

Helping women leaders grow

Mary Smith

Pastor Mary Blessing Smith has been leading and teaching women's groups for many years. There is a lot of material available written by her, which is available from our website.

This new material has been written to help these women. Any woman can attend this course or use this material, and will be encouraged and blessed by it. But those who belong to the groups above will find the course most helpful.

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Inner life

Many leaders make a mistake at the beginning of their ministries – they believe that leadership is a question of what we DO. So they rush round doing things, and in the process they learn to be moderately good leaders. But why settle for second best? Don't we want to be really effective leaders under God? If we do, then we have to avoid the "doing" mistake. For leadership is not a question of what we do, but first of all it is about who we are. The quality of our inner life, and of our personal walk with Jesus is what really matters. If we get that right, then what we do will flow from that relationship. So let's look at the quality of our inner life.

1. Self worth

Mary Magdalene was a woman with no self worth. Inhabited by 7 demons, (Luke 8:2) she felt completely worthless. But when she met Jesus, not only were the demons driven out, but she was given back her feeling of self worth. She knew that she was of value to him, that there was a place for her, and a work to do which was hers alone to do. Her value was underlined by the fact that she was the first person in John's Gospel to meet the risen Jesus. (John 20:10-18) It is so easy for women to feel worthless in society today, so the woman who is raised up to be a leader must have an inner conviction of her own worth to Jesus. Here are some things to consider:-

1. In the presence of God, she has unique worth. (Luke 12:6-7) Unlike the world, God does not take away a woman's self worth.

2. In the presence of God she can have inner strength and confidence. For His power has been released into her life, (Romans 8:11) and she is able to obey the commands of the Lord. There is an outer war fought over our obedience to God's commands, and we will return to that later. But in the inner spiritual world, a woman can be at peace with herself and her maker. Many leaders never manage to claim their self worth. But God gives it again and again. Look at these passages:-

The woman bent double. (Luke 13:10-17)

The woman with a haemorrhage.(Mark 5:25-34)

The woman leader must learn to spend time in His presence, sensing and enjoying her unique value in His sight, and then she will get a true appreciation of how much she is worth to Jesus.

2. Cut off the past

One of the things which surprised me as I began to grow as a leader was how much of the past I had to cut off. We cannot grow as leaders if we are chained to the past by guilt, failure, fear, or the occult. All these things have to be cut off from us. Lazarus is a good example to us. He had died, and then Jesus called him back to life again. But look carefully at what Jesus said to him:-

“Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” (John 11:44)

Lazarus could not enter into his new life, while he was still wearing his grave clothes. The same is true for leaders. We cannot enter into our leadership while we are still wearing our grave clothes. What grave clothes might we have to remove? It's a familiar list:-

**Sin: Guilt: Failure: Anger: Resentment: Bitterness:
Fear: Occult ties.**

All these and others have to be broken . Only Jesus can do it, and he wants to do it. How do we enter into this? Lets look at what God has shown is in Psalm 51:- “Against you, you only have I sinned.” (v.4)

It is against God we have sinned. No amount of discussion or debate can change this basic truth. Accepting it is the starting point for true repentance. However, it is the hardest point for a Christian to find.

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (v.7)

Once we know our sin, we need the cleansing of God, which comes through the blood of Jesus — “The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

“You desire truth in the inner parts.” (v.6)

As we are praying and thinking about these things, the enemy will do all he can to spoil our repentance. He knows he must, because this is such a powerful and life giving moment for us. (See 1 Samuel 7:7) While we are repenting, we need to hear words of truth from the Bible, to counter the lies of the enemy. Words like:-

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

“Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Psalm 51:7)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”(1 John 1:9)

“Create in me a pure heart.” (v.10)

Repentance has to result in a new way of living. We cannot repent and continue in the same way as before. Once the grave clothes were removed, Lazarus had to live again, and in a different and more powerful way. What does God expect of His Christian women?

A commitment to a new way of life. Even though we do not know the implications, we must be willing to let the Holy Spirit make the changes. Working out this new way of living is easier if we think, pray and talk with others.

A willingness to pay the price of repentance, and the changes it will bring personally, in church life, and beyond.

