

Study Guide – Just Women, Spring 2017

By Reverend Dr. Beth Rupe
Bloomington, IL

Introduction

Welcome to *Just Women*! We hope this leader's guide will help you plan meaningful study sessions using the Spring 2017 issue of this magazine.

In the introduction to this issue, Pat Donahoo, Executive Director of International Disciples Women Ministries states that women have been denied equal rights and authority over their own bodies throughout history as they were devalued and seen as deserving fewer rights. Despite this from their positions on the margins, women have found their voices and broken barriers claiming their identity as God's beloved and pushing for the freedom to which they were entitled.

This quarter's issue, celebrates these brave women who rose up claiming value for themselves and for others. This study guide offers four sessions. It begins with "*Why I March*," where we consider why Disciples women chose to participate in the Women's March on January 21, 2017. As you consider the motivations of these barrier-breaking women, we will also commemorate the women who have broken barriers for you. Next, we will celebrate the groundbreaking ministry of The Reverend Dr. Sharon Watkins as she completes her second term as General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We will examine her journey to GMP and barriers that she has broken in light of the question, "for what moment in time are we being prepared?" The third session will focus on the issue of sexual assault on college campuses and consider what Disciples colleges are doing to keep students safe. Finally, the last session will focus on communicating our values and priorities to our children as we consider "*Family Matters: Talking to Our Daughters*"

New to this study guide are devotional materials for each lesson. These materials are designed for groups whose meeting formats do not include a complete study but who want to introduce the articles and topics included in *Just Women* in their group setting as they encourage women to do deeper reading on their own.

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 Spring 2017 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.

Session 1

Supplies

- Poster board with words, **HER-story** written on top and images of women who have been trailblazers and leaders in advancing women's rights (you can find these on the internet by googling Women Trailblazers or specific women who you know), leave room to attach photos that your group members bring.
- The article "*Why I March: Women's March 2017.*"
- Bible.
- Optional – A copy of 1) Favilli, Elena and Francesca Cavallo. *Good Night Stories, for Rebel Girls: 100 Tales of Extraordinary Women*. Timbuktu Labs, Inc. 2016; 2) Schatz, Kate. *Rad American Women A- Z*. City Lights Books, 2015; or 3) Schatz, Kate. *Rad Women Worldwide: Artists and Athletes, Pirates and Punks, and other Revolutionaries that Shaped History*. Ten Speed Press, 2016

In Preparation for Your Meeting

Prior to your meeting invite your group members to find photos of women they know who fought for equality, who broke barriers, and who have been trailblazers. Examples of this include women who served as the first women elder, trustee, board chair (moderator) in the congregation, etc., women leaders of your Regional Church, women who fought for the right to vote, for equal pay, or other civil liberties or rights, women who burned their bras or protested in other ways for women's rights, and/ or women who broke glass ceilings in their jobs.

Ask them to bring these photos and stories of these women to your group.

Opening Prayer

Pray in unison

O God,
help me to believe
the truth about myself –
no matter how beautiful it is!

Amen.

The opening prayer was written by Macrina Wiederkehr. She is a member of the Benedictine order and an author and spiritual guide. Wiederkehr points to the divine in

nature, relationships and the rhythms of daily life as she creates rituals and practices everyday spirituality.

Icebreaker

If you chose to obtain one of the additional books on women trailblazers, select several of the stories to share. Discuss reactions to these stories. Were they familiar? Were you surprised? What other contributions have women made to the area that was highlighted?

Share the photos that the members of your group brought. Tell the stories of the women in the photos. Identify the challenges that the women overcame? What was the price paid in making these breakthroughs? What are the implications for future generations because the women acted in the ways they did? Attach the photos to the poster and display throughout your group.

Scripture Focus

Luke 8: 1 -3, 23: 26 - 49, 55 – 56

Background

The gospel of Luke is part of a two-volume narrative written in the second half of the first century for a community that is composed increasingly of Gentiles. Therefore, a major concern of the writer is legitimizing this expansion and inclusion as the story of Jesus the Christ is rooted in the fulfillment salvation history of Israel. Jesus the Christ is shown to fulfill the law and the prophets and bringing God's salvation to the entire world.

In the gospel the Holy Spirit authorizes Jesus who acts as the chief agent of God's kingdom as he embodies God's inclusive hospitality. Through Jesus the Christ cultural scripts are rewritten and social strata are upturned as people lacking power and status enter God's realm. Written in a male dominated society, women are often nameless and voiceless in scripture. As Lisa Davison states in *Preaching the Women of the Bible* (Chalice Press, 2006), "When they hear of Jesus' disciples, most people think of twelve men. The dominant impression of both the biblical texts and their traditional interpretations has been that only men followed Jesus, not women. Yet, hidden within the gospel are clear indicators that this description is inaccurate." Our passages are among these indicators.

