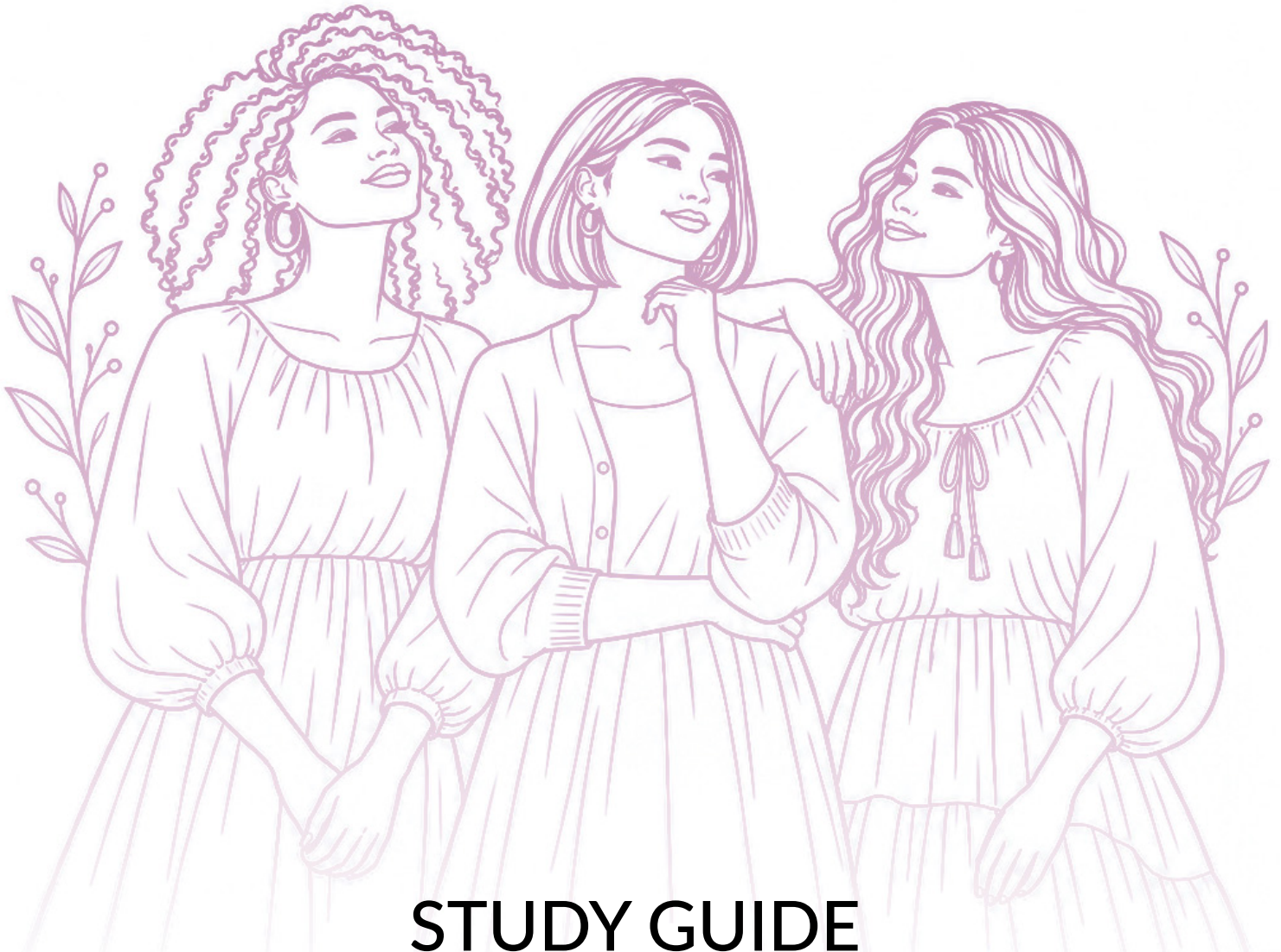




STUDY GUIDE

COURAGEOUS WOMEN

NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN WHO SHAPED THE EARLY CHURCH