Do you as a leader, need to throw off your gaudy clothes of the past? Then use Psalm 51, and make your confession. God will answer you

3. Walking with a pure heart.

Sin clings to us, like chains, and if we do not get rid of it daily, we will trip up! The Bible tells us clearly that God forgives, (1 John 1: 8-9) but we have to be very aware of what kind of sin clings, and how.

Look at Matthew chapters 5 to 7 to help identify the areas of sin. This needs to be a regular personal study. Note in particular:-

Anger (5:21-26) This must play no part in the life of the prophet, or it will dilute his word.

Lust (5:27-30) The prophet is a powerful character, and can attract people of the opposite sex for the wrong reasons.

Enemies. (5:43-48) A prophet will make enemies. It's vital we know how to behave. Otherwise we will easily allow enmity to creep into our words. **Giving.** (6:1-4) The temptation is to take. This can be overcome by having the opposite gift - the desire to give.

Worry. (6:25-34) There are so many pressures in this calling. We have to have a clear mind, not a worried one.

Criticism. (7:1-5) We are daily being criticised. How we handle it is key to the growth of our ministry.

The writer to the Hebrews says this:-“Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. (Hebrews 12:1) Begin now. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you those things which are holding you back. Confess them, and then walk in the way which He opens up for you.

4. Resisting the enemy

Our enemy loves to destroy, and especially to destroy leaders. So we have to be aware of how he attacks and works against us. Knowing his ways is our strength. I have included quite a lot of material here. I haven't done this to exalt the enemy – it is Jesus I want to lift up. But leaders do need to be aware of the things I have written here.

1. His ways

Here are some of the ways the enemy attacks leaders:-

Through hard times

When the going is tough, the enemy wants us to deny God. He wants us to say “You’ve failed me!” He whispers to us “It’s time to give up.” How can we resist? Isaiah tells us to seek the Lord, while he may be found. (Isa 55:6) In the darkest and most difficult times the Lord is near. Any other statement or thought is a lie. We have to call on him, and trust him to hear and answer us. It is easy to do this when the going is easy, but not so easy when things are hard. The mature worker knows that in whatever circumstance, those who call on the Lord do not call in vain.

Through dry times

We all pass through times of spiritual dryness. It seems to be a natural part of our Christian life. Probably the Lord allows these times to strengthen and toughen us for the battles ahead. In these times, we can so easily become discouraged and disheartened. Again, Isaiah speaks to us:- “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.” (Isa 55:1) The water is always there for us to drink. Call, call, call, and the Lord will refresh you.

Through times of doubt

Like dryness, we all have doubts at times. This seems to be a natural part of the Christian life. Doubts, honestly faced, can often be the doorway to deeper revelation and closeness to the Lord. But we must not let them get out of hand, or they will destroy us. Don’t think that this could not happen to you - it could happen to any of us. (“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.” 1 Corinthians 10:12) Take your stand on the words of Jesus to Thomas – “Stop your doubting and believe!” (John 21:27) It is not always easy to do this – but take the firm stand against doubt, and like so many temptations, it will run away!

Through failure

We have all failed. I should write this a hundred times for you to read! The enemy seizes on every failure to tell you “You’re no good as a leader. Give up. Your sins disqualify you.” But I will say it again – we have all failed. As long as we recognise our failures, and confess them, Jesus forgives us, and we start again. Have a look at these two passages concerning Peter – Mark 14: 66-72 and John 21: 15-17. This is how Jesus deals with failures- he makes them leaders in his church! The problem is that many leaders think they have to be perfect. But this is not possible. We live in a fallen world, and we will make mistakes. They are not the end of our ministries. Often they deepen our understanding of our calling, if we let them. Or they can destroy us – if we let them. The choice is ours to make.

Through sickness

We believe in a God of miracles, but when we get sick, and no apparent healing comes, we begin to doubt, and the enemy presses us hard. It is vital for us to believe for our healing. (Isaiah 53:3-4) This stops the mouth of the enemy. If we have prayed for healing, and have not yet received it, then we have to say “I am believing for my healing.” God will do it when he is ready. If we do not believe this, the enemy will attack again and again.

Through despair

Many leaders experience despair – despair over their own behaviour, over their inability to change things, over their circumstances, or over the flock for which they are caring. We have to guard against despair, or it will turn us into defeated leaders. Jonah provides the perfect guidance. In his distress he called to the Lord, and the Lord answered him. (Jonah 2:1) The Lord will always answer, and give direction for the way ahead.

