

# Gender and Biblical Reflection

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# Gender and Biblical Reflection

For an NGO whose identity, history and core values are Christian, a biblical and theologically sound grounding is essential in determining priority, strategy and response at every level of our daily work, particularly regarding Gender and Development. World Vision affirms that Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically, and also distinguishes between inspiration and interpretation. Inspiration relates to the divine impulse and recognises the whole canon of Scripture as the Word of God. Interpretation is our human activity as we seek to discern revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To be truly biblical, followers of Jesus must continually examine their faith and practise under the searchlight of Scripture. In humility, we acknowledge that Christians through history have erred in interpretation at various times and have had to rely on the grace of God in resubmitting to the authority of Scripture in light of new understanding. Just as we now recognise that Copernicus was correct despite condemnation by church authorities, and just as Jesus had to rebuke

Nicodemus, his own disciples and religious leaders of his day for not understanding Scripture accurately, so we followers of Jesus today need to be humbly willing to re-examine our assumptions regarding God's words to us about gender relations and reconciliation.

Module 2 explores central biblical passages, concepts and imagery related to gender dynamics. Activities allow staff to reflect on what the Bible says about gender relations, discrimination, women, injustice and cultural issues in gender relations. Actual historical context of the life of women in the New Testament illumines Jesus' response to harmful traditions and cultural constraints faced by women at that time.

Jesus' own transformation of gender dynamics – the cultural and religious norms during New Testament times – is presented as our deepest motivation to work for justice, empowerment and transformed gender dynamics in the 21st century. This module can also be used as devotional material or as a one-day, in- depth study on gender and the Bible.

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

## 1. **From Genesis to Galatians**

New insights are encouraged during small group discussion and reflection as participants re-examine key theological concepts in Genesis with a gender lens. Additionally, participants examine gender equality, diversity, unity and complementarity in light of Genesis 1:26-28 and Galatians 3:26-28.

## 2. **Incarnational Power: The Magnificat**

A dramatic reading of the Magnificat highlights the poetry, socio/political/historical realities and implications of this passage for gender equality. Participants work in pairs or small groups to explore how the Magnificat speaks to God's order and point of view regarding gender dynamics and social structure. Further questions address intergenerational implications for nurture and support of girl children's potential and consequences of this provision or lack for whole communities.

## 3. **Jesus Challenges the Gender Dynamic**

A thorough grounding in the gender dynamics that Jesus lived and modeled is essential for any Christian understanding of gender. In this session, participants are introduced to the historical and textual evidence of constraints women faced in New Testament times. Participants work in small groups to prepare and present a narrated role-play of two biblical stories: The Samaritan Woman, and Mary and Martha. Narrative and dramatic role-play help participants examine ways in which Jesus engaged with harmful traditional and cultural patterns.

## 4. **Gender Imagery in the New Testament**

In this session, participants examine familiar passages and imagery in the New Testament with a gender lens. Discussion and activities heighten awareness of "gender mainstreaming" throughout the New Testament and the challenge this raises for all Christians working with GAD.

## 5. **Scripture Search in the Community: Using a Gender Lens**

This session outlines Scripture search methodology and its effectiveness in introducing and developing gender equity. Participants use role-play to explore practical and powerful ways in which Scripture can be applied to resolve conflicts in gender dynamics.

# 1. From Genesis to Galatians

## Objectives

- Reflect on the creation story in Genesis through a gender lens
- Examine the key passage of Galatians 3:26-28 in light of our faith and gender dynamics
- Assist participants in the integration of scriptural principles in all aspects of World Vision's work

**(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes)**

## Session Flow and Description

### **Introduction - 10 minutes**

- Present objectives to participants.
- Have Genesis 1:26-28 on a transparency or on sheets of paper for each participant.
- Ask as many participants as time allows to stand and read Genesis 1:26-28 aloud to the group. Intonations and emphasis will vary from reader to reader. You want participants to listen to this very familiar passage with diverse intonations as well as with both male and female voices.

### **Small Groups: Genesis 1:26-28, Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender - 20 minutes**

*Divide into groups that each include both men and women.*

#### **Discussion Questions**

- Genesis 1:26-28 is a familiar passage. How has it affected your life as a Christian?
- How has it affected you as a member of your particular gender?

