



# ADULT STUDY

from *www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com*

## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 1

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Lost Everything*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who lost everything (Luke 7:11–17) and reflect on how Jesus' treatment of widows might inspire change in our own communities.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once, and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session will have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.
- This session does not assume adults have received and read the Participant Handout prior to meeting. Time will be used during the session for participants to read specific sections and discuss them. Encourage participants to read the handout in its entirety during the week.
- Before participants arrive, write the Mary Oliver quote, "Attention is the beginning of devotion,"

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Attention, the beginning of devotion

#### EXPLORING

- Retelling the story
- Learning and changing

#### RESPONDING

- Reflection: Who would Jesus see today?

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

on the board or newsprint and place it in a location that will be easy for all participants to see upon arrival.

## Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers
- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout for this session
- Copies of the Participant Handout for session 2
- Pens
- Paper
- Jar or basket

## Teaching Tip

Throughout this session, “widows” are referred to as a category of persons. Be sensitive to the fact that there may be some individuals in your group who have lost a spouse and for whom this term is not just a category but a very personal part of his or her identity. These participants may have unique insights into the Scripture, but they may or may not feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

Holy God,  
in this Lenten season we give you thanks for your  
attentive Spirit.  
May our time together today open us to your  
presence  
and help us to consider how we neglect our devo-  
tion to you  
and to those in our community in need of compas-  
sion.  
In Christ’s name we pray.  
Amen.

### 2. Attention, the Beginning of Devotion

Welcome participants to the session and direct their attention to the Mary Oliver quote, “Attention is the beginning of devotion.” Ask them to close their eyes for a minute and picture someone who has shown them devotion in their lives. What are some of the specific forms of attention that contributed to this sense of devotion?

Ask participants to open their eyes and turn to a partner. Have them share the person they recalled and

some of the examples of how attention led to devotion. If anyone would like to share with the larger group, invite them to do so.

Explain that in this Lenten series, the group will explore how Jesus’ attention to women demonstrated his devotion to them as beloved children of God, thereby disrupting the cultural norms of the day. Oppressed by patriarchal systems, from Jesus’ time to today, women continue to be drawn to the good news of Jesus. In today’s session, we will look specifically at how Jesus’ treatment of a widow in Luke 7 might inspire change for our communities today.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 3. Retelling the Story

Have participants take a few minutes to read the section of the Participant Handout titled “The Woman Who Lost Everything.” Form three groups: one to represent the widow, one to represent Jesus, and one to represent the disciples and the crowd. Have each group read Luke 7:11–17 and then imagine the story from their person’s/group’s perspective. Once each group has had a few minutes to prepare, ask them to share their retelling with the larger group. Then, together as a whole group, discuss the following:

- What unique emotions were represented in each retelling?
- How does hearing the story told from three different perspectives, along with the contextual information in the Participant Handout, open us to hear this Scripture in a new way?
- Did you hear something new in the story when you heard another group’s retelling? If so, what did you hear, and how did it change your perspective?

### 4. Learning and Changing

Explain that much of what Jesus did in his ministry was revolutionary. Those who served as witnesses to his relationships with others, like this widow, were challenged to rethink many of their previously held assumptions. Ask participants to take a few minutes to read the section of the Participant Handout titled “The Community Learns and Changes When Jesus Sees.” The authors point out a clear connection between this story in Luke 7 and the treatment of widows that we

observe in the book of Acts. Together, discuss the following questions:

- What other values or practices in today's church are based in the Gospel stories of Jesus?
- How might these practices seem countercultural to the outside world?
- Why is it important for us to understand the scriptural nature of actions we take as a community of faith?

## Responding (5 minutes)

### 5. Reflection: Who Would Jesus See Today?

Give participants a few minutes to read the sections of the Participant Handout titled "Life for Widows in Tanzania" and "Who Would Jesus See Today? Who Do We See?" Pass out small pieces of paper to participants and ask them to write down the name of a group of people who, like the widow in today's Scripture story, desperately need the attention and devotion of Jesus and his community of followers. Invite volunteers to share what they wrote if they feel comfortable doing so.

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 6. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, with a partner, have participants share with each other one new insight they have gained from the day's discussion. Once everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

Before closing in prayer, distribute the participant handout for next week and encourage participants to read it in its entirety prior to the next session.

### 7. Prayer

Gather the pieces of paper from the Responding activity and place them in a jar or basket in the center of your space. Explain that for the closing prayer, your group will be given an opportunity to pray for those you have named as needing the attention and devotion

of the community of Christ. Open the prayer with the following words and then allow time for individuals to pray silently or aloud.

Loving God,  
you offered your compassion and devotion to all,  
but especially to the ones society ignored and  
abused.

Today you do the same, seeking out the ones we  
are most likely to forget.

Help us in this Lenten season to open our hearts  
and minds

to the cries and the silence of the ones who need  
your love most.