Through anger, resentment, and bitterness

It is so easy for a leader to become angry, resentful or bitter. The people of God do not make our calling easy - look at the way they treated Moses. But if we let these things enter into our lives, they will destroy – destroy us, destroy our families and our fellowships. We protect ourselves best by knowing about them, watching out for them, and praying constantly for the protection of the Holy Spirit.

Through temptation

The position of leader opens us to certain temptations:-

Sexual sin. I know that this is common to all, but leaders, because of their position, often find themselves in a position to take advantage, or be taken advantage of, by the opposite sex. When we are strong there is no problem, but when we are tired, frustrated, or having trouble in our own marriage, then the enemy brings the opportunity.

Theft. Judas was in charge of the money bag, and he took the opportunity to steal for himself. The leader often has access to money and objects which belong to the body. Many have become thieves. Don't say that it will never happen to you – it has happened to so many

Pulling down. The leader knows many things about those in his or her charge. It is so easy to use this information to pull people down.

How do we stand against these and other attacks of the enemy? We have to have a very full grasp of Ephesians 6: 10-18:-

“ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The belt of truth.

The belt of the Roman soldier was where he carried his weapon, and his supplies. It was important to him, and it is important to us. Our belt is biblical truth - knowing the truths about Jesus, and having a life firmly built on those truths. To do this, we have to know them in our heads, know where to find them in the Bible, and apply them to our hearts, so that we naturally live by them.

The breastplate of righteousness.

The Roman breastplate was a kind of iron coat. It protected his heart. We stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus –this protects our heart. We face no condemnation and no judgment, because Jesus has dealt with these things. His blood has sanctified and cleansed us. We are seen by the Father as righteous. And our enemy has also to see us and accept us as righteous. He will hate this – but that’s just his bad luck. He lost, and we won. We are the victors through the righteousness of Jesus.

The gospel shoes.

The Roman soldiers had strong sandals, so that they could march, and could stand firm in battle. We have gospel shoes. We will not be pushed over, or pushed backward. Our feet are standing on the rock of the Good news of Jesus. We own the ground on which we stand. We are not thieves – our enemy is the thief. The good news of Jesus is our title deed. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Alleluia!

The shield of faith.

The shield of the Roman soldier was a defensive and an attacking weapon. It protected the soldier from the blows of his enemy, but it could also be used to push his enemy down, so that he could be stabbed to death. By our faith, we are protected, and by our faith we advance. Incidentally, Roman soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, so their shields looked like a steel wall to the enemy. Let’s make sure we fight together, and not separately.

The helmet of salvation.

Our heads must be protected in combat but if it is hurt, we are unable to fight. In the spiritual realm, our spirit must be protected in the same way. The enemy will seek to attack our spirit, but with the helmet of salvation, none of his attacks can work. By our salvation, we belong to Jesus. No attack can succeed, although sometimes the battle may be hard and long. In the end we will overcome.

The sword of the Spirit.

The Roman soldiers carried a short sword, which could cut, stab and slash in the heart of battle, without damaging their comrades on either side of them. Our short sword is the word of God, which we must know how to use to stab, cut and slash against our enemy. We must know the Bible, and how to use it. This experience does not come quickly, but by daily practice and exercise. The older we get in faith, the stronger we should be, because we know more of the word of God, and how to use it.

I have written quite a lot about resisting the enemy. It is a discipline which every leader has to exercise regularly, as he or she protects the flock.

5.The servant heart Mark 8:34

In Africa, the servant heart is often absent. So many leaders want position, power, respect, and honour. This is so destructive of both themselves and the work they do.

Many want to be thought of as “great men of God.” To be looked up to for their ministries, and to be honoured for what they do. The true man or woman of God wants none of these things. He or she is seeking something far more precious – the heart which is in Jesus, which is the servant heart:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”

Any other desire will destroy the prophet., So what is the servant heart which we are seeking after?