Archeological and textual evidence has been found that in the first century B.C.E., upper class women were teachers and even leaders of some synagogues (Davison, Kindle Electronic Edition Loc 1318 of 1910) in towns and outlying villages of Palestine. Throughout the gospel, Jesus interacts with women in ways that challenge cultural norms. This should not be misinterpreted to suggest that Jesus began a radical feminist movement. While on most occasions he treated women with dignity, he also falls prey to male biases of his culture. The women who participate in his ministry and travel with him for the most part go unnamed (It should be noted that of the 1426 names in the First

Testament only 111, or 8%, are women's names. In the New Testament, less than 40 women are named and many are references to First Testament women. Only 12 women are named in relationship to Jesus. Davison Kindle Electronic Edition Loc 1375 of 1910. It should be noted that the role of the women is not differentiated from the role of the men who accompany Jesus. Both follow and provide ministry (Davison Kindle Electronic Edition Loc 1351 of 1910). Thus as Lisa Davison states, "So prevalent were these female followers in Jesus' life that three gospel writers determined that they could not be omitted from their telling of the Jesus story.... Whatever the reason, the women could not be erased, they were too important" (Davison Kindle Electronic Edition Loc 1351 of 1910).

Questions

- ***Read the scripture passages from Luke.*** What is the relationship of each of the women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, to Jesus? What are the implications of their presence? What do we learn about Jesus' followers from Luke 23: 26 – 49? What are the implications of Luke 23: 55 – 56? What are the implications of the women being included alongside the twelve apostles?
- Throughout history, it has been suggested that women's leadership within the church should be limited as Jesus only chose male disciples. Here it is stated that women provided for Jesus and supported his ministry financially. The Greek word *diakoneo*, from which the word deacon is derived, is used. What does this suggest about women's roles within the early church? Why do you think that women's contributions to Jesus' ministry often go unmentioned? How was the presence of these women acts of resistance? What are the implications for today's church?
- In Theodore Melfi's *Hidden Figures*, Katherine Johnson is forced to walk a half mile to use a bathroom that was designated "coloreds only." To add to the difficulty this trek had to be made in a dress, heels and pantyhose and without the assistance of the bikes on campus that men could routinely use. When this is brought to light, along with other daily humiliations that Johnson must endure, her superior Al Harrison marches the half mile takes a sledgehammer, destroys the sign and declares, "Here at NASA, we all pee the same color!"

While a powerful line and moment in the movie, it never happened in real life. Johnson gained the "right" to use the "whites only" bathroom because she just started using the restroom of her choice. Likewise, in real life the door remained closed and Johnson sat in her office rather than in the control room after she did the math to bring John Glenn safely back to earth.

How do these artistic choices change the dynamics of what happened? How are these ways of silencing women's voices and undermining women's power? As we have seen, the women in gospel are often unnamed? What is accomplished in this? How are women and their contributions left unnamed today? In society? In the church?

- Wiederkehr's prayer suggests that it is sometimes difficult for us to see the truth about ourselves when that truth points to our beauty, strength or power. Do you

- agree with that why or why not? If you agree why do you think it is difficult for us to identify our beauty, strength or power?
- Share your understanding of the Women's March. When did you learn about the March? What was your reaction? Did you or do you know anyone who participated in the March? What were your or their reasons for marching?
 - ***Read the quotes that women sent in for marching.*** In the article, what reasons do the marchers give for their participation? What do you think about these reasons? How do these reasons make you feel?
 - At the March, Cynthia Hale prayed, "Help us to remember every day of our lives that resistance begins now. This is only the beginning. We will march into the future prepared, O God to ensure that each person's right, each person's dignity, worth and value is ensured." What does resistance mean to you? How are you prepared to act to ensure that each person's right, dignity, worth and value is ensured? What does that mean to you?
 - What do you hope happens as a result of the Women's March? How do you see this movement continuing?

Closing Prayer

Close with Disciples Women's Benediction.