COURAGEOUS WOMEN

Part 1

NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN WHO SHAPED THE EARLY CHURCH

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Teaching Panel



Melinda Estabrooks | @melinda_estabrooks

Host & Executive Producer, See Hear Love

Melinda Estabrooks is the Host and Executive Producer of the Women's Talk show, *See Hear Love*, launched in the Fall of 2016. *See Hear Love* is a show and community that values belonging, storytelling, courage, authenticity, inclusion, and faith in Jesus. Melinda is also the author and curator of the book, *Always Know*, a collection of short stories from See Hear Love guests who share their personal experiences of faith, perseverance, and hope. For the past 25 years, Melinda has worked in broadcasting, journalism, PR and marketing, leadership facilitation, advocacy, fundraising and motivational speaking around the world. She loves being a wife to Chris, a stepmom to Nathan and Sophie, travelling, connecting amazing women together and laughing! Her favourite encouragement to women is, 'Today is not your forever!'



Karmyn Bokma | @karmynbokma

**Worship & Congregational Engagement Pastor,
North Burlington Baptist Church**

Karmyn Bokma is a pastor and a speaker in the GTA. For almost 2 decades, she has served in ministry contexts of all kinds, from youth and young adults, to small groups and discipleship, to senior pastoring. She currently works as the Worship and Congregational Engagement pastor at North Burlington Baptist Church. Regardless of the role, Karmyn always feels a passion to continue to point people to Jesus and discover together what he has to say to us about our identity, our character and our place and work in the Kingdom. She is married to Ben and they have three (ever growing!) kids: Ellie, Zeke and Silas. As a family they enjoy board games, getting outside, camp ministry, movie nights and great snacks.



Caroline Durocher | @carolinebergeroncoaching

Pastor, Director and Certified Leadership Coach, Founder Vivid Academy

Caroline Durocher-Bergeron is a certified and award winning leadership coach, a sought after speaker, a seasoned mentor, a thriving entrepreneur and the lead pastor at l'Église le Carrefour (Sherbrooke, Quebec). She is the founder of VIVID Academy, a leadership certification that equips and empowers women to lead with clarity, confidence, courage, impact. She is also the founder of l'espace Valeureuses, an online platform in French that strengthen women around the world. She provides national (or you could word it online French platform) leadership with Mission Canada (PAOC), helping identify, equip, and mobilize workers to serve Québec and francophone communities across Canada. For more than 25 years, Caroline has served in pastoral ministry, leadership development, coaching, missions, and public speaking in Haiti, Vancouver, Montréal, and Québec. She holds a BA in theology, an MA in leadership, as well as certifications in life, leadership, and business coaching. Caroline is passionate about helping women grow in their leadership so they can embrace their calling, build sustainable lives, and realize their God-sized dreams. She loves musical theatre, travelling, meaningful conversations, and experiencing God through the arts. Her greatest joy is sharing life and ministry with her husband, Pascal, and being the mother of their three artistic adult children. Her favourite challenge to women is: "Your calling is too important to remain buried. It is time to rise."

Teaching Panel



Rev. Dr. Yajaira Gomez | 🌐 : lifegivingministries.ca

📷 : @DrYajairaGomez | 📘 : facebook.com/LifegivingYG

Missionary Pastor & Founder, Lifegiving Ministries

When Rev. Dr. Yajaira Gomez speaks, women leave with more courage than they walked in with. A Missionary Pastor, founder of Lifegiving Ministries, and adjunct faculty at Bible colleges across Canada, she is a sought-after communicator known for her ability to connect across cultures, speaking in English, Spanish, and French to audiences across the globe. Bold and full of passion, she brings a presence that turns hesitant hearts toward action. Her own story—a childhood in Central America marked by crisis and a long search for hope—shapes the way she connects with every audience.

Through Lifegiving Ministries, she leads short-term mission teams to places in desperate need, equipping leaders across the nations. Her work includes a long-term education and feeding program in the Congo and a Bible school she planted in Belize that is now self-sustaining. Wherever she speaks, women walk away not just inspired, but changed.