Denies: Victory over self was what Jesus gained in Gethsemane. It is the hardest battle to win. We are the centre of our own world. When we surrender to Jesus, he becomes the centre. We have to battle away to ensure that he stays there. Areas of conflict include:-

Position: (Luke 18:9-14) Power: (Acts 8:9-25) Sex: (Matthew 5:27-30) Control: (Mark 8:33) Money: (Acts 5:1-2) Deceit: (2 Samuel 11:14-15) **Takes up:** The hard road: (Jeremiah -20:7) the lonely road: (Gethsemane – Mark 14:39) the suffering road: (Paul at Philippi – Acts 16: 16-24) the servant road. (Jesus: John 13; Isa 53:1-3) The servant does whatever it takes to fulfil the will of the Lord.

Follows: Obediently and willingly. It's a commitment to a lifestyle of repentance and faith, obedience and sacrifice. It is a commitment to walking in the way of Jesus in full knowledge of what it might mean. Like Bartimaeus, (Mark 10:52) we follow him, like the man at Gate Beautiful, (Acts 3:8) we rejoice, and like the woman bent double (Luke 13:13) we praise God.

If a leader is having a problem with service, here is the perfect answer:-

“Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to his servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat?’ Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper. Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?’ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are only unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17: 7-10)

This little parable keeps our feet firmly on the ground. We are to serve, not when it is convenient to us, or when we feel like it, but when the Master says so. Some people find this parable hard, but that is because they have short memories! Jesus went to Calvary for us, serving the will of his Father up to the very end, so that we could be free. He has earned our love, our trust and our service. Strangely, when we adopt this attitude, we find ourselves more loved, more cared for and closer to Jesus than we were before. This is one of the miracles of service. **Here are some servant principles to think about:-**

1. **To serve** is more important than to be served. (Mk 10:45)
2. **Serving** is the example Jesus sets for us, not power and position
3. **By serving**, we value others – exactly what Jesus did for us
4. **We are** protected against the dangers of power.

A leader's life

From the inner relationship, we move to look at the issues and experiences of ministry. There are many – too many to include here. I have chosen a few which I think are relevant to women pastors and leaders.

1. The feelings a Pastor/leader experiences.

The Pastor or leader has to have a good understanding of the Bible, of the Church and of leadership skills. These can all be learned by study and experience. But there is one thing which cannot be taught, and that is the ability to feel the hurts, pains and emotions of those we serve. This skill is essential to our ministry, because only as we feel the pains and emotions of others, can we truly minister to them. What kind of things will we have to experience?

Distress. (Study Hannah in 1 Samuel 1)
Sorrow at our own failings. (Study Peter in Mark 14:66-72)
Pain of grief. (Study Jairus in Mark 5:35-43)
True love. (Study the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-38)
Fear. (Disciples in John 20:19; Israelite army in 1 Samuel 17:11)
Being let down. (Disciples. Luke 24:17-18)
Commitment. (Study Mary Magdalene in John 20:10-18)
Rejection. (Study Jesus in Mark 6:1-6)
Joy (Study the Lost son in Luke 15:11-24)
Contentment. (Study the Shepherd in Luke 15:5)
Hope. (Study Hebrews 11: 39-40)
Power. (Study Jesus in Mark 5)
Release. (Study the man at the Beautiful Gate. Acts 3:8)

These feelings, and many more, will be found in the lives of those we minister to, and we have to learn to recognise these emotions, and feel them ourselves. Those who can do this, and it is a gift of God, become the best Pastors and leaders

2. Pressures common to Women leaders

God made us uniquely male and female, and blends our different gifts and experiences into His ministry. Within this truth there is another one - there are certain pressures which are unique to a woman pastor/leader, and it is good to recognise them. Consider these things:-

Emotions.

Generally, women tend to experience their emotions either more intensely, or more publicly than men. (Men are emotional people too! But they tend to handle them in a different way.) It's good to accept this, and make sure that in our ministry, we "take every thought, (and emotion) captive." (2 Corinthians 10:5) Then the Lord will be able to use our emotions to minister, rather than letting our emotions get the better of our ministry.

Over commitment in relationships.

Sometimes the nature of a woman leads her to be overcommitted in relationships. Samuel (strangely a man) had this problem with his relationship with Saul. He was so committed, that even though God had rejected Saul. Samuel went on grieving for him. In the end, the Lord had to intervene "How long will mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel?" (1 Samuel 16:1) Samuel didn't know when to let go. It's a problem which many women leaders face. There isn't an easy answer here, except to remember these words "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask God for it." (James 1:5)

Intimidated.