### **Plenary Group: Examining Genesis 1:26-28 - 30 minutes**

*Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender*

- Debrief and share responses from the small group discussion.
- Present key points from Handout 2.1a on Genesis 1:26-28.
- The word “man” in Genesis 1:26 is gender- neutral in the original language and includes both men and women.
- Both men and women were created by God and blessed by God.
- Both men and women were given the task of caring for God’s creation.

## **Small Group Discussion: Galatians 3:28 - 15 minutes**

*Activity 2.1b, Gender Transformation in the New Testament*

- Read the passage aloud before groups’ discussions begin.
- Ask participants to read the passage to one another again as they begin their discussion.

### **Discussion Questions**

- How does this passage challenge each of us, every day, in every interaction?
- What promises are contained within this passage?
- Who was Paul talking to then? Who is he talking to now? Why does this passage translate across genders, millenniums and cultures? How does this passage speak to diversity? How are we all “equal”?

## **Plenary Group: Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity - 10 minutes**

*Handout 2.1a*

### **Discussion Questions**

- Put these four concepts on a flip chart in a “table” format. Ask participants to give concrete examples from their workplace of each.
- How do the passages from Genesis reflect God’s original intention for equality, diversity, unity and complementarity between genders? Give examples of these from your own lives as Christian.
- How does Paul address these concepts in Galatians 3:26-28?
- How do these concepts inform our own development objectives for transformed gender relations and intentional focus on both women and men, boys and girls?

## **Post-Session Assignment: Becoming a Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes**

- Set up a section in your library or office for articles and theological reflections on gender.
- If you keep a prayer journal or a personal journal, set up a section for questions, prayers or biblical insights on gender and theology.

### **Materials**

#### *Handouts and Activities*

- Handout 2.1a, Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity
- Activity 2.1a, Genesis and Gender
- Activity 2.1b, Gender Transformation in the New Testament

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Create transparencies of Genesis 1:26-28 and Galatians 3:28.
- Make copies of Handout 2.1a and Activity 2.1a and Activity 2.1b for participants.
- Consult other texts or theologians if you have questions.
- Practise discussion questions with colleagues and reflect on possible responses.
- Create a flip chart of equality, complementarity, unity and diversity to use in the plenary session.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

## **Genesis and Gender**

### **The Creation**

Genesis 1 and 2 reflect God's ideal intention for the world and for all people: male and female together as created in the image of God. Male and female both were to work co-operatively together to care for the rest of creation.

In Genesis 1, we read: 26*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."* 27*So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created*

*them; male and female he created them. 28God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God’s image, had a direct relationship with God, and jointly shared the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). In Gen. 1:26-31, the word sometimes traditionally translated “man” should be interpreted as a human being (as in “mankind”), and the Hebrew “adam” as a generic and gender-neutral term. “Adam” becomes gender-specific when it is used as a proper name. When God said, “Let us make man in our image”, the intended gender neutrality is emphasised in verse 27, “male and female he created them”. Thus men and women are to be co-stewards and share God-created potential.

*In Genesis 2 we read: 7Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 15Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. 18Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 21So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.*

Mary Evans, in her book *Woman in the Bible*, points out in Genesis 1-2 that “the distinction between the sexes is there from the very beginning, inherent in the idea of Man; the creation of mankind as male and female is an integral part of God’s decision to make Man...Sexual distinction in creation therefore is quite clear. Nevertheless in this account there is no distinction between male and female in their creation as in the image of God or as having dominion over all the earth. No hint of subordination of one sex to the other can be found here. The blessing and commission of verse 28 in no way excludes or limits the female part of Man.”

Gilbert Bilezikian provides a more detailed reasoning for the equality of man and woman in Genesis 1-2. Just as both man and woman bear the image of God, both are assigned responsibility of stewardship for the earth, without any reference to differentiation on the basis of gender. He argues, "The text gives no hint of a division of responsibilities or of a distinction of rank in their administration of the natural realm. They are both equally entitled by God to act as His vice-regents for the rulership of the earth. The lack of any restrictions or of any qualifications in their participation in the task implies roles of equality for man and woman."

## **The Temptation and Fall**

In Genesis 3:1-6 we read: *Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.*

The Bible teaches that man and woman were co- participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:21-22).

The Bible also teaches that rulership by Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was, therefore, not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall, rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

Evans states, "It is not the relation as such that is destroyed, but rather its perfection. Man and woman are still complementary but no longer perfectly so. Life outside of Eden must be lived with all the conflicts and tensions that were the inevitable result of Man's disobedience to God."