Helen Burns | @helenburns

International Speaker, Author, Found and Teaching Pastor at Relate Church, Surrey BC.

Helen Burns co-founded Relate Church in Surrey, B.C. in 1986, where she served alongside her husband John as Lead Pastor for 35 years. In 2018, they transitioned leadership to their daughter Angela and her husband Rod, and continue to serve as Founding and Teaching Pastors. Helen is a respected voice in the Canadian Church and a trusted leader who has ministered extensively across Canada and around the world. With over four decades of ministry experience, Helen is a passionate communicator and a champion of strong relationships—within families, marriages, and church communities. Helen and John have been married for over 50 years. They have three daughters and eight grandchildren. She finds great joy in family life and in serving the Church in Canada.

Bible Study Guide

Introduction

The New Testament presents a compelling picture of women who faithfully led, served, taught, prophesied, financed ministry, opened their homes, and helped establish the earliest Christian communities.

While their stories are often brief, they reveal something remarkable: the Gospel elevated women into visible and significant ministry in ways that were often surprising within the Roman world.

This study explores the following women who shaped the early church:

- Phoebe — Servant Leader
- Junia — Apostle and Pioneer
- Lydia — Businesswoman and Church Founder
- Philip's Four Daughters — Prophetic Voices

Each week you will discover:

- Historical background
- Biblical teaching
- Cultural significance
- Leadership lessons
- Reflection questions
- Prayer

Discover the remarkable women who helped shape the early Church and what their faith and influence means for us today.

Faith. Courage. Influence.

We look forward to you being encouraged, inspired, and spiritually formed by the examples of these women. May it spur you on to love God deeply and use your life to spread good news.

See Hear Love Team

PREFACE: Read This Before Starting Your Study.

The World of the Early Church: Understanding the First Century

The Roman Empire was highly patriarchal. To appreciate how remarkable the women of the early church were, it helps to understand the world they lived in. The Roman Empire was deeply patriarchal culture in which law, religion, family structure, and social expectations centered authority in the hands of men. The head of every household was the **paterfamilias** ("father of the family"), whose authority extended over his wife, children, slaves, and even adult sons until his death or legal emancipation.

The Roman belief system was in contrast with Christianity. The New Testament still recognizes household structures but repeatedly calls men to use authority through love, sacrifice, humility, and service, modeled after Christ (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). Jesus redefined greatness as serving others rather than dominating them (Mark 10:42–45).

The gospel did not erase these social structures overnight, but it introduced a radically different vision of human dignity and community that elevated women in surprising ways.

Women generally:

- could not hold public office
- were expected to focus on household responsibilities
- had limited educational opportunities
- were often represented by fathers or husbands

Yet Christianity created communities unlike anything surrounding them.

Women became:

- patrons
- prophets
- evangelists
- teachers
- missionaries
- hosts of churches
- ministry partners

Paul regularly names women alongside men as fellow workers.

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

It's important not to overstate the contrast but to have a balanced, accurate historical perspective. The Roman world was not uniformly oppressive toward women. Wealthy Roman women could own businesses, sponsor public works, and wield considerable social influence. Likewise, the New Testament churches still operated within their cultural context and reflected many existing household structures.

What made Christianity distinctive was not the abolition of every social convention *but the conviction that every believer*—male and female—was created in God's image, redeemed by Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and gifted for the building up of the Church. This theological foundation gradually transformed how Christians understood leadership, service, and the value of women.

Bible Study Guide

Discussion Questions:

How does understanding the Roman world deepen your appreciation for the women mentioned in the New Testament?

In what ways did Jesus' treatment of women challenge the assumptions of His culture?

What can the modern Church learn from the early Christian practice of recognizing and encouraging the gifts of both women and men for the sake of the gospel?

Notes:

Map of Our Journey

This study follows the spread of the Gospel across the Mediterranean.



Illustration generated using AI and reviewed for accuracy.

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WEEK TWO: Phoebe: The Courage to Risk

Teacher: Karmyn Bokma

Scripture: Romans 16:1-2

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae..."

