

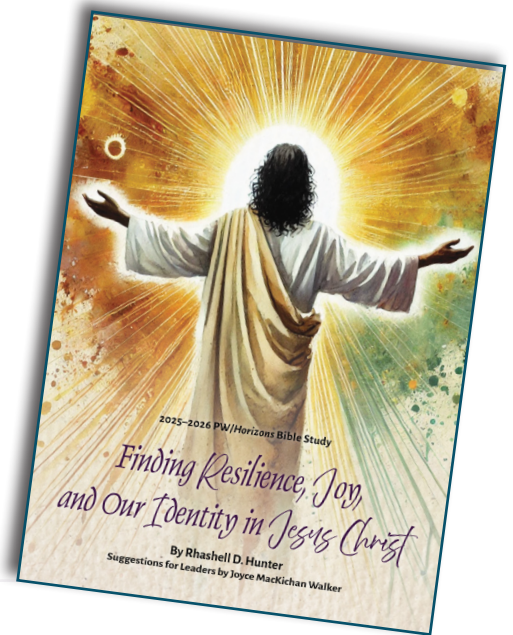
Workshop for Leaders

Rev. Dr. Rhashell D. Hunter



Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ

2025–2026 Presbyterian Women/Horizons Bible Study



What Is This?

A lesson plan for leaders who introduce this Bible study in your congregation or any group.

Who Will Find the Workshop Helpful and Why?

The Workshop for Leaders is written for Bible study leaders who are preparing to lead study groups, pastors and educators who will encourage and prepare others to lead, and presbyteries introducing the study to their congregations. This resource provides a foundational background for the content of the study, an outline of the lessons, suggested activities, and a list of additional resources.

What Can You Expect Participants to Learn?

1. Identify how resilience helps us bounce back in life and how several biblical characters exhibit resilience.
2. Articulate the difference between Christian joy and feeling happy, and how joy can be a way of responding to and living one's life.
3. Possess a deeper understanding of our identity by remembering our own baptism and our beloved status as God's children.
4. Learn recent women's biblical scholarship, as well as how women show up in scripture in places where we do not expect to see them.
5. Become familiar with the structure of the Bible study lessons.
6. Explore biblical women, Jesus' witness, and our own experiences of faith by engaging in activities and answering reflection questions in each of the study's lessons.

7. Articulate how prayer, Bible study, and spending spiritual time with God provides the basis for our resilience, core identity, and joy in Christ.

Room Set Up

The room set up depends on the number of people present, though it is helpful to set up the room with chairs and tables. Participants at the tables will have their study material and note pad, or tablets or electronic devices for taking notes in front of them. If you have a larger group, you may have six to eight chairs at a table, for example. Then, the table groups can also serve as small groups for discussions and activities.

Determine the time you have set, what your objectives are, and what you want the participants to learn and discover. Select the resources you want to highlight and the activities you will use from this workshop.

Materials Needed

- A copy of the Bible study for each participant.
- A variety of study Bibles. Consider the new *Westminster Study Bible*, 2024, or other study Bibles such as the *Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Study Bible*, 2023, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 2018, or the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 2017.
- Pens, note pads, or electronic devices for taking notes.
- Computer with internet, projector, and screen for showing videos to the group.
- A white board and dry erase markers, an easel and pad with markers, or a computer with note-sharing capabilities, or a way to project comments of the group.

Workshop Lesson Plan

Main Idea

In this Bible study, we will explore resilience. This is modeled for us by several biblical characters, Gospel and epistle writers, as well as Jesus. So, what exactly is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to spring back into shape and to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or stress—such as from family, relationships, health, workplace, and financial stressors. People who survive and thrive well in change are resilient.

The Bible study is also about joy. How do we find joy in a chaotic world? The way that I think of Christian joy is different from how a lot of people define joy.

Joy is sometimes confused with happiness. For Christians, joy can occur while we are in the midst of difficult circumstances. Joy is the second fruit of the spirit, preceded by love and followed by peace (Gal. 5:22–23). Trust in God when we are in trying times can fill us with glorious joy and peace. We have joy in our suffering, because ultimately our joy is found in Jesus Christ.

We will also seek to rediscover our identity.

Identity is more than who we are or who we show ourselves to be. At its core, it points to our humanity. Our core identity is not found in our titles, our positions, our spouses, our partners, or our possessions. For Christians, our identity is found in Jesus Christ.

In the study, we will follow Mary the Tower (Mary Magdalene), Mary “of a certain village,” the woman who was poor, the prodigal child, the woman who was bent over, the travelers on the road to Emmaus, as well as Jesus. These biblical characters and writers model for us resilience, joy, and finding our identity in Christ. My hope is that their witness will call you to greater devotion and faithfulness. This is an invitation and an opportunity for you to become grounded again, renew your faith and reconnect to Christ.