Devotion

Soon afterward, Jesus traveled through the cities and village, preaching and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, The Twelve were with him along with some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. Among them were Mary Magdalene (from whom seven demons had been thrown out), Joanna (the wife of Herod's servant Chuza), Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Luke 8: 1 – 3, CEB

Throughout the gospels, we hear that women showed up during Jesus's ministry. Some are named but many more are unnamed. All experienced the power of Jesus in their lives so powerfully that they got out of their homes and followed Jesus. These women show up cooking and engaging in traditional women's work. They show up to provide financial support for his travels and work. They showed up on equal terms with the apostles and disciples. They show up grieving as he walks beaten and bleeding to a cross on Golgotha. They show up as he is placed in a tomb. And, they show up as new hope is raised in his resurrection.

Today, women continue to experience the power of Jesus in their lives. In his presence, they claim their beauty, strength and power. In his presence, they find the courage and the hope to resist today's cultural scripts that deny their full humanity, dignity, worth, and value. In the Women's March on January 21, 2017, millions showed up and some were named. They got out of their homes and they showed up:

- “For justice and equality of all people” (Karen Ruetz)
- To proclaim “that women's rights are human rights” (Joanne Verburg)
- “to help preserve the freedoms others have fought steadfastly for... in the areas of children and adults with disabilities, women's reproductive health, protecting abused women, environmental stability, healthcare, immigration, freedom to marry whom one loves, freedom of religion, human rights...” (Jill Sewell Rice)
- “For my neighbors who are like me, for my neighbors who are different than me, and for those I may never meet.” (Lisa, Gengenbach)
- “sisters must stand with sisters.” (Christal Williams)

They showed up because they followed Jesus.

Prayer:

O God,
 help me to believe
 the truth about myself –
 no matter how beautiful it is!

Amen.

Macrina Wiederkehr

Session 2

Supplies

- The article “*It’s Been a Privilege to Serve*” by Tanya J. Tyler
- Bible

In Preparation for Your Meeting

Prior to your meeting invite your group members to read the book of Esther. It is a relatively short book, ten chapters. Ask them to identify main characters, summarize the plot, and identify the theme.

Opening Prayer

*(Stand and face any direction you choose.
Take one step forward, as you look about, up, and down.)*

O Great, Holy Spirit, I take this step into the *day* you have given. I embrace all I see – the season, the wind, the fragrances, the weather. Let me always accept the day given with a grateful heart.

(Take another step forward.)

O Spirit of Life, I put my arms around *myself*, all that I am, all that I can be. I stand here in my own history, with all the mistakes and victories. I hold all those I will meet today, in my journeying and in my work. Let me walk gently through the lives of my work companions and friends. Though they make way for my passing, may they spring back neither broken or bruised.

(Take another step forward.)

O glorious Spirit of Mystery, I put my arms around you. I do not know what will happen to me today, but I accept it. Give me heart of courage and believing, so that I may put my trust in you, and fear nothing.

A Native America Way to begin the day from the Plains Tribe (Ford-Grabowsky, Mary. *Woman Prayers: Prayers by Women from Throughout History and Around the World*. HarperCollins e-books, 2009 Kindle Electronic Edition loc. 343 of 3416).

Scripture Focus

The book of Esther.
Focus verses - Esther 4: 1 – 17

Background

Written after the Babylonian exile, the historical setting of Esther is the Diaspora. Addressing the theme of exile and living amongst a hostile majority, Esther examines themes of annihilation. This annihilation is two-fold, extinction of cultural identity and actual genocide. In this book, the importance of solidarity, courage, cleverness and chance are lifted up.

Most scholars agree that the book of Esther is a novella or short story. It is unique among the books of the Bible as there is no explicit mention of God or God's role throughout the narrative.

Esther 4: 1 – 17 follows a decree by Ahasuerus (Xerxes in Greek) ordering the wholesale slaughter of the Jews. This decree is instigated by Haman who has argued that the Jews are insubordinate and seditious, following their own laws and not the king's laws. Mordecai hears of the degrees performs rituals of mourning. While others join Mordecai in mourning, Esther is unable to do so as she has hidden her ethnicity from the king. In a series of messages carried by eunuchs Mordecai appeals to Esther to use her position to intercede for her people. Esther initially replies that intercession is impossible. In verses 13 – 14, Mordecai challenges Esther that perhaps she has obtained her possession in the king's household for a "moment like this" (CEB).

It should be noted that eunuchs play an important role on the book of Esther. Male and yet not male due to castration, these men exist at a gender boundary and are thus able to cross other boundaries. It should also be noted that according to the purity laws, eunuchs would have been considered unclean.

