

Chapter 9

Relationship with Others: Men and Women

DEBRIEF

Have group members repeat the memory verse (Genesis 55:20) from last time, and as they arrive, have them share how they did with last week's "Respond" step concerning forgiveness.

Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group.

HEAR THE WORD (All Citations from the NIV)

Context: Adam and Eve lived in perfect shalom, together with God. "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Their marriage, as described in Genesis 2:24, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" is a beautiful picture of shalom as it incorporates the love God has for both unity and diversity. But they disobeyed God, first Eve, then Adam. The results were devastating, including to their relationship with one another. To Eve God said: "Your desire [Hebrew has the connotation of "desire to control"] will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16).

Relational challenges between women and men started then and are still around today.

But Galatians 3:26-28 tells us, women and men have alike been accepted and reconciled in Christ:

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

At the time of Jesus' ministry, women were often treated as second-class citizens. Jesus' actions were revolutionary: he honored women in many ways. In the gospels we see examples of how he taught them spiritual truths (Lk 10:39), welcomed them to follow and provide for him financially (Lk 8:1-3). He appeared first to a woman after he rose from the dead (Jn 20:14-16). There are many other examples. These encounters

were counter-cultural, demonstrating the shalom between genders that the Kingdom of God brings.

One powerful example of how Jesus brings redemption and shalom in painful circumstances is found in John 8. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees want to trap Jesus. So they bring to him a woman caught in adultery and make her stand before the group. What an embarrassment! But where is the man who committed adultery with her? As is often the case even today, the man escapes. In many cultures the rules for women are much stricter than for men. But God says in Leviticus 20:10 “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.”

John 7:53-8:11 (NIV)

⁵³ Then they all went home, ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Get three volunteers to take the parts of the narrator, Jesus and the Pharisees reading the story aloud. What stands out to you, and what questions do you have?

2. Imagine that you are the woman standing before Jesus. How do you feel at different points in the story, including at the end? Or imagine that you are the man who committed adultery with this woman. She has been taken for stoning and you are free. How do you feel?
3. Now put yourself in the mind of one of the Pharisees. How do you react when Jesus says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?)

4. Why do you think Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground?
5. Why do you think that the Pharisees and teachers of the law leave, the older ones first? How do you think they felt?
6. Why does Jesus tell the woman to go and leave her life of sin? What do you think Jesus would have said to the man who committed adultery with this woman?

APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

7. The place of women and men is often viewed differently in different cultures. How are they viewed in the culture you grew up in? In the culture you are living in now? How comfortable would Jesus feel with these views?

RESPOND

Practice: Advocating for Others (and women in particular)

How can you handle in a Christlike way experiences of being ignored, excluded or abused, taking into account both justice and forgiveness? These are very sensitive issues which may need a long time for processing and healing so it might be wise to seek help from a trained Christian counselor.

Read through the following questions and choose the one to three that trigger you the most and work on it/them this week. Write out your thoughts on the chosen questions.

1. Describe any times you have observed or experienced abuse. Can you think of ways we can fight against abuse?
2. The use of certain gifts have often been restricted by the church from being practiced by women. How do you think women should use their gifts in the Body of Christ, the church?
3. Are men allowed to be vulnerable or are men always supposed to be strong? How can men use their power in godly ways?
4. How can men and women work together to bring more shalom between men and women in their own circles and/or in the larger society around them?
5. What are your personal pitfalls in gender relations? What habits of yours might need changing?
6. What kinds of attitudes and actions are needed by both men and women to enable women to use their gifts more freely in the Kingdom?
7. How/when should you challenge cultural norms and when should you wait and ask God to show you a gradual way to implement change while still honoring old traditions?
8. Where do you need to ask for or extend forgiveness in gender interactions you have had?

Forgiveness for past woundings in this area is important (see chapter 8 of this Guide) and takes a lot of time and often, willingness to face pain and distress. One idea is to write a letter to the person(s) who hurt you. This letter might never be sent, depending on your situation and cultural background. But consider sharing it with a trusted friend.