Hear us now as we lift them up to you in prayer . . .

*(Leave time for others to pray silently or aloud. When enough time has passed, close with a simple "Amen.")*

## Teaching Alternative

The authors of the study draw from their personal experiences serving in Tanzania. There may be participants in your group who have similar insights from professional or personal travels from places nearby your church or farther afield. Encourage participants to share how various cultures around the world mistreat groups of people and how our attention to these issues can help bring about change. Of course, do not forget to include examples of how this also regularly happens within our own culture and the ways we are called to take action as disciples of Jesus.

## Key Scripture

Luke 7:11–17

## For More Information

Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 2016.

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# ADULT STUDY

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## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 2

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Stole Her Healing*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who stole her healing (Mark 5:24–34) and reflect on Jesus' countercultural approach to shame and honor.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once, and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.
- Although time will be used during the session for participants to read specific sections of the Participant Handout, encourage them to read the handout for the next session during the upcoming week.

### Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers
- Bibles

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Jesus in Mark's Gospel

#### EXPLORING

- The unseen woman
- Shame and honor
- Why search for her?

#### RESPONDING

- Jesus sees her and changes her story

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

- Extra copies of the Participant Handout for this session
- Copies of Participant Handout for next session

- Pens
- Paper
- Jar or basket

## Teaching Tip

In this session’s Participant Handout, discussion of the woman’s physical condition focuses specifically on her infertility. Bear in mind that individuals of any age or phase of life may find this to be a sensitive topic. Allow participants to share their experiences as they feel led, but be careful not to pressure anyone to share during this part of the discussion.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

Surprising God,  
 as we continue our Lenten journey,  
 help us to recognize the ways in which we shame  
 others and ourselves.  
 Through the stories of those you took the time to  
 honor,  
 may we find new reasons to pause, look, and see  
 your image reflected  
 in the faces of the afflicted.  
 In Christ’s name we pray.  
 Amen.

### 2. Review of Previous Week

For the benefit of those who may have missed the previous week’s session, ask those who were present to help summarize what the group discussed and learned. Encourage individuals to share if they had a particular experience throughout their week that called to mind the Scripture passage or the themes discussed in the previous session.

### 3. Jesus in Mark’s Gospel

Drawing from the introduction section of the Participant Handout, briefly summarize Mark’s Gospel for the group, being sure to include the following points:

- Throughout the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus performs many healing and exorcisms. However, he does so uniquely in that he doesn’t charge for his services (as most healers of his day would have).
- In the passage your group will study today, Jesus has been summoned to the home of Jairus in order to save his daughter. Jairus was an important, honorable man

in his town, so the disciples saw this as an opportunity for Jesus to make a name for himself among the leaders of this patriarchal society. However, what happened next caught everyone off guard.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 4. The Unseen Woman

Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 5:24–34 aloud to the group. Instruct participants to close their eyes and imagine the scene as it is read to them. Then allow a few minutes for participants to read the section of the Participant Handout titled “The Unseen Woman Who Interrupts Progress.”

Count off by threes and form three groups. Each group should designate a scribe to record the group’s answers on a piece of paper. Group 1 is to consider the following questions in a global context, group 2 in a national context, and group 3 in a local context. The questions for discussion are:

- What are markers of honor in this context (global/national/local)?
- What advantages do these markers offer those who bear them?

Note: if participants need help getting started on these questions, offer them the following example—most U.S. high schools still practice the tradition of letterman’s jackets, a system in which students can earn letters based on their athletic, academic, or artistic achievements. This marker of honor denotes the effort put forward and offers them certain advantages, both in joining social groups and when applying to college.

Once the three groups have had some time to create their list of markers, ask for a representative of each group to share their lists while a volunteer writes the responses on the board or newsprint so that everyone can see what each group discussed. Explain that in the next activity, the group will refer back to these lists.

### 5. Shame and Honor

Allow a few minutes for participants to read the section of the Participant Handout titled “About Shame and Honor.” Looking to the lists compiled in the previous activity, ask the group to consider and discuss the ways in which these markers promote either shame or honor in the global, national, and local context.

To help us find a Christian response to this shame and honor culture, we look to the story of the woman who stole her healing from Jesus. Direct participants to the following quote in the “About Shame and Honor” section, and read it aloud to the group:

In her own way, though, this woman also showed exactly the kind of faith that Jesus was always looking for—a kind of daring, reckless, risky gamble that ignores and even upsets social, political, and religious properties, all honor and shame—so long as it aimed for good rather than evil.

Ask participants to think of specific individuals who have demonstrated the kind of faith described in this quote. These may be historical figures or individuals who participants know personally. How do you see honor and shame reflected in these stories?

## 6. Why Search for Her?

Allow a few minutes for participants to read the section of the Participant Handout titled “Why Search for Her?” The authors bring up a very interesting point about Jesus’ desire for the woman to receive both physical and social restoration.