Questions

- Have members of your group summarize the plot of Esther. Ask for their reactions to the book. What do they identify as key themes and messages of the book?
- Read the fourth chapter of Esther. Ground the verses in the flow of the narrative by asking what has happened that has led to Mordecai's mourning? What is Esther's response?
- Esther continues to hide her identity and initially does not want to intercede for the Jews. What do you think she was feeling? How would you have felt in a similar situation?
- Mordecai suggests that Esther has obtained her position in the king's household for a time like this? What does this mean to you? How does God continue to use individuals to accomplish God's plans? Have you ever felt called by God to intercede for another? How?
- In Esther, some unexpected individuals are used to save the Jews. Eunuchs were considered unclean according to the purity laws of the time. Women were seen as subordinate and without power. How does the book of Esther challenge those assumptions?

- Why did Sharon Watkins decide to stop deemphasizing the significance of her election? Why do you think that she initially wanted to deemphasize her role as the first woman to lead a mainline Protestant denomination?
- Another first that occurred during Dr. Watkin's twelve-year term as General Minister and President was preaching at the National Prayer Service following President Obama's inauguration. Drawing on Cherokee wisdom, Dr. Watkins shared the following folktale.

A grandfather is talking with his grandson and he says there are two wolves inside of us that are always at war with each other

One of them is a good wolf that represents things like kindness, bravery and love. The other is a bad wolf, which represents things like greed, hatred and fear.

The grandson stops and thinks about it for a second then he looks up at his grandfather and says, "Grandfather, which one wins?"

The grandfather quietly replies, "The one you feed."

From this tale, she drew the following advice for President Obama and Vice-President Biden, *"We need you, leaders of this nation, to stay centered on the values that have guided us in the past; values that empowered us to move through the perils of earlier times and can guide us now into a future of renewed promise. We need you to feed the good wolf within you, to listen to the better angels of your nature, and by your example encourage us to do the same."*

What does this mean to you? How do we feed the good wolf?

- Describe how Sharon Watkins initially resisted and then followed her call to ministry? What and who encouraged her on her journey? Have you ever resisted a call from God? Why were you resistant? What helped you to overcome the resistance? Sometimes, our journey takes some surprising turns and twists? What has surprised or delighted you as you have followed God's call?
- What have been some of the ups and downs of Dr. Watkins ministry as General Minister and President? What does she identify as one of the big challenges of her ministry? How is your Region involved in addressing issues of racism? Your congregation? What are some of the obstacles to dismantling racism and becoming anti-racist and pro-reconciling?
- Dr. Watkins advises the next GMP to "Trust your colleagues. And start your disciplines of good eating, good exercise, good prayer, and good stewardship on Day 1." How is this good advice for any Christian? How do you or how can you follow this advise in your daily life?
- What does Dr. Watkins identify as barriers to women? What barriers have you experienced in your life? How have you overcome those barriers?

Closing Prayer

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

Devotion

“Don’t think for one minute that, unlike all other Jews, you’ll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. In fact, if you don’t speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be a part of the royal family.”

Esther 4: 13 – 14 (CEB)

Have you ever found yourself asked to do something for which you were uncertain that you were prepared?

Initially, your mind fills with reasons why you are not qualified or equipped for this. You begin to look for excuses or for the names of others who you believe are better suited for the task. Or, perhaps you are filled with excitement as you consider the question, “can I do it?”. Whatever your initial reaction, something deep inside calls.

Have you ever found yourself taking a different life path than you expected? Have you ever experienced that sense of accomplishment and wonder over how you have grown as a result of accepting what seemed to be a challenge?

Upon entering college, Sharon Watkins had not considered being a full-time minister. Graduating from Butler University with a degree in French and economics, she entered seminary thinking that her path was leading to her becoming a social worker who would “do some theology on the side.” After a less-than-satisfying field placement, Watkins began to consider congregational work. Watkins states, “The minute I walked into the church, I knew I had been running away from ministry for a long time, and from that moment, I embraced it.” The journey from that first church experience to being called as General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) included: two years working with a program of adult literacy in the Congo and several stops at Phillips University including: director of student services, director of church relations, associate vice-president of university relations. As GMP, Watkins has broken barriers as first women to head a mainline Protestant denomination. She witnessed to the highs and the lows of the church. In her words, “As GMP, I see the church at its best.” She also states, “In the first year, for a variety of reasons, we were a church that was hurting... I think my ministry helped us move toward a sense of healing. It helped us take a breath and think about how much we love our church instead of how big the challenges were.”

In a story of exile, Esther risked all to come before the king to save her people. For a moment, like this she was called. In the story of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Sharon Watkins responded to lead a hurting church toward healing responding to God’s call to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. For a moment like this, she was called. In your story, there is a call from deep within. You have been prepared and you have been equipped. For a moment like this you are called.

Prayer:

(Stand and face any direction you choose.

