

Study Guide – *Just Women*, summer 2016

By Reverend Dr. Beth Rupe

Welcome to *Just Women*! We hope this leader's guide will help you plan meaningful study sessions using the summer 2016 issue of this magazine.

In his essay in *God's Earth is Sacred: Essays on Eco-Justice* Willis Jenkins states:

The National Council of Churches statement on the environment, *God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to the Church and Society*, opens by laying out evidence of a theological failure. Ocean health declines, habitats shrink, forests are lost and yet despite a generation of eco-theology and the energy of some committed faith groups, "we have clearly failed to communicate the full measure and magnitude of Earth's environmental crisis – religiously, morally, or politically." Christianity's public witness [has] been inadequate and most Christians blithely participate in destructive social ecologies.¹

In an attempt to communicate the scope of the environmental crisis and the call for God's people to adopt and advocate for an approach that recognizes the interplay between human dignity and quality of life and care of the environment, this issue of *Just Women* focuses on eco-justice. Featuring articles on poison water in Flint, Michigan and on Green Chalice, the Disciples care ministry of creation, *Just Women* names sins of abandoning our role as environmental stewards and calls us back to our role as co-creators with God in caring for all of creation.

This study guide offers four sessions that will introduce and define eco-justice, provide an overview of what others are doing to make a difference, and encourage your group to consider how they can answer the call to care for creation.

Preparation

In preparing for the study sessions outlined here, have an individual subscription for each woman in your group. If you need more magazines, go to <http://www.discipleswomen.org>, and follow the link to *Just Women*.

Read through the Summer 2016 edition and familiarize yourself with how the theme is developed in the articles. Ask your group members to read the article that you will be focusing on *before* your meetings so everyone will be prepared to participate in the study.

¹ Willis Jenkins. "The Moral Assignment of Our Time: Reclaiming Nature and Grace for Theological Ethics," in Paul Santmire, Larry Rasmussen, Marcia Owens, John Chryssavgis, Jim Nash, Laurel Kearns, Janet Parker, Bill Greenway, Willis Jenkins, Ann Riggs, *God's Earth is Sacred: Essays on Eco-Justice* (National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, 2011) Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 1203 of 8722.

Session 1

Supplies

A pitcher of ice water set in middle of study space, paper for each group member, copies of Patricia Case's article "*Down to the River to Pray: A Water Crisis of Biblical Proportion in Flint, Michigan,*" the opening prayer and **Tips to Save Water** (located at end of lesson) for each participant, and a Bible.

Opening Prayer

Read in unison:

It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.

I, I am the spirit within the earth.
The feet of the earth are my feet;
The legs of the earth are my legs.
The strength of the earth is my strength;
The thoughts of the earth are my thoughts;
The voice of the earth is my voice.
The feather of the earth is my feather;
All that belongs to the earth belongs to me;
All that surrounds the earth surrounds me.
I, I am the sacred works of the earth.

It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.

Hildegard of Bingen²

Icebreaker

As the members of the group arrive, give each woman a sheet of paper and ask her to make a daily diary of the water that she has used during the past week. When all women have arrived and are done with their daily diary, review what they have listed. Have items such as food production, transportation, utility production been included? Review the **Water Facts**. Ask what is new information and what surprises those in your group. Following the discussion of water usage, ask the women to brainstorm what they might do to conserve water? If they are having difficulty in identifying conservation methods, review **Tips to Save Water**. What would they need to change to use only 1000 gallons of water per day?

² Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, *Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World, EPub Edition* (HarperCollins: 2010) Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 141 of 5568. Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179) was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, Christian mystic and visionary. She was known as Sybil of the Rhine by her contemporaries.

Water Facts

Did you know that the average United States citizen uses 2000 gallons of water daily? This is twice the global average of 1000 gallons per day.

Did you know that 338 gallons of water are used in the production of one serving (3 ounces) of beef? One gallon of milk (16 cups) requires 880 gallons of water. Raising one serving of pork requires 108 gallons of water. Raising one serving of poultry requires 88 gallons of water.

