Women in the Mission of God

Diocese-Based Leadership Training Program
Mennonite Churches of East Africa (KMC/KMT)

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Objectives:

1. To help women find their place in the work of the Kingdom of God.

2. To encourage the church to use the gifts women bring to the church and the communities they live in.

3. To challenge women’s fellowship groups to broaden their vision to reaching out to their communities.
Lesson 1  Introduction - Women in the Mission of the God

Just as God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 (I will bless you, and through you all the nations will be blessed) included and depended on Sarah’s participation, so God today requires both men and women to continue his mission in the world. Before the foundations of the world, God adopted us as his children to show his grace to others, to inherit his rich blessings and to bring praise for his glory. His plan to redeem all people to himself and restore human fellowship with Him includes the participation of all God’s children. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

In the OT there are many examples of women who were called to partner with God in the work he was doing in the world.

- **Miriam** used her gift of leadership and partnered with her brothers Aaron and Moses in leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. (Exodus 15:20; Micah 6:4)
- **Sarah**, as a faithful wife went up with Abram from their home and became the mother of a nation according to God’s promise. (Genesis 12:5; 1 Peter 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:11)
- **Jochabed**, mother of Moses, put her faith in her God and followed her inclinations to go against the king’s order. By the simple act of saving her son, she prepared a child who although raised in the Egyptian courts, afterward was used of God to rescue his people from Egypt (Exodus 2:1-10; Hebrews 11:23)
- **Deborah**, a prophetess and judge in Israel went into battle with Barak at God’s instruction. (Judges 4:4-10) The victory God gave Israel through her leadership gave Israel rest from war for 40 years. (Judges 5:7, 31)
- **Esther** was used to save God’s people from being destroyed by the Persian King. Although she was a foreigner and a woman, she used her position as queen to boldly go against protocol, and with the prayers of God’s people sustaining her, she trusted God who gave her wisdom to deal with the situation.

In the time of Jesus, women continued to be used of God.

- **Mary**, the mother of Jesus, and **Elizabeth**, the mother of John the Baptist, through holiness of life were chosen to bear the forerunner of the Messiah and the Messiah. (Luke 1:28-38)
- Some women who had been cured by Jesus were followers of Jesus, and ministered to Jesus and his disciples daily from their own resources. (Luke 8:2,3) These included **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanna**. They were key witnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry, and also of his death and resurrection. (Mark 15:40-41)
- The **woman of Samaria** (John 4:39-42) was not shunned by Jesus because of her past or her heritage. She became the first evangelist and brought many from her village to the knowledge of Jesus. (John 4:39-42)
Jesus elevated the status of women by allowing them to participate in his ministry. By using examples of women of faith and their roles in his teachings and stories, he modeled a higher standard of equality between men and women.

Women of the Bible served God in their daily lives through circumstances that came their way. They put their trust in God during times of need. They honored and served God through sincere holiness of life, through obedience, and through openness to his will. Through them God was able to accomplish amazing demonstrations of his power and glory.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What was the purpose of God before the foundation of the world? (Ephesians 1: 3-14)
2. Chose one example of a woman in the OT who is a challenge to you and state why you chose that woman.
3. Give an example of a woman who was used by God through a small act, but became a blessing to many.
4. List important character traits you see in our examples of Biblical women. Can these traits be developed in today’s women so that God can use us?
5. Identify an act or gift you may have that God could use.
Lesson 2 Women in the Christian Church

The early believers began seeing wonders of God being performed within the body of Christ in the context of meeting together daily for fellowship, teaching, breaking of bread and prayer. As they learned to know each other they became aware of needs among themselves and within the larger community. In response, they began selling their possessions and goods bringing them to the church to distribute to any that had need. God blessed this effort and through it many more were saved and came to faith (Acts 2:42-47). Even today, the church’s vision should not be focused only on our own needs but focused on the poor and needy outside the church in our communities (Deuteronomy 15:11; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23; Romans 12:13).

The early church welcomed women to do the work of the church in partnership with the other disciples.