## **Gender Transformation in the New Testament**





***No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found.***

– Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World”

## Redemption

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ, we all become children of God, one in Christ and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-28).

***Galatians 3:28*** “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

***In Galatians 3:28***, Paul challenges us to reflect on how we relate to each other when we identify ourselves as followers of Jesus. On this subject, Gilbert Bilezikian provides a detailed exposition of Galatians 3:28: “When males and females identify with Christ by faith, their spiritual allegiance takes precedence over their maleness and femaleness. Because of their commonality in that one area of life which is of supreme importance to them, they are united in Christ. Their sense of personal worth shifts from their maleness or femaleness to the unity they share in Christ. They still remain male and female, but such distinctions become immaterial to their equal participation in the life of the church.” He says the lesson to be learned from this passage is that the practise of sex discrimination is irrelevant and sinful in the church.”<sup>7</sup>

## Important Texts

1. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11).
2. Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole body of Christ, under his authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom. 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil. 4:2-3; Col. 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron. 34:22-28; Prov. 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).
3. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10;

Rev. 1:6, 5:10).

4. The Bible defines “head of the household” as a function of leadership. Leadership is consistently represented throughout Scripture as empowerment of others for service, rather than as the exercise of power over others (Matt. 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

## **Equality, Complementarity, Unity and Diversity**

**Equality** - Men and women are of equal value in the sight of God. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word “helper” (ezer), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, is also used in describing God in most instances of Old Testament usage (eg., 1 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.

**Diversity** - The diversity between men and women is expressed biologically, emotionally and psychologically. However, these differences do not presuppose or imply superiority or inferiority.

**Unity** - Male and female together represent the image of God. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen. 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20, in some versions, the word “suitable” or “fit” (kenegdo) denotes equality and adequacy.

**Complementarity** - Men and women need each other.

# 2. Incarnational Power: The Magnificent

## Objectives

- Reflect on the perspective of Mary, the young girl who became one of the most influential women in the biblical narrative at a pivotal moment in human history
- Prepare participants to engage in meaningful theological dialogue on this passage

**(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour)**

## Session Flow and Description

### Introduction - 10 minutes

- Present objectives of the session.
- Ask each participant to share one personal quality Mary must have possessed to successfully carry out the mission assigned to her. Each participant should identify a different quality.

### Plenary Group Presentation: Activity 2.2a - 20 minutes

- Prepare two participants before the session to do a dramatic reading. Choose a man to read the background section. Choose a woman to read the Magnificat from Luke.
- Begin with the woman outside the room as the man reads the background. When he is finished, the woman will enter the room and read (or recite, if it is memorised) the Magnificat.
- After the presentation, ask the group to share any new insights about Mary's role and character. Does the Magnificat reflect qualities to add to the list generated at the beginning of the session?

## **Plenary Group: Small Group Debriefing - 15 minutes**

*"Implications of the Magnificat" (Handout 2.2a)*

- Gather input briefly from the pairs or small groups.
- Incorporate insights from the group and review essential theological themes found on Handout 2.2a

## **Post-Session Assignment: Becoming A Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes**

### **Memorise the Magnificat**

### **Materials**

Handouts and Activities

- Activity 2.2a, Dramatic Reading of Mary's Magnificat
- Handout 2.2a, Implications of the Magnificat

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Prepare two participants to do the dramatic reading.
- Make copies of Activity 2.2a and Handout

2.2a for participants.

- If available, review theological commentaries on this text.
- If time permits, memorise the Magnificat.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Prepare two participants to do the dramatic reading.
- Make copies of Activity 2.2a and Handout

2.2a for participants.

- If available, review theological commentaries on this text.

- If time permits, memorise the Magnificat.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

### **Plenary Group Presentation: Activity 2.2a**

- Prepare two participants before the session to do a dramatic reading. Choose a man to read the background section. Choose a woman to read the Magnificat from Luke.
- Begin with the woman outside the room as the man reads the background. When he is finished, the woman will enter the room and read (or recite, if it is memorised) the Magnificat.
- After the presentation, ask the group to share any new insights about Mary's role and character. Does the Magnificat reflect qualities to add to the list generated at the beginning of the session?

**15 minutes**

### **Small Groups or Pairs**

#### **"The Magnificat and Gender" Discussion Questions**

- How does the Magnificat speak to God's order and point of view on gender dynamics? On social structure?

