

Called to Reflect His Light: A Women's Leadership Workshop

"The Teacher has come and is calling for you" (John 11:28).

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were some of Jesus' closest friends. The account of His coming to see them when Lazarus died was among the most moving stories of the Bible. He raised Lazarus from the dead, ministered to him and his sisters and made Himself known as the Resurrection and the Life.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Martha ran to see Him. After talking with Him for a little while, she found Mary and said, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you."

One women's ministry leader testified that before she met Jesus, her life was sin-filled, fearful, insecure and rebellious. When, in her darkest hour, she wanted someone to save her, she began to hear God calling her to Himself.

Just like Mary and this woman, Jesus is calling for you.

Jesus has called you to His family. Jesus has called you to lead others to Him – to be an example of His grace. Jesus is calling for you to reflect His light to others.

Jesus is Our Teacher, Our Leader Christian Leaders Follow Him

Throughout the Bible, God communicated personally with His people – women as well as men. He called them by name. He provided for them. He gave them guidance. He cared for them. He still does.

In the Old Testament, God spoke to women through many means. With the coming of Jesus, He revealed Himself as a friend and a brother. Now, His Spirit lives within His sisters, comforting and guiding them.

Good big brothers love, protect and guide their sisters. Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life for ours. His life is our model for living and leadership.

Paul said, "Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ." Even if you don't have a leadership role in the church, you are a leader. Someone is watching you. You are an example to your husband, your children, grandchildren, other relatives and friends who know you. You do have an influence on others.

Jesus led by example

Some presidents and CEOs never mix with the workers of their company. They only see those in upper management. They delegate. They manage. Their decisions are sometimes made without understanding the intricate workings of the business.

They are known for stepping on or over those underneath them in order to get ahead. Often these leaders do whatever it takes to make their position look good.

Jesus is the opposite of these ivory tower managers. He did not separate Himself from those He was trying to lead. On the contrary, He lived among them. He used various teaching methods, but one teaching style. He led by example.

Jesus led by the example of His life. He demonstrated how to follow God's commandments by obeying every one of them perfectly. He never avoided anyone. He showed how to relate to everyone – no matter how different they may be. He showed His disciples how to be a servant leader by washing their feet. He showed them how to endure hardship through His sacrificial suffering.

Jesus led by the example of His words. He told stories to illustrate spiritual truth. He is Truth and told the truth. He exposed hypocrites. He offered compassion to those who trusted Him. He offered truth and allowed His hearers to make a choice. He called many to follow Him. Some did. Some turned away.

Jesus led by the example of His pure heart. He is God, but His life was an example of humility. He never sinned and never needed forgiveness, but as He bore our sin on the cross, He demonstrated the ultimate example of forgiveness.

Jesus led by demonstrating how we should live and lead. He asked for love, loyalty and service, but He did not demand it. He demonstrated it.

Jesus was a sacrificial leader. He only asks those who follow Him to do what He did – as our example.

A “shining example” describes someone who has a lifestyle worthy of following. Jesus led by shining. He is Light. He shares His light with His brothers and sisters.

He is calling for you to let Him shine through you.

As not all leaders are good leaders, not all Biblical examples were positive. Some had a negative influence. However, lessons can be learned from both good and bad examples of leadership.

Application

God called to leadership many women in the Bible. We will examine just a few of them. Reflect on whether their influence was positive or negative. Group discussion questions, a leadership application and a private reflection follow each example.

These women's stories are familiar, but the application of lessons learned from their testimonies, coupled with Jesus' leadership example as Light of the World, can have a tremendous impact on your own influence of others.

Eve

And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" (Genesis 3:13a).

The first time we find the Lord asking for any woman is after Eve ate the forbidden fruit and gave it to her husband.

Eve had a unique opportunity to set a shining example for all women to follow. She had the privilege of walking with God in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, her example brought darkness – sin – into the world. It is easy to blame Eve for all of our troubles; however, would any of us have been any different?

Group Discussion Questions

Eve may have been unaware that she was a leader, but she was. Why did Adam name her Eve (Genesis 3:20)?

Paul warned the Corinthians not to have their minds corrupted from the simplicity that was in Christ – just as Eve did when she was deceived by the serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3). Why do you think Eve gave in to the temptation to do what God clearly told her not to do?

