




## Facilitator's Guide

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# WELCOME

WELCOME TO *SHE: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry*. Your role as a facilitator is an important one. You are guiding the conversation. You are creating space for honest conversation. You are coming alongside the participants to accompany them in this process and possibility of empowerment. This is holy and sacred work.

Thank you for being willing to accept this important role and for taking on something that is not just about teaching material but about being willing to engage others in a process of discovery, appreciation, and growth. Thank you for realizing that pastoral care might be necessary in these gathering sessions.

Given the nature of the subject matter, adherence to every step and every word in this facilitator guide as well as the participant book is not possible. We believe in a living God who has chosen to dwell with us, to change us, to be changed by us. As a result, fluidity, discovery, and creativity should be at the heart of these five weeks.

The purpose of this facilitator guide is to help you in the covering of this material, but it is better to imagine the goal as understanding how you are hosting space for truth and discovery. Your role is not to “teach” the material or impart information but to guide the discussion, to come alongside the participants in their questions and comments, and to tend the process. You are not the one with all of the answers. Rather, you have accepted a call to host and protect, to enable and ease a conversation. You are also a listener—not just listening for the facts and experiences that people share but also how they are interpreting those experiences. How are they making sense of them? This is one of the goals of *SHE*. It is not enough to talk about our experiences as women in ministry. We also need intentional interpretation so as to move to a different space and place of being and thriving.

## INTRODUCTION

The premise of *SHE: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* is telling the truth, and hearing the truth is no easy task. In telling the truth, we risk judgment and rejection. In hearing the truth, we internalize that judgment and rejection rather than viewing it as a moment of possibility and change. It is awfully hard to speak the truth when you don't know the truth about yourself. To believe and understand what it means to be a woman in ministry depends on some radical truth-telling. If that does not happen, then women in ministry will be blindsided by unrealistic expectations.

Why do we begin with truth-telling? Because this is, in part, what we are called to do in the church. This is what the Bible does. It tells the truth about ourselves. Our joys and our sorrows. Our sin. Our brokenness. But it also tells the truth about God. How God is active in our lives. How God responds to our brokenness with love, mercy, and grace upon grace. As people in ministry, we need to be adept at both kinds of truth-telling so as to speak into the fullness of the biblical witness.

## CREATING A SAFE SPACE

*It's a privilege and an act of love to tend formation spaces,  
and we are able to do it because we have been loved.*

—Carla Dahl

Truth-telling will not happen unless people know that the space in which they speak the truth, their truth, is safe. Before addressing the material for the first session, you will need to begin the meeting with establishing this safe space. The first session should plan for a longer meeting time so that the ground rules can be set for the kind of environment that is essential for vulnerable speech. The first activity in this first session should be to set the parameters for safe space and a contract for conversation. The nature of the material demands that the group is committed to letting go of all judgment, competition, and expectation. This is not a place to determine winners and losers. It is not a space to perpetuate the binaries of our culture. Rather, it is a blessed opportunity to be in the kind of dialogue and relationship that is rather rare these days in our culture—an opportunity for trust and honesty and truth. Talking about some of the most personal realities of our lives and ministry such as faith, vocation, identity, authenticity, voice, sexuality, and bodies needs a generous and grace-filled space where the truth does not sense some kind of demanded censorship.

The space needs to be a place where you view the other as one whom God loves. As John F. Kennedy said, “Too often we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.” Thoughtfulness in our speech, in our own approach to the material at hand, and toward the other go a long way in creating the kind of community where true change can occur. Disagreement is inevitable, but we agree to come from a place of kindness. We agree to be committed to how we can help one another live into the unique person in ministry God calls us to be.

The ground rules can be formulated by the group itself but you should have several basic principles in place, such as confidentiality, nonjudgmental presence, trust, and deep regard. As the facilitator, you will need to work at establishing agreed-upon approaches of engagement and encounter.

