

Women Speak of God: Participant's Guide

(ver. 1.1)

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Class Sessions: Weekly Order of Activities

Each session will include the following segments, usually in the same order each session.

Arrival Activities

Display your nametag or nameplate.

Opening Prayer

Each session has a prayer provided. Some are read together and some are responsive. Another prayer or hymn may be substituted.

Telling Time

At the beginning of each class students will always have time to “tell about a time when” as a way to explore the themes of the session in our life stories. Students will form groups of two or three. Each student will share in turn. You do not need to take notes. No group reporting will be done. Be sure that everyone in your group has a turn to speak. (Your class leader during the exercise will remind you of the time remaining.)

Video Segment

The video lectures vary in length:

Session One:	11:53
Session Two:	26:41
Session Three:	18:30
Session Four:	21:55
Session Five:	21:37
Session Six:	18:16
Session Seven:	18:08
Session Eight:	7:42

Central Issues

Each session includes a time to identify themes and issues in the readings and video. The student book identifies two or three central issues in each session. In addition, students will identify other issues they may find in the material.

The Writer Speaks of God

This activity allows students to identify the ways they hear the writer speaking about God, as well as insights of their own.

Exercises

Each session offers a variety of learning activities related to the session.

Break

A 10-15 minute break will be provided. Breaks are not “dead time.” Breaks create important empty space that allows for deeper learning throughout class time. A break allows students recovery time, informal learning, and most important, time with each other that is not directed by an activity. The Holy Spirit can be at work in break time, and it is important to not squeeze or minimize that time.

I Speak of God

In each session students will write their reflections on the topic.

So What? Questions

Each session will include discussion questions that go beyond historical information to ask “so what?” What difference does this historical witness make for our congregation?

Looking Ahead

Each week offers a preview of next week’s readings.

Class Business

This brief time is provided to answer questions, distribute materials or make announcements.

Closing Prayer

Each session has a prayer provided. Some are read together and some are responsive. Another prayer or hymn may be substituted.

Class Session 1. Introduction: Our Family History

Session 1: Introduction: Our Family History

Opening Prayer	2 minutes
Telling Time	5-8 minutes
Introductions	15-20 minutes
Video Segment	12 minutes
Central Issues	5 minutes
Exercise 1	15 minutes
BREAK	10-15 minutes
Exercise 2*	20 minutes
I Speak of God	10-15 minutes
Exercise 3*	10-15 minutes
So What	10 minutes
Looking Ahead	2 minutes
Class Business	2 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute

**For a class session of 90 minutes or less, your class leader may choose to skip this exercise.*

Opening Prayer: Leader reads normal print; students read bold print.

Almighty God,
 you have given us grace at this time
 with one accord to make our common supplication to you;
 and you have promised through your well-beloved Son
 that when two or three are gathered together in his name,
 you will be in the midst of them.
 Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us;
 granting us in this world knowledge of your truth,
 and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of John Chrysostom, 5th century (United Methodist Hymnal [UMH] 412)

Telling Time: Tell about the last time you went to a family reunion. Why did you go?

Introductions: Tell your name and identify the denominations or faiths that are part of your family background.

Video Segment

Central Issues:

1. Our family stories tell us who we are as a family.
2. Christians from the past are our extended family and God's family, and they form our identity, too.

In what ways did these issues resonate in the video?

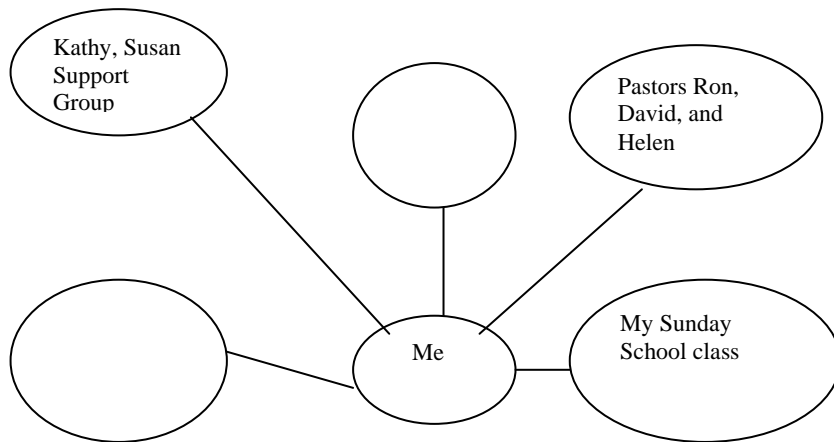
What other issues did you hear?

Exercise 1: Gifts and Burdens.

- a. What have you inherited from the generations of your family before you that has gifted your life? What have you inherited that is a burden?
- b. If another member of your family were answering these questions, how would their answers be different?
- c. What have you inherited from the generations of Christians before you that has gifted your life? What have you inherited that is a burden?