## **Incarnational Power: The Magnificat**

### **Dramatic Reading of Mary's Magnificat**

#### **Background**

Mary and Joseph lived during a time when girls were engaged to be married as early as 12 years old, so Mary most likely was in her early teens. Both she and Joseph were in for big trouble, as their cultural and religious traditions observed Deuteronomy 22:23-24(a) and the law regarded an engaged girl who was pregnant to be promiscuous: "If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death."

In light of this, Mary's faith in God is indeed dramatic as she accepts the responsibility of being the mother of the Messiah. Joseph also demonstrated great faith in accepting the risk of this extraordinary situation, which was not of his choosing. There were gender issues! Both genders were challenged to see their lives and their realities in a new light. As you listen to this poem, keep in mind that Mary is a girl child in a male-dominated society. She is a rural girl, poor and pregnant under very "suspicious" circumstances. Keep Joseph's enlightened role in mind as well.

## **The Magnificat**

Luke 1:46-55: 46 *And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever."*

## **Implications of the Magnificat**

### **...For men's and women's equality**

Both men and women can accept responsibility and take necessary risks. Men and women are on an equal level, morally (in God's eyes) if not societally (in man's eyes). The poor, the non-ruler and the hungry all have a God-given and intrinsic opportunity to live life fully. All have an equal place in the kingdom of God.

### **...For the equality of boys and girls**

The Magnificat speaks directly to opportunities for girls, and Mary reminds us in this passage that the opportunity extended to her was to all generations. Mary was a young girl when God chose her for this role. In many societies, girls are still discriminated against. In some cases, girl children face the risk of being aborted before they are born. In many cultures, girl children are often considered a burden while boy children are considered a blessing.

### **...God's order - Mary's witness in the Magnificat**

God shows a special concern for those who are humble, discriminated against and poor. He desires mercy and will magnify and uplift the humble. In places where men are the rulers and women are treated unjustly, God wants to change this order. By choosing Mary, God demonstrated the value and dignity of a poor peasant girl.

# 3. Jesus Challenges the Gender Dynamic

## Objectives

- Reflect on the role of women during Jesus' ministry
- Prepare participants to engage in meaningful discussion with other training participants, staff and community members on how key scriptural passages relate to gender
- Examine implications of Jesus' encounters with culture and tradition in the New Testament through a gender lens
- Explore key stories from the New Testament through role-plays

**(Estimated Session Time: 2 hours and 10 minutes)**

## Session Flow and Description

### Introduction - 15 minutes

- Share objectives for the session.
- Ask participants to share one of Jesus' encounters (with either a man or a woman) that has influenced or affected their faith.

### Plenary Group Presentation - 20 minutes

*Handout 2.3a, The Context of Women in New Testament Times*

#### **Include:**

- Exclusion from public life
- Separation of genders



- Marriage dynamics
- Roles and responsibilities
- Worship restrictions

### **Discussion Question**

- Which of these constraints or attitudes still affect women in your country or region?
- Describe their impact.

## **Dramatisation Preparation - 15 minutes**

*Activity 2.3a, Dramatisation: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, and Activity 2.3b, Dramatisation: Jesus, Mary and Martha*

### **Group Instructions**

Ask groups to prepare a role-play of the encounter.

- Give group #1 the background information and Scripture text for Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.
- Give Group #2 the background information and Scripture text for Jesus' encounter with Mary and Martha.
- If the two groups are too large, divide participants into four groups and allow more than one group to present each story.
- The groups will need to include a narrator to present the background context for the audience before the role-play begins.
- The groups will need to assign a discussion leader to draw out implications for gender equality and insights into Jesus' life and ministry after the role-play. This discussion leader can review the implications on the handout and ensure that all implications are covered.

## **Role-Play Presentations - 20 minutes**

## **Plenary: Jesus' Encounters with Women and Their Implications - 15 minutes**

## **Discussion Questions**

- Think about a time when you actively or mistakenly blocked someone's future possibility or potential (either gender). What were the underlying reasons?
- In the world's eyes, what were the implications for Jesus' own life regarding his encounters with women and the marginalised in his society?

## **Dramatisation: Group Dynamics in Jesus' Life - 20 minutes**

- Read Mark 7:1-13 to the plenary group. Who are the "players" in this story?
- List them on a flip chart as they are identified.
- Divide the group in half, and designate one individual in each group to be the "director". All members of each group should take a role in the story.
- Have each group create a two- to three-minute skit in which the dynamics and story of this passage are acted out. They may want to include extra dialogue, for example, Pharisees whispering in the background to illustrate what the Pharisees were thinking about Jesus. Jesus' words should not be altered.