Topics in the books will surface memories and old wounds as well as suggest and expose feelings otherwise unknown. The issues discussed are those that touch the core of who we are. Creating a safe space means safe-guarding vulnerability and having each other's backs.

Essential for safe space conversation is *regard* and *risk*: regard means that you respect the presence and opinions of the other. You may not agree, but it is not your job to agree. It is your job to be present without judgment. Regard means to choose to come from a place of kindness. Regard means also a commitment to listen to understand and not just listen so as to reply, all the while

formulating your own response. It means believing in the other without an immediate reaction of questioning or conclusion. Someone once said, “Speak your mind, but ride a fast horse.” That might very well need to be a reality in ministry, but it does not have to be the situation for this study. Participants need to know that they can speak their mind and that the other members of the group will listen in love.

A safe space is one in which you trust that you can take risks; to speak out loud that which is in your heart, perhaps that which you have never said out loud before. “Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage,” said Anaïs Nin. As Brené Brown notes, courage is not bravery. Courage is living and leading from your heart. This is heart talk. If you cannot risk your heart, then the space is a dangerous one. If you cannot risk, then transformation may not be possible. Transformation means risk-taking. It demands courage. It admits change is necessary. Are you going to play the game or change the game?

Creating a safe space might also mean giving permission for participants to leave at any time. “You are not free to stay unless you believe you are free to leave” (Brenda Schaeffer). It may very well be that a participant cannot continue with the study for any of a number of reasons. For this truly to be a place of regard and respect, a participant needs to know that finishing the course may not, in the end, be an option. Perhaps the material in the study surfaces too many other subterranean issues that need more attention than the topics of the book itself. Support that decision. And come alongside that person with any kind of help you are able to provide. Pray for that person—that what needs to be addressed for the sake of living out of truth can be found and experienced.

As the facilitator, you will also introduce to the group the kind of language everyone should be conscious of using with one another. As discussed in the participant book, you need to have each person share with the group what pronoun they would like to be addressed with (<https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/>). In order to cultivate an environment of inclusion and nondiscrimination, commit in general to using nongendered pronouns and nouns when referring to mixed-gender groups (e.g., “humanity” rather than “man” or “mankind”) or when the gender of a subject is unknown, fluid, or gender identified.

Furthermore, our use of language and pronouns when it comes to God also needs to be a topic for discussion at this first meeting. All language is insufficient to describe God. Moreover, scripture uses both masculine and feminine metaphors to explain God’s relationship with God’s creation. We should be aware to avoid using gender-specific pronouns for God and to use male and female pronouns interchangeably. If the use of gender-specific pronouns is necessary to make an argument or claim about a particular biblical text, a theological commitment, or an opinion, that usage and its justification should be acknowledged in the conversation.

*Tending to formative spaces is an act of love.*

—A friend

## OVERVIEW

The course is five sessions long, with each session focusing on one of the five keys. The format for the facilitator’s guide for each session is the same: BACKGROUND AND FOCUS,

GATHERING AND CHECK-IN, POINTS OF ENTRY, POINTS OF DISCUSSION, and CLOSING. As the facilitator, you should read through the entire chapter of both the facilitator guide and the participant book to get an overview of the material and to make some decisions for each session. For example, the GATHERING AND CHECK-IN exercise and CLOSING exercise could be interchanged depending on your group and your own goals for the session.

The participant book suggests five points of connection for each chapter: Read, Reflect, Reconsider, Reframe, Renew. The participant book imagines that Read, Reflect, Reconsider, and Reframe happen prior to each session as groundwork for the group experience. READ is to read the chapter in the book as well as the additional resources as there is time or interest. REFLECT asks the participants to reflect on specific questions in response to the reading and in preparation for the session discussion. RECONSIDER suggests that the participants reconsider some key aspects of the material in response to the reading and intentional reflection. REFRAME helps participants consider how engagement with the material has brought them to a place where a reframing of the questions or issues is more helpful than asking the same questions provided from the beginning. This area of focus explores how things have changed over the course of working with the material. RENEW is the step imagined as response to the group meeting. RENEW encourages the participants to imagine how they will choose to be different, or what action might they take in the next week. These actions are simply possibilities and experiments, not necessarily a lifetime commitment. They are actions that they might want to try out. They are things to practice. Think about practice from the perspective of music. It takes practice to feel more comfortable with certain skills. These are practice steps, not habits or rituals to which they have to be beholden forever.