Ask participants to return to their small groups from the previous activity and think of a specific issue in which a physical change could also help lead to a social change. Write these examples down to be shared in the Responding and Closing activities.

## Responding (5 minutes)

### 7. Jesus Sees Her and Changes Her Story

Ask for volunteers from each small group to share the specific examples of physical and social restoration. Ask the larger group: How have honor and shame contributed to the situations we have named?

Encourage the group to think of a specific way this group or individuals can respond to dynamics of shame and honor that they see happening in their local context. How might they carry this response into the week ahead?

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 6. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, in pairs, have participants share with one another one new insight that they have gained from the day’s discussion. Once

everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

Before closing in prayer, distribute next week’s Participant Handout and encourage participants to read it in its entirety prior to the next session.

## 7. Prayer

Gather the pieces of paper from the Exploring activity and place them in a jar or basket in the center of your space. Explain that for the closing prayer, your group will be given an opportunity to pray for the individuals, groups, and situations you have named as needing physical and social restoration. Open the prayer with the following words and then allow time for individuals to pray silently or aloud.

Loving God,  
you honor each of us as your beloved children,  
yet time and time again we allow our own perceptions of honor to create shame  
among our brothers and sisters in Christ.  
Hear now our prayers  
as we ask for healing and redemption.  
Help us to be vessels of your peace in a broken world.

*Leave time for others to pray silently or aloud. When enough time has passed, close with a simple, “Amen.”*

## Teaching Alternative

Prior to the session, search headlines in the global, national, and local news for stories in which markers of honor or shame have led to the mistreatment of people. Distribute one of each of these stories to small groups 1, 2, and 3 and ask them to compare and contrast the narrative of these stories with the story of the woman in Mark 5:24–34. How can we help to show a Christ-like faith that brings about physical and social restoration in moments such as these?

## Key Scripture

Mark 5:24–34

## For More Information

“The 5 (Unwritten) Rules of Honor-Shame Cultures,”  
<http://honorshame.com/the-5-unwritten-rules-of-honor-shame-cultures/>.

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# ADULT STUDY

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## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 3

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Claimed Her Place*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who claimed her place (Mark 7:24–30) and reflect on the faith of a woman willing to challenge Jesus' words and actions toward her.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once, and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session will have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.
- Although time will be used during the session for participants to read specific sections of the Participant Handout, encourage them to read the handout for the next session in its entirety during the upcoming week.

### Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Context: the debate about becoming dirty

#### EXPLORING

- Getting away to Tyre
- A mother on a mission

#### RESPONDING

- What does this mean for us today?

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

- Bibles
- Extra copies of the Participant Handout for this session

- Copies of the Participant Handout for next session
- Pens
- Paper
- Jar or basket

## Teaching Tip

Today's Scripture passage is one that has left faithful followers of Jesus unsettled and perplexed for generations. Throughout the discussions and activities you will engage in during this session, be mindful that the goal of your time together is not to arrive at any final conclusions of what is a "right" or "wrong" interpretation of this text. There will always be aspects to Scripture that elude us. The goal of your time together is to allow the Spirit to lead your group in an exploration that may open your hearts and minds to ways of seeing the stories of Scripture in a new light.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

Unsettling God,  
 throughout this season of Lent,  
 give us the courage to face the stories of Scripture  
 that unsettle and even disturb us.  
 As we listen for your Spirit's voice,  
 guide us into new places of reflection,  
 and on this journey may we becoming willing  
 followers of your Word.  
 In Christ's name we pray.  
 Amen.

### 2. Review of Previous Week

For the benefit of those who may have missed the previous week's session, ask those who were present to help summarize what the group discussed and learned. Encourage individuals to share if they had a particular experience throughout their week that called to mind the Scripture passage or the themes that were discussed in the previous session.

### 3. Context: The Debate about Becoming Dirty

Drawing from the introduction section of the Participant Handout, briefly summarize the Pharisees' concern about defilement, being sure to include the following points:

- Leading up to the passage we will study today, the Pharisees had expressed deep concern about Jesus' disciples eating with defiled hands. (They were coming to the table without washing.)
- Jesus responded by using examples from Isaiah to illustrate that true defilement comes from *inside* a person, not from *outside*. He reframes defilement as sin: violence, lying, theft, being unfaithful. It is actions such as these that result in defilement.

Ask participants to keep this context in mind as they hear today's Scripture lesson.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 4. Getting Away to Tyre

Begin by asking the group to share adjectives that come to mind when they think of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Encourage them to come up with as many descriptors as possible. As they share, write these words or phrases on the board or newsprint so that they are visible to everyone in the group. Once you have compiled your list, have the group read all these descriptors aloud together.