Take one step forward, as you look about, up, and down.)

O Great, Holy Spirit, I take this step into the *day* you have given. I embrace all I see – the season, the wind, the fragrances, the weather. Let me always accept the day given with a grateful heart.

(Take another step forward.)

O Spirit of Life, I put my arms around *myself*, all that I am, all that I can be. I stand here in my own history, with all the mistakes and victories. I hold all those I will meet today, in my journeying and in my work. Let me walk gently through the lives of my work companions and friends. Though they make way for my passing, may they spring back neither broken or bruised.

(Take another step forward.)

O glorious Spirit of Mystery, I put my arms around you. I do not know what will happen to me today, but I accept it. Give me heart of courage and believing, so that I may put my trust in you, and fear nothing.

A Native America Way to begin the day from the Plains Tribe

Ford-Grabowsky, Mary. *Woman Prayers: Prayers by Women from Throughout History and Around the World*. HarperCollins e-books, 2009 Kindle Electronic Edition loc 343 of 3416.

Session 3

Supplies

- The article “Safe on Campus: Disciples Colleges Work for Change” by Selys Rivera
- Bible
- Computer and internet access

Opening Prayer

Divide the prayer according to stanzas. Divide these between the women in your group and have them share the prayer.

God of thunder
don't just lift my voice,
throw it into
the wide world.
Let me bellow your anger
and outrage with wickedness,
and all injustice.

God of the silenced
lift my voice.
Raise my tongue from its
silent tomb,
free it from its place
behind barred teeth.
Let my language be
liberty, courage and hope.

God of my heaviness,
lift my voice
That my fear and weariness will
turn to a flood of fresh words
that your daughters may be heard.
Let me lift up of loveliness and
lament our loss.

God of the whisper
lift my voice.
Fill my lungs with your breath
open my mouth
let me sing of your mercy,
a brooding spirit, the wind of change.

Echoing God
lift my voice
that our song may reverberate
across the rocks and mountain tops,
and through the archways
corridor power.

Loud and love God
be my voice
that I may tell of the
sensuous creatureliness
the incarnate gentleness,
the enfolding grace
of your unending love

Alison Swinfen
Glasgow, Scotland.

Rose, Margaret, Jenny Te Paa, Jeanne Person, Abigail Nelson. *Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to Change the World*. Morehouse Publishing, 2009. Kindle electronic edition, 7238 of 9538.

Icebreaker

As a group watch Ted Talks: *Jimmy Carter: Why I believe Mistreatment of Women is the Number One Human Rights Abuse*.

http://www.ted.com/talks/jimmy_carter_why_i_believe_the_mistreatment_of_women_is_the_number_one_human_rights_abuse.

What is your reaction to this video? What do you agree with? What do you disagree with?
What does President Carter identify as number one cause of mistreatment of women?
How is scripture used to subjugate women? What does President Carter identify as abuse of women? According to President Carter what can we do?

Scripture Focus

Esther 1: 1 – 22

Background

Many Christians have minimal exposure to the book of Esther, as texts from the book occur only once in the readings of the Revised Common Lectionary. Considered by most scholars to be a novella written between 400 and 200 BCE, the book of Esther explores themes of violence, vengeance, power and the abuse of power. Three versions of the

book of Esther exist; the canonical version is the only one that does not mention the name of God. The book identifies the origins of the Jewish festival of Purim.

The story takes place in the capital city of the Persian Empire, Susa, during the reign of Ahasuerus, Xerxes in Greek. Traditionally this period is known as the Babylonian exile or Diaspora (5th century BCE). While the biblical text identifies the Persian queens as Vashti and Esther, Persian and Greek records show that Ahasuerus was only married once to Amestris in 486 BCE. A woman depicted as a cruel despot by Greek historians, Amestris was the daughter of Otanes, a nobleman of high rank who has helped Ahasuerus obtain the throne.

The narrative opens with a clear exaggeration of the extent of Ahasuerus' kingdom. While history indicates that 27 provinces comprised the Persian realm at its largest, the biblical text suggests 127. The addition of 100 provinces to the Persian realm serves to inflate the privilege, power and pomp of the king. It should be noted that the lavishness and extravagance, including a 6 month banquet, the 7 day banquet and the queen's banquet, associated with the Persian empire would have served to make this empire morally suspect to the original readers of the text.