The BACKGROUND AND FOCUS section sets the stage for the chapter and is for your information/preparation for the session. The GATHERING AND CHECK-IN time can be an opportunity for check-in but should be brief, having participants share one or two words that describe how they are feeling as they gather for the session. You might decide that each GATHERING AND CHECK-IN will begin with prayer, either a prayer addressing the theme of the session, a prayer that gives voice to the concerns of the group that have been shared with you, or a prayer in which all persons are given space to voice specific issues.

The POINTS OF ENTRY section provides suggestions for inviting and entering into the discussion. The video segment is meant to provide the primary point of entry into the material, but it can be used in any way you choose. Given time constraints, you may need to choose only one or two of the POINTS OF ENTRY options, or imagine taking up some of the possibilities offered in this section later in the session.

Each session will offer POINTS OF DISCUSSION questions. This facilitator's guide as well as the participant book have questions you can choose from as a starting point for your discussions. You won't have time to use all of the questions in these resources, but as facilitator you will take the temperature of the group as you go along and choose which questions the group will explore together. POINTS OF DISCUSSION is a place for imagination and creativity. One technique for discussion is to use the Parking Lot method, where questions that surface can be written down on a blackboard/whiteboard/Post-It for later discussion. You might also want to leave a minute or two at the end of the session for participants to write down questions to hand in to you that you can then read during the week and decide how to address in the next session.

The facilitator's guide also provides a CLOSING with different possibilities for wrapping up the conversation.

Prior to the first session, send a welcome correspondence to the participants in the group. The welcome letter might sound something like the following, but feel free to edit and adapt as best works with your circumstance and context:

Welcome to *SHE: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry*. I am honored to be your facilitator for this important and, I hope, meaningful time of discussion.

Details about meeting: length, location, materials, etc.

Our time together will include five parts: Background and Focus, Gathering and Check-In, Points of Entry, Points of Discussion, and Closing. For our first session, please read the preface, the introduction, and chapter 1 of the book and the participant book. In addition, please come prepared to provide a brief introduction of yourself: your name, why you are here, and one sentence or quotation that caught your attention in the readings.

I'm looking forward to spending this time with you.

A suggested length for each session is 90 minutes, with 15 minutes dedicated to gathering and check in and the last 15 minutes to wrap-up, consider next steps, and close the session. However, session length can be determined by the group and adjusted accordingly. You may want to contract with the participants to have the first session be longer so that you will have time to watch the introductory video and cover the material in the preface and the introduction.

## SESSION ONE

# KEY NUMBER ONE: THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN, THE BIBLE, FEMINISM, AND THEOLOGY

*Your value does not decrease based on  
someone's inability to see your worth.*

—Unknown

## BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

WE HAVE TO start with the Bible. Because this is why we are here. The primary goal of this first chapter is to invite participants to think about and be honest about what the Bible means to them. It is rare that we have an opportunity to have these kinds of conversations. So much of talk about the Bible remains on the surface of its content, as if the content alone determines meaning. People still insist that the Bible can be read objectively, that is, without any realities, contexts, or experiences that might shape interpretation.

We need to tell the truth about what the Bible means to us. That we are selective about what is in it. And that our claims about the Bible are also claims about who we think God is. What do we really feel about the Bible? What is our relationship with the Bible? If we can have truthful conversation about what the Bible means to us, perhaps we can let go of the notion that the Bible is only ideas and rules, and actually begin to talk about how it helps us make sense of our lives.