Then have participants close their eyes while you read Mark 7:24–30 aloud to the group. Allow them a moment to process the story with their eyes still closed and then invite them to open their eyes and discuss the following:

- Does the Jesus we see reflected in this story reflect the words and phrases on our list? Why or why not?
- How is Jesus' interaction with the Syrophenician woman unlike most of his other interactions with individuals in need?
- How does this interaction make you feel?

Allow a few minutes for participants to read the section of the Participant Handout titled "Getting Away to Tyre." Explain that in the remaining activities in this session, we will be taking a deeper, more critical look at the context and meaning of this passage. However, in order to gauge initial reactions to the passage, designate each side of your meeting space as either:

- Side 1: Jesus was truly frustrated in this moment and snapped at the woman.

- Side 2: Jesus was testing the woman and intended to help her all along.

Ask participants to choose one side or the other, noting that there is no right or wrong answer to this question—this activity is simply meant to measure our initial reaction to this unsettling story.

### 5. A Mother on a Mission

The authors of the study outline six elements of the woman's response that call for deeper exploration. Depending on the number of participants in your group, assign each of these aspects (1–6) to an individual/partners/a small group. Allow a few minutes for participants to read about their assigned number in the section of the Participant Handout titled "A Mother on a Mission." Ask them to consider and discuss the following questions, just as they relate to their assigned number:

- What does this aspect of the woman's response teach us about her character?
- What does this aspect of the woman's response teach us about her understanding of Jesus?

Once each individual or small group has had the opportunity to consider these questions as related to their assigned aspect, ask them to report their findings back to the larger group. Ask for a volunteer to take some simple notes on the board or newsprint so that the group can look back at their findings once everyone has reported. Ask participants to summarize in one or two sentences: What do we know about this woman's character? What do we know about her understanding of Jesus?

To close this activity, share with the group the author's conclusion that because of the woman's persistence, Jesus changed his mind. Do participants agree or disagree? Why or why not?

### Responding (5 minutes)

#### 6. What Does This Mean for Us Today?

In the final section of the Participant Handout, the authors use Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Why We Can't Wait* as a modern-day example of a statement from a believer who demonstrated the courage embodied in the story of the Syrophenician woman in order to demand change in moments of oppression and injustice. They end with a call to look around for those peo-

ple who are in Christ's body even though we fail to see them.

On small pieces of paper, ask participants to reflect for a moment and write down names of individuals or groups of people within our society whom we fail to see and acknowledge as worthy of having a place at God's table.

### Closing (5 minutes)

#### 7. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, with a partner, have participants share with each other one new insight they have gained from the day's discussion. Once everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

Before closing in prayer, distribute next week's Participant Handout and encourage participants to read it in its entirety prior to the next session.

#### 8. Prayer

Gather the pieces of paper from the Responding activity and place them in a jar or basket in the center of your space. Explain that for the closing prayer, your group will be given an opportunity to pray for the individuals/groups/situations you have named as those we fail to see. Open the prayer with the following words and then allow time for individuals to pray silently or aloud.

Hopeful God,  
 you invite us to your table  
 to receive your abundance—in crumbs, in loaves,  
 in a cup that runs over.  
 Yet often in our haste and fear,  
 we ignore those who cry out for a place among us.  
 Help us to be Christlike in our willingness to listen to these voices.  
 Help us to be open to change, no matter what age  
 or phase of life we are in.  
 Hear us now as we ask for forgiveness and pray  
 for reconciliation  
 with those we have failed to see.

*Leave time for others to pray silently or aloud. When enough time has passed, close with a simple, "Amen."*

## Teaching Alternative

Prior to the session, obtain a copy of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Full text and audio versions of this letter may be found at: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>. Quotes and/or summaries of the letter may also be found by conducting a simple internet search. Have participants read the section in the Participant Handout titled "What Does This Mean for Us Today?" and then, in partners or small groups, read King's letter and discuss the specific connections between his message and the words and actions of the Syrochonician woman.

## Key Scripture

Mark 7:24–30

## For More Information

Martin Luther King Jr. *Why We Can't Wait*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

"Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963, [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html). This is an open letter responding to a letter published in the Birmingham newspaper by an interfaith, ecumenical group of white male religious leaders titled "A Call to Unity." That letter encouraged King and the movement to have patience.

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# ADULT STUDY

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## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 4

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Had Five Husbands*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who had five husbands (John 4:1–42) and reflect on the concept of the gift of living water and how we are called to give and receive this gift today.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once, and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.
- Although time will be used during the session for participants to read specific sections of the Participant Handout, encourage them to read the handout for the next session in its entirety during the upcoming week.

### Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Context: hate and conflict

#### EXPLORING

- The three moral economies
- Of mountains and murder

#### RESPONDING

- Living water today

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout
- Pens

- Paper
- Jar or basket

## Teaching Tip

Today's Scripture passage is quite lengthy, and it is filled with many complexities and deep meaning. Be sure not to rush your group through the reading of John 4:1–42. During the Exploring activity in which the passage is read, you may want to ask for two volunteers to read the voices of Jesus and the Samaritan woman while you act as the narrator.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

Living God,  
mid-journey in the desert, we find ourselves  
parched.  
We search for the source of your living water  
as we approach your Word today.  
May it flood the places within us that are withered  
and weary.  
And in your generosity and love toward us,  
help us to find new life.  
In Christ's name we pray.  
Amen.

### 2. Review of Previous Week

For the benefit of those who may have missed the previous week's session, ask those who were present to help summarize what the group discussed and learned. Encourage individuals to share if they had a particular experience throughout their week that called to mind the Scripture passage or themes discussed in the previous session.

### 3. Context: Hate and Conflict

Drawing from the "Introduction" and "A History of Hate and Conflict" sections of the Participant Handout, briefly summarize the history shared between Judeans and Samaritans. Be sure to include the following:

- Today's Scripture passage takes place in Samaria, home of the Samaritan community. Samaritans had their own version of the law, their own language and alphabet, and their own practices of worship. Judeans rejected the beliefs and practices

of the Samaritans and viewed their ways as false teachings.

- When the Samaritan woman questions why Jesus is asking her for a drink, she is acknowledging a history of shared conflict and suffering between their two communities of origin.

Ask participants to keep this context in mind as they hear today's Scripture lesson.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 4. The Three Moral Economies

Before reading the Scripture passage for the day, ask participants to form three groups. Assign each group one of the following economies: human, divine, or demonic. Then give everyone a few minutes to read the section of the Participant Handout titled "The Gift of Living Water." Drawing from the descriptions of the three moral economies, have each group come up with some additional examples of their own to illustrate their assigned economy. Each group should record their examples on a piece of paper.

Once every group has had enough time to compile their lists, ask for a representative from each group to share their examples aloud while a volunteer records them on the board or newsprint. After each group has shared, as a large group, study the lists and add any additional examples participants can think of.

When you have finished, ask participants to listen carefully as you read John 4:1–42 aloud. Ask them to raise a hand every time they hear the word *give*. Once they have heard the passage in its entirety, discuss the following questions:

- What economy does the Samaritan woman have in mind when she speaks to Jesus? How can you tell?
- What economy does Jesus have in mind when he replies to the Samaritan woman? How can you tell?
- How might we operate in our secular lives (professionally, personally, financially, etc.) in such a way that reflects an understanding of the moral economy? What are the challenges to this way of life? What are the advantages?

### 5. Of Mountains and Murder

If there is time, allow participants to review the section in the Participant Handout titled "Of Mountains and Murder" and invite discussion. You might ask:

- What does the author suggest is the significance of calling Jesus the savior of the world?
- What are the implications for Christians today?

## Responding (5 minutes)

### 6. Living Water Today

The authors write, “One way to put Jesus’ gospel on a bumper sticker would be: ‘No more victims/Victims no more.’”

On small pieces of paper, ask participants to write their own bumper sticker gospel tagline based on something they have learned or experienced through the story of the woman who had five husbands. Ask for volunteers who are willing to share what they have written and describe how the story inspired their bumper sticker.

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 7. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, with a partner, have participants share with each other one new insight they have gained from the day’s discussion. Once everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

Before closing in prayer, distribute the Participant Handout for the next session and encourage participants to read it in its entirety prior to the next session.

### 8. Prayer

Ask for participants to close their eyes and think of an individual or group that is in need of Jesus’ living water. Invite them to keep this person or group in mind as you pray together. Open the prayer with the following words and then allow time for individuals to pray silently or aloud:

God who brought the waters forth in the beginning;  
 who fed the tired, hungry, and thirsty in the desert;  
 who greeted the Samaritan woman at the well;

listen now as we lift our prayers to you  
 for those who are in need of the gift only you can  
 give,  
 the gift of living water, so that they might never  
 be thirsty again.

*Leave time for others to pray silently or aloud. When enough time has passed, close with a simple, “Amen.”*

## Teaching Alternative

If you have a group that might be open to acting out a skit, encourage them to form small groups, read the story of John 4:1–42, and place it in a modern-day scenario. Turn this scenario into a skit that the small groups then perform for each other. Then discuss the following questions:

- How does thinking about this story in modern-day terms change or influence our understanding of its meaning?
- Who are the Judeans and Samaritans in our midst today? What does it look like for them both to share from the well of Jesus’ living water?

## Key Scripture

John 4:1–42

## For More Information

“Calendar Inscription of Priene,” Wikipedia.org, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar\\_Inscription\\_of\\_Priene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar_Inscription_of_Priene).

Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 55.

“Samaritans,” Wikipedia.org, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritans>, for more information.

