

Phoebe the Co-Worker

by Suzette Thompson

Questions to consider, discuss or journal.

1. 1 Cor 14:26 reads, “*What then, brothers and sisters? Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, another tongue or and interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up.*” Under what circumstances have you encountered this type of church service: where everyone participates?
2. Do you have a tendency to relegate some chapters to the “boring list of names” bin? Now that you are reading Rom 16 in detail for perhaps the first time, has this been an eye-opening experience? As Suzette points out, this list includes “Jewish, Greek and Roman names, men, woman, slaves and freemen!” What lessons can you learn from this list of names?
3. Suzette argues that Phoebe not only hand delivered Paul’s letter to Rome but read it aloud and had enough background information to clarify any confusing points that the Roman church may have had. How does this change your views of Romans? Does it appear more lively and real, rather than merely static doctrinal information?
4. Have you ever been a member of a house church? If not, is this something that holds appeal to you? What are the pros and cons of a house church?
5. Paul calls Phoebe a “deacon”. 1 Tim 3:11 reads “*In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*” The ‘*in the same way*’ refers back to verses 8-10 where Paul is outlining the criteria for being a male deacon. This verse (11) adds criteria for women deacons. We are told that Paul has deep respect for Phoebe and considered her trustworthy to take his letter to the church in Rome. Does this bring into question beliefs that you hold about women in the first century church and the roles they played? Does it change the view that many of of Paul: that he was opposed to women?
6. What have your learned about Phoebe from this article? Has this article whetted your appetite to learn more about the other women mentioned in scripture: for example, the women who followed Jesus and perhaps financed his ministry?