## **Plenary Group Presentation - 20 minutes**

Ask the two groups to share their skits.

## **Discussion Questions**

- Describe the experience of playing the role of a Pharisee both before and after Jesus spoke.
- How did it feel to speak Jesus' lines?
- What does this passage say to us today about the original intent of God's law and the temptation to misuse God's law to enforce or expand personal power at others' expense?

## **Post-Session Assignment - Becoming a Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes**

- Track your own gender encounters for a few days.
- At the end of each day, reflect on which encounters possessed transformative potential and why.

## **Materials**

### **Handouts and Activities**

- Handout 2.3a, The Context of Women in New Testament Times
- Activity 2.3a, Dramatisation: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
- Activity 2.3b, Dramatisation: Jesus, Mary and Martha

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Create a presentation based on Handout 2.3a.
- Makes copies of Handout 2.3a and Activities 2.3a and 2.3b for participants.
- Study Mark 7:1-13. You may be called upon to help the small groups with ideas as they prepare.
- Ensure that a flip chart is available to you for this session.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

## **The Context of Women in New Testament Times**

To understand Jesus' treatment of women and how he challenged cultural norms, it is helpful to understand the context of his day. Donald Kraybill describes what he calls "the female box" Hebrew women were put into:

Women were excluded from public life. When walking outside the house, they covered themselves with two veils to conceal their identity.... A woman could be divorced for talking to a man on the street. Women were to stay inside. Public life belonged to men.

Young girls were engaged around twelve years of age and married a year later. A father could sell his daughter into slavery or force her to marry anyone of his choice before she was twelve. After this age she couldn't be married against her will. The father of the bride received a considerable gift of money from his new son-in-law. Because of this, daughters were considered a source of

cheap labour and profit.

In the house, the woman was confined to domestic chores. She was virtually a slave to her husband, washing his face, hands, and feet. Considered the same as a Gentile slave, a wife was obligated to obey her husband as she would a master. If death threatened, the husband's life must be saved first. Under Jewish law, the husband alone had the right to divorce.

The wife's most important function was making male babies. The absence of children was considered divine punishment. There was joy in the home at the birth of a boy. Sorrow greeted a baby girl. A daily prayer repeated by men intoned, "Blessed be God that hath not made me a woman." A woman was subject to most of the taboos in the Torah. Girls could not study the Holy Law - the Torah. Women couldn't approach the Holy of Holies in the temple. They couldn't go beyond a special outer court designated for women. During their monthly purification from menstruation they were excluded from even the outer court.

Women were forbidden to teach. They couldn't pronounce the benediction after a meal. They couldn't serve as witnesses in court, for they were generally considered liars.

Culture is the mechanism we develop to cope with the world around us. When culture develops outside God's rule, it reflects man's sinfulness more than the intentions of God's creation. As Kraybill noted:

“... Jesus knowingly overturns social custom when he allows women to follow him in public. His treatment of women implies he views them as equal with men before God. The prominence of women in the Gospels as well as Jesus' interaction with them confirms his irreverence for sexual boxes. He doesn't hesitate to violate social norms to elevate women to a new dignity and a higher status.”

Jesus related to women and treated them as equals and restored their dignity. In John 4:1-42, he accepted a drink from a Samaritan woman. Elsewhere, a woman with an issue of blood touched him. He welcomed this woman, contrary to ancient laws dictating her touch to be unclean (Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:40-56).

Women were accepted into the ranks of discipleship, often travelling with Jesus and supporting him financially (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3).

In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul's manifesto stresses equality among people: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, **there is no longer male or female**; for **all of you are one** in Christ Jesus [emphasis added]."

## Dramatisation: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

### Group Instructions

- Ask one person to be the narrator and read the background for your audience before the skit begins.
- Ask another group member to lead a discussion at the end of the skit to elicit implications for gender equity from the story. This discussion leader will listen to what the group says and read additional implications of this story listed on this handout if not already mentioned by the group.
- Now, work together to prepare a dramatisation of this story. Everyone should take a role. Remember that there were neighbours, onlookers and community members in this story as the Samaritan woman returns to her village.
- Think about how they would have responded and what they would have said.
- Do not change words spoken by Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

### Background

Women usually drew water at the end of the day, rather than in the heat of midday, as this woman did (verse 6 says it's the "sixth hour"). Biblical scholars have pointed out the hour she chose to draw water, suggesting that perhaps the woman was trying to avoid other women, who would have ostracised her because of her five husbands (verse 18). She was also a Samaritan, whom Jews considered half-breeds. She was an outcast, a morally suspicious woman from a despised ethnic group, and it was socially unacceptable for Jesus to speak with her. In fact, Jewish religious leaders would rarely speak with any woman in public. Yet she is the first person to whom Jesus reveals his identity as the Messiah.