Memory Verse: Galatians 3: 26-28 (NIV)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Memorize them in your heart language and in English this week.

CLOSING

Ask the group, "How may we pray for you as you try to live as a woman or man in a Christlike way and use your gifts to serve the Kingdom?" Share prayer requests for each other and spend time praying for one another to be able to put into practice this week's lesson and for the needs of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francina de Pater was an international student in Costa Rica and was also involved in her local group of IFES Netherlands, experiences that shaped her and led her into ministry. She served for 14 years in a ministry reaching out to people in prostitution. In 2012 she became the national director of International Student Ministry in IFES Netherlands. In 2017 she became the ISM coordinator for IFES Europe and in 2022 Associate Regional Secretary for IFES Europe and Global Catalyst for the Lausanne ISM network. She is a trained coach and counselor and is since 2009 owner of Precious Coaching & Training which offers life coaching, specialized in trauma, burnout, stress and pastoral care. Francina is married to Arie; they have three children and they live in the cheese city of Gouda in The Netherlands.

DIG DEEPER

For biblical material supporting equal partnership between women and men in Christian ministry (only available to InterVarsity staff or official volunteers):

<https://aboutwomen.intervarsity.org/apologetics-theology/bible-study-women-men-equal-partnership>

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- To help participants understand how the Fall in the Garden of Eden brings specific challenges to both men and women
- To help participants understand the impact of the kingship of Jesus in freeing us from this curse; to realize how specific challenges play out in the cultures we are each from and what redemptive change is needed.
- To help participants see where they might have to *ask* forgiveness or *extend* forgiveness, and how forgiveness can be part of a healing process which might require the help of others
- To help participants gain vision for men and women using their gifts together to advance God's Kingdom

Special Note to Facilitators: This topic could potentially bring up issues such as homosexuality, feminism, or transgenderism which students from many cultures will have strong feelings about. If students ask about these issues, bring them back to the passage being discussed, saying something like, "That is a good question. Where do you see it being addressed in this passage?" If the asker cannot connect the question to the passage, you could say, "Let's focus on what this passage is telling us." After the group is over, text the friend and offer to get together to discuss his/her question more personally.

Notes On The Questions

The NIV (and most other English translations) note that this passage is not in the earliest manuscripts of the book of John. As the NIV Study Bible notes, "This story probably did not belong originally to the Gospel of John. It is absent from almost all the early manuscripts, and those that include it sometimes place it elsewhere (e.g., after Lk 21:38). But the story may well be an authentic tradition about Jesus." You don't need to bring this up unless someone asks about it.

Question 2: This is an honor-shame culture. Clearly the woman felt shame. The man probably also feels his own shame (at being caught? or being unfaithful to a wife and to God?) and perhaps is afraid that the woman will die. But some group members may see it differently, and that can raise a good discussion.

Question 4: If you imagine this scene, the woman, probably half dressed and experiencing great shame among all these men, would be the focal point. When Jesus stoops down (and doesn't seem to look at the woman until all but she have departed),

he draws attention away from her shame, already refusing to condemn her before he says anything.

Question 5: In honor-shame cultures, the older are generally the wiser. They know themselves and their hearts and they are honest enough to admit the consequences... they are not without sin and therefore can't throw a stone. The younger ones are less self-aware, but drop their rocks too. But sadly, none turn to the Savior who could save them from their sin and shame, but rather walk away. Jesus must grieve over them.

Question 6: Turning from sin is critical for the ongoing healing of the woman. Had the man been present, undoubtedly Jesus would have also invited him to confession of sin, forgiven him, and told him, "Go and sin no more."

Question 7: Help each other to reflect on his/her own culture and identify and clarify possible blind spots. Compare situations to how Jesus lived and try to imagine how He would have reacted to that.