Women leaders can be intimidated by the men around them. Then they start doing the things which stop the intimidation, and this often compromises their ministries. Remember, it is not natural size or sex which marks out a ministry. “Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit” says the Lord.(Zech 4:6) It is the power of God which gives us powerful ministries, and the courage not to be intimidated by anything or anyone.

Men/male leadership.

This issue has been very widely talked about in recent years. Let’s sidestep it in this book. The Serving Africa Mission believes in male servant leadership, where the men take the head, but take it in a servant way, seeking to release the way for ministries of every kind, regardless of gender.

Lack of opportunity

Sadly, many of the male leaders of Africa do not have a servant headship position. So they fail to make opportunity for women to exercise their ministries. Again and again, women are not asked to minister, given opportunities that the Pastor doesn’t want, or given opportunities which, while good, do not develop their call and experience. I have seen this over and over again. Not only is it a great waste of talent and resource, it is deeply frustrating for women who do respect male leadership, but who want to be allowed to exercise their call within that conviction.

This sorrow has to be carried patiently in the heart. God is changing things in Africa. As the cities grow ever bigger, more open and flexible patterns of ministry are coming into being, which will allow for the development of women in leadership. The prayer battle must go on, even as God opens more and more doors. We must not get disheartened or overwhelmed with frustration. Prayer changes things, even attitudes in the Church.

The problems which women will face in their ministries are far outweighed by the vast benefits. As this is quite a big issue, let’s look at it now:-

3. The fullness of God’s created order

As God made male and female to complete his created order, so the mixture of masculine and feminine in Pastoral ministry brings blessing to the body of Christ. Jesus certainly accepted the ministry of women. He commended their faith and courage, and honoured them by making his first appearance to them. In the early days of faith women prophesied, (Philip’s daughters: Acts 21:9), opened their lives to Jesus (Lydia in Acts 16:14-15) and allowed their homes to be used for ministry. Dorcas was commended for the quality of her life, and many women were commended in the endings of Paul’s epistles.. Teams of men and women functioned (Priscilla and Aquilla: Romans 16:3) and the Church clearly taught that if leadership was male, it carried profound responsibilities. In the list of Offices, (Ephesians 4:11-

12) and gifts, (Romans 12:3-8) there is no prohibition to women. Clearly God wanted to open the fullness of ministry to them. Too much time has been wasted looking at the problems, rather than the blessings. We, as a Mission, believe that ultimate leadership falls to the men, but this position is a servant one. Male leaders have a great burden and responsibility to ensure that women achieve the maximum potential in the body, as they do in the created order. Rather than looking at the negatives, we should think of the unique benefits women in ministry bring to the body. Here are a few to consider:-

Women bring a different perspective on issues.

Look at the story of the Manoah and his wife. (Judges 13:1-25) Manoah has one piece of the truth, but his wife has another. Put them together, and we get the full picture. This kind of situation occurs again and again in ministry and leadership, and it gives us the full picture.

A greater sensitivity. (John 20:11)

I don't believe that men are insensitive. Men can and do have powerful emotional experiences. But I also believe that women often have a greater sensitivity to feelings, emotions and situations. The story of the empty tomb in John's Gospel is a good illustration. Peter and the disciples come running to the tomb, look in, and go away puzzled. But it is left to a woman to remain, held there initially by her sensitivity and emotional loss, but deep down, appreciating that something special had happened, without knowing what that something might be. So she received truth which she was able to pass on to the men. This added sensitivity is a most precious addition to ministry, and very useful in a mixed sex leadership team.

Woman to woman.

There are many situations where a male Pastor should not find himself – especially in the home of a woman alone. These situations, and many others like them, are situations where a woman Pastor or leader should and can minister without the problems encountered by a man. I'm not saying that men cannot counsel and teach women, but what I am saying is that there are some situations where this is better done by another woman.

A powerful heart for intercession

All can intercede. But I believe that the nature of a woman makes her especially suitable for intercession. So when leadership makes no provision for women leadership and ministry, this intercessory input is missing.

4. Dwelling in his presence

One day, Jesus was at dinner with Simon the Pharisee, “when a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learnt that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she bought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.” (Luke 7:37-38). She wasn’t building her relationship with Jesus on her Bible, her prayer, or her worship. For her this was not enough. She wanted more - she wanted to be in his presence, and stay there. Women who want to serve the Lord in leadership must learn her lesson. Our walk with him in service can never be sustained by the Bible, prayer or worship alone. Don’t misunderstand me - these things are vital to us, and very precious. But if we want to lead, we have to go further. We have to learn to dwell in his presence. How do we do this?

