



What is Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is simply language that attempts to include all people in it. We create worlds as we speak and our commitment is to create a world where men and women are welcomed, respected, seen, heard about and heard from equally. In Galatians 3:28, Paul writes, "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" Because we are all equal in God's eyes, our language should reflect this new reality of the Kin-dom. There are a few different ways we can do this:

- ✘ We can remove gender bias from language by choosing to avoid gender specific words like *man, men, brotherhood* (when referring to the entire denomination or church), etc., in our worship and church-led events and studies. Instead of *man*, we use *human* or *person*. Instead of *men*, we use *humanity, people, persons*, etc. Instead of *brotherhood*, we use *church family* or *denomination*.
- ✘ We can emphasize non-gendered images of God like God as Rock, Spirit, Dove, Flame, Potter, etc.
- ✘ Realizing that it's very difficult to remove all gendered words from our stories and our worship, we can balance masculine and feminine images. Instead of *men*, we can say *men and women*. Instead of *he*, we can say *he or she* or simply say *he* one time and *she* the next. Because there are female images of God in the Bible, we can refer to God as *He* sometimes and *She* sometimes. We can pray not to the *God of Abraham*, but to the *God of Abraham and Sarah*. We can say *brothers and sisters* instead of *brothers*. We can balance male metaphors for God like *God our Father* with biblical female metaphors like *God our Mother*.

Why Use Inclusive Language? The reasons are many!

Make your message clearer. In most churches, more than half of the people in your pews are female. If you want EVERYONE to hear the brilliant theological points you carefully wove into that sermon or lesson plan and feel drawn into the presence of a God who loves and accepts them as they are for who they are, then you want to speak to EVERYONE who's there. And typically, more than half of them don't answer to *he*.

Help every person connect with God. If you continue to use exclusive language, there are going to be some people sitting in front of you feeling disconnected from God's presence and trying to 'translate' what you're saying to fit their own situation as women/girls. They're going to miss whatever else you're saying as they perform this amazing feat of 'listening for something they can hear'. It will also make some of them angry and frustrated and excluded in God's House and that is not the response you want people to be having in worship. If both women and men are created in the image of God, then our images of God and our talk of humanity should be gender-neutral or gender-balanced.

Introduce your listeners to a bigger God than they know right now. Being inclusive does not mean removing all gender from God or people, though there are many rich gender-neutral metaphors for God. It also means balancing gender language, using MORE metaphors! You can still call God "Father". But now you'll call God "Mother", too. You can preach or liturgize about the faith of Abraham, David, and Daniel. But you'll also talk about the faith of Rahab, Sarah, and the Shunnamite woman.

Increase Biblical literacy. What percentage of your congregation even knows who Rahab was and what she did? How many know that she appears in the genealogy of Christ? How many know the story of the Shunnamite woman or Hagar? Emphasizing the faith of the women along with the men in the Bible means that your church or group will become more Biblically literate.

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Increase Biblical Role Models. If roughly half (or more) of your congregation is female, then providing both them and their brothers with strong, faithful, female role models is crucial. Give girls and women faithful, vibrant role models like Hagar, Sarah, Rahab, Deborah, the Shunnamite woman, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus, and many more! Balance these role models with Abraham, David, Solomon, Peter, Paul, John, and the like. The men may discover they have many things to admire about and learn from biblical women, too!

It's easier than you think! If you use inclusive language well, the people who don't care about inclusive language won't care or miss all those 'hes' and 'hims'. But the people who do care will feel at ease, welcomed, 'seen', heard, and respected! To the rest, your worship will simply seem richer and more accepting and your messages will seem much clearer. So why not try it?

Inclusive language invites everyone into God's story and ensures that no one is left standing outside God's circle of acceptance, welcome, and joy.

The Bible and Inclusive Language

Some biblical translations intentionally adjust pronouns and other gender references to include women. Others do not. There are generally several things that translators have to consider:

- ✘ the nature of the original language and the intent of the passage. For example, does the Greek word for 'brothers', *adelphoi*, literally refer to male brothers in the passage or does it refer to a larger community of people like a crowd, both male and female, in which case it may be translated "brothers and sisters".
- ✘ whether the male language refers to people or God. Some translators choose to make the language for people inclusive while retaining the male pronouns for God. Others will choose to make language for God and Christ inclusive as well. For example, they may change the phrase "Son of God" to "Child of God" to include women, who can never be 'sons' but are absolutely 'children' of God.
- ✘ how to deal with pronouns to make a passage read well while retaining the original meaning. Sometimes, 'he' and 'him' can be replaced with words like 'person' or 'whoever'. Other times, translators will replace a singular pronoun with a plural one, changing 'he' to 'they', for example. This is actually a frequent construction in spoken English, though not in written English.

The *Translator's Notes* in your Bible will tell you about the choices the translators made and why they made those choices. Here are some of the more common Bible translations and how they fare in terms of using gender-neutral language.

Translations that use inclusive language for God and human beings (Inclusive Bibles):

- ✘ The Inclusive Bible: New Testament

Translations that use inclusive language for human beings only (Semi-inclusive Bibles):

- ✘ New Revised Standard Bible (NRSV)
- ✘ New Living Translation (NLT)
- ✘ The Message
- ✘ Today's New International Version (TNIV)
- ✘ Today's English Version (TEV)
- ✘ New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
- ✘ New Century Version (NCV)
- ✘ Revised English Bible (REB)
- ✘ Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Translations that do NOT use inclusive language:

- ✘ King James Version (KJV)
- ✘ New King James Version (NKJV)
- ✘ New International Version (NIV)
- ✘ New American Standard Version (NASV, NAS, or NASB)
- ✘ English Standard Version (ESV)
- ✘ Revised Standard Version (RSV)
- ✘ New American Bible (NAB)