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# ADULT STUDY

from *www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com*

## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 5

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Saw and Anointed Jesus*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who saw Jesus and anointed him (Mark 14:3–9) and reflect on the concept of the gift of living water and how we are called to give and receive this gift today.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once, and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session will have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.
- Although time will be used during the session for participants to read specific sections of the Participant Handout, encourage them to read the handout for the next session in its entirety during the upcoming week.

### Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Context: crucifixion in Mark's Gospel

#### EXPLORING

- The female prophet unlike any other
- The resistant disciples

#### RESPONDING

- Choosing our story

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

- Bibles
- Extra copies of the Participant Handout for this session

- Copies of the Participant Handout for next session
- Pens
- Paper
- Jar or basket

## Teaching Tip

In the section titled “The Two Kinds of Stories,” the authors present a dichotomy: a male-centered, violent story and a female-centered, nonviolent story. Your group may need some extra time to explore and unpack this section, giving particular attention to how historical and cultural norms have contributed to the observations named by the authors. It is important to specify that this dichotomy is meant to reflect specifically the last three chapters of Mark’s Gospel.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

God whose ways are not our own,  
 you see us better than we see ourselves.  
 And in rare moments, we are grateful to see you  
 in your midst.  
 As we turn to the story of the woman who  
 anointed you  
 as your crucifixion was imminent,  
 help us to choose the path that leads to the hope of  
 your resurrection.  
 In Christ’s name we pray.  
 Amen.

### 2. Review of Previous Week

For the benefit of those who may have missed the previous week’s session, ask those who were present to help summarize what the group discussed and learned. Encourage individuals to share if they had a particular experience throughout their week that called to mind the Scripture passage and/or themes discussed in the previous session.

### 3. Context: Crucifixion in Mark’s Gospel

Drawing from the “Heading toward Crucifixion” and “His Disciples Resist” sections of the Participant Handout, briefly summarize the context of crucifixion for your group. Be sure to include the following:

- One of the unique features of Mark’s Gospel is the “messianic secret,” meaning that no human

knows Jesus’ true identity until about halfway through the Gospel. Even once his identity is revealed, the men who were his disciples didn’t see and understand his ways until after his death and resurrection. However, the female disciple in today’s story sees and understands before then.

- While the disciples had no intention of accepting their own violent death at the hands of the Romans, because they wanted to force death on their enemies instead, Jesus demonstrated a leadership that was self-sacrificial to the point of death.
- The struggle between Jesus and his male disciples is the context for his anointing in today’s story.

Ask participants to keep this context in mind as they hear today’s Scripture lesson.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 4. The Female Prophet unlike Any Other

Begin by asking for a volunteer to read the passage, Mark 14:3–9, aloud to the group. Then allow a few minutes for participants to read from the section of the Participant Handout titled “The Female Prophet unlike Any Other.”

Form two groups and designate one of the groups “Courageous” and the other group “Offensive.” For the purposes of this activity, the courageous group is to draw from the Participant Handout and Scripture passage and create a list of ways in which the female prophet was courageous. The offensive group is to take a different view on the situation and, drawing from the Participant Handout and Scripture passage, create a list of ways in which the female prophet was offensive to those around her.

Once each group has completed their lists, ask them to share their findings with the larger group. Together, discuss the following questions:

- What are some other examples of individuals throughout history whose courageous acts were found to be offensive?
- Why is it that courage so often offends?
- How do you imagine the disciples felt after hearing Jesus’ response to the woman’s actions?

### 5. The Resistant Disciples

The authors write, “The reaction of the men present is predictably disappointing” and “From this point on

in the Gospel, Jesus' disciples increasingly turn away from him, finally abandoning him at his arrest." They seem to suggest that because Jesus did not affirm their instincts, whether it was their desire to criticize the female prophet or their desire to kill the Romans, they quickly turned away from him.

As human beings, we are all prone to resisting the will of our Savior. In partners or small groups, ask participants to think of some stories or messages of Jesus that we actively resist in our own lives. Discuss together:

- What are some of the things Jesus tells us that we do not want to hear?
- How do we resist Jesus' call on our lives?
- How might we, like the woman, act in greater understanding of the call of Christ Jesus?

## Responding (5 minutes)

### 6. Choosing Our Story

Give participants a few minutes to read the section of the Participant Handout titled "The Two Kinds of Stories." When they have finished, hand out small pieces of paper and ask them to write a response to the following question: If Jesus is the divine bringer of a whole new way of life, what is one concrete step I am willing to take to participate in his ongoing story?

Participants will not be asked to share their responses to this question, though if anyone offers to share their response, they are welcome to do so.

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 7. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, with a partner, have participants share with each other one new insight they have gained from the day's discussion. Once everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

Before closing in prayer, distribute the Participant Handout for next week and encourage participants to read it in its entirety prior to the next session.

