



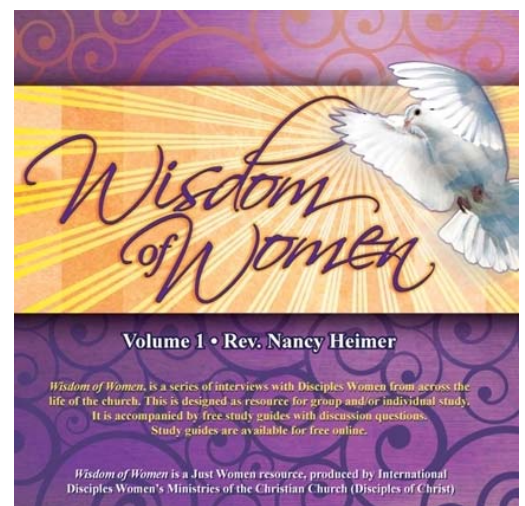
# *Wisdom of Women* Study Guide—Volume 1

International Disciples Women's Ministries

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## Session One: The Rev. Nancy T. Heimer

### Background:

*Wisdom of Women* is a new series of video interviews with Disciples women from across the life of the church. The purpose of this series is two-fold: to capture our history so that it is not lost and to enable us to share the wisdom that we have found, learning about who we are as women and empowering us to live into our future.

Touching on everything from how and when they heard a call on their lives to balancing roles as wife, mother, and career—nothing is off limits. Each interview consists of 60 to 90 minutes of conversation and wisdom edited into 13 or 14 short segments of six to ten minutes each. The study guide with suggestions for use and questions for reflection and conversation after each segment is available as a free download at [www.discipleswomen.org](http://www.discipleswomen.org) and will accompany each DVD. The DVD's are a cost item and can be ordered by calling 1-888-346-2631 or online at [odw@disciples.org](mailto:odw@disciples.org).

The DVDs have been designed to be used by women and men in a variety of settings. Some may choose to watch the entire video in one sitting in the privacy of home, referring to it for that extra boost of encouragement. Journaling after viewing the video and reacting to the questions could be especially helpful if watching it alone.

Others may watch one segment with a group of friends, entering into discussion about what was just heard. The video could be the "resource person" for a women's retreat. Still others may make it a quarterly Sunday School class, viewing one or more segments each week, followed by discussion. This resource can be used in the traditional CWF group or in a wisdom circle. (for a model "wisdom circle" see the web site, [www.discipleswomen.org](http://www.discipleswomen.org)).

Might men also benefit from hearing and discussing the wisdom of women? We certainly think so, as could women benefit from hearing men's reactions! However you choose to use this new resource, in whatever setting, with whatever participation, your life will be enriched by hearing and reflecting on *Wisdom of Women*.

The Rev. Nancy T. Heimer, retired Program Director in the Department of Church Women (now the renamed Office of Disciples Women) is the first interviewee in this series. Hear Nancy's reflections on becoming a clergy woman in the 1970s, the challenges of

prioritizing and balancing motherhood, marriage, and career, the challenges and gifts she encountered as she learned to deal with losing her eyesight, and so much more. The plan is to have the next interview DVD available by January 2011 and a new one each year following that. Planned interviewee for 2011, the next Woman of Wisdom, is Melvia Fields.

## Preface:

Nancy wants us to see beyond her own particular story and hopes that it will point to experiences and greater truths and insights of the viewers. Before you/your group begin watching Nancy's story, here are some questions for reflection and discussion:

1. What does the series title, Wisdom of Women, say to you? What is wisdom? How does it differ from knowledge? How does smart differ from wise? From where does wisdom come? Can it be taught or is it attained some other way?
2. Do women have a unique source or understanding life that we call wisdom? What women have taught me wisdom? Is women's wisdom valued by society equally with men's wisdom?
3. What do I/we hope to gain from a study of and reflection about the wisdom of women? What wisdom have I gained over the years? Where/how can I share my wisdom with that of others?

## Format:

For each segment (chapter) you will find several questions for conversation and a suggested scripture passage to study. Using a variety of Biblical translations will yield both inclusive and non-inclusive language, a good opportunity to talk about the issue of language. Watch the video, stop it and reflect on the questions, either as an individual watching by yourself, or as a group. Note that viewing time is listed with each chapter title.