- Women were present when the great commission was given, telling the disciples of Jesus to “Go, tell, teach and make disciples.” (Matt. 28:10)
- They were there praying with the disciples, and waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:14)
  - It was a women’s prayer group that received the first missionaries (Acts 16:13) and became the founders of the church in Philippi (Phil. 4:2,3).
  - Lydia, a businesswoman extended hospitality to Paul and Silas and later ministered to them after they had been in prison. Acts 16:12-15, 40)
  - Priscilla who worked alongside Paul with her husband Aquila, helped Apollos to understand the way of God more perfectly. (Acts 18:18, 24-26)
  - The daughters of Philip prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).
  - Paul commended Phoebe, a deaconess who traveled extensively and oversaw 2 churches (Romans 16:2).
  - Paul sent his greetings to Mary, “who has worked hard for you” (Romans 16:6).
  - Junia, a female relative, who was in prison with Paul and was “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

Questions for discussion:

1. In your own words, describe the setting in which the early church saw other people’s needs and were willing to share their possessions and goods with those in need.
2. What was the result of sharing with those in need?
3. How can we become more aware of needs in our communities and develop the compassion to risk our possessions for the good of others?
4. Why do you think Paul, the first missionary, was sent to a women’s prayer group?
5. What other things did women do in the early church?
6. Why do you think the early church didn’t exclude women’s participation in the work of church?
Lesson 3 Members of the Body of Christ

Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians likens the church to the body of Christ, of which Christ is the head. Through his sacrificial love for us he wants to present us to God as a holy and blameless bride (Ephesians 5:23-32). Even as a body is made up of different parts and needs all members participating to function properly, so the church needs each member to do its part for the good of the whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Romans 12:4-5). Because we are “baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ”, we are all given equal importance and grace within the body (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No one can say that another member is not important or of lesser importance than they are. Even if some parts are weaker and less respectable, the body as a whole should honor those parts even more and protect them from exposure to any injury. When one member suffers or doesn’t do its part, the whole body suffers. If one member succeeds or rejoices, all rejoice.

Women as individual members of the body are given tasks and spiritual gifts that contribute to building of the church. Women along with the other disciples of Jesus were given the same commission to go, make disciples, baptize and teach (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus desires to send all disciples out into the harvest (Matthew 9:37). While Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, he challenged the social traditions of his time by noticing and ministering to women along with others. In talking to the Samaritan woman at the well he broke all cultural and social norms, but when he had finished his conversation with her, she was so excited, she went and told others about the Messiah. She, a sinful, but changed woman, became the first evangelist! Jesus didn’t tell her, “That’s not your job!” He thoroughly affirmed her enthusiasm and her ability to share the good news and used her testimony for the good of others.

God’s plan from before the foundation of the earth, was to bring all as his children together into one family (household) whose head is Jesus. As we join together we grow into a holy temple and dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2:19-22) But individually, we each are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice which is holy and acceptable to God. (Romans 12:1) Our offering of service becomes an expression of our worship to Him.

Discussion questions:

1. How is the church like the body of Christ? What do members of the body of Christ do out of respect for their head?
2. How does the church function like a body?
3. Are there different degrees of importance in the body? Are there different roles for the members of the body?
4. What is more important, the job of each member, or how it contributes to the whole functioning of the body?
5. What other examples can you give of how Jesus challenged the way his society thought about women.
6. What are ways women can be a living sacrifice to God?
Lesson 4 Women and their Gifts

The Spirit gives varied gifts to members in the church for use in building up the body and for the ministry of the church (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

- Each person who is a member of the body of Christ has a particular gift that can be used (1 Corinthians 7:7; 1 Corinthians 12:7).
- Paul admonishes Timothy to not neglect the gift that was given to him (1 Timothy 4:14).
- The gifts given to the church are mentioned in several places in the Bible. Prophecy, faith, ministry, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, diligence, compassion, and cheerfulness (Romans 12:6).
- Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing miracles, prophesy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
- Apostles, prophets, teachers, leaders, deeds of power, healing, assistance, and tongues (1 Corinthians 12:27-31, a list of the contributions or jobs within the church).