The consequences of Eve's disobedience have been far reaching. When Christians sin, what are the consequences - in their personal lives, in their witness, in the church?

Leadership Application

Since it is true that we can learn from negative examples of leadership, what did Eve's experience teach you about your influence on future generations?

Private Reflection (for your journal, not to share):

The first question the Lord asks any of us is, "Is your heart right with Me? Is there sin in your life?"

Even after becoming a Christian, we sometimes allow sin to reign in our lives. When that happens, we are not allowing Jesus to be Lord. We are allowing Satan to rule in that area. Is there some sin in your life that you need to confess to God so that He can have complete control?

Hagar

Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness...and He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:7-8a).

Hagar has been referred to as an abused woman. In her service as Sarai's maid, she did Sarai's bidding, becoming pregnant by Abraham. Sarai then became jealous and treated Hagar so harshly that Hagar fled. The Angel of the Lord found her by the spring and called out to her.

Hagar obeyed the Lord when He told her to return to Sarai and submit to her. Her encounter with the Lord made her aware that although she was unfairly treated by Sarai, she was not alone...*the Lord has heard your affliction* (Genesis 16:11). God knows, God sees, God comforts, God leads and God calls.

Group Discussion Questions

Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (Genesis 16:13). How did her understanding of God change because He called to her?

This was not the last time she was treated harshly by Sarai or rescued by God (Genesis 21:9-21). God called to Hagar again (verse 17-19). When she wept, God responded. God opened her eyes, provided for her needs and gave her a promise. She was a slave girl and yet, God made a great nation of her son (Genesis 21:18). As a girl who had always been in situations beyond her control, how do you think God's personal response to her made her feel about Him and her value in His eyes?

Leadership Application

Hagar, an unlikely leader, demonstrated faith in responding to God's call in her life. What leadership principles does she exhibit?

Private Reflection

Like Hagar, have you ever been abused or despised by those closest to you? Have you heard God calling you while you were in a situation totally beyond your control? Have you given Him your fears and let Him meet your needs?

Sarah

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" ... And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? ...But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!" (Genesis 18:9-15).

Sarai, the woman who had been so cruel to Hagar, had a special calling from God. God changed Sarai's name to Sarah, promising He would bless her, give her a son and that she would be a mother of nations. When He told Abraham this, Abraham laughed, wondering how it would be possible for a child to be born to a man one hundred years old and a woman who was ninety (Genesis 17:15-17).

Sarah, beyond the age of childbearing, also laughed in disbelief when she heard it. She then lied about her laughing when she was caught. Amazingly, God used her

anyway. He instilled in her strength and faith to be the mother that He called her to be (Hebrews 11:11).

Group Discussion Questions

God called for Sarah indirectly, through Abraham. Although women are individuals in God's eyes – His chosen daughters – as wives, they have a special role in relation to their husbands. See Ephesians 5:22-24.

When God delayed, in her eyes, in bringing about the birth of the promised child, Sarai took matters in her own hands by giving Hagar to Abraham to bear a child. What did this impatience and lack of faith cost her? Why do you think God waited until Sarah was past childbearing age to give her a son?

Sarah obeyed Abraham (1 Peter 3:6), but she struggled with the issue of control. Have you observed this as a problem in marriages in the church where you serve? How can you help women with this issue?

Leadership Application

Was Sarah a positive or negative leader? Is it possible to be both? Why or why not?

Private Reflection

Resentment of the husband's role of leadership is a common struggle among wives. When Eve sinned and God pronounced judgment on her sin, He said, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" (Genesis 3:16). Do you resist and resent your husband's rule over you? If so, what is your proper response?

Rahab

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham...Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab...By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace...likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (Matthew 1:1, 5, Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25-26).

Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). The story of Rahab is told in Joshua 2, but she is mentioned several times after that as an example of a woman of faith. She and Sarah are the only two women mentioned in Hebrews 11 – the role call of the faithful. James couples her name with Abraham's as an example of faith. Most importantly, we know that God called her to be in the lineage of Jesus Christ himself. What a surprising and amazing sign of God's grace – to call a Gentile, a harlot to be a shining example of faith!

In practically every reference of Rahab, she was called Rahab the harlot. There was no mistaking the fact that Rahab was a sinner. She, however, had something that many righteous (i.e. Pharisees) did not have – an understanding of the fear of God

and faith that He could and would save her. Her faith did not disappoint her. Her faith was so strong that it pleased God and He rewarded her richly for it.