We have to start with the Bible because of the way in which the Bible has been used to justify whether or not women should lead in churches.

The purpose of this chapter is to facilitate conversation around the importance of knowing one's theology and owning one's view of the authority of the Bible. Many conversations around Bible passages corralled for whatever purposes result in disagreement simply because the starting point is competition or scriptural proof-texting. The goal of this discussion is to invite dialogue around the Bible that goes to the deeper level of assumptions that we have of the Bible and to admit that our theological commitments shape our interpretation of scripture. This is not an exercise to expose those of us who have theological biases, because we all have them. The issue is whether or not we know them or are willing to admit them. Our theological commitments determine what we see, and what we want to see, in the Bible.



Asking questions about the authority of scripture, however, will raise discomfort. For some, the authority of the Bible has never been in question. For others, the Bible has been used as a weapon against them—against who they are and what they believe. As facilitator, you need to be prepared for this anxiety.

We need confidence in our faith vocabulary, in what we think about the Bible, in how we talk about the Bible, not for the sake of competition or winning a proof-texting battle, but for a commitment to conversation around the Bible that expects openness and discovery.

## GATHERING AND CHECK-IN

Watch the introductory video. Some questions you might want to ask could include:

What are some initial questions about or responses to the video?

Did you have a favorite quotation in this chapter?

What was it and why did it have meaning to you?

Is there a quotation that you would add to this chapter?

Reflect on the following quotation:

*The opposite of faith is not doubt, it's certainty.*

—Anne Lamott

How does this quotation relate to our discussion about the meaning and authority of the Bible?

## POINTS OF ENTRY

Have someone read the poem/reading at the beginning of the chapter. Invite conversation around how the poem/reading intersected with the material in the chapter. Are there certain words/phrases that stood out and had new meaning?

Have two or three people (or everyone) share the Bible stories that they identified as representing the core of their theology.

What Bible story did you identify as representing the core of who you are, and what did it show you about who you think God is?

What Bible story or biblical book summarizes your theology?

## **POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

Consult the Exercises and Questions for Discussion at the end of the chapter in *SHE* and decide which questions you might like to focus on. Consult the participant book for possible avenues for furthering the conversation. For example, have participants share if and how their view of the Bible changed after working through the material for this session.

## **CLOSING**

Prayer is always an option for the closing time—and an important one. The facilitator needs to gauge what is needed for the group depending on the tone and mode of the group conversation. The closing time might also include looking ahead to the next week by setting out some initial areas of focus for the reading/exercises for the week. The closing might also return to the poem at the beginning of the chapter, perhaps reading it together.

## SESSION TWO

# KEY NUMBER TWO: THE TRUTH ABOUT VULNERABILITY, BODIES, AND SEXUALITY

### BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

THE FIRST THING this chapter asks us to do is to think about God in a rather unpopular way—that at the heart of God’s character is vulnerability. Vulnerability is often misunderstood as sharing too much or as referring to weakness. One of goals of this chapter, therefore, is to reframe vulnerability as essential to ministry because it is essential to who God is.

Vulnerability is at the center of this chapter because of its focus on the challenges that women face because of the objectification and sexualization of our bodies. The expectations of female bodies are out of control, yet these expectations continue to take hold of our very selves, defining our identities and our ministry.

As objects of scrutiny, we are hard on ourselves, judge ourselves against others, and constantly compare ourselves to unrealistic representations of the female body. As noted in the participant book, according to the documentary *Embrace* (<https://bodyimagemovement.com/embrace-the-documentary/>), 91 percent of women hate their bodies. We need to ask what that means for how we do ministry when one of the principle claims of our theology as Christians is that God became human. God became flesh. Does that make a difference for how we think about ministry, about our leadership?