It is in identifying our own gifts that we can begin to understand how God wants us to be used in the church. Sometimes it is easier to see a gift in another person than it is to recognize our own gift. We are impressed easily with what we see in another person and wish we could also bless others in the church. The best way to discover your gift is to volunteer for simple tasks or simply begin doing things that might bless others and that you think you might enjoy. After trying some simple service for the Lord you may be able to identify the things that give you the most satisfaction. Also listen for affirmation from others about your gifts, not to be proud, but to help you be certain that God has given you a gift for that service to others or the church.

Remember, not everyone needs to serve in a way that is given special recognition by the church, in fact, it is more important to be noticed by the giver of gifts (God). He is pleased when you bless others through the gift he has given you even in the ordinary activities of the day. Women in general tend to be more relational, so often display the gifts of caring, nurturing, and giving to others. The church needs these gifts. But the Holy Spirit also gives spiritual gifts to women that are to be used to strengthen the church. Women can be powerful in their ministry of prayer, and in encouraging and coming alongside others in their struggles. Women also tend to be less authoritative in their approach, working cooperatively with others, for the good of all. They tend to be open and willing to share from personal experience, and others can learn and benefit from their openness. This is a powerful tool of women for both teaching and motivating others to change.

Questions for Discussion:
1. What is the purpose for God’s gifts to each person in the church?
2. What’s the difference between special abilities and spiritual gifts?
3. We tend to look at positions that need to be filled in the church rather than emphasizing the use of spiritual gifts. Is this good or bad? Why?
4. Are the gifts of healing, prophecy or preaching more important than the gifts of hospitality or generosity? Why are some gifts more prominent than others?
5. Have you been able to recognize someone else’s gift? Have you affirmed them in using that gift? Take some time helping each other to identify possible gifts among you.
Lesson 5  Women and their Roles in the Church

The Church has not always done a good job of including women in the ministry of the church. We need to rethink the roles of women in the church, so that the specific contributions of women can be fully utilized for the benefit of the church and the community. Rosalia Oyeweka in her book, *Reaching Out to the Women of Africa*, says, “The main issue is not that of women taking over the authority in the church, but enabling them to use their gifts and talents to enhance the Kingdom of God, together with men.”1 The church needs to challenge the roles that society has placed on women as second-class citizens, and needs to elevate women to equality with and not inferiority to men. The Bible teaches that women and men are both created in God’s image and have been given gifts that are needed in the church. (Read *Genesis* 1:27; *Galatians* 3:28) Hence, they have equal status with men, not to compete with them but to work together with them in God’s work.2

It does seem that women and men’s roles may be different in the family but this does not give status to one over the other in the church. In other Biblical teaching, the man is given the leadership role, and the woman the supportive role in marriage and in the home. The woman is called to submission in order to maintain harmony and be in partnership with her husband for smooth running of the home. However, each person in his/her role is asked to give due respect to the other because both are heirs together in the Kingdom of God (*Genesis* 2:18; 1 Peter 3:7; *Ephesians* 5:21,22,25).

There are examples of women in the Bible such as Deborah and Miriam in the OT who were chosen to fill leadership roles for specific jobs alongside the men in leadership. (*Judges* 4; *Micah* 6:4) They displayed certain gifts that were important in accomplishing the purposes of God. Even so today, women are called to develop and use their specific gifts whether in leadership or other roles to assist in the ministry of the church. The New Testament also gives many examples of women who worked alongside others leaders in the early church (*Acts* 16:12-15; *Romans* 16; *Acts* 21:8-9). Denying a woman an opportunity in the church just because she is a woman, means leaving out the potential use of her God-given spiritual gift and excludes a high percentage of church members from participating in the work of the church. To recognize and use the gifts of women is absolutely necessary for the church to function fully as the body of Christ.

How then do we explain Paul’s instruction to the church about women being silent in the churches? (1 *Corinthians* 14:34-35; 1 *Timothy* 2:11). The New Testament letters were personal letters written by Paul and Peter to encourage newly established churches. Many of these churches were experiencing problems in their church life that still had roots in their cultural background. It seems Paul was attempting to address some issues that had developed in these churches such as unruliness in services and certain women taking control of matters in the church. He felt that in these situations, it was best for the women to learn by quiet listening rather than by participating in the discussions.

