living Fully in the Spirit's Gifting
<http://biblicallysidebyside.com/index.php/courses/>
(Session 1 is free, but the other sessions are available for a subscription fee.)

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Here are some practical ways to begin building God’s church together:

- Bishop, Kelly Ladd. “7 Ways to Practice Gender Equality in Your Church.” The Junia Project. April 6, 2016. <https://juniaproject.com/7-ways-practice-gender-equality-church/>.
- Briggs, J.R. “9 Ridiculously Practical Ways for Male Leaders to Empower Female Leaders in the Church.” CBE International. September 21, 2017. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/blogs/9-ridiculously-practical-ways-male-leaders-empower-female-leaders-church>.
- Johnson, Devyn Chambers. “Four More Commitment.” Commission on Biblical Gender Equality blog. December 14, 2017. <http://blogs.covchurch.org/bge/2017/12/14/four-more-commitment/>.
- Medina, Grisel Medina. “8 Strategies for Lifting Women into Ministry in Your Church.” Patheos. June 5, 2017. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2017/06/05/lifting-women-ministry-church/>.

Meet two primary contributors to the Building God’s Church Together learning process:

Dr. Rob Dixon lives in California with his wife and four children. He has spent more than two decades in campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In addition, Rob holds a Doctor of Intercultural Studies degree from Fuller Theological Seminary, focused on the topic of flourishing mixed gender ministry partnerships. Learn more at his website: <https://togetherinmission.net>.

Rev. April Fiet lives in the panhandle of Nebraska with Jeff, her co-pastoring partner, and their two children. She has more than a decade of pastoral ministry experience and is a graduate of Western Theological Seminary. April is the author of this Bible study and the primary writer of the RCA’s We are Speaking statement. Learn more about her at her blog: <http://aprilfiet.com>.

The Building God’s Church Together learning process—to equip you to create healthy ministry environments where everyone’s gifts and leadership can be nurtured, developed, and used to strengthen and build the body of Christ for mission in the world—includes the following:

On-ramps:

- A list of curated theological and practical resources about women and men leading together—an ideal first step for those who are wishing to learn more personally or are seeking resources to bring to their leadership teams. This list and the 4-week study are available on our website (<https://www.rca.org/women/building-gods-church-together>) and by email request.
- This study that you may have just completed.
- Regional Connection Events—a daylong “taste and see” event designed for local leaders with the purpose of getting the conversation started in a particular area. Congregations and other faith-based organizations bring a small team of leaders for an interactive day of worship, Bible study, and workshops. Next steps can include forming a learning community, joining a mini leadership collaborative, or leading a group through this 4-Session Study in your context.

Deeper dives:

- Learning Community—a six to twelve month journey for congregations in a classis or region to explore Building God’s Church Together. The emphasis is on shifting culture within each congregation and creating healthy, lasting change. Led by trained facilitators and other faculty, learning communities are customizable and usually meet three or four times in person; all other meetings are virtual. Learning Communities are made up of five to seven congregations in regional proximity; each congregation has teams of four to six leaders.
- Mini Leadership Collaborative—a six-week virtual small group for pastors and ministry leaders seeking to engage the subject matter in an intentional way. The collaborative is composed of weekly gatherings led by trained facilitators (via Zoom video meetings) and peer coaching. Eight to twelve leaders form a cohort that meets virtually. These cohorts are not limited by geography, though some groups may choose to form after a regional connection event.

For more information on these offerings and to explore how to bring this process to your community, contact Rev. Liz Testa, coordinator for RCA Women’s Transformation and Leadership, at etesta@rca.org or visit us at <https://www.rca.org/women/building-gods-church-together>.

NOTES



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