### Story



**John 4:7-10, 25-30:** 7A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (his disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) 9The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water...25The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." 27Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" 30They left the city and were on their way to him.

### **Implications of this story**

Jesus' values radically differed from those of his day, when women were considered to be second-class and inferior in the best of circumstances. Jesus saw this woman as valuable and significant. After conversing with her, he tells her he is the Messiah. This reflects the pattern of his Incarnation, turning existing powers and structures of the time upside down.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus was not born to a high-class family. He was born to a poor peasant girl and her fiancé, who though skilled in woodworking was forced to flee with her and the baby as refugees in the early years of Jesus' childhood. Later, in his ministry years, Jesus did not focus on rich and important members of society. Instead, he associated with outcasts: tax collectors, prostitutes and other "sinners." He has harsh words for Pharisees and religious leaders who use their power to unjustly burden the people they are supposed to serve and lead. Jesus continually broke social norms by paying attention to those on the margins of society.

Clearly, women did not have a very high status in this culture. Jesus is making a statement not only about gender, but also about race and justice. He crosses the boundaries of gender, racial and economic distinctions and shows that all people are worthy of dignity and respect.

<sup>12</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1990).

# Dramatisation: Jesus, Mary and Martha

## Group Instructions

- Ask one person to be the narrator and read the background for your audience before the skit begins.
- Ask another group member to lead a discussion at the end of the skit to elicit implications for gender equity from the story. This discussion leader will listen to what the group says and read any additional implications of this story listed on this handout if not already mentioned by the group.
- Now, work together to prepare a dramatisation of this story. Everyone should take a role. Remember that there may have been neighbours, onlookers and community members entering the house to see and speak with Jesus. Perhaps that is why Martha was so busy and stressed in the kitchen.
- Think about how different people would have responded and what they would have said.
- Do not change words spoken by Jesus, Mary and Martha.

## Background

In the time and culture in which Jesus lived, only men were instructed about God and theology. Just as Jesus took time to discuss spiritual matters with the Samaritan woman, so he also took time to talk to Mary (and to Martha, to the degree she took time to listen...).

## Story

*Luke 10:38-42: Now as they [Jesus and his disciples] went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

**Implications of this story:** Jesus challenges prescribed roles.

The culture in which this story takes place is one that required women to serve men who lived in and visited their homes. Martha was busy with all the duties she was struggling to fulfil. She was doing what was expected of her as a woman. Mary, on the other hand, was doing what was forbidden to her as a woman. She was sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his teachings. Jesus did not rebuke Mary for this, but instead commended her, saying that she had chosen "what is better". Mary's choice is radically different from the typical role prescribed for Jewish women at that time. Jesus' response was radically different from the typical male response to her choice at that time.



# 4. Gender Imagery in The New Testament

## Objectives

- Explore the New Testament with a gender lens
- Prepare to lead meaningful discussion with training participants, staff and community members on scriptural passages related to gender

**(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour)**

## Session Flow and Description

### **Introduction - 10 minutes**

- Share objectives for the session with participants.
- Read the excerpt from Dorothy Sayers in Handout 2.4a.

### **Individual Work: Activity 2.4a, Jesus challenging Gender roles - 20 minutes**

- Give participants the list of gender distinctives in Jesus' ministry.
- Ask them to read the list and the Scripture passages, choose three or four, and reflect on why Jesus used each particular image and way of life to illustrate his parable or teaching.
- Ask participants to make notes and be prepared to share in the plenary session.

### **Plenary Group: Gender Imagery - 30 minutes**

Bring out the rich potential in the imagery and Jesus' lifestyle by having participants share insights from their individual work.

## Discussion Questions

- Who was Jesus talking to in the passage?
- Who is he talking to now?
- Why do these images and lifestyle choices translate across genders, millenniums and cultures?
- What do they tell us about some sources of Jesus' education?
- How does the fact that Jesus, a man, who spoke the way he did, challenge us to transform gender relations and intentionally focus on enlightenment for both genders?

