



This is the first study of eight

STUDY: WOMEN,

This is the first study of eight that are planned over the next two years. We will look at women around the world, and also, the issues that affect women. We will look at the special ways in which The Women's Missionary Society and The Presbyterian Church in Canada are working to support and encourage women around the world and we will look at ways that perhaps each one of us can do more to support women in need.

This is a brief introductory session to start you thinking about the issues that affect women today. Following the study, there will be a time for prayer on the topics that will be covered over the next two years.

Opening

One: God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image,
make them reflecting our nature

All: **So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,**

that are planned over the next two year.

an Introduction

by Colleen Wood

One: And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

**All: God created human beings;
he created them godlike,**

One: Reflecting God’s nature.
He created them male and female.

All: God blessed them:
“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

One: Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

(From Genesis 1:26–28 The Message)

We have been formed male and female, equal, but different. Over the next several studies, we will pray for women within Canada and around the world. We will look at what it is like to be a woman in Canada, learn about the life of women within a few of our partner churches and organizations, and consider some of the issues that affect us all.



We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.

~Malala Yousafzai

Women in Canada

According to StatsCan, in 2010, 50.4% of the total population in Canada was female, amounting to 17.2 million females. As with the general population of Canada, the female population is aging.

It is interesting, that as you begin to look at women today, a lot has changed over the past several years. For instance, over 20 years ago, men aged 25–54 had more post-secondary education than women, but today that is no longer true. Women, even from a young age, get better marks in school and are more likely to finish high school. In addition, more women graduate from college and university with a diploma or degree. The challenge in this current situation is that women with the same education, still have lower employment earnings than men.ⁱ

Within Canada, about 4% of the total Canadian female population is Aboriginal. This population is younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with the median age for females being 27.7 (it is 40.5 for the non-Aboriginal population). Aboriginal women do face more issues. They are more likely to be lone parents and experience teen pregnancy, and they have lower education and employment rates and often suffer from inadequate housing. They also have a lower life expectancy at 76.8 years (compared to 82 for the non-Aboriginal population).ⁱⁱ

The female immigration population made up just over 20% of the country's female population. As you may have guessed, the source of immigrants has changed over the years. Europe was still the most common source of immigrants in 1971, but today that has changed to Asia and the Middle East (59%).

Obviously, this means that many of our immigrants are now visible minorities. Immigrants tend to settle in our large population centres.

Among our immigrant population, they were more likely to be legally married and many lived with their immediate family. The female immigrant population is also more likely to have completed a university degree or certificate than women born in Canada, partly because Canada's immigration policy emphasizes education.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women of the World

Thinking about women around the world, there are a few things to note. First, there are 57 million more men than women in the world. In the world's most populated countries of China and India this is very pronounced, but in most other countries there are more women than men.^{iv}

Women, around the world are generally the ones responsible for caring for family members, meaning many women have a larger workload than men.

Women, around the world, live longer than men, but this is equalized in countries where pregnancy and childbirth can be life-threatening.^v

The United Nations states that there have been advances in education. Women still account for $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's illiterate population, but overall literacy rates for the young are increasing.^{vi}

The three most challenging areas for women are power, violence, and poverty. Women are underrepresented in national parliaments. Even within the business world,



Questions

What do you think is the best part about being a woman in Canada in 2015?

What do you think is the worst part about being a woman in Canada in 2015?



women are underrepresented on boards of directors of large companies. Violence against women is universal and takes all forms—physical, sexual, psychological, and economic. Around the world, women are subjected to lack a movement, genital mutilation, rape, child marriage, and so many other atrocities. It is estimated that over 125 million girls and women alive today have experienced female genital mutilation.^{vii}

Finally, women are more likely to live in poverty.^{viii} It has been said, that women account for 70 per cent of those living in absolute poverty (less than \$1.00 a day).^{ix}

If you have visited other parts of the world, how would you describe women in that part of the world?

Bible Study

Read Luke 2:36–38

In three short verses, it is amazing how much we learn about Anna. First, she was a prophetess, meaning that she would receive messages from God to pass along. We also learn of her tribe and her family, and that after seven years of marriage, she became a widow.

We also learn that she is an elderly Jewish woman.

She is a holy woman who is constantly at the temple having devoted her life to God. When she sees Jesus, she immediately recognizes him as the one who will bring redemption to Israel.

Questions:

What can we learn from Anna about God?

What characteristics can be used to describe Anna?

Are these positive or negative attributes?

What can Anna teach us about how we live as God's People, or more specifically as women?

Activity

Preparation: Bring several newspapers from the past month to distribute to your members. Also, post two pieces of Bristol board or chart paper. On one board write In Canada... and the other In the World...

Look through the newspapers to see what issues are facing women in Canada and around the world. Tear out the articles and/or headlines or list these issues on the chart paper.

Question:

Did any of these topics surprise you? What are some of the positive issues? What are some of the negative issues?

Closing Prayer

Our closing prayer is extensive as we pray for the areas that we will be looking at over the upcoming year.

Loving God, We thank you for this world. We thank you for Canada. We thank you for making each of us in your image. Be with us as we consider what it means to live as a woman in today's world.

We pray for women in Canada. Today, many of us live in freedom with boundless opportunities. We thank you for the opportunities we have. Yet, even within Canada, there are those living below their potential because they were born female. Be with these women and help them to find ways to move forward.

We pray for our church. We pray for all leaders within the church, male and female. We pray that these leaders will work to create a safe place for all and look for ways that the church can reach out to the marginalized within our communities and around the world.

We pray for those women who are involved in the sex trade. Many as children were abused, exploited, and devalued. Many faced racism. We pray now that these women will find a new way forward. We pray for those, such as the Rev. Deb Rapport, who are working with women in the sex trade and through relationships and goal setting, and are helping women to reclaim themselves and their lives. We pray that our country will continue to move forward in punishing the users, not the victims.

We pray for women who are victims of domestic violence. Many women and children live in constant fear in their homes. We pray that these women and children will be safe. We pray for their physical and emotional well-being. We



When women
suffer in
silence, they
suffer alone,
and their
suffering
grows. Only
when women
come together
and break the
silence can
their suffering
end.

~ Raheel Raza

pray for a safe escape for these women. Loving God, be with those who work with these women and help them to heal in safety.

We pray for Aboriginal women in Canada. Many still hold the scars as survivors or generational survivors of the Indian Residential Schools. Many are still recipients of racism and abuse. We pray that they will be in loving relationships and will have countless opportunities for health and education. Help our country to move forward in reconciliation with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, so that we can move forward to create a new future for this country.

We pray for the Maya-Mam women of Guatemala, one of our Together We Can! projects. We pray for the women in this area who are serving as agricultural promoters. Give them the strength and courage to encourage others. We pray that through their education, food scarcity will be reduced and even eliminated. We also pray that the oppression they face will be eliminated and that cycles of poverty will be broken.

Finally, we pray for all those born female in this world. We know that girls continue to be treated as inferior so often within our world. We know that many are abused, and that they do not have equal access to education, food, and safety. We pray that all children will have access to these basic needs.

As we move forward as women in the church, help us to always pray for those who are marginalized in this world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11542-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11442-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11528-eng.htm>

^{iv} <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/Executive%20summary.htm>

^v *ibid.*

^{vi} *ibid.*

^{vii} <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

^{viii} <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/Executive%20summary.htm>

^{ix} <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-women-around-world>