Did you know that the average United States citizen relies on 670 gallons of water per day for electricity production and that a gallon of gasoline requires 13 gallons of water for its production?

Did you know that nearly 95 percent of the water that you use is hidden in the food you eat and products you buy?

Scripture Focus

Genesis 1

Questions

- Read Genesis 1 aloud. From Genesis 1 what do we learn about the character of God? What do we learn about the task of humanity? What does it mean for God to declare creation good? What does it mean to be stewards of the earth? What comes to mind when you think about “environmentalism?”
- What stories have you heard in the news about the environment? Examples might include: 1) laws in Utah, Colorado and Washington that limit the collection of rainwater by individuals due to the potential impact on aquifers and groundwater supplies, 2) Nestlé’s CEO Peter Brabeck –Letmathe’s statement that the answer to global water issues is privatization, as access to water is not a human right. The Public Relations department of the corporation that is the world’s largest producer of food later said this was not what he meant to say, 3) water rationing in western states including Nevada, Arizona, California due to drought and shortages, 4) lack of water rights on Native American reservations stemming from a vote in 1948 when Native Americans were not allowed to vote, regarding the establishment of water right in cities and towns across the country. What are your reactions to these stories? What are the similarities in the stories that are being covered? What are the differences? What surprises you in these stories? How do you feel when you hear these stories?
- Summarize Patricia Case’s article “*Down to the River to Pray: A Water Crisis of Biblical Proportion in Flint, Michigan.*” What led to the crisis? What impact has it had on the community of Flint and its citizens? What is the bigger picture of economic devastation that surrounds the water crisis in Flint, Michigan? How did you feel when you read this story? What surprised you? What angered you?
- **Defining Eco-justice.** The World Council of Churches states that eco-justice connects “humanity’s destruction of creation with the abuse of economic and political power which

result in the poor people having to suffer the effects of environmental damage.”³ How is the water crisis in Flint an issue of eco-justice? What are other examples of the poor suffering due to the effects of environmental damage?

- In Patricia Case’s article “*Down to the River to Pray: A Water Crisis of Biblical Proportion in Flint, Michigan,*” Disciple’s Regional Minister Eugene James states, “Flint is a clear case of environmental racism.” What is environmental racism and how does it relate to eco-justice? What are other instances of environmental racism?
- What does it mean to be living “up South?”
- Who are Mona Hanna-Attisha, Leanne Walters, and Marc Edwards? How did they make a difference? How is the good news of the gospel being lived out in Flint, Michigan? Do you believe that one person can make a difference? Why?
- Review the sidebar, “*What can you do.*” Identify a plan of action to become involved and to work and advocate for safe water for all.
- Ask the members of your group to focus on the pitcher of water that is at the center of your study space. Allow for a few minutes of silence and then read the following: “We begin our lives in water, floating and nourished in our mother’s womb. Comprised of about 60% water, we cannot survive without sufficient water. All of creation needs water to survive. Jesus uses water as a symbol for our spiritual need saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” (John 3:37) Our souls cannot survive without living water. Our tears are salt water that can reflect both our extreme joy and abundant sorrow. Water refreshes. Water cleanses. Water is crucial. ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.’” (Genesis 1:1–2) Allow a few minutes of silence then ask: What comes to mind as you look at the water? What does the water represent? What has our discussion today said about the necessity of water? How is the use of water related to privilege?

Closing Prayer

Close with the Disciples Women’s Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.

³ The World Council of Churches website, “*The WCC and Eco-justice,*” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/eco-justice>, accessed on May 28, 2016. For further information on the intersection of ecology, faith and justice, you can download Dieter T. Hessel’s “*Religion and Ethics Focused on Sustainability,*” from Eco-Justice Now, “Religion and Ethics Focused on Sustainability” <http://www.ecojusticenow.org/resources/Eco-Justice-Ethics/Religion-and-Ethics-Focused-on-Sustainability.pdf>. Accessed on May 28, 2016.