Unfortunately, over the years, these verses have been emphasized strongly in the church since men have had the authority to do so, instead of reading all the other scriptures that obviously allow women to speak and encourage women to be used according to their gifts. Part of the
problem over the years may be in the way these words were translated. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word generally translated silence, has more of the meaning of “quietness, and peaceable presence, tranquility,” not “to be without voice.” The word authority should be more correctly translated as “not to dominate, or domineer over another.” If these verses would be read in this way, it would allow for women with appropriate behavior and gifts to be full participants in the congregation and be valued for the service they bring to the church.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is it Biblical to say that a woman’s status is not equal to man’s status?
2. How have roles and status become entangled in the thinking of the church?
3. What should be a woman’s attitude as she functions in the church?
4. Should a woman be able to be in a leadership position if she has the gifts for that position or is the most spiritually mature person in a new church?
5. Under what circumstances should a woman be considered a potential candidate for ordination as a pastor?
Lesson 6   Benefits and Challenges of Women’s Fellowship Groups

Women comprise a large percentage of the church and are a natural link to the needs in the African community. Women meeting together for prayer and fellowship have a unique opportunity to reach out to others for relevant grassroots teaching. Often after fellowship, women don’t hurry home but stay to talk about issues in their lives. These discussions can be a common ground for learning new things together and can help women to learn to solve their own problems. Positive change can happen when women work together for the good of the community. It is important for women of the church to understand how to bring wholeness and life to their communities and how to do it within their own resources. Women themselves are best equipped to minister to the needs of other women in the church and have natural daily contacts with other women in the communities they live in. They can be a tremendous influence for good in the church community.

Women’s fellowships have some benefits over other groups that meet. Usually they are more informal and flexible, allowing for the inclusiveness of women of various backgrounds and faith journeys. Fellowships have a common purpose of sharing spiritually hence there is a stronger commitment to each other without the necessity of rigid structural organization. With the Bible as a teaching tool, women can be motivated and challenged to practical changes in their lives (Titus 2:3-5). Learning from the stories of Bible women and men can help to strengthen our faith and give guidance for how we live (1 Peter 3:1-6). As women learn together and look at their lives, they begin to strategize together to help each other solve problems or gain insight on situations they are facing. Biblical teaching can easily be expanded to very practical things such as personal health, care of the family, and taking care of the earth.

There are also some specific challenges that women’s fellowships face. One challenge often found is a mistrust of leadership. Some women, especially in rural areas, when given a little power may use it for their own benefit. Traditionally women’s groups have been built around small projects that are meant to help women increase their capacity to better their own lives. This has led to an over-emphasis on money. When money becomes the focus of a group it can bring many problems such as jealousy and misuse of money which is usually handled by the leaders. When there is mistrust with a group, and vision becomes narrow and full of competition the potential of influence in the community is very limited. Instead of the usual small moneymaking projects, women’s fellowship groups should be widening their focus to helping others solve their problems and building capacity within individuals and within the community. Mistrust can also come from within the church leadership, especially if the group may be accomplishing something that the church feels should be done under the leadership of the church.

Another challenge that women’s fellowships face is that of how to govern themselves. Because women for many years have tended to be restricted to certain roles in the church, they do not always feel competent in leadership roles. This often leads to confusion and poor management and to improper use of leadership. It is important for women to learn appropriate models for leadership and then to be wise in giving positions to those who have the ability to lead effectively, not just based on friendship or family relationships. Allowing
women to control their activities or tell them how to do things only adds to the confusion and often takes away the control women need to have for their own decisions. Women need to learn for themselves how to get correct information and develop ideas that they have. They need to know how to access materials that will help them understand their situation fully and address their concerns properly. They need to develop confidence and competence in their ability to ward off criticism that comes, but also need to be able to accept non-interfering advice if that should be needed.