Where? Historical Context:

The Woman Who Carried the Gospel

Cenchreae was Corinth's eastern harbor.

It connected Greece with Asia Minor and was filled with:

- merchants
- sailors
- travelers
- Roman officials

The church there likely included people from many cultures.

What?

What did Phoebe do? Phoebe appears to have been one of its key leaders.

Most biblical scholars also believe Phoebe likely delivered Paul's Letter to the Romans—a role requiring trust, literacy, and the ability to explain Paul's teaching to the recipients.

Who?

Who Was Phoebe? Paul describes her using two remarkable titles.

1. Diakonos

Meaning:

- servant
- minister
- deacon

The same Greek word is used elsewhere for male ministers.

Rather than merely helping behind the scenes, Phoebe appears to have held recognized ministry responsibility within the church.

2. Prostatís

Often translated:

- patron
- benefactor
- protector
- leader

This suggests she financially supported the ministry and likely exercised leadership through her influence and resources.

Why?

Why was Phoebe Counter-Cultural? In Roman society:

Women were rarely entrusted with official public responsibilities.

Yet Paul:

- publicly commends her
- entrusts her with Scripture
- asks churches to receive her
- encourages believers to assist her

She becomes one of the most trusted people in Paul's ministry.

Life Lessons:

- Faithfulness matters more than fame. Your everyday obedience may have eternal influence.
- Generosity is not measured by wealth but by willingness.
- God calls both women and men to faithfully use their gifts for the good of His people and the advance of the gospel.

Reflection Questions

1. Where is the Holy Spirit asking me to have courage to take a risk?
2. Where has God entrusted me with influence that I sometimes underestimate?
3. How can generosity become part of my leadership?
4. What gifts has God given me to strengthen His Church?
5. What are Leadership Lessons we see through Phoebe's life?

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WEEK THREE: Lydia: The Courage to Pioneer

Teacher: Caroline Durocher

Primary Scripture

Acts 16:11–15 “Paul and his team traveling by ship from Troas to Macedonia. They arrive at Philippi, a key Roman city. On the Sabbath, they meet women by a river for prayer. A businesswoman named Lydia believes the message, gets baptized with her family, and hosts the missionaries”

Acts 16:40 “After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.”

Historical Context

Philippi was a Roman colony.

It reflected Roman culture, military power, and commerce.

Paul arrived expecting to find a synagogue but instead discovered women gathered beside the river for prayer.

There Lydia encountered Christ.

Who Was Lydia?

She was:

- from Thyatira
- a dealer in purple cloth
- financially independent
- worshipping God
- baptized with her household

After her conversion she immediately offered hospitality.

Her home became the first church in Europe.

Purple Cloth

Purple dye was extremely expensive.

Lydia's business likely served wealthy Roman elites.

Thyatira (in modern-day Turkey) was famous for its textile and dyeing industry.

Lydia was likely selling luxury fabrics rather than making the dye herself.

Her customers were probably wealthy Roman officials and elite households in Philippi.

She appears to have been financially successful, as she owned a home large enough to host Paul and his companions and the first church in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 40).

She appears to have been a successful entrepreneur with substantial resources.

Purple cloth was one of the most valuable luxury items in the ancient world. During the time of the New Testament, it symbolized wealth, power, royalty, and prestige. This makes Lydia's occupation in Acts 16:14 especially significant.

Where did purple dye come from?

The finest purple dye, known as Tyrian purple, originated in the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon (modern-day Lebanon).

It was extracted from small Mediterranean sea snails called **murex** (primarily *Bolinus brandaris* and *Hexaplex trunculus*). Around **8,000-12,000 snails** might be needed to produce just **one gram of pure dye**.

Why was it so expensive?

The expense came from several factors:

- thousands of shellfish for a small amount of dye
- labor-intensive extraction
- long fermentation process
- skilled craftsmanship
- transportation across the Roman Empire

Because of this, purple cloth could cost **many times its weight in silver**, making it one of the most expensive textiles in the ancient world.