Vashti can be translated beautiful and Ahasuerus, can be translated mighty man. We are told that the mighty man wants to exhibit the beauty before his guests. He orders seven eunuchs to bring Vashti to the banquet hall. While the text does not give a reason, Vashti refuses to appear before the king. Literary critics state that this omission of a reason is a literary device that allows the reader to draw one's own conclusions for the refusal. Ancient rabbis have suggested that Vashti refused because she was offended as she was required to appear naked wearing only the royal crown before the king's guests. Vashti's refusal initiates a national crisis. Left unaddressed her refusal is a denial of the king's authority and power. So the king seeks the advice of others on what to do. To avert this crisis, Memucan suggests that the queen be banned and forbidden to enter the king's presence. This pleases the king who then sets about to seek another queen. Patriarchal and political control are reestablished.

Questions

- Share the Vashti's story by reading Esther 1 or by having members of your group summarize the story. What is your reaction to Vashti's refusal? What is your reaction to the king and his emissaries?
- What does this story say about the status of women in ancient Persia?
- How is patriarchal and political control exercised over women today?
- Describe Selys Rivera's experiences while she in college? How did her workplace experiences impact other aspects of college life?
- According to the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website (https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/sexual_harassment.cfm)

“It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that's person's sex. Harassment can include “sexual harassment” or unwelcome sexual

advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general.

Both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.

Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted).

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employer, such as a client or customer."

Does Rivera's experience fit within this definition? Why or why not?

- While sexual harassment in the workplace can make a person uncomfortable it can have more significant consequences. Sexual harassment can lead to low self-esteem, stress and anxiety. The victims of sexual harassment might blame themselves for what is happening. Over an extended period of time sexual harassment can contribute to clinical depression and physical health problems such as weight fluctuations, headache, sleep disturbances and high blood pressure. In addition to personal costs, sexual harassment has a potential economic impact due to absenteeism, low productivity, employee turnover and low morale. Did Rivera experience any of these consequences?
- Review the statistics related to sexual harassment. What surprised you about these statistics?
- What is Chapman University doing to stop sexual harassment on campus? Why is it important to share the stories of survivors? What is victim blaming? What has been your experience with "victim blaming"?
- What is happening on other Disciples campuses to stop sexual harassment and sexual assault?
- What is the similarity in sexual harassment and sexual assault? Are there differences? How can one contribute to the other? Can sexual harassment or sexual assault happen to men? What attitudes in our society contribute to this being seen only as a male on female problem?
- According to the article, what are the root causes of sexual harassment and sexual assault in our society? Do you agree with this understanding? Why or why not? Have you heard the term "Rape Culture?" What does this mean to you? Rape culture may be defined as "a society or environment whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of normalizing or trivializing sexual assault and abuse."

What are the social attitudes that contribute to the establishment of a rape culture?
How might this culture be changed?

- What is an “active bystander?” What might you do to become an active bystander?

Going Deeper

Prior to your meeting, divide the websites listed in the sidebar: Resources and Tools among the women in your group. Have them visit these sites and be able to report on the information on these sites.

Closing Prayer

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

Devotion

They were to bring Queen Vashti before him wearing the royal crown. She was gorgeous, and he want to show off her beauty both to the general public and to his important guests. But Queen Vashti refused to come as the king ordered through the eunuchs.

Esther 1: 11 – 12a. CEB

According to a study conducted in 2005, 62% of college students have been sexually harassed and 20 – 25 % of college women and 6 % of college men have been sexually assaulted. According to the Department of Justice 80 % of these crimes are not reported.

In light of reality of countless women and men who have endured sexual harassment and sexual assault, Disciples colleges are staying “No more. “ Programs are being developed to increase awareness and provide ways for survivors to speak out and name their experience. Advocacy groups are being formed in efforts to prevent sexual violence.

According to Dani Smith, Director of PEER and Health Education at Chapman University, the root cause of sexual is, “a lack of respect, a sense of entitlement” that is present not only in the perpetrator but in our culture as a whole.

Vashti was commanded to appear before the King. According to the ancient Rabbis he commanded her to expose herself to strangers as a source of entertainment for the King and his guests. Vashti resisted the expectations and rules of her society as she refused to be exploit. While many women in the bible are unnamed, Vashti’s name is spoken. She was one who refused to be kept down.

Let us pray.

God of thunder
don’t just lift my voice,
throw it into
the wide world.
Let me bellow your anger
and outrage with wickness,
and all injustice.

God of the silenced
lift my voice.
Raise my tongue from its
silent tomb,
free it from its place
behind barred teeth.
Let my language be
liberty, courage and hope.

God of my heaviness,
lift my voice
That my fear and weariness will
turn to a flood of fresh words
that your daughters may be heard.
Let me lilt of loveliness and
lament our loss.