We need spaces and places to tell the truth about how we feel about our bodies and how our bodies really do embody our faith and our ministry. This chapter calls us to embrace our bodies as the locus of ministry, as that which communicates God’s love. The reality is that ministry is deeply incarnational, sensual, and sensorial. We do ministry with our bodies—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching. Sometimes it is our bodies that do ministry because our words cannot suffice. We need to imagine how to live out a theology of embodiment because at stake is the incarnation itself.

In this discussion, you will need to be prepared for the spectrum of potential expression when it comes to people sharing how they feel about their bodies. To embrace the incarnation might be all but impossible if your body has been beaten and violated, ridiculed and abused. For some, this may be the first time they have even admitted to their very selves the truth of what has happened to their bodies. The participant book offers resources for people who may realize that they need to seek help in dealing with sexual abuse.

## **GATHERING AND CHECK-IN**

Watch the introductory video.

What initial questions about or responses to the video do you have?

Did you have a favorite quotation from this chapter? What was it and why did it have meaning to you?

Is there a quotation that you would add to this chapter?

## **POINTS OF ENTRY**

Watch Brene Brown's video on vulnerability listed at the end of the chapter ([https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)). Invite response to the video with particular focus on what it means to claim vulnerability, an essential characteristic of God, as a way of doing ministry.

Have someone read the poem/reading at the beginning of the chapter. Invite conversation around how the poem/reading intersected with the material in the chapter. Are there certain words/phrases that stood out and had new meaning?

## **POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

Discuss the questions at the end of the chapter about body. Invite participants to share how they answered the questions about their bodies. Leave space for the direction that this discussion might take. Do not overscript this conversation, as the subject matter demands freedom from the constraints of fear and shame that likely have trapped many when it comes to body image.

## **CLOSING**

End the session by doing a modified lectio divina on John 1:14. Invite participants to name how and in what way they can hear the promise of this verse differently because of the session's conversation.

## SESSION THREE

# KEY NUMBER THREE: THE TRUTH ABOUT GENDER, IDENTITY, AND AUTHENTICITY

## BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

TELLING THE TRUTH about gender, identity, and authenticity is to recognize how challenging it is to maintain our authentic selves when there are so many expectations in the church, especially for women. Not living your truth is exhausting—physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually exhausting. Naming that exhaustion is essential. Our efforts in ministry can be less fatiguing if we are leading from our true selves. As the facilitator, you might want to consider spending some time thinking about what makes up your identity, how you do ministry from your authentic self. Your willingness to share your own experiences can go a long way in creating the space necessary for participants to imagine their own sources for identity and authenticity.

This chapter invites reflection on the core commitments of your life that are essential to who you are. Are you willing to share some of yours with the group? Can you name one or two that you have to remember because they are central to who you are, particularly when your authenticity and identity has been challenged?

In this session the facilitator will need to be sensitive to the idea of voice. It may be that in the process of this course and in this session, someone's voice could be set free. Identity and authenticity find meaning in the idea of voice, which is not just what comes out of your mouth but your whole being. You may even express to the group that this session is a step toward discovering your own voice. One of the saddest truths about voice is the realization of when your voice has been silenced. This is a reality for many and will require empathy, compassion, and pastoral care. Important to a life in ministry is believing that God needs your voice. And when you are able to speak your own truth, when you know your own voice, you are able to help others speak their truth as well.

This conversation will also necessitate a realization of and sensitivity to the radical binaries of gender that exist in our society now. You will need to wonder, even assume, that someone present might be struggling with gender or could be in the process of gender transition. Gender identity makes expectations of gender all the more confusing, complicated, and oppressive for all people, but especially when ministry in the church demands certain assumptions about leadership incongruent with gender discussions and struggles today.