Questions for discussion:

1. Discuss the differences of women teaching women, and men teaching women. Why is teaching more effective if women are used teach women?
2. Name some reasons why fellowships groups have a natural way of influencing and teaching concerning life issues.
3. How can Biblical teaching be a motivating factor for practical changes in daily life issues?
4. Why is money such a challenge to women’s fellowships? How can we put less focus on money and more focus on improving daily life?
5. How do we as women improve our capabilities to govern ourselves?
6. How do we build trust within our fellowship groups?
7. When choosing leaders for a group, what qualities make a good leader?
Lesson 7 Developing Vision

In order for women to begin reaching out to others, it is important first of all to develop a vision for what needs to be done. The book of Nehemiah is a good example of how a vision and plan were developed to meet a need. Read and study the account in the book of Nehemiah to help us understand the steps we should take for developing vision.

- **Nehemiah 1:3** A report of a need among his people brings grief to Nehemiah.
- **Nehemiah 1:6** Nehemiah brings the need to God while praying and fasting.
- **Nehemiah 1:8-10** He pleads the assistance of God for his people and devises a plan.
- **Nehemiah 2:5** He requests the assistance and blessing of the King.
- **Nehemiah 2:17-18** He rallies the people’s support for the rebuilding of the walls.
- **Nehemiah 2:19** They face resistance but trust in God giving them success.
- **Nehemiah 3:1** Organization begins, includes everyone from high priest to the daughters of Shallum (3:12)
- The rest of the book of Nehemiah reports on their progress, their difficulties, and how they eventually completed the project.

Women’s fellowships first of all need to understand that they are participants in the work of God’s kingdom. Once we as women are convinced we do have work to do in God’s kingdom, we need to develop smaller visions of service in their communities. These smaller visions develop as we become aware of spiritual, physical, and social needs in the families and communities around us. Spiritual needs can be addressed through regular Bible teaching and discussion in your groups. Much developmental teaching is focused on the very things that women are involved in on a daily basis, so there is great opportunity to work with women to improve their standard of living. Women are the ones who farm, plant crops, harvest, buy and sell, feed families, and need to make money reach for their children’s education. They are responsible for the health of their children and the management of the land. These roles are productive and important in making healthy communities to live in. Our goal should not be to take these roles away from women but to find ways to make their work easier, more efficient and more productive. This then will elevate their status of living and give them more control over their daily lives.

Our vision should always be related to local needs and our teaching must be given on a level that can be understood. Change happens in small ways, and is only effective when women understand and can manage to carry out the changes. Big changes that require the expertise of an outsider and cannot be maintained by local people, usually are not successful. Our goal should be that as we teach and improve people’s lives, they should be able to share what they have learned with others who will pass it on to the others (2 Timothy 2:2).
Questions for discussion:

1. Review the steps of developing a vision that Nehemiah used. What should be the foundation on which vision is built?

2. From what should we develop vision?

3. Good organizational skills are required to make a successful plan. Identify a person or persons in your group who have this gift and affirm that person.

4. Is it all right to only address spiritual needs in our groups?

5. Start small, address a need that your group can handle. Is this a good motto?

6. What should our goal be, according to 2 Timothy 2:2?
Lesson 8  A Holistic Approach

“African people have a way of looking at the world that sees everything as part of the whole. This is called holistic thinking. The spiritual world is seen as part of the whole and not separated from the physical.” Everything in life influences and affects everything else. So it is very appropriate in the African setting to present practical teaching concerning daily life and physical needs along with spiritual teaching. The Hebrew word, Shalom, best describes the ideal of total health and well-being that God intended for us as his children. Holistic teaching through women’s fellowships attempts to bring Shalom to women, addressing physical, mental, social and spiritual needs (Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 2:1-12; 1Thessalonians 5:23.)