God of the whisper
lift my voice.
Fill my lungs with your breath
open my mouth
let me sing of your mercy,
a brooding spirit, the wind of change.

Echoing God
lift my voice
that our song may reverberate
across the rocks and mountain tops,
and through the archways
corridoring power.

Loud and love God
be my voice
that I may tell of the
sensuous creatureliness
the incarnate gentleness,
the enfolding grace
of your unending love

Alison Swinfen
Glasgow, Scotland.

Rose, Margaret, Jenny Te Paa, Jeanne Person, Abigail Nelson. *Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to Change the World*. Morehouse Publishing, 2009. Kindle electronic edition, 7238 of 9538.

Session 4

Supplies

- The article “Family Matters: Talking to Our Daughters” by Olivia Bryan Updegrove
- Bible
- Blank paper and writing utensils for each participant

Opening Prayer

Read in unison

Holy God may we,

“.... celebrate children
who laugh out loud
who walk in the mud and dawdle in the puddles
who put chocolate fingers anywhere
who like to be tickled
who scribble in church
who whisperin loud voices
who sing in louder voices
who run...and laugh when they fall
who cry at the top of their lungs
who cover themselves with bandaids
who squeeze the toothpaste all over the bathroom
who slurp their soup
who chew coughdrops
who ask questions
who give us sticky, paste-covered creations
who want their picture taken
who won't use their napkins
who bury goldfish, sleep with the dog, scream at their best friend
who hug us in a hurry and rush outside without their hats.
[We] celebrate children
who are so busy living they don't have time for our hangups
And [we] celebrate adults who are as little children.... [we] celebrate the community that
cares... the church...”

Amen.

Adapted from: *Balloons Belong in Church* by Ann Weems

Icebreaker

While the concept has re-emerged in the United States on television, radio shows and in the theater, as well as in movies and books, and has shown up in media around the world, Art Linkletter first introduced the premise of asking a question to a child who would respond in some unusual and sometime incredibly insightful ways in the 1940s. *Kids Say the Darndest Things* provided insights into how children viewed the world and what they were intentionally, but more often unintentionally, being taught by the adults around them.

In Art Linkletter's *Kid Say the Darndest Things* (Prentice-Hall, 1957), children responded in the following ways.

Linkletter, "Well, surely you can describe yourself?"

Child, "Well. I'm mostly dependable."

Linkletter, "What do you mean by that.?"

Child "Nobody can ever depend on where I'll be or what I'll do."

Linkletter, "Why did the teacher pick you today?"

Child, "Because I have the gift of gab."

Linkletter, "Does it ever come in handy?"

Child, "Sure! It got me out of school today, didn't it?"

Linkletter, "Easter is one of the most exciting times for a five year old, and I wonder if you can tell me what's the first thing you're going to do?"

Child, "Wake up."

Linkletter, "Any brothers or sisters?"

Child, "A sister."

Linkletter, "How old?"

Child, "month old"

Linkletter, "what does she do most of the time?"

Child, "Plays on the back fence"

Linkletter, "How can she do that?"

Child, "She's a cat."

Share some of the "darndest" things you have heard from children.

Scripture Focus

Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 9

Background

Deuteronomy literally means the "second law." Within this title is the understanding that this book is a restatement and reapplication of the law that Moses received on Mt. Sinai.

This restatement and reapplication is presented in the form of five messages delivered by Moses. Deuteronomy insists that there is one covenant that must be applied by each generation to the circumstances in which that generation is living. Our passage today is taken from the address that explores key covenantal themes.

These verses are commonly referred to as the Shema. The Shema is a prayer that calls for radical commitment and devotion to God. YHWH is not merely the first god of Israel, YHWH is the only God of Israel. The prayer locates the covenant with YHWH at the center of Israelite life and calls for this covenant to be taught to each new generation. Devotion to YHWH is a sign of a healthy nation.

Questions

- The Shema is an important prayer in the Jewish faith. It is the centerpiece of both morning and evening prayers. It speaks of the importance of covenantal relationship with God and reaffirms a personal relationship between God and the people. Loving the Lord with heart, soul and might were central values for the people. What does loving the Lord with heart, soul and might mean to you? Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 9 stresses the importance of teaching this valuable lesson to each generation. Why do you think this is so important? While stressing the importance of passing on the tradition, these verses also model how the tradition is to be reinterpreted in light of current circumstances of life? Why is this reinterpretation and reapplication important? What happens when faith is not reinterpreted and applied in light of current cultural context?
- Olivia Bryan Updegrave also speaks of teaching our children and of passing on values to our children. She speaks of a difficult conversation with her daughter following the 2016 Presidential election. What was this conversation about? What made the conversation difficult?
- What are some of the difficult conversations that you have had to have with children? What has helped prepare you for those conversations? What resources, sources of authority, do you consult to prepare you for these conversations?
- Updegrave speaks of how she attempted to put her feelings and thoughts into concepts that might be comprehended by a three-year old? Why is it important to consider your child's development and perspective in answering their questions?
- After she told her daughter that the whole world was not ready for Elsa, she writes:

We will, however, respond as women of faith. We will continue to find ways to empower our daughters and even ourselves. We will be more diligent, intentional, and empowering. We will fight with knowledge, skill, and our actions. We will embrace our princesses, and show them how to be queens, leaders, justices, moms, godmothers, and even president.

My dear daughter, I am taking action to empower you. So are many of the women around you. They are lifting up scriptures like Isaiah 40:29-31 (“they shall mount up with wings like eagles”) and Joshua 1:6-9 (“be strong and

courageous.”) They are inviting you – yes, you – to walk with us as we protest the injustices and “mean and bad stuff.” They are also praying for you.

We will show you that presence and community matter. We will love you and stand next to you when the world is harder than it should be. You will also see us stand by one another in all our imperfections. We will walk with you, and we will try to give you the skills and abilities to be who God has called you to be now and in the future. We will show you that you are worthy.

What message and values are embedded in these words? What does Olivia want to teach her daughter? How do you respond to this message? Was it the message you received when you were growing up? If not how was that message different?

- Updegrave promises to “show up.” What does this mean? How do we show up for the children in our lives?
- Allowing toddlers and young children to make reasonable choices is critical if they are to grow-up to be morally sensitive, rationally independent, and ethical individuals. Obviously, for very young children choices must be tailored so that children are choosing between acceptable possibilities. The range of acceptable possibilities changes as the child matures. Giving children choices requires that we move beyond “mind mommy and daddy” and engage in genuine conversations with children. We listen to hear what they are thinking and feeling. We recognize the danger of teaching blind obedience that is not undergirded by the ability to think critically. How is Updegrave seeking to teach her child to make choices and to think critically? How does this take on different forms at different ages?
- Updegrave concludes by saying, “ we will do our best to give you roots and wings. We will laugh and cry in the big and the small moments. We will find love in all moments.” Take a blank piece of paper. Consider a child in your life. Write a letter to that child explaining your commitment to give him or her roots and wings, to help them find love in all moments. You will not need to share this letter unless you want to do so. Allow sufficient time for each person to compose her letter. Provide time to discuss what the process of writing the letter was like for participants. Invite individuals to share what they would like from their letters.

Closing Prayer

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

Devotion

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. **5** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. **6** Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. **7** Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. **8** Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, **9** and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6: 4 – 9, NRSV

In her article, “Family Matters” Speaking to our Daughters,” Olivia Bryan Updegrave speaks of the importance of showing up for our children. She passionately urges us to engage in the difficult conversations that define who we are and what we value as people of faith. She urges us to speak using words but even more powerfully to communicate through our choices, our actions, in the way we live our daily lives.

Her article reminds us that children are watching us; they are listening to us. It is important to consider the messages they receive and the lessons they learn from us.

Remember, powerful girls grow up feeling secure in themselves. They believe in their abilities. They take action, make positive choices, and think critically about the world around them. Powerful girls express their feelings and have empathy for other people. They are compassionate. Powerful girls are not perfect. There are moments of insecurity and doubt. But powerful girls are not afraid to risk making a mistake or to not to try because and it won't work out. They can work through a conflict in positive ways. They are shaped and formed by the way we see them, the words we use with and about them, the actions we take for them and with them.

It has been said that

Sugar and spice
and everything nice
that's what little girls are made of

Sunshine and rainbows
and ribbons for hair bows
that's what little girls are made of

Tea parties, laces
and baby doll faces
that's what little girls are made of

But, is that all little girls are made of?

Inquistive minds
and curious thoughts
that's what little girls are made of

courage and daring
and helmets to play ball
that's what little girls are made of

princesses and rebels,
physicists and mathematicians
artists and musicians
politicians and philanthropists
and every heart's pursuit
that's what little girls are made of

adventure and wonder
dreams of a better world
that's what little girls are made of.

Strong women, may we know them, may we raise them, may we be them.

Let us pray

Gracious God, send your Spirit of Wisdom so that we may find the words to say and know they ways to act so that we may be conduits of your love and grace as we teach your ways to the children in our lives. Amen.