This chapter also focuses on the need to have people in your life who see when parts of you drift away and are willing to name when that is happening. It is important to help participants realize the roles that certain people play in their lives. For example, there are significant distinc-

tions between friend, mentor, coach, supervisor, and expert. Knowing the kind of accompaniment necessary to live into and from your true self might very well be a goal of this session for some participants. One of the results of working through this book and the workbook could be that a participant determines the necessity to pursue guidance in ministry with a more formal and intentional arrangement such as a professional coach. Clergy coaching, life-coaching, and preaching-coaching are all potential areas of interest. You will want to have a resource list for people who have identified these specific advocacies for their ministry.

## GATHERING AND CHECK-IN

Watch the introductory video and invite questions and responses.

Did you have a favorite quotation in this chapter? Why did it have meaning to you?

Is there a quotation that you would add to this chapter?

## POINTS OF ENTRY

Have someone read the poem/reading at the beginning of the chapter. Invite conversation around how the poem/reading intersected with the material in the chapter. Are there certain words/phrases that stood out and had new meaning?

Authenticity is a rather popular notion these days, but what does it mean?

What does authenticity mean to you? Why is it important?

Do you recall a time when you knew you were not living out of your truth?

Invite participants to reflect on this quotation:

*And if I asked you to name all the things that you love,  
how long would it take for you to name yourself?*

—Unknown

## POINTS OF DISCUSSION

*Instructions for living a life. Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.*

—Mary Oliver

Have participants consider the following quotation with the focus of this chapter in mind:

*The surest way to lose your self-worth  
is by trying to find it through the eyes of others.*

—Becca Lee

Invite participants to talk about what core commitments are central to who they are. We name them and know them in order to make sure that we are clear about what is most central to who we are.

What is one core commitment that resonates with you?

Why is that commitment core to who you are?

Can you describe a time when this core commitment was so far off balance, so neglected, that you knew or sensed that you were “in trouble”?

## CLOSING

Ask participants to name one core commitment that they have identified as needing attention and how they imagine tending it specifically this week. What steps will they take? Who will they entrust to help them make it happen?

End with this quotation as a benediction and sending:

*Be who God meant you to be  
and you will set the world on fire.*

—Catherine of Siena

## SESSION FOUR

# KEY NUMBER FOUR: THE TRUTH ABOUT SEXISM

### BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

THERE IS A crack in the proverbial glass ceiling—several of them, in fact, which is one of the reasons that an entire chapter on sexism is necessary. Whereas there was a time when the church only had to entertain the notion of women in ministry, now it has become a reality. The church has not taken the necessary steps to catch up with the new landscape of leadership it supposedly endorsed.

There is an entire chapter on sexism so as to tell the truth about how prevalent it is in our society—and that the church is not immune to this systemic sexism. In fact, it may even be worse within the church. This chapter tells the truth about how it feels when your ministry is consistently and constantly assessed and evaluated based on your looks and not on your skills, your mind, or your theology. This chapter tells you that you are not alone and you are not making this up.

One reaction to this chapter will be disbelief. If the participants keep a sexism log as the “homework” for this session, they will likely come with a sense of surprise but also dismay. Sexism relies on the power of rhetoric, the power of words to demean and disregard and dismiss so that participants may arrive with a very real sense of being “beaten down.” Time will be necessary to process the truth of how systemic, prevalent, and ubiquitous sexism is in our lives. We are not being emotional.

One of the tools to navigate the constant sexism in the church suggested by this chapter is a glossary of sexism. Why? So that you can begin to name what is really happening rather than dismissing these comments as “Oh, he didn’t mean it” or “I’m being too sensitive” or “I’m making too big a deal of this.” To name what is happening is one way to feel empowered in your ministry. You might want to add to this glossary from your own experience or invite others to offer terms they have heard regarding sexism. Unfortunately, this glossary is ever-expanding.