Group Discussion Questions

God forgives sin. He rewards faith. How can Rahab's example help you minister to women who have a hard time believing God loves them?

Rahab was bold when it came to protecting her household and defending the men of God. Would you agree that the opposite of fear is faith? How is that practically carried out in everyday living?

Leadership Application

What positive leadership traits did Rahab exhibit?

Private Reflection

Satan sometimes is successful in hindering the fruit bearing of a Christian because she is unable to forgive herself for past sins in her life. Is there a personal application in Rahab's story?

Ruth

Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God...So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, and she bore a son...and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 1:16, 4:13, 17).

We find another pagan woman, Ruth, in the genealogy of Jesus. Her history was not like Rahab's. She was described as a loving, obedient daughter-in-law of Naomi. God looked on her heart, saw her faith and called her to be the grandmother of King David. Her true story illustrates persistent devotion to her mother-in-law; the kinsman redeemer (a foreshadowing of Christ); obedience, faithfulness, humility.

Group Discussion Questions

Ruth's story clearly indicates that God works behind the scenes in our lives to accomplish His will. How does the Romans 8:28 principle apply in Ruth's story?

Ruth had been observing Naomi throughout her years married to her son. Why do you think Ruth was so determined to stay with Naomi and to worship her God?

Leadership Application

Ruth, though humble, was a very determined woman. She would not be swayed from her convictions. As Jesus evidenced in His own life, it is possible to be strong and humble at the same time. Examine His leadership characteristics and chose all that apply to Ruth.

Private Reflection

Have you ever let Satan keep you from taking a stand for Christian principles?

Hannah

For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him (1 Samuel 1:27).

Hannah, a godly woman, barren for years, demonstrated her strength and faith in God by praying for a son. She made a commitment to Him that she would dedicate her son to his service. God answered and Hannah followed through on her promise.

Hannah's primary concern was bearing a son for her husband. Although Elkanah tried to comfort her, she still asked God for a child. When she committed her unborn son to God's service, there is no evidence she told Elkanah about her vow. However, she must have trusted in his support and she got it (1 Samuel 1:23). As a result, God blessed both Elkanah and Hannah with more children (1 Samuel 2:20-21).

Group Discussion Questions

Someone who makes a vow to God must be determined to keep that vow. How hard do you think it was for Hannah to leave Samuel with Eli as she had promised?

Hannah's barrenness and the mistreatment by her rival grieved her (1 Samuel 1:6). How she handled her sadness made all the difference. What did she do?

Leadership Application

Hannah did not consider herself a leader. She desperately wanted to be a mother. Mothers, however, have an important leadership role. Which leadership traits are necessary for mothers?

Private Reflection

Have you ever let bitterness eat at you until you were unable to function?

Esther

For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14).

Ruth and Esther are the only women who have Old Testament books devoted to them. Both were strong and courageous. Ruth's courage enabled her to leave her culture, her home and trust in Naomi's God as her own. Esther was a Jew. Her courage enabled her to stand up for God's chosen people, even at the point of risking her own life.

Group Discussion Questions

The Bible has a lot to say about being careful with our words. Sometimes it is best to keep silent. However, at other times, it is necessary to speak out. How did Esther prepare herself to speak to the king?

What were the possible consequences if the king did not like what she said? How did Esther present her case to the king?

Leadership Application

Esther was strongly influenced by Mordecai. Her own circle of influence included King Ahasuerus, the king's eunuch, the other women in the court, Haman, and the Jewish people. Without her leadership, things might have turned out differently. Which leadership principles did Esther exercise in order to save her people?

Private Reflection

Have you ever been responsible for someone else's well being? If so, do you think you acted wisely? If you were in Esther's situation, what would you have done?

Mary

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus (Luke 1:31).

Of all the women in our list, Mary is the one who most captures our heart. What an honor it was to be chosen to be the mother of our Lord. Only a humble woman with a servant spirit could have filled this role.

When Mary speaks, it is often with praise on her lips for God. She is most often said to have kept things in her heart. She must have pondered and reflected on so much of what happened in her life and the life of her Son.