According to Mrs. Oyweca, some of the most common topics that are relevant in the communities around us include child health, hygiene, preventive medicine, home remedies, home environment, gardens, food production and storage, clean water, and feeling good as women. Many health issues can be reduced very simply by learning about where diseases come from and how to prevent or to control diseases. Women’s fellowships are ideal places for simple teaching concerning the spread of malaria, Typhoid, T.B., childhood diseases, tetanus, polio, child spacing and AIDS. Community health workers can be brought in to do the teaching or women from the group who are knowledgeable in the basic health concepts can also teach. Our teaching should give practical suggestions such as the use of mosquito nets, the importance of immunizations, how to provide safe water and food for their families. We should teach them about risky behaviors that will give them diseases. There are home remedies that many African women know to help with diarrhea, fevers, and worms. Women should be taught other simple health solutions such as preparing oral rehydration solution for sick children, management of fever, and early treatment of illness. Teaching of this nature can be used to save lives and reduce the amount of money spent on medicines and health care. When women share information, ask questions and discuss their daily lives with each other, a lot of practical learning takes place.

In addition to health teaching, women should be taught how to conserve resources of fuel and water, how to collect clean water, how to improve their cooking methods and kitchens, how to replant trees and plan for the future. Tips concerning gardening such as using manure, composting and retaining moisture in their gardens can be taught through fellowships. These are small things even the poor can use to increase the quality and output from gardens. Problems of proper storage, distribution, and marketing should also be discussed. All teaching of course, has to be done in the right spirit, and ideas need to be presented carefully with allowance for discussion by the group in order for ownership to take place.

Women who learn how to improve their lives and solve their own problems begin to feel better about themselves. They begin to take pride in the work they do, and soon see the value of learning and helping each other to live better. When practical teaching and spiritual teaching take place together, the whole person is developed and people come to a new level of Shalom.
Question for Discussion:

1. Discuss some examples of how Africans think “holistically.” (Spiritual affects social, and physical, and physical affects spiritual). In what ways is this good? In what ways is this bad?

2. Do you agree with the list of issues that need to be addressed in African communities? Make a more specific list for your community according to the importance of need.

3. Assess how you could begin to address these issues. Are there people in your group who can provide simple teaching and guide discussion of these issues?

4. How does building self-esteem and knowledge among women strengthen their influence in the community?

5. At creation, man was given the mandate to take care of the earth. In what ways can we take care of and conserve the resources of the earth?
Lesson 9  Culture, Taboos, Morality, and Money

In many African cultures women are restricted in a way that binds them to certain duties or activities. They are often seen as second-class citizens, as property of the husband, or even as a slave to their master. Through our study we have seen that this is not a Biblical view of women even though many church attitudes and practices reinforce these cultural views. As Christians we need to be willing to question some of these cultural traditions to bring real freedom to women.9 Cultural taboos often cause resistance to teaching that could save lives and lead to positive development in society. Often these taboos carrying weight because of the fears or threats that accompany them. Christians, however, have a way to address fears through faith in Jesus’ power.

Rosalia Oyweka puts traditional beliefs and practices in three groups: Helpful, Neutral (neither helpful or harmful), and Harmful.10 She defines helpful practices as those that should be encouraged even if they are done for the wrong reasons. Neutral practices are those that can be ignored because they are neither harmful nor helpful. However, harmful practices need to be carefully assessed and addressed. Motivation to change these should be based on biblical teaching concerning care of our bodies as the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), release from fear (Psalm 34:4; 46:2; Isaiah 41:10; 51:12-13) and other spiritual teachings such as freedom in Christ.

Some examples of teaching that addresses harmful traditional beliefs are:11
- how various dietary restrictions are harmful for pregnant women
- children with measles should be bathed to help reduce fever
- the need to reduce rather than increase the temperature of someone with fever
- the need for plenty of fluids for a child with diarrhea

Fellowships are not only important for the teaching they give on these issues but also for the support they can provide women who step out of traditional cultural patterns. A faith community can help provide the courage necessary to confront cultural issues that need to change.

Because of the foundation of Biblical teaching, women’s fellowships have a unique opportunity to address moral issues in society. God’s laws were established to provide the best possible circumstances for his created beings. Teaching such as the Ten Commandments, love of one’s neighbor, and the Christian approach to marriage all provide a basis for morality in our societies today. A Biblical perspective on sexual behavior should be an important teaching in the church to address attitudes and conduct that lead to sexual diseases and AIDS.