BREAK:

Exercise 2: Draw a "faith family" cluster diagram. Who has formed you spiritually? Using the circles, write in the names of individuals and groups that make up your "faith family." See example on the next page.



Use the space below to draw your own faith family cluster diagram.

Discuss: Was it hard or easy to think of who is in your faith family?

What experiences or people are NOT in your diagram?

I Speak of God

When I think of God’s family, I see myself as _____.

Take a few minutes to write reflectively on this topic. Use the page at the end of this lesson.

Exercise 3: Family Characteristics

In your family, list the characteristics that identify a (the name of your family of origin)?

Describe how these characteristics are expressed. How do you know them?

In the Christian family, what are the characteristics that identify a Christian?

Describe how these characteristics are expressed. How do you know them?

So What?

What are some of the historical factors that have shaped our church family? (Note that throughout our study the term “church family” refers to the life of your own congregation rather than to the larger denomination or the church universal.)

What are some of the influences that people who join this church bring with them?

What are the characteristics that identify members of our church family?

Looking Ahead: In the coming week you will read an account of an early Christian martyr, Perpetua (pronounced: purr-pet-chew-a). Listen for the conflicts created around her as she tries to live out her Christian identity. What are the expectations her family places on her? What are the expectations fellow Christians place on her?

Class Business**Closing Prayer:**

Loving God, we are all part of your family. We give thanks for the gifts and we struggle with the burdens of this family. We gather with the communion of saints, all of our mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters in the faith. Thank you for giving us this family. Help us see our place in it as we study together. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I Speak of God

When I think of God's family, I see myself as _____.

Take a few minutes to write reflectively on this topic.

Women Speak of God: Leader's Guide

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Class Session 1. Introduction: Our Family History

Note: Leader instructions are always in *italics* and follow the students' instructions.

Session 1: Introduction: Our Family History

Opening Prayer	2 minutes
Telling Time	5-8 minutes
Introductions	15-20 minutes
Video Segment	12 minutes
Central Issues	5 minutes
Exercise 1	15 minutes
BREAK	10-15 minutes
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I Speak of God	10-15 minutes
Exercise 3*	10-15 minutes
So What?	10 minutes
Looking Ahead	2 minutes
Class Business	2 minutes
Closing Prayer	1 minute

**For a class session of 90 minutes or less, you may skip this exercise.*

Arrival Activities: *Welcome students. Provide materials to make nameplates or nametags. Have students make nametags upon arrival. Names plates can also easily be made with single sheets of letter-size paper, folded into thirds to make a table tent. Have the student write his or her name in large, readable letters and place the nameplate in front of them at their table or desk. Collect the nametags or plates at the end of class and bring them next week.*

Opening Prayer: leader reads print, students read bold print

Almighty God,
 you have given us grace at this time
 with one accord to make our common supplication to you;
 and you have promised through your well-beloved Son
 that when two or three are gathered together in his name,
 you will be in the midst of them.
 Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us;

**granting us in this world knowledge of your truth,
and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayer of John Chrysostom, 5th century, (United Methodist Hymnal [UMH] 412)

Telling Time: Tell about the last time you went to a family reunion. Why did you go?

Ask students to form groups of 2 or 3. Each student will share in turn. They do not need to take notes. No group reporting will be done. To be sure everyone in the group gets a turn, after 3 minutes, remind them they are halfway through their time.

Introductions: Tell your name and identify the denominations or faiths that are part of your family background.

Keep a running list of denominations on chalkboard or newsprint. For example, the first student may say their family was always Methodist. Write Methodist on the board. The next student may identify Methodists and Baptists in their background. Add a check next to Methodist, to indicate another student, and add Baptist to the list. Add another check mark each time a student identifies a tradition already on the list. Students may also identify “no church background” as part of their family history. This is important to note, too, and can be added to the list as “non-religious” a big category in American life. After introductions are complete say something like:

“This list represents our wide Christian family and its various branches. Right here in this room, we have a Christian family reunion of sorts. This is great!”

Video Segment: 12 minutes

Central Issues:

1. Our family stories tell us who we are as a family.
2. Christians from the past are our extended family and God’s family, and they form our identity, too.

Lead a class discussion of the following questions for 5 minutes:

In what ways did these issues resonate in the video?

What other issues did you hear?

Exercise 1: Gifts and Burdens.

