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BOOK REVIEW

Unhiding women in the Parables: A study guide for groups and individuals

Du Toit, C.D., (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2026), ISBN 979-8-3852-6688-3 (paperback); ISBN 979-8-3852-6689-0 (hardcover); ISBN 979-8-3852-6690-6 (ebook)

Historically, biblical texts have maintained an androcentric nature and posture – written from a male-centric perspective in a manner that appeals and makes sense to the times where women's voices were muted and their significant contribution relegated to the background. The presence of women in biblical texts has always been hidden, thus marking the erasure of women. In post-colonial times, the unhiding of women offers an interpretive lens and a critical socio-scientific reading of texts that allows for a faithful imaginative revelation of women agency and presence. This process is not about digging the role and the presence of women. It is about restoring and reclaiming women in the Bible. This has serious implications in contemporary society. It is about enabling the agency and women's voices to thrive. Chitando (2020) argues that the Bible can be used for the purposes of development in Africa, offering liberative readings. Musa Dube, a renowned post-colonial feminist scholar, helps us understand that a post-colonial feminist theologising presents "the call for transformation, emancipation and liberation of African women's lives, this is also the

Circle's theology" (Kaunda 2024:70). Parables remain pivotal in illuminating fundamental Christian teachings.

In his book, Charel Du Toit makes a profound contribution in feminist reading of the Parables. He introduces the concept of "unhiding" women, which involves uncovering their implicit presence and contributions in the textual reading of the Parables. It is about inclusion and justice of women who have been deemed unimportant. It enables a reader to "see", imagine women in Parables which invariantly empowers women and challenges negative ideological perceptions about women in ancient times. These are not necessarily suitable for contemporary contexts. Unhiding women characters as both a lens and a methodology enables the modern audience to situate women deemed invisible.

The methodology of unhiding women is presented as a four-step process of a traditional reading which is meant to reveal how women are obscured in texts. The second layer allows the reader to unveil the historical and cultural traditions and norms often missed by the audience. This form of imaginative reconstructed reading allows the reader to delve deeper into "unhiding" the women in the narrative so that the reader relates. The third layer of reading uses visual tools – inserting visual words that enhance reading where women are central to the parable's text. The final step offers an alternative exegetical reading that allows women's voices and agency to come alive in a parable.

Women's roles as mothers, wives, workers, healers, and providers are often hidden in the text but were essential to the narratives and their outcomes. The book presents the parable of The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), which intentionally ignores the presence of a woman, situating the narrative between the father and two sons. An unhiding reading reveals the mother's unseen work in maintaining family unity, mediating disputes, and preparing the feast. Women's work in preparing meals, managing household tasks, and ensuring the success of the feast is central to the narrative's resolution.

The book also engages another parable, The friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8). Women's roles as bakers and providers of bread are central to the story's premise. The parable's focus on honour and shame highlights the social influence of women in the community. The neighbour's eventual compliance is driven by the social pressure tied to the work and reputation of women. The good samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). Women were common travellers on the roads of the Roman Empire, facing the same dangers as men. The inn, a central location in the parable, was often managed by women, who were responsible for hospitality, care, and financial management. The samaritan's act of compassion relies on the expertise and work of women in the inn. The author shares the parable of The sower (Luke 8:5-8), in which women visibly

participate in preparing fields, crafting tools such as the sower's pouch, and gleaning the harvest as essential to the agricultural process. The success of the harvest is a communal victory, dependent on the uncredited contributions of women. The author is also explicit in employing the role of women in the parable of The persistent widow (Luke 18:2-5). In this parable, the widow is often portrayed as a helpless victim. However, by employing the unhiding reading methodology, the woman's task becomes explicit, revealing her as a resourceful player.

This book offers an easy-to-follow approach for untrained readers and sophisticated readers in a sense that reclaims women's agency, by intentionally challenging patriarchal interpretations. Du Toit presents an alternative reading of the parable with real characters, where women are central to the narrative. This uncovers a rich tapestry that was previously made invisible. At the end of unhiding women in each parable, a set of questions evokes a rich discussion about the explicit presence of women. Of course, this changes and challenges the interpretation of a parable in a good way.

This book is a relevant resource that offers timely tools to curb the injustices of the times. For the modern community of faith, the book trains everyone to read and re-read the parables in a manner that affirms women. The book offers great tools for how Scripture is read, engaged, and imparted to impact modern communities that struggle to escape patriarchal cultures in reading texts. In the 21st century, the book may be a great resource for theological education, seminaries, and churches. In my opinion, this book can equip and empower women guilds as they hold contextual Bible studies, with an intent to reclaim women's voices and teaching the entire congregation that Jesus used these narratives to challenge everyone. Hence, the journey of reading the Bible, asking questions, and further imagining women characters and their significant contributions can be what our society needs for the sake of gender and social justice. Recognising the contributions of women in biblical narratives can inspire a more equitable and compassionate community, aligning with the radically inclusive vision of the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, the analysis of gender roles in biblical parables, as presented in *Unhiding women*, challenges traditional interpretations and highlights the indispensable contributions of women. By adopting an "unhiding" methodology, readers can gain a more comprehensive and historically accurate understanding of the Parables, fostering justice and inclusivity in both biblical interpretation and modern communities of faith. This is about changing academic work into prophetic work to impact the community at large.

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