## Materials

## Handouts

- Handout 2.4a, Reflection by Dorothy Sayers
- Activity 2.4a, Jesus Challenging Gender Roles

## Facilitator Preparation

- Make copies of Handout 2.4a for participants.
- Make copies of Activity 2.4a.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.
- Review all Scripture passages used in this session and record your observations and insights.

## Reflection by Dorothy Sayers

Dorothy Sayers, a Christian author, wrote:

Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man – there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them as either, “The women, God help us!” or “The ladies, God bless them”; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity

to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything “funny” about woman’s nature.

14 Dorothy Sayers was a Christian scholar, novelist and thinker. She is counted amongst the “Oxford Christians,” most notably including C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien. Her essay, “Are Women Human?,” on women’s rights and role in a male-oriented society, was published after her death in 1978, under the same title by Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill.

## Jesus Challenging Gender Roles

Please take a moment to reflect on the following gender distinctives in Jesus’ life and what they mean to you as a man or as a woman working today in community development. Make notes and be prepared to share your thoughts and insights in the plenary session.

The following references<sup>15</sup> offer important passages for further study and reflection. Here are some questions to think about as you consider these examples: Which stories about Jesus illustrate his concern for women? How did he challenge the roles society expected women to fulfil? How does Jesus’ example differ from the way we see women treated today in various cultures and places?

### Scripture Reference

Scripture Reference	Your Observations and Insights
Jesus was touched by a woman with an issue of blood. Instead of rebuking her, he welcomed her, despite Jewish law that said she was unclean  (Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:42-48).	
Women travelled with Jesus and supported him financially  (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3).	

<p>All four Gospels record a prostitute having the honour of anointing Jesus at a Pharisee luncheon</p> <p>(Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:37-39; John 12:1-8).</p>	
<p>Jesus' teachings and parables included things familiar to women, such as wedding feasts, childbirth, yeast, sewing and grinding corn</p> <p>(Matt. 9:16; 13:33; 22:2-14; Luke 17:35). He even used feminine imagery to describe God (Luke 15:8-10).</p>	
<p>Jesus' teachings were meant to appeal to both men and women. He often emphasised a point by telling two similar stories, or using two images, one with a man and one with a woman</p> <p>(Matt. 24:39-41; 24:45-51 and 25:1-13; Luke 11:5-9; 11:29-32; 17:34-36 and 18:1-8).</p>	
<p>Jesus' female followers were the ones who stayed with him during his crucifixion</p> <p>(Mark 15:40-41).</p>	
<p>Jesus' female followers were the first ones to arrive at the empty tomb</p> <p>(Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-9).</p>	

Jesus taught women about the kingdom of God, despite cultural constraints that provided only men with religious education. Jesus had women followers in a time when women were not supposed to be in public unless on a domestic errand, much less in public in the company of men unrelated to them. Women ended up being Jesus' most loyal followers, staying with him during his crucifixion after all his male disciples left. Women were the first to witness his resurrection, in a culture that did not value women's testimony.

(See Scripture references listed on the preceding pages.)

# 5. Scripture Search in the Community: Using a Gender Lens

## Objectives

- Prepare participants to use Scripture Search methodology
- Prepare participants to do their part to integrate scriptural principles into all of World Vision's work
- Develop the discipline of studying Scripture with a gender lens

**(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour and 20 minutes)**

## Session Flow and Description

### **Introduction - 10 minutes**

- Share session objectives.
- Ask participants to share an instance when a Bible study changed dynamics in a community or ADP.

### **Plenary Group Presentation - 15 minutes**

Handout 2.5a, Using Scripture Search in the Community

- Include
- The origin of Scripture Search
- The two steps of Scripture Search

## **Small Groups: Using Scripture Search - 30 minutes**

Give small groups copies of Handout 2.5a and Activity 2.5a

Instructions for Activity 2.5a: Present a role-play situation in which Scripture Search and Galatians 3:26-28 resolve a conflict.

## **Plenary Group Debriefing - 20 minutes**

### **Discussion Questions**

- What advantages developed from bringing the conflict into an opportunity for biblical reflection?
- What differences are there between a sermon on Galatians 3:26-28 and the Scripture Search methodology?
- Why is a reflective and open process effective in conflict scenarios?
- In this setting, you were given a prescribed amount of time to work this through. How long do you think the process might take in an actual conflict situation? Why?