We have to love him.

This seems obvious, yet in busyness of our earthly lives, our love for Jesus can grow cold. Mary (Luke 10:40) had this problem. So keen to do a good job, she neglected what she should have cherished most –her closeness to Jesus. Loving is a work of the Holy Spirit in us, but love has to be nurtured to grow. Read Mary’s song (Luke 1:46-55) and commit yourself to more loving and less doing.

A quiet place.

Jesus went aside to quiet places occasionally, so that he could spend time with his Father. We must do the same. There must be a place we can go to adore, worship and express love. This doesn’t have to be a physical space. We can build an altar in our spirit, a place where we can go to be with him. Ultimately, there are no words to describe this place. It is a gift of God in response to the longing of our hearts. Seek it, and God will give it.

5. Maintaining a good spirituality

If we learn to dwell in His presence, we are well on the way to having a good spiritual walk with Jesus. But those who lead come under intense pressure, and this can easily weaken our spirituality. So we have to work hard at maintaining it. Think about:-

Getting as well as giving.

Martha rebuked Mary because she was sitting at the feet of Jesus. (Luke 10:40) But Mary was right. Those who walk with Jesus in leadership have to get, as well as give. Mary wanted to receive, and we also must take every opportunity to receive teaching and encouragement. We need to listen to good preaching, listen to good radio ministry, and if possible, read books and watch videos. I know the last two are not so easy to get in Africa, but if you get the chance, take it. It is also good to go to a Conference every now and again, where you can sit back and receive. There are so many conferences around. Make sure you choose wisely, and don’t get caught up in endless conference going.

Study to grow

If we want to grow – grow as people and grow as leaders, then it is no good thinking that one course, like this one, gives us all we need. We need to plan a programme of Bible reading which will help us grow. Have a look at the study material on our website www.serving-africa.org.

Some find it helpful to get a book which will help. “Everyday with Jesus” is very popular in Africa. If you can’t afford a book, then why not buy one as a group. Each can pay a little, and you all get a chance to study. I know that some find reading hard. So why not work with a friend who can read.

A pattern of worship and prayer

This is not a difficult thing to understand. We all have a basic pattern - daily prayer, regular worship, daily Bible reading. It is so important for a leader to maintain this pattern, and add things to it which help – for example meeting with other Pastors to pray. Just make sure that you hold on to your pattern. Jesus did not go it alone. He had his twelve friends, and within that twelve, he had a group of four who got closer to him, and then one “the beloved” who was especially close to him. We need to think in the same way. The temptation is to make do by ourselves, but if we try it, we will ultimately fail. Part of God’s created purpose is for us to have those with whom we can share.

6. Knowing the Gospel

God’s people know that their salvation was earned at the cross of Calvary. The Bible teaches us what this means. The Bible has much to say about the cross. It gives us many different understandings. It teaches us:-

Jesus paid the price of sin.	John 1:29
Jesus took our place.	Romans 5:6
Jesus dealt with death.	Hebrews 2: 14-15
Jesus made peace by his blood.	Colossians 1:20
Jesus won a great victory.	Colossians 2:15
Jesus set us free.	Ephesians 2:8
Jesus broke the curse.	Galatians 3:13

But how do we remember all this? Each different piece of teaching has a powerful picture linked to it. These pictures will help us understand and remember what the Bible is teaching. Here are the pictures. Pick one or two of them, and learn them, with the verse which is attached to them.

Jesus paid the price of sin. (John 1:29)

You have gone to the market, to buy food. You see many lovely fruits, and knowing that your family like all these things, you put them all in your basket. Then the seller asks you for the money. You suddenly realise that you have none. The seller gets angry. “You are a thief” he cries “you want my fruit, but you won’t pay.” You try to defend yourself, but a crowd has gathered, all shouting and pushing you. You panic, and then suddenly a friend steps into the crowd, and pays your money. The crowd go away, the seller is happy, and you are free to go back to your family, with your fruits! In the same way, Jesus has paid the price for our sin, so that we can live in peace, and enjoy the blessings of God.