We are told that it's good health for our brains to learn three new things daily. For the weeks while using this video consider noticing or acquiring one new piece of wisdom each week. You might begin each gathering asking: what wisdom have we heard during the previous week? Where did it come from? Why did you notice this? What makes it

wisdom? Is it valid/helpful for you?

Other questions which you might use after watching each chapter are:

What did I see? What did I hear? What do I feel? What struck me as containing wisdom?

At the close of each session you might want to end with prayer time together, thanking God for the insights and wisdom shared by Nancy and with each other.

## ***Chapter One: Belonging Right From the Beginning***

(viewing time: 4 minutes, 23 seconds)

1. What early lessons did Nancy learn in her church? From her family? Did you learn faith lessons as a child? Where? From whom? Are you passing along the wisdom that you learned/ are learning? How?

2. What image will you remember from this chapter? (lighting the candle, the importance of the stained glass window? others?) Have there been times when you needed to be "lifted up" in order to give your unique gifts? Did you experience that lifting? If not or if so, how did that feel? Have you ever been discouraged by someone else from offering your gift because of your gender?

3. Nancy affirms pride in being a strong feminist. How would you define that expression? What feelings does it arouse in you? What signs (visible and unseen) might you see, hear, and feel regarding equal roles of women and men in your congregation?

4. Scripture verses you might study: Matthew 18:1-5 and Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 4: 7-9. What other "wisdom" and "wisdom of children" verses come to your mind related to this chapter?

## ***Chapter Two: Struggling to Follow the Call of God***

(viewing time: 5 minutes, 34 seconds)

1. "My father said, 'You can't quit something you start,' and I said, 'if you start the wrong thing, it would be stupid not to leave.'" Nancy says this about her brief time enrolled in

Christian Education at Hartford Seminary. Nancy says that not everybody starts the right thing every time. What have you started, then stopped? How did that feel? What was the short term effect? the long term effect?

2. Nancy describes the mystical experience of "hearing" the voice of God. How did that happen for her? What clear message did she hear? Have you ever had such an experience, receiving a clear, resounding message about something important in your life?

3. Nancy says, "This is what I was meant to do," referring to the study of religion and becoming a pastor. What is/has been your life dream, the thing that you "can't get enough of"? Are we all born to do something special? Do we all find, with never a doubt, what it is we're meant to do?

4. Scripture verses you might study: Isaiah 6:8, Romans 8:31-39, Philippians 4:6-7. How might these verses give strength when hardships seem to interfere with the calling that we're hearing?

### **Chapter Three: Making Critical Choices**

(viewing time: 4 minutes, 47 seconds)

1. Is it possible for us to "have it all"? A career, a family, hobbies, and leisure time, volunteering? Is it realistic to believe that we can find fulfillment in all areas of life? When choices have to be made do we make them on the basis of what the world expects of us? How does gender play a role in this? What other things determine our choices? What are some of the prices we pay with the choices we make? What prices have I paid? Was it worth it or is it too soon to tell?

2. "I am doing the best that I can do," Can we make that statement? What helps us?

3. Is it okay to be a stay-at-home mom or to take a traditional woman's role in society? Where do we get messages about what is okay/not okay for a girl/woman to do with her life? What do you think about the partnering of parents and Nancy's use of the words "mutual dependency" and "interdependency"? Is this question past history or still a lively issue?

4. Scripture verses to study: I John 3:18 is a model of parenting for women who make the choice to stay at home as well as for those who are employed. I Corinthians 12:4-10. Change all of the indicated gifts to ones which were possibilities for you. How did you make the choice about what had been allotted to you?

## ***Chapter Four: Discovering Vision While Losing Sight***

(viewing time: 9 minutes, 31 seconds)

1. Nancy and Roger made a pact that she would finish seminary when their youngest child started school. What delays/compromises have you needed to make as you've attempted to reach your life goals? Have these delays or compromises helped or hindered you in your journey?
2. Nancy tells of going from 20/30 vision to 20/300, being legally blind, in a matter of six weeks. What impresses you about Nancy's story as she so quickly became partially sighted? What reactions helped her to continue to do what she felt called to do? What would be difficult? How did she deal with her limitations? How did NOT following her doctors' advice impact her life?
3. What was the faith community's role in Nancy's being able to go ahead with her life? What role did Roger play? The seminary? How does our faith community help people live complete lives despite their limitations? What road blocks does it sometimes impose? Nancy reminds us that we all have limitations. What limits me? In what ways have I learned or not yet discovered ways to be comfortable with those limitations? What helps me? What hinders me?
4. Scripture verses: Psalm 34: 17-18, Psalm 46: 1-3, Psalm 138:7, Matthew 19:6, Romans 5:1-5. How am I a wiser person because of the pain and set backs I've experienced in life?

## ***Chapter Five: The Right Time, The Right Place, The Right People***

(viewing time: 5 minutes, 28 seconds)

1. Rather than saying "yes" to what was asked of her, Nancy offered her known gifts and

passions. Is that our response when we're asked to do something- a job? leadership in the church? volunteer work? Are you able to say "no" to requests which don't seem like your calling?

2. How far have women come towards the goal of being in full partnership with men in the life of the church? Give some specific examples of ways that full partnership is working and some it which it is not yet alive. Is working on this goal still important?

3. Nancy says, "It was the right time, the right place, and the right people." She is talking about the 1970s and 1980s. Can that be said about something today? in your life? in the church? in the world?

4. Scripture verse you might study: Esther 4:14. Recall the Esther story of how she came to be there and why it was the right time for her to be in that right place? What "such a time as this" exists in your life?

## **Chapter Six: Moving From Acceptance To Partnership**

(viewing time: 6 minutes, 38 seconds)

1. What does the expression "the solidarity of sisterhood" mean to you? Are there "shocking things" you'd like to find a safe place to say? Where do you find strong support, acceptance and respect given and received?

Nancy describes a way to get along with people with whom we disagree politically and theologically, to respect them, mutually love and listen to them, tell them the way that you see it and understand that your ideas will sometimes be rejected. Is that practical advice in this time of great polarization?

2. Carole A. Etzler wrote (in 1976) the song, "Sometimes I wish my eyes hadn't been open." It goes on to say, "sometimes I wish I could no longer see all of the pain and the hurt and the longing of my sisters and me as we try to become free." This song is primarily about women being able to be full partners in all aspects of life. Are there things you can now see that you can't ever unsee, that you now hear that you can't ever not hear? Consider this question related to your community and to your global sisters.

3, "By empowering the women we were empowering the men, the church," says Nancy. As the role of women has grown what affect has this had on the role of men? As

seminary enrollment has grown from 11% to 50% women, what has this meant to the church?

4. Scripture verses you might study: Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12. When have you discovered the comfort and strength of two being better than one?

## ***Chapter Seven: It's All About Language, Isn't It?***

(viewing time: 4 minutes, 58 seconds)

1. Is it true that "man" is the generic word meaning men and women? Nancy asks, "Does the rest room sign that says "man" mean me, a woman?" Do you have to translate saying, "that means me too," when you hear and read scripture, hymns, and sermons in your church? How important is language? Have we lost ground in awareness of inclusive language?

2. Does it feel right to exclude men or women with our language? How did the men in Nancy's seminary class feel when she used only feminine pronouns and images in a sermon? How did it feel to Nancy to exclude them? What other groups are sometimes not included? youth? disabled persons? low income persons? Whose "job" is it to notice and "open eyes" to correct non-inclusive language?

3. What are the effects of hearing and reading nothing but non-inclusive language? Is it different now from when you were a child? Discuss the evolution of terms such as "fireman" to "firefighter," "mail man to letter carrier," "statesman" to "ambassador."

4. Scripture verses to study: Isaiah 49:14-16, Isaiah 66:10-13. What do these feminine images of God add to our understanding about God?

## ***Chapter Eight: In Loving Partnership***

(viewing time: 6 minutes, 6 seconds)

1. Throughout her career Nancy has signed her correspondence in green ink (easier for her to see) and with the words "in loving partnership," Thus, the title of the Strathdee song and the title of this chapter. Nancy describes her career as being built upon partnership. How is partnership valued in today's world? In your family? In your job? In

your church?

2. Girls are given more encouragement to compete these days. In what ways is this good and helpful? How is it harmful? What is gained and what is lost as women become more competitive? Is there room for both partnership and competition? Does being competitive mean that one person has to be primary (number one) and the other be secondary (the loser).

3, "Where two or three are together, Jesus is in the midst of us and the Holy Spirit empowers us," says Nancy. Have you ever been part of a group or community where you've had that experience? What was it like? Are you currently part of any such group? Would you like to be? Where could you look for that possibility?

4. Scripture verses to study: Matthew 18: 19-20. How many are needed to make something happen? What number is the "critical mass?" Name some times when Jesus worked with two or three to produce miracles.

## ***Chapter Nine: Sharing Precious Gifts***

(viewing time: 6 minutes, 16 seconds)

1. The gifts that sisters bring and give so selflessly have been like a basket flowing with jewels for Nancy, causing her to say, "I'm so rich," What makes you feel rich? What (in Nancy's words) "lights your fire causing sparks to pop out," totally energizing you?

2. Nancy's understanding of being created in the image of God is that each other person is also created in God's image. When is it easy for me to see God in the "other?" When is it difficult? How does living with the belief that God is in each person change the way I treat others? Nancy affirms our need for each other as there are so many gifts to give and receive.

3. Nancy tells us that when we are truly open to each other the risk factor is huge. "We might have to give up a little piece of something we thought was precious to ourselves, but it was really only fake." What separate groups in addition to female/male have a hard time being open enough to receive each other's gifts, cannot risk losing even though they would also gain? Think about the news headlines from TV and the daily paper. What groups could benefit from this way of approaching each other, laying down their

adversarial posture?

4. Scripture verses you might study: Proverbs 3: 13-18. Winning the lottery or finding wisdom: which would make you feel rich? Try to give your real answer, not what you think is the "proper" one.

## **Chapter Ten: Defining Power**

(viewing time: 5 minutes, 34 seconds)

1. By what title(s) do you want to be known and called? How is it helpful to use Mrs., Ms, Miss, Rev., Dr., or no title at all? Why was the title of Reverend important to Nancy? What do such titles denote? How important are names?

2. What is your definition of POWER? Do you have power? From where has it come? Do you like feeling your power? Does it ever make you feel uncomfortable? Why is that? How do you use it (both at your best and at your worst)?

3. Nancy talks about the difference between overpowering and empowering. Give examples of times when you've felt overpowered? How did that feel? Give examples of times when you've felt empowered. How did that feel? Does my claiming my power take away someone else's power? When I believe that I truly am created in the image of God, empowered by God, how does that affect my understanding and use of my power?

4. Scripture verses to study: Galatians 3:25-28. Contrast these words with the prayer many Jewish men have used daily upon awakening: "Thank God, I am not a Gentile, thank God I am not a slave, thank God I am not a woman."

## **Chapter Eleven: Retelling the Biblical Story**

(viewing time: 9 minutes, 9 seconds)

1. How would you define "feminist theology?" Nancy defines it as, "understanding the Biblical message through our own experiences and insights," She says that means that we have to live into that message. Comment on her definition and what "living into" a Biblical message means to you.

2. Read John 4:1-30, 39-42. If you are using this resource by yourself, read it out loud. If there are three or more of you studying the guide together, act out the scripture, with one person acting as narrator, one as Jesus, and one as the woman. How does the woman react to Jesus' conversation with her? Why would we expect her to be intimidated by him? In her context what were her choices for survival? How would I have felt and acted had I been in her situation? Have I ever had the experience of being intrigued by someone when I might have reacted instead with fear and intimidation?

3. What are we looking for when we read the Bible? One suggestion made by Nancy is that it's for "revelation of the whole truth." Here is a place for women to regain their sense of being created in the image of God. What does Nancy mean when she says that Christians need to move "beyond the apple and the snake to the stone rolled away from the grave and the vision of Jesus in the garden saying to the women, 'Go and tell.' "

4. Scripture verses to study: Matthew 28: 1-10 (if you have time, you could also notice the variety of Mark 16: 1-8, Luke 24: 1-11, and John 20: 11-18). How can we understand these verses through the insights of this chapter of Nancy's wisdom?

## **Chapter Twelve:**

### ***Towards a Sacred Community of Women and Men in the Church***

(viewing time: 7 minutes, 48 seconds)

1. What women do you remember from the Bible? Those who are named? Those whose names are not given?
2. What difference does it make if the word "deacon" is translated as minister rather than servant? How might this affect the role of women in the church? Are both roles important? Are both roles suitable for both women and men? With which role are you more comfortable?
3. "Women hold up half of the sky." Nancy points out that for centuries we've only had half of the Bible because women's unique insights and experiences have been left out. Now women can bring our half, the other half that hasn't been heard. What does Nancy mean by this? Why might women view life and scripture differently from the way men do? If I'm for women do I have to be against men?



## Woman-to-Woman Worldwide

(viewing time: 9 minutes, 12 seconds)

1. What can we gain by meeting with church people from other countries? What do they gain by our going there? Have you, a close friend or family member traveled abroad? In what ways were you/they changed by that experience? When a few members of your group are sent/sponsored to travel, what are some ways their learnings can be shared with the whole group?
2. Nancy says that no matter what our language, culture, race, and differing faith perspectives, we share the same goals, the same aim in our careers, the same hopes for our families, our churches, and our life as women. What does that mean? How can we open new doors?
3. Do we have a different sense of the "other" when we have the opportunity to sit down side by side and share ideas, hopes, beliefs, wisdom? What new opportunities are there to do this in our present age of highly technological communication?
4. Scripture verses: Luke 24: 13-35. Study this passage of the Emmaus Walk. Note that it shows that we may meet and recognize Jesus as we walk with "the stranger" and share our experiences and faith. When has a stranger made a difference in your life?

## CONCLUSION

We hope that this study has been a way of sharing the wisdom of one woman, Nancy Heimer, and of other women, as well as your own. Here are some questions to consider, having completed the experience of this video.

1. What have I learned about the recent history of women in the church? What surprises and "aha" moments were there?
2. What have I learned about the wisdom of women and ideas about some ways to "hold up half of the sky" with that wisdom?
3. Consider writing your own "book of wisdom" or taping a video about what you've learned/are learning. These could be shared with loved ones or not as you feel is appropriate.

## Biography of Nancy T. Heimer

The Rev. Nancy T. Heimer is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a native of Winchester, Massachusetts. Currently she and her husband, Roger, also a minister reside in Bloomington, Indiana.

A graduate of Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts, she attended Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut and Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary before graduating from Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky. Rev. Heimer is the mother of three and grandmother of nine.

Between 1959 and 1974 the Heimers lived in Scranton, Pennsylvania; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Louisville, Kentucky. In 1975 they moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where for 20 years Nancy served as Director of Leader Development in the Department of Church Women (now Office of Disciples Women), Division of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). During this time she developed and led seminars, preached, resourced retreats and workshops, and provided Bible studies for women and churches across the United States and Canada. Among the projects for which she was responsible was the Woman-to-Woman Worldwide Program which enabled women to travel to other parts of the world in order to visit and share concerns with their global sisters.

Her ecumenical responsibilities included membership on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches and service on the board of the Coordinating Council for Women of the United Church of Christ. In 1987 she traveled to the USSR to participate in the first bilateral dialogues between her denomination and the Russian Orthodox Church.

From 1991 to 1996 Nancy and her husband served in ministry with the United Reformed Church in London, England. There she was Interim Minister in several congregations and developed an Interim Ministry Program with the churches in the Roding District. After returning to the United States she presented the Bible studies at the Disciples 1998 Quadrennial Assembly for women with over 3500 attending.

Now fully retired, Nancy enjoys time with her family, teaching an adult Bible class, planning worship experiences, serving as consultant upon request from the Disciples

## CREDITS

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*Wisdom of Women* is a series of interviews with Disciples Women from across the life of the church! This is designed as a resource for group and/or individual study. It is accompanied by free study guides with discussion questions. Study guides are available for free online.

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