One term that might be a helpful lens through which to view one goal of this session is resilience. Consider the following definition: “Resilience is the capacity to prepare for, recover from, and adapt in the face of stress, challenge, or adversity. . . . You can build and accumulate resilience, which builds capacity. . . . The better prepared or more resilient you are, the less you create situations from which you will have to bounce back and the better you will be able to handle situations in the moment” (HeartMath, *Building Personal Resilience: A Handbook for Heartmath Certified Coaches and Mentors*). Resilience is, in part, a necessary stance when it comes to being a woman in



ministry. Resilience means being proactive rather than reactionary. Too often women in ministry react in situations where being prepared and knowledgeable might make all the difference in the world.

Talking about sexism openly and honestly is vitally important. We have hidden this truth for too long, and we need to talk about how what we say to each other has the power to hurt tremendously. It is an opportunity to start conversation around how we can support each other, calling out when these things happen. This is hard work, but naming it and talking about it is a first step.

## GATHERING AND CHECK-IN

This week has the potential to be one of the most difficult sessions in the course. The participants will have kept a sexism log and will have realized just how systemic sexism is in our world. Consider a gathering exercise that invites peace and comfort. Start with the poem that begins the chapter as a point of reflection. Have someone read the poem/reading. Invite conversation around the poem/reading and how it intersected with the material in the chapter. Are there certain words/phrases that stood out and had new meaning? In what way?

Or begin with prayer, inviting each participant, if they choose, to name one petition—of grief or of hope.

## POINTS OF ENTRY

Show the video for this session and invite initial reactions and responses. The focus for this discussion needs to be acceptance. That is, one of the means by which sexism continues to exist and have control in our lives is our denial of it. This is not a session to prove sexism exists. It is to accept that it does and to begin to move forward with what to do about it and how to go about reducing its ability to define and determine our ministry.

Are you willing to share an example of sexism included in your log?

Describe your feelings in that moment.

How did you address the situation—or *not* address it?

## POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Based on the examples of sexism that the participants experienced and in the chapter, have willing participants describe, with the help of the group, how they might imagine dealing with instances of sexism in the future. You might want to set up some role-play discussion, not to observe what to do but rather to brainstorm together what might work in different circumstances.

## CLOSING

Have participants reflect on the following quotation based on the conversation:

*Things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered.  
We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil.*

—A. Brown

Read the following poem to the group as a benediction/dismissal:

### STAND

why so afraid to stand up?  
someone will tell you  
sit down?  
but here is the truth  
someone will always tell you  
sit down  
the ones we remember  
kept standing

—Ruth Forman

## SESSION FIVE

# KEY NUMBER FIVE: THE TRUTH ABOUT LEADERSHIP

### BACKGROUND AND FOCUS

MUCH OF WHAT holds us back in leadership is fear—fear of failure, fear of disappointment, fear of not meeting expectations. Important for leadership to be successful is to be able to name what you fear—and why. Reflect on the following quotation and consider how you might present it to the group meeting for discussion.

*“Be not afraid” does not mean we cannot have fear. Everyone has fear, and people who embrace the call to leadership often find fear abounding. Instead, the words say we do not need to be the fear we have. We do not have to lead from a place of fear, thus engendering a world in which fear is multiplied.*

—Parker J. Palmer (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/leading-from-within/>)

There is no shortage of leadership books out there. You might do a Google search and list some possibilities in the group discussion. But what does leadership look like in the church? How should leadership be different in the church? How can and how must our leadership be defined and shaped by the Bible, by theology? Does your leadership represent your theology? These are the important questions raised by this chapter.

It may be that you are considered a leader to this group. You might want to anticipate questions about your own leadership commitments and style, how you came to be the leader you are, and in what ways your sense of leadership intersected with the material in the chapter.