Jesus took our place. (Romans 5:6)

You are standing in a court of law. You have done something wrong - you know you have, and now the sentence is coming. You have no influence over this court or this Judge. In fact you know you are guilty, and you fear for your future. No more freedom, no more being with your family or friends, no more time to talk in the Market or sit under a tree. Your whole life is about to be destroyed. But just before the Judge speaks the terrible words “guilty” a man stands up in the court, and says “Judge, I will go to prison instead of this person.” The Judge agrees, and you are free – free to go and do the things you like doing, to be with your friends, to sit and enjoy your freedom. In the same way, Jesus has stood in our place, so that justice might be satisfied, and we might be free from our sentence.

Jesus dealt with death. (Hebrews 2: 14-15)

In the forest there was a very large snake. Everyone was afraid of this snake, because it was big, powerful and very dangerous. Anyone it saw it bit, and that person was sure to die. Everyone was told “beware of the snake in the forest.” One day, you are walking home on the path through the forest, when the snake appears in front of you. You are afraid, because you know that the snake will bite you, and you are going to die. You want to run, but you are so terrified, that you just stand. The snake hisses and comes near to you. You shut your eyes, waiting for the terrible bite, and pain and death. But nothing happens. You open your eyes, and see that that snake is dead! Its head has been cut off. You run back to the village and shout “The snake is dead! I have seen it with its head cut off. We need no longer be afraid of the snake!” In the same way, Jesus has destroyed death, so that we who love him might not have to live with the fear of death.

Jesus made peace by his blood. (Colossians 1:20)

Two men were gambling in the village, and suddenly one of them shouted “You are cheating.” In no time, all the village was aroused, and fighting broke out, as people took sides. One child ran to find the Mama of the village, and although she was very small, she pushed her way through the fighting, until she faced the two men who had started it all. For a while she spoke, and when she had finished, the two men shook hands, the fighting stopped, and life returned to normal. In the same way, Jesus has made peace for us – between us and the justice of God, by his blood shed on the cross.

Jesus won a great victory. (Colossians 2:15)

The Christians in the orphanage were in despair. They had spent all the money they had, and now the children were without food. They knew that something had to happen quickly, but they didn't know what could happen. They felt completely defeated. They had opened the orphanage to care for hungry children, and they believed God had called them to this, but now they had failed. "Perhaps something will happen today" said the Manager of the orphanage. But although he looked out all day, nothing happened. Then, late in the evening, a car arrived. He went out to meet it. Two men stepped out, and said "We think God has spoken to us, and you need this money." They gave him an envelope, and drove away. When he opened it, there was enough money to buy food for all the children. "Alleluia" he cried. "We have won a great victory." There was much food for all the children that night.

In the same way, Jesus has won a great victory for us. He has defeated the enemy, and given us new hope. Alleluia!

Jesus set us free. (Ephesians 2:8)

A man borrowed money for a project, and then found he could not pay it back. Day after day he worried about this, and day after day the one he had borrowed from would say "If you don't pay, I will have you thrown into prison." He tried everything he could think of, but still he could not repay. The one owed the money said "Tomorrow, I am coming for my money, and if you don't have it, you are going to prison, and I will make sure it is the worst prison I can find."

The next day came, and the debtor was terrified. He hid inside his home, and would not even come out. A friend of the man he owed money came to the door and called out "Peter, come out. I have something to tell you." Shaking with fear, the debtor opened the door. "It's OK" the man said, "he forgives you this debt. You are free." In the same way, Jesus has set us free from the debts of sin, and the power of the enemy, that we might be free and live in joy.

Jesus broke the curse. (Galatians 1:13)

A woman went to the fetish, because she wanted to harm one of God's people. "Put a curse on this person" she said, and gave her money. The fetish priest chanted a powerful curse, and it flew towards God's person. Surely this person would be broken by this curse? But as the curse came to God's person, it did not strike the heart of the person, but struck the cross of Christ, which was lifted high over God's person, as it is for all who love Jesus. The curse was completely destroyed. The woman who had gone to the fetish went to see the results of her work, but found God's person happy and at peace. "What has happened to the curse" she asked? "Broken by the cross of Jesus" was the reply.

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My other book “God’s women” is available on our website. You can download it free from the page called BOOKS 3.

There is also much other material available on the site, as well as details of our work.