For many people, even in our churches, development is tied with money. However, in rural areas, where resources are limited, money making projects are often not successful and are frequently limited to only a few people. There is an alternative more holistic approach to development where the emphasis is how to make the money that is available go further and how to reduce the need for some uses of money. This is called income substitution. Some examples of income substitution may include: food production on their own farms,
prevention of disease to reduce medical bills, mending clothes, using energy saving stoves, growing firewood trees, and learning to make soap, body oil, candles from locally available materials. This approach strengthens fellowship groups and reduces the emphasis that is prevalent in society that money is the solution of all problems. ¹²

**Questions for Discussions:**

1. Should all cultural practices be questioned and challenged?
2. What should be our guide when dealing with cultural taboos and practices?
3. Think of some tribal or cultural taboos that have negatively impacted your community. What can women do to address these issues?
4. What are some issues of morality that you see in your community? How could your women’s group speak to these issues?
5. Do you think an emphasis on money has destroyed some women’s groups? Give some examples.
6. How do you think income substitution would work in your community?
Lesson 10 Participatory Learning – Helping People Learn

Just as soil needs to be prepared for planting in order to produce a good crop from seeds we plant, so our teaching needs certain conditions to help it take root and prosper in the hearts of people. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9) reminds us that unless we are careful where and how we plant seeds of truth and change, we will not reap the benefits we desire. Our teaching may have difficulty sprouting, or be choked out by other difficulties and die before it becomes mature. This lesson will teach us how to prepare the soil and to help people learn from the teaching we do in our fellowship groups.

People who have studied how adults learn best, have found out that participatory learning is most effective for adults. Because adults already have learned much from their experiences they can use those experiences as resources to help each other to learn. Participatory learning takes advantage of gathered knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge through dialogue and discussion in a small group setting. Adults are quick to learn if the material presented is relevant to their lives. Their powers of observation and reasoning are mature and can be beneficial if they are given respect regarding their views and experiences. This is a people-oriented approach rather than a content oriented approach. It also emphasizes problem solving by the people themselves rather than being told how to solve a problem. In this process of learning people are helped to understand a problem, how to look for possible solutions and how to apply and carry out the solution.

Participatory learning is best accomplished in small groups of 4-12 with a designated leader who does not give all the input but leads dialogue among the participants. They should be encouraged to sit together in a circle enhancing discussion and open sharing among the group. Everyone should be given the right join in and each viewpoint should be respected for what it is. No one person should be allowed to dominate the discussion and all persons should be encouraged to give new ideas, trying not to duplicate the ideas of others. Some may be encouraged to share their own stories or perhaps have a parable or fable that may pertain to the topic. Demonstrations and practical exercises (hands on learning) may also be appropriate at some point to enhance the learning process. Questions prepared prior to the dialogue are helpful to draw out ideas from the group. Questions may also develop during discussion and should be directed to and answered by the participants, not by the discussion leader. Learning done in this way empowers women to see themselves as capable, and the potential for them following through on their ideas is much higher than when they are simply told solutions to their problems.

There will be times when your fellowship group may need to call on someone outside the group to provide input to address issues that the group feels incapable of addressing. It is advisable to use other trained personnel sometimes to help with teaching concerning difficult issues. Listening for potential links to other groups, connecting with them to learn specific skills or gain insight from things they have learned will be of value to your group, but do not use them to take the place of working on your own solutions as a group.
Questions for discussion:

1. Why is preparing the minds of people for the seeds of our teaching so important?
2. How and why is learning in adults different from that of children?
3. What are the basic rules of participatory learning?
4. Develop some questions to ask when talking about a certain problem.
5. How should dialogue be conducted?
6. Why is it important to make teaching relevant to your group?

Credits:


1. Page 25
2. pg. 30.
3. pg. 39,53.
4. pg. 20.
5. pg. 20.
6. pg. 56.
7. pg. 54.
8. pg. 70.
9. pg. 80.
10. pg. 82.
11. pg. 83.
12. pg. 86.