### 8. Prayer

Ask for participants to hold the pieces of paper with their concrete steps for participating in Jesus' ongoing story in an open palm as you pray the following prayer:

Merciful God,  
at times we are like the prophet woman:  
courageous enough to offend,  
open enough to see your presence before us.  
But too often we are like your disciples:  
blinded by the way we think your story should  
unfold  
and quick to criticize and silence the prophets in  
our midst.  
Be with us in the days ahead, and take these inten-  
tions and prayers we offer you today.  
May we be faithful and courageous enough to  
take part in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who  
died and rose for us.  
Amen.

## Teaching Alternative

In the introduction to this session, the authors note, "in the church's active memory, the Last Supper and the men present at it are well remembered, but this woman is not well remembered, in spite of Jesus' prophecy concerning her." Using Vanderbilt University's Revised Common Lectionary Resource Site (<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>), find several pieces of artwork that correspond with both the Last Supper (Matt. 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–39, and John 13:1–17:26) and the woman who anointed Jesus (Matt. 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9, Luke 7:36–50, and John 12:1–8). Print some images or create a slideshow of them, and compare and contrast how the woman is depicted versus how the disciples are depicted. What do these pieces of artwork communicate about the significance of the woman and the significance of the disciples?

## Key Scripture

Mark 14:3–9

## For More Information

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1994).

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# ADULT STUDY

from [www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com](http://www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com)

## LEADER'S GUIDE Session 6

# Jesus Sees Women: An Adult Lenten Study

*The Woman Who Was Set Free on the Sabbath*

### Goal for the Session

Participants will explore the story of the woman who was set free on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17) and reflect on the roles of bondage and freedom in Jesus' ministry.

### Preparing for the Session

- Read the Participant Handout and this Leader's Guide at least once and consider what adaptations need to be made for your group.
- Pray that all who might come to the session will have a meaningful experience.
- Organize chairs in such a way that participants can see one another during discussion.

### Materials Needed

- Board or newsprint
- Markers or chalk
- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout
- Pens
- Paper
- Jar or basket

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Prayer
- Review of previous week
- Context: Luke's Gospel

#### EXPLORING

- Bondage and freedom
- The Sabbath day
- A name for the nameless

#### RESPONDING

- Women and freedom

#### CLOSING

- New insights
- Prayer

## Teaching Tip

This last session is an opportunity to look back and summarize what the group has gained from participating in this Lenten series. Given time constraints, you will want to decide ahead of time if you'd like to devote your entire session to this particular lesson or if you'd like to spend some time looking back. The "Teaching Alternative" at the end of this Leader's Guide offers some suggestions on how to lead your group through a reflection on the entire series.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### 1. Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

God who makes us free in Christ,  
we thank you for sending your Son to us  
so that we might be loosed from the chains of sin  
and bondage.

In this time together, help us remember that once  
we were captive to sin,  
but set free in Jesus, now we are called to serve in  
his name.

Amen.

### 2. Review of Previous Week

For the benefit of those who may have missed the previous week's session, ask those who were present to help summarize what the group discussed and learned. Encourage individuals to share if they had a particular experience throughout their week that called to mind the Scripture passage or themes discussed in the previous session.

### 3. Context: Luke's Gospel

Drawing from the introductory section of the Participant Handout, briefly summarize the context of Luke's Gospel for your group. Be sure to include the following:

- Throughout his ministry, Jesus challenged commonly held perspectives of the day. For example, he taught his followers that tragedies and other horrific events were, in fact, not a sign of God's disfavor. He told parables that celebrated the virtues of care, mercy, and patience.
- In today's particular text, Jesus heals a suffering woman on the Sabbath. Curing her of the physical disfigurement she has suffered from

for eighteen years, he is immediately confronted by a leader of the synagogue who is critical of the fact that he has performed his healing on the Sabbath.

- The Scripture passage we will explore today includes issues of bondage and freedom, healing and Sabbath, and the nature of our worship of God.

Ask participants to keep this context in mind as they hear today's Scripture lesson.

## Exploring (25 minutes)

### 4. Bondage and Freedom

Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 13:10–17 aloud to the group. Then allow participants a few minutes to read the sections of the Participant Handout titled "Bondage and Freedom" and "The Meaning of Eighteen." The authors note that while in many Gospel stories the verb meaning "to heal" is used, in this story Jesus uses two verbs whose meaning is "to set free, to untie, to loose, or to release," implying that this woman's condition effectively bonded or imprisoned her. This choice of words, along with the number eighteen, would have called to hearer's minds the bondage and oppression experienced by their ancestors, the Israelites.

Our nation also carries with it a history of bondage and oppression, from the earliest days until now. On your board or newsprint, draw a simple time line from 1776 up until today, with markers at each one-hundred-year mark. Ask for participants to come forward and add to the time line moments in our nation's history when bondage and oppression were confronted. (Note: if your group is too large to do this on a common board or newsprint, this activity may also be done in small groups.) Once participants are finished, discuss the following questions:

- Why does it matter that, in this story, Jesus uses a verb that means "to set free" instead of "to heal"?
- How does this give us new insight into the moments in our nation's history when oppression and bondage have been confronted?
- What is the "unfinished business" of our nation today—who are the ones living in bondage? Who are the captives still waiting to be freed?