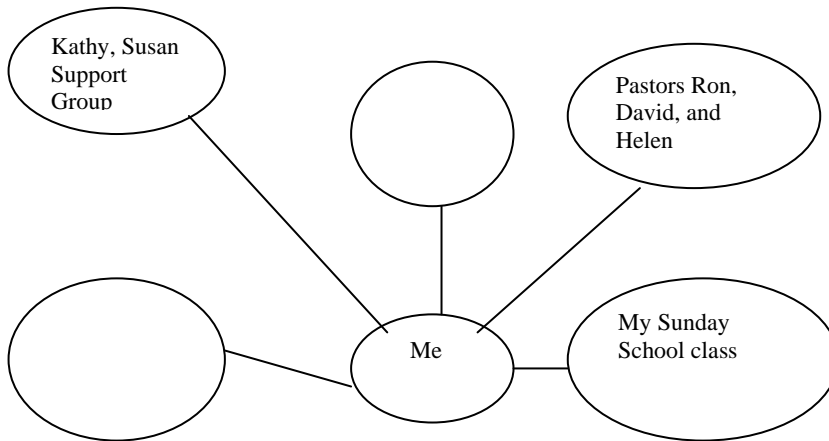
a. What have you inherited from the generations of your family before you that has gifted your life? What have you inherited that is a burden? Use 2 columns on the board or newsprint, one titled “Gifts” and one titled “Burdens.” As students respond, write words or phrases from their answers under the appropriate column. They may be surprised to find that many of the same things go in both columns. Allow 5 minutes.

b. If another member of your family were answering these questions, how would their answers be different? Discuss this question as a class. Allow 2-3 minutes.

c. What have you inherited from the generations of Christians before you that has gifted your life? What have you inherited that is a burden? Again, use 2 columns on the board or newsprint, one titled “Gifts” and one titled “Burdens.” As students respond, write words or phrases from their answers under the appropriate column. Encourage them to be honest. It’s OK to identify things in the Christian tradition they don’t like, or that they reject. The point of the exercise is to see that the Christian family, like each of our own families, has both gifts and burdens. Allow 5 minutes.

BREAK: encourage fellowship

Exercise 2: Draw a “faith family” cluster diagram. Who has formed you spiritually? Using the circles, write in the names of individuals and groups that make up your “faith family.” See example.



Use the space in the student book to draw your own faith family cluster diagram.

Allow about 7-8 minutes for students to work individually on their cluster diagrams.

Students may be concerned about doing the exercise “right.” Reassure

them that there is no way to fail this exercise. They can include people from their childhood (Sunday School teachers, pastors, friends) as well as from their adulthood. In some cases, it may be easier for students to identify events, such as church camp or a Bible study, first, and then identify the people or groups associated with those events.

Ask students to share diagrams in groups of 2 or 3. Allow 7-8 minutes.

Call the plenary back together. Lead a class discussion of the following questions, allowing about 5 minutes

- Was it hard or easy to think of who is in your faith family?
- What experiences or people are NOT in your diagram?

If time allows, these questions may be fruitful, too:

- If you had completed this cluster diagram 5 years ago, how would it have looked different?
- Can you imagine that you might be part of someone else's cluster diagram?

I Speak of God

When I think of God's family, I see myself as _____.
Take a few minutes to write reflectively on this topic.

Explain to students that this is personal writing time. Their writing will not be shared with the class but they will have an opportunity to discuss their thoughts following a few minutes of writing time. It is important that the classroom have a contemplative environment for this exercise. If students want to move chairs to create a private space that's fine. After about 5-7 minutes of writing time, invite students into groups of 5 to discuss their thoughts on this topic. Allow 5-7 minutes of small group discussion.

Exercise 3: Family Characteristics

This exercise can be done in small groups of 5 or as an entire class.

In your family, list the characteristics that identify a _____
(the name of your family of origin, e.g. "Smith" or "Johnson")?

Describe how these characteristics are expressed. How do you know them?

Ask each person to identify just 1 or 2 characteristics. For some this will be very difficult, as their family does not have a strong sense of identity. It is important to identify that lack of identity is a characteristic of some

families. Allow 5-7 minutes.

In the Christian family, what are the characteristics that identify a Christian?

Describe how these characteristics are expressed. How do you know them?

As a class, brainstorm these items on the board. Allow 5-7 minutes.

So What?

What are some of the historical factors that have shaped our church family? (**Note that throughout our study the term “church family” refers to the life of your own congregation.**)

What are some of the influences that people who join this church bring with them?

What are the characteristics that identify members of our church family?

Allow up to 10 minutes for a free-flowing discussion to help connect this week’s material to your congregational life. Choose the questions that seem fruitful. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Silence is not failure. Remember to count slowly to 20 during the silence before you introduce a different question.

Looking Ahead: In the coming week you will read an account of an early Christian martyr, Perpetua (pronounced: purr-pet-chew-a). Listen for the conflicts created around her as she tries to live out her Christian identity. What are the expectations her family places on her? What are the expectations fellow Christians place on her?

Class Business: *Use this time to answer questions, distribute materials, make announcements.*

Closing Prayer:

Loving God, we are all part of your family. We give thanks for the gifts and we struggle with the burdens of this family. We gather with the communion of saints, all of our mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters in the faith. Thank you for giving us this family. Help us see our place in it as we study together. In Jesus’ name, Amen.