## **Post-Session Assignment: Becoming a Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes**

- Begin to gather specific Scripture passages you may want to use in a Scripture Search process.
- Use Scripture Search in your office devotionals. Bring in the gender lens and assist participants to see Jesus' role in gender dynamics.

### **Materials**

#### Handouts and Activities

- Handout 2.5a, Using Scripture Search in the Community
- Activity 2.5a, Resolving Conflicts with Scripture Search Methodology: A Role-Play

## **Facilitator Preparation**

- Make copies of Handout 2.5a and Activity 2.5a.
- Reflect on discussion questions and the Scripture Search role-play.
- Create a presentation based on Handout 2.5a.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

## **Using Scripture Search in the Community**

World Vision Philippines developed the Scripture Search methodology as a tool for assisting communities in integrating Scripture into the Transformational Development process.

The Scripture Search use of the Bible in Transformational Development assumes the Bible is more than a source of rules or a conceptual framework. This methodology recognises a creative encounter with God found in the Bible and the story God has chosen to tell us there.

The Scripture Search process extends the traditional use and scope of the Bible in the following ways:

<b>Traditional use of the Bible</b>	<b>Scripture Search use of the Bible</b>
Primarily addressed to individuals	Primarily addressed to the community
Primarily about spiritual things	Addresses all spheres of life, including the spiritual
Primarily about the world to come	Primarily about this world, and by extension, the world to come
Primarily written from the divine point of view	Primarily written from the divine point of view, but includes the view of the “least of these”

### ***Assumptions of the Scripture Search methodology***

- God is already at work in the community.
- Members of the community have accumulated a great deal of wisdom in all arenas of life, including spiritual perspectives.
- The community is responsible for its own spiritual pilgrimage.



- People in the community are capable of making their own application of spiritual truth to their local situation.
- Local churches of all denominations have the primary responsibility for contributing to the spiritual well-being of the community, and hence Scripture Search is non-proselytising.

Scripture Search is undertaken as part of an action- reflection-action process by which a community guides its own development. The same community group that is organising and carrying out other development activities can utilise Scripture Search.

Within this learning cycle, the Bible is used to illumine the past and guide the future. Scripture becomes a resource for the community's ongoing dialogue regarding commitments, values, beliefs and traditions of the community, all of which affect possibilities of the development programme in positive or negative ways. Scripture Search is not something isolated and relegated to the "religious" sphere of life, but part of a community's holistic and normal development process.

### **Scripture Search involves a simple two-step process**

1. First, a facilitator comes to a community meeting prepared with a Scripture reading, usually a story or a parable, for use during a time of reflection and experience-sharing. Selection of the passage is based on issues the community is facing. The story or verses are handled like a case study, with open-ended questions. Preaching or teaching from the text is discouraged.
2. Second, it is up to participants themselves to determine the relevance of the text in their lives, in light of issues with which the group is struggling. Facilitators use a variety of non-directive methods to encourage wide participation and to draw out insights. Three questions tend to be used in most settings:
  - What are similarities between what is happening in this text and your experience now? (This encourages contextualisation.)
  - What light does this text and the experience of the people in it shed on your experience today? (This leads to prayerful reflection.)
  - What do you think you should do about these insights as a group and personally? (This leads to actualisation and results in a contribution to new plans that trigger the next action-reflection- action process.)

# Resolving Conflicts with Scripture Search

## Methodology

### A Role-Play

#### *Instructions*

Within your group, assign the following roles:

- Community facilitator
- Head of the Water Committee (Man)
- Head of the Education Committee (Woman)
- Community members

#### *Situation*

- You are reaching the last part of an intensive evaluation process for a significant development project. Everyone is overworked and tired at this point.
- When scheduling the final meetings, a conflict erupted between the Head of the Water Committee (man) and the Head of the Education Committee (woman). When she states that it is impossible for her to attend meetings in the evening, he brings up all of the accommodations to the women's schedules throughout the project. Enough is enough. When are needs of the men considered?
- She states that the needs of men are automatically considered and that the particular emphasis on women's needs is simply a corrective.
- He quits.
- As they are both Christians, they finally agree to come together with community leaders for a study of Scripture and prayer.

The community facilitator chooses Galatians 3:26-28, and other members of the group are carefully chosen to help work this through.

Walk through the process of using Galatians 3:26-28 with Scripture Search methodology to help resolve this.