Our current circumstances suggest that we can no longer be secure in the fact that the church leads differently than the world, that our leaders are ontologically better than secular leaders simply because they run a church. In fact, the opposite has all too often been true and now seems to be truer than ever. The truth is the church and its institutions have proven themselves to be a bastion of sexism, actively harboring climates that are toxic for women in ministry. To what extent has the church contributed to the latent misogyny that raised its ugly head when the United States faced the possibility of electing a woman as president? To what extent has the church allowed racism by

pretending that whitelash could not possibly exist? The truth is the church plays it safe for the sake of numbers, budgets, members, and power. The truth is the church has remained silent about the truth of the gospel—the truth of the gospel that tells the truth of God’s love for all people. For the church to continue to be church, it may have to tell the truth about itself. It may have to apologize for not standing up for the very persons Jesus sought to save. The church may have to look to the left and the right and notice who is getting hanged on a tree and say *stop*. In other words, there may be concerns around how the church itself has let people down. These disappointments need to be voiced and heard.

Leadership in the church has to be connected to God and it has to be God-shaped. As a result, leadership needs to be authentic and autonomous—truly who you are, because God is committed to the uniqueness of you. Leadership needs to be relational. Because our God is relational. God is constantly starting and trying to maintain relationships. This suggests that one of the most important attributes of God, one that we rarely talk about or want to think about, is vulnerability. To be in relationship is to be vulnerable, susceptible to hurt and rejection, which is often why many leaders escape into total autonomy. Leadership needs to be communal. Our God is a communal God and to be a person of faith, to be a believer, is not to be by yourself or lead by yourself but to be a part of a community.

Furthermore, as leaders in the church we are shaping a community, the ethos of a community. We are accountable to a community. In other words, “Leaders are culture creators” (Ryan Stigile). Yet few seem to realize this, which is one of the primary downfalls of leaders, especially in the church. Leaders in the church are theology shapers and movers. They are setting in place ways to think about God, ways to imagine God moving in the world.

This is challenging for women in ministry because we may very well want to change the theological imagination of the community we serve, yet we do not have a history of theological discourse that engages a feminine imagination for God’s activity. Having influence on a congregation’s theology is a critical task of being a leader in the church. At the same time, how women in ministry introduce different ways of thinking theologically might meet resistance. In other words, it is not that you yourself or your ministry is met with resistance but that you have invited alternate ways of thinking about God.

## GATHERING AND CHECK-IN

Consider how the following quotation might be a helpful point of reference during this discussion.

*A big part of leadership is recognizing  
that your fruit often grows on other people’s trees.*

—Todd Adkins

## POINTS OF ENTRY

Watch the video and engage initial reactions, questions, and discussion. Determine if there is a particular direction participants might want to go with the material.

What are your primary concerns when it comes to your own leadership?

Where have the challenges in your leadership been? Are you able to name them?

Have someone read the poem/reading at the beginning of the chapter. Invite conversation around how the poem/reading intersects with the material in the chapter. Are there certain words/phrases that stood out and had new meaning?

## POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Have participants share an aspect of their leadership plan.

Name one goal on your leadership plan. Why is this goal important to you?

How does it represent who you truly are?

How does it reveal your true identity and what it means to be an authentic leader?

What steps have you imagined to meet this leadership goal?

## CLOSING

Have each participant name at least one take-away from the course. Did you have a favorite reading or quotation from the book? What is one thing that has empowered you? Do you feel that your power has been unlocked? Reflect again on what it means to unlock your power as a woman in ministry, as a person in ministry.

If time permits, you might facilitate a discussion on John 4:1-42 and how the Samaritan woman at the well is a model for what it means to engage the truth.

Consider also using the material from the epilogue as a way to bring the course to a conclusion. End with the closing benediction from the epilogue:

May the God of Eve teach you to dance.  
May the God of Hagar bring you comfort in the desert.  
May the God of Miriam bring companions to you when you struggle.  
May the God of Deborah teach you courage for your battles.  
May the Christ who knew Mary and Martha show you the way of balance.  
May the Christ who healed the bent-over woman heal your pain.  
May the Christ of Mary of Magdala send you out to proclaim your story.  
In the name of Christ who is the memory, hope and authority of the future.