Welcome and Introductions

Begin by welcoming participants and introducing yourself. Ask participants to pray the opening prayer in unison.

Opening Prayer (unison)

O God, as we immerse ourselves in your word today, lead us in your way, that we may serve you faithfully. Guide us as we celebrate our love for you, for you are the source of our joy. Amen.

ACTIVITY 1: Finding Our *Resilience* in Jesus Christ

In Lesson 1, we read about Mary the Tower (Mary Magdalene). Mary Ann Beavis suggests that Magdala was not a place, rather Magdalene (μαγδαληνη) was a nickname or title from the Aramaic *magdala*, meaning “Mary the Tower” or “Mary the Great” (Luke 8:2). New scholarship from Dr. Elizabeth Schrader Polczer shows surprising scribal additions to the manuscript of Papyrus 66, (P66), which is the world’s oldest near complete copy of the Gospel of John. The scribe changed Mary’s name to Martha. Schrader Polczer says, “Imagine if you read a Gospel of John where Mary gives the central confession of John’s Gospel. . . . That is an extremely important character” (See Rhashell Hunter, *Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*, Lesson 1).

(24 minutes) Watch the first 24 minutes of the YouTube video “Mary Magdalene and the Gospel of John with Elizabeth Schrader,” Women Erased series, Future Church, YouTube, August 26, 2021, [youtube.com/watch?v=_b3Y3cJ0Ic8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_b3Y3cJ0Ic8). Watch up to Schrader Polczer’s reading of her “Reconstruction of John 11:1–5.”

(3 minutes) Next, read John 11, replacing Martha’s name with Mary the Tower (or Mary Magdalene) and revise the plural “sisters” to “sister.” Imagine that you have just read Papyrus 66 or the first printing of the King James Bible (which include only Mary, not Martha, and only one sister).

(5 minutes) Mary the Tower was a woman who traveled across Palestine with Jesus and a group mostly of male disciples. Some most likely found this inappropriate. Additionally, Peter might have had a dispute with Mary. It takes a strong woman to be able to serve as Jesus taught in a male-dominated society. Do you think Mary the Tower is a model of resilience? If so, why?

(5 minutes) In Lesson 3 of the Bible study, Jesus was led to the wilderness where he faced several challenges (see Luke 4:1–13). Just as Jesus was tested, so are we. Ask participants to answer, “What is another word for resilience?” For example, consider endurance. In the Bible we read about how testing produces endurance (see James 1:1–4, Rom. 5:3–4, and Luke 8:5–15).

ACTIVITY 2: Finding Our *Joy* in Jesus Christ

(20 minutes) Ask participants to find a partner. If the group does not have an even number of participants, form one three-person group or the leader can partner with someone.

Give the pairs three to five minutes and ask each person to describe a joyous scene from a television show or movie. One that sticks out for me is an older movie where the characters are all cleaning the kitchen together after dinner and dancing to a Motown song.

Next, give each partner three to five minutes to describe a time at church or another spiritual event that felt joyous. Contrast how it was different from the scene in the movie or TV show. For me, once at a family funeral many family members shared funny stories and good times we had with our departed loved one. While some would not think of this as joyous as it was a time of sadness, we laughed, and the experience bonded us as a family and as members of the family of God.

End by asking members of the large group to shout out a word or two that answers why Christian joy is different from happiness. Allow time for five or six participants to share a word or phrase.

ACTIVITY 3: Finding Our *Identity* in Jesus Christ

(30 minutes) Have the group get into pairs. Tell them that Person A will answer a question in one minute. Then Person B will repeat their answer as accurately as possible and will add anything that may have been left out. Each pair determines who will be Person A and Person B. The workshop leader (or someone you designate) will keep time and announce when to start and stop the activity.

Questions for the pairs

1. Turn to **Lesson 7** and find the section titled “Finding Our Identity in Jesus Christ.” Read the first four

paragraphs. Ask Person A to name in one minute **one person and one place that helps us to form our identity**. Ask Person B to take a minute to repeat the answer and add their ideas.

2. Switch roles. Person A now becomes Person B (the listening partner). Turn again to **Lesson 7** and read the section titled “A Daughter of the Covenant.” Jesus gives the woman who was bent over an identity, calling her a daughter of Abraham. She is a daughter of the covenant, and she belongs to Christ. Ask Person A to answer in one minute, “**What does it mean to be identified as part of the family of God?**” Ask Person B to take a minute to repeat the response and add any thoughts.
3. Switch roles again. Turn to **Lesson 8** and read the first four paragraphs of the lesson (following the opening prayer and summary). Ask Person A to answer in one minute “**What did we (or our parents) profess at our baptism?**” Ask Person B to take a minute to repeat the answer and add anything.
4. Switch roles one last time. Turn to **Lesson 8** and find the section titled “Remembering Who We Are.” Read paragraphs three to six. Ask Person A to answer in one minute, “**What is a Christian’s answer to an identity crisis?**” Ask Person B to take a minute to repeat the response and add theirs.