## 5. The Sabbath Day

The authors quote from both Exodus and Deuteronomy in order to illustrate two different understandings of Sabbath. In Exodus, Sabbath is equated with rest. In Deuteronomy, Sabbath is equated with freedom. In today's passage, Jesus clearly leans toward the Deuteronomic interpretation as he frees the woman from her ailment.

Allow a few minutes for participants to read the section of the Participant Handout titled "Remember the Sabbath Day: Which Way?" Then, with partners or in small groups, ask them to discuss the following questions posed by the authors:

- What would it look like for someone to practice Sabbath by being set free or setting another free in order to praise God more fully?
- Who do we know who is oppressed or in bondage? Whom could we set free as a Sabbath discipline?

Once partners or groups have had a few minutes to discuss the questions, ask for volunteers to share their insights with the larger group.

## 6. A Name for the Nameless

At this point in the session, determine whether you will spend the remaining time focused on this particular lesson or if you will utilize the options in the "Teaching Alternative" to review all six sessions in this series.

Although we do not ever learn the name of the woman in this story, Jesus gives her a name when he refers to her as "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). Not only did this place her in relationship with Jesus, but it also gave this daughter of Abraham the full rights and privileges of an heir.

Give each participant a sheet of paper and ask them to fold it into quarters. In each quadrant of the paper, ask them to write a name by which they are called by someone in their life. For example, in addition to our given name, some of us may have nicknames bestowed by friends or relatives, names that identify our profession, and names that may identify our familial relationships.

When participants have finished, ask for volunteers to share which of these names means the most to them. What is the significance of this name? How does it influence who they understand themselves to be? Close with a reminder that in God's eyes, we are all named "Child of God" and, as such, are God's beloved.

## Responding (5 minutes)

### 7. Women and Freedom

Give participants a few minutes to read the sections of the Participant Handout titled "Jesus' Perspective on Women and Freedom" and "Conclusion." The authors close by challenging readers/participants to do the following:

- remember Jesus
- adopt Jesus' vision
- discern how to act

Distribute small pieces of paper to each participant and ask them to write down one step they will commit to taking as a response to this series that will help them carry out the threefold charge of this story: remember Jesus, adopt Jesus' vision, and discern how to act.

## Closing (5 minutes)

### 8. New Insights

Offer participants a few moments to reflect on everything that has been discussed in this session. Then, with a partner, have participants share with each other one new insight they have gained from the day's discussion. Once everyone has had time to share, ask for volunteers to share their newly gained insights with the larger group.

### 9. Prayer

Ask for participants to place the pieces of paper with their concrete steps for fulfilling the threefold charge of the study in a jar or basket and say this prayer over their intentions, allowing time for them to voice their own prayers should they desire.

God who sees, discerns, and acts on our behalf,  
we thank you for this Lenten journey we have  
been on together,  
for all the ways in which your Spirit has opened  
our eyes to your living Word, and  
for the community we have built through time  
and conversation dedicated to You.  
We pray that as we go out into your world, we  
might seek freedom in the face of bondage  
and, by naming all we encounter as our siblings  
in Christ,  
grow closer to one another and to you.  
Amen.

## Teaching Alternative

Walking back through the stories and themes of each session, jot down some notes on the board or newsprint about the highlights of each session. To help you get started:

- Session 1: The Woman Who Was Losing Everything (Luke 7:11–17)
- Session 2: The Woman Who Stole Her Healing (Mark 5:24–34)
- Session 3: The Woman Who Claimed Her Place (Mark 7:24–30)
- Session 4: The Woman Who Had Five Husbands (John 4:1–42)
- Session 5: The Woman Who Saw Jesus and Anointed Him (Mark 14:3–9)
- Session 6: The Woman Who Was Set Free on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17)

Ask participants to share which of the sessions was most impactful for them and why. What insights have influenced their Lenten journey the most? Ask everyone to come up with one word that summarizes what

they will take with them as a result of participating in this study.

## Key Scripture

Luke 13:10–17

## For More Information

Cecilia Kibada, “Violence against Widows Is Still a Nightmare,” *The Citizen*, September 22, 2018, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/magazine/Violence-against-widows-is-still-a-nightmare/1840564-4772964-14de8vm/index.html>.

Monica Mhoja, “Branded as Witches, Stripped of Land: Tanzania’s Widows Need Support,” Landesa Rural Development Institute (blog), May 11, 2018, <https://landesa.org/blog-branded-as-witches-stripped-of-land-tanzanias-widows-need-support>.

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