Why Was Lydia Counter-Cultural?

Business leadership was largely dominated by men.

Yet Lydia:

- owned a thriving business
- managed her household
- hosted a church
- supported missionaries

Her home became the birthplace of Christianity in Philippi.

Life Lessons

God uses our homes for ministry.

Business can become Kingdom mission.

Hospitality changes lives.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in my life is Holy Spirit prompting me to have the courage to pioneer?
2. How can my home become a place of ministry?
3. What resources has God entrusted to me for His Kingdom?
4. Where might God be inviting me to practice courageous hospitality?

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WEEK FOUR: Junia: The Courage to Lead

Teacher: Helen Burns

Primary Scripture

Romans 16:7

"Greet Andronicus and Junia... They are outstanding among the apostles."

Historical Context

Paul wrote Romans around AD 57.

His greetings in chapter 16 reveal an extraordinary network of ministry partners. Junia is one of them. She was an apostle that led in her context.

Who Was Junia?

Paul tells us four things.

She was:

- Paul's relative
 - imprisoned for the Gospel
 - a believer before Paul
 - outstanding among the apostles
-

What Does "Apostle" Mean?

The word literally means:

"one who is sent."

While the Twelve held a unique role, the New Testament also applies "apostle" more broadly to commissioned missionaries and church planters.

Junia is recognized as an exceptional member of this wider apostolic ministry.

Why Was Junia Counter-Cultural?

Roman culture celebrated military heroes, politicians, and wealthy men.

Paul celebrates a woman because she:

- suffered for Christ
- planted churches
- faithfully proclaimed the Gospel
- earned respect among Christian leaders

Her authority came through sacrifice.

Life Lessons

Kingdom influence often grows through suffering.

Faithfulness leaves a lasting legacy.

God values obedience over visibility.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in my life do I need the courage to lead?
2. What sacrifices has following Jesus required from me?
3. How can I encourage others who faithfully serve without recognition?
4. What legacy of faith do I hope to leave?

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WEEK FIVE: Philip's Four Daughters: The Courage To Use Their Voice

Teacher: Rev. Dr. Yajaira Gomez

Primary Scripture

ACTS 21:8-9

"He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied."

Historical Context

Paul was traveling toward Jerusalem.

He stayed in Caesarea with Philip the Evangelist.

Luke briefly notes something extraordinary:

Philip's daughters were recognized prophets.

Luke records this as an accepted and valued ministry within the church.

What Is Prophecy?

In the New Testament prophecy involved:

- encouraging believers
- strengthening the Church
- revealing God's direction
- calling people toward faithfulness

It was one of the most respected spiritual gifts.

In the New Testament, prophecy was a gift of the Holy Spirit that involved speaking God's message to strengthen, encourage, and comfort His people (1 Corinthians 14:3). While prophecy could include foretelling future events, it most often involved faithfully communicating God's truth for the building up of the Church.

Philip's daughters were recognized for exercising this spiritual gift, showing that women were active participants in the Spirit-filled life of the early Christian community.

Why Were They Counter-Cultural?

Young unmarried women held little public authority in Roman society.

Yet the Church recognized their spiritual authority.

Their voices mattered because God spoke through them.

Life Lessons

God speaks through people of every age.

Spiritual gifts are given for building up the Church.

Faithfulness matters more than status.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do I need the courage to use my voice?
2. What spiritual gifts has God entrusted to me?
3. How can I use my voice to strengthen others?
4. Where might God be inviting me to step out in faith?

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Final Reflection

These women ministered in different ways.

Woman	Gift	Influence
Phoebe	Service & Leadership	Strengthened churches through ministry and generosity
Junia	Apostolic Mission	Pioneer leader and faithful witness
Lydia	Hospitality & Business	Established the first church in Philippi
Philip's Daughters	Prophecy	Strengthened the Church through Spirit-led encouragement

Though their ministries differed, they shared common qualities:

- Faithfulness over fame
- Courage over comfort
- Service over status
- Influence rooted in Christ

SEE HEAR LOVE

with Melinda Estabrooks

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