Ask the large group to share what they discovered in their pairs, either at the end or during this activity.

Structure of Bible Study Lessons

(5 minutes) Invite participants to look at the summary of lessons included with this workshop and found in the Contents section of the Bible study. Explore the titles, scriptures, and main ideas of each lesson.

(5 minutes) Tell the group

- Part I of the study explores resilience, Part II is on joy, and Part III is on finding our identity
- Each lesson includes
 - o opening prayer and summary
 - o insights about several biblical characters, including Jesus
 - o activities for participants to deepen their engagement
 - o reflection questions
 - o closing prayer

- Suggestions for Leaders follow each lesson and are intended to enhance a group's study time together and make the study leaders planning easier.

(5 minutes) Ask participants to find the Suggestions for Leaders pages for one of the lessons and review them.

Study Resources

(5 minutes) Look at the Contents page to find

- About the Bible study and Suggestions for Leaders authors
- Introduction
- About the Art in the Bible study
- Annotated Bibliography that contains brief descriptions of books, videos, and additional resources, and why the author finds them helpful. Maybe you'll discover a book that you'd like to read to learn more about resilience, joy, or identity, and even how joy or identity in some cultures and ethnicities has been over-controlled and prohibited.

(5 minutes) Ask participants to select one lesson. Look at the activities suggested within the lesson and the reflection questions at the end. Reviewing this will help study leaders find natural breaks in the lesson, where the text can become interactive, and how participants can engage the lesson in different ways. Be sure to give opportunities for anyone who has not had a chance to speak to do so if they choose. They can always pass!

Concluding Our Time Together

(10 minutes) Ask the large group to shout out, one at a time, a sentence or phrase that answers the questions

1. What will help you the most to prepare to lead (or participate in) this study?
2. Name something you read or heard that is new to you or that you would like to explore further.

After the last person has spoken, thank the participants for coming, share the additional resources listed below, and conclude by asking all to pray the closing prayer in unison.

Closing Prayer

Redeeming Christ, thank you for calling us by name and making us your own. When we forget that we are part of your family, help us to reclaim our identity, found in you. Open our eyes that we may recognize you. Open our hearts that we may serve you with joy. Guide us to participate in your reign in the world, for you pave the way for us to follow you. Amen.



Learn more, purchase, and find additional resources for this study by visiting presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/resilience

Additional Resources



- *Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*, published in **English, Spanish, ecumenical, audio**, and **large print** versions. The audio version is read by the author.
- **Companion DVD/Download**, which includes lesson introductions presented by the Bible study author. Groups can use the author's introductions to begin their study sessions, to highlight a certain part of the lesson, or to supplement the lessons.
- **Promotional flier and poster** for sharing information about the study.
- **Bulletin covers** for worship in a church or mid-council, for a group event, or a PW gathering, like an installation service.

2025–2026 Presbyterian Women/*Horizons* Bible Study

Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ

Lesson	Title	Scripture	Main Idea
PART I—Finding Our <i>Resilience</i>			
1	Mary Magdalene, the Tower	John 20:11–18 John 11:17–27	Our faith is strengthened by learning more about Mary Magdalene, a towering witness to the resurrection.
2	Mary “of a Certain Village”	Luke 10:38–42	Mary’s story teaches us that spending time listening to and learning from Jesus is the better part.
3	Jesus Is Tested	Luke 4:1–13	Christ’s wilderness experience shows us that when our lives are dangerous and frightening, we are not alone.
PART II—Finding Our <i>Joy</i>			
4	The Prodigal Child, the Eldest Child, and the Devoted Parent	Luke 15:11–32	God offers grace and love, not because of what we do, but because of who we are—beloved children of God.
5	The Gift of the Woman Who Was Poor	Mark 12:41–44	Joy in Christ is more than happiness; it can change challenging circumstances into faith-filled, even joyous, times.
6	Finding Our Joy in Christ: “I Will Say It Again, Rejoice”	Philippians 4:1–23	Christian joy emerges from a deep belief that God is good, and God reigns forever.
PART III—Finding Our <i>Identity</i>			
7	The Woman Who Was Bent Over	Luke 13:10–17	As followers of Christ, we are to serve with a compassionate and healing spirit and be part of setting people free.
8	Remembering Jesus’ Baptism	Luke 3:1–22 Matthew 3:1–17 Mark 1:1–11 John 1:19–34	In baptism we are identified as God’s own children charged to serve faithfully, justly, and lovingly.
9	When You Are Walking With Jesus: The Road to Emmaus	Luke 24:13–35	Jesus did not abandon his followers; we are not alone, for the Spirit of God is with us.