Group Discussion Questions

Mary's response was immediate, "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). What were the implications of her obedience? How did people view her and Joseph when she became pregnant?

Although considered an adult, Mary was still young when she became pregnant – very likely a teenager. How did God prepare her for this special calling?

Leadership Application

Mary prompted Jesus to perform His first miracle (John 2). "*Whatever He says to you, do it,*" is a guiding light for any Christian leader. What does Jesus say to do?

Private Reflection

What is your normal response to God's asking you to do something that others will not understand, something that might cause major problems in your life?

Anna

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).

All we know of Anna are in the verses above; however, that is enough to let us know that God prepared both a man (Simeon) and a woman (Anna) to recognize the Savior when He arrived.

Mary was young. Anna was very old. God had given each of them a unique assignment in the declaration of the Good News.

Age does not seem to be a factor in receiving a special calling from God. Anna's service was not public. She served in one place – the temple – for many years. Her service was a private, consistent devotion to God.

Group Discussion Questions

Every person's calling from God is unique. Sometimes He has His daughters serve in a public calling with many people observing their lives. Sometimes He asked them to serve in obscurity. Who do you think gets the greater reward?

Do you know an "Anna?" If so, describe her.

Leadership Application

Obviously, those in the public arena can influence a greater number of people. God rewards those who follow Him, no matter how large the sphere of influence. How can an "Anna" be a leader?

Private Reflection

What do you believe is God's calling in your life? What is the essential ingredient for following that calling?

Samaritan Woman

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink" (John 4:7).

Some of the women in the Bible remain unnamed to us, but not to God. The story of the woman of Samaria gives a beautiful truth to women everywhere – no matter who you are, where you have come from, what you have done – God is calling you.

Iris Blue is an American who travels and tells her remarkable story of God's calling

her to Himself. As a young rebellious girl, she ran away from home, became involved in drugs and was arrested as a teenager and sentenced to eight years in prison. She served a longer time because of her bad attitude. One and a half years after her release, a young man shared the gospel with her. She became a Christian, stating that she “knelt down a tramp and stood up a lady.”

Group Discussion Questions

When Jesus called this woman, He deliberately went through Samaria. Other Jews would have gone around it. He spoke to a woman. Other men would not have done this. He continued a conversation with her until He reveals Himself as the Messiah.

As a result of His calling her, what happened to her? How did she change? What did she do? Were other people saved because of her testimony?

How can her experience help you minister to other women?

Leadership Application

If the assignment of a believer is to lead others to the Light of the World, this woman was a shining example of how to do that. Although she knew about the Messiah, her knowledge was confused. However, all she needed to do was tell her story for others to be introduced to Jesus. What leadership qualities did she exhibit?

Private Reflection

A witness is someone who gives an account of a personal experience. Have you neglected to share the gospel because you didn't know what to say? Does this woman's example help you realize your story is the good news – the gospel?

Dorcas

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas... full of good works and charitable deeds... But it happened in those days that she became sick and died...And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up...And many believed on the Lord (Acts 9:36-42).

The only extraordinary thing about Dorcas was her service to others. She was a seamstress, caring for the widows in her city. Her death so affected them that God called her back to life, using the prayer of Peter as His tool. Through her resurrection, many believed on the Lord.

Group Discussion Questions

God called an ordinary woman to meet the needs of many widows in her community. He notices the deeds of every person. When they serve Him, as Dorcas

did, He rewards them and allows them to bear fruit.

Do you know women who feel frustrated because they are not accomplishing “big” things for God – they are just ordinary? What does the story of Dorcas reveal to you and them about God’s evaluation of a life?

Christians are called upon to exercise the spiritual gifts they have been given to serve the church. Some of these gifts are public, some are private, but all are important. What does 1 Corinthians 12 say about the importance of each gift?

Leadership Application

Some Christians with spiritual gifts that are service oriented do not feel that they qualify as leaders. They believe leadership is left to those with the gift of prophecy, or teaching, etc. Everyone has influence, however. Which leadership principles do you see in Dorcas?

Private Reflection

Do you know what spiritual gift God has given you? If so, are you exercising it for the good of the body? Are you satisfied with how God made you?

Conclusion

God is calling you first and foremost to a relationship with Him. When His Spirit lives within you, He can shine through your life. He calls you to reflect His light. When you do, you can light the way for others to follow.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

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