Tips to save water

Toilets, Taps, Showers, Laundry, and Dishes

- 1994 was the year that federally mandated low-flow showerheads, faucets, and toilets started to appear on the scene in significant numbers.
- On average, 10 gallons per day of your water footprint (or 14% of your indoor use) is lost to leaks. Short of installing new water-efficient fixtures, one of the easiest, most effective ways to cut your footprint is by repairing leaky faucets and toilets.
- If you use a low-flow showerhead, you can save 15 gallons of water during a 10-minute shower.
- Every time you shave minutes off your use of hot water, you also save energy and keep dollars in your pocket.
- It takes about 70 gallons of water to fill a bathtub, so showers are generally the more water-efficient way to bathe.
- All of those flushes can add up to nearly 20 gallons a day down the toilet. If you still have a standard toilet, which uses close to 3.5 gallons a flush, you can save by retrofitting or filling your tank with something that will displace some of that water, such as a brick.
- Most front-loading machines are energy- and water-efficient, using just over 20 gallons a load, while most top-loading machines, unless they are energy-efficient, use 40 gallons per load.
- Nearly 22% of indoor home water use comes from doing laundry. Save water by making sure to adjust the settings on your machine to the proper load size.
- Dishwashing is a relatively small part of your water footprint—less than 2% of indoor use—but there are always ways to conserve. Using a machine is actually more water efficient than hand washing, especially if you run full loads.
- Energy Star dishwashers use about 4 gallons of water per load, and even standard machines use only about 6 gallons. Hand washing generally uses about 20 gallons of water each time.

Yards and Pools

- Nearly 60% of a person's household water footprint can go toward lawn and garden maintenance.
- Climate counts—where you live plays a role in how much water you use, especially when it comes to tending to a yard.
- The average pool takes 22,000 gallons of water to fill, and if you don't cover it, hundreds of gallons of water per month can be lost due to evaporation.

Diet

- The water it takes to produce the average American diet alone—approximately 1,000 gallons per person, per day—is more than the global average water footprint of 900 gallons per person per day for diet, household use, transportation, energy, and the consumption of material goods.
- That quarter pounder is worth more than 30 average American showers. One of the easiest ways to slim your water footprint is to eat less meat and dairy. Another way is to choose grass-fed, rather than grain-fed, since it can take a lot of water to grow corn and other feed crops.
- A serving of poultry costs about 90 gallons of water to produce. There are also water costs embedded in the transportation of food (gasoline costs water to make). So, consider how far your food has to travel, and buy local to cut your water footprint.

- Pork costs water to produce, and traditional pork production—to make your sausage, bacon, and chops—has also been the cause of some water pollution, as pig waste runs into local water sources.
- On average, a vegan, a person who doesn't eat meat or dairy, indirectly consumes nearly 600 gallons of water per day less than a person who eats the average American diet.
- A cup of coffee takes 55 gallons of water to make, with most of that H₂O used to grow the coffee beans.

Electricity, Fuel Economy, and Airline Travel

- The water footprint of your per-day electricity use is based on state averages. If you use alternative energies such as wind and solar, your footprint could be less. (The use of biofuels, however, if they are heavily irrigated, could be another story.) You would also get points, or a footprint reduction, for using energy-star appliances and taking other energy-efficiency measures.
- Washing a car uses about 150 gallons of water, so by washing less frequently you can cut back your water use.
- A gallon of gasoline takes nearly 13 gallons of water to produce. Combine your errands, car pool to work, or take public transportation to reduce both your energy and water use.
- Flying from Los Angeles to San Francisco, about 700 miles round-trip, could cost you more than 9,000 gallons of water, or enough for almost 2,000 average dishwasher loads.
- A cross-country airplane trip (about 6,000 miles) could be worth more than 1,700 standard toilet flushes.
- Traveling from Chicago to Istanbul is just about 10,000 miles round trip, costing enough water to run electricity in the average American home for one person for more than five years.

Industry—Apparel, Home Furnishings, Electronics, and Paper

- According to recent reports, nearly 5% of all U.S. water withdrawals are used to fuel industry and the production of many of the material goods we stock up on weekly, monthly, and yearly.
- It takes about 100 gallons of water to grow and process a single pound of cotton, and the average American goes through about 35 pounds of new cotton material each year. Do you really need that additional T-shirt?
- One of the best ways to conserve water is to buy recycled goods, and to recycle your stuff when you're done with it. Or, stick to buying only what you really need.
- The water required to create your laptop could wash nearly 70 loads of laundry in a standard machine.
- Recycling a pound of paper, less than the weight of your average newspaper, saves about 3.5 gallons of water. Buying recycled paper products saves water too, as it takes about six gallons of water to produce a dollar worth of paper.⁴

⁴ National Geographic, *Water Conservation Tips*, <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/water-conservation-tips/>, accessed May 28, 2016.

Session 2

Supplies

A computer with internet access, copies of Carol Devine's "Calling Disciples to Creation Care," The Alverna Covenant (located at the end of lesson) and opening prayers for each participant, and a Bible.

Preparation

Prior to your group meeting visit the Green Chalice website:

<https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/dhm-ministries/environment/>, and familiarize yourself with the resources available. Be prepared to give an overview of the website to your group.

Opening Prayer

When you arise in the morning
Give thanks for the morning light,
For your life and strength.
Give thanks for your food
And the joy of living.

If you see no reason for giving thanks,
The fault lies in you.

Tecumseh⁵

Icebreaker

Prior to the arrival of your group have a computer with internet where all can view the screen. Go to the Green Chalice website: <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/dhm-ministries/environment/>. After all members have arrived view the Holy Ground Video.

Where is your holy ground? How does God speak to you when you are on holy ground? How do we treat the earth as if it were not holy ground? How is your faith demonstrated in environmental care? How are Disciples leading the way in caring for God's earth?

Following the video and discussion of what you have seen, review the resources available on the Green Chalice website.

Scripture Focus

Psalm 24: 1-2

⁵ Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, *Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World, EPub Edition* (HarperCollins: 2010) Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 336 Of 453. Tecumseh was a Native American leader of the Shawnee.

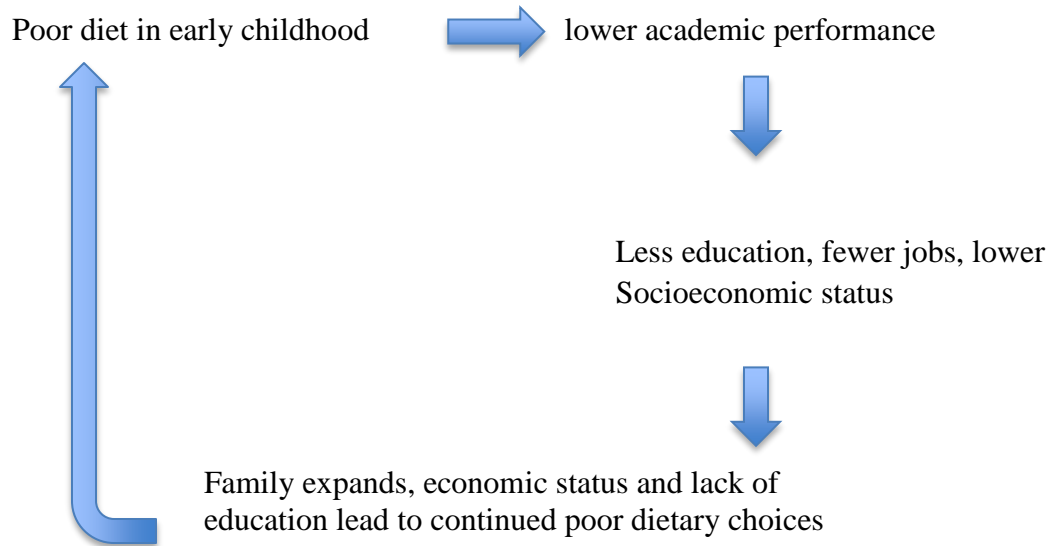
Questions

- Read Psalm 24: 1 – 2 aloud. What does it mean for the earth to belong to God? How can we affirm that the “earth is the Lord’s?”
- Carol connects the Lord’s Table with the childhood table at her grandmother’s house. How are these connected? How are these tables connected to her choice to become a vegetarian? To go to seminary? To her ministry as an environmentalist and as Minister for Green Chalice?
- Summarize the history of eco-justice ministries in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). What is new or surprising to you? How has your congregation taken part in these ministries? Read the Alverna Covenant. With what do you agree? What questions does this covenant raise for you? How does this covenant affirm and challenge you? Remind your group that each person can affirm this covenant by signing the covenant online and/or by downloading a copy of the covenant to post by going to <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/dhm/dhm-ministries/environment/the-alverna-covenant/> .
- Read Resolution 1520 – Concerns for Environmental Racism. A copy can be found at <http://ga.disciples.org/category/resolutions/page/2/> . How is Environmental Racism defined? What are the impacts of environmental racism? What has the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) resolved to do to address environmental racism?
- Food deserts are a form of Environmental Racism. The USDA defines a food desert as an area of low-access where at least 500 people or 33% of the census population resides more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store. To view of map of food deserts in the United States visit <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts>. Where are the food deserts in your area? What are consequences of food deserts?

Did you know? The Food Research and Action Center has identified a link between low access to food and obesity. Factors which contribute to this link include: 1) access to convenience stores and lack of full service grocery stores and farmers’ markets, limiting availability of high-quality fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products, 2) food choices are more limited when individuals lack transportation and must walk or use public transportation when food shopping, 3) healthy foods, when available, tend to be more expensive than lower nutritional energy-dense foods, 4) low-income neighborhoods have great availability of fast food restaurants, especially near schools.⁶

⁶ For further information on the link between poverty and obesity, visit FRAC <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity/>

Did you know? Dieticians and nutritionists have shown a cyclical relationship between poor nutrition and educational outcomes.



Identify what steps are being taken in your community to eliminate food deserts and to provide nutritional food to all community members.

- According to Carol Devine, what are Disciples' congregations doing to care for the environment? What is being done in your congregation? Community? Brainstorm what you might do to get involved.
- Devine concludes her article by stating: "It is at times a struggle to balance being a full-time pastor, which is my first priority, with the creation care work about which I am so passionate. My congregation keeps me grounded in the day-to-day joys and concerns that life brings to everyone. But it is the climate crisis that wakes me up at night, and so God continues to call me to teach and preach care for the earth, which God deemed very good." What wakes you up and fills you with passion for God's good earth?

Closing Prayer

Close with the Disciples Women's Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.

The Alverna Covenant

Whereas:

God has created the world with finite resources;

God has given to us the stewardship of the earth;

God has established order through many natural cycles;

And it is evident that:

We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained;

We are interrupting many natural cycles;

We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and pollution;

We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained;

A member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution;

I will support recycling efforts

I will search for sustainable lifestyles;

I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society;

I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this covenant

Session 3

Supplies

A computer with internet access, newsprint, markers, copies of Louisa Sherrill's "*Body and Soul: Caring for Your Body and Our World,*" *Connections*, and *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (located at the end of the lesson) for each participant.

Opening Prayer

Read in unison

Sowing the seed,
My hand is on the earth.

Wanting the seed to grow,
My mind is one with the light.

Hoeing the crop,
My hands are one with the rain.

Having cared for the plants,
My mind is one with the earth.

Eating the fruit,
My body is one with the earth.
Wendell Berry⁷

Icebreaker

A Charter of Rights

When all members of your group have arrived, ask one person to serve as reporter. Ask the women to imagine that they have been asked to draw up a Charter of Human Rights. Ask them to list the rights that they would include. (Provide sufficient time for brainstorming and do not edit anything that the women suggest, as the reporter lists the rights on the newsprint.) After the list has been generated, tell the group that you are now going to discuss what has been written, indicating that not all persons may agree with everything. Give them permission to disagree. Ask the group to discuss why they believe something is or is not a basic right.

⁷ Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, *Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World, Epub Edition* (HarperCollins: 2010) Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 304 of 453. Wendell Berry is an American novelist, poet, environmental activist and farmer from Kentucky.

Give them a copy of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. Provide time for them to review the list. Have the group compare their list with this declaration. How are they similar? How are they different?

Scripture Focus

Matthew 25: 31 – 46

Questions

- Read Matthew 25: 31- 46. When you hear “poverty,” what comes to mind? How are the poor portrayed in popular media, in the news, by politicians? Does everyone have the same opportunity to climb the economic ladder? Why or why not? Who are “the least of these” in today’s society? What does Jesus teach about the poor in this scripture?
- Louisa Sherrill identifies two options that will promote nutrition and high-quality food choices. What are these? What options in your community do you have to exercise these choices?
- Discuss how you choose what food to buy? How do your choices make an impact on the environment, i.e. -how do individually packaged single serve items such as snack foods, yogurts, and juice boxes have a greater impact than multi-serve packages? What is the impact of buying water in bottles or coffee in disposable cups verses uses glass or travel mugs? Does your congregation buy fair trade, organic coffee? Does your congregation use paper or Styrofoam products for fellowship events? How do these choices relate to eco-justice?
- Louisa Sherrill ends by stating, “Choosing organic and local food not only positively affects your body, but also has a positive impact on our planet now, and for future generations.” What is this positive impact?
- General Assembly Resolution 1520 identifies Environmental Racism and the existence of food deserts as justice issues. (If your group has not previously read this resolution, you can obtain a copy at: <http://ga.disciples.org/category/resolutions/page/2/>.) How might the ability to choose organic foods or foods grown locally at farmers’ markets, be examples of environmental racism and white privilege? (White privilege is a term for the socio-economic advantages that are experienced by those identified as white in the Western world.) How does socio-economic status make a difference in the choices that are available for families?
- Take a field trip to a local food pantry or have representatives visit and report back to the group. Speak to organizers about where they obtain the food that is distributed. Identify the types of foods that are typically available for distribution. Does your food pantry offer any options for fresh foods? If so where do they obtain the food? Does your food pantry offer any educational resources to its clients regarding nutrition or recipes for nutritious meals? Are these needed? If so, brainstorm what might be done to provide these resources.
- Visit the website for the Nashville Food Project at <http://thenashvillefoodproject.org> . Familiarize yourselves with the history of the project, located under the tab “About Us,” and the work of the project, located under the tab “Our Work.” What is the vision of this project? How are the homeless being served in your community or area? Are there community gardens in your community? How are you involved in feeding the hungry? Your congregation? Brainstorm what might be done to help feed the hungry.
- Read *Connections*. What is the *Free the Girls* project? What might you do to help? What is the *Season of Creation*? What does your congregation do in worship to celebrate God’s creation?

What is the plan project? Does a shelter in your area need sleeping mats? How are you serving those in poverty? How is your congregation serving those in poverty? If you are unaware of how your congregation is serving, you can contact your Outreach Chair or pastor to discuss how your congregation is serving the least of these.

Closing Prayer

Close with the Disciples Women's Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- 1. We are all free and equal.** We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.
- 2. Don't discriminate.** These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences.
- 3. The right to life.** We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.
- 4. No slavery – past and present.** Nobody has any right to make us a slave. We cannot make anyone our slave.
- 5. No Torture.** Nobody has any right to hurt us or to torture us.
- 6. We all have the same right to use the law.** I am a person just like you!
- 7. We are all protected by the law.** The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.
- 8. Fair treatment by fair courts.** We can all ask for the law to help us when we are not treated fairly.
- 9. No unfair detainment.** Nobody has the right to put us in prison without a good reason and keep us there, or to send us away from our country.
- 10. The right to trial.** If we are put on trial this should be in public. The people who try us should not let anyone tell them what to do.
- 11. Innocent until proven guilty.** Nobody should be blamed for doing something until it is proven. When people say we did a bad thing we have the right to show it is not true.
- 12. The right to privacy.** Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters or bother us or our family without a good reason.
- 13. Freedom to move.** We all have the right to go where we want in our own country and to travel as we wish.
- 14. The right to asylum.** If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.
- 15. The right to a nationality.** We all have the right to belong to a country.
- 16. Marriage and family.** Every grown-up has the right to marry and have a family if they want to. Men and women have the same rights when they are married, and when they are separated.
- 17. Your own things.** Everyone has the right to own things or share them. Nobody should take our things from us without a good reason.
- 18. Freedom of thought.** We all have the right to believe in what we want to believe, to have a religion, or to change it if we want.
- 19. Free to say what you want.** We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.
- 20. Meet where you like.** We all have the right to meet our friends and to work together in peace to defend our rights. Nobody can make us join a group if we don't want to.
- 21. The right to democracy.** We all have the right to take part in the government of our country. Every grown-up should be allowed to choose their own leaders.
- 22. The right to social security.** We all have the right to affordable housing, medicine, education, and child care, enough money to live on and medical help if we are ill or old.
- 23. Workers' rights.** Every grown-up has the right to do a job, to a fair wage for their work, and to join a trade union.
- 24. The right to play.** We all have the right to rest from work and to relax.
- 25. A bed and some food.** We all have the right to a good life. Mothers and children, people who are old, unemployed or disabled, and all people have the right to be cared for.
- 26. The right to education.** Education is a right. Primary school should be free. We should learn about the United Nations and how to get on with others. Our parents can choose what we learn.

27. Culture and copyright. *Copyright is a special law that protects one's own artistic creations and writings; others cannot make copies without permission. We all have the right to our own way of life and to enjoy the good things that "art," science and learning bring.*

28. A free and fair world. *There must be proper order so we can all enjoy rights and freedoms in our own country and all over the world.*

29. Our responsibilities. *We have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.*

30. Nobody can take away these rights and freedoms from us.

Session 4

Supplies

A copy of Beth Rupe's "*Prayer Station*," **The Desert Fathers and Mothers**, (located at the end of the lesson), and a Bible for each participant.

Opening Prayer

Begin today's group by sharing joys and concerns. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, lift these joys and concerns up to the Lord in a circle prayer during which each participant has an opportunity to pray. Please note that not everyone may be comfortable praying aloud so do not insist that everyone speak during the prayer time.

Icebreaker

When all members of your group arrive ask the women to consider the following: What is prayer? What are your prayer practices? What is the difference in corporate and individual prayer? Have you every lacked the words to pray?

Scripture Focus

Psalm 46

Questions

- Read Psalm 46. What stands out to you in this Psalm? How do you feel as you hear the words of this prayer? When have you experienced the strength of the Lord as refuge and ever-present help, in times of trouble? What do you think the psalmist means by "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells?" What does it mean to "Be still and know that I am God?" What comes to mind when you hear "Be still?" What are obstacles to being still? Are you comfortable with silence? Why or why not?
- Read **The Desert Fathers and Mothers**. What was happening in the fourth century in society and in the church? How is today a time of significant change and challenge?
- What do you believe that it means to be "truly alive?" We state that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. What does this mean to you? What implications does Jesus' full humanity have on our full humanity?
- The desert writers believed that one's spiritual progress was dependent on one's prayer life. For them this meant beginning with an empty soul and listening for God. What does it mean to listen for God in prayer? How have you experienced this?
- John Chryssavgis states that for the desert writers, "Prayer is learning to live, without expecting to see results, it is learning to love, without hoping to see return, it is learning to be, without demanding to have." What do you think that this means? What does it mean to "simply try to pray?"
- The desert writers believed, "Ceaseless prayer did not mean constant prayer, but prayer that accompanies all that one does." How can we pray in ways that accompany all we do?
- The desert writers speak of the importance of spiritual guides. Who are and who have been your spiritual guides?

- Chryssavgis states, “Our culture teaches us that the more we have the better we are, Antony’s taught him the less he had, the more he was!” What does this mean to you? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Read *Prayer Station: Sheila Spencer and the Healing Power of Silence*. What led to Sheila’s being embraced by silence? Have you ever had an experience where you had to receive instead of give? What was that like for you? What makes it difficult to receive care?
- Sheila speaks of the “gift of being present.” How does this relate to “be[ing] still and know[ing] that I am God?” How does this relate to our ability to be present to others and to life’s experiences?
- Review suggestions that might facilitate creating space for silent prayer. What do you think the benefits of silent prayer might be in your life? What would be the challenges in silent prayer for you? What would you need to do to create space for silent prayer in your life?
- Take fifteen minutes to practice silent prayer as a group by following the suggestions in the article. At the end of the fifteen minutes provide an opportunity for the participants to share about their experience.

Closing Prayer

Close with the Disciples Women’s Benediction or a prayer led by someone in your group.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers

It may be said that the fourth century was a time of significant change and challenge for the church. In 311 CE, Galerius issued the “Edict of Toleration,” that ended state sanctioned persecution of Christians and in 313 CE, Constantine issued the “Edict of Milan,” that essentially granted Christians preferred religious status within the empire. In response to what was seen by some as the lowering of standards and the compromise of calling to culture that resulted after these Edicts, the desert fathers and mothers moved to the margins of both society and the church.⁸ There they established a lifestyle in which the spiritual seeker could find what it meant to be “truly alive,”⁹ to be truly human. There the abbas and ammas defined true humanity as an acceptance of one’s imperfections, weaknesses, and failures.¹⁰

Rooting their spirituality in the study of scripture, the desert writers believed that spiritual progress was dependent on one’s prayer life. Underlying this belief for the desert fathers and mothers was the understanding that emptiness is the beginning, as God enters the empty soul.¹¹ Prayer and solitude was seen as the way to remove all that would distract and prevent encounter with God. Indeed, for the desert writers, silence and prayer were essential for survival within the desert.¹² It was in silence that self-knowledge was obtained and that the passions were conquered. For the abbas and the ammas, ceaseless prayer did not mean constant prayer but prayer that accompanies all that one does. Chryssavgis states that for the desert writers, “Prayer is learning to live, without expecting to see results, it is learning to love, without hoping to see return, it is learning to be, without demanding to have.”¹³ The goal for the abbas and the ammas was to simply try to pray.

Similar to their understanding of silence, the desert writers understood that solitude and prayer was contingent on patience; patience was connected to the cell. Chryssavgis states that for the desert fathers and mothers a major temptation for the desert writers was to abandon their cells, which was the

⁸ John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc. 2003, xii.

⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 49 – 51.

¹¹ Chryssavgis., xi.

¹² *Ibid*.,

¹³ Chryssavgis, 98.

starting and ending point for the work of the soul. The abbas and ammas suggest that if one stays in one's cell the boundaries of the cell expands until we can encounter God wherever one is.¹⁴

In their writings, the abbas and the ammas state that everyone needs a spiritual guide. They see the desert as a place of accountability and responsibility where obedience is a way to grace. Indeed, this pattern of accountability and responsibility is seen in one pattern of habitation that is seen with the desert writers, that pattern of several individuals living in proximity to one of the abbas or ammas. However, for the desert writers submitting to a spiritual guide is not indicative of a hierarchical structure.¹⁵ Indeed, the fathers and mothers were far more likely to see themselves as fellow sojourners and learners; they did not seek to recruit disciples.¹⁶

While the withdrawal of the fathers and mothers to the deserts may seem excessive to us, the abbas and the ammas encouraged moderation and were leery of what they considered excessive asceticism. Chryssavgis suggests that the call of the desert is a call to realize that we all can do with less than what we have; it is a call not to focus on material things but to center on God. He further suggests that “the treatment of the body appears negative to us because we overload the body with far too much... Our culture teaches us that the more we have the better we are, Antony's taught him the less he had, the more he was!”¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 41 – 43.

¹⁵ Chryssavgis, 63 – 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., 75 – 77.

